

SEAMUS HEANEY'S BOG POEMS

GUILT AND RESPONSIBILITY DURING THE
TROUBLES



SEAMUS HEANEY

- born 1939
- grew up in Northern Ireland
- father was a farmer (cattle-dealing), mother's family worked for the linen mill
- at 12, won a scholarship for a boarding school in Derry



BELFAST

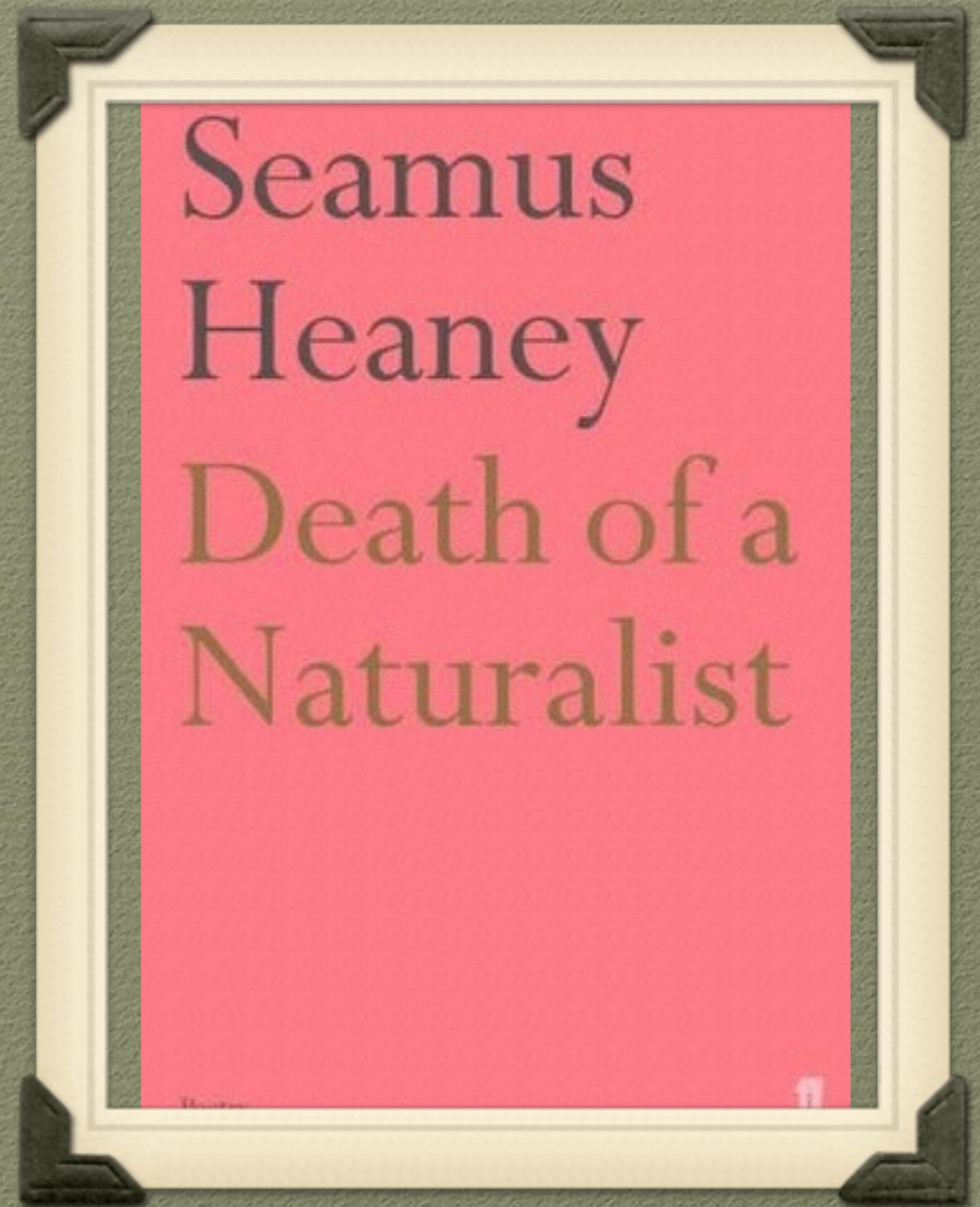
- attended Queen's University in Belfast
- taught at various secondary schools
- introduced to Patrick Kavanagh's work
- began publishing poems in 1962
- joined the Belfast Group





DEATH OF A NATURALIST

- published in 1967
- second volume,
breakthrough work
- rural poems
- childhood, family, land



THE TROUBLES

- Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association
- Civil rights march in Derry, 1968
- Battle of the Bogside and the 1969 Northern Ireland Riots
- Unionists vs. Nationalists
 - based in political, represented by religious



A CITIZEN'S PERCEPTION

“While the Christian moralist in oneself was impelled to deplore the atrocious nature of the IRA's campaign of bombings and killings, and the "mere Irish" in oneself was appalled by the ruthlessness of the British Army on occasions like Bloody Sunday in Derry in 1972, the minority citizen in oneself, the one who had grown up conscious that his group was distrusted and discriminated against in all kinds of official and unofficial ways, this citizen's perception was at one with the poetic truth of the situation in recognizing that if life in Northern Ireland were ever really to flourish, change had to take place.”

