**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 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.

**Letters from Yorkshire** by Maura Dooley

In February, digging his garden, planting potatoes,

he saw the first lapwings return and came

indoors to write to me, his knuckles singing

as they reddened in the warmth.

It’s not romance, simply how things are.

You out there, in the cold, seeing the seasons

turning, me with my heartful of headlines

feeding words onto a blank screen.

Is your life more real because you dig and sow?

You wouldn’t say so, breaking ice on a waterbutt,

clearing a path through snow. Still, it’s you

who sends me word of that other world

pouring air and light into an envelope. So that

at night, watching the same news in different houses,

our souls tap out messages across the icy miles.