Against the Grain

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Booklover – Picking Blackberries

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Booklover — Picking Blackberries

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Disappointment. The appropriate sentiment upon learning that the 2018 **Nobel Prize** in Literature would not be awarded due to a scandal involving allegations of sexual misconduct by the husband of a seated academy member. (It caused quite a stir — Google it and read.) I look forward to all the **Nobel Prize** announcements each year, and writing about the current Literature Laureate has been a staple in the *Booklover* series for *Against the Grain*. Time to pull out the **Nobel Literature Laureate List** and pick another author.

Seamus Heaney won the 1995 **Nobel Prize** in Literature “for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past.” “Blackberry-Picking” was my random choice from a list entitled “10 of the Best **Seamus Heaney** Poems Everyone Should Read” found on *interestingliterature.com*. Sidebar: still getting my head around the whole digital reading experience. The site gave the following brief description:

“This classic **Heaney** poem, published in his first published volume, the 1966 book *Death of a Naturalist*, is simultaneously about picking blackberries in August and, on another level, about a loss of youthful innocence and a growing awareness of disappointment as we grow up. It’s undoubtedly one of **Heaney’s** best-known poems, and remains widely studied in schools.”

Seems I’ve made a fine choice. Blackberry picking should be part of everyone’s youthful summer experience and disappointment is what got us here to this poem.

I would usually share a few lines from my reading experience to accentuate the impact of the word craft; however, the following caution on the website where I found the poem gave me pause. “Caution: Users are warned that this work is protected under copyright laws and downloading is strictly prohibited. The right to reproduce or transfer the work via any medium must be secured with **Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC**.” I might suggest another Google search and read.

The family farmhouse called Mossbawn in Northern Ireland is the birthplace of **Seamus Heaney**. Maybe the bucolic setting of his youth influenced the poetic metaphor of blackberry picking for this Irish lad. While studying English Language and Literature at the **Queen’s University of Belfast**, he read **Ted Hughes’** “Lupercal” and was pricked by the poetry thorn. He also pursued training in the teaching field and thus a career path of education and poetry was launched. He lectured in many educational

settings including **Harvard University** where he served both as the Bolyston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory from 1985-1997 and the **Ralph Waldo Emerson** Poet in Residence from 1998-2006.

Honorary degrees and literature accolades filled up the professional “jam-pot” of the man that **Robert Lowell** called “the most important Irish poet since **Yeats**.” His poetry is well loved, studied and popular. Book sales alone were tallied at two-thirds of the sales of the other living poets of the United Kingdom. In 2013, **Heaney** passed and was buried in the countryside of his youth. His obituary included one verse that seems to get a lot of exposure as it expressed in three lines and 16 words his strong sense of

Irish identity over British nationality:

“Be advised, my passport’s green
No glass of ours was ever raised
To toast the Queen.” 🍀

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such as subscription discounts, technical assistance, and discounts on the purchase of supplies. One of their newest efforts is *SimplyE*, an eBook platform developed with the **New York Public Library**, which simplifies identifying and using eBooks and is platform neutral. The results are encouraging and the service will move into audio and other formats. **Amigos** is offering an impressive number of services to its member libraries which explains why it is only one of two former **OCLC** affiliates still in existence.

Glenn Koelling and **Alyssa Russo** of the **University of New Mexico** presented an innovative way to provide library instruction. Titled, “*What’s in Your Junk Closet? The Making of a Mystery Room*,” the presentation described the major components of the Mystery Room workshop they created, loosely based on escape rooms. They also discussed their experience devising clues which students have to solve in the process of learning about information formats commonly used in college-level research. The major learning outcome of the Mystery Room workshop is related to the “process” frame from the **ACRL** framework. The program was well received by the audience with many indicating that they would like to take part in the exercise.

Of course, there were many more sessions dealing with important issues, such as “*Caring for the Mind: Providing Mental Health Information at Your Library*,” presented by **Sarah Miles**, from the **National Network of Libraries of Medicine**; “*Magic Wand the All of Us Grant*,” presented by **Linda Morgan Davis** and **Katherine Spotswook**, from the Public Library, Albuquerque and Bernalillo County (a program designed to help researchers understand why people get sick or stay healthy); “*Including Diversity in our Planning and Assessment: Towards Increased Social Justice through Promoting and Assessing Diversity Efforts*,” presented by **Karen Nelson**, **Eastern New Mexico University**; and “*Cataloging and NM Academic Libraries during the Amigos OCLC years*,” presented by **New Mexico State Library’s Bradley Carrington**, which gave a fascinating history of New Mexico librarians implementing and working with **OCLC’s** cataloging services.

Next year will be a joint conference of **NMLA** and **Mountain Plains Library Association** that will be held in the historic Old Town of Albuquerque, NM, which is very popular with conference attendees. 🍀