

Kestrel for a Knave, Barry Hines (1968)

Session 3

Resources:

Free download of the book: https://kupdf.net/download/barry-hines-a-kestrel-for-a-knave_5a118630e2b6f5126c511a32_pdf

Looking for Kes: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7w3VccLdEpM (1 hr)

Kes (1969) - film.

THEME: nature

Read: Anderson's Tadpole Story (p60-61/160)

Is it a good story?

Why/why not?

How does the story make you feel?

Does Anderson like the frog spawn?

Does Anderson like nature?

Would you put the wellies on?

Do you know anyone else who would?

What impact on the immediate surrounding area do you think this incident would have had?

What lasting impact do you think this incident would have had on Anderson and the other boy in the story?

Read: Death of a Naturalist

Picture of a flax bog - <https://durrushistory.com/2017/02/13/flax-and-lined-development-dunmanway-bantry-flax-ponds-durrus-district/>

Looking at the basics of a poem:

How many **stanzas** [sections]? 2

Does it rhyme? No, written in **blank verse**

How many **syllables in a line**? 10, making it iambic pentameter, apart from lines 21/22
Normally iambic pentameter takes the stress pattern, 'da DUM, da DUM', like a heart beat.

How is the **stress pattern working here**? All over the place

E.g. All **year** the **flax-dam** **festered** in the **heart**

Of the **townland**; **green** and **heavy headed**

5 'da's and 5'DUM's, but not alternating. Makes for a disjointed rhythm.

Iambic pentameter is used by the likes of Shakespeare and Yeats, but smoothly and with finesse.

Is there any **alliteration** [matching first sound] or **assonance** [matching sound within words]? Yes, lots.

E.g. Alliteration: All year the **flax-dam** **festered** in the heart

Assonance: Of the townland; **green** and heavy headed

But used disjointedly - lacking smooth rhythm.

English poetry from the middle-ages would use alliterative meter. By not having a pronounced iambic pentameter, the alliterative meter is allowed a voice too.

Heaney is mixing the old with the new.

Is each line a complete sentence in itself [**end-stopped**] or do they roll on to the next line [**enjambment** (pronounced en-jam-ment)]? Most enjambed, a couple of lines are end-stopped.

It controls how you read it by controlling the pace, pauses and rhythm of text

Invokes emotion in the reader: anticipation, movement and flow or sometimes confusion

Gives layers to a poem: one line can contradict the meaning of another, e.g. 'He loved / hating her.'

Giving complexity and ambiguity, particularly in poems where punctuation is not used so much, e.g. Eats/Shoots/And leaves.'

Why? To show energy and enthusiasm in first stanza, and anxiety in the second stanza.

Does the speaker appear in control of the situation? Nope.

Out of control stress patterns

Irregular patterns of alliteration

Lots of enjambed lines

Looking at the title of the poem:

"Death of a naturalist"

What is a naturalist? A scientist, who examines some aspect of **life**, but is not part of it. Detached and impartial of what they are studying.

Why 'death' and not some euphemism, e.g. 'going over the rainbow bridge' (it's a popular one on dog forums)? It's hard, factual, unsentimental, cruel, final.

This title encompasses both the concepts of death and life - **the life cycle**

Looking at the content of the poem:

What do you think the poem is about? On one level, a person losing their love of the natural world, on another, a person moving from childhood into adolescence and the emotional trauma that can come with it.

Stanza 1.

What do you think?

How does it make you feel? The words 'daddy' and 'mummy' are safe words. It is happy writing of a happy childhood.

Do you like the imagery?

rotting flax and bluebottles - death and decay
dragon-flies, spotted butterflies, frogspawn - life

What words ring out for you?

Stanza 2.

What do you think?

How has the wording changed? More aggressive (grenades, blunt heads, invaded, vengeance), hard, ugly words, onomatopoeia (words that sound like what they describe), e.g. croak, plop, slap.

Do you like the imagery? War like, with the 'great slime kings' leading the battle.

How does this stanza make you feel?

How does the speaker's relationship with nature change during the poem? To begin with he loves nature and enjoys it, wanting to know everything it has to share, but as he gets older, he starts to find it threatening and disgusting, something to run away from, rather than something to explore and marvel at.

The way you look at the world with innocence and wide-eyed wonder as a child, changes as you mature and you start to understand sexuality. Although you may know about reproduction as a young 'un, you don't fully understand it until you get a bit older. Through the eyes of adolescence, you start to see things in a new way, but they can become more threatening and at times repulsive.

The frogspawn represents human reproduction, and the speaker is at that stage where their awareness of sex is such that they now see it is disgusting, and something that unsettles his previously gentle world.

The divide between the speaker and the natural world has broken down - the speaker no longer knows where one starts and one ends. Before it was clear, the speaker observed and nature happened in front of them, both life and death. Now, they realise that they are part of that circle of life, not just a chance bystander.

How do you feel about nature?

How has nature played its part throughout the 2020/21 COVID lockdowns?

Nature gives:

- people a reason to get outside of themselves
- to be a part of something bigger than their own small, transient worlds
- allows people to use all their senses
- a sense of eternity - past, present and future all rolled into one

Read: Exert from an article referring to Steve Backshall Desert Island Discs.

How does age play a part in how we interact with/our relationship with nature?

How do you think people's relationship with nature has changed over generations?

Read: Is Chris Packham right - should children eat tadpoles? Article

Any thoughts?

Read: Extracts 1-3 from A Kestrel for a Knave

How does Billy feel about nature?

Billy shows both a love and fascination with nature, but at the same time, an indifference. In one respect, he really wants to look after it, but in another he doesn't seem to think of what impact his actions are having on it - litter dropping, removing birds from nests, throwing stones at birds etc.

Reasons for lack of concern for the environment:

- Attitudes of the 1960s - most weren't too aware of the impact of pollution
- 14-year-old boys aren't renowned for their thinking and forward-planning skills
- People have a tendency to copy what you see and what is done to them
- Billy values some aspects of nature more highly than others.

[Mr Farthing] '...You like wild life, don't you, Billy?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'Have you ever kept any more birds before this one?'

'Stacks, Animals an' all. I had a young fox cub once, reared it an' let it go. It wa' a little blinder.'

'What birds have you kept?'

'All sorts, maggies, jackdaws; I had a young jay once; that wa' murder though, they're right hard to feed, an' it nearly died. I wouldn't have one again, they're best left to their mothers.'

'And which has been your favourite?'

Billy looked at Mr Farthing as though his mentality had suddenly deteriorated to that of an idiot.' (P116/160)

How does this help us relate to Billy? It makes him more well-rounded as a character, more believable.

Has A K for a K had any impact on how you look at/think about nature?

What will be your lasting thoughts and memories of this book?