

The Whitsun Weddings

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Whitsun Day is the one day of the year in which the marriage tax is declared null by the British government, thus affording 24 hours of relief to those couples unable to get hitched due to dire economic circumstances. It is on that day that the speaker of "[The Whitsun Weddings](#)" has been forced to take a later train than the usual one he rides. It is almost 1:30 on an unpleasantly hot Saturday afternoon when the quarter-full train pulls from the station. As the train takes off, a panorama of the backside of homes, a fishing dock and a river are can be seen through the open windows.

As the afternoon wears on and the train speeds through the countryside, these sites are replaced by stretches of farmland, industrial canals and another town that looks like the last one. What the speaker doesn't take much notice of as the train is moving are the weddings that are taking place as a result of the holiday. The bright afternoon sun throws its light on certain scenes, while others remain hidden in the shade. Only when the movement comes to a stop at each station is the speaker given enough time to pay attention to the weddings.

The first thing that strikes him is the loudness that these weddings produce. The second thing he notices is how the brides and their maids try to copy the latest fashions, but succeed only in becoming parodies of style. His next thought is how all the mothers of the brides share the common physical trait of being overweight; how yellow, purple and green are the hot colors of the moment; and how every single wedding party seems to include a dirty-minded uncle somewhere. Cafes, banquet halls and yards all serve well for stringing the bunting and hosting the party. And then, amid a hail of confetti and last minute advice, the bride and groom were waved goodbye on the train platform.

As the train makes its way closer to London, the landscape grows more urban in atmosphere and a dozen more marriages will take place before the speaker arrives. As the train begins to move well past being only a quarter full, the speaker ponders how none of the grooms and their brides ever stop to contemplate how they will share something with each of the other newly wedding couples for as long as their marriage lasts.

The light, but unavoidably apparent sense of scorn toward the bridal parties that the speaker has expressed in his thoughts undergoes an ironic shift as the train pulls into the station. London's industrial dark suddenly takes on a sense of magic as he realizes that the collection of so many newly married couples has given a meaning to the coincidence that has brought them all together in the same. Amid imagery of arrows, showers and rain, the full significance of the massive potential for all the fertility to come together and change the world overwhelms his previous cynical attitude

Church Going by Philip Larkin

Reference :www.poemanalysis.com

'*Church Going*' by [Philip Larkin](#) is a seven stanza poem that is made up of sets of nine lines. Each of these strophes is constructed with a specific, but somewhat halting rhyme scheme in mind. Larkin has chosen to make use of both full and half end rhymes. These varying endings give the poem a feeling of unpredictability. One is never quite sure when the words are going to fall into line, or step out, breaking the pattern.

One such instance of these varied types of rhymes is in the first stanza in lines one and three as well as two and four. The poet lines up the words "On" and "stone" to rhyme, as well as "shut" and "cut." The former are connected through a half rhyme and "shut" and "cut" through a full rhyme.

"*Church Going*" by Philip Larkin describes the emotions experienced by a [speaker](#) who is inexplicably drawn to the exploration of churches.

The poem begins with the speaker entering into a building the reader later discovers is a church. He is not sure why exactly he wants to be there, and is even more confused by what he sees inside. He has seen many altars, pews, and bibles before and does not feel any type of reverence towards them. The speaker reads briefly from the Bible and exits.

Upon leaving the church he contemplates what the building represents and what it will mean when all the believers are long dead. He pictures the very last explorer of the building and wonders whether he or she will be like him, curious but emotionless.

The poem concludes with the speaker deciding that no matter what the building might mean, it is important for humanity that churches be maintained. He sees

them as being places of coming together and acceptance of one's common humanity with the rest of the world.

The poem begins with the speaker describing, through initial action phrases, his entering into a place. In the first two lines it is unclear to the reader where exactly this speaker is and what is so important about making sure, "there's nothing going on." The reader might ask, what is this place that it needs to be empty for one to enter? What could have been "going on?"

The speaker checks to make sure the structure is clear and steps inside. He mentions the fact that the door closes with a "thud" behind him. It is both sealing him into the space, and keeping the exterior world out.

If one had not assumed the identity of the structure from the title, the next line makes known to the reader that the speaker is exploring a church. Immediately it becomes clear why the space needed to be empty so that he could explore inside it. There is an important word mentioned in this section which changes the feeling of the poem, "Another." This is not the first time that he has entered into an abandoned, or simply empty, church.

The speaker glances around and notices all the items that are consistent throughout all the churches that he has visited. There are books, and sets, and "stone." He is unsurprised by these sights. He also takes in the fact that there is some "brass and stuff / Up at the holy end." This mundane way of referring to the altar at the front of the church says a lot about the speaker. He does not hold any reverence or respect for the space he is in.

