Personal Helicon

SUMMARY

When I was a child, adults couldn't stop me from going to the water wells and old water pumps in the countryside, with their buckets used to draw out water, and the crank and rope used to lower and lift the bucket out of the well. I loved the depth of the wells, which were dark inside, and how at the bottom, the water reflected the sky, so the sky appeared to be trapped or held within it. I loved also the scents of the wells, with their aquatic plants, mold and mushrooms, and humid moss.

There was one well, in a yard where bricks are made, covered by a wooden top that had started to rot. At this well, I relished the full, crashing sound that the bucket made when it dropped to the end of the rope and hit the water. This well went so far down that you couldn't even see a reflection in the water at the bottom.

There was also a less deep well that had been dug beneath a kind of dry gravel trench. This well was growing plants within it, much in the way that plants would grow within an aquarium. Here, you could pull roots out of the soft soil and broken-down leaves at the bottom of the well; when you did this, you could see your own reflection, looking like a white face suspended in the water.

Other wells would echo if you spoke or called into them, so that your voice came back to you—differently, though, with a kind of strange, purified music to it. One well scared me, because, from the ferns and flowering plants around it, a rat suddenly darted out over the water, making a slapping sound as it ran across my reflection in the water.

Now that I am an adult, to pull out roots or reach into algae and slime, or to look, like a large-eyed mythological Narcissus, into some water source, would be to act in a way considered immature or beneath the dignified ways adults are supposed to act. Instead, I rhyme and write poems to see myself as I once did in the wells, and to make the darkness echo.

THEMES

THE INNOCENCE AND WONDER OF CHILDHOOD

In "Personal Helicon," the speaker describes the sense of wonder and discovery he experienced while exploring old wells as a child. The poem celebrates the adventurous joy of childhood, while also suggesting that for many people, growing older entails a loss of innocence and curiosity about the world.

The speaker remarks that as a child, no adult could "keep" him from the wells and old water pumps that he so "loved" and "savoured," and conveys a sense of awe when he describes his explorations of these wells. For many adults, these wells and water pumps would just have been ordinary, functional aspects of the landscape. That the speaker as a child found them fascinating suggests that children are uniquely able to see wonder and beauty where adults often can't. The poem thus sets up a clear distinction between the world of children and that of adults.

The speaker also makes it clear that he wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty during these explorations. His vivid descriptions of things like "fungus and dank moss," "soft mulch," and "slime" lend a visceral feel to his childhood adventures. Childhood, the poem implies, is a time of intense sensory experience, as well as of deep connection and communion with the natural world.

The speaker's descriptions of the wells also suggest his childhood innocence and bravery. For example, he mentions finding one well "scaresome," or frightening, when a rat suddenly moved across the speaker's reflection in the water; that he kept exploring implies a willingness to fully engage with the landscape, even if he wasn't sure what he would find. The speaker's description of talking into a well to hear the echo of his own voice "[w]ith a clean new music in it" further implies that childhood curiosity allowed the speaker to learn not simply new things about the world, but also about himself and his place within it.

Yet the speaker goes on to acknowledge that as an adult, he is no longer able to experience this sense of wonder and discovery in the same way. The speaker remarks that looking into wells in the way he did as a child is now "beneath all adult dignity." In other words, the speaker is aware that he can no longer act as he did as a child; he can no longer "pry into roots" or "stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring."

The speaker implies that this is not because he wouldn't *want* to look into wells anymore; rather, he is constrained by the social norms that require adults to act in a "dignified" way. Indeed, the allusion to Narcissus—a figure from Greek mythology who infamously fell in love with his own reflection—suggests that adults often view the curiosity of children as something frivolous and selfish, despite the fact that the speaker found great fulfillment in his youthful explorations. Growing up, the poem ultimately suggests, can make people lose some aspect of their childhood wonder, in turn creating distance between people and the world around them, and even within themselves.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Lines 6-7
- Lines 11-12
- Lines 13-16
- Lines 17-19

POETIC INSPIRATION

In many ways, "Personal Helicon" is a poem *about* poetry, and about where poetic inspiration comes from. The poem implies that the inspiration for poetry and art doesn't need to come from lofty or remote places. It suggests, in fact, that the deepest inspiration for poetry can simply come from childhood memory, and from what is most personal, specific, and local in one's own life.

The title, "Personal Helicon," implies that the poem as a whole is about poetic inspiration and where inspiration comes from for *this particular poet*. "Helicon" refers to the name of a mountain in Greece. According to Greek mythology, the mountain had two springs that were sacred to the muses, beings who inspired poetry. Mount Helicon, and these springs, were thought to be the source of poetic inspiration. Later, the speaker refers back to this allusion when he compares his childhood self to Narcissus. Narcissus was a figure in Greek mythology who was fascinated by his own reflection; the water where he looked into his reflection was also located on Mount Helicon.

Yet the title of this poem is "Personal Helicon." In other words, the speaker is exploring what poetic inspiration means to *him*, personally, which is something quite different from the lofty, classical image of the mountain in Greek myths.

For the speaker, as the poem goes on to make clear, the source of inspiration is not the remote springs of a mythical mountain, but rather the immediate wells and old water pumps of his childhood. Far from being lofty or idealized, these wells had a "rotted board top," or were "shallow [...] under a dry stone ditch." They were surrounded by the local plants of the landscape, including "ferns and tall / Foxgloves," and even included a "rat" that "slapped" over the speaker's reflection in the water.

The poem makes clear, though, that it is precisely these specific details, and the speaker's own personal childhood experience, that make these wells so important to him. In fact, the poem as a whole is made *out* of these details, as the speaker lovingly recalls them.

At the end of the poem, the speaker also suggests that it was these personal experiences within this local landscape that inspire his poetry now. The speaker remarks, at the poem's closing, that he "rhyme[s] / To see [him]self" and "set the darkness echoing," connecting the writing of poetry to his childhood experiences with these wells. Furthermore, the poem as a whole seems to have been inspired by these experiences, and by the specific wells of the speaker's childhood. The poem implies, then, that every poet can have their own "Helicon," their own source of inspiration—rooted not in something lofty or abstract, but rather in what is most immediate, personal, and real in one's own experience.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20

ART AS EXPLORATION AND DISCOVERY

In addition to considering the *source* of poetic inspiration, "Personal Helicon" also offers a vision of the nature of art *itself*. The poem suggests that writing poems—and by implication, creating any work of art—is essentially a process of exploration, discovery, and even play. This process, the speaker suggests, allows both the writer and reader to see *beyond* the poem or work of art, into what is most mysterious in the world *and* in themselves.

Through the poem, it becomes clear that the wells the speaker describes are metaphorical representations of poems and the act of writing poems. When the speaker says, at the end of the poem, that he "rhyme[s] / To see [him]self, to set the darkness echoing," he implies that to him, writing poems is akin to looking and speaking into wells. Notably, wells, just like poems, are crafted, human-made things. Yet just as wells allow people to access the life-giving quality of water, it is clear that for the speaker what is most fascinating about the wells—and by implication poems—is the greater mystery and insight that they offer.

As a child, the speaker describes one well "so deep you saw no reflection in it," conveying a sense of mystery and awe. Later he recounts how seeing his own reflection in the water, noting that he appeared to himself as "A white face [that] hovered over the bottom." Similarly, he notes that the echoes he heard in the wells when he spoke "gave back your own call / With a clean new music in it." Through all of these descriptions, the speaker suggests that in looking and speaking into these wells, he was able to find something strange in the familiar, as even his own reflection became mysterious and new.

Now, the speaker suggests, he writes poetry to experience this same sense of mystery and strangeness. When the speaker says that he writes "To see himself," he recalls the sense from earlier in the poem of a reflection made new—and suggests that writing poetry is an act of self-exploration and self-discovery. He also notes that he "rhyme[s] [...] to set the darkness echoing." This idea of hearing an echo in the darkness recalls the quality of being unknowable introduced earlier in the poem, in the depth of the well with "no reflection." In other words, the speaker continues to write in order to glimpse what can't be fully crafted, contained, or known, in himself and also in

the larger world.

It is notable, too, that the speaker depicts his writing process as, in a sense, a kind of play. By comparing his experience of writing poems to his childhood adventures exploring the countryside where he grew up, the speaker implies that for him, writing poems has the same quality of innocence, wonder, and joy that characterized his childhood discoveries. Writing poems, then, is what allows this speaker to retain a sense of childlike innocence and wonder that he might otherwise have lost.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

As a child, ...
... buckets and windlasses.

The poem's title alludes to Mount Helicon, a mountain in Greek Mythology that was thought to be the source of two springs believed to be sacred to the muses and to inspire poetry. By alluding to this mythical mountain, the title clues readers' into the fact that what follow is going to be about artistic inspiration. However, as the title also makes clear, this poem is about the poet's "*Personal* Helicon": what poetic inspiration means to this poet in particular.

This source of inspiration then becomes clear in the poem's first two lines ("As a child [...] windlasses"). Just as mythical springs are sources of water, here the speaker invokes sources of water in connection with what inspires his poetry. However, these sources of water aren't the lofty or far-off springs of Mount Helicon. Instead, they are the specific old water wells and water pumps that the speaker as a child could find in his local landscape. The speaker remarks that "they"—presumably the adults in his life—couldn't keep him away from these wells, situating these adventures purely in the realm of childhood. The speaker also says that he was especially fascinated by wells' "buckets" (used to draw out the water) and "windlasses," or the crank and pulley used to lower and lift the bucket out of the well.

