Punishment

SUMMARY

I can imagine the noose pulling tight at the back of the hanged girl's neck and the wind blowing across the front of her naked body.

The wind hardens her brownish nipples and shudders her delicate ribs, which look like ropes through her skin.

I can imagine her corpse sunk under the peat bog with a rock weighing it down, and the sticks and branches floating on the bog's surface.

At first, her drowned body was like a young tree stripped of bark. When they dug up, her bones were tough as oak, and her skull was like a wooden tub holding her brains.

Her head, which had been shaved, was like a field dotted with black, cut-down cornstalks. The blindfold her executioners had given her was like a dirty bandage, and the rope around her neck was like a ring symbolizing the romance they punished her for.

Adulterous girl, before you were shaved and executed, you were blonde and skinny with hunger, and your face, which the bog has darkened and fossilized, was lovely.

Poor, singled-out victim, I almost feel as if I love you—but I realize, deep down, that I would've stayed silent in the face of your persecution, thereby punishing you as much as if I were stoning you.

I'm just the clever, self-indulgent witness of your brain's dark, visible folds; your web-like muscles; and your exposed, easily counted bones.

I've also stood by silently as your modern equivalents—women accused of betraying the Irish nationalist cause by sleeping with British soldiers—have had tar poured on their heads and been tied up, crying, beside public railings.

I join in outward anger, as a "civilized" person, at this uncivilized punishment. But deep down, I know what motivates this calculated, tribalistic, personal vengeance.

THEMES

THE PERMANENCE OF VIOLENCE AND VENGEANCE

Seamus Heaney's "Punishment" contemplates one of the ancient "bog bodies" dug up from the bogs of Ireland. This particular corpse belongs to a young woman executed, or so the speaker imagines, for the crime of adultery. Her fate reminds the speaker of Irish women who, during Heaney's own time, were publicly punished for their romantic involvements with British soldiers. The speaker recognizes that his "civilized outrage" at this modern-day violence is a kind of lie: he understands "tribal[ism]" and the "revenge" motive just as instinctively as his ancient forebears. And no matter how he feels, brutal public punishments—of women in particular—continue to happen just as they did before modern "civilizat[ion]." The poem thus implies that violence, vengeance, and the "scapegoat[ing]" of women are historical constants: humanity hasn't meaningfully evolved beyond them since ancient times.

The poem describes an execution victim whose punishment at first seems primitive and antiquated. After being stripped naked and hanged, the young woman's body was "weigh[ted]" with a "stone" and thrown in the bog. The speaker suggests that she was executed as an "adulteress" (though this is speculation). In most modern societies, adultery is no longer a criminal (much less a capital) offense, so both the execution and the crime seem like relics of a barbaric past.

But the speaker realizes this ancient punishment has contemporary parallels in his own country; in other words, it can't be safely relegated to history. To the speaker, the hanged adulteress seems similar to a group of young Irish women in his own time: those whose communities tarred and feathered them for sleeping with British soldiers during the conflict known as "The Troubles." Tarring and feathering is itself an ancient, cruel mode of punishment, which readers might associate with history books—yet it happened in Northern Ireland in the late 20th century.

The poem implies, then, that what is "ancient" is also "modern"; these parallel situations give the lie to idealistic notions of human progress. Pointedly, the speaker calls the modern tarring-and-feathering victims "sisters" of the hanged girl. Though divided by centuries, these punished women belong inextricably to the same human family—and that family is so unvarying (human nature is so constant) that they might as well belong to the same generation. And of course, the speaker is part of that family, too. He admits that, although he "would connive / in civilized outrage," he perfectly well "understands" the "tribal, intimate revenge" behind both punishments. In other words, though he disapproves of the revenge, there's something disingenuous about his and others' pretense that "civilized" humanity has moved beyond such things. Deep down, he knows they haven't.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-44

VOYEURISM VS. ACTIVISM

"Punishment" describes the well-preserved remains of an ancient execution victim who was young, female, and vulnerable. The speaker (a version of the poet, who encountered photos of such victims in books) is keenly aware of the "artful voyeur[ism]" of his description. As he contemplates, pities, and "almost love[s]" this ancient girl, he recognizes that young women in his own time also face terrible public punishments and that he does nothing to intervene on their behalf. That is, he draws an uncomfortable parallel between his role as a witness or "voyeur" to history and his role as a bystander amid the evils of the present. The poem suggests that pity for history's victims is inadequate—even self-indulgent—as long as it remains passive.

The speaker's detailed description of the executed girl seems to convey sensitivity, empathy, and even tenderness. The speaker imagines himself in her place just prior to execution, claiming he "can feel" the noose on her neck, the wind on her "frail" body, and so on. He acutely senses her fragility and vulnerability. From the evidence of her remains, he reimagines the living face and body of this "Little adulteress," deciding that she was "beautiful" despite her malnourishment and suffering.

Yet the speaker himself judges that his tenderness is disingenuous—a kind of artistic pose—because he's too passive or cowardly to help the living equivalents of the dead girl. He tells the girl that "I almost love you / but would have cast, I know, / the stones of silence." That "almost" is crucial: he suggests that what he feels for her falls short of genuine love. He admits that, if he'd lived during her time, he wouldn't have intervened on her behalf—unlike someone who really loved her. Instead, he would have aided her persecutors by remaining silent and neutral.

He may be a sensitive witness to history, but he's not a passionate historical *actor* or agent of change. And he knows this for a fact, because he recognizes that the dead girl has living, suffering "sisters." He compares the hanging of the "adulteress" to the public "tar[ring]" of young women in his own day: specifically, Irish women who were romantically linked with British soldiers. (In the late 20th century, conflict between Britain and Ireland spawned a period of state violence and terrorism known as "the Troubles." The tarred women of this period were essentially punished for tribal disloyalty—and, like the ancient "adulteress," for loving the wrong person.) Again, the speaker is *writing* about these victims, but not doing anything else on their behalf, so he feels complicit in their persecution.

By extension, the poem implies that real love—especially for the innocent, vulnerable, wronged, etc.—is never passive in the face of injustice. It expresses itself through activism, not voyeurism.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-12
- Lines 23-44

ART AND PRESERVATION

The bog in "Punishment" turns the fragile corpse of a girl into an object as sturdy and lasting as an "oak[]." The "artful" poet (or speaker) does something similar with his art. By reimagining the girl's story and linking it with present-day realities, he bestows a kind of immortality on an anonymous person and a forgotten historical moment. Like the Irish bogs themselves, the poem hints, art has incredible preservative properties. It may even have certain *redemptive* properties: it can summon up lost beauty and grant power and significance to people who were trivialized, abused, and rejected.

