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**Death by Blackberry**

While seeing big fat blackberries, you normally don’t connect them to anything else except for prickly fruit that stains your fingers; however, Sylvia Plath manages to give them a deeper meaning in her poem, “Blackberrying.” Plath’s poem is about a persona who goes on a journey while picking blackberries. Some people argue that the overall meaning is about nature, but knowing her history; the poem connects to suicide and can really tug on a readers heartstrings.

Plath’s poem is broken up into three stanzas of free verse that are nine lines each. This structure breaks her trip down blackberry lane into a beginning, middle, and end. This helps you see the change in her attitude from how joyful she is while walking through the lane of blackberries to becoming very dejected while staring at the sea. You can see this change in the theme through the way she leaves behind the sweet blackberry hills for the salty, overwhelming sea.

In the first stanza, Plath’s persona is picking blackberries in the woods. Plath shows the persona is alone and stresses it with the repetition of the word “nothing,” (1). Plath also gives the blackberries many human qualities with the use of personification by comparing it to, “the ball of [her] thumb and dumb as eyes,” (5). By using human body parts, it reflects a human which makes sense when the persona has a “blood sisterhood,” with them (8). By using personification, it makes it clearer that the blackberries are a symbol for the lack of people. Believing that this is true, the persona’s sadness is revealed when she is alone when she is surrounded by people. This sadness is what later implies that the persona will later commit suicide.

Her unhappiness intensifies as the poem continues. Plath’s persona identifies choughs and flies on her walk. The chough suggests death—along with the flies. In line ten, the birds are “in black,” (10). The color black solidifies the choughs connection to death in mourning (which foreshadows the persona’s desire for death in the last stanza). The color black also helps reconnect the longing of death back to the blackberries. Plath writes, “I come to one bush of berries so ripe it is a bush of flies,” (15). This also points to death; the berries are spoiled and rotten to the point where flies literally are covering the bush. All of these allusions to death are made obvious when the persona says, “they believe in heaven” (17). Her reference to heaven puts a positive outlook on death as well as tying all of it together. Most importantly it proves that the persona is okay and happy with the thought of death by giving it a divine appeal such as heaven.

Along with choughs, flies, and the color black, the sea symbolizes death too. It has been an image throughout the entire piece. When introduced in the first stanza, it is unseen but still “hooks” (3), the persona, drawing it nearer with every step. It is mentioned—again being unseen—in the next stanza and the draw becomes more intense by the way she doubts, “the sea will ever appear at all,” (13). She does not think that she will ever find the sea, however it still pulls her close. There is another pull and you see the sea take over the persona because afterwards, “the berries and bushes end,” (18). This represents the end of her life surrounded by loneliness and is where the tone shift is located.

In the third and final stanza, the person is staring death in the face. She is as close to it as she can be. You see this when she says, “The only thing to come now is the sea,” (19). You understand her journey down a path as a journey within herself that brought her from a world of people to where she is now, on death’s doorstep. You see this door open when Plath writes, “[she] look out on nothing, nothing but a great space/ of white and pewter lights,” (26-27). This resembles some sort of an afterlife such as when people can “see the light.” All of this points to one conclusion: the death of the persona. Since she is by herself, you can come to the assumption that she killed herself by jumping off of the mountain into the sea.

Plath adds Pathos, emotional or motivational appeals, to make this poem hit closer to home. All of the language chosen—nobody, slapping, phantom, etc.—is Nobody very doleful and upsetting to make you feel all of the emotions that persona feels, when she is feeling them. By adding pathos, she makes the poem more emotional and it almost persuades you into thinking the same way the persona does about life. These appeals to the readers’ emotions ultimately make it more pleasing to read and make it more elaborate of a text.

Plath adds depth to blackberries and the sea. She takes simple objects and turns those objects into complex symbols that you need to understand her poem, “Blackberrying.” She creates a small sense of morbidity that isn’t easily picked up on, which is why this poem can read into several different ways. Suicide might not be the first translation somebody agrees with, but by taking a closer look it is definitely a major theme throughout Sylvia Plath’s poem.