

Punishment Theme

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Themes

Suffering and Injustice : The poem shows how a young girl was punished very cruelly by her tribe. Heaney shows how societies often treat women harshly and punish them in the name of justice. The poet feels very sad for her and calls her a **“poor scapegoat.”** The poet imagines the young girl was punished unfairly, probably for having a love affair.

Guilt and Silence : The poet feels both pity and guilt. He feels sorry for the girl, but he also knows that he might have stayed silent if he were there. He says he would have **“cast the stones of silence.”** Heaney connects this to modern times, showing that people still remain silent when others suffer. The poem teaches us that silence in the face of injustice is also a kind of guilt.