

Natural imagery in "death of a naturalist"

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Write a close analysis of 'Death of a Naturalist' explaining how the poet uses natural imagery and the structure of the poem to convey the themes of the loss of childhood innocence and the formulation of adult identities. How typical is it of the collection 'Death of a Naturalist' in terms of the representation of these themes? Seamus Heaney was born in Northern Ireland in 1939. Heaney's father was a farmer, and a cattle dealer, he was also very popular within the community.

It can be said that Seamus Heaney's reference to farming and love of nature can be due to his upbringing, as well as his regular mention of love and pride for Northern Ireland. Seamus Heaney's feelings towards Ireland's cultural controversies are addressed in the majority of his poems, this brings Irish and English literary traditions to attention, and many critics have praised him for the particular attribute.

Natural imagery conveys the theme of childhood innocence in 'Death of a Naturalist' with the use of 'childish' language for example 'bubbles gargled delicately', has a paradox effect as the statement is contradictory, it also carries the sense of childhood innocence as playing with bubbles is an activity associated with children. Also, 'gargled' is onomatopoeic and pleasant sounding. The quote emphasises children's innocence and naive outlook on the world and nature.

The use of 'swimming tadpoles', 'daddy frog', 'mammy frog' and 'little eggs', all depict an image of childhood innocence, through the basic 'childlike' language used as well as the family links, for example 'mammy' and 'daddy' depict the happy-go-lucky ideology that many young children have,

again suggesting that the speaker is a naive, young child. ' But best of all was the warm thick slobber', the unattractive, slime is something that appeals to children, conveying further the theme of childhood innocence. The structure also plays a role in conveying the theme of childhood innocence.

The whole first stanza has an ignorant tone to it, with the message that nature is amazing, and so problem free, ' there were dragon-flies, spotted butterflies, but best of all was the warm thick slobber' the tone being so simple minded, as although the speaker is describing the most beautiful aspects of nature, they are fascinated with the thick slobber that appeals to children. The fact that they describe it as ' best of all' shows the simplicity of a child's innocence, and what little it takes to amuse them. It also creates the image of a beautiful appy natural world that appeals to children. There is also a tone that carries a sense of fascination, ' for they were yellow in the sun and brown in rain. ' Because speaker is quite interested in, or fascinated by the frog spawn, and we know this due to the tone of the poem ' best of all' etc, we are introduced to the fetish by the constant positive description of nature. This could reflect to the phase that many children go through, or it could be symbolic of when a child learns something new, so applies it to all aspects of life.

The use of enjambment ' here, every spring I would full jampotfuls of the jellied specks... ' creates a sense of excitement, the disability to pause, due to the thorough interest emphasises a childlike fetish and innocence. Natural imagery conveys the theme of adult identities emerging, the second stanza

starts off with ' Then' this appears as though the speaker is reminiscing on their childhood, which suggests the formulation of adult identity.

The speaker suggests that as a child they were blind or unaware to the reality of the frogspawn, ' To a coarse croaking that I had not heard before. ' The alliteration of ' coarse croaking' contrasts to the positive tone used in the first stanza, the quote appears to suggest that the speaker has experienced realisation, or reality, as they have suddenly realised that the frogspawn have a ' coarse' sound and that they are now aware that the frogspawn is not as amazing as they first believed.

Also there is a line break and the word ' Before' appears on the next line starting with a capital letter, this could be symbolic of the fact that the ' coarse croaking' had always been around, yet the speaker has just acknowledged it, or realised it was there, emphasising the point of realisation, creating a further image of the formulation of adult identity. Gross-bellied frogs' suggests that the frogs seem ugly to the speaker now, which contrasts to the description of frogs made in the first stanza ' but best of all was the warm thick slobber of frogspawn' the contrast indicates the change in mind, or the loss of childhood innocence, and the formulation of adult identities. ' I sickened turned and ran' implies that the speaker felt repulsed by the nature whereas as a child they loved the nature so much that they would ' wait and watch' this appears to be a child changing as adult identities are introduced. That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it,' expresses the speakers feelings; if they played around with nature again bad would come from it. This forms the idea that as an adult the speaker has learnt their lesson and will not be childish and play with it

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anymore. The second stanza carries army connotations, implying that the frogs are going to get revenge or attack the speaker, this is suggested with the use of 'rank,', 'angry,' , 'obscene threats,' 'poised like mud grenades,' 'great slime kings,' and 'vengeance,'.

