

The Symbolic Value of “The Tollund Man”

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1

A mummy dug out of a bog in Denmark inspired Seamus Heaney to write his poem “The Tollund Man” in 1972. The poem, which is included in his third anthology, *Wintering Out*, is the first of several “bog poems” Heaney wrote on the topic of mummies. Most of those other poems are in his fourth anthology, *North*. “The Tollund Man” differs from the other “bog poems” in that the narrator has not personally witnessed the mummy, but instead formulates his narrative on the basis of the description in archaeologist P. V. Glob’s book *The Bog People*. Heaney had never seen the mummy, but only viewed a photograph in Glob’s book. This is made apparent to the reader when Heaney begins the poem with the statement that some day he will go to see “The Tollund Man.” Actually, years after composing the poem, Heaney journeyed to Denmark and Germany to see several mummies that had been excavated from bogs, and he composed several more “bog poems.”

Wintering Out was first published during a time of serious strife in Northern Ireland. Catholics, who had been suffering a great deal of discrimination in Ulster but were energized by the civil rights movement in the United States, began to protest. Protestants reacted to this new-found vigor with violence, and the police were forced to interfere to maintain order in the district. In 1969, in order to quell this anarchy, British army units were sent to Belfast and Londonderry, where in 1971 they began to arrest people and did not give them a fair trial. Almost 1,500 individuals were reported to have been arrested. In that same year, as a result of a disagreement about tactics, the Irish Republican Army split into two distinct factions. The provisional IRA began a campaign of terrorism in an effort to purge Ulster of Protestant militants. On January 30, 1972, “Bloody Sunday,” British troops fired on Londonderry civilians, killing thirteen.

Heaney writes in *Preoccupations* that his primary goal in composing “The Tollund Man” was to present images as a symbol of the predicament of Irish:

From that moment the problems of poetry moved from being simply a matter of achieving the satisfactory verbal icon to being a search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament [...]. I felt it imperative to discover a field of force in which, without abandoning fidelity to the processes and experience of poetry [...] it would be possible to encompass the perspectives of a humane reason and at the same time to grant the religious intensity of the violence its deplorable authenticity and intensity. (56)

Careful consideration must be given to Heaney's intention to use the Tollund Man as an image or symbol. His use of the expression "field of force" provides insight into the meaning of these multi-dimensional words. Heaney required a form of discourse through which he could authorize the religious aspects of violence, discourse which he found to be facilitated not through direct prose, but through an visual image. As the phrase "encompass the perspectives of a humane reason" implies although Heaney intended an image to be symbolic, he also wished it to be accessible and logical.

Critics have focused largely on the symbolism behind "The Tollund Man." That the two kinds of deaths are overlapped in this poem has attracted much criticism. In this poem, two kinds of deaths are depicted; one is the death of the Tollund Man, and the other is those of labourers in Northern Ireland. Some, for example, have pointed out that by identifying two kinds of deaths, Heaney justifies killings in Northern Ireland. Ciaran Carson, referring to Heaney in "'Escaped from the Massacre?'" as the "laureate of violence" (183), demonstrates that by describing the archaic ritual murder, Heaney seeks to justify the violence in Northern Ireland. In "'Pap for the Dispossessed,'" David Lloyd develops this argument, criticizing Heaney for having reduced history to myth and for attempting to give an aesthetically pleasing resolution to a serious political conflict by rendering disparate events as symbolic moments (103). Edna Longley, in "'Inner Émigré' or 'Artful Voyeur?,'" points out Heaney's tendency to confuse voluntary martyrdom with involuntary one (150). These commentaries, which focus on the effectiveness of the symbolism intended by Heaney, encompass the essential problem in understanding "The Tollund Man."

The presumption upon which those views are based — that the Tollund Man's death and deaths in the conflict in Northern Ireland are essentially different — has rarely been examined. In this essay, I deal with the validity of that presumption. If two kinds of deaths are proved as essentially same, the Tollund Man can function as a symbolic image effectively. In the following pages, I will evaluate the symbolic value of the Tollund

Man, focusing on the way in which his death is described in the poem.

2

The poem is divided into three parts. The first centers on the narrator's decision to go to Aarhus, where the preserved head of the Tollund Man is on display in the museum at Silkeborg. The following segment offers clear evidence of the ways in which Heaney bases his description of the Tollund Man and his explanation of why he was killed on Glob's *The Bog People*. On a superficial level, this part appears to indicate that the Tollund Man died peacefully, as the bridegroom of a goddess:

Some day I will go to Aarhus
To see his peat-brown head,
The mild pods of his eye-lids,
His pointed skin cap.