While these opening lines feel relatively straightforward—the speaker makes clear that the poem will be about his childhood and these wells that he loved—several elements of sound and structure work to unify them and create a patterned opening to the poem. First, the alliteration of "**w**ells" and "**w**indlasses," as well as the consonant /l/ sounds within these words, highlight these nouns and call special attention to them. In fact, the "they," who tried to keep the speaker from going to these wells, fade from prominence as the musical parallels between these words implies that it was the wells, and everything associated with them, that received all the child-speaker's attention.

From the outset of the poem, then, the speaker sets up a subtle juxtaposition between the world of adults (who might have tried to stop the child-speaker from exploring the wells out of concerns for his safety), and the world of children, who are drawn by their natural curiosity and inquisitiveness to the world around them.

LINES 3-4

I loved the ...
... and dank moss.

The speaker describes the wells and water pumps more specifically, highlighting their sensory detail. "I loved the dark drop," the speaker says, referring to the dark inside of the well, "the trapped sky, the smells / Of waterweed, fungus, and dank moss."

Through this list, the speaker makes clear that he loved all the physical, tangible aspects of these wells, from their dark interiors, to the way the water's reflection would make it appear that the sky was "trapped" or held within the well, to the smells of the plant life growing in these damp environments. The imagery of these lines is vivid and immediate, as though the speaker can visualize and even smell these wells in the present.

The sense of the tactile vividness of the wells is also heightened by the musicality of the lines, which builds on the poem's opening. The consonant /w/ sounds in "**w**ater**w**eed" recall the alliteration of "**w**ells" and "**w**indlasses" in lines 1-2, while the alliterative "**d**ark **d**rop" and sibilance of "**s**ky," "**s**mells," "**f**ungus," and "mo**ss**" connect the disparate items in this list together, conveying a sense of the wells, and the speaker's experience of them, as all-encompassing, integrated, and whole.

Notably, the speaker uses asyndeton when listing these aspects of the wells ("the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells") leaving out conjunctions that might ordinarily require the speaker and reader to slow down. In doing so, the poem implies that the speaker could go on listing these aspects of the wells that he loved, without pausing and perhaps infinitely. This sense is further emphasized by the enjambment at the end of line 3 ("I loved [...] the smells"), which requires the reader to move forward over the line ending without pause.

Interestingly, while in a way this list seems that it could go on forever, it is also structured through groups of three. First the speaker remarks that he loves "the dark drop," "the trapped sky," and "the smells" of the wells. Then, in detailing the smells, he lists three elements that he could smell: the "waterweed, fungus, and dank moss." Rhythmically, these clusters of three build on and develop the opening of the poem, in which the speaker described the wells and their qualities in terms of pairs, first recounting the "wells and old pumps," and then their "buckets and windlasses." This subtle development speeds up

the poem in a certain way, as the speaker's lists grow longer; at the same time, it also implies a kind of internal development within the speaker as a child, as he moves more fully into the imaginative world of these wells and his encounters with them.

Finally, it is worth noting that while these lines complete the ABAB rhyme scheme of the poem's opening stanza, they also indicate that the rhyme scheme of the poem will not be fixed or rigid. While "wells" at the end of line 1 rhymes exactly with "smells" at the end of line 3, the ending of line 2, "windlasses," is only a slant rhyme with the end of line 4, "moss." While this rhyme scheme alludes to a fixed ABAB rhyme scheme, it also, then, allows in a kind of organic change and variation, in keeping with the living, dynamic world of the speaker's explorations.

LINES 5-7

One, in a ...
... of a rope.

As the poem continues into its second stanza, the speaker begins to describe specific wells that he loved as a child. Interestingly, just as the speaker used asyndeton in the second half of stanza 1 ("the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells"), here, the first sentence of stanza 2 also leaves things out. It is almost, but not quite a complete sentence. "One in a brickyard, with a rotted board top," the speaker says, omitting the word "was" that would ordinarily follow "One"; the sentence thus *appears* to be a complete sentence, since it ends with a period, but is missing its primary verb. This omission makes the poem feel spoken, immediate. Also, by leaving out the formal completion of the sentence, the address to the reader feels more intimate, as though the speaker trusts the reader to understand and imagine what he is describing.

It is notable, too, that this description of this well, and the imagery the speaker uses, further emphasizes the difference between these wells the speaker loved—his own source of poetic inspiration—and the mythical springs on Mount Helicon. This well that the speaker recalls, here, is located in a "brickyard," or a place where bricks are made, implying a working-class reality. The top of it was made out of a rough board, and that board was "rotted."

Yet these details, it is clear, don't stop the speaker from loving the well. Instead, and importantly, they are part of what he *does* love about them, and he goes on to describe how he interacted with this well. "I savoured," he says, "the rich crash when a bucket / Plummeted down at the end of a rope." The word "savored" (written in the poem in its British English spelling) is often used to describe complete sensory enjoyment, such as someone "savoring" the taste of a certain food. Used in this context, it communicates how fully the speaker was present with this well and his experience of it.

This impression of sensory enjoyment is also heightened by the sounds in these lines; describing the bucket dropping into the water, the speaker uses words that almost onomatopoetically *depict* this sound, as the phrase "rich crash," with the /ch/ and /sh/ at the ends of the words, creates a noise like an object crashing into water.

The sounds of these lines also work to enact the action the speaker describes. The alliterative /b/ sounds of "brickyard," "board," and "bucket" and the /r/ sounds of "rotted," "rich," and "rope" are interrupted by the /p/ and /l/ sounds of "plummeted," as the speaker describes the sudden, breathtaking moment when the bucket dropped so deeply into the well. These sounds and the immediacy of them suggest that in the present, the speaker can imagine and even, through the poem, *experience* what he felt when he was a child, while also making this experience vivid and tangible for the reader.

LINE 8

So deep you ... reflection in it.

The speaker continues his description of this well in the brickyard. This particular well, the speaker says in line 8, was "[s]o deep you saw no reflection in it."

Just as the first line of this stanza was almost, but not quite, a complete sentence, this line appears to be a complete sentence ("So deep you saw no reflection in it.") yet it too is missing part of its syntax—in this case, both the subject and verb ("It was"). This omission, as in the start of the stanza, conveys a sense of the speaker addressing both himself and the reader directly, as though the reader is there *with* the speaker in the experience, and doesn't need things to be fully or formally explained. This sense of the reader's involvement is heightened by the speaker's casual use of "you," which invites the reader to imagine themselves within the scene.

After the bucket, at the end of line 7 ("Plummeted [...] rope") reaches the bottom of the well, the poem implies that the speaker is left standing there, in the quiet, looking down into the well and realizing that it is so deep he can't see his reflection in the water. The line, then, continues the imagery of the stanza up to this point, yet it also introduces a new element into the poem—a sense of mystery, the unknowable, and the infinite.

The word "deep" can relate to both physical depth and emotional or spiritual "depth." Both senses of the word are at play here, with the speaker's description of the well suggesting a profound internal experience—perhaps a kind of loss of self (or loss of a familiar self) as he looked for his reflection in the water and saw only the well reaching down into the earth.

As in lines 2 ("And old pumps [...] windlasses") and 4 ("Of waterweed [...] dank moss"), the line endings in this stanza are close but not exact end rhymes. The /aw/ sound of "top" differs from the long /o/ of "rope," while the second syllable of "bucket" resembles but doesn't exactly rhyme, with "it"; both of these latter sounds are also unstressed, weakening the rhyme.

At the same time, the rhyme endings are close enough that they *suggest* a full rhyme scheme, a larger pattern that structures the poem and gives it energy and shape. Much like the wells in the poem itself—which are structured and shaped yet also overgrown, with a "rotted [...] top" or a depth that extends out of sight—the poem's line endings communicate a sense of structure but also a dynamic energy that grows beyond and past this structure and can't fully be contained.

LINES 9-10

A shallow one ...
... like any aquarium.

In stanza 3, the speaker goes on to describe another specific well that he remembers from his childhood. This well, unlike the deep well in the brickyard, was "shallow" and located "under a dry stone ditch," or a kind of gravel trench.

As in the preceding stanza, the speaker introduces this well using an incomplete sentence. Without prefacing it with a phrase like "There was," he simply says, "A shallow one under a dry stone ditch / Fructified like any aquarium." By this point, though, the speaker has established the language and syntax of the world of the poem, which the reader can track and understand. Just as the child-speaker might go from place to place following his own intuition, the speaker implies a kind of trust in the reader to accompany him from well to well, without formal introduction.

In line 10 ("Fructified [...] aquarium"), the speaker describes this particular well in more detail, using complex and unusual vocabulary. This well, the speaker says, was "fructified," a word that means something is productive or bearing fruit, "like any aquarium." In the context of the poem, the line means this well was growing plant life out of its shallow depths, the types of water plants that might grow within a household aquarium made to hold fish.

Aside from these words' more complex musicality, the more complex diction in this line also creates a subtle level of meaning in the poem. At this point, the speaker has shifted from the Anglo-Saxon, monosyllabic words—like "dry" and "ditch," which are also held together through their alliteration and hard /d/ sounds—to the Latinate words "fructified" and "aquarium." He does so, importantly, when he describes the interior of the well itself, a shift suggesting that for the speaker, even this overgrown, shallow well was a source of endless fascination, complexity, and strangeness.

