Digging. Honoring the 1995 Nobel Prize for Literature

Digging



Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pin rest; 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 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, going 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.
Seamus Heaney