

Death of a Naturalist Poem

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Death of a Naturalist by Seamus Heaney

All year the flax-dam festered in the heart Of the townland; green and heavy headed Flax had rotted there, weighted down by huge sods. Daily it sweltered in the punishing sun. Bubbles gargled delicately, bluebottles Wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell. There were dragonflies, spotted butterflies, But best of all was the warm thick slobber Of frogspawn that grew like clotted water In the shade of the banks. Here, every spring I would fill jam-potfuls of the jellied Specks to range on window sills at home, On shelves at school, and wait and watch until The fattening dots burst, into nimble Swimming tadpoles. Miss Walls would tell us how The daddy frog was called a bullfrog And how he croaked and how the mammy frog Laid hundreds of little eggs and this was Frogspawn. You could tell the weather by frogs too For they were yellow in the sun and brown In rain.

Then one hot day when fields were rank With cowdung in the grass the angry frogs Invaded the flax-dam; I ducked through hedges To a coarse croaking that I had not heard Before. The air was thick with a bass chorus. Right down the dam gross bellied frogs were cocked On sods; their loose necks pulsed like sails. Some hopped: The slap and plop were obscene threats. Some sat Poised like mud grenades, their blunt heads farting. I sickened, turned, and ran. The great slime kings Were gathered there for vengeance and I knew That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it.