

Punishment Key Facts

Writer: Seamus Heaney | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Key Facts

- **Poet:** Seamus Heaney (1939-2013)
- **Full Title:** Punishment
- **First Published:** The poem was published in Heaney's 1975 collection *North*
- **Form:** The poem consists of 11 quatrains (4-line stanzas), a total of 44 lines
- **Meter and Rhyme Scheme:** The poem is written in free verse. It means the poem has no strict meter or rhyme scheme.
- **Tone:** Sad, thoughtful, guilty, and sympathetic
- **Setting:** A bog (swampy land) in Northern Europe. The poem is also connected to Ireland during political violence (The Troubles)
- **Speaker:** The poet himself (Heaney) — he speaks as an observer
- **Main Character:** The bog body of a young girl (called the "little adulteress") who was killed by her tribe.

Key Notes

The Troubles

"*The Troubles*" was a time of great violence and conflict in Northern Ireland, from the late 1960s to 1998. It happened because two groups of people disagreed about how the country should be ruled. One group, mostly Catholic, wanted Northern Ireland to join the Republic of Ireland and become one united country. The other group, mostly Protestant, wanted to stay part of the United Kingdom.

Because of this, there were many bombings, shootings, and killings. Thousands of people died, including many innocent men, women, and children. Seamus Heaney wrote during this period. Many of his poems, like "*Punishment*" and "*The Tollund Man*," show his deep sadness about this violence. He used old stories, myths, and bog bodies to talk about how violence and sacrifice still continue in modern times.