Just as the bog preserves the victim's body, the poem preserves her story—to the point where it almost seems to bring her back to life. At the time of her death, the girl was terribly "frail," but by the time she's "dug up," the chemicals in the bog have hardened her corpse to "oak-bone." Similarly, the poem makes a permanent record of a fleeting and once-forgotten event. Indeed, the poet/speaker claims that "I can feel" and "I can see" what the girl went through, emphasizing that her experience is no longer buried and lost to history. It's now a *shared* experience, for the reader as well as the poet. The poet imagines her "noose" (also preserved by the bog) as "a ring / to store / the memories of love." Of course, the noose was the cause of her death and the bog her burial place. But in a strange way, these things have also *memorialized* her tragedy—and the poem does something similar. It can't resurrect her, of course, but it records her trauma and turns her remains into something "artful."

This "artful[ness]" offers a faint hint of redemption in an otherwise somber, self-accusing poem. The speaker ambiguously calls himself the girl's "artful voyeur." At most, this is only half a compliment, since "artful" can mean "cunning" or "deceitful" as well as "skilled at art." Still, it's the closest thing to a positive note in the poem, and it signals Heaney's awareness that he *has* created a memorable portrait of the hanged girl. The victim will never receive justice or come back to life, but the poem honors her in the only way that may still be possible. As if lifting her "weigh[ed]"-down body from the bog, it elevates her image to something "beautiful."

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-36

MISOGYNY

"Punishment" illustrates how women are punished more harshly than men for transgressing social boundaries—particularly those involving sex. Punishment, in these cases, becomes a way for male-dominated society to assert control over women's bodies and lives. By casting himself as a passive "voyeur" of such punished women, the male poet basically accuses himself of participating in this misogyny. As an artist, he may suspect that his fascination with these women arises from lust or other unsavory motives. As a citizen, he recognizes that he has not objected to—and therefore passively assents to—society's punishment and control of women.

The poem implies that the women it describes are victims of a misogyny—in particular, a sexual double standard—that has remained constant from ancient through modern times. The speaker calls the executed woman a "scapegoat," meaning that she was singled out and punished not only for her own offenses but those of others. That she was scapegoated as an "adulteress" implies that she was punished more harshly than the man or men she slept with. Similarly, the modern, "tar[red]" women of Northern Ireland have been punished, in effect, for sleeping with the enemy (British soldiers). But there's no such penalty for men in parallel situations; society treats their "betray[al]" as less severe. Though men were sometimes tarred for other reasons, only these "betraying sisters" are humiliated for perceived offenses related to sex. They, too, are scapegoats for a larger problem. A misogynist double standard therefore remains in effect centuries after the death of the "adulteress."

The speaker's criticism of his own role frames him as complicit in this misogyny. He describes himself, uneasily, as an "artful voyeur." Indeed, the poem focuses heavily on the adulteress's naked body, over which she had little agency in life and has no agency in death. Only in this passive state does she become "art" as opposed to a person. By calling himself voyeuristic, the speaker implies that there's something intrusive and exploitative about his detailed description—and that he may be writing it more for his own satisfaction than for the sake of love or justice. In fact, he admits that he would have "silen[tly]" witnessed the adulteress's hanging and that he's done nothing to intervene in the tarring of his female contemporaries. Creating art about these injustices is the most he's willing to do, and even this art may be an exploitative act or a poor substitute for activism.

These moral qualms take on more significance if the speaker is Heaney himself, a famous writer (and thus a man with some power in his society) at the time he wrote this poem. Heaney seems to be weighing whether art like his can meaningfully address the unjust "Punishment" of women, or whether it simply exploits or compounds the problem.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-44

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

I can feel ...
... her naked front.

The poem opens with the words "I can feel," but it soon becomes clear that the speaker isn't talking about his own experience. Instead, he's imagining someone else's. The unidentified speaker—who, later details will suggest, might be read as Heaney himself—is re-creating the experience of a woman who once stood "naked" with a rope around her "neck." The poem's title signals that her hanging was not a suicide; it was an execution, or "Punishment."

The speaker imagines "the tug / of the halter," or noose, as it tightened at the "nape" (back) of the woman's neck; this is a description of the moments just before her hanging, or perhaps of the hanging itself. The imagery is vivid and tactile (i.e., based on the sense of touch), helping readers, too, viscerally imagine themselves in this grim situation.

Normally, the word "halter" refers to a rope used for leading or tying up animals. Here, it suggests that the woman's executioners are dehumanizing her, treating her no *better* than an animal. Clearly, she isn't "naked" by choice in the "wind[y]" weather; her captors have stripped her in order to humiliate her. As later lines reveal, she has been convicted of a perceived sexual offense—adultery—so her punishment is designed first to shame and then to kill.

Though some religions regard adultery as a sin, few modern societies treat it as a crime, and even fewer treat it as a capital crime (one punishable by death). In modern Europe, where Heaney was writing, public shaming and execution for adultery are associated with more primitive eras; they haven't been part of formal legal systems for centuries. Right away, then, the method of "Punishment" is a clue that the woman in the poem lived long ago. However, the poem will question whether European cultures—and "modern" or "developed" societies in general—have truly progressed beyond such cruelty.

LINES 5-10

It blows her ...
... in the bog,

Lines 5-10 continue to describe the woman, or girl, being shamed and punished. The speaker imagines the wind "blow[ing] her nipples / to amber beads" and "shak[ing] the frail rigging / of her ribs." Through these vivid sensory details, the speaker implies that the wind is cold without actually

mentioning the word "cold." The word "rigging" is a metaphor: it means the ropes tied to a ship's mast, and here suggests that the girl's "ribs" show through her skin like a series of "frail," parallel ropes. The speaker is implying, then, that her body is skinny and fragile. Later lines will call her "undernourished" and "Little," with the implication that she was also fairly young.

Whereas line 1 began with the claim "I can feel," the next stanza begins with a parallel claim: "I can see." Again, the speaker is not literally witnessing the woman's "Punishment," which belongs to the distant past. Instead, he's vividly imagining the event for the sake of the poem. This third stanza also takes a small leap forward in time: having been hanged to death, the girl is now "drowned" in "the bog."

