

A Summary of Philip Larkin's The Toad

The toad in Philip Larkin's "Toads" is a central metaphor by itself for a vocation that is forced. Especially, one that you have no attitude and aptitude for. The toad has been utilized as the apt metaphor as it is sluggish and ugly. It squats incorrigibly on areas that it is not supposed to, and is a pertinent emblem for stagnation. Here it stands for the stagnation of life, and stagnation of one's rational and intellectual capabilities as it is sacrificed for the 'labour' of work..

The poet had an aptitude for writing that forms his area of expertise. The 'wit' here is a larger metaphor for people preferring money over their aptitude/area of interest. People do not resort to the vocation that they love for the want of more money, and therefore give in to the rat race...something that is represented by the great American Dream. The position of 'squatting' is also an incorrigible/difficult one. The speaker strives to use his wit as a pitchfork and drive it away.

A week has only seven days, six of which the Toad soils. No adequate time is left for recreation. Just for the reason that that one has to toil to pay his bills, and that is totally out of proportion. The prospects of such work works like a "sickening poison", one that grows on one's system.

The poet goes on to list the many people who live on their wits. The first is the Lecturer. Lispers are here those 'affecting the air of sophisticated culture', not someone suffering from a speech impediment. These people thrive in the high strata by means of their ability of affectation. A 'losel' denotes a "worthless person"; and a lout a "clumsy, stupid fellow." The speaker may signify that these may function as jokers/clowns by means of their wit. 'Wit' is also an alternative term to comedy. "Loblolly-man" from loblolly (meaning 'a sloppy liquid') may imply the act of appeasing someone (slang: soaping). This also requires a considerable talent in the art

of talking. And yet, these people do not end up as paupers. He utilizes alliteration to emphasize this fact.

Also, people who seem to live on a basic minimum, seem to enjoy it, for they are not forced to work in spite of themselves. 'Nippers' is a kind of British colloquialism for 'young boys'.

Lots of folk live up lanes
With fires in a bucket, Eat windfalls and tinned sardines-
They seem to like it. Their nippers have got bare feet,
Their unspeakable wives Are skinny as whippets
– and yet No one actually starves. The speaker wishes that he could tell his boss to go stuff his pension. But the idea of future dreams builds his vision, and obstructs his way. However, the irony of the situation is that one slogs to spend quality time with his loved ones; and in the rat-race does not get time at all to spend with his loved ones. The best years of his life are whiled away working overtime. The 'hunkers' weigh him down. They are as cold as snow, and therefore benumbing. The word 'hunker' has the following meanings:

- 1) To squat close to the ground; crouch. Usually used with down: hunkered down to avoid the icy wind.
- 2) To take shelter, settle in, or hide out. Usually used with down: hunkered down in the cabin during the blizzard.
- 3) To hold stubbornly to a position.(Source:answers.com)

Therefore, it may allude to all of these meanings: crouch to avoid harsh financial realities, find refuge in the same, and obstinately stick to this ground. The 'road less traveled' will never let him get hold of the girl, money and fame at a single setting. Both these aspects do not necessarily complement or embody(bodies) each other always. But when work and aptitude co-exist, it is not difficult but almost impossible to lose the both, in spite of yourself because you

love it. As Robert Frost once said:” ‘My goal in life is to unite my avocation with *my vocation*,/As my two eyes make one in sight.”

To understand Part V it helps to know about the double meaning of ‘Word’. ‘Word’ can refer both to the Bible (as the word of God) and to Christ himself as God (with a capital, i.e. ‘the Word’). So ‘the Word’ can be used to refer to Christ, who was both the son of God and God himself in human form. This is what St John means when he opens his Gospel: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’ That is, ‘the Word’ is both the manifestation of God (Jesus, who was God come down in human form walking amongst the world) and the revelation of God (the Bible, the revealed truth of God).

In other words (as it were), the modern world no longer hears God, or heeds his ‘word’ (that is, Biblical scripture). Will the ‘veiled sister’ (often analysed as a version of the Virgin Mary) pray for those who ‘oppose’ God, who oppose ‘the Word’, those who walk in darkness? The repeated line ‘O my people, what have I done unto thee’, is Biblical, from Micah 6:3: God addresses these words to those who have forgotten him and fallen into idolatry, or worship of worldly things, instead of worshipping him.

Part VI begins by echoing the opening words to the first section, but with one key difference: ‘because’ is now replaced by ‘although’. Although the speaker does not hope to turn to the world (now he has found his faith in God, he doesn’t need to), he can nevertheless enjoy the world around him again (as he couldn’t at the opening of the poem, because he had lost his faith). We then get another window-image (cf. Part III): this window reveals the beauty of the world to him.