Digging
by Seamus Heaney

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down

Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade.
Just like his old man.

My grandfather could cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner’s bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, digging down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I’ve no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I’ll dig with it.

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FROM COLLECTED POEMS BY PATRICK KAVANAGH. COPYRIGHT © 1964 BY PATRICK KAVANAGH. ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY THE DEVIN-ADAIR COMPANY.
The bicycles go by in twos and threes—
There's a dance in Billy Brennan's barn tonight,
And there's the half-talk code of mysteries
And the wink-and-elbow language of delight.
Half-past eight and there is not a spot
Upon a mile of road, no shadow thrown
That might turn out a man or woman, not
A footfall tapping secrecies of stone.

I have what every poet hates in spite
Of all the solemn talk of contemplation.
Oh, Alexander Selkirk knew the plight
Of being king and government and nation.
A road, a mile of kingdom, I am king
Of banks and stones and every blooming thing.

MEET THE POETS:
Seamus Heaney
BORN
1939, on a farm in County Derry in Northern Ireland
THE POET'S ROLE
Much of Heaney's poetry addresses the political and social situation in Ireland. He has always been concerned with the role of poetry in modern society.
BELOVED TEACHER
Throughout his career, Heaney has been a lecturer at various colleges in Europe and the U.S. Since 1981, he has spent part of every year away from his home in Dublin to teach at Harvard.
NOBEL WINNER
The Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to Heaney in 1995.
HEANEYBOPPERS
Heaney's work is both critically and popularly acclaimed. His readings draw hundreds of loyal fans known as "Heaneyboppers."

Patrick Kavanagh
BORN
1904, in the village of Inniskeen, County Monaghan, in Northern Ireland
DIED
1967, in Dublin
HOW HE CAME TO BE A POET
Kavanagh spent his early life working on his family farm. But then, he said, "I dabbled in verse, and it became my life."
THE GREAT CONTROVERSY
"The Great Hunger," Kavanagh's poem about the mental and sexual frustrations of Irish rural life, was deemed obscene at the time it was published, and all copies were seized. Now, it is widely considered to be Kavanagh's best work.