LINES 11-12

When you dragged ...
... over the bottom.

Notably, as the speaker continues to describe the well in lines 11-12 ("When you [...] the bottom"), he shifts back to simpler words. Yet these words are predominated by long vowel sounds, slowing down the reader's movement over the lines.

"When you dragged out long roots from the soft mulch," the speaker says, "A white face hovered over the bottom." The long /a/ in "dragged," and long /oo/ in "roots" emphasize the work the speaker undertook to pull out these roots.

As in the stanza before, the speaker here uses the second-person "you," inviting the reader to imagine themselves in the speaker's experience. At the same time, the second person "you" suggests that the speaker is also addressing his former self.

In this case, with this well, the speaker could "dra[g] out" roots from the bottom of the well, which was filled with "soft mulch," or broken-down plant matter. Unlike the well in the brickyard, "[s]o deep you saw no reflection in it," here the speaker, after dragging out these roots, can see his own reflection, conveyed in the image of "[a] white face hovered over the bottom." Yet if the speaker is, in a sense, returned to himself through this image of the reflection—after seeing no reflection in the deep well of the brickyard— it is important that the reflection is one made strange, defamiliarized, as the speaker sees himself as simply a "white face" that "hovered" or was suspended in the air, over the depths of the well.

Finally, while this stanza seems, in some ways, similar to the previous one—each describes a particular well from the speaker's memory—subtle changes in the stanza's syntax and line endings also signal a rhythmic shift in the poem. Where the preceding stanza was made out of three sentences, the second of which extended over the middle two lines, here the stanza is divided evenly in half, with lines 10 ("Fructified [...] aquarium") and 12 ("A white face [...] bottom") each ending with the end of a sentence.

As in the preceding stanzas, this stanza also contains slant rhymes at its line endings; "ditch" has a different vowel sound than that in "mulch," though they share a consonant ending, while "aquarium" is close but not an exact rhyme with "bottom." The poem's variance in its relationship between sentence and line stanza to stanza, as well its slant rhymes, convey a sense of organic development within the speaker's experience and the poem itself. The poem, like the natural world the speaker loved and explored, feels dynamic, alive, and ever-changing.

LINES 13-14

Others had echoes, ...
... music in it.

At the beginning of stanza 4, the speaker describes the way in which certain wells "had echoes," or would echo when he spoke into them. These wells, he says, "gave back your own call / With a clean new music in it."

In this description, the speaker evokes the experience of calling into a well and hearing his voice returned to him—except his voice would be different somehow, transformed into a voice that with "music in it," "clean" and "new." This description recalls

the image at the end of stanza 3, when the speaker's own reflection became strange and unfamiliar to him, and he saw himself in the water of the well as a "white face" that "hovered over the bottom." Here, it is not only the speaker's face, but also his voice, that becomes transformed through his encounter with the wells. The consonant hard /c/ sounds in these lines, which link the "echoes" of the wells to the "call" of the speaker, and the way it returned to him as "clean," emphasize this sense of transformation, connecting the speaker's voice to the well itself.

Importantly, since lyric poetry has its origins in music—indeed, the word "lyric" comes from a name for an ancient stringed instrument, the lyre— by saying that his "call" came back to him with "music in it," the speaker subtly alludes to the poem's prevailing metaphor, in which looking and speaking into wells represents the creation of poetry. Additionally, since poetry is verbal and was traditionally spoken and sung, the speaker's "call" and the idea of his voice connect to the sense of him as a poet, his everyday voice transformed into the music of poems.

As earlier in the poem, the speaker addresses the reader—and his former self—with the second person "you," implying that anyone's voice could become strange, musical, and transformed into poetry through a willingness to engage in this way with the world around them.

Finally, it is notable that this sentence works as a kind of echo itself, recalling the sentence and line at the end of stanza 2: "So deep you saw no reflection in it." Both sentences end with the phrase "in it," and, since there is little direct repetition in the poem, this repetition stands out. Interestingly, the "it" refers, in each instance, to something different; in the earlier iteration, the speaker referred to the well itself, in which no reflection could be seen. Here, though, the speaker refers to his own voice, or "call," which is transformed by echoing through the well. The repetition of this small phrase links the speaker's voice, his call—and indeed his poetry—with the wells that implicitly transformed him into a poet.

As he subtly connects his experience of these wells to his development as a poet, the speaker also implies that what is most compelling to him about the wells—and about poetry—is not the made thing itself but what it allows him to glimpse or grasp of the unknown or unfamiliar. Here, it is that "clean new music" that the speaker treasures—not his own voice, exactly, but how, through encountering the mysterious and unknown, his voice is changed.

LINES 14-16

And one ...
... across my reflection.

The speaker describes another well he remembers from his childhood. "And one," he says, "Was scaresome," because a "rat" suddenly darted out of the surrounding plants "across [the speaker's] reflection."

If the first lines of this stanza, and the speaker's evocation of the "music" of his echoing voice, moved the poem toward a sense of profundity or a more sweeping gesture, this description of the "rat" that came suddenly out of the "ferns and tall / Foxgloves" restores the poem and the speaker to his immediate, local, and even humble setting. Again, the speaker reminds the reader that these wells in the speaker's experience are not mythical or remote springs. Instead, they are grounded and real, overgrown with the plants of the local landscape, "ferns" and tall flowering "[f]oxgloves." The detailed imagery of this description is immediate, tangible, and clear.

This stanza ends with the poem's second use of direct repetition, this time with the word "reflection." The speaker mentions his reflection here almost casually, and only in the context of the "rat" that "slapped" across it in the well. Yet this repetition is important.

Tracking the poem's depictions of the speaker's reflections up to this point, it is important that the speaker first described a well where he couldn't see himself at all; then a well when he became only a "white face." Now, in this third iteration of his visual reflection, the speaker sees another living thing, a rat, move across his face in the water.

These descriptions, and the way they build in the poem, convey a sense of the speaker undergoing a kind of fundamental transformation, beginning with, in a sense, a loss of his ordinary self, then seeing himself made strange in the water, and then finally seeing himself as part of a larger world that other beings inhabit and move across. The direct repetition of "reflection" emphasizes this change in the speaker, and who the speaker has become.

LINES 17-19

Now, to pry ...
... all adult dignity.

The speaker invokes this sense of transformation directly in the poem's final stanza. Talking about he has changed in becoming an adult, he says, "Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime, / To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring / Is beneath all adult dignity." At this point, the speaker makes clear, he can no longer go around exploring wells, pulling out roots, or digging into slime. Neither can he stare into the wells to see himself in the water, because all of this would be considered, according to social codes, "beneath" the "dignified," more reserved ways that adults are expected to act.

The speaker emphasizes this adult view by describing his younger self as "Narcissus," a figure in Greek Mythology who famously fell in love with his own reflection. Narcissus, according to myth, looked into a spring that was located on Mount Helicon, the mountain thought to be the source of poetic inspiration, from which this poem takes its title.

Through this allusion, then, the speaker refers back to the title,

and to the fact that the poem as a whole is about his own personal source of poetic inspiration. At the same time, through the allusion, he implies that adults might view children's curiosity and inquisitiveness as something vain or even selfish, as the character of Narcissus is viewed.

The speaker also uses more negative words, such as "slime" and "stare," to describe himself as a child and his childhood experiences. The sibilant /s/ sounds of these words connect them to the /s/ sounds in "Narcissus," suggesting that, from an adult point of view or the viewpoint of social conventions, all of these explorations and experiences of discovery could be seen as negative or self-indulgent.

At the same time, the speaker also subtly critiques this point of view. As the poem has already made clear, the speaker as a child didn't really look into the wells as Narcissus looked into the spring; Narcissus was famously in love with his own physical appearance, where the child speaker was simply fascinated by the depth of the wells and the strangeness with which he experienced his own reflection and his own voice. This is a radically different *kind* of reflection. Also, the phrase "beneath all adult dignity" is subtly sarcastic. The speaker implies that these might be codes of behavior, yet they are just codes, not truly legitimate. He also suggests that it's not that he wouldn't *want* to look into wells anymore, but that now, he is socially constrained in doing so.

Finally, these lines contain a third instance of repetition in the poem, in the word "roots." The speaker has evoked the roots within the wells in literal terms, as physical things that he "dragged out" of the "soft mulch." But roots also evoke depth, and the source of things; to get to the root of something is to understand where it comes from, and why it is the way it is. Adults might see "pry[ing] into roots" as idle play, yet the poem implies that it is much more than this.

LINES 19-20

I rhyme ...
... the darkness echoing.

In the closing sentence of the poem, the speaker returns directly to the idea of poetic inspiration set out in the poem's title. Since as an adult he can no longer actually explore wells, the speaker says, "I rhyme / To see myself, to set the darkness echoing."

In these lines, the word "rhyme" works as a metonym. Rhyme is an element of poetry, that here stands in for poetry as a whole. The speaker, then, says that he writes poetry—and rhymes, creating verbal music—to experience what he once experienced through these wells, "see[ing] [him]self," and "set[ting] the darkness echoing."

