 Resource 9 - Wild Grapes – Analysis

Stanza 1

* The tone and atmosphere is set in this first stanza - The old orchard has become a swamp and has lost its fertility - marsh land not quite solid, not quite water, used to compliment water and the image of decay throughout the poem
* The word ‘full’ is repeated to suggest that the decay has permeated the area
* Orchard was once kept and tended - parallels the Garden of Eden, a place of burgeoning life, but, like the human memory of this wonderful place, there is only the memory of this bountiful place left - the orchard has become sour and broken
* Drowned in earth – water image for being buried, impression of marshland
* Mulligan and Hartigan are Irish names
* Bitter fruit is used both literally and metaphorically – all that is left are wild feral grapes, everything else is dying and broken. The orchard only produces these bitter fruits
* Overall tone parallels emotional desolation and regret – we can tell that the persona knows this place
* Rhyme scheme (aa bb a) – soft rhymes of memory: 'air', 'there' and 'care'.

Stanza 2

* The persona knows this place, he remembers that the cherries were never raided by birds
* The semicolon after the apples makes us consider his memory of the place and picture it in the same way he does, and to contrast with the next part and climax of his sentence
* “dogstar” – a very bright star
* He evokes a brilliant picture, then shatters it with the line not / An apple or a cherry; only grapes – big climax
* Isabella grapes – grapes with a tart skin, but sweet flesh - an ambiguous taste, and the only thing left in the orchard
* “like boughs of musket-shot” This simile suggests bullets/ something that is deadly
* Stanza is one sentence long that is broken by pauses that make us consider and see the implication of decay and desolation. The rhyme of 'forgot', 'not', and 'shot' - suggests bitterness.

Stanza 3

* “Eating their flesh” personifies the grapes – from now on, the grapes and the girl the narrator remembers are metaphorically intertwined; they share the same Mediterranean name
* “half-savage” suggests cannibals
* “the taste of fur is a bitter outer coating to the grape” – the girl has an outer appearance that is similar
* acid – she has a bit of a sting in her tongue
* “gipsy-sweet” – alludes to the girl's origin or spirit. Gipsies are seen as exotic, sensual, renegades, seductive, passionate, yet fiery. All the descriptions of the grapes are parallels to the girl Isabella
* The memory of this girl has lingered on, just like the aftertaste of the grapes; everything in the orchard has gone but these grapes; the girl is dead and gone and her people moved on, but the memory of her is tenacious and has remained, “Defiantly” – showing her personality
* “swallows” – the description of the orchard as a place that even the birds have abandoned emphasises the quiet and deadness of the place. Swallows mate for life, and return each year to the same nest after migrating. Something really bad must happen for a pair of swallows not to return to their mate.

Stanza 4

* The grapes have become outlaws like the gipsies – rejected by society
* “strange bough” – grapes have gone wild, and the girl who, in her defiance
* “harsh sweetness” is an oxymoron – it captures the ambivalence of the girl, and the persona's relationship with the girl
* “dark hair swinging and silver pins capture gipsy life” – this sensuous image that expands in a series of compound words: “half-fierce – a kiss, or embrace; half-melting – passionate”
* “ Kissed here” ... who remembers now? This line leaves us with this rhetorical question, and makes us question the relationship between the persona and the girl. Maybe he just adored her, kissed her and remembered the bliss of it. Is he obsessive? The question ends the poem, and is deliberately ambiguous - nothing lasts, she has gone, dead, her memory lingers on, regardless of decay and time.