

The Honeysuckle

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

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

The poet is speaking about his feelings while picking the honeysuckle.

2. Focus on the first stanza.

a. Note down words and phrases describing:

- **what the poet does**

“I plucked a honeysuckle” (line 1)

- **what happens to him**

“was torn” (line 3) and “fouled my feet” (line 4)

- **what happens to the blossom he picks**

“was thinned” (line 6)

- **how he feels about it**

“I found it sweet and fair” (line 7)

b. What metaphor is used to describe the honeysuckle ?

The metaphor used is “the prize” (line 3)

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

Though the difficulty of the enterprise is emphasised throughout the stanza, the final line throws a positive light on the poet's action and stresses that it was worth doing.

3. Focus on the second stanza.

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

- The new plant is not isolated as the first one and is described as “a richer growth”, “nursed in mellow intercourse”, “not harried”. Moreover, the metaphor “prize” in the first stanza underlines the difficulty in reaching it, but at the same time the urge to get it, the metaphor “all virgin lamps” seems to predict the poet's reluctance to pick it.

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

- The poet might have thrown the stem away for several reasons. Maybe, he doesn't like his spoilt flower now that he has seen more beautiful ones, or he realises that flowers are more beautiful if unplucked, or he cannot choose among so many; finally, maybe he thinks that he won't feel the same joy as the first time.

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

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

The verb "I plucked" in the first line is exactly the opposite of the verb "plucked not" of the last line . The two verbs convey antithetical attitudes.

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

The contrast may symbolise:

- a. different attitudes to beauty;
- b. different periods of the poet's life such as the impetuosity of youth versus the thoughtfulness of maturity or
- c. sensual love versus spiritual love

Revision

What characterises Rossetti's early artistic career?

He started his literary career with translations from Dante and other Italian poets showing a great formal ability in reproducing metre and rhyme.

What were the aims of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood?

They believed that art had lost its ties with nature since the Italian painter Raphael so they aimed at recreating such ties by being truthful to nature, which had to be achieved through a minute description of detail in nature.

What negative events affected his life?

In 1862, after only two-year marriage, his wife died from an overdose of laudanum. He never got completely over the shock caused by his wife's death so, ten years later, in 1872, he attempted suicide and even if he recovered, he remained a drug addict for the rest of his life

Revision

What are his main literary works?

His main literary works are “Poems” and “Ballads and Sonnets” , two collections of poems published respectively in 1870 and in 1881. The second one also includes a sequence of sonnets known as “The House of Life” which is considered by some critics Rossetti’s finest work.

What are the predominant features of his poetry?

His poetry is characterised by:

1. a sensuous response to beauty,
2. an interest in the Middle Ages and
3. a constant interaction of word and visual images.

His poems, therefore, often show a pictorial rendering of a scene, and, like his paintings take on a symbolic value.

What influence did he have on later literary movements?

He influenced the later aesthetic movement, which developed towards the end of the 19th century, but nowadays he has been almost completely forgotten.