

Blackberry picking analysis

Business



Blackberry Picking Analysis BY pat57xx This is one of Heaney's poems that centre on memories of his childhood, growing up on a farm in the Irish countryside. Here he recalls the annual experience of picking wild fruit in late summer. Heaney uses assonance in his phrase 'glossy purple clot' to describe the first blackberry that ripened and stood out from others pictured with the simile as being still 'hard as a knot'. Heaney compares the taste of the first ripe berry to the sweetness of 'thickened wine'.

He uses the metaphor 'summer's blood' to express the redness of the juice that led to a desire for more: 'lust for picking'. The reference to blood is the first suggestion of a less enjoyable or innocent experience. The second part of the sixteen-line first stanza tells how they collected all the containers they could lay their hands on: 'milk-cans, pea-tins, Jam-pots'. The rhythm of the list is repeated two lines later in 'hayfields, cornfields and potato-drills' whose bordering hedges offered the fruit for picking.

Onomatopoeia in the phrase 'tinkling ottom' suggests the sound of the first few berries hitting the metal of the cans they were dropped into. An ominous picture is painted in the description of the ripe fruit on the top: 'big dark blobs burned like a plate of eyes'.

Perhaps this reflects the vivid imagination of a child. The macabre imagery increases at the end of the first stanza, where Heaney uses the simile 'sticky as Bluebeard's' to describe the blackberry juice covering the palms of the children's hands as if it were blood, thus echoing the earlier metaphor of 'summer's blood'.

In the shorter second stanza, the pleasures of picking and tasting the first ripe berries soon fade away. The berries were ‘hoarded’ in the byre, but very quickly begin to go mouldy. The mould is described as a ‘rat-grey fungus’: the inclusion of the word ‘rat’ in the metaphor emphasizes the distaste of this deterioration. The smell and taste are focused on too.

‘Stinking’ makes no bones about the unpleasant smell, and the original sweet taste of the blackberries turns sour. The following line reminds us that the poet is speaking here as a child: ‘I always elt like crying.’

It wasn’t fair...

‘Then once again the smell is recalled: ‘all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot’. In the last line, Heaney remembers that he always hoped the blackberries would last once they had been picked, but inside realised that this was impossible. It is interesting to compare this with another poem of Heaney’s, ‘Death of a Naturalist’. Both of them centre on childhood memories that begin as innocent, pleasurable experiences rooted in nature, but both end in disillusion. Nature’s beauty and sweetness do not endure.

The desire for the experience ends in revulsion. There is even a parallel in the structure of the two poems with the extended first stanza followed by a more compact second one that describes a change, the moment of disillusion and disgust. Heaney addresses all the senses with his imagery and hints here and there among his initial admiration and enjoyment that things are perhaps not all they seem. The innocence of childhood and the wonders of nature are transient, and disappointment has to be confronted