For an Irish writer, and for Seamus Heaney in particular, "the bog" has a specific set of connotations here. Ireland is famous for its peat bogs, which can also be found in other parts of Northern Europe. These bogs sometimes act as a preservative—a sort of natural refrigerator—for bodies and objects that sink in them, and they've yielded some remarkable archeological discoveries.

"Punishment" is one of a series of poems Heaney wrote about so-called "bog bodies" (well-preserved human remains) recovered from Irish and Northern European bogland. It's based on an ancient corpse recovered near the German town of Windeby in 1952. (Years after the poem was published, scientists found that the corpse was male, not female, and that its cause of death was probably disease or malnutrition.) Some details in the poem draw on an account given in the 1965 study *The Bog People*, by P. V. Glob. Heaney doesn't expect the reader to recognize this particular allusion, but he counts on the reader's general familiarity with the "bog bodies" phenomenon, which other poems in *North* (the collection "Punishment" comes from) focus on as well.

LINES 11-16

the weighing stone, ...
... oak-bone, brain-firkin:

Lines 11-16 describe the aftermath of the young woman's death. After hanging her, her executioners drowned her in the bog, attaching a "weighing stone" to her so that her corpse wouldn't float back to the surface. She sank under the muck, surrounded by "floating rods and boughs"—branches and similar debris—that remained after she disappeared from view. The poem renders these details concisely, almost cinematically, as if cutting from one shot to another and zooming in on details.

The speaker then segues from one image involving wood ("boughs") to another. "Under" the bog, he reports, the girl's body at first resembled a "barked sapling," or slender young tree stripped of its bark. This metaphor again emphasizes her youth, vulnerability, nakedness, etc. Yet over time, her body turned to something much sturdier in appearance. As it fossilized, her "bones" came to resemble "oak," while her skull came to resemble a "firkin"—a small, old-fashioned, usually wooden tub—holding her "brain."

Notice how these metaphors convey a transformation that began with the imagery in lines 5-8. First, the speaker compares parts of the girl's body to "beads" and "frail" ropes: delicate, fragile items. Then he compares her drowned body to a stripped "sapling," which is made of wood, but still associated with delicacy. Finally, he likens her fossilized body to "oak," which connotes toughness and durability. So by the time it was "dug up," the girl's corpse appeared mighty rather than fragile. (This photo of the bog body that inspired the poem gives a clear sense of what Heaney means: notice how the bones and preserved flesh look equally sturdy, and in fact resemble dark wood.)

LINES 17-22

her shaved head ...
... memories of love.

Lines 17-22 add further details about the hanging victim's body. The speaker notes that her head was "shaved," presumably as part of her shaming and punishment. The short, stiff hairs that remain on her head resemble "a stubble of black corn," or the black remnants of cornstalks cut down in a harvest. This simile carries deathly overtones: after all, the Grim Reaper is traditionally imagined as a harvester of souls. The color "black" is also symbolically associated with death (and the fossilized bodies recovered from Northern European bogs were generally of a dark brown or black color).

The corpse is also wearing a "blindfold": a grim courtesy that executioners traditionally offer to their victims. The blindfold resembles, or is, a mere "soiled bandage"—nothing fancy. Symbolically, this image might suggest the agony the condemned young woman went through, or the way her society judged her to be *morally* "soiled" (stained).

Notice the heavy alliteration in lines 18-19:

> [...] like a stubble of **b**lack corn,
> her **b**lindfold a soiled **b**andage,

These /b/ and /s/ sounds have occurred frequently in previous lines (e.g., "**b**ody in the **b**og," "she was a **b**arked **s**apling"). They will repeat in lines 27 and 31, too ("tar-**b**lack face was **b**eautiful"; "the **s**tones of **s**ilence"). Several stanzas contain prominent, often alliterative /n/ and /r/ words as well ("the **n**ape / of her **n**eck"; "**r**igging / of her **r**ibs"; "her **n**oose a **r**ing"). These recurring sounds give the stanzas about the hanged girl a distinctive texture; they also make the language more emphatic and heavy, as if bogging it down. That effect fits the setting, which is a literal bog! And, sure enough, once the poem transitions *away* from the bog in the last two stanzas, the dense alliterative sounds largely vanish.

Finally, lines 20-22 describe the "noose" around the girl's neck

as "a ring / to store / the memories of love." This is a curious metaphor: after all, the noose was the implement that killed her, not a sentimental keepsake. But as the following line will reveal, she was killed for adultery, or sex outside of her marriage. This is a crime of passion (in societies where it's considered a crime at all), so in a darkly ironic way, the ring-shaped noose, like an engagement or wedding "ring," comes to symbolize a romantic relationship. The noose has been drowned along with her, too, so in that sense, it *is* a macabre sort of keepsake. (Compare married people who are buried with their wedding bands.)

LINES 23-27

Little adulteress, ...
... face was beautiful.

Lines 23-27 reveal some of the victim's backstory: who she was in life, or at least, who the speaker *imagines* she was. Line 23 reveals that she was hanged as an "adulteress": a married woman who has sexual relations outside of her marriage. In a number of ancient cultures (and a few modern ones), adultery was regarded as a crime, and sometimes a capital crime.

The speaker calls the girl a "Little adulteress," hinting that she was not only physically diminutive but also, perhaps, quite young. He then describes what she looked like in life, apostrophizing her directly:

> [...] before they punished you
> you were flaxen-haired,
> undernourished, and your
> tar-black face was beautiful.

The direct address creates an effect of sudden familiarity and tenderness. It's as if the speaker is attempting to *connect* with this young execution victim across the span of millennia. The speaker imagines that she was "flaxen-haired," or blond, presumably because blond hair is common in the region where her corpse was found. (Heaney based the poem on a "bog body" from Northern Germany.) He also imagines her as "undernourished," a detail that ties back to the earlier metaphor about her skeletally thin body ("the wind [...] shakes the frail rigging / of her ribs"). It's possible that adultery was punished harshly in this ancient society in part because resources were scarce, and sexual competition overlapped with competition over those scarce resources.

