for us very often than ingredients.
Had we not fed our severed heads[3] on poetry
final might have been our fame's starvation.
Upholding cuisine for us are the French
to be counting in scores and called Gallic.[4]

In English and many more, in Chinese
the verb surrounds itself nucleus-fashion
with its subjects and qualifiers.
Down every slope of the wok they go
to the spitting middle, to be sauced,
ladled, lidded, steamed, flipped back up,
becoming verbs themselves often

and the calm egg centres the meatloaf.

2006

3. Sometimes said to have been venerated by the ancient Celts.
4. Of Gaul, the Roman name for the region of France. In French, 20 is still a base number from 70 to 99.

SEAMUS HEANEY
1939–2013

Seamus Heaney was born into a Roman Catholic family in predominantly Protestant North Ireland (or Ulster), and he grew up on a farm in County Derry bordered on one side by a stream that marked the frontier with the largely Catholic Irish Republic (or Eire) to the south. He won scholarships first to St. Columb's College, a Catholic boarding school, and then to Queen's University in Belfast. There he became one of an extraordinary group of Northern Irish poets from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds, including Michael Longley and Derek Mahon, who read, discussed, and spurred on one another's work. He taught at Queen's University, before moving in 1972 to the Irish Republic, where he became a citizen and full-time writer. He was Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard and Professor of Poetry at Oxford, and in 1995 won the Nobel Prize in Literature.

With "Digging," placed appropriately as the first poem of his first book, Heaney defined his territory. He dug into his memory, uncovering first his father and then, going deeper, his grandfather. This idea of poetry as an archaeological process of recovery took on a darker cast after the eruption of internecine violence in Northern Ireland in 1969, culminating in the 1972 Bloody Sunday killing of thirteen Catholic civilians by British paratroopers during a civil rights march in Derry. Across several volumes, especially *North* (1975), Heaney wrote a series of grim "bog poems," about well-preserved Iron Age corpses discovered in the peat of Northern Europe and Ireland. In these poems he sees the bog as a "memory bank," or unconscious, that preserves everything thrown into it, including the victims of ritual killings. He views contemporary violence through the lens of ancient myths, sacrifices, and feuds, an oblique approach that gives his poetry about the Troubles an unusual depth and resonance. He had discovered emblems for the violence in Northern

Ireland in *The Bog People*, a book by the Danish archaeologist P. V. Glob, published in translation in 1969, "the year the killing started." Heaney wrote of it:

> It was chiefly concerned with preserved bodies of men and women found in the bogs of Jutland, naked, strangled or with their throats cut, disposed under the peat since early Iron Age times. The author . . . argues convincingly that a number of these, and in particular, the Tollund Man, whose head is now preserved near Aarhus in the museum of Silkeburg, were ritual sacrifices to the Mother Goddess, the goddess of the ground who needed new bridegrooms each winter to bed with her in her sacred place, in the spring. Taken in relation to the tradition of Irish political martyrdom for the cause whose icon is Kathleen Ni Houlihan [mythic figure emblematic of Mother Ireland], this is more than an archaic barbarous rite: it is an archetypal pattern. And the unforgettable photographs of these victims blended in my mind with photographs of atrocities, past and present, in the long rites of Irish political and religious struggles. ("Feeling into Words")

In the bog poems Heaney reflects on the poet's responsibilities to write about the dead, yet to do so without prettifying or exploiting them. He probes the vexed relations between lyric song and historical suffering, "beauty and atrocity": the need to be true to his calling as artist, but also to represent the irredeemable carnage of modern political violence—"the actual weight / of each hooded victim / slashed and dumped" ("The Grauballe Man"). The result is a tough-minded witnessing, an ethically scrupulous and self-aware mourning of collective loss and sectarian murder. (For more on the Troubles, see the "Imagining Ireland" topic in the supplemental ebook.)

From the late 1970s Heaney elegized specific victims of the Troubles, such as his acquaintance Louis O'Neill, in "Casualty," as well as more personal losses, such as the natural death of his mother, in "Clearances." He also wrote poems about domestic love, such as "The Skunk" and "The Sharping Stone." Heaney was thus both a private poet—skillfully kneading grief, love, and wonder into poems about his family and his humble origins—and a public poet, affirming his affinities with the Catholic civil rights movement, which has struggled against British and Protestant domination. Even in his public poetry he refused slogans, journalistic reportage, and political pieties, scrutinizing instead the wellsprings of collective identity, the ambivalences of individual response to history. Responding obliquely to the destruction of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, he reworked a two-thousand-year-old Latin ode by Horace in "Anything Can Happen," and the bombings of the London underground (subway) on July 7, 2005, reverberate in *District and Circle* (2006).

