

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82)

THE HONEYSUCKLE¹ (1870)

This poem was included in the first collection of Rossetti's poems published in 1870.

Text One

1 Read the poem and say who is speaking and about what.

I plucked² a honeysuckle where

The hedge on high is quick³ with thorn⁴,

And climbing for the prize⁵, was torn⁵,

And fouled⁶ my feet in quag-water⁷;

5 And by the thorns and by the wind

The blossom, that I took was thinn'⁸d,

And yet I found it sweet and fair.

Thence⁹ to a richer growth I came,

Where, nursed in mellow intercourse¹⁰,

10 The honeysuckles sprang by scores¹¹,

Not harried¹² like my single stem,

All virgin lamps of scent¹³ and dew¹⁴.

So from my hand *that first* I threw,

Yet plucked not any more of them.

2 Focus on the first stanza.

a) Note down words and phrases describing:

1 what the poet does

2 what happens to him

3 what happens to the blossom he picks

4 how he feels about it.

b) What metaphor is used to describe the honeysuckle?

c) What light does line 7 throw on the poet's action?

3 Focus on the second stanza.

a) Point out the differences between the new plant and the stem the poet had picked earlier.

b) What is in your opinion the reason why the poet throws away the stem in his hands and doesn't pick any more?

4 Consider the poem's meaning. The poem can also be read at a symbolic level, like most of Rossetti's poems.

a) Explain how the verbs in the first and in the last line of the poem reflect a changed attitude to the honeysuckle.

b) What aspects of human experience can the contrast symbolise in your opinion?

What is the prize?

that first refers to...

1. *Honeysuckle*, climbing plant with sweet-smelling yellow and white flowers (caprifoglio).

2. *plucked*, picked (colsi).

3. *quick*, here it means 'alive' (piena di).

4. *thorn*, sharp pointed growth on plants (spine).

5. *was torn*, was hurt (mi ferii).

6. *fouled*, made dirty (sporcai).

7. *quag-water*, mud (pantano).

8. *was thinn'd*, became less thick (si sfolti).

9. *Thence*, from there (da lì).

10. *nursed in mellow intercourse*, intertwined in a ripe relationship (uniti in un maturo rapporto).

11. *by scores*, in great quantity (in gran quantità).

12. *harried*, harmed (danneggiati).

13. *scent*, perfume (profumo).

14. *dew*, drops of water which condense at night (rugiada).