

## **Punishment**

Seamus Heaney

I can feel the tug  
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 weighing stone,  
the floating rods and boughs.

Under which at first  
she was a barked sapling  
that is dug up  
oak-bone, brain-firkin:

her shaved head  
like a stubble of black corn,  
her blindfold a soiled bandage,  
her noose a ring

to store  
the memories of love.  
Little adulteress,  
before they punished you

you were flaxen-haired,  
undernourished, and your  
tar-black face was beautiful.  
My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you  
but would have cast, I know,  
the stones of silence.  
I am the artful voyeur

of your brains exposed  
and darkened combs,  
your muscles' webbing  
and all your numbered bones:

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.

## The Ministry of Fear (for Seamus Deane)

Seamus Heaney

Well, as Kavanagh said, we have lived  
In important places. The lonely scarp  
Of St Columb's College, where I billeted  
For six years, overlooked your Bogside.  
I gazed into new worlds: the inflamed throat  
Of Brandywell, its floodlit dogtrack,  
The throttle of the hare. In the first week  
I was so homesick I couldn't even eat  
The biscuits left to sweeten my exile.  
I threw them over the fence one night  
In September 1951  
When the lights of houses in the Lecky Road  
were amber in the fog, it was an act  
of stealth.

Then Belfast, and then Berkeley.  
Here's two on's are sophisticated,  
Dabbling in verses till they have become  
A life: from bulky envelopes arriving  
In vacation time to slim volumes  
Despatched 'with the author's compliments'.  
Those poems in longhand, ripped from the wire spine  
Of your exercise book, bewildered me—  
Vowels and ideas bandied free  
As the seed-pods blowing off our sycamores.  
I tried to write about the sycamores  
And innovated a South Derry rhyme  
With hushed and lulled full chimes for pushed and pulled.  
Those hobnailed boots from beyond the mountain  
Were walking, by God, all over the fine  
Lawns of elocution.

Have our accents  
Changed? 'Catholics, in general, don't speak  
As well as students from the Protestant schools.'  
Remember that stuff? Inferiority  
Complexes, stuff that dreams were made on.  
'What's your name, Heaney?'

'Heaney, Father.'

'Fair

Enough.'

On my first day, the leather strap  
Went epileptic in the Big Study,  
Its echoes plashing over our bowed heads,  
But I still wrote home that a boarder's life  
Was not so bad, shying as usual.

On long vacations, then, I came to life  
In the kissing seat of an Austin 16  
Parked at a gable, the engine running,  
My fingers tight as ivy on her shoulders,  
A light left burning for her in the kitchen.  
And heading back for home, the summer's  
Freedom dwindling night by night, the air  
All moonlight and a scent of hay, policemen  
Swung their crimson flashlamps, crowding round  
The car like black cattle, snuffing and pointing

The muzzle of a Sten gun in my eye:

'What's your name, driver?'

'Seamus ...'

*Seamus?*

They once read my letters at a roadblock  
And shone their torches on your hieroglyphics,  
'Svelte dictions' in a very florid hand.

Ulster was British, but with no rights on  
The English lyric: all around us, though  
We hadn't named it, the ministry of fear.

### **Funeral Rites**

Seamus Heaney

I

I shouldered a kind of manhood  
stepping in to lift the coffins  
of dead relations.  
They had been laid out

in tainted rooms,  
their eyelids glistening,  
their dough-white hands  
shackled in rosary beads.

Their puffed knuckles  
had unwrinkled, the nails  
were darkened, the wrists  
obediently sloped.

The dulse-brown shroud,  
the quilted satin cribs:  
I knelt courteously  
admiring it all

as wax melted down  
and veined the candles,  
the flames hovering  
to the women hovering

behind me.  
And always, in a corner,  
the coffin lid,  
its nail-heads dressed

with little gleaming crosses.  
Dear soapstone masks,  
kissing their igloo brows  
had to suffice

before the nails were sunk  
and the black glacier  
of each funeral  
pushed away.

## II

Now as news comes in  
of each neighbourly murder  
we pine for ceremony,  
customary rhythms:

the temperate footsteps  
of a cortège, winding past  
each blinded home.  
I would restore

the great chambers of Boyne,  
prepare a sepulchre  
under the cupmarked stones.  
Out of side-streets and bye-roads

purring family cars  
nose into line,  
the whole country tunes  
to the muffled drumming

of ten thousand engines.  
Somnambulant women,  
left behind, move  
through emptied kitchens

imagining our slow triumph  
towards the mounds.  
Quiet as a serpent  
in its grassy boulevard

the procession drags its tail  
out of the Gap of the North  
as its head already enters  
the megalithic doorway.

