

Memory, childhood. Nature

Write about the way the poet presents childhood in 'Death of a Naturalist'.

NTEO

In the poem 'Death of a Naturalist' by Seamus Heaney, the theme/idea of childhood is shown as the speaker ^{changes} ~~moves~~ from a young boy obsessed with frogspawn to one who is disgusted by the frogs they turn into.

MAIN

At the start of the poem, in the first stanza, the speaker remembers a summer when the 'flax-dam' festered in the heart of the townland'. The setting of summertime could have been used by Heaney to represent some of the most memorable times of his childhood. Later on in the stanza, the poet writes that "best of all was the warm thick slobber of frogspawn". Heaney uses the word "best" to show how this was a particular highlight of the speaker's childhood. Heaney lived on a farm as a young child and it is believed the poem is autobiographical, describing his interest in collecting frogspawn as a child. The speaker then describes how he "would fill jam-pot-fuls of the jellied specks which he would display at home and school. This emphasises how interested and obsessed he became with it, as he would 'wait and watch until the fattening dots burst into nimble-swimming tadpoles". The verbs 'wait and watch' emphasise how intrigued the speaker was by the frogspawn'. In the last part of the stanza the speaker remembers his teacher telling him how a 'daddy' frog would "croak" and then "the mummy frog laid hundreds of little eggs". This shows the theme of childhood as the teacher is describing frogs reproducing.

in a very innocent, child-friendly way. In this way, stanza one represents the speaker's innocence as a child.

Stanza two describes the speaker's disgust when he discovers what the frogs turn into: "gross-bellied frogs". The adjectives ~~such~~ suggest his disgust. This could be the poet showing the move from being a young child to a teenager, discovering the reality of sex and reproduction. The setting is described as "rank" which could be a way of symbolising how life seems more complicated as someone grows older. The speaker describes how he "sickened, turned, and ran" as though he is desperate to escape. This could be the speaker literally wanting to run away from the horrible frogs, or how he is finding life more challenging and wishes to run away from the reality of being a teenager. When Heaney was younger, his brother died - perhaps he is writing about how he felt when this happened as he is thought to have been very shocked by it.

The poem is written in lengthy sentences (iambic Pentameter) as it seems that Heaney wanted to describe his experiences in detail. The line "I sickened, turned and ran" is the shortest sentence of them all, and is an example of caesura. This emphasises the speaker's shock and repulsion at the frogs and also his shock at the change from childhood to teenager.