By referring back to earlier instances of the poem, in which the speaker described looking for his own reflection in the water or calling into the well to hear the echo of his voice, the speaker now makes clear that the wells he has described throughout the poem are actually metaphors, or one collective extended metaphor, for poetry and the experience of writing poetry. Just as, as a child, he sought out these wells to see his reflection made strange or hear his voice come back to him with a "clean new music in it," the speaker says that now, he writes poetry to similarly see into himself, to see himself differently, and to hear the darkness "echo."

It is important to note, however, the subtle shift in language at the poem's end. Where before the speaker talked about hearing his own voice echo, here the speaker describes setting "the darkness" *itself* "echoing." This implies that the speaker doesn't simply write poetry about himself, or to look at himself; he writes to understand himself and his experiences differently, to find the depths of meaning within them, and also to hear the larger darkness or mystery of the universe and the world, through his interaction with it. This process of writing, as the poem's ending makes clear, isn't "narcissistic" at all, since it brings both the writer and reader into contact with what is strangest and most mysterious within the personal, familiar, and known.

Interestingly, too, the poem itself ends with not exactly a rhyme but with an echo. As in the stanzas that came before, which contained some exact end rhymes but a predominance of slant rhymes, in this last stanza line 17 ("Now, to pry [...] slime") and line 19 ("Is beneath [...] I rhyme") rhyme, but the endings of the other two lines—"spring" and "echoing"— only echo each other. It is not the constraint of rhyme that is important here, the poem implies, but the speaker's openness to what can't be fully contained through rhyme or poetry. The word "spring," which refers directly to those mythical springs of inspiration, finds its "echo" in the echoing itself, the kind of reverberation the speaker encounters through speaking into the darkness, and looking into the wells of himself and of the world.

SYMBOLS

WELLS

The most important symbol in "Personal Helicon" is that of the wells that the speaker evokes throughout the poem. Wells represent depth—including internal depth or profundity. They are also sources of vitality, since wells enable people to access the element of water, necessary for survival. Within the poem, the wells metaphorically represent the deep, internal sources of the speaker's poetic inspiration, while also symbolizing that poetry is, like water, something nourishing—even something essential to human life.

Importantly, the poem shows that these wells were actual, specific wells in the speaker's memory; details like the "rotted board top" and the "dry stone ditch" make it clear that these

wells can't be read *only* symbolically. Indeed, it is their actual, physical, nature that the speaker as a child found most fascinating and wonderful. Yet by the poem's ending, it is clear that the speaker sees these wells and his childhood experiences in this rural landscape as the source of his poetry. He also implies that looking into wells is akin to writing poems, as both are fundamentally processes of exploration and discovery.

Finally, the wells symbolize, in a sense, the whole of the speaker's childhood experience and memory, which is now the source that he can draw from—as one would lower a bucket into a well—for his poems. The poem implies that this source of inspiration, like a deep well, can't be depleted. And because the wells in the poem are so specific, local, and real, the poem also invites the reader to consider what might be their own "Helicon," their own wells of memory and experience from which they can draw meaning.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20

ROOTS

The speaker of "Personal Helicon" refers twice to roots. First, he describes "drag[ging] out long roots from the soft mulch" of a shallow well as a child. Then, at the end of the poem, he refers to his younger self "pry[ing] into roots."

It is clear that the speaker means that he *literally* pulled and dragged tree or plant roots out of wells. At the same time, the roots also function symbolically in the poem. Roots are the part of a plant or tree that can't be easily seen, yet are vital to its life and growth. They often represent the origins of something, or why something is the way it is. If someone is said to "get to the root of the matter," this means that through effort and work, they are able to understand the source of an issue or a situation.

In the poem, that the speaker pulls out these roots symbolizes his fundamental curiosity about the world, and his determination to look more deeply into why things are the way they are. Additionally, the childhood experiences the speaker evokes are, in a sense, the "roots" of his current self and his current poetry. His work as a poet, then, is to "drag them out," to understand them, and to see them more clearly.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 11:** "When you dragged out long roots from the soft mulch"
- **Line 17:** "Now, to pry into roots,"

DARKNESS AND DEPTH

At several points in the poem, the speaker refers to the darkness that he saw as a child looking down into the wells. He comments on one well that was particularly deep—and implicitly dark, since he wasn't able to see the bottom. Finally, at the end of the poem, he says that he now writes poetry to "set the darkness echoing."

In many cultural contexts, darkness symbolizes hopelessness, despair, or evil. Yet it is clear that the darkness within the wells doesn't mean these things to the speaker of "Personal Helicon." Rather, the darkness and depth of these wells represent a kind of profound unknowability or infiniteness, like the vast darkness of space. When the speaker looks into the darkness of the wells, the poem suggests that he sees into what is most mysterious in the world and in himself.

Now, then, when the speaker "rhyme[s]" or writes poetry, he does so to come into contact with this mystery, just as, as a child, he called into the dark depth of the wells to hear his own voice echo back, transformed. The darkness and depth of these wells and the earth itself, the poem suggests, is not something to be feared, but rather to be explored with wonder and curiosity.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "I loved the dark drop,"
- **Line 8:** "So deep you saw no reflection in it."
- **Lines 19-20:** "I rhyme / To see myself, to set the darkness echoing."

REFLECTIONS

In "Personal Helicon," the speaker describes his experiences looking into wells to see his own reflection. He notes that one well was "[s]o deep you saw no reflection in it," while in another his reflection came back to him strange, unfamiliar, as a "white face [that] hovered over the bottom." Finally, at the poem's ending, the speaker says that he now "rhyme[s]," or writes poetry, to "see [him]self"—implicitly, to see his own reflection in his poetry just as he once did, as a child, in the well's water.

Reflections are powerful symbols of self-awareness and self-knowledge. They represent seeing oneself literally, in terms of one's physical appearance, but also seeing *into* oneself, in the sense of self-understanding and insight. The speaker's changing reflections in the poem—from seeing no reflection, to seeing a reflection defamiliarized, to seeing another living creature move across his reflection—represent the speaker's growth, transformation, and increasing self-knowledge.

The poem also invokes another kind of reflection in its reference to Narcissus, the figure from Greek mythology who famously fell in love with his own reflection. The speaker

compares his young self to Narcissus, suggesting that from an adult viewpoint, children's curiosity might be viewed as self-indulgent or self-preoccupied. But, in fact, according to the myth, Narcissus was infatuated with his own physical appearance and his own beauty; he wasn't seeking further knowledge or discovery as the speaker of "Personal Helicon" does. By juxtaposing these two *different* types of reflection, the poem implies that true poetry and true curiosity must go beyond merely writing about the self, to looking within oneself and one's deepest experiences.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "So deep you saw no reflection in it."
- **Line 12:** "A white face hovered over the bottom."
- **Line 16:** "a rat slapped across my reflection."
- **Lines 18-19:** "To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring / Is beneath all adult dignity."
- **Lines 19-20:** " I rhyme / To see myself,"

POETIC DEVICES

EXTENDED METAPHOR

Throughout "Personal Helicon," the speaker describes the wells and water pumps that he loved to explore as a child. Then, in the poem's closing lines, the speaker says that he now "rhyme[s]," or writes poetry, "[t]o see [him]self, to set the darkness echoing." Just as the speaker once looked into wells to see his own reflection, and called into wells to hear the echo of his own voice, the poem implies that he now writes poetry to see his own reflection or hear his own voice transformed into music within his poems.

Those wells and water pumps, then, and the speaker's experiences looking into them, become an extended metaphor in the poem, representing both poetry and the process of writing. Just as the speaker once adventurously explored wells with openness and curiosity, this metaphor implies that now, for him, the act of writing poems includes a similar process of discovery.

This extended metaphor also carries additional levels of meaning. First, it is worth noting that wells are *constructed* things, made out of stone, concrete, or metal, and dug into the earth. The speaker emphasizes that he values all the crafted, made qualities of the wells he encountered, including the "rotted board top" on one and the bucket that he could lower to the end of a rope until it hit the water with a "rich crash." Similarly, poems are crafted out of language, which is shaped into phrases, sentences, lines, and stanzas. "Personal Helicon" emphasizes this crafted quality, since it is structured into steady quatrains and uses a rhyme scheme.

At the same time, though, the speaker suggests that what he most values in the wells are the living things within and around them, as well as the sense of profundity and mystery that the wells allow him to glimpse. He notes the plants growing around the wells, calling attention to the way the wells, as a water source, enable life. He also remarks on one well so deep that he could see "no reflection in it," as well as the experience of calling into wells to hear the echo of his own voice "[w]ith a clean new music in it." These details suggest that for the speaker, what he most loves about the wells are the life they can support, and the depths that he can look into within them.

By extension, the metaphor implies that it is these same qualities that the speaker values in poems. While a poem is a crafted thing, the speaker suggests that why he truly writes is to see *beyond* the made thing, to look into his own experiences and memory, and into the vastness of the universe itself. This extended metaphor, then, creates a vision of poetry, suggesting that just as wells enable people to access the life-giving element of water, poems can allow people to see into what is most meaningful and real in the world and in themselves.

Where Extended Metaphor appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20

ALLUSION

"Personal Helicon" includes two important allusions. First, the title of the poem alludes to Mount Helicon. Within Ancient Greek mythology, Mount Helicon was home to two springs that were sacred to the muses who inspired poetry; the mountain as a whole was considered the source of poetic inspiration. Through this allusion, the title "Personal Helicon" makes clear to readers that this poem will be about poetic inspiration and the sources of inspiration. Importantly, though, the title also revises the allusion, since it lets readers know that the poem is about this poet's "Personal Helicon," or where poetic inspiration comes from for this poet, Seamus Heaney, specifically.