In the flat country near by
Where they dug him out,
His last gruel of winter seeds
Caked in his stomach,

Naked except for
The cap, noose and girdle,
I will stand a long time.
Bridegroom to the goddess (1-12)

A great deal of evidence implies that Heaney wrote the poem on the basis of having read Glob's *The Bog People* and not out of any direct visual experience with the Tollund Man himself. The narrator describes the Tollund Man in great detail, writing that he has a "peat-brown head" (2), a "pointed skin cap" (4), and gruel from winter seeds in his stomach (7-8), and the narrator is aware that he is naked except for the cap and noose (9-20). Nevertheless, he announces in the very first line that he has never seen the Tollund Man in person: "Some day," he writes, "I will go to Aarhus/To see his peat-brown head" (1-2). Heaney is forming his description of the Tollund Man based on Glob's account in *The Bog People*.

The similarities between Glob's description in *The Bog People* and Heaney's account in "The Tollund Man" are striking, underscoring the likelihood that the latter was based largely on the former. Glob writes that "on his head he wore a pointed skin cap fastened securely under the chin by a hide thong. Round his waist there was a smooth hide belt. Otherwise he was naked" (20). That description is mirrored almost to the word in Heaney's poem. Although the noose is not referred to at that point by Glob, it is described later, upon removal of the soil: "This disclosed a rope, made of two leather thongs twisted together, which encircled the neck in a noose drawn tight into the throat and then coiled like a snake over the shoulder and down across the back" (20). It is not merely the content of the two texts that is similar in many details; often Heaney's very word choices recall Glob's descriptions. The narrator in "The Tollund Man" refers to the Tollund Man's hat as a "pointed skin cap," using Glob's exact phrase. Furthermore, Glob describes the Tollund Man's stomach contents as follows:

Investigation showed that although the contents of the stomach consisted of vegetable remains of a gruel prepared from barley, linseed, "gold-of-pleasure" (*camelina sativa*) and knotweed, with many different sorts of weeds that grow on ploughed land, it could not have contained any meat at the time of death. (33)

From that description, it is not difficult to find relation with Heaney's "last gruel of winter seeds" (7). Clearly, Heaney's poem was, to a large extent, based directly on Glob's description of the Tollund Man in *The Bog People*.

Although the mummy cannot, of course, narrate the story himself, the body provides clues as to the circumstances of the Tollund Man's death. The body is a text to be read by the observer. Glob's scientific analysis of the clues provided by the Tollund Man's corpse is similar in many ways to the readers' interpretation of the text. Glob writes:

Perhaps it is because of the dominating position of the goddess that Tacitus makes no mention of a male partner, essential in a ritual marriage. This role may have been performed by her priest, whose part in the ceremonies is so strongly emphasized by the Roman historian. The description of the drowning of the goddess's attendants in the lake on the completion of the rites recalls the sacrificed bog people. There is indeed much to suggest that the bog people were participants in ritual celebrations of this kind, which culminated in their death and deposition in the bogs. (163)

Glob is unable to come to any concrete conclusions about the circumstances surrounding the deaths of the bog people. Here, he merely presents one possibility, in no way suggesting that his deductions are factual. The narrator in the poem, however, chooses to subscribe to this possibility, as can be seen in the use of the phrase "Bridegroom to the goddess" (12).

The identification of the earth with religion and the female body is not based on Glob's description, but the result of Heaney's imagination. Heaney's works characteristically render the earth as both sexual and holy. In *Preoccupations*, Heaney relates an experience from childhood that may clarify this tendency:

To this day, green, wet corners, flooded wastes, soft rushy bottoms, any place with the invitation of watery ground and tundra vegetation [...] possess an immediate and deeply peaceful attraction. It is as if I am betrothed to them, and I believe my betrothal happened one summer evening, thirty years ago, when another boy and myself stripped to the white country skin and bathed in a mosshole, treading the liver-thick mud, unsettling a smoky muck off the bottom and coming out smeared and weedy and darkened. We dressed again and went home in our wet clothes, smelling of the ground and the standing pool, somehow initiated. (19)