- Seamus Heaney, *Crediting Poetry*





Bloody Sunday

- anywhere from 3,000 to 30,000 marchers
- debates about armed or unarmed
- 26 men shot, 14 dead
- revitalized the IRA

THE TOLLUND MAN

- "The Tollund Man seemed to me like an ancestor almost, one of my old uncles, one of those moustached archaic faces you used to meet all over the Irish countryside. I felt very close to this. And the sacrificial element, the territorial religious element, the whole mythological field surrounding these images was very potent. So I tried, not explicitly, to make a connection between the sacrificial, ritual, religious element in the violence of contemporary Ireland and this terrible sacrificial religious thing in The Bog People.

• -Seamus Heaney , 1979



TOLLUND MAN

I
Some day I will go to Aarhus
To see his peat-brown head,
The mild pods of his eye-lids,
His pointed skin cap.

In the flat country near by
Where they dug him out,
His last gruel of winter seeds
Caked in his stomach,

Naked except for
The cap, noose and girdle,
I will stand a long time.
Bridegroom to the goddess,

She tightened her torc on him
And opened her fen,
Those dark juices working
Him to a saint's kept body,

Trove of the turfcutters'
Honeycombed workings.
Now his stained face
Reposes at Aarhus.



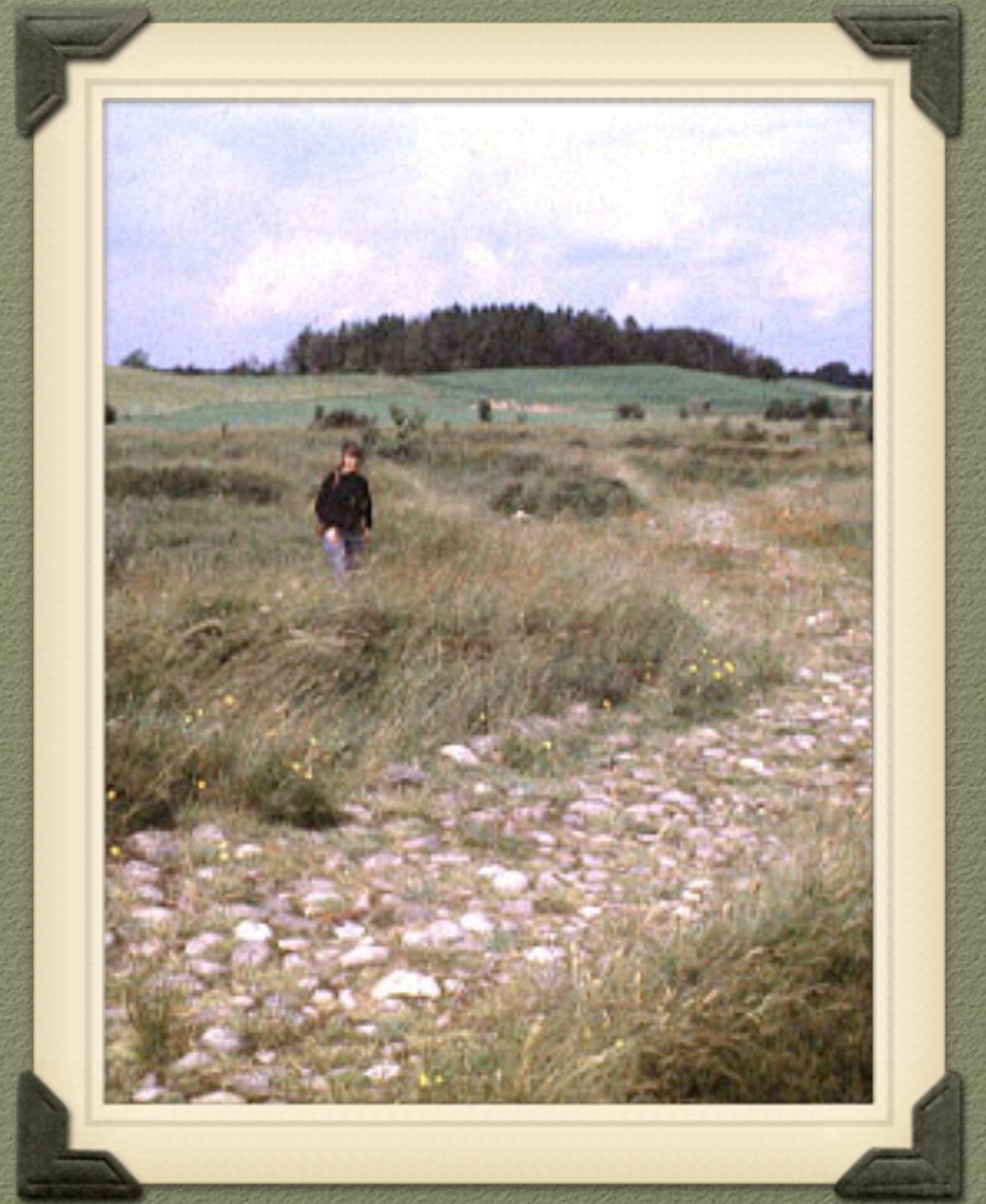
THE TOLLUND MAN

II

I could risk blasphemy,
Consecrate the cauldron bog
Our holy ground and pray
Him to make germinate

The scattered, ambushed
Flesh of labourers,
Stockinged corpses
Laid out in the farmyards,

Tell-tale skin and teeth
Flecking the sleepers
Of four young brothers, trailed
For miles along the lines.



