

Thoughts on Place

Returning from Ireland, a place I'd been many times, so many thoughts ... change, for the better, toward an unknown, a source of pride, and loss ... so many contradictory thoughts.

I'm American, thru and thru. Born and raised. I know the streets. The laws, the ways. A McDonald's at every other highway exit – all with hot coffee and a clean restroom. Love Thai and Viet Namese. See plays, produce a few ... know the tax code and racial divides, by color, by street, by income ... the political chasms ... dizzying re-definitions of gender by however I feel I am today ... of acceptance, rejection or ... And love, too. A vast array of whatever comes my way ... and I get it ... I understand it, all of it ... or some, most, usually anyway. But I don't feel at home. Yes, it is my home ... always has been ... it just doesn't feel that way.

My mom, dad and I came to Ireland in 1976. We went everywhere. A mad dash, to and fro. Dublin. Kerry. Sligo. Yeats' grave. Conner Pass, Cork, National Museums, round towers and peat bogs ... Doolin before it became DOOLIN ... Galway, Spanish gates ... people, walking, not so many cars ... "you can't get there this way" ... telephones, not so good ... TV's, only a few ... old people who remembered my own, or stories of same, their graves or lack thereof ... a tinker's wagon, the Aran Isles, Glengesh, Ardara ... and Irish, on many tongues ... seemingly held close to the chest, yes, and on the knees, especially in the rural West ... border crossings blown up ... Oglaign na hÉirinn, winking, waving us on, me with my phoenix rising lapel pin forgotten from the night before – probably too many Guinesses in a pub.

My dad, he disappeared in Gleann Cholm Cille ... my mom and me, we went inside, sat with the ladies by the peat fire, a cúpan tae or two ... a cold, hard, bitter day in June. Then he reappeared, sporting the very symbol of his name – CORCORAN, ruddy complected – back from the strand, his cheeks aglow ... and he declared, this is home. This is ... his home.

He died in '88 ... the hub of our wheel, broken. I returned ... took his gavel – he'd been a judge, his Irish flag which hung in his courtroom, a photo of him, a young WWII naval officer ... took them up Croagh Patrick ... a cold October day ... met the Brennan's from Leeds, the Murphy's from Belfast along the way ... and piped him 'back into Ireland' ... we all formed a circle and prayed ...

We've been back many times since ... my own family, Sharon, and me ... mostly to learn Irish ... IS TABHATAACH DOMH É ... back in that same glen my father called home ...

I understand his sense of place ... I feel it here, too – even more so in that glen ... yet ... it's so hard to explain ... the girl in Derry ... the Troubles, a page, for her, of a faded history ... the roads, PASSABLE, unlike before ... M's and even N's – tho some still dubbed AN BÓTHER BOCHT ... and cars, OMG, ubiquitous as rain ... who needs a land line ... and languages, so, so many spoken on the streets ... but barely a word of Irish ... it's the Tower of Babel, a human ant hill, now laid low ... we babblers scrambling all about– each on our own mad dash into - what ...

And me ... realizing that, yes, this is my home, too, as much or more than any other ... but even locals shocked to hear me thank them in Irish ... a few, looking up, a smile, saying slán ... only one, stopping to have a conversation he so eagerly wanted to have ... in that vast bog in the West of Mayo, I felt myself coming alive ... but ...

Place.

At 70, I'm sensing I have no place ... no place that truly IS my home ... not inside ... not where my heart lies ... not, at least, outside my wife's embrace.