

The Pen

The pen that told the truth
went into the washing machine
for its trouble. Came out
an hour later, and was tossed
in the dryer with jeans
and a western shirt. Days passed
while it lay quietly on the desk
under the window. Lay there
thinking it was finished and
without a single conviction
to its name. It didn't have
the will to go on, even if it'd wanted.
But one morning, an hour or so
before sunrise, it came to life
and wrote:
"The damp fields asleep in moonlight."
Then it was still again.
Its usefulness in this life
clearly at an end.
He shook it and whacked it
on the desk. Then gave up
on it, or nearly.
Once more though, with the greatest
effort, it summoned its last
reserves. This is what it wrote:
"A light wind, and beyond the window
trees swimming in the golden morning air."
He tried to write some more
but that was all. The pen
quit working forever.
By and by it was put
into the stove along with
other junk. And much later
it was another pen,
an undistinguished pen
that hadn't proved itself
yet, that facilely wrote:
"Darkness gathers in the branches.
Stay inside. Keep still."

RAYMOND CARVER

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
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

My Typewriter

I have a trim typewriter now,
They tell me none is better;
It makes a pleasing, rhythmic row,
And neat is every letter.
I tick out stories by machine,
Dig pars, and gags, and verses keen,
And lathe them off in manner slick.
It is so easy, and it's quick.

And yet it falls short, I'm afraid,
Of giving satisfaction,
This making literature by aid
Of scientific traction;
For often, I can't fail to see,
The dashed thing runs away with me.
It bolts, and do whate'er I may
I cannot hold the runaway.

It is not fitted with a brake,
And endless are my verses,
Nor any yarn I start to make
Appropriately terse is.
'Tis plain that this machine-made screed
Is fit but for machines to read;
So "Wanted" (as an iron censor)
"A good, sound, secondhand condenser!"

EDWARD GEORGE DYSON