The expressions "betrothed" and "initiated" reflect Heaney's tendency to infuse descriptions of the earth with sexual and religious imagery. Seamus Deane explains the sexual imagery in Heaney's works in the following manner:

Maternity is of the earth, paternity belongs to those who build on it or cultivate it. There is a politics here, but it is embedded in an imagination given to ritual. That which in political or sectarian terms could be called nationalist or Catholic, belongs to maternity, the earth itself; that which is unionist or Protestant, belongs to paternity, the earth cultivated. What Heaney seeks is another kind of earth or soil susceptible to another kind of cultivation, the ooze or midden which will be creative and sexual (thereby belonging to "art") and not barren and erotic (thereby belonging to "society" or "politics"). (175)

The equation of the earth with the feminine is found clearly in the fourth stanza of Heaney's poem:

She tightened her torc on him
 And opened her fen,
 Those dark juices working
 Him to a saint's kept body, (13-16)

In the fourth stanza, when referring to the goddess Nertus, to whom the Tollund Man may have been devoted as a sacrifice, the narrator uses the anonymous "she" to describe the goddess in lieu of her name. This change has the effect of conveying the universality of the Tollund Man's faith. Another possible explanation is that Heaney, a Catholic, identifies the goddess with Mary, and through this association implies that she is representative of all female devotional figures. In addition to the avoidance of the goddess' name, Heaney departs from Glob's model by inserting a great deal of sexual imagery, using terms such as "opened her fen" (14) and "Those dark juices working/Him to a saint's kept body" (16). "Dark juices," perhaps, refers to the goddess's bodily fluids, which may recall Glob's scientific explanation of the preservative powers of the bog water. The Iron Age man's head and body were remarkably intact, particularly the parts that were in heaviest contact with bog water, which is saturated with soil-acids that act as preservatives (28-31). Jonathan Allison points out that this sexualization of a scientific idea can be seen as an allusion to an abnormal marriage, with the bog being identified with the vagina, and the Tollund Man's absorption in the bog implying his total absorption into the female anatomy (110). These examples of the personification of the bog and the deepening of the character of the Earth Goddess cannot be gleaned entirely from Glob's work and must, therefore, be credited to Heaney's imaginative abilities.

Heaney's use of personification and metaphor gives the reader clues as to the author's attitude toward the Earth Goddess. To some extent, he bases his poem on Glob's assumption that the Tollund Man was devoted to the goddess. This stanza may be interpreted as equating faith in the Earth Goddess with the field of force described in *Preoccupations*.

Although it is uncertain whether the Tollund Man died voluntarily, or was involuntarily slain, there is a clear sign of violence on his body. The rope found knotted around the Tollund Man's neck implies that his death included some element of violence. Glob describes the rope as follows:

The Tollund man most probably met his death by means of this rope. The vertebrae

of the neck did not appear to be damaged, but the doctors and medico-legal experts who took part in the examination judged, nevertheless, from the way the rope was placed that the Tollund man had not been strangled, but hanged. (32)

The Tollund Man is described as though the Earth Goddess took great care to preserve his body, an image that stands in stark contrast to the violent implications of the rope. That his death was a form of extreme violence cannot be ignored, but such acts of violence are not conducted in an arbitrary fashion. Rather, the Tollund Man's sacrifice was conducted within a religious framework that seeks to maintain order on a larger scale by emphasizing the continuation of the species, brought about through the marriage of the Tollund Man and the Earth Goddess. Faith in the Earth Goddess, in other words, acts as a field of force granting the authority to commit such a violent act as hanging another living being.

On the other hand, Heaney's Christianity is an important point that cannot be overlooked, as can be seen by the phrase "a saint's kept body" (16). Helen Vendler indicates that the poem is infused with the specter of the Catholic Church (43). Indeed, Catholics believe that the body of a saint does not rot, as it has been blessed by God. While Heaney stays true to the Tollund Man's belief in the Earth Goddess, the sense of Catholicism is pervasive throughout the poem. As far as this stanza is concerned, it is clear that the narrator does not cast away Catholicism completely and begin to believe in the Earth Goddess. The narrator, as a Catholic speaking from the perspective of the twentieth century, describes the belief in the Earth Goddess as a field of force authorizing the violent act of sacrifice.