## III

When they have put the stone  
back in its mouth  
we will drive north again  
past Strang and Carling fjords

the cud of memory  
allayed for once, arbitration  
of the feud placated,  
imagining those under the hill

disposed like Gunnar  
who lay beautiful  
inside his burial mound,  
though dead by violence

and unavenged.  
men said that he was chanting  
verses about honour  
and that four lights burned

in corners of the chamber:  
which opened then, as he turned  
with a joyful face  
to look at the moon.

### **Viking Dublin**

Seamus Heaney

I

It could be a jaw-bone  
or a rib or a portion cut  
from something sturdier:  
anyhow, a smaller outline

was incised, a cage  
or trellis to conjure in.  
Like a child's tongue  
following the toils

of his calligraphy,  
like an eel swallowed  
in a basket of eels,  
the line amazes itself

eluding the hand  
that fed it,  
a bill in flight,  
a swimming nostril.

II

There are trial pieces,  
the craft's mystery  
improvised on bone:  
foliage, bestiaries,

interlacings elaborate  
as the netted routes  
of ancestry and trade.  
That have to be

magnified on display  
so that the nostril  
is a migrant prow  
sniffing the Liffey,

swanning it up to the ford,  
dissembling itself  
in antler combs, bone pins,  
coins, weights, scale-pans.

III

Like a long sword  
sheathed in its moistening  
burial clays,  
the keel stuck fast

in the slip of the bank,  
its clinker-built hull  
spined and plosive  
as *Dublin*.

And now we reach in  
for shards of the vertebrae,  
the ribs of hurdle,  
the mother-wet caches—

and for this trial piece  
incised by a child,  
a longship, a buoyant  
migrant line.

#### IV

That enters my longhand,  
turns cursive, unscarfing  
a zoomorphic wake,  
a worm of thought

I follow into the mud.  
I am Hamlet the Dane,  
skull-handler, parablist,  
smeller of rot

in the state, infused  
with its poisons,  
pinioned by ghosts  
and affections,

murders and pieties,  
coming to consciousness  
by jumping in graves,  
dithering, blathering.

#### V

Come fly with me,  
come sniff the wind  
with the expertise  
of the Vikings—

neighborly, scoretaking  
killers, haggars  
and hagglers, gombeen-men,  
hoarders of grudge and gain.

With a butcher's aplomb  
they spread out your lungs  
and made you warm wings  
for your shoulders.

Old fathers, be with us.  
Old cunning assessors  
of feuds and of sites  
for ambush or town.

VI

'Did you ever hear tell,'  
said Jimmy Farrell,  
'of the skulls they have  
in the city of Dublin?

White skulls and black skulls  
and yellow skulls, and some  
with full teeth, and some  
haven't only but one,'

and compounded history  
in the pan of 'an old Dane,  
maybe, was drowned  
in the Flood.'

My words lick around  
cobble quays, go hunting  
lightly as pampooties  
over the skull-capped ground.

### **A New Siege (for Bernadette Devlin)**

John Montague

*Once again, it happens.  
Under a barrage of stones  
and flaring petrol bombs  
the blunt, squat shape of  
an armoured car glides  
into the Catholic quarter  
leading a file of helmet-  
ed, shielded riot police;  
once again, it happens,  
like an old Troubles film,  
not for the last time...*

Lines of history  
lines of power  
the long sweep  
of the Bogside  
under the walls  
up to Creggan  
the black muzzle  
of Roaring Meg  
staring dead on  
cramped houses  
the jackal shapes  
of James's army  
watching the city  
stiffen in siege

Lines of defiance  
lines of discord  
near the Diamond  
brisk with guns  
British soldiers  
patrol the walls  
the gates between  
Ulster Catholic  
Ulster Protestant  
a Saracen slides  
past the Guildhall  
a black Cuchulain  
bellowing against  
the Scarlet Whore  
twin races petrified  
the volcanic ash  
of religious hatred

SMALL SHOT HATH  
POURED LIKE HAIL

Symbol of Ulster  
these sloping streets

THE GREAT GUNS  
SHAKEN OUR WALLS  
a spectral garrison  
no children left  
sick from eating  
horseflesh, vermin  
curs fattened on  
the slain Irish  
still flaunting  
the bloody flag  
of 'No Surrender'  
GOD HAS MADE US  
AN IRON PILLAR  
AND BRAZEN WALLS  
AGAINST THIS LAND.

