



Beauty, Bounty, Brio, Buoyancy

SEAMUS HEANEY INTRODUCES AN ANNIVERSARY ALBUM



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF HARVARD NEWS OFFICE. (OPPOSITE), JUSTIN IDE. (THIS PAGE, TOP) STEPHANIE MITCHELL; (BOTTOM) JON CHASE.

IN 1986 SEAMUS HEANEY created a true legacy for Harvard's commemoration of its 350th birthday with his "Villanelle for an Anniversary" ("A spirit moves, John Harvard walks the yard/The books stand open and the gates unbarred."). Now, a quarter-century on—no longer lecturer, but Nobel laureate—Heaney may have turned the trick again. His lyrical prose preface to *Explore Harvard* (a lush photo album prepared by Harvard Public Affairs and Communications photographers and writers, published by Harvard University Press) homes in on three images to distill the essence of the place.

One, of Design School students planting the roof at Gund Hall, "united by a concatenation of ladders which comprise a kind of landlubber's rigging," strikes Heaney as a "single ascending up-reach whereby the whole thing becomes an image of aspiration, of individual endeavour gaining momentum and meaning from being part of a shared activity." Another is of a "down-to-earth spade and trowel job," an archaeological dig in Harvard Yard: "meticulous work, unspectacular but intensely focused, not unlike the workaday attention a student must pay to his or her academic assignments." The book's theme, he says, is in the middle course between sky and earth—a condition he calls "buoyancy," revealed especially in student life, and a characteristic, along with

the "collective brio" of the place, of which he was beneficiary as a faculty member from 1982 to 1996.

John Harvard's much-rubbed toecap completes Heaney's triangulation: it reminds him of the queries he undertook in 1986 to discover inspiration for his great villanelle-in-making, delving into the original benefactor's history and the College's origins "beside the cattle sheds"—familiar terrain for the poet. And so he is anchored in this "beautiful, bountiful cornucopia of images."

Beauty, bounty, brio, buoyancy: exactly the right terms for a great university—and for Heaney's creative celebration of this one. *Explore Harvard* indeed. ♡

Explore Harvard: The Yard and Beyond (\$39.95) is available from booksellers or online at www.hup.harvard.edu.

