

# Seamus heaney's poems explore the loss of childhood

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Seamus Heaney is a renowned Irish poet. Growing up on a farm, is a a theme that permeates much of his work., like “ Early Purges”. While other minor events, influenced his work, such as “ Death of a Naturalist” and “ Blackberry Picking.” Although, Heaney’s poems contain very different themes, they also have one similarity: loss of childhood innocence. Due to the fact that all of these events awakened Seamus Heaney into the world of adulthood.

“ Death of a Naturalist” which was published in 1966, is one of Seamus Heaney’s most famous poems. It contains symbolisms of death and of childhood, specifically that of Heaney’s. This poem is about the metaphorical “ death” of a metaphorical “ naturalist”. It refers to Heaney’s experience with nature as a boy and his loss of childhood innocence. The poem opens with a vivid, yet ambivalent description of a “ flax-dam that festers in the heart of the townland”(Line 1, 2).

He observes this but is not disgusted by it. Heaney makes the place sound magical by using tinkling phrases such as ‘ dragon-flies, spotted butterflies’; he captures the sense of wonder by using childish expressions such as ‘ best of all’(Line 7, 8). Knowing that he came here “ every spring” and “ fill[ed] jampotfuls of the jellied specks”, we can infer that Seamus is very used to this activity (Line 11). When Heaney opens his last verse with “ then”, you can expect an abrupt change in events (Line 22). Heaney starts to view the flax-dam differently, and uses similes such as “ their loose necks pulsed like sails” to describe the grotesque imagery of the frogs (Line 29). It seems as if time has passed, and Seamus has lost his innocence.

To him, what once seemed so majestic and mysterious, is just a place where “vengeance” and “obscene threats” scare the once naive and curious “naturalist” (Line 29, 32). Another perfect example of the loss of childhood innocence is “Early Purges”. This poem focuses on the traumas of childhood. In it, the speaker looks back to his childhood and recalls his first experience of death, which was when he “first saw kittens drown” (Line 1). The image is stuck with the author, since he is “frightened for days” (Line 10).

Although the young and naive author sees very traumatised of the experience, the older man who he refers to as “Dan Taggart” seems to not care about the kittens as he refers to them as “scraggy wee shits” (Line 1, 2). As time passes and the author has seen many animals being drowned or “trapped”, he gets used to the idea of death (Line 14). To him now death “makes sense”, and he is opposite to the idea that death is “unnatural” (Line 18, 19). At the beginning of the poem, Heaney was a child who was terrified, but by the end of the poem he is fully grown and is able to understand the importance of death. “Blackberry-Picking” is one of Seamus Heaney’s poems, where much symbolic work is used.

It tells the story of when the author hopes that the blackberries will ripen so that he can collect them. However, if you look deeper into the meaning of the story, there is a greater message. The poem starts out with how the author hopes that the “blackberries would ripen” (Line 1). In this line, the author is referring to youth and hope. When someone is new to the world, they refer to them being ‘green’, because they are new and inexperienced.

The “ green” berries are just like that; they are new and inexperienced (Line 4).

While in Line 7, the author refers to the berries as what he “ lust[s]” after. He will do anything to accomplish his dreams or harvest the berries. Later on, when the author harvests the “ fresh berries”, he seems happy and complete (Line 18). Unfortunately, when he reaches his hand he finds that “ rat-grey fungus” has affected all of the berries, meaning that they are dying (Line 20). At the end, the author mentions life as being unfair, and how “ sweet flesh would turn sour”, referring to how once of the womb we begin our dying process (Line 22). Although “ each year” the author “ hope they’d keep, even though” he “ knew they would not”; the author is using his desire to keep the berries fresh as a metaphor for the desire of humans to keep good in life from dying, even though we can’t (Line 24).

Seamus Heaney is truly exceptional in using symbolism in a way to get his message out there. He uses his own experiences to tell stories of loss of childhood innocence and the awakening into the adult world. In “ Death of a Naturalist”, he poetically turns his memory into a story of loss of childhood innocence. While in “ Early Purges”, Seamus tells the process of how he became an adult. In “ Blackberry-Picking”, Heaney focuses on how we are born with hope and dreams, but we lose it on our way. All of these three poems, tell stories of a lost childhood innocence and the awakening into the world of adulthood.