Later in the poem, the speaker compares his younger self to Narcissus. Like Mount Helicon, the figure of Narcissus comes from Greek Mythology. Narcissus famously fell in love with his own reflection as he saw it within a spring; this spring, incidentally, was located on Mount Helicon. Importantly, Narcissus wasn't fascinated by his reflection in the way the speaker of "Personal Helicon" is. In the poem, the speaker as a child is intrigued by the ways in which his reflection becomes strange and unfamiliar in the water. By contrast, Narcissus was infatuated with his own beauty and physical appearance.

Through making this allusion, the speaker suggests that from an adult point of view, children's natural curiosity—including curiosity about their reflections—might seem frivolous or self-absorbed. At the same time, the poem subtly critiques this view, since it shows that in fact the speaker of this poem looks into his own reflection not out of self-infatuation, but out of a kind

of innocence and wonder.

Interestingly, the poem's allusion to Narcissus also includes an additional, indirect allusion. At the end of the poem, the speaker remarks that now, since he can't be Narcissus, he instead "set[s] the darkness echoing" as a poet. Echo, too, was a figure from Greek Mythology. She fell in love with Narcissus, but he rejected her, instead falling in love with his own reflection. After this, Echo eventually became only a voice. At the poem's ending, then, the speaker implies that he can no longer act as he once did as a child, so instead he can use his voice for the creation of his poems, "echoing" his earlier experiences and the wonder he felt.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 18:** "To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring"
- **Line 20:** "to set the darkness echoing."

JUXTAPOSITION

In "Personal Helicon," the speaker alludes to Ancient Greek mythology, invoking both the mythical Mount Helicon, thought to be the source of poetic inspiration, and, later, Narcissus, a figure from Greek mythology who fell in love with his own reflection. These allusions help to establish a framework for the poem, making it clear that the poem will be about poetic inspiration and self-reflection.

At the same time, these allusions help to create powerful juxtapositions in the poem. By alluding to Greek mythology and the mythical springs beloved by the muses of poetry, the speaker invokes elements of classical culture and thought. Yet the *actual* "springs" that the speaker describes within the poem as the source of *his* poetic inspiration are, in fact, the overgrown "wells and old [water] pumps" of the rural, working class Northern Irish countryside.

Far from being lofty, serene, or untouched, these wells have clearly been much used by ordinary people in daily life. They are located in places like a "brickyard"—where bricks are made—or "under a dry stone ditch." In other words, these wells that the speaker so loves, and that are the true source of his inspiration, are specific, local, and even humble aspects of his own childhood landscape.

Through this juxtaposition, the poem suggests that poetic inspiration—and poetry itself—doesn't need to be lofty, remote, or detached from ordinary people's lived experiences. In fact, the poem suggests that these experiences, with all of their detail and specificity, can be the source of true inspiration, with endless complexities of meaning, if one is willing to look into them deeply.

Additionally, while the speaker compares his younger self to Narcissus, he also implicitly juxtaposes the two. Narcissus fell in love with his own physical appearance and his own beauty as it was reflected back to him—in fact, his name is the source of the modern word "narcissist." The speaker of "Personal Helicon," on the other hand, isn't self-absorbed at all, whatever the adult world might think. In fact, the speaker of the poem looks into his own reflection to experience the strangeness of it in the water, and to undergo a kind of transformation. Through this juxtaposition, then, the poem suggests that a different kind of self-reflection is possible, one that isn't superficial or self-absorbed, but is, rather, truly inquisitive and open.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "wells / And old pumps with buckets and windlasses."
- **Line 5:** "One, in a brickyard, with a rotted board top."
- **Line 8:** "So deep you saw no reflection in it."
- **Line 9:** "A shallow one under a dry stone ditch"
- **Line 12:** "A white face hovered over the bottom."
- **Line 18:** "To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring"
- **Lines 19-20:** "I rhyme / To see myself"

IMAGERY

"Personal Helicon" is rich with imagery. From the visual images the speaker evokes within the wells—"the dark drop, the trapped sky"—to the sounds he recalls hearing in the wells—the "rich crash" of a bucket dropping and hitting the water, the echo of his own voice—the poem makes the speaker's sensory experiences of these wells vivid and immediate. In fact, the imagery in the poem includes almost all the senses: it combines visual images with smells, sounds, and things the speaker touched within the wells, such as the "slime" and "soft mulch."

This imagery has several effects in the poem. First, it emphasizes how fully connected the speaker was to this landscape as a child, since even now, as an adult, he can recall every aspect of these wells with absolute clarity. The specificity of the imagery also invites the reader into the scene with the speaker. Such details as the "ferns and tall / Foxgloves," or plants growing around one well, or the image of the speaker's "white face" reflected in the water, are so clear and precise that the reader can almost experience these things along with the speaker. This allows the reader to take part in the speaker's childhood explorations and experience this sense of wonder and discovery along with him.

Finally, the imagery works to suggest that it was not only these wells that were so important to the speaker (and that now inspire his poems), but also this landscape as a whole. In fact, when the speaker encounters the wells, he also encounters everything living around them, from the trees and plants growing out of them to the "rat" that suddenly darts across the water. The imagery, then, creates a kind of world of the poem, the world of the speaker's childhood and this rural landscape, implying that it is this landscape as a whole that is this poet's

true "Helicon."

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- Lines 3-18

ASYNDETON

Several times in "Personal Helicon," the speaker makes lists—of things he loved about the wells, about his former self, and about himself now—and leaves out the conjunctions that lists would ordinarily require. These are instances of asyndeton.

For example, in the opening stanza the speaker says, "I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells / Of waterweed, fungus, and dank moss." Here, the list "the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells" omits the conjunction that readers might expect: "I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, *and* the smells."

Similarly, in stanza 4, the speaker describes those wells that "had echoes, gave back your own call / With a clean new music in it," omitting the word "and" before "gave." In both of these instances, the omission of the conjunction speeds up the list and implies that the speaker could go on listing these qualities forever, continuing to recount elements of the wells that he loved.

Asyndeton also occurs in the poem's closing stanza:

> Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime,
> To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring

The lack of conjunctions here again helps the poem move swiftly and smoothly. It also echoes the asyndeton that appeared earlier in the poem. By listing these qualities of himself as a child—or how adults would see this child—with the same grammatical structure he used earlier to describe what he loved about the wells, the speaker implies that, at some level, he hasn't really changed at all. The conventions and social norms of the adult world might require him to act in different ways, yet he is fundamentally the same person, still shaped and inspired by that landscape that he can remember so vividly and so well.

This sense of the speaker possessing the same wonder and love for the landscape that he did as a child is emphasized by the poem's final instance of asyndeton, which occurs in its closing lines: "I rhyme / To see myself," the speaker says, "to set the darkness echoing." In this last sentence of the poem, the speaker omits the "and" that would normally connect the two clauses. In doing so, he implies that the same energy, inquisitiveness, and innocence that he possessed when he was young—free from the trappings of social expectations, and even grammatical norms—still live in his poetry.

Where Asyndeton appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells"
- **Line 13:** "Others had echoes, gave back your own call"
- **Lines 17-18:** "Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime, / To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring"
- **Line 20:** "To see myself, to set the darkness echoing."

END-STOPPED LINE

In its line endings, "Personal Helicon" shifts between instances of enjambment and end-stopped lines, creating musicality and balance in the poem's pacing. Those lines that are end-stopped, especially those that end with a full stop—coinciding with the end of a sentence—create moments of particular emphasis, conveying moments of reflection or awareness within and around the action of the poem.

For example, in the second stanza, line 5 ("One [...] rotted board top") is end stopped, and the sentence occupies a single line. The middle sentence of the stanza then bridges two lines, over an enjambed line ending. Yet the final line of the stanza, line 8 ("So deep [...] in it") returns to a full stop, again with the sentence inhabiting a single line.

The pacing in this stanza works to enact what the stanza describes. First, in the initial end-stopped line, the speaker remarks on one well "in a brickyard," locating the reader in this place. The middle two lines of the stanza describe the speaker dropping a bucket to the end of a rope, with the enjambment at the ending of line 6 ("bucket / Plummeted") conveying the action of the bucket dropping further and further into the well. Then, the stanza's closing end-stopped line ("So deep [...] in it") communicates a moment of quiet, calm, and pause, as though the speaker is standing still in this instant looking down into the depths of the well. The end-stopped lines, then, work to manage pacing, but also communicate the speaker's experiences around these wells, conveying the shifts between his actions and explorations and instances of profound insight and awareness.

Finally, it is worth noting that all the stanzas in the poem are full stopped, concluding with the end of a sentence. This creates a sense in the poem of evenness and calm. While the speaker celebrates the excitement and wonder he once felt in encountering these wells, then, he also conveys, through the poem's measured pacing, the peacefulness, serenity, and safety that he experienced within this landscape.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "windlasses."
- **Line 4:** "moss."
- **Line 5:** "top."
- **Line 7:** "rope."
- **Line 8:** "it."

- **Line 10:** "aquarium."
- **Line 16:** "reflection."
- **Line 17:** "slime,"
- **Line 20:** "echoing."