The speaker also comments that the girl's "tar-black face was beautiful." This ambiguous phrase could mean a few different things. It probably does not mean that she was born with very dark skin, as, in ancient Northern Europe, this would make an unusual combination with light blond hair. It *could* imply that her face was tarred by her executioners (in parallel with the punishment described later), though this detail does not appear in the speaker's account of the execution itself. It's also possible that sun exposure (e.g., from outdoor labor) and/or the grimy conditions of impoverished life darkened her skin to some degree. However, the speaker most likely means that her face is *now* "tar-black," after fossilizing in death, in contrast with its healthy and "beautiful" appearance in life. (This reading is supported by photos of real-life bog bodies.) Regardless, the speaker describes the young woman with a mix of pity and affection, according her the kind of humanity her killers denied her.

LINES 28-31

My poor scapegoat, ...
... stones of silence.

The speaker continues to address the executed girl with tenderness and sympathy, but now he begins to question his right to these feelings. In lines full of soft /s/ consonance, he admits that he would have stayed "silen[t]" about her punishment if he'd been alive at the time:

> My poor scapegoat,
> I almost love you
> but would have cast, I know,
> the stones of silence.

The hushed, sibilant sounds fit the speaker's sober, self-accusing mood. The speaker effectively acknowledges that the girl wasn't guilty of a serious offense and that she wasn't *uniquely* guilty, either. She was a "poor scapegoat," unfairly singled out for punishment. Sex outside of marriage is common; for whatever reason, she happened to be caught and blamed for something many people do. And she may well have faced a misogynistic double standard (been scapegoated as a woman) since there's no indication here that her (presumably male) lover was punished for the same offense.

The speaker feels tenderly toward this "scapegoat," then, and wants to equate that tenderness with "love." But he feels that wouldn't be accurate. He "know[s]" and admits that, if he'd been around to witness her fate, he wouldn't have tried to intervene—the way someone who *truly* loved her would. Instead, he would have metaphorically "cast [...] the stones of silence": that is, collaborated in her murder by staying silent about her unjust persecution. He wouldn't have been one of her executioners, but he would have been one of the bystanders who failed to speak out against them. His silence would have been a form of violence.

This metaphor also alludes to the Gospel of John (8:3-11), in which a group of men asks Jesus whether they should punish an adulterous woman by stoning her. (This was a standard punishment for adultery at the time, prescribed by older Mosaic law, and it still exists in a few modern societies.) Jesus famously replies: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." The men depart in shame, implicitly

acknowledging that they, too, are sinners and have no right to judge her.

Heaney acknowledged that this biblical passage partly inspired "Punishment." In these lines, he implies that it's not enough to withhold one's participation from acts of unjust violence; one should actively oppose them. To remain silent in the face of others' persecution is as bad as persecuting them oneself.

LINES 32-36

I am the ...
... your numbered bones:

In lines 32-36, the speaker continues to reflect on his own relationship to the young woman he's writing about. Of course, this relationship is extremely indirect; the two are separated by thousands of years and, seemingly, a vast cultural gulf. But seeing her well-preserved corpse (at least in photos), and guessing at the violent nature of her death, has moved him. He is haunted not only by her tragic execution but by the sense that, had he been alive to witness it, he would have done nothing to stop it.

Instead, he *writes* about the event, and about her body, in detail. This action also makes him uneasy, as if, by viewing her remains, he's intruding on her privacy. In fact, he calls himself "the artful voyeur" of her fossilized body. This complex and loaded phrase can be read in many ways: "artful" can variously mean *artist-like*, *skillful*, or *cunning*. Meanwhile, a "voyeur" is someone who spies on other people's private or intimate moments, often out of lust (similar to a *peeping Tom*). More broadly, it can mean anyone who snoops on others for their own enjoyment.

Hence, "artful voyeur" is an ambiguous phrase. It suggests that the speaker—who appears to be the poet—quietly, skillfully observes the girl's body for the purposes of his art. Yet he also seems to fear that there's something self-indulgent or exploitative about this activity. At best, he views himself as a skilled witness to and recorder of history. At worst, he suspects that he bears witness to historical injustices rather than meaningfully opposing them, because that's the easier and more gratifying role. His passive "silence" may facilitate his "art[]," but he feels that it's also morally suspect.

As if to illustrate his "voyeur[ism]," he describes the corpse further, with precise, detailed imagery:

> [...] of your brain's exposed
> and darkened combs,
> your muscles' webbing
> and all your numbered bones:

In other words, the brains resemble "combs" or honeycombs; the exposed muscles are "web"-like structures; the bones are so well-preserved that they can be "numbered" or counted. The imagery here is indeed a little creepy and voyeuristic (deliberately so), but it's also highly evocative. It might inspire mixed feelings in the reader, just as it does in the poet/speaker.

LINES 37-40

I who have ...
... by the railings,

An important shift occurs in lines 37-40, as the speaker juxtaposes the execution of the ancient "adulteress" with a cruel punishment inflicted on modern women. The poem suddenly leaps forward in time, to what would have been the present day (the 1970s) for Heaney.

This period saw extended, often violent conflict in Heaney's native Northern Ireland, as the country's nationalists (those who wanted Northern Ireland to leave the United Kingdom and unite with the rest of Ireland) opposed its unionists (those who wanted Northern Ireland to remain in the UK). The nationalist side was largely Catholic and the unionists largely Protestant, so religious tensions heightened the conflict. The UK sought to maintain its hold on the region through police and military force. This period of tensions, which lasted from the 1960s through the 1990s, became known as "the Northern Ireland conflict" or "the Troubles."

During the Troubles, the nationalist paramilitary group known as the I.R.A. (Irish Republican Army) sometimes harshly punished Irish women who dated British soldiers. They viewed such romantic relationships as a "betray[al]" of the nationalist cause. One of their methods of punishment involved the ancient practice known as "tarring and feathering." They would pour hot tar over the women's heads, cover them with feathers that stuck to the tar, and display the humiliated women in public (e.g., by chaining them to lampposts or railings in front of their homes).

In this next-to-last stanza, the speaker draws an implicit parallel between the ancient and the modern "Punishment[s]"—between the hanging of the "adulteress" and the "tar[ring]" of Irish women. Both punishments are painful; both involve public humiliation; both "scapegoat" women for perceived sexual offenses, enforcing a misogynistic double standard. (The I.R.A. tarred men for other reasons, but not for sexual relationships.) And while tarring isn't a death penalty, women who suffered it in Northern Ireland often experienced social death and fled their communities afterward. (The metaphor "cauled in tar" is ironic in this context: cauls are membranes that cover some newborns' heads and are traditionally viewed as lucky omens. That is, they're usually associated with birth and good fortune, not death and misfortune.) In all these ways, the women punished for "betraying" the nationalist cause are the metaphorical "sisters" of the hanged adulteress. They're victims of a brutality and hypocrisy that have lasted thousands of years.

