DEATH OF A NATURALIST

*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 5

Wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell.

There were dragon-flies, 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 10

I would fill jampotfuls 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 15

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 20

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 25

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. 30

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.