ENJAMBMENT

"Personal Helicon" includes numerous instances of enjambment. These moments of enjambment convey the speaker's childhood love for the wells he describes. For example, in the first stanza, the speaker lists aspects of the wells, saying, "I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells / Of waterweed, fungus, and dank moss." The enjambment after "smells," here, propels the reader over the line ending to the continuation of the speaker's list, communicating the speaker's enthusiasm and energy.

Instances of enjambment in the poem also work to bring the reader more fully into specific moments of the speaker's memories. For instance, in stanza 2 the speaker describes how, in the well in the brickyard, he would drop a well down to reach the water. "I savoured the rich crash," he says, "when the bucket / Plummeted down at the end of a rope." This particularly hard enjambment—which divides the subject, "bucket," from the verb, "[p]lummeted," enacts what the speaker describes, that plummeting of the bucket further and further into the well's depths. The enjambment invites the reader, too, to experience or witness the thrill of watching the bucket drop, along with the speaker.

Similarly, in stanza 4, the speaker describes being startled when, looking into one well, "out of ferns and tall / Foxgloves, a rat slapped across my reflection." As in his description of dropping the bucket to the end of its rope, here the speaker describes the rat darting out across the well as though it is happening within the moment of the poem; the enjambment, which separates the modifier "tall" from the noun "[f]oxgloves" enacts, within the poem, the suddenness of this instant, when the rat suddenly darts out from the surrounding vegetation across the speaker's reflection.

Importantly, the poem's moments of enjambment are also balanced by its end-stopped lines. This balance brings together the vividness of the speaker's memories, and his youthful excitement, with the measured recounting of the poet in the present. The balance of the two also implicitly suggests that despite that "scaresome" well where the rat darted out, or other moments of thrill and action, the overall experience the speaker describes is fundamentally one that is harmonious, peaceful, and whole.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "wells / And old pumps"
- **Lines 3-4:** "smells / Of waterweed"
- **Lines 6-7:** "bucket / Plummeted"
- **Lines 9-10:** "ditch / Fructified"
- **Lines 11-12:** "mulch / A"
- **Lines 13-14:** "call / With"
- **Lines 14-15:** "one / Was"
- **Lines 15-16:** "tall / Foxgloves"
- **Lines 18-19:** "spring / Is"
- **Lines 19-20:** "rhyme / To"

ALLITERATION

Alliteration occurs throughout "Personal Helicon." For example, note the alliterative /w/ sounds in the first stanza, with "**w**ells," "**w**indlasses," and "**w**ater**w**eed." These sound links the words together, suggesting that for the speaker, the wells, the windlasses with which the rope and bucket were lowered into the wells, and the plants that grew within the wells were interconnected, all part of what fascinated him.

Similarly, in stanza 1, /d/ sounds unify the phrase "**d**ark **d**rop." This /d/ sound repeats alliteratively later in the poem in such words as "**d**own," "**d**eep," "**d**ry," "**d**itch," "**d**ragged," and "**d**arkness." This harder consonant demands greater emphasis and enunciation, calling attention to the depths of the wells the speaker encountered.

In the second stanza, /b/ sounds connect "**b**rickyard," "**b**oard," and "**b**ucket," emphasizing the material reality of this well and the working-class context—a brickyard—within which it existed. Alliterative /r/ sounds, meanwhile, link "**r**otted," "**r**ich," "**r**ope," and "**r**eflection," again emphasizing the well's materiality. The speaker's language is filled with a richness of sound that helps readers focus on the images at hand.

Later, in stanza 4, alliterative /f/ sounds connect the "**f**erns" with the "[**f**]oxgloves" that also grow around the well, bridging the enjambment between the two lines and creating a sense of the plants as part of a larger, unified natural setting. Similarly, the /r/ sounds of "**r**at" and "**r**eflection" connect the rat—this other living creature—to the speaker himself, implying that they are both part of and connected to this landscape.

Throughout the poem, then, alliteration works to link words and their meanings to one another, creating music while also conveying the speaker's connection to this landscape and the landscape as interconnected within itself.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "could," "keep," "wells"
- **Line 2:** "windlasses."
- **Line 3:** "dark drop," "sky," "smells"
- **Line 4:** "waterweed"
- **Line 5:** "brickyard," "rotted," "board"
- **Line 6:** "rich," "bucket"
- **Line 7:** "down," "rope"

- **Line 8:** “deep,” “reflection”
- **Line 9:** “dry,” “ditch”
- **Line 11:** “dragged”
- **Line 13:** “call”
- **Line 14:** “clean”
- **Line 15:** “ferns”
- **Line 16:** “Foxgloves,” “rat,” “reflection”
- **Line 17:** “slime”
- **Line 18:** “stare,” “some spring”
- **Line 19:** “dignity”
- **Line 20:** “see,” “set,” “darkness”

SIBILANCE

The poem is filled with sibilance in each stanza. These /s/ sounds create a kind of hushed feeling within the poem, conveying the solitude of the speaker within this landscape, as well as the kind of hush or quiet the speaker might hear within a well.

For example, in the opening stanza, /s/ sounds connect the words "pumps," "buckets," “windlasses,” "sky," “smells,” “fungus,” and “moss” (there are some /z/ sounds here as well, which are sometimes categorized as sibilant and add to the effect). The fourth stanza is again full of sibilance, in such words as “scaresome,” “foxgloves,” “slapped”; adding to the hushed, reverent effect is the /sh/ of "reflection." The poem’s closing stanza is perhaps the most sibilant of all, with "roots," “slime,” "stare," "Narcissus," “some spring,” “see,” “set,” and "darkness" filling the poem with a respectful gentleness.

At the same time, because /s/ sounds are considered “voiceless”—they are made by the person speaking directing air through their teeth—the sibilant sounds have the impression of being ongoing. Just as it is hard to tell when a hissing sound begins or ends, the /s/ sounds in the poem create a kind of musicality that sustains and underlies the whole, a hush of breath that unifies everything the speaker recounts and ties his earlier experiences to his poetry now.

Where Sibilance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** “pumps,” “buckets,” “windlasses.”
- **Line 3:** “sky,” “smells”
- **Line 4:** “fungus,” “moss”
- **Line 6:** “savoured,” “crash”
- **Line 8:** “So,” “saw,” “reflection”
- **Line 9:** “shallow,” “stone”
- **Line 11:** “roots,” “soft”
- **Line 12:** “ face”
- **Line 15:** “scaresome”
- **Line 16:** “Foxgloves,” “slapped,” “reflection”
- **Line 17:** “roots,” “slime”
- **Line 18:** “stare,” “Narcissus,” “some ,” “spring”
- **Line 20:** “ see,” “set,” “darkness”

CONSONANCE

“Personal Helicon” is overflowing with consonance. Aside from the many instances of alliteration and sibilance, the poem’s other forms of consonance work to link words together and make the speaker’s experiences vivid and accessible to the reader.

In the first stanza, /l/ sounds connect "child," “wells,” “old,” “windlasses,” "loved," and “smells.” These soft /l/ sounds contrast with the sharp /d/, /k/, and /p/ sound of such words as "pumps," "buckets," "trapped," "sky," "dank," “dark,” and “drop.” Together, this mixture of hard and soft consonance evokes the simultaneous excitement, fear, and wonder the speaker felt; the consonance of this stanza subtly suggests that for the speaker, despite the darkness and depth of the wells, there was something basically comforting about his experiences with them.

In stanza 4, meanwhile, hard /k/ sounds bring the stanza together as a whole together, connecting the word “echoes” with "back," “call,” “clean,” “music,” "scaresome," "Foxgloves," "across," and "reflection." Here, the consonance conveys, at the level of the poem’s sounds, the way in which the well was inextricably connected to the poet’s “call”—his voice—as well as his transformation into a poet. The stanza describes the echo of the speaker's voice in the well, and the sounds of the poem echo throughout the stanza itself.

Finally, some consonant sounds in “Personal Helicon” are onomatopoetic or close enough to it. For instance, the speaker’s description of the “rich crash” of the bucket dropping into the water *sounds* like a crashing sound, those /ch/ and /sh/ enacting the noise of an object dropping into water. Similarly, the description of the “soft mulch” from which the speaker drags out “long roots” emphasizes the softness of those broken-down leaves, the /ft/ and /ch/ sounds communicating that impression of plant matter that is almost, but not completely, soil. These moments combined with the other instances of consonance in the poem create a rich verbal landscape for the reader to traverse, enacting, through the poem’s music, the varied and richly alive landscape that the speaker recalls from his childhood.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “child,” “could,” “keep,” “wells”
- **Line 2:** “old,” “pumps,” “with,” “buckets,” “windlasses”
- **Line 3:** “loved,” “dark,” “drop,” “trapped,” “sky,” “smells”
- **Line 4:** “waterweed,” “fungus,” “dank moss”
- **Line 5:** “brickyard,” “rotted,” “board,” “top.”
- **Line 6:** “rich,” “crash,” “bucket”
- **Line 7:** “Plummeted,” “rope”

- **Line 8:** “deep,” “reflection”
- **Line 9:** “shallow,” “one ,” “under”
- **Lines 9-10:** “dry stone ditch / Fructified like any aquarium”
- **Line 11:** “dragged,” “roots,” “soft”
- **Line 12:** “face,” “hovered over”
- **Line 13:** “echoes,” “back,” “call”
- **Line 14:** “clean,” “music”
- **Line 15:** “scaresome,” “for,” “ferns”
- **Line 16:** “Foxgloves,” “across,” “reflection”
- **Line 17:** “into roots, to,” “finger,” “slime”
- **Line 18:** “To ,” “stare,” “Narcissus,” “some,” “spring”
- **Line 19:** “adult,” “dignity”
- **Line 20:** “see,” “myself,” “set,” “darkness,” “echoing.”