Meanwhile, the speaker is a "voyeur" to both the ancient and modern punishments, though in slightly different senses. He

merely observes the result of the hanging long after the fact, whereas he witnesses the tarring and feathering in his own homeland, in his own time. (It's unclear whether he's *personally* witnessed any of these incidents, but he's at least learned about them in the news.) And while he's disturbed by the cruel tarrings, which cause women to "we[ep] by the railings" they're tied to, he has "stood dumb" rather than speaking out against them. He feels he has cast "the stones of silence": enabled the violence by remaining passive and neutral.

LINES 41-44

who would connive ...
... tribal, intimate revenge.

In the final stanza, the speaker continues to reflect on his own role as a witness to cruelty, both historical and contemporary. He has already accused himself of being a "voyeur" or passive bystander, the kind of person who remains "silent" or "dumb" in the face of injustice. At most, he considers himself an "artful" voyeur: someone who can turn the cruelty he witnesses into art.

Now, he admits that he "understand[s]" the roots of violence and vengeance that might otherwise seem incomprehensibly cruel. He would like to "connive / in civilized outrage" when he witnesses it, as in the cases of tarring and feathering (lines 37-30). That is, he'd like to join those who indignantly insist that "civilized" humanity should have progressed beyond such barbarism. But he feels that, on some level, to do so would be hypocritical. (The verb "connive" has connotations of scheming and deceit.) He's all too familiar with the primitive passions that still roil under humanity's civilized surface; he "understand[s]"—perhaps through his own psychology and experience—"the exact / and tribal, intimate revenge" that befell the punished women.

This kind of "revenge" is mercilessly "exact" in whom it targets. It's "tribal" in multiple senses: reminiscent of ancient tribes (i.e., primitive), and also rooted in tribal loyalties (which, in modern times, might be ethnic, national, religious, etc.). Finally, it's "intimate" in that it involves personal, and often familial or romantic, passions. (Remember, both the ancient and the modern women were punished for sex.)

The poem's conclusion is therefore deliberately, troublingly ambiguous. By writing the poem, the poet/speaker *has* in some sense spoken out about "tribal," misogynistic violence. But he resists a straightforward stance of righteous "outrage," instead casting himself as a morally murky figure. He's an artist who bears witness to, but subtly enables or even participates in, the world's ongoing cruelty.

POETIC DEVICES

IMAGERY

"Punishment" is full of precise and detailed imagery, which brings to life not only the appearance but the backstory of the executed "adulteress."

The speaker, writing in modern times, tries to empathize with her long-ago experiences: he claims that "I can feel" and "see" what happened to her. Using tactile (touch-based) imagery, he imagines "the tug / of the halter," or noose, on her "neck," and "the wind" on her bare body in her last moments of life. Using visual imagery, he also imagines things she *couldn't* have seen, including "her drowned / body in the bog" and "the floating rods and boughs" around her.

After recreating this scene, he describes the appearance of her body as it was dug up from the bog. This account seems based on photographs of a corpse formerly called "the Windeby Girl," discovered near the German town of Windeby and described in Heaney's source material, the 1965 study *The Bog People*. (The corpse later turned out to be male.) He points to visual details mentioned in that book, including the "shaved head" and "blindfold" that seem to indicate death by execution. He also sketches an anatomical portrait of the corpse's "brain[]," "muscles[]," and "bones." The perspective here feels unsettlingly intimate, or perhaps tenderly human, rather than clinical, as the poet labels himself an "artful voyeur." Likewise, the speaker affectionately imagines how the girl appeared in life: "flaxen-haired, / undernourished," yet "beautiful."

The poem's final imagery involves punished women in Seamus Heaney's own day: women who were tarred and feathered for their alleged "betray[al]" of the Irish nationalist cause. The reference to women "we[eping] by the railings" they were tied to offers a brief, yet powerful visual portrait. The image "cauled in tar" is partly tactile, too, as it prompts the reader to imagine hot tar sticking to the skull like a "caul[]," or membrane.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-19
- Lines 25-27
- Lines 33-36
- Lines 38-40

ALLITERATION

The poem is heavily alliterative, especially in the stanzas about the executed girl. Notice the density of /n/, /b/, and /r/ words in lines 2-10, for instance:

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 overall effect is heavy, emphatic, and harsh: appropriate to this scene of an execution victim "weigh[ted]" with a stone and drowned in a "bog." The thick consonants *bog down* the poem's pace, contributing to its somber mood. This effect continues as the scene unfolds: /b/ and /s/ syllables also cluster in line 16 ("oak-bone, brain-firkin"), lines 18-19 ("like a stubble of black corn, / her blindfold a soiled bandage"), and line 27 ("tar-black face was beautiful").

Another notably alliterative phrase comes in line 31: "the stones of silence." Here, sibilant /s/ sounds give the line a sinister hush, appropriate to a metaphor framing silence as a kind of violence.

Interestingly, alliteration fades as the poem transitions into the modern era (lines 37-44). This shift might be a quiet, but clever nod to literary history. Heavily accentual and alliterative verse is associated with the early centuries of English poetry, including Old English classics like *Beowulf* (an epic poem Heaney translated later in his career). By foregrounding, then dropping, alliteration, Heaney not only registers a shift in physical setting (from a dense bog to city streets), he subtly registers a shift from ancient to modern times.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "nape"
- **Line 3:** "neck"
- **Line 4:** "naked"
- **Line 5:** "blows," "nipples"
- **Line 6:** "beads"
- **Line 7:** "rigging"
- **Line 8:** "ribs"
- **Line 10:** "body," "bog"
- **Line 16:** "bone," "brain"
- **Line 18:** "stubble," "black"
- **Line 19:** "blindfold," "soiled," "bandage"
- **Line 27:** "black," "beautiful"
- **Line 31:** "stones," "silence"

METAPHOR

The poem's language is richly metaphorical. Like his vivid imagery, Heaney's metaphors help acquaint readers with something profoundly alien: the preserved corpse of an ancient execution victim.