Amongst all the physical things he notices, he also feels an "unignorable silence" that is overwhelming in the space. It seems to the speaker that the church has been absent of people for quite a long time.

The speaker moves "forward" to the front of the church and "run[s]" his hand over the pews. Once he has made it to the front he looks around and notices what seem to be complete repairs and restorations done to the roof. This is a curious fact about the space as it is so devoid of people. There is no one there to ask why this is the case.

The speaker continues his journey through this religious space and takes to reading from the Bible. He speaks a few "large-scale verses" in an increased

volume, spreading the words around the space. His projected voice comes back to him in an echo.

This ends his tour of the church and he departs after leaving an “Irish sixpence,” an incredibly small amount of money, in the donation box. He comes to the conclusion that this place was not worth visiting.

In the third stanza the speaker seems to have some kind of inner conflict about his attraction to churches. He knows, and knew, that there would not be anything new inside, but he stopped anyway. This is not unusually for him. He “often” does it and winds up in this same mental space. The man is frequently entering into the churches, searching through their religious objects, and then leaving unsatisfied. He does not yet know what he is looking for but is always left with one specific question.

He is curious about what the church will be like, or what the human race will utilize all the churches for, when the very last believer is gone. When they have fallen “completely out of use” will they be avoided “as unlucky places?” Or will the “sheep” have full rein over their interiors?

In the fourth stanza the speaker continues his contemplation of what the churches will become when all the religiously devoted have passed on. One idea the speaker has about the fate of these place is the continued existence of their power. He considers the possibility that in the future people will still come to them for a variety of spiritual reason. Mothers might bring their children to “touch a particular stone” for luck, or perhaps people will come to see the dead “walking.”

He knows that “Power of some sort will go on” even if the traditional religious context is lost. The “superstition” he knows will surround the place “must die” as well. One day, even the “disbelief” of the superstitions will be lost. All that the building will be is “Grass...brambles, buttress, sky.” It will be no more than its walls.

As time passes this conglomeration of architectural elements will fall further into disrepair. It will become “less recognizable” as the days more forward until its original purpose is completely unknown.

The speaker embraces a new question in this stanza. He is considering who the very last believer, or pilgrim, or seeker of true will be who enters the building. Will

this person even comprehend where he or she is? What, he wonders, will this man or woman think as the final remainder of a dead religion?

The last person, he assumes, will be “one of the crew” who knows what a “rood-loft” is. This is a reference to what is more commonly known as a rood screen. It is a feature of late medieval church architecture that was situated between the chancel and nave at the front of the church.

In the final lines of this stanza the speaker contemplates who this person is. Will they be a “Christmas-addict” or someone who is there solely to seek out “organ-pipes and myrrh,” and all the religious ephemera of the church? Lastly, he considers the option that the seeker will be as is he, someone who is “uninformed” and unclear on the purpose of religion.

As the poem begins to conclude the speaker continues his prospective description of who the last visitor of the church will be. This person might be as he is, curious about the place because of its long-lasting nature. It has “held unsplit” for so long, one might wonder what has allowed it to survive. The onlooker might think on further in the same vain as he, wondering what the “frosty barn is worth” and how, without knowing its worth, it can please one to “stand in silence here.”

The final stanza of the piece returns to the speaker’s own thoughts, he has finished contemplating what could be, and resumes his own present musings. Up until this point the reader might be under the impression that the speaker holds no real regard for religion, or the true structure of the church. This is quickly dismissed with the first line of this stanza. He states that the church is, “A serious house on serious earth.” It has a true and worthy purpose and should not be made fun of. It is a place where all the “compulsions” or impulses of human beings meet.

Here, the truth of human existence is “recognized” and celebrated. The fact of this, he thinks, should not ever become “obsolete.” It is important enough to be remembered forever. The church will “forever” bring out a “hunger” in one that cannot be discovered through any other means. The discovery of “serious[ness]” will remain with one until the end. A man or woman who has rediscovered something in themselves, will take it with them to “this ground.” They will return to the churchyard and the place where “so many dead lie round.”

Toads' is one of Philip Larkin's most famous poems. When asked later in an interview how he came up with the idea for the toad as a metaphor for work, Larkin replied, 'Sheer genius.' He probably had his tongue in his cheek when he said this, but it is an inspired and instantly memorable analogy. Larkin wrote 'Toads' in 1954, and it was published a year later in his second collection, *The Less Deceived*. You can read 'Toads' [here](#); what we'd like to do in this post is analyse Larkin's poem and attempt to isolate what makes it so interesting.

