

A Thorn in the Night Market

Blackberries are a hardy plant. They can grow almost everywhere, spread fast and efficiently, and have natural defenses that make them prickly to handle. Something else that spreads quickly and is hard to remove is hunger. Hunger, much like the blackberries that plague some areas, is ignored by those who do not suffer from the problem themselves until it begins to directly affect them. “Blackberries” by Pauline Leah Rankin illustrate how some thing never really go away, and “The Night Market” by Evelyn Lau highlights hunger surrounded by food.

The poem “Blackberries” illustrates how the people in the writer’s eyes are similar to blackberries that run rampant throughout the wild spaces of the city. The people “remain/blackberry vines/[with] fruit and thorn” (Rankin 48-50) meaning that they will stick and lash out at whoever tries to uproot them. Additionally, it is hinted that the wishes of the people living in the area are ignored. By the lines “bulldozers/contractors/hack their way/ trying [to] smooth [us/into] neat shops/blank concrete” (41-47) the contractors and builders are building new and regular things into a unique neighborhood, something the residents loathe with a strong passion, making them declare “we [will] hang on/[we] won’t be transplanted” (51-52).

In “The Night Market” it is shown that surrounded by food, hunger is still present. This is made known early in the poem, as it is stated “[She] stares at [the vats of curried] fish balls/[and] braised tripe [like a] storefront window/ [in Beverly Hills] face squeezed by hunger” (Lau 3-5). The fact there is a hungry person in the sea of food stands in the Richmond Night Market is very surprising. The notion and reality of there being hungry people everywhere is not unlike the thorny presence of the blackberries. It is prominent problem that will not go away, no matter how hard you try. But as the speaker laments that she feels compassion for the hungry woman, they

keep getting food and eating without a care in the world, as they could “buy [her/a] meal [and] not miss it. [Instead]/we gorge [on] dumplings [and] waffles” (15-18). This ignorance is not unlike the contractors ignoring the wishes of the East Side residents to stop the changing of the neighborhood. Both parties are ignoring a want in their respective poems, whether it be the refusal of the wishes of residents or the blatant hunger shown by the woman’s expression.

In conclusion, “Blackberries” and “The Night Market” are connected because they highlight a point or idea that never goes away. The stubbornness of the people are as much as a fact as the hunger that afflicts people in the city today, surrounded by food. Some things just never go away, regardless of it being people or problems.