One final point that is important to take note of in the first part is that the winter seeds remain in the Tollund Man's stomach long after his death. They do not "germinate" and thus do not fulfill their allotted function. Mother Earth traditionally has two aspects, the devourer and the generator. Here, however, she plays only the former part. While the Tollund Man is devoted enough to the Earth Goddess to sacrifice himself in an effort to bring the bounty of the harvest to his people, his efforts are in vain, as he fails to rot and therefore has no role in nourishing the plants. The bog water prevents him from fulfilling his function, rendering his death meaningless.

3

In the second part, the narrator describes the deaths resulting from the political

conflict in Ireland. Superficially, these deaths appear to be disorderly, thus standing in sharp contrast to the Tollund Man's death, which is centered on the ritual order of the Earth Goddess. The second part begins with a prayer to the Tollund Man:

I could risk blasphemy,
 Consecrate the cauldron bog
 Our holy ground and pray
 Him to make germinate
 The scattered, ambushed
 Flesh of labourers (21-26)

The use of the word "blasphemy" continues the theme of ambivalence towards religion. Although the consecration of the bog and the prayer directed at the Earth Goddess do not belong to Christian tradition, the narrator is nevertheless tempted to commit blasphemy.

Despite the risk of committing blasphemy, the myth pulls on the narrator, as implied in the following stanza, which contrasts the deaths of the Irish victims with the death of the Tollund Man:

Stockinged corpses
 Laid out in the farmyards,
 Tell-tale skin and teeth
 Flecking the sleepers
 Of four young brothers, trailed
 For miles along the lines. (27-32)

In contrast with the Tollund Man having been preserved like a saint by the goddess' fluid, the Irish victims are "scattered" (5). After their deaths, they are deprived of peace, "trailed/For miles along the lines" (12). Here, we should remember Glob's indication that identifies the bog people with priests who participated in the ritual. The Irish victims are further contrasted with the Tollund Man through the implication that the Tollund Man was aware of his fate when he became a priest, but that the Irish victims were "ambushed" (5) and thus unprepared for what was to come.

The second part of "The Tollund Man," therefore, appears to describe the contrasting ritual order in Denmark and the disorder in twentieth-century Ireland, using the

deification of the Tollund Man as a mechanism by which to explain the anarchy. In essence, however, the two situations are highly similar, in that both represent the violence included in the religion. The superficial contrast is subverted, and the common characteristics are made clearer in the third part.

4

The third part of this poem is the most complex and therefore merits particularly careful analysis. Unlike Glob, who "read" the body, the narrator in Heaney's poem "writes." In other words, his function is as a poet, as opposed to a scientist, and he is therefore able to add another dimension to the story of the Tollund Man.

The narrator imagines himself driving to Silkeborg museum in Denmark, likening his experience to the Tollund Man being transported in "tumbiril." The true key to the nature of the Tollund Man's death lies in the use of this word.

Something of his sad freedom
As he rode the tumbiril
Should come to me, driving, (33-35)

In all probability, "tumbiril" refers to the cart used to transport the Tollund Man to the bog. Glob's work, however, contains no description of such a carriage. Indeed, Glob makes no mention at all of the method by which the Tollund Man was moved to the site of his death.

The word "tumbiril" is a problematic one, given that it is intended to represent the cart used to carry the Tollund Man, a man who, presumably, has been peacefully embraced by the Earth Goddess in the moment of his death. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines "tumbiril" as "an instrument of punishment, the nature and operation of which in early times is uncertain; from 16th c. usually identified with "cucking-stool." *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines "cucking-stool" as "an instrument of punishment formerly in use for scolds, disorderly women, fraudulent tradespeople, etc., consisting of a chair (sometimes in the form of a close-stool), in which the offender was fastened and exposed to the jeers of the bystanders, or conveyed to a pond or river and ducked." The implications of this word are vast. Not only was the tumbiril used to expose criminals to the jeers of the bystanders, but also to punish them by submerging them into a pond or river. This shameful method of punishment certainly does not imply heroism or a

death met voluntarily for the greater good of the people.

The word “tumbriil” also relates to the French Revolution, as *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines this word as “a cart used to carry condemned prisoners to their execution, esp. to the guillotine during the French Revolution.” Clearly, the historical implications of this word cannot be ignored.

Michael Parker, discussing the relevance of the use of the word “tumbriil,” points out that this word bridges the past and the present. Parker does not, however, present any answers to the question of why the Tollund Man, who died heroically, for the sake of the people, is invested with imagery of a condemned prisoner carried to the guillotine, jeered at by curious throngs of people. Vendler indicates that the predominant theme of this poem is the repetition of violence, but she does not mention how the word “tumbriil” comes into play.