THE TOLLUND MAN

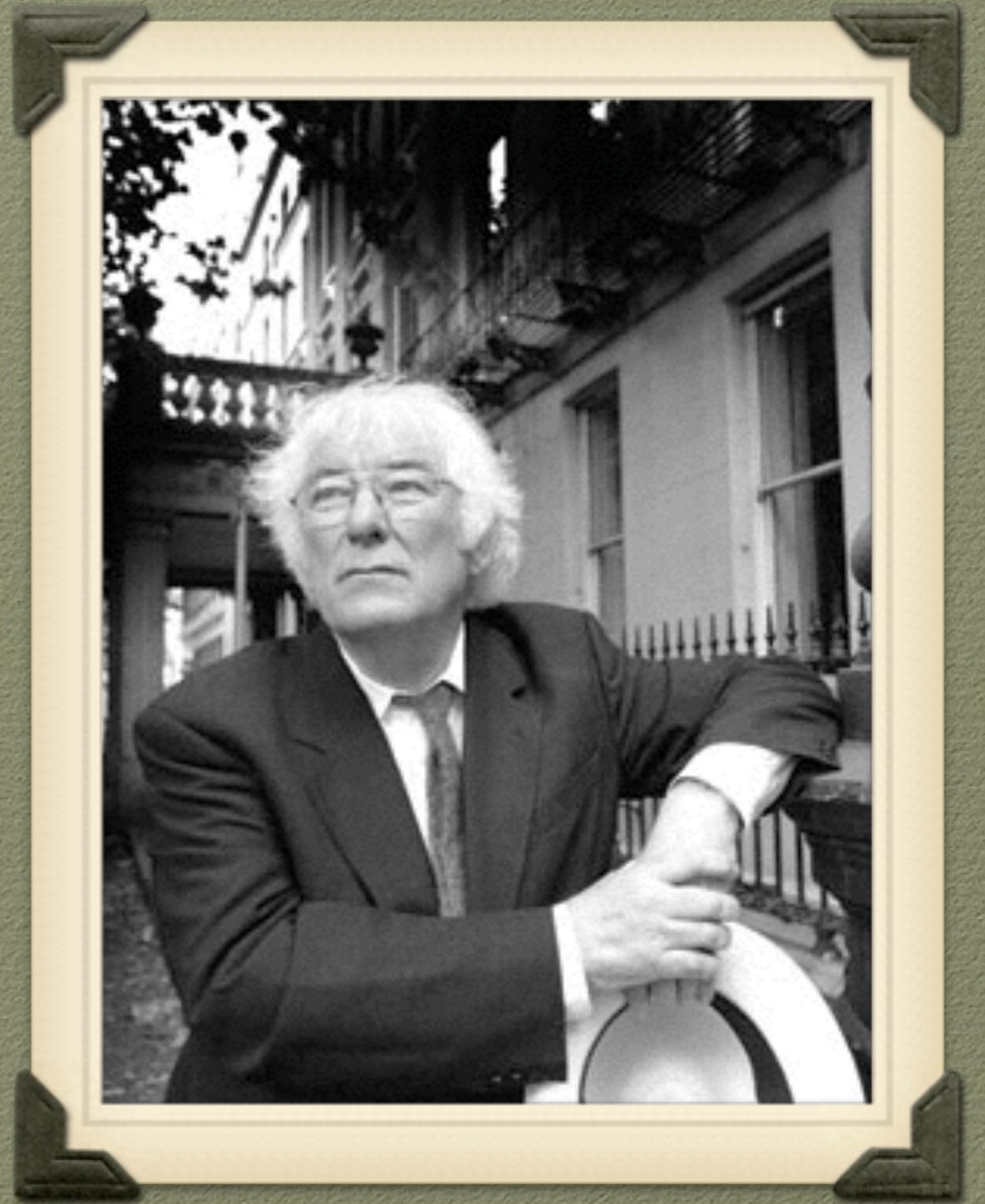
III

Something of his sad freedom
As he rode the tumbril
Should come to me, driving,
Saying the names

Tollund, Grauballe, Nebelgard,

Watching the pointing hands
Of country people,
Not knowing their tongue.

Out here in Jutland
In the old man-killing parishes
I will feel lost,
Unhappy and at home.



“PUNISHMENT”

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.

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:

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,
your muscles' webbing
and all your numbered bones:

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

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



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