In summary, 'Toads' is a cry of frustration that sees Larkin grumbling about having to devote his entire day to work, just so he could have an evening (as he put it in the 1982 *South Bank Show* special about him). He has to give up 'six days' of his week to the toad *work*, which seems 'out of proportion' for what he gets in return. Yet he ends up concluding that work is probably something he is well-suited to, and he wouldn't want to be one of those people who live without it. For he, too, is 'toad-like'.

Why the toad? What did the poor toad do to deserve such an unflattering portrayal? Toads are considered ugly, damp, slimy, but also servile (the word 'toady', formed off the back of the animal, denotes someone who is sycophantic and eager to please). Work strikes Larkin as being like that: work is unromantic, base, distasteful, unattractive. But toads are hardly the most fearsome of creatures, and, as foes from the animal kingdom go, would be pretty easy to vanquish. Would you rather be attacked by a toad or a tiger? No contest. This lends the image of Larkin driving the 'brute' toad off with his pitchfork an air of comicality, like a gardener disposing of an unwanted garden pest. Surely the toad can be easily got rid of.

But it's not that simple, of course. Larkin's deft use of off-rhymes – work/pitchfork, life/off, and so on – suggests his displeasure with having to work for a living, but these half-rhymes also come to reflect his flawed stance against work. There is something unconvincing about raging against the machine and wanting to enjoy a life free from work, for such a life would be oddly hollow. Larkin himself held this view: he was fond of saying that a poet only needs two hours a day in which to write, so what is he going to do for the rest of the day? And then, another problem: even if he didn't work for a living in a day job, in order to get the money, the fame, and the girl – which he identifies as his main goal – he would have to work anyway, so he would never truly escape the toad *work*. There is another toad within him, compelling him to work – for

otherwise he would never achieve anything. As romantically appealing as those lispers and losels may appear to him, he knows he could never live like them. He's not brave enough. Toads, as remarked earlier, are associated with servility, and are not the bravest animals in the world. He is 'toad-like' because he could never turn his back on civilisation and all the benefits it brings – financial security in the form of his pension, for one thing, to say nothing of fame, riches, and sex – in order to live among the loblolly-men. Dream on.

Larkin's reference to 'loblolly-men' has puzzled readers, until we realise that 'loblolly' [was old slang for a bumpkin](#), the implication being that a 'loblolly-man' is a country bumpkin or peasant. A 'losel', similarly, is a rake or scoundrel, a general ne'er-do-well.

This concept of the two toads, the one representing the institution of work itself and the one that lurks deep within Larkin, helps to explain the meaning of that final stanza: it's hard not to be a bit of a toad when you slave away at work all day, just as it would be difficult to chuck in the job when you harbour a toad-like approach to living as part of your nature.

'Toads' sees Philip Larkin examining and analysing his own attitudes to work, and many workers have found themselves agreeing with his assessment. It would be lovely to give it all up, wouldn't it? But, as Larkin argued in ['Poetry of Departures'](#), a poem he completed a couple of months before 'Toads', there is something false about the dream of giving everything up and the perceived freedom such an act would bring. 'Toads' brilliantly encapsulates the emptiness of such a dream.

Toads by Philip Larkin

'*Toads*' by Philip Larkin is a nine stanza poem that is separated into sets of four lines, known as quatrains. These quatrains do not follow a specific pattern of rhyme. Instead, there are isolated moments of perfect and imperfect (or slant) rhymes. For instance, in the first stanza the first and third lines are perfect, with the "-ck" sound. The second and fourth lines are half, consonant rhymes, using the "f" sound. There are numerous examples of both techniques of rhyme throughout '*Toads*.'

A reader should also take note of the use of repetition at the beginning of lines. This is known as [anaphora](#) and occurs to great effect in the third stanza with the alliterative use of “Lots,” “Lecturers” and “Losels” at the beginning of the first three lines. The repetition and [alliteration](#) continues into the stanza with four more examples of words that begin with “l.”

In regards to rhythm, Larkin also makes use of different patterns. The stressed and unstressed syllables migrate from first to second position and often times there are extra syllables at the end of lines, This creates a feeling of unevenness and even discomfort. It connects directly the [subject](#) matter of the poem itself in which the [speaker](#) discusses his own unhappiness and lack of satisfaction with his situation. You can read the full poem [here](#).

Summary of *Toads*

Reference: www.interestingliterature.com

‘*Toads*’ by [Philip Larkin](#) tells of the two toads, or pressures, that exist within a speaker as he struggles to free himself from everyday life.

