

Reflections on a Muddy Pond



It's the kind of lazy, sunny, Irish day that facilitates time travel. All of the sights and sounds conspire to dance me between the 1950's and 2013. They are not so much flashbacks as "meander backs" - there is no hurry, no sudden movements and no motion sickness. It's much more like multiple memories overlaid on the screen of my perception, which don't need to displace each other but rather weave a tapestry of a timeless now.

Eleven white cows and one little speckled calf are lying in a field pleasurably chewing the cud. They had been busily cropping the grass but now are revisiting this earlier meal in a leisurely fashion. Occasionally one will roll over on its side so that its long tongue can lick its shoulder. I can hear their contented sighing.

In the distance a conscientious dog is barking vociferously in reaction to wind-borne auditory and olfactory signals from would be invaders. I imagine him patriotically patrolling the perimeter of his patron's premises, prophylactically protecting it.

A magpie is squawking noisily as she overflies me, warning her mate of my proximity. He is perched sixty feet up in a great Ash tree. Her outstretched wings end in white fanlike feathers that stroke the air as she dips and rises in the sine wave of her seesaw flight style.

A week of heavy rains has created puddles of various sizes. From the flat roof of Séamus's new workshop I gaze down upon one of them. It has an irregular shape and is about six feet across at its widest point. On Thursday last, when it was full of fresh rain, two of my grandnephews, Malcolm and Mink who are half-Irish, half-Dutch, made quite a splash in it. They are both two years old, and nothing warms the heart of a two-year old boy like the prospect of getting really wet and really muddy in such a puddle. Gratefully their mothers, Deirdre óg and Aisling, recognize that messy clothes is a very small price to pay for such an ecstatic experience. So the boys are allowed to indulge their fantasies with wild abandon.

Yesterday and today have been really sunny, so the puddles are in a slow retreat. In Swahili there is a distinction between "Upara wa tajiri" (a rich man's baldness) and "Upara wa maskini (a poor man's baldness.) One starts from the forehead and works its way backwards; the other starts on the crown of the head and advances simultaneously in all directions. But for the life of me I can't remember which is which. No matter! This puddle is employing both kinds as it shrinks, because it is simultaneously retracting its entire perimeter, while also uncovering and growing a small island (a clod of earth) in the center. The sun must have a very strong immune system for it laps up the bracken liquid without any health consequences.

A swallow is doing acrobatics about me, darting daringly. It is the nearest thing I know to an extraterrestrial craft, because it makes a series of orthogonal changes in direction that defy human aviation. Without

throttling back even a little, it skims the puddle-top snatching an insect off the surface, leaving not even a ripple in its wake.

A white, fluffy cloudlet is wiping the sweat off the sun's fiery face, and the resulting shadow turns the puddle into a perfect mirror. I can see the reflection of a Whitethorn bush, caught creatively by the irregularly shaped frame of the profile of the puddle. The water is so still that I can see the blossoms on the twigs of the Whitethorn.

In the puddle are insects and algae, the fauna and flora of a Mother Nature who specializes in Improv theatre. She has never met a challenge that she didn't find inspiring. In the space of this simple little puddle, God's great cosmic symphony is fractally displayed as a hologram called Life.

Namasté,

Tír na nÓg
May 2013

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Seán". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.