

SEAMUS HEANEY AT HARVARD

In the restaurant after his reading
someone told a joke
whose punch line involved
speaking while giving a blow job,
puffed cheeks and muffled speech,

and he smiled and asked politely
to hear the last part again,
not for comprehension
but to prolong his amusement,
that blend of courtesy and naughtiness

familiar to me from being in his class that year
though too shy to say much
like a lot of his hangers-on
treated graciously
if at arm's length a bit

as when he inscribed my
and my friend's and another friend's
copies of *Station Island*
with identical whimsical lines.
His poetry, his fame, his ease

in dispensing wit and kindness
and not least his (to us) exotic accent
inspired a reverence
that seemed to weary him
when I admired the attention

paid him by the waitstaff that night
saying it must be nice
and he answered it was
if one didn't mind being
a mascot.