These words and phrases suggest that the frogs are there to take revenge in a war like manner, for the fact that the speaker stole the spawn as a child, the words all describe the frogs in a harsh, aggressive way, which again contrasts to the description made in the 1st stanza 'nimble swimming tadpoles,'. However, the use of the word 'kings' in the second stanza indicates that the speaker may still admire the frogs, despite all the negative feelings they have towards them. vThe speaker is suggesting that frogs are everywhere and they are ugly, 'gross-bellied', pictured with assonance in the phrase 'cocked on sods'.

Their flabby necks are described by Heaney with the simile 'pulsed like sails'. The sound of their movements is expressed by onomatopoeia: 'slap and plop', which obviously disgusted Heaney who felt that these were 'obscene threats'. In line thirty their stance is described by the simile 'Poised like mud grenades', an image that echoes the war-like connotation of the word 'invaded' in line twenty-four. Heaney again voices his distaste for the sound of the frogs in the phrase 'their blunt heads farting'. This negative description indicates the speaker's annoyance at the realisation of the frogs, as the adult identity is introduced.

The structure of the 2nd stanza contrasts to the 1st stanza. Where the 1st stanza has a loving, fascinated tone, the 2nd stanza carries an angry, hateful

tone, ' obscene threats. ' The fact that the first stanza is almost double the length of the second, connotes that the speaker had an enjoyable childhood, and the second stanza resembling the adult identities came too quickly and brought along realisation that nature wasn't what it seemed and also the annoyance that the speaker learnt so late that what they loved as a child wasn't at all reality.

The use of alliteration and assonance emphasise the hatred and annoyance felt towards nature, for not being what they thought it was. This can suggest the adult identity being formed, learning new things and realising childhood was innocent and naive. It can be a metaphor for life, thinking, as a child that life is amazing yet when you grow up, and are an adult you realise that life isn't as great as what you first thought.

Blackberry-Picking is poem that resembles Death of a Naturalist, its use of structure and natural imagery to convey the themes of loss of childhood innocence and formulation of adult identities. Natural imagery and structure convey the theme of loss of childhood innocence with basic language such as ' big dark blobs' to describe the blackberries and with the description of lust for the berries connotes a childish fetish or fascination for picking and eating the berries ' Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for picking. Summer's blood ' connotes the hard work and effort put into picking the berries during the school holidays, which conveys the theme of childhood innocence. Structure conveys the loss of childhood innocence in this poem with the only rhyming couplet signifying the child's enjoyment of berry picking, ' glossy purple know among others, red, green, hard as a knot. ' The half rhyme that

goes through the poem also conveys a child like tone; it carries a playful, fun message.

Natural imagery and structure also convey the theme of formulation of adult identities. ' A rat grey fungus glutting on our cache. ' The inclusion of the word 'rat' in the metaphor emphasizes the distaste of this deterioration. Also ' the sweet flesh would turn sour. ' As well as ' the lovely canfuls smelt of rot. ' These quotes all suggest a positive object turned negative, which could metaphorically resemble the speaker's life; as a child it was lovely and fun, and then as an adult it changed to difficult and bitter.

The structure also conveys the theme of the formulation of adult identities with the use of the half rhyme representing berries that could have been sweet, and ' right' but instead being sour and ' wrong'. The last two lines of the poem have a rhyming couplet, ' lovely canfuls smelt of rot. Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not. ' This could signify the continuation of hope through the adult life, metaphorically speaking; hope that life would go back to being youthful and fun.

To conclude I would say that it is typical of Heaney's style of writing to convey the themes of adult life and child innocence through natural imagery and structure. Heaney uses natural imagery in many of his poems and as well as symbolising the themes we have looked at he also uses natural imagery and structure to convey the message of his Northern Irish roots. The use of natural imagery and structure conveys the themes of loss childhood innocence and formulation of adult identities and is typical through many of Heaney's poems.