Although critics have not paid enough attention to the implication of this word, there are a variety of important interpretive possibilities. Both the image of the French Revolution and the association with a cart transporting a prisoner are far from the image of a priest who voluntarily chooses to die in a peaceful fashion. The third part of the poem sheds light on how the narrator may have imagined the circumstances surrounding the Tollund Man’s death.

Many of Heaney’s bog poems attempt to compare the mummies found in the bogs with a massacre that took place in modern-day Ireland. Many critics, however, have criticized these comparisons, often holding that the two forms of death are so disparate that they cannot be placed side by side. Carson, in “‘Escaped from the Massacre?’,” criticizes Heaney’s bog poems:

The two methods are not compatible. One gains its poetry by embodiment of a specific, personal situation; the other has degenerated into a messy historical and religious surmise — a kind of Golden Bough activity, in which the real difference between our society and that of Jutland in some vague past are glossed over for the sake of the parallels of ritual. (183)

Carson’s criticism is true in that the political and historical background of Ireland and ancient Denmark are so different that they can hardly be compared, and that the past in Jutland is “vague,” for it is impossible to unearth the exact reason for the Tollund Man’s death. Nevertheless, the death of the Tollund Man and the deaths of the victims of the conflict in Northern Ireland demonstrate similar characteristics, in that they

underscore the relationship between religion and violence.

Longley, who presents a scathing critique of Heaney's work, writes in "Inner Émigré or 'Artful Voyeur?'" that the Tollund Man is presented as a sacrificial volunteer. She points out that "The prototype developed by 'The Tollund Man' is a scapegoat, privileged victim and ultimately Christ-surrogate" (74). Later, she criticizes Heaney's approach by saying that "Heaney does not distinguish between involuntary and voluntary 'martyrdom', and the nature of his 'archetype' is such as to subsume the latter within the former" (75). Longley, in other words, sees the image of Christ in the Tollund Man, and from that image she interprets that the Tollund Man is a voluntary "martyr." Her critique is based on her identification of the narrator of "The Tollund Man" and Seamus Heaney as the author of *Preoccupations*. Involuntary "martyrdom" most likely refers to the victims of the conflict in Northern Ireland, described in the second part of the poem. In short, Longley criticizes the poem for confusing two disparate forms of martyrdom. Both "archetype" and "emblem" refer to the imagery that typically represents an abstract concept. Longley believes that it is wrong to connect two disparate concepts using archetypes or emblems. Longley's critique, however, loses strength when one considers that it is doubtful whether Heaney intended the Tollund Man to be seen as a voluntary martyr.

The possibility that the Tollund Man is described as a Christ-surrogate is considerable; Jesus, like the Tollund Man, was sacrificed to benefit mankind. However, it is possible that placing too much emphasis on the image of the Christ, without paying enough attention to the poem's imagery, can lead to a misreading of the Tollund Man as a voluntary martyr. In the poem, the narrator explicitly renders the Tollund Man as an unwilling participant in his death. He does not choose to die, but, as a priest, has no control over his fate.

The word "tumbriel" provides the essential clue to this reading of the poem. If the narrator wished to emphasize the image of Christ, he would not use such a word, for it is well known that Christ was not carried in a cart, but rather walked to the hill of Golgotha carrying a cross. Longley's criticism is based on the description in *Preoccupations*, but it is important to consider the meaning of the word within the context of the poem. Whether imagined as an instrument of punishment or as a car used to carry a prisoner, the word "tumbriel" brings to mind a prisoner being involuntarily punished by his community. The French Revolution is particularly relevant, as many prisoners were executed by guillotine as an effect of the myth of Enlightenment, similar to the manner in which the priest is sacrificed as an effect of the myth of the Earth Goddess.