The speaker first portrays the young woman in the last moments of her life, as she is stripped of her clothes and hanged. He compares her cold, exposed nipples to "amber beads" and her "ribs," showing through her malnourished body, to "frail rigging"—that is, fragile ropes tied to ships' masts. Both comparisons highlight the girl's terrible "frail[ty]" and vulnerability.

By contrast, death turns her into an ironically sturdy figure. Preserved for centuries under the bog, her body, which initially resembled "a barked sapling," or stripped young tree, becomes as solid as "oak." Her skull comes to resemble a solid wooden "firkin," or tub, for her "brain[s]." It's not just her "bone[s]" that have endured, either: her scalp remains so well preserved that one can tell it was "shaved." Heaney likens her shaved hair to the "stubble" (cut stalks) of "black corn": an eerie simile that symbolically suggests how death cut her down in her prime. Even her noose, preserved along with her body, comes to seem metaphorical or symbolic: the speaker compares it to "a ring" holding "the memories of love." Whereas earlier metaphors stressed the girl's *vulnerability*, then, the figurative language in lines 13-22 stresses the opposite: the strange *durability* of her body and of the "love" she was punished for.

Later metaphors carry rich connotations as well. For example, the speaker claims that, had he witnessed the girl's persecution, he would have "cast [...] the stones of silence" at her. In other words, he would have helped her persecutors by failing to speak up on her behalf. This metaphor echoes the familiar idea that silence in the face of injustice is a kind of violence. (It also echoes a passage from the Bible; for more, see the Allusion entry in this section of the guide.)

The final metaphor describes modern (or late 20th-century) victims of tarring and feathering. It likens the "tar" poured over their heads to a "caul[]": the membrane covering the skulls of some newborn infants. This metaphor is ironic, as cauls are traditionally considered good-luck omens, whereas these women are terribly *un*lucky. The metaphor might also grimly suggest that these women have entered a new life, or new phase of life. (Many had to flee their communities after their public humiliation.)

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-6:** "It blows her nipples / to amber beads,"
- **Lines 7-8:** "it shakes the frail rigging / of her ribs."
- **Lines 13-16:** "Under which at first / she was a barked sapling / that is dug up / oak-bone, brain-firkin:"
- **Lines 17-18:** "her shaved head / like a stubble of black corn,"
- **Lines 20-22:** "her noose a ring / to store / the memories of love."
- **Lines 30-31:** "but would have cast, I know, / the stones of silence."
- **Lines 33-34:** "of your brain's exposed / and darkened combs,"

- **Line 39:** "cauled in tar,"

JUXTAPOSITION

The poem juxtaposes two time periods—one ancient, one modern—as well as two implied settings: the bogs of Northern Europe and the towns of Northern Ireland. More importantly, it juxtaposes two kinds of "Punishment" for purposes of comparison.

The speaker doesn't mention exactly where or when the hanged girl lives, though it implies that her recovered body is centuries old. Her story is based on the real-life body known as Windeby I (formerly "the Windeby Girl"), which dates to roughly the first century CE. By the time it was "dug up" near the town of Windeby in Northern Germany, it was nearly two thousand years old. In Heaney's account, the body belonged to a teenaged girl condemned and executed for adultery, presumably by members of her own Germanic tribe.

The speaker then juxtaposes this ancient punishment with a modern one. During the Troubles, or the Northern Ireland conflict of the late 20th century, the Irish Revolutionary Army sometimes "tar[red]" and feathered Irish women who dated British soldiers. Though it wasn't a death sentence, the punishment was cruel, painful, and humiliating, and its victims often fled their communities afterward.

This juxtaposition implies that humanity, whether in Northern Europe or elsewhere, has never become particularly "civilized." Nor have women ever stopped facing misogynistic double standards, especially where sex and the body are concerned. From ancient bogland to modern cities, male-dominated society attempts to police female sexual and reproductive lives. For all the speaker might express "civilized outrage" at the modern injustice, he admits that he's previously stayed silent about it—and that he "understand[s]" too well the primitive motives behind it.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-44

ALLUSION

The poem centers on two major historical/political references, covered in depth elsewhere in this guide. It juxtaposes the imagined backstory of a Northern European "bog body"—loosely based on the corpse known as Windeby I, which is about 2,000 years old—with the punishment of Irish women who dated British soldiers during the Troubles.

The poem also contains a biblical allusion in lines 28-31. Addressing the "Little adulteress" directly, the speaker admits:

> My poor scapegoat,
> I almost love you
> but would have cast, I know,
> the stones of silence.

These lines echo a famous passage from the Gospels (John 8:3-11), in which "scribes and Pharisees" bring an adulterous woman to Jesus and ask whether they should punish her by stoning. Jesus replies: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." The woman's accusers, admitting they have sinned themselves, let her go free.

In the poem, the speaker acknowledges that, in a similar situation, he would have "cast" the "stones of silence" at the accused adulteress. In other words, he would not have stoned her to death himself, but he would have stayed silent and allowed others to do so. His silence would have made him as hypocritical, and as guilty, as the executioners themselves.

Heaney confirmed that these lines were inspired by "Christ's challenge to the men about to attack the women taken in adultery, a challenge that is entirely apposite in the north of Ireland today." That is, he intended the "adulteress" in his poem to parallel the one in the Gospels, and invoked both as a warning against the cruel, unjust punishment of women during the Northern Ireland conflict.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Lines 23-27:** "Little adulteress, / before they punished you / you were flaxen-haired, / undernourished, and your / tar-black face was beautiful."
- **Lines 28-31:** "My poor scapegoat, / I almost love you / but would have cast, I know, / the stones of silence."
- **Lines 37-44:** "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."

VOCABULARY

Nape (Lines 1-3) - The back of the neck.

Halter (Lines 1-3) - Usually refers to a rope with a noose used for leading or tying up an animal; here refers to a hanging noose placed around an execution victim's neck.

Rigging (Lines 7-8) - A metaphor comparing the girl's ribs (visible through her skin) to the ropes supporting a ship's mast.

Weighing stone (Lines 9-11) - A heavy stone tied to the execution victim in order to sink her body deep in the bog.

Bog (Lines 9-10) - The poem describes one of a number of well-preserved ancient corpses, known as "bog bodies," that archaeologists have retrieved from Ireland's peat bogs.

Rods (Line 12) - Sticks and similar debris floating on the surface

of the bog.