ASSONANCE

Assonance works in “Personal Helicon” to create intricate music and patterning throughout the poem. It ties individual words together, creating unified images and actions. For example, when the speaker describes the “bucket” that “plummeted” down into the well in the brickyard, the short /uh/ sound connects the noun—the bucket—with its plummeting action, and bridges the enjambment that divides the two lines. Similarly, the “rat” that darts out across another well is said to have “slapped” over the speaker’s reflection, the short /ah/ sound connecting the rat with its action. These close instances of assonance create the sense that within the world the speaker describes, all the living things and aspects of the world are integrated and interconnected.

The most assonant stanza is the final one, where long and short /i/ sounds weave throughout the words:

> Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime,
> To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring
> Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme
> To see myself, to set the darkness echoing.

There is also clear repetition of the short /eh/ sound in the poem's final moments. It makes sense that this stanza is particularly musical—particularly poetic—given that the speaker is describing himself as an adult looking back on his childhood and writing poetry.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “keep me”
- **Line 2:** “pumps,” “buckets”
- **Line 6:** “bucket”
- **Line 7:** “Plummeted”
- **Line 8:** “in it”
- **Line 9:** “one under,” “dry”
- **Line 10:** “Fructified like”
- **Line 11:** “you,” “long,” “roots,” “soft”
- **Line 14:** “new music”
- **Lines 14-15:** “one / Was scaresome”
- **Line 16:** “rat slapped”
- **Line 17:** “pry,” “into,” “finger,” “slime”
- **Line 18:** “big-eyed Narcissus, into”
- **Lines 18-19:** “spring / Is”
- **Line 19:** “dignity,” “I rhyme”
- **Line 20:** “myself,” “set,” “darkness echoing”

VOCABULARY

Helicon () - "Helicon" refers to Mount Helicon, a mountain in Greece. According to Greek mythology, Mount Helicon was home to two springs, which were believed to be sacred to the muses who inspired poetry. The mountain as a whole was thought to be the source of poetic inspiration.

Windlasses (Line 2) - A windlass is a device, also called a winch, used for raising or lowering objects. A rope is wound around the windlass, and by turning a crank, the rope is lowered or lifted, along with whatever is attached to the rope. Windlasses are traditional features of wells, used to lower buckets into wells to retrieve water, and then lift them out again.

Waterweed (Line 4) - A general name for different kinds of aquatic plants that grow submerged or floating in water, much like weeds or wild grass that grow on land.

Brickyard (Line 5) - A place where bricks are made.

Savoured (Line 6) - To "savor" something is to wholly enjoy or relish it. The word is often used in connection with food or other sensory experience, as in someone savoring the flavor of something. In the poem, the word appears in its British English spelling ("savoured" instead of "savored").

Plummeted (Line 7) - If something plummets, this means it quickly or suddenly falls a great distance. In the poem, the word conveys the speed with which the bucket drops into the well, as well as the depth of the well itself.

Fructified (Line 10) - If something is "fructified" this means that it has been made fertile or is bearing fruit. For example, rain could be said to "fructify" the earth, helping crops to grow. In the poem, the word means that this shallow well has become a fertile ground for plants, implying that it is now overgrown.

Aquarium (Line 10) - A kind of transparent shallow tank, made to hold fish or water plants.

Mulch (Line 11) - Mulch is made out of broken-down leaves or plant matter; it is the word for plant matter when it has started to deteriorate into soil, but hasn't completely deteriorated.

Scaresome (Line 15) - Scary or somewhat frightening.

Foxgloves (Line 16) - Tall, flowering plants, native to Western

Europe, Asia, and Africa. Their flowers are usually purple, pink, or white.

Narcissus (Line 18) - Narcissus is a figure from Greek mythology. According to these myths, Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection upon seeing it in a spring on Mount Helicon. Infatuated with his own appearance as he saw it reflected back to him, Narcissus rejected the love of Echo, another character from Greek mythology. As a result, Echo is said to have eventually become only a voice—an echo. The figure of Narcissus is the source of the modern word "narcissist."

Spring (Line 18) - A spring is a place where water flows up out of the ground. In Greek mythology, Narcissus is said to have fallen in love with his reflection as he saw it in a spring. Importantly, too, it was the springs on Mount Helicon that were believed to inspire poetry; if poets drank from these springs, they would receive poetic inspiration.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Personal Helicon" is made up of five quatrains, or four-line stanzas, each of which follows an ABAB rhyme scheme. This regular form gives structure to the poem, suggesting that the speaker's childhood explorations and the landscape he explored have a kind of intrinsic sense of balance to them.

At the same time, the poem does also include some slight variations. For example, within each quatrain the poem varies its sentence lengths, so that some sentences extend over multiple lines, while some occupy a single line. Also, the lines vary in length to some degree. For instance, line 10 ("Fructified [...] aquarium") is visually much shorter than the line that follows ("When you dragged [...] mulch"). At this particular moment in the poem, the variation of line length emphasizes the juxtaposition between the aquarium-like shallow container of the well and the "long roots" that the speaker drags out of it.

At the larger level of the poem, though, the variation of line lengths, and the variation in the relationship between sentence and line, contributes to the sense of the poem as organic and varied. While it follows a form—much like a well has a form and shape—it also *diverges* from this form, refusing to be entirely contained or confined by it. This form and variation, then, enacts some of what the poem describes, as the forms of the wells allow the speaker to look *beyond* the wells, into the depths within, the earth itself, and his own reflection.

Apart from its form, "Personal Helicon" works in the mode of an *Ars Poetica*, or a poem written about the art of poetry. Over the course of the poem, it becomes clear that the wells and the speaker's experience looking into these wells now inform and inspire his poems. Furthermore, the speaker compares the act of writing poems to the experience of looking into those wells, implying that the process of writing is fundamentally one of exploration and discovery.

METER

"Personal Helicon" has no fixed meter. This absence of a set meter is fairly standard for a contemporary poem, but it also helps to create the feeling, in this poem specifically, of something that is immediate, spoken, and natural, as though the speaker is addressing the reader directly in conversation.

At the same time, the poem uses numerous clusters of stresses to create music and meaning. For example, in the second half of the first stanza, the speaker describes what he most loved about the wells he explored as a child; these descriptions include multiple moments of two stressed beats occurring in a row, adding a sense of emphasis and intensity to the speaker's reminiscence:

> I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells
> Of waterweed, fungus, and dank moss.

Later in the poem, in lines 14-16, the speaker similarly describes one particular memory of a well in a sentence that is increasingly clustered with stresses:

> [...] And one
> Was scaresome, for there, out of ferns and tall
> Foxgloves, a rat slapped across my reflection.

These groups of stresses create a sense of density in the poem, as well as emphasis; they suggest that for the speaker, each detail of his experiences and of these wells is worth recalling and emphasizing. At the same time, they help to create the sensory world of the poem, conveying at the level of sound the dense richness of these wells, overgrown with plant life, roots, mulch, and even living animals moving out of and across them. It is this richly detailed and densely alive world that the speaker celebrates in the poem, and enacts at the level of the poem's music.

RHYME SCHEME

"Personal Helicon" follows an ABAB rhyme scheme. The rhyme sounds change in each stanza of the poem, from ABAB in stanza 1, to CDCD in stanza 2, EFEF in stanza 3, GHGH in stanza 4, and IJIJ in stanza 5. This steady pattern creates music and unity in the poem, conveying a sense of the speaker's childhood experiences as integrated and whole.

At the same time, the poem also creates patterning and music through its *divergences* from the rhyme scheme. As a matter of fact, *most* of the end rhymes in the poem—"windlasses"/"moss" in stanza 1; "top"/"rope" and "bucket"/"in it" in stanza 2; "ditch"/"mulch" and "aquarium"/"bottom" in stanza 3, "one"/"reflection" in stanza 4; and "spring"/"echoing" in stanza

5—are actually slant rhymes. They *allude* to rhyme, in a sense, but they function more as *echoes* of other sounds—much like the echoes the speaker hears when he calls into the wells' depths.

The slant rhymes also convey a sense of the poem as resisting any kind of fixed, rigid structure. Just like the wells themselves, which are wonderful to the speaker not *in spite* of their overgrown, living quality, but *because* of these things, the language of the poem feels living and varied, consistent but also constantly changing.

Interestingly, at the end of the poem the speaker refers to his own rhymes. When describing why he writes poetry, he says, "I rhyme / To see myself, to set the darkness echoing." "Rhyme" creates a full rhyme with "slime," in the first line of this stanza. Yet the word "echoing," which closes the poem, only echoes its rhyming pair, the "spring" that the speaker evokes at the end of line 18 ("To stare [...] spring"), referring both to the wells of his childhood and the mythical springs of poetic inspiration. Rather than seeking to control that spring, the poem implies, the speaker is most able to experience wonder and inspiration in his poetry by simply "set[ting]" the wells of memory "echoing," and embracing the natural world and his experience as it is, strange, mysterious, and alive.