This interpretation is reinforced by the use of the phrase “sad freedom.” Longley does not mention anything about this phrase, but the nature of this “freedom” is critical to an understanding of the meaning behind the Tollund Man’s death. According to Helen Vendler, “sad freedom” is the freedom felt by those who face their own end. Vendler compares the Tollund Man with Hamlet: “The ‘sad freedom’ of the certain knowledge of death — Hamlet’s sad freedom in the last act — is bestowed on the young poet (Heaney is still only thirty-three) by the apparent repetitiveness of history” (43). Vendler compares this part of the poem with the “freedom” expressed by Hamlet in the last act of the play. It is possible that what Vendler had in mind is the moment when Hamlet faces his own death:

Heaven make thee free of it. I follow thee.
 I am dead, Horatio. Wretched Queen, adieu.
 You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
 That are but mutes or audience to this act,
 Had I but time — as this fell sergeant, Death,
 Is strict in his arrest — O, I could tell you —
 But let it be. Horatio, I am dead,
 Thou livest; report me and my cause aright
 To the unsatisfied. (5.2. 337-44)

Alexander Schmidt notes that in this context “free” means “not encumbered, affected or stained with” (“free” adj. 3). Perhaps it is here that Vendler finds the image of being “not encumbered.” If one takes into consideration this meaning of “free,” in other words, “not in bondage,” it becomes clear that the narrator believes that the Tollund Man has been liberated from his sacrificial status by his own death. This image is clearly incompatible with the interpretation that the Tollund Man is a “voluntary” martyr.

Another key to a complete understanding of the nature of the Tollund Man’s death is a careful examination of the ways in which the narrator overlaps with his subject. This part of the poem is written in the form of the narrator’s imaginings, as he believes he sees the people of Denmark pointing at him as he drives to the Silkeborg Museum in Jutland. In such a situation, the narrator imagines that he can feel the Tollund Man’s “sad freedom.” In this part, it is implied that the narrator driving the car and the Tollund Man carried by the tumbrel are in similar situations. The following stanza describes the sense of alienation felt by the narrator:

Saying the names
 Tollund, Graubaulle, Nebelgard,
 Watching the pointing hands
 Of country people,
 Not knowing their tongue. (36-40)

The fact that the narrator is unfamiliar with the language, coupled with his sense that the residents are pointing at him, gives him a sense of alienation which is overlapped with that the Tollund Man might have felt.

This sense of alienation is further reinforced by the calling of place-names: "Tollund, Grabaulle, Nebelgard" (5). This calling of the place-names cannot be disregarded merely as the narrator talking to himself. *Wintering Out* includes a number of poems that can be discussed in the context of place-names. Some of the major "place-name poems" are "Toome," "Anahorish," "Fodder," and "Broagh." David Lloyd, in his discussion of "Anahorish," points out that by calling place-names a narrator is able to retrieve his lost identity (332). Edna Longley points out that place-name poems delineate the relationship between scenery and language (130). Finally, Ciaran Carson identifies "Toome" and "Broagh" as variations of *dinnshenchas*, or place-name lore (185).

"*Dinnshenchas*" is a traditional genre in early Irish narrative and learned literature. Whether or not Heaney's place-name poems are traditional *dinnshenchas* is questionable, but it is important to consider the effect of calling place-names in *Wintering Out*. It merits attention that, in place-name poems, it is not standard English that is used, but an Irish dialect. In "The Tollund Man," place-names are not English, but Danish, which the narrator does not understand, as the phrase "not knowing their tongue" (40) shows. Glob points out that the place-name "Tollund" comes from Edda, meaning "Tor's Grave" (28). It is important that, in this poem, unlike other place-name poems, the close relationship between place-name and scenery cannot be seen. This is partly because the narrator here calls Danish place names. Furthermore, as Neil Corcoran points out, the narrator's lack of command for the language in this unfamiliar land results in a deep sense of alienation (37). The narrator is attracted to the myth of Jutland, but the local residents react to him in an unfriendly manner, watching him with the curiosity reserved for strangers.

The narrator's sense of isolation can be clearly noted in the line "I will feel lost" (43). The narrator ends the poem by restating his sense of alienation, thereby giving the reader a clue as to the nature of the Tollund Man's death:

Out there in Jutland
 In the old man-killing parishes
 I will feel lost,
 Unhappy and at home. (41-44)

The narrator's sense of "feeling lost" clarifies the sense of alienation felt by the narrator. Corcoran indicates that the use of the word "home" in the phrase "Unhappy and at home" shifts the tone from mere irony and sadness into tragedy and desolation (37). Surely, "lost" implies "desperate" or "hopeless," so Corcoran's assertion is persuasive in that, if one is familiar with the situation in which one feels desperate and unhappy, it is nothing but tragedy. But when one considers the narrator's sense of alienation, the word can be viewed in another perspective; this word can mean "lost in the way." Having lost one's way and finding oneself in an unfamiliar land contribute to the sense of alienation experienced by both the narrator and the Tollund Man.

