



Personal Helicon -Seamus Heaney

Seamus Justin Heaney (1939 – 2013) was an Irish poet, playwright and translator. He received the 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature. Heaney was and is still recognised as one of the principal contributors to poetry in Ireland during his lifetime, often described as "the greatest poet of his age". In this poem, Heaney talks about his childhood fascination with wells and old pumps, and how, like so many of his childhood experiences and memories, they were a source for his poetic inspiration: becoming his 'Personal Helicon'.

[Click to access a reading of the poem by Seamus Heaney.](#)

for Michael Longley

As a child, they could not keep me from wells
And old pumps with buckets and windlasses.
I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells
Of waterweed, fungus and dank moss.

One, in a brickyard, with a rotted board top.
I savoured the rich crash when a bucket
Plummeted down at the end of a rope.
So deep you saw no reflection in it.

A shallow one under a dry stone ditch
Fructified like any aquarium.
When you dragged out long roots from the soft mulch
A white face hovered over the bottom.

Others had echoes, gave back your own call
With a clean new music in it. And one
Was scaresome, for there, out of ferns and tall
Foxgloves, a rat slapped across my reflection.

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.