

I.Y. HASHIMOTO

On Seamus Heaney's Hair

Understand, of course, that if you are intense enough, anything white will do. Early in the morning, just before the wind picks up and small boys stack cardboard boxes on the curb, put your sleepy eyes close to something like a bleached sheet or a jumbo Safeway egg or Mona Charen. Stare at that cheap white thing, that sad source of inspiration. Stare and stare and just before your eyeballs dry out and your lids rub like wash cloths dragged over melons in July—look for colors to break out and blood explode behind the broken background of the day; look for wow, for smoke, a burning car on a Belfast street.

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Anything, of course, will do, but who would want a jumbo egg or Mona Charen when they could have...just one clump of Seamus Heaney's hair?

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I've only seen that hair once—over I forget what—fish, maybe—although I don't think I was eating the fish. I was eating something else, I'm sure. There was a fruit compote—bluish berries, all mashed up—I remember spooning those berries next to a lump of processed squash or pale sweet potato. Purple and red bled into yellow. A colleague of mine, who was sitting between me and Seamus Heaney, had just turned and said that she was not ignoring me on purpose—she was just doing her job. And as she turned back to entertain the Poet with recollections of Cambridge, Mass., *Car Talk* or Boston in the spring, I looked over the back of her head and from where I was sitting, I could see the whole west side of Seamus Heaney's head—and what a marvelous side it was.

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Someplace between Laramie and Rawlins, I imagine snow drifting over the highway—deep white blowing snow. The wind is gusting and the road is closed. Past the gates, too late to stop, stranded motorists are digging emergency snow caves with tire irons and bare hands. They will hunker down in those caves with Hershey bars and aspirin and write poetry until the snow lets up and dogs bark.

Oh the snow, oh the snow,
lies thick on Heaney's brow,
chug-a-lug chug-a-lug
Oh the snow, oh the snow,
blocks out the sun, the moon,
hidey-hie, hidey-ho

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Out on the floes, where the snow sparkles brighter than you could ever imagine, you do not stare at polar bears or poets' heads or count the hairs on frozen fish; you squint for them through small slits machined in goggles made of bone or space-age plastic. Behind those small slits, you filter sight or you go blind.

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I am blinded. I am dumbfounded, but I am not obsessed. I just want some of that pure white wavy stuff that sits up on Seamus Heaney's head like snow or fine white calf tail or pure white baby seal. I will take a clump or two of that fine white stuff, stack it in a large brass tube, portion it out a little at a time to wing dry flies: Royal Trudes and Royal Wulfes and maybe a couple of House and Lots. If I do not have enough, I will tie what I have on the back of a single Turke's Tarantula—dressed out on a size 4 hook—a large, floppy-legged bug with a single wing like a big bright sail.

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Grandpa Osumi had some of the nicest old hair I have ever known—thick and dark and straight. It never lost its color even when he got

too old to swear or smoke cigars or suck whiskey right out of the bottle. But who was grandpa Osumi, anyway? Down at that beaten kitchen table, watching his wife manage the Pennsylvania Hotel, empty chamber pots, flush the single toilet down the hall, two blocks from the Greyhound bus depot, he collected broken fold-up knives from guests too distracted to remember and ate *okazu*.

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Grandma Osumi had nice hair, too, though it didn't last as long and thinned out too quickly and made her look too small too soon. And Tadaichi, my father, pulled his straight back over his head—dark and wavy, like he had crimped it with a marcel iron. When he was young, he posed with that hair—hanging out in front of an old Ford in black and white, hands in his baggy pants—he may not have known what he was doing, but his hair was cool. When it got too long, he pulled tufts of it out to the side where he could see them in the mirror and trimmed them back with sewing scissors.

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But Seamus Heaney's hair. Seamus Heaney's Hair.

Why would I want someone else's hair when I could wear . . .

The Poet's hair.

In our upstairs bathroom by the sink, he will pull bits of that pure white stuff out to the side and cut them off, and I will catch them as they fall and save them in a Ziploc bag—enough to thatch or weave into a thick mat or hat or poke through cheese cloth or felt. I will take that mat or hat and lash it on my head to warm my frontal lobe; I will wear it in the snow; I will wear it in the rain. I will stroll past the statue of the deformed fish and wait for someone to say, "Hi, how are you? 'sup?" and "What's that on your head? It looks like a big white piece of carpet. What are you doing with a carpet on your . . . by gawd! you're wearing . . ." And I'd say, "Yes, I'm wearing Seamus Heaney's hair, what do you think, you bloke, you oaf, you ploughsock, you bent slug-horn? Do you think I'd wear a carpet on

my head or something taped together out of Grandpa Osumi's trunk?"

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(To wear a mat of Seamus Heaney's hair, first make sure it's all one piece and bound with something pliable like bias tape or cording or double stitching, preferably on a sewing machine with a good zigzag. If it is, carefully poke holes in the corners and tie a ribbon or a string to each hole with simple overhand knots. Once your knots are tight, hoist it with both hands, careful to keep the whole thing from stretching one side to the other, careful not to drop it on the bathroom floor. When you're satisfied that you have control, lower it on your own hair or shave your own hair off and—this is, in fact, preferable—build a soft, secure platform of dryer lint or ethafoam to keep what you attach from shifting in a strong wind. Never use contact cement or anything containing toluol, heptane, acetone, or naphtha as these could catch on fire at book signings or on tour.)

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(To fish with a clump of Seamus Heaney's hair, lash it on to something thinner than a wire fence and thicker than a spittle string. Loop the line back and forth, back and forth off the end of your rod until you can lift that hair between the trees and thrum without a bump from ten to two o'clock. When you have the rhythm right, you'll feel the rod load and thrum without a bump from ten to two o'clock. Swing that fly and load that rod and long before you lose control and that bright clump of perfect hair thumps you in the back of the head, zing it out and let it splat next to reeds or under the branches of the mock oranges or wild roses that grow low along the bank. Skip that clump upstream and wait for it to bounce into the thin seam between deep current and back eddy. When it breaks free from the slow water, mend your line and let it drift dead until something big rolls on the surface and sucks it up.)

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Must sell: Grandpa Osumi's hair. All you can wear. Nice stuff, and clean. Name your price. 522-1364. Ask for Hash.

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Down on the corner of 15th and Stout, I will board the number 15 bus with Seamus Heaney on my head. I will drop exact change in the till and stagger toward the back, past the toothless boys who chew on the metal rail in front of them, past women with pink curlers who stare at me as if I'm stupid and out of place, past young lads with guns and knives in their baggy pants, past little cats and ducks, past Christmas past and Christmas yet to come and auld lang syne. Finally, when I reach the very back, where the seats turn sideways over the wheels, a small fellow with a buckle on his hat and a sack of wool mittens clasped to his chest will stop me and ask with a slight Irish accent and a knowing eye, "Ayre ye... Ayre ye...?"

And I'll say, "Why, yes, I am. Yes I am. How did you know?"