

PUNISHMENT

-SEAMUS HEANEY

In the poem "Punishment" by Seamus Heaney, the poem speaks about a young woman who is shaved, naked and killed in bog compressing tree's branches and stones upon her. He says that the young woman is killed for a crime called "adulterous". The speaker presents a form of punishment as an ancient example of brutality. In ancient times this kind of punishment was practiced by the people of northern Europe as a custom.

The poet creates an imaginary situation to describe the way the girl was punished on charge of adultery. He describes the poor condition of a young girl and his describes in such a way as if he can feel the pain of that poor girl. The girl was not treated like a human being when she was being given punishment, she was buried alive. The girl is described as weak and fragile. When the girl was punished, she was pulled her with a rope and she was made naked. She was trembling with cold, her whole body was shaking but was unable to do anything to protect her.

The girl was like a non-living thing. The cruel people used an old knife to shave her hairs. Her eyes were blindfolded so that she could not see the world. The stones, rods and boughs were used to cover the bog where she was buried alive. Then the poet imagines the picture of the girl when she was alive. He compares her 'shaved head' to 'stubble of black corn', the noose to a "ring" and he imagines a beautiful picture of the girl as silky haired. The poet shows his sympathy to the girl by saying "My poor scapegoat". The crime for which she was punished was not done by her alone, her partner was also involved in the crime. But her partner was not punished because he was male, the girl became the victim of gender discrimination.

The poet sets a link between this girl and the women who were also like this in the period of war between England and Ireland as they had relationship with British. The poet was a witness of this kind of cruel situation and felt guilty because he could not do anything for them. The victims are different but the form of brutality is same.