Columba's Derry!  
ledge of angels  
radiant oakwood  
where the man drove  
knelt to master  
his fiery temper  
exile chastened  
the bright candle  
of the Uí Néill  
burns from Iona  
lightens Scotland  
with beehive huts  
glittering manuscripts  
but he remembers  
his secret name  
'He who set his  
back on Ireland.'

Lines of leaving  
lines of returning  
the long estuary  
of Lough Foyle, a  
ship motionless  
in wet darkness  
mournfully hooting  
as a tender creeps  
to carry passengers  
back to Ireland  
a child of four  
this sad sea city  
the loneliness of  
Lir's white daughter's  
ice crusted wings  
forever spread  
at the harbor mouth.

Lines of suffering  
lines of defeat  
under the walls  
ghetto terraces  
sharp pallor of

blackened walls  
sick at heart and  
seeking a sign  
the flaghung gloom  
of St Columb's  
the brass eagle of  
the lectern bearing  
the Sermon on the mount  
in its shoulders  
'A city that is  
set on a hill  
cannot be hid.'

Rearing westward  
the great sunroom  
of Inis Eoghain  
coiling stones of  
Aileach's hillfort  
higher than Tara  
the Hy Niall  
dominating Uladh  
the white stone  
of Sliabh Snacht  
sorrow veiled  
the silent fjord  
in *uaigneach Eire*  
a history's wind  
plucks a dynasty  
from the ramparts  
bids a rival  
settlement rise

London's Derry!  
METHOUGHT I SAW  
DIDOE'S COLONY  
BUILDING OF CARTHAGE  
culverin and saker  
line strong walls  
but local chiefs  
come raging in  
O'Cahan, O'Doherty  
(a Ferrara sword  
his visiting card)  
a new mythology  
Lundy slides  
down a peartree  
as drum and life  
trill ORANJE BOVEN!

Lines of protest  
lines of change  
a drum beating  
across Berkeley  
all that Spring

unemployed shades  
slope shouldered  
broken bottles  
pubs and bookies  
red brick walls  
Falls or Shankill  
Lecky or Fountain  
love's alleyway  
message scrawled  
Popehead: Tague  
my own name  
hatred's synonym

But will the meek  
inherit the earth?  
RELIGION POISONS US  
NORTH AND SOUTH.  
A SPECIAL FORCE OF  
ANGELS WE'D NEED  
TO PUT MANNERS ON US.  
IF THE YOUNG WERE  
HONEST, THEY'D ADMIT  
THEY DON'T HOLD  
WITH THE HALF OF IT  
THE SHOWBANDS  
AND THE BORDER HALLS  
THAT'S THE STUFF  
Said the guardian  
of the empty church  
pale siege windows  
shining behind us

Lines of action  
lines of reaction  
the white elephant  
of Stormont, Carson's  
raised right paw  
a protestant parliament  
a Protestant people  
major this and  
captain that and  
general nothing  
the bland, pleasant  
face of mediocrity  
confronting in horror  
its mirror image  
bull-voiced bigotry

The emerging order  
of the poem invaded  
by cries, protestation  
a people's pain  
the defiant face  
of a young girl  
campaigning against

invoking the new  
Christ avatar  
of the Americas  
running voices  
streets of Berlin  
Paris, Chicago  
seismic waves  
zigzagging through  
a faulty world

Overflowing from  
narrow streets  
cramped fields  
a pressure rising  
to match it  
tired marchers  
nearing Burntollet  
young arms linked  
banners poled high  
the baptism of  
flying missiles  
spiked clubs  
Law and Order's  
medieval armour  
of glass shield  
and dangling baton

Lines of loss  
lines of energy  
always changing  
always returning  
A TIDE LIFTS  
THE RELEIF SHIP  
OFF THE MUD  
OVER THE BOOM  
the rough field  
of the universe  
growing, changing  
a net of energies  
crossing patterns  
weaving towards  
a new order  
a new anarchy  
always different  
always the same

Across the border  
a dead man  
drives to school  
past the fort  
at Greene Castle  
a fury of love  
for North, South

memory's mortmain	eats his heart
a blue banner	on the far side
lifting over a	a rocky promontory
broken province	his family name
DRIVE YOUR PLOUGH	O'Cahan, O'Kane
a yellow bulldozer	my uncle watches
raising the rubble	sails upon Foyle
a humming factory	(a flock of swans)
a housing estate	drives forward
hatreds sealed into	
a hygienic honeycomb	

## **Derry**

Seamus Deane

I

The unemployment in our bones  
Erupting on our hands in stones

The thought of violence a relief,  
The act of violence a grief  
Our bitterness and love  
Hand in glove.

