

"personal helicon" by seamus heaney essay sample

[Life](#), [Childhood](#)



“ Personal Helicon” by Seamus Heaney Essay Sample

“ Personal Helicon”, by Seamus Heaney, is one segment from his first collection of poems titled “ Death of a Naturalist”. This early work is centralised around a mixture of childhood innocence, self-discovery and the transition into adulthood. All of these are fairly ordinary factors of existence, yet Heaney applies them in order to bring forth a powerful reflective poem, aided by the basic foundational idea of wells. During the poem, Heaney alters wells from an insignificant object to something that screams importance, in terms of his childhood memories, and the consequent person he became.

Personal Helicon is centralised around Heaney’s loss of naivety and conversion into adulthood. Through the poem he explores the conflict between the freedom of youth and thus society’s expectations of adults. Heaney utilises his poetry as a form of compensation for lost childhood experiences:

“ As a child, they could not keep me from wells”

The abrupt opening of the poem instantly brings forth an innocent quality, as in, when Heaney was growing up, life seemed more simple, with a lack of worries. The first line is vague in subject yet straight to the point and abrupt in execution. However Heaney not only explores the delight in his childhood, but also the horrors. Heaney talks of wells with a massive amount of expanse, indicating us of these important memories for him. In order to do this, he applies various features:

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

The sensory imagery here creates an earthiness, which highlights the importance of the Irish landscape to Heaney, the delights in nature that he has, a heavily featured aspect in his work. " Dark drop" is an indication that Heaney is delving downwards to his memories of youth, which is emphasised by the harsh sounding alliteration. There are many references to wells throughout the poem, examples of this being demonstrated are through effective word choice, such as " Plummeted". This also acts as a mention towards probing deeper into Heaney's past, however when this happens, we see a turn of events:

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

In this situation, Heaney is recalling a particular well where a rat scared him. Here we see the poet's pleasure from wells being counteracted with the negativity of this experience. This hints towards the transition into adulthood. The event becomes symbolic for his own jump from a nonchalant childhood into the burdens and corruption of the world, for him, primarily the troubles in Ireland. We see that for Heaney, his poetry is an escapism, an outlet for his views " I rhyme to see myself". Through poetry, Heaney is able to convey himself in any way he pleases, putting forward his political views and love for his Irish heritage. This also acts as a way of engaging his

readers, and ensues his beliefs to be both poignant and significant. Due to his very personal style, we trust him, and engage more in what he says.

As *Personal Helicon* develops, so does Heaney as a person, as the title suggests. In Greek mythology, Helicon is said to be a mountain whereby there is a spring that writers venture to drink the waters of poetic inspiration. For Heaney, his Helicon are wells, a source of inspiration, and poetry is how he channels it. Heaney pursues the Greek mythology by also mentioning Narcissus:

" To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring
Is beneath all adult dignity."

Narcissus is a Greek figure obsessed with his own reflection, and this parallels with Heaney's captivation with his lost childhood, thus opens up ideas on his own self-discovery, whereby poetry acts as a way for him to learn things about himself. Towards the finale of the poem Heaney's final jump into adulthood is made. The poet sees himself as a changing person, " a white ghost", with the " immature" fascination in wells being beyond him now, this contrasts completely with the opening. Yet now, Heaney allows himself to feel the same types of emotions of his youth through the poetry he creates, hence highlighting to his audience that it is the little things in life that cause the most joy.

Ultimately, the journey from childhood to adulthood is depicted in a memorable way by Heaney, thus becomes remarkable due to its simplicity. *Personal Helicon* is a means by which Heaney is able to communicate his

internal emotions and illuminate negative aspects of life: conflict and growing older. Through these avenues, he highlights to the reader not only the inevitability of the ageing process, but that youth can be recaptured and consequently restored, and for Heaney, essentially poetry is the key.