

## SOME THOUGHTS ON THE INTERSECTION OF LITERATURE AND ARCHAEOLOGY...

By Rosemary Basquill

I am a high school English teacher with a passion for history and archeology. Artifacts are such a direct link to our past – to touch an object crafted by a long dead human is both electrifying and humbling. There is an intersection between these physical artifacts and our lingual artifacts, literature. Writers sometimes reflect on actual artifacts while crafting a piece. Seamus Heaney, one of the greatest poetic voices of our generation, is an excellent example of this intersection between archeology and literature.

He wrote “Tollund Man” about the man who sacrificed himself to the bog 2,000 ago in Denmark. This poem describes the site, but also connects this violent past to Northern Ireland’s present Troubles. Unfortunately man’s savageness seems to transcend place and time.

You can learn about the Tollund Man and hear Seamus Heaney read his poem [here...](#)

You can read the text of “Tollund Man” [here...](#)

Heaney’s “Punishment,” “Nerthus,” “Bog Queen,” “Tollund,” “The Grauballe Man,” “Kinship,” and “Strange Fruit” are also meditations on the same theme.

Seamus Heaney continues using artifacts for inspiration with his translation of *Beowulf*. The description of Shield Sheafson’s magnificent funeral resembles the Sutton Hoo findings only creatively imagined as set sail into the sea.

You can read about the Sutton Hoo excavations [here](#) and [here...](#)

Rosemary Basquill teaches high school English in Delaware. She volunteers at the [Independence Living History Center Archeology Lab](#) at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania . Rosemary has visited archaeological sites in England that form the settings for the literary works used in her classroom. The Society for American Archaeology public web pages project thanks Rosemary for this contribution.