II

At the very most  
The mind's eye  
Perceives the ghost  
Of the hands try  
To timidly knock  
On the walled rock.  
But nothing will come  
And the hands become  
As they insist  
Mailed fists.

III

The Scots and English  
Settling for the best.  
The unfriendly natives  
Ready for the worst.  
It has been like this for years  
Someone says,  
It might be so forever, someone fears,  
Or for days.

## **Ulster Names**

John Hewitt

I take my stand by the Ulster names,  
each clean hard name like a weathered stone;  
Tyrella, Rostrevor, are flickering flames:  
the names I mean are the Moy, Malone,  
Strabane, Slieve Gullion and Portglenone.

Even suppose that each name were freed  
from legend's ivy and history's moss,  
there'd be music still in, say, Carrick-a-rede,  
though men forget it's the rock across  
the track of the salmon from Islay and Ross.

The names of a land show the heart of the race;  
they move on the tongue like the lilt of a song.  
You say the name and I see the place  
Drumbo, Dungannon, or Annalong.  
Barony, townland, we cannot go wrong.

You say Armagh, and I see the hill  
with the two tall spires or the square low tower;  
the faith of Patrick is with us still;  
his blessing falls in a moonlight hour,  
when the apple orchards are all in flower.

You whisper Derry. Beyond the walls  
and the crashing boom and the coiling smoke.  
I follow that freedom which beckons and calls  
to Colmcille, tall in his grove of oak,  
raising his voice for the rhyming folk.

County by county you number them over;  
Tyrone, Fermanagh...I stand by a lake,  
and the bubbling curlew, the whistling plover  
call over the whips in the chill daybreak  
as the hills and the waters the first light take.

Let Down be famous for care-tilled earth,  
for the little green hills and the harsh grey peaks,  
the rocky bed of the Lagan's birth,  
the white farm fat in the August weeks.  
There's one more county my pride still seeks.

You give it the name and my quick thoughts run  
through the narrow towns with their wheels of trade,  
to Glenballyemon, Glanaan, Glendun,  
from Trostan down to the braes of Layde,  
for there is the place where the pact was made.

But you have as good a right as I  
to praise the place where your face is known,  
for over us all is the selfsame sky;  
the limestone's locked in the strength of the bone,  
and who shall mock at the steadfast stone?

So it's Ballinamallard, it's Crossmaglen,  
it's Aughnacloy, it's Donaghadee,  
it's Magherafelt breeds the best of men,  
I'll not deny it. But look for me  
on the moss between Orra and Slievenanee.

## Procession

*I.M. Grandmother Hannah Carney*

John Montague

Hawk nose, snuff-stained apron;  
I stand beside you again in  
the gloom of your hallway  
peering up & down Fintona's  
cattle-stained Main Street  
some thronged fairday evening.

As you ramble on, like someone  
sick or drunk, confessing to  
a stranger in a bar, or train;  
ignoring my small years, while  
you spell out your restless pain,  
mourn a tormented lifetime.

Frank, your pride, eldest boy,  
interrogated again and again,  
arrested in your warm kitchen,  
bayonets and British voices  
bullying him abruptly away  
to the barbed wire, the tin

huts of Ballykinler, model  
for Long Kesh, Magilligan.  
Your youngest son, Tom, then  
drills in the old bandroom  
to follow him; soon lands  
himself into the Curragh prison.

Released, your two internees  
were met at the railway station,  
cheered and chaired home  
with a torchlight procession:  
but one half of the town  
held its blinds grimly down.

Still hatred and division  
stain that narrow acre  
from which you sprang.  
A half century later  
the same black dreams  
return to plague your daughter,  
their sister, my mother.

A Paisleyite meeting  
blared outside her window.  
A military helicopter  
hovered over the hospital,  
a maleficent spider. Her  
dying nightmares were of her  
sons seized by soldiers!

Across the rough, small hills  
of your country girlhood –

the untamed territory of  
the Barr, Brouher Mountain –  
we brought your daughter home,  
yellow car beams streaming;  
a torchlight procession.