Barked sapling (Lines 13-14) - A metaphor comparing the girl's naked and drowned body to a young tree stripped of bark.

Oak-bone (Lines 15-16) - Metaphorically suggests that the girl's bones, preserved under the bog, have become tough and durable as oak.

Brain-firkin (Lines 15-16) - A "firkin" is a small tub meant to hold butter, liquids, etc., so "brain-firkin" is a metaphor for the drowned girl's skull.

Shaved head (Lines 17-18) - It's implied that the girl's head was shaved as part of her punishment (formerly, she was "flaxen-haired").

Stubble (Lines 17-18) - Plays on two related meanings of "stubble":

- Cut stalks left over after grain (such as corn) has been harvested.
- Short, stiff hairs growing out of a person's head or body.

Adulteress (Lines 23-24) - A woman who commits adultery (sleeps with a married person or sleeps with someone outside her own marriage). Historically, adultery has been considered a crime or sin (or both) in many societies and religious traditions.

Flaxen-haired (Lines 25-26) - Having blond or pale yellow hair.

Tar-black face (Lines 26-27) - An ambiguous phrase. Might suggest any or all of the following:

- This "undernourished" girl lived an impoverished life that left her face soiled with grime or sunburnt from outdoor work.
- She was literally tarred by her executioners (as her modern "sisters" are tarred in lines 38-40).
- Her face (and body in general) has grown dark while fossilizing in the bog.

Scapegoat (Line 28) - An individual blamed or punished for the crimes or faults of a group.

Voyeur (Lines 32-34) - Someone who spies on private or hidden activity (e.g., involving nudity, sex, etc.) for their own pleasure.

Combs (Lines 33-34) - Here, a metaphor for the brain's folds, which Heaney is comparing to honeycombs (or possibly to the fleshy growths on top of roosters' heads).

Webbing (Line 35) - A web-like structure, or a type of woven fabric. A metaphor for the appearance of the body's exposed muscles.

Your betraying sisters (Lines 37-38) - A reference to female victims of tarring and feathering during the late-20th-century Northern Island conflict, known as the Troubles. Members of the IRA (Irish Republican Army, a paramilitary organization) punished Catholic women in Northern Ireland for having relationships with British soldiers (or with members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, a police force viewed as enforcing British rule). Nationalists, who wanted Northern Island to leave the UK and unite with the rest of Ireland, saw such relationships as a "betray[al]" of their cause. According to the *Belfast Telegraph*:

These terrified women had their heads shaved before being dragged to a lamppost.

Once tied up, they had hot tar poured over their heads.

This was followed by feathers being dumped over them which would stick to the tar for days, acting as a reminder of their so-called crimes against their community.

Cauled (Lines 38-39) - A "caul" is a membrane covering the heads of some newborn infants, so the women who have had hot tar poured on their heads are metaphorically "cauled in tar."

Connive (Lines 41-42) - Conspire in a devious way.

Tribal (Lines 43-44) - Rooted in loyalty to a particular ethnic, national, or religious group, or in conflict between such groups.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Punishment" consists of 11 free-verse quatrains. In other words, it contains 11 stanzas of four lines apiece, with no meter or rhyme (other than the imperfect rhyme between "combs" and "bones" in lines 34 and 36).

The short lines and short stanzas introduce frequent pauses into the language, giving the poem a slow, thoughtful pace that fits its sobering subject. The halting rhythm might even suggest that the speaker is choosing his words carefully. Heaney was a master handler of meter and rhyme, so his choice of free verse here suggests a deliberate plainness of style, a desire not to dress up a poem that is so much about vulnerability and suffering. At the same time, the regular quatrains reflect the speaker's attempt to be "artful" (line 32) in shaping these painful stories.

METER

"Punishment" is a free verse poem, meaning that it has no regular meter (or rhyme scheme). The poem's formal plainness makes a good match for its humble setting (a bog), stark subject matter (violent death), and restrained and somber tone. The lines remain relatively short throughout, ranging from two to eight syllables. The poem sounds controlled and lyrical despite its lack of a consistent rhythm.

RHYME SCHEME

As a free verse poem, "Punishment" has no rhyme scheme. There is one imperfect rhyme in lines 34 and 36 ("combs"/"bones"), but it's not part of a larger pattern.

Again, Heaney was a master of formal devices like meter and rhyme; his best-known poems are often richly musical. But the stark setting and subject matter of "Punishment" seem to have

encouraged Heaney to adopt a plainer, less traditionally "poetic" style. Indeed, the hanged girl in the poem likely lived before the birth of most English-language poetic conventions, so Heaney may have felt that organic rhythms and rough-hewn language suited her story best.

SPEAKER

The speaker is a central and complex part of the poem. Rather than settling for passive description, he highlights his own moral burden with respect to the events he describes. The speaker is never named, gendered, etc., but given his status as an "artful" (art-making) chronicler of Irish/European history and politics—from the ancient "bog people" to the late 20th-century Troubles—he is usually read as a stand-in for the poet.

In theory, the speaker has no direct connection to the punishments in the poem. The executed girl was hanged and "drowned" centuries before his time; she is one of the recovered "bog bodies" Heaney learned about from an academic book on the subject. The speaker re-creates her story with the help of some imaginative license (e.g., claiming she was hanged for adultery). By contrast, the girl's so-called "betraying sisters"—Irish women punished during the Troubles for involvements with British soldiers—*are* the speaker's contemporaries. However, there's no suggestion that the speaker knows any of these women personally or could have directly prevented their punishment.

So why does he feel so guilty? He may be writing as an ordinary citizen of his country, lamenting his failure to oppose these *kinds* of injustices. He may also be writing as a public figure of sorts. Heaney was already a highly regarded writer in his native Ireland by the time "Punishment" appeared (1975); arguably, he could have taken a stronger public stand against the "tribal" violence of the Troubles. Some of his contemporaries felt that he should have done so, and the speaker of the poem admits that he has "stood dumb" in the face of shocking violence. Nevertheless, the poem itself, and others Heaney wrote around this time, constitutes its own form of public statement. Its speaker walks a delicate line, implying that any "civilized outrage" he might express would be hypocritical, yet bearing witness to the cruel "tar[rings]" and their devastating effect on their victims. Ultimately, he laments the persistence of violence, vengeance, and misogyny over the centuries, while acknowledging that "silence" like his own can fuel them.

SETTING

The poem has two settings, both implied rather than mentioned outright: Northern Germany and Northern Ireland.

