

Cherries¹

Lucien Stryk

Because I² sit eating cherries 1
which I did not pick³
a girl goes bad⁴ under

the elevator tracks⁵, will 5
never be whole again.
Because I want the full bag,

grasping, ⁶twenty-five children
cry for food. Gorging,
I've none to offer. I want

to care, I mean to⁷, but not 10
yet, ⁸a dozen cherries
rattling at the bottom of my bag.

One by one I lift them to
my mouth, slowly break
their skin—twelve nations 15

bleed⁹. Because I love, because
I need cherries¹⁰, I
cannot help them. My happiness,

bought cheap¹¹, must last forever.¹² 19

¹ Chekhov's short story "Gooseberries" is Stryk's inspiration for this poem. Read a summary and analysis of "Gooseberries" at SparkNotes: <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/chekhov/section8.rhtml>. For the story itself, go here: <http://www.ibiblio.org/eldritch/ac/gooseb.html>.

² Look at how often the speaker uses "I" in this short poem. What does that mean?

³ Why is it significant that he didn't pick the cherries. How many of us do pick our own cherries?

⁴ What does it mean to "go bad" when referring to fruit and when referring to people?

⁵ Stryk lived in Chicago whose transit system includes an elevated train. The "elevator tracks" might be referring to the sections of the train that are elevated.

⁶ Who is grasping? The narrator? The children? Both? Note the difference in why each are grasping.

⁷ By saying he wants and means to care, what does that tell us about his state of enlightenment, of his awareness of what's going on in the world? Does this make his actions even more reprehensible? How is he reflective of the average experience/existence of people in America?

⁸ After this phrase, he mentions the cherries left at the bottom of the bag. Does that mean he won't care until he has nothing to give? Will that provide him with an excuse not to care – "I would give, but I have nothing myself" kind of thinking?

⁹ What happens when we bite into or cut up cherries? How is this connected to bleeding?

¹⁰ He doesn't just "love" cherries – he "needs" them. What is the difference in the two feelings? And what do these cherries potentially represent in America?

¹¹ Why is it "bought cheap"?

¹² What kind of life view seeks eternal happiness? How realistic is this?