

A Frog's Fate

Contemptuous of his home beyond
The village and the village-pond,
A large-souled Frog who spurned each byeway,
Hopped along the imperial highway.

Nor grunting pig nor barking dog
Could disconcert so great a frog.
The morning dew was lingering yet,
His sides to cool, his tongue to wet:
The night-dew, when the night should come,
A travelled frog would send him home.

Not so, alas! the wayside grass
Sees him no more:— not so, alas!

A broad-wheeled waggon unawares
Ran him down, his joys, his cares.
From dying choke one feeble croak
The Frog's perpetual silence broke:
'Ye buoyant Frogs, ye great and small,
Even I am mortal after all.
My road to Fame turns out a wry way;
I perish on the hideous highway,—
Oh for my old familiar byeway!'

The choking Frog sobbed and was gone:
The waggoner strode whistling on.

Unconscious of the carnage done,
Whistling that waggoner strode on,
Whistling (it may have happened so)
'A Froggy would a-wooing go.'
A hypothetical frog trolled he,
Obtuse to a reality.

O rich and poor, O great and small,
Such oversights beset us all.
The mangled frog abides incog,
The uninteresting actual frog:
The hypothetical frog alone
Is the one frog we dwell upon.

—Christina Rossetti

Brooding Grief

A yellow leaf, from the darkness
Hops like a frog before me;
Why should I start and stand still?

I was watching the woman that bore me
Stretched in the brindled darkness
Of the sick-room, rigid with will
To die: and the quick leaf tore me
Back to this rainy swill
Of leaves and lamps and the city street mingled before me.

—D. H. Lawrence

The Frog Prince

I am a frog
I live under a spell
I live at the bottom
Of a green well

And here I must wait
Until a maiden places me
On her royal pillow
And kisses me
In her father's palace.

The story is familiar
Everybody knows it well
But do other enchanted people feel as nervous
As I do? The stories do not tell,

Ask if they will be happier
When the changes come
As already they are fairly happy
In a frog's doom?

I have been a frog now
For a hundred years
And in all this time
I have not shed many tears,

I am happy, I like the life,
Can swim for many a mile
(When I have hopped to the river)
And am for ever agile.

And the quietness,
Yes, I like to be quiet
I am habituated
To a quiet life,

But always when I think these thoughts
As I sit in my well
Another thought comes to me and says:
It is part of the spell

To be happy
To work up contentment
To make much of being a frog
To fear disenchantment.

Says, It will be *heavenly*
To be set free,
Cries, *Heavenly* the girl who disenchant
And the royal times, *heavenly*,
And I think it will be.

Come then, royal girl and royal times,
Come quickly,
I can be happy until you come
But I cannot be heavenly,
Only disenchanted people
Can be heavenly.

—Stevie Smith

Death of a Naturalist

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
Wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell.
There were dragonflies, 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
I would fill jam-potfuls 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
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
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
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.
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.

—Seamus Heaney

Small Frogs Killed on the Highway

Still,
I would leap too
Into the light,
If I had the chance.
It is everything, the wet green stalk of the field
On the other side of the road.
They crouch there, too, faltering in terror
And take strange wing. Many
Of the dead never moved, but many
Of the dead are alive forever in the split second
Auto headlights more sudden
Than their drivers know.
The drivers burrow backward into dank pools
Where nothing begets
Nothing.

Across the road, tadpoles are dancing
On the quarter thumbnail
Of the moon. They can't see,
Not yet.

—James Wright

Frogs Outside Barbischio

How reassuring to listen to frogs once more
From stagnant water in an old brick cistern
Beside olive trees run wild and the unprogrammed
Flight of a butterfly over hot fields and terraces.
One grandfather frog stays on his stick to watch
A self-tormentor return to his book to trace
His anatomy of melancholy. He's in Italy
To surprise an old hopelessness known long before.

The cosmos of frogs inside its wet-walled fort
Warbles and cavorts in the all that there is.
Wise frog rejoinders have challenged that book:
Come down to our waters so pulsingly black
And lose all your stubble of fortune and truth.
Here's art inside art, incision and sign
Of the purposeless minute outlasting its span,
Of the gloat and the plop and the stick still afloat.

—Peter Porter