The first 36 lines focus on one of the ancient "bog bodies" archeologists have recovered from peat bogs in Northern Europe. Such bogs are a famous feature of Heaney's native Ireland, but the body he describes here was inspired by a corpse found near Windeby, in Northern Germany. Heaney's source for the poem's details was P. V. Glob's study *The Bog People* (1965), which gives an account of "the young girl from Windeby, in Domland Fen." At the time, this corpse, now known as Windeby I, was thought to be a blindfolded girl with a shaved head; later, it turned out to be a 16-year-old boy who had died of illness or hunger. (See the Context section of this guide for more.) Nevertheless, Heaney's poem is a work of imagination set in the Northern European "bog[s]," where ancient people *like* this girl were buried hundreds and thousands of years ago. Some of these corpses, including the famous Tollund Man, were indeed victims of hanging.

Lines 37-44 jump forward to the Northern Ireland of the 1960s and 1970s: the early period of the Northern Ireland conflict, a.k.a. the Troubles. During that conflict, the paramilitary group known as the I.R.A. (Irish Republican Army) sometimes "tar[red]" and feathered women suspected of having sexual relations with British soldiers. They then chained the women to lampposts, where, in Heaney's words, the women "wept by the railings" (of bridges, etc.) in humiliation. Heaney was born in Northern Ireland and wrote this poem in the 1970s, so he was brooding on contemporary violence in his homeland.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Seamus Heaney grew up a farmer's son and became the most acclaimed Irish poet of his generation. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995, with the Nobel committee citing his "works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past."

Heaney's early literary influences include the American poet Robert Frost (1874-1963), whose work also dealt with rural topics and the natural world, and the English romantic poet John Keats (1795-1821). In his Nobel Prize lecture, Heaney referred to Keats's "Ode to Autumn" as the "ark of the covenant between language and sensation." William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)—a previous Irish Nobel laureate—was another significant influence, about whom Heaney wrote the essays "Yeats as an Example?" (1978) and "A Tale of Two Islands: Reflections on the Irish Literary Revival" (1980).

Like many of Heaney's poems, "Punishment" is inspired by the landscape and history of his homeland, including County Derry, Northern Ireland, where he was raised. It's one of numerous poems Heaney wrote about Northern European bogs, and about the skeletons ("bog bodies") and ancient artifacts recovered from them. "Punishment" appeared in his 1975 collection *North* alongside several other such poems, including

"Bog Queen" and "The Grauballe Man."

Heaney is the best-known poet of the Northern School, a group of Northern Irish poets who began to garner attention in the 1960s, as political and cultural unrest escalated in their country. *North* contains a number of poems that wrestle with the Northern Ireland conflict, which lasted from the 1960s through the 1990s (see below).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Heaney was born in Northern Ireland in 1939. He grew up in a country wracked by what became known as "the Troubles" or the Northern Ireland conflict. The Troubles (c. 1968-1998) were a dispute between Protestant unionists, who wanted Ireland to remain a part of the United Kingdom, and Roman Catholic nationalists, who wanted Northern Ireland to join the Republic of Ireland. The struggle was often violent: more than 3,600 people were killed and 30,000 wounded in these decades.

Heaney himself was a Catholic and nationalist who chose to live in the south of Ireland. Some contemporaries criticized him for declining to take explicit sides in the Troubles, but his writing (including the books *Wintering Out* and *North*) does address the conflict in both direct and indirect ways. Even his seemingly non-political poems reflect his profound awareness of Irish history and identity.

"Punishment" specifically references a notorious series of incidents from the Troubles: the tarring and feathering of Irish Catholic women who were romantically involved with British soldiers (or policemen in the British-allied Royal Ulster Constabulary). Members of the IRA (Irish Republican Army), a paramilitary organization, carried out these incidents of public humiliation to avenge these women's perceived "betray[al]" of the nationalist cause. Typically, perpetrators shaved the women's heads, poured "tar" on them, dumped feathers on the tar, and tied the women to lampposts or "railings" to be jeered at by their communities. "Punishment" draws a parallel between these modern incidents and the long-ago execution of an "adulteress": a young woman who, in Heaney's telling, was hanged and "drowned" in a "bog," where her body was found centuries later.

As the poem suggests, the peat bogs of Ireland and Northern Europe have been a rich source of archeological discoveries. These include well-preserved skeletons of ancient and prehistoric humans and animals, as well as remarkable artifacts such as "bog butter." Several of Heaney's poems about "bog bodies," including "Punishment," were inspired by material in P. V. Glob's archeological study *The Bog People* (1965). Heaney's account of a young adulteress echoes Glob's description of a body recovered near Windeby in Northern Germany:

> Tacitus [the ancient Roman historian] names a special punishment for adultery by women, but says nothing about male adultery. The adulterous woman had her hair cut off in the presence of her relatives and was then scourged out of the village. This calls to mind one of the bog people in particular, the young girl from Windeby, in Domland Fen. She lay naked in her grave in the peat, her hair shaved off, with nothing but a collar of ox-hide round her neck, and with bandaged eyes.

Though such punishments for adultery may well have happened, DNA testing later revealed that this particular corpse, once known as the Windeby Girl, was really a 16-year-old boy. He probably died of disease and malnutrition, not hanging, and his "blindfold" was really a headband.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- The Poem Aloud — Listen to Seamus Heaney read "Punishment." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsoUBO0qRQg)
- The Poet's Life and Work — A biography of Heaney at the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/seamus-heaney)
- Heaney, Nobel Laureate — Read Heaney's citation and lecture as the winner of the 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature. (https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1995/heaney/lecture/)
- Heaney Talks Poetry — Watch a late-life conversation with the poet. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7sskc1pi_k)
- Tarring and Feathering During the Troubles — Historical context on tarring and feathering during the Northern Ireland conflict, a.k.a. the Troubles. (https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/public-humiliation-that-was-all-too-familiar-during-troubles/28397271.html)
- The Bogs of Ireland — More on Ireland's peat bogs and their storied history. (https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/10/19/multimedia/ireland-peat-bogs.html)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER SEAMUS HEANEY POEMS

- Blackberry-Picking
- Bogland
- Death of a Naturalist
- Digging
- Exposure
- Follower
- Mid-Term Break

- Personal Helicon
- Requiem for the Croppies
- Storm on the Island
- The Tollund Man

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