The narrator's sense of alienation is clearly aligned with that of the Tollund Man. As the narrator drives his car, the kinship he feels with the Tollund Man is made apparent through his sense of "sad freedom" (33), recalling how the Tollund Man must have felt as he was carried to the execution ground on the tumbriil. How does Heaney make explicit the Tollund Man's sense of alienation? As communication is founded in a sharing of ideas, it is possible that the Tollund Man's alienation arises from a difference of opinion. The people must have viewed the Tollund Man as a mere sacrifice to the Earth Goddess, but it is possible that the Tollund Man saw the ritual differently and could not believe in the efficacy of the ritual and in the justness of authority completely as the people of "the old man-killing parishes" certainly did. This interpretation is strengthened by the use of the term "sad freedom" and the image of the prisoner brought to mind through the use of the word "tumbriil." The prisoner cannot do anything save obeying the decrees of authority. Taking this into consideration, it is not difficult to understand the use of phrases such as "man-killing parishes." As the word "parish" means religious district, this phrase clearly brings to mind the violent aspects of religion, lending credence to the sense of isolation and alienation felt by the Tollund Man as he approaches his death.

A close reading of the third part of the poem is crucial to a clear interpretation, as it is here that the Tollund Man's sense of alienation is revealed. The Tollund Man is sacrificed for the Earth Goddess, Nertus, but his death eventually proves meaningless. If, as is implied in the poem, the Tollund Man does not go to his death voluntarily, but is

rather forced to die for the good of the community, it is the religion of the Earth Goddess that bears responsibility for his death. The cause of the deaths in Northern Ireland was the conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants. Both the sacrifice of the Tollund Man and the deaths in Northern Ireland are variants on the theme of religious violence. Both deaths are meaningless, which strengthens the symbolic value of the Tollund Man. The death of the Tollund Man demonstrates to the reader that the conflict in Northern Ireland is not the result of temporary and localized madness, but rather violence born of religion, a connection that existed even in the Iron Age. "The Tollund Man" functions effectively in a symbolic sense, presenting a visual image of the field of force that grants the twentieth-century killings religious intensity and authority.

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Synopsis

The Symbolic Value of "The Tollund Man"

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Seamus Heaney's poem "The Tollund Man" was written in 1972, inspired by a mummy dug out of a bog in Denmark. This poem was written during a time of serious political strife in Ireland.

Heaney wrote in *Preoccupations* that his primary goal in composing "The Tollund Man" was to present image as a symbol of the predicament of Irish. He explained the characteristics of such image or symbol by using the phrase "field of force" to grant the religious intensity of violence its deplorable authority and intensity.

Thus far, critics have focused largely on the symbolism behind "The Tollund Man." Many critics have pointed out that by identifying two different kinds of deaths Heaney justifies killings in Northern Ireland.

These discussions, which focus around the effectiveness of the symbolism intended by Heaney, encompass the essential problem in understanding "The Tollund Man." In this essay, I will evaluate the symbolic value of the Tollund Man, focusing on the way in which his death is described in the poem.

The poem is divided into three parts. The first part of the poem centers around the narrator's decision to go to Aarhus, where the preserved head of the Tollund Man is on display. On a superficial level, this section appears to indicate that the Tollund Man died peacefully, as the bridegroom of a goddess.

In the second part, the narrator describes the deaths resulting from the conflict in Northern Ireland. Superficially, these deaths appear to be disorderly, thus standing in sharp contrast to the Tollund Man's death. In essence, however, the two situations are highly similar, in that both represent the violence included in the religion.

The superficial contrast is subverted, and the common characteristics are made clearer in the third part. Paying close attention to such words and phrases as "tumbriel," "sad freedom," "lost," it will be clear that in this section the Tollund Man is described as the involuntary martyr. In this reading, it is the religion of the Earth Goddess that bears responsibility for his death. One of the reasons behind the deaths of the laborers in Northern Ireland was the conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants. Both the sacrifice of the Tollund Man and killings in Northern Ireland are variants on the theme of religious violence. The death of the Tollund Man demonstrates to the reader that the conflict in Northern Ireland is not the result of a temporary and localized madness, but rather violence born of religion, a connection that existed even in the Iron Age. "The Tollund Man" functions effectively in a

symbolic sense, presenting a visual image of the field of force that grants the twentieth century killings religious intensity and authority.