**ENG-CC Punishment**

1} Write a critical appreciation of the poem ‘Punishment’

Ans: The poem is written in iambic pentameter lines - mostly blank verse, but with half-rhyming couplets at the beginning and end.

This is an imaginary poem in the sense that the writer imagines the condition of the girl before getting punishment and the aftermath after discovering the preserved body. He imagines and describes a corpse that was found in 1951 of a young girl who had been brutally tortured and killed as a punishment for adultery. The whole poem is divided into three parts, describing the preserved body after discovery, going into an imagined flashback of the time before getting the punishment, and then switching to his personal feelings about punishment. The writer made a critical comment on the culture and human nature of Ireland through this poem. He described about past and present by using his imagination, presumptions and his own memories. This poem shows the mythical associations with the connection between violence and religion. This poem shows the cruelty of human nature. This poem is a symbolic of the unchanging and resilient aspect of the manner with which humans regard one another.

Heaney takes this discovery as an ancient example of brutality and links it with the modern form of brutality which is evident in the Irish rebels killing Irish girls who even dared to interact with British soldiers. This poem puts brutality at the centre with which it links past and present, history and modern time. What continues from ancient time to modern time are cruelty, brutality and primitivism. The poem also alludes to the miserable situation of women and the adverse discrimination that they face just because of their gender. Loving someone is not a crime and yet it is the woman who suffers. Hence this poem can also be read as a commentary on the fate of women and the abuse they suffered from the society.

2} Write a short note on Seamus Heaney.

Ans: Seamus Heaney was born on April 13, 1939, on a farm in Castledawson, County Derry, Northern Ireland, the eldest of eight children. In 1963, he began teaching at St. Joseph's College in Belfast. Here he began to write, joining a poetry workshop with Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, and others under the guidance of Philip Hobsbaum. In 1965 he married Marie Devlin, and in 1966 year he published his first book of poetry, Death of a Naturalist. His other poetry includes Door into the Dark (1969), Wintering Out (1972), North (1979), Selected Poems 1965-1975 (1980), Station Island (1984), The Haw Lantern (1987), New Selected Poems 1966-1987 (1990) and Seeing Things (1991). In 1999 he published a new translation of the Old English heroic poem Beowulf. Heaney developed a completely unique style that subtly refers to all times and places, and in which a fascinating game is played with contradictions and paradoxes. His tone is usually mild and serene, making the existential themes he broaches all the more intense.

3} How does the poet describe the punishment of the girl in the poem?

Ans: The poet presents the past incident vividly as though he had been witness to it. The girl was pulled with a rope from her neck and stripped naked. Her head was shaved and all parts of her frail body were subjected to unbearable torture. Finally, she was buried alive in a bog. Stones, rods and boughs were used to cover her in the bog. The poet describes that he can almost feel the tug of the halter on the Neck as the body is taken out of the bog. It swung naked and he could almost make out the ribs hanging in it. Furthermore, he describes that her head is shaved which resembles a stubble of black corn and her eyes are blindfolded which are soiled with the body being buried for long. Her face is black like tar and her broken body hangs limply in the air. He further addresses her as a “poor scapegoat” who probably ended up being either framed or blamed for an affair.

4} What is the poet’s reaction to the punishment?

Ans: The poet is empathetic to the punishment and fate of the young girl. He calls her a “poor scapegoat” because she is the only one made to suffer for love while the society easily lets the male go free. However, despite his empathy, he is also not courageous a person to make a difference for he confesses that he been there at the time she was being punished; he would only have been an artful voyeur and simply watched along with the rest of the society never lifting a finger to help her out.

5} Describe the punishment the young girl faces in the poem.

Ans: The young girl as imagined by the poet must have been brutally tortured to death. In a cruel manner she is paraded naked as her hair is shaved off, her face blackened and after numerous blows, she is hung with a blindfold on her eyes.

6} ‘Seamus Heaney has criticized society’s attitude towards women’. Do you agree? Elaborate.

Seamus Heaney’s ‘Punishment’ paints a dismal picture of a young girl brutally punished for adultery. The brutality of the punishment dates back to the primitive age. But, the poet likens it to the modern time, when Irish girls having a relationship with British soldiers received similar punishment. The poet cannot alienate himself from her deep anguish. He feels ‘the tug of the halter at the nape of her neck’ and ‘the wind on her naked front’. He imagines her being a flaxen haired beautiful girl before the punishment mutilated her. He almost falls in love with the girl. But, he regrettably finds himself only as an ‘artful voyeur’ who stood dumb at the sight. The poet affectionately calls her ‘little adulteress’ and a poor scapegoat. The image of a scapegoat suggests that only the women were subjected to such cruel punishment. It speaks of the sad plight of women who have little free choice in male-dominated society. Adultery is seen as a sin committed by women, and not men, in a patriarchal society. It is through these observations that he criticizes the attitude of the society against women where they are always discriminated against based on their gender.

7} When was the poem published?

Ans: It was published in the collection *North* in 1975.