The poem begins with the speaker describing how there is one thing that plagues him more than anything else, a toad. This toad, represents work, exterior obligations and financial pressures. It is always there, forcing poison into his life. Larkin’s speaker is curious about what his life would be like, and if he’d be happier, if he was poor.

The next stanzas depict the lives of the poorest, those who struggle to find food and shelter. Although Larkin realizes the struggles of a job-less life, he thinks these people are happier than he is. Plus, he states, no one ever actually seems to starve to death.

In the next section of ‘*Toad*’ the speaker admits that he is never actually going to make this shift. He is not brave enough to throw off the pensions given to him by the government. This is due mostly to a second toad. This one is present within his body and forces him to keep his job. The combination of these two toads is the entire reason he is unable to change.

Toads

Reference: poemanalysis.com

In the first stanza of this piece the speaker begins by asking the reader a rhetorical question. He is expressing his unhappiness with the “toad work” and how it seems as though he’s supposed to let it “Squat” on his life. It is clear from these

first lines that the “toad” is not a physical animal, instead it is used as a [metaphor](#) to represent the pressures of the world and how work and obligations are always there.

He goes on to ask a second question. Larkin’s speaker has an idea that should be able to use his wit,

[...] with as a pitchfork
And drive the brute off?

This makes clear the frustration he feels, as if there is a possibility that his world could change but he doesn’t quite know how to achieve it.

In the second stanza Larkin’s speaker describes the six days of the week that the “toad,” or work, plagues him. It “soils” his life, his thoughts, and his emotions with a “sickening poison.” His work, which is never defined, is bringing him no great benefits. It only allows him to “pay...a few bills” and in return he is poisoned by it. The cost and benefits are completely out of proportion.

In the third stanza he speculates on what it would be like to live as some others do, “on their wits.” The following lines insert a number of the examples of people that Larkin sees as living off their “wits” rather than depending on poisonous work. He includes “Lecturers” who use their brains and passions to make money. Then there are “Lispers” or people who have lisps. He feels as if they need to work even harder than those without lisps to secure work.

He goes on to refer to “losels,” or worthless people, who have no redeemable character traits. There are also “loblolly-men” and louts.” There are clowns and drunken people. Just as in the first two lines, he looks to this group as examples of those who worse than him, but still managed get by without the weight of the poisonous toad. The use of alliteration in these lines unites the different types of people, it connects them through sound and the visual on the page.

Larkin’s speaker presents a few additional examples of people who do not worry about maintaining constant work in their lives. There are many people, he thinks who,

[...] live up lanes
With fire in a bucket.

From the speaker's perspective these people, although they are without homes or dependable sources of income, and therefore food, are happy. They seem to the speaker to "like" living around fires and eating "windfalls" or fruit that is knocked from trees and tins of "sardines" they find.

The people who live up lanes, as mentioned in the fourth stanza, have "nippers." This is a reference to children. These children are as poor as their family members. They run around without shoes.

He mentions the "unspeakable" or indescribable" wives of these poor men and how thin they are. Through a [simile](#) he compares them to "whippets" or a very small, thin breed of dog. Though everyone seems to be starving, from Larkin's perspective, "No one actually starves." The speaker's [tone](#) is quite interesting in these lines and those which preceded them. It is easy to see how these opinions come from the perspective of one who has never actually known real poverty.

In the sixth stanza the speaker returns to his own personal feelings. He wishes that he possessed the courage to throw off the toad and shout out to the government to,
[...] Stuff your pension!

Larkin's speaker wants to rid himself of his own dependence on government entities and subsidies. If he was able to assert his own bravery then he'd find a new freedom. That being said, he knows there is no chance of him actually taking the plunge. His liberation from monetary concerns is a pipe-dream he knows he won't ever achieve.

In the seventh stanza the speaker goes into the true nature of his problem. There is the first toad that rests on his body, representing work. There is also,
[...] something sufficiently toad-like [that]

Squats in [him] too;

This speaks to his inability to move beyond the societal rules and purposefully break away from the capitalist system of the day. He depicts the toad as being "heavy as hard luck" and "cold as snow."

The force inside him is so influential that it keeps him from getting what he wanted. The toads, especially in combination, won't allow him to achieve "The fame" or women or money he wants all at one time. There is nothing the speaker can do. He can't "blarney" or charm his way out of being a human being, destined to struggle through life.

In the final stanza the speaker addresses the general issue that plagues his life, the two toads. He states that the one toad within him, that forces him to consider his obligations, does not fuel the exterior toad. But the fact that they are existing together at the same time makes life all the more difficult.