An Irishman writing in the language of the British Empire, he translated Gaelic poetry and renewed specifically Irish traditions, such as the *aisling*, or vision poem, but he was also steeped in the English literary canon, drawing on British poetry from *Beowulf* (his prize-winning translation appears earlier in this anthology) to the works of William Wordsworth, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Ted Hughes. Straddling a multiplicity of divisions, transubstantiating crisscross feelings into unexpected images and intricate sonorities, Heaney's work has been embraced by popular audiences for its accessible style and yet also admired by poets and academic critics for its lyric subtlety and rigorous technique.

Formally, Heaney's poetry ranges from strenuous free verse—the clipped lines and unrhymed quatrains of the bog poems—to more traditional forms, such as the modified terza rima of "Station Island" and the sonnet sequence "Clearances." His poems are earthy and matter-of-fact, saturated with the physical textures, sights, smells, and sounds of farm life, and they are also visionary, lit up by hope and spirit, enacting penitential pilgrimages and unbridled imaginings. That Heaney's poetry is both earthbound and airborne, free and formed, public and private helps explain why he is seen by many as the most gifted English-language poet of his generation.

Digging

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[1]
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[2] 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.

1966

The Forge

All I know is a door into the dark.
Outside, old axles and iron hoops rusting;
Inside, the hammered anvil's short-pitched ring,
The unpredictable fantail of sparks

1. Small furrows in which seeds are sown.
2. Slabs of peat that, when dried, are a common domestic fuel in Ireland.

Or hiss when a new shoe toughens in water.
The anvil must be somewhere in the centre,
Horned as a unicorn, at one end square,
Set there immoveable: an altar
Where he expends himself in shape and music.
Sometimes, leather-aproned, hairs in his nose,
He leans out on the jamb, recalls a clatter
Of hoofs where traffic is flashing in rows;
Then grunts and goes in, with a slam and flick
To beat real iron out, to work the bellows.

1969

The Grauballe Man[1]

As if he had been poured
in tar, he lies
on a pillow of turf
and seems to weep

the black river of himself.
The grain of his wrists
is like bog oak,
the ball of his heel

like a basalt egg.
His instep has shrunk
cold as a swan's foot
or a wet swamp root.

His hips are the ridge
and purse of a mussel,
his spine an eel arrested
under a glisten of mud.

The head lifts,
the chin is a visor
raised above the vent
of his slashed throat

that has tanned and toughened.
The cured wound
opens inwards to a dark
elderberry place.

Who will say 'corpse'
to his vivid cast?
Who will say 'body'
to his opaque repose?

1. A body exhumed from a Danish bog and photographed in P. V. Glob's book *The Bog People*.

And his rusted hair,
a mat unlikely
as a foetus's.
I first saw his twisted face

in a photograph,
a head and shoulder
out of the peat,
bruised like a forceps baby,

but now he lies
perfected in my memory,
down to the red horn
of his nails,

hung in the scales
with beauty and atrocity:
with the Dying Gaul[2]
too strictly compassed

on his shield,
with the actual weight
of each hooded victim,
slashed and dumped.

1975

Punishment[1]

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front.

It blows her nipples
to amber beads,
it shakes the frail rigging
of her ribs.

2. Roman marble reproduction of a Greek bronze sculpture depicting a wounded soldier of Gaul, whose matted hair identifies him as a Celt, in Rome's Capitoline Museum.

1. In 1951 the peat-stained body apparently of a young girl, who lived in the late 1st century C.E., was recovered from a bog in Windeby, Germany. As P. V. Glob describes her in *The Bog People*, she "lay naked in the hole in the peat, a bandage over the eyes and a collar round the neck. The band across the eyes was drawn tight and had cut into the neck and the base of the nose. We may feel sure that it had been used to close her eyes to this world. There was no mark of strangulation on the neck, so that it had not been used for that purpose." Her hair "had been shaved off with a razor on the left side of the head. . . . When the brain was removed the convolutions and folds of the surface could be clearly seen [Glob reproduces a photograph of her brain]. . . . This girl of only fourteen had had an inadequate winter diet. . . . To keep the young body under, some birch branches and a big stone were laid upon her." According to the Roman historian Tacitus, the Germanic peoples punished adulterous women by shaving off their hair and then scourging them out of the village or killing them. More recently, her "betraying sisters" were sometimes shaved, stripped, tarred, and handcuffed by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) to the railings of Belfast in punishment for keeping company with British soldiers.

I can see her drowned
body in the bog,
the weighing stone,
the floating rods and boughs.

Under which at first
she was a barked sapling
that is dug up
oak-bone, brain-firkin:° *small cask*

her shaved head
like a stubble of black corn,
her blindfold a soiled bandage,
her noose a ring

to store
the memories of love.
Little adultress,
before they punished you

you were flaxen-haired,
undernourished, and your
tar-black face was beautiful.
My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.
I am the artful voyeur

of your brain's exposed
and darkened combs,° *valleys*
your muscles' webbing
and all your numbered bones:

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled° in tar, *wrapped, enclosed*
wept by the railings,

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.

1975