"Strange Fruit"

Poem

1939

“Strange Fruit” was originally written as a poem by Abel Meeropol, a high school teacher from the Bronx, after seeing a picture of the lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith in Marion, Indiana in August of 1930. The poem was published in the union magazine, The New York Teacher. They later set the poem to music. The founder of the first integrated New York nightclub, Café Society, Barney Josephson, brought the song to Billie Holiday. She first performed the song in 1939. For the singing the song, she often feared she may be lynched, however the song became a part of her regular musical act.

Southern trees bear strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant south,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh,
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.