SPEAKER

Although the speaker of "Personal Helicon" remains unnamed within the poem, many things suggest that the speaker is a representation of the poet, Seamus Heaney. First, the title of the poem refers to the mythical Mount Helicon, which was thought, within Greek Mythology, to be the source of poetic inspiration. This title indicates that the poem is about poetic inspiration, and furthermore, about this poet's *personal* inspiration.

As the poem progresses, specific details of the setting also contribute to this reading of the speaker. Heaney grew up in rural Northern Ireland, and many attributes of the poem's setting—including the countryside the young speaker explores, local industry such as the brickyard, and plants such as ferns and Foxgloves, native to that landscape—suggest that this landscape is a representation of the one in which Heaney grew up.

Finally, at the end of the poem the speaker directly refers to himself as a poet. "I rhyme / To see myself," he says, "to set the darkness echoing." This reference to "rhyming," a traditional element of poetry—and one that structures this poem as well—again implies that the speaker is Heaney the poet, writing about his own experiences and his own source of inspiration.

At the same time, the fact that the speaker *does* remain anonymous leaves the speaker ultimately open to interpretation. And finally, it is worth noting that while the speaker of this poem clearly has a self—he has curiosity, inquisitiveness, and an adventurous spirit—in many ways the poem is about the transformation of self through exploring the world and the act of writing.

Just as the speaker's reflection changes in the poem through his interactions with different wells and with poetry, the poem suggests that what people might ordinarily think of as the "self" or as personal identity is in fact mysterious and constantly changing. The speaker, then, is likely Heaney—or a representation of Heaney—but is also the deeper, more mysterious and unfamiliar self that the speaker sees reflected in the wells and in his poetry.

SETTING

The primary setting of "Personal Helicon" is the speaker's childhood landscape, which he explores as he seeks out the wells and old water pumps that so fascinate him. Details such as the "ferns and tall / Foxgloves" surrounding one well, the "soft mulch" from which the speaker "drag[s] out long roots" in another, and the wells themselves, which are traditional features of farm life, indicate that this landscape is a rural one. The reader can visualize the speaker finding these wells and water pumps in the countryside during his solitary explorations. At the same time, the detail of the "brickyard," where the speaker finds one well, conveys a sense of local industry and working-class life within this rural setting.

Notably, the old-fashioned wells in the poem, with their "buckets and windlasses," are still functional as wells when the speaker as a child finds them. But the fact that some seem to be overgrown with plants implies that they are, perhaps, starting to go out of use.

These details establish a time frame for the poem, suggesting that the speaker grew up in this landscape at a time when it still retained its traditional, rural qualities but was becoming increasingly industrialized, most likely around the mid-20th century. In fact, these details are consistent with Heaney's own childhood. The poet grew up in County Derry in rural Northern Ireland, and his family owned a small farm. He was born in 1939, meaning that he grew up in the 1940s, when wells would still have been in use within this landscape, but the landscape was also changing.

Importantly, "Personal Helicon" does also include—or at least imply—a second, contemporary setting. This is the setting that is implicitly present at the end of the poem, when the speaker no longer inhabits the same rural landscape or time frame of his childhood but remembers it through his poetry. This second setting is not specified; instead, what seems to be important at the poem's ending is how, through the act of writing poetry—which can be written anywhere—the speaker can remember those places and landscapes that most shaped his

consciousness and identity.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"Personal Helicon" was published in 1966 as the final poem in Heaney's first major collection of poems, *Death of a Naturalist*. Much of the collection as a whole, like "Personal Helicon," draws on Heaney's childhood experiences growing up in County Derry in Northern Ireland and explores how these experiences shaped the poet's consciousness. This collection, which received widespread recognition, helped to establish Heaney's international reputation as a poet.

At the time Heaney published *Death of a Naturalist*, he was a member of what was known as the Belfast Group. This group brought together Northern Irish poets who met to offer each other feedback on their work in progress. Heaney had attended its meetings from the time the workshop began in 1963, and he first read aloud a number of poems from *Death of a Naturalist*, including "Personal Helicon," at the group's meetings. Heaney's longtime friend, the poet Michael Longley—to whom "Personal Helicon" is dedicated—was also part of the group, and later members included such well-known poets as Ciarán Carson and Paul Muldoon. Although there is debate about the degree to which these workshop discussions influenced each poet's work, The Belfast Group as a whole is seen as playing an important role in shaping this generation of Northern Irish poets.

On a larger level, as a poet Heaney was interested in engaging deeply with a range of literary traditions. His work shows the influence of Dante and Virgil, and he translated ancient Greek plays. Significantly, Heaney was also interested in the English language and its history. As an Irish poet (Heaney identified as Irish, despite his birth in Northern Ireland, legally part of the UK) Heaney was interested in the complexities of language and linguistic inheritance; English was, after all, the language imposed on Ireland through British colonialism. Heaney studied Irish, Latin, and Anglo Saxon (or Old English), and his work shows the influence of all of these languages.

After *Death of a Naturalist*, Heaney went on to publish 12 more collections of poetry, as well as translations of Greek drama and a translation of the Old English epic *Beowulf*, between 1966 and his death in 2014. He is considered a major English language poet, winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995, and his work continues to exert influence on poetry and literature in Ireland, the UK, and around the world.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In "Personal Helicon," the speaker evokes a world and way of life that, for many modern readers, is familiar only through movies and books. As a child, the speaker inhabits a countryside populated by old-fashioned wells, complete with their buckets and windlasses. The rural landscape he explores seems traditional, even archaic.

In fact, Heaney grew up in County Derry, Northern Ireland, in the 1940s, on a family farm, and these ways of life were still, within that context, every day and ordinary. Soon, with increasing industrialization, the wells would go out of regular use, at least in the forms in which the child speaker encounters them; the poem hints at this imminent change, through the ways in which some of the wells are overgrown, as though they abandoned and almost derelict. Yet at the time that the child speaker—and Heaney himself—grew up in this landscape, this world of rural life was still intact.

This historical context of this particular setting is important to the poem and to Heaney's work as a whole. Heaney himself remarked that "I learned that my local County Derry [childhood] experience, which I had considered archaic and irrelevant to 'the modern world' was to be trusted." Indeed, it was the very "archaic" qualities of this rural upbringing in the mid-20th century that lay the groundwork for Heaney's poetry, as he expresses in "Personal Helicon."

It is difficult to discuss Heaney's work without also considering the broader history of Northern Ireland, where he grew up, and Ireland as a whole. For centuries a colony under British rule, the Irish have experienced dispossession, poverty, famine, and a loss of language and national identity. Northern Ireland, which is still legally a part of the UK, was, during the late 20th century, the site of what are known as the Troubles, a period of violent conflict between the Protestant, British-aligned inhabitants of Northern Ireland, and the Catholic Irish inhabitants, who have experienced pervasive discrimination, poverty, and violence.

Despite the fact that he was born in Northern Ireland, part of the UK, until the end of his life Heaney regarded himself as Irish, not British. He famously refused the office of Poet Laureate of the UK, writing, in his often-quoted poem "Open Letter": "Don't be surprised if I demur, for, be advised / My passport's green. / No glass of ours was ever raised / To toast The Queen." And much of his later work dealt with the Troubles, if often metaphorically, as in his collection *North*, published in 1975.

This overall context is important to understanding Heaney's work and "Personal Helicon" specifically. Through the title, "*Personal* Helicon," and through the poem's divergences from the lofty, idealized sources of poetic inspiration in Classical thought, the speaker conveys the sense that there isn't an existing literary context in which he is fully at home. Because of this, the poem suggests, he must forge his own *personal* Helicon, his own identity as a poet, and his own poetics.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Heaney Reads "Personal Helicon" — Listen to the poet read "Personal Helicon," along with a number of other works, in this recording from a 1971 reading at the 92nd Street Y in New York City. (https://bookgeeksanonymous.wordpress.com/2017/08/30/personal-helicon-by-seamus-heaney/)
- More on Heaney's Life — A biography of Heaney published at the website of the Nobel Prize, which the poet won for Literature in 1995. This particular article details Heaney's childhood in County Derry, Northern Ireland, and how he continued to view this landscape as the "country of the mind" for his poetry. (https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1995/heaney/biographical/)
- "HomePlace" — Visit the website of the Seamus Heaney HomePlace, an arts and literature center devoted to Heaney's life and legacy, to read a range of resources about the poet and his work. The Seamus Heaney HomePlace is located in the village in Northern Ireland where Heaney grew up. (http://www.seamusheaneyhome.com)
- "A Poet of Happiness" — Read this article by Stephanie Burt at the New Yorker to learn more about Heaney's life and poetry, and why he has come to be understood as a "poet of happiness." (https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/how-seamus-heaney-became-a-poet-of-happiness)
- Mount Helicon — Read more about the mythical mountain believed to inspire poetry. (https://www.britannica.com/place/Mount-Helicon)
- The Belfast Group — Read more about the group of poets of which Seamus Heaney was a member in the 1960s. This group brought together Northern Irish poets and helped to shape a new generation of Irish writers. (https://belfastgroup.digitalscholarship.emory.edu/overview/)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER SEAMUS HEANEY POEMS

- Blackberry-Picking
- Death of a Naturalist
- Digging
- Follower
- Mid-Term Break
- Storm on the Island

HOW TO CITE

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