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“Toads” — 仕事に関する詩 —

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“Toads” – Poems about Work –

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この論文はホイットマンから現代までの詩人達が、仕事に関する英文で書かれた欧米の詩を調査するものである。骨の折れる、服従を強いられる仕事、仕事につく為の教育準備、求職活動、失業、面接、労働者の不満、雇用者達、仕事からの逃避、について書かれた詩を取り上げ、テーマを探究する。この論文は、運命の至福とは成すべき事と成したい事が一致する仕事、すなわち、心身共に自分の好きなことを追求するという喜びの創造性、を見い出す事を示唆するものである。

“Twenty years of schoolin’, and they put you on the day shift” “Subterranean Homesick Blues,” Bob Dylan

“I was looking for a job, and I found a job, and heaven knows I’m miserable now” “Heaven Knows I’m Miserable Now,” The Smiths

“Welcome to the working week, I know it’s gonna thrill ya, I hope it don’t kill ya” “Welcome to the Working Week,” Elvis Costello and the Attractions

“Work is whatever a body is obliged to do...Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do,” Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Mark Twain*

Work can be either a curse or blessing, and poets have spoken of both aspects. They love their own work, despite its difficulty, because they can work independently, alone, in solitude, which is the bliss of freedom; but they are united in their opposition to the enforced conformity and drudgery of the work that most people have to do to earn their daily bread. Lucky is the person who can find satisfaction in his or her work, for most people wish they were doing something else more satisfying. This paper intends to look at the subject of work as treated in poetry: in particular, what people think of

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work, and the effects of working on the workers.

No doubt Biblical attitudes have influenced the Western outlook on work. In the beginning work is a curse, dealt out by God to our ancestors Adam and Eve for their transgressions: “Accursed be the soil because of you! Painfully will you get your food from it as long as you live. It will yield you brambles and thistles, as you eat the produce of the land. By the sweat of your face will you eat your food, until you return to the ground, as you were taken from it,” Genesis 3: 17-19, *The New Jerusalem Bible* (1985). But work is also seen as a duty to fulfill and to discharge conscientiously: “Whatever work you find to do, do it with all your might,” Ecclesiastes 9: 10. It is this spirit--working with a will--which Whitman (1973) celebrates in “I Hear America Singing”:

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day--at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with their open mouths their strong melodious songs.

We notice immediately the debt Whitman's style in this poem owes to Hebrew poetry (as translated in the King James version of the Bible): the cadence of the long-flowing lines, their stately rhythm, which help to convey the rhythms of work expressed in the poem and suggest the dignity of work and the workpeople themselves. But in some ways the poem seems a far cry from life as it is lived today in the West by many workers, what with manual labor being taken over by machines and women working outside the home because the husband's income isn't enough to provide for their children's upbringing and education. Whitman's poem was first published in 1860; a few years later, in 1899, Edwin Markham published his poem “The Man With the Hoe” (Williams, 1959), prefacing it with Genesis 1:27, from the King James Version: “God made man in His own image/ In the image of God He made him.” Markham's poem offers a stark contrast to the satisfaction in work expressed by

“Toads” — 仕事に関する詩 —

Whitman:

Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans
Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,
The emptiness of ages in his face,
And on his back the burden of the world.
Who made him dead to rapture and despair,
A thing that grieves not and that never hopes,
Stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox?
Who loosened and let down this brutal jaw?
Whose was the hand that slanted back this brow?
Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?

Is this the Thing the Lord God made and gave
To have dominion over sea and land;
To trace the stars and search the heavens for power;
To feel the passion of Eternity?
Is this the dream He dreamed who shaped the suns
And markt their ways upon the ancient deep?
Down all the caverns of Hell to their last gulf
There is no shape more terrible than this--
More tongued with censure of the world's blind greed--
More filled with signs and portents for the soul--
More packt with danger to the universe.

What gulfs between him and the seraphim!
Slave of the wheel of labor, what to him
Are Plato and the swing of Pleiades?
What the long reaches of the peaks of song,
The rift of dawn, the reddening of the rose?
Through this dread shape the suffering ages look;
Time's tragedy is in that aching stoop;
Through this dread shape humanity betrayed,
Plundered, profaned and disinherited;

Cries protest to the Powers that made the world,
A protest that is also prophecy.

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,
Is this the handiwork you give to God,
This monstrous thing distorted and soul-quencht?
How will you ever straighten up this shape;
Touch it again with immortality;
Give back the upward looking and the light;
Rebuild in it the music and the dream;
Make right the immemorial infamies,
Perfidious wrongs, immedicable woes?

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,
How will the future reckon with this Man?
How answer the brute question in that hour
When whirlwinds or rebellion shake all shores?
How will it be with kingdoms and with kings--
With those who shaped him to the thing he is--
When this dumb Terror shall rise to judge the world,
After the silence of the centuries?

Markham's poem is written in blank verse and has a stately cadence of its own. The poem builds quietly from a picture of the oppressed worker bowed by his labor into an angry warning about the future to the overseers who control the worker and are responsible for his fate. The poem foresees the turmoil and strife of the 20th century to come as workers rise against their masters, sometimes violently, to claim their rights. It seems a far more accurate picture of workers and their plight than Whitman's, beautiful as the latter is, and this seems to have been realized from the very outset of its publication, as within a week of its having been printed in the *San Francisco Examiner* "it had been reprinted by newspapers across the country and became the most popular poem in the United States that year" (Spaulding, 1999).

Markham doesn't accuse God of injustice; he accuses the powerful who sit in judgment over working people. Yet his questions "Who loosened and let down this brutal jaw? / Whose was the hand that slanted back this brow? / Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?" seem to be an ironic

echo of Blake's reverential inquiries into the making of “The Tiger” : “What immortal hand or eye / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?...What the hammer? what the chain? In what furnace was thy brain?...Did he who made the Lamb make thee?” Blake asks how the same God that made the gentle lamb could have made the ferocious tiger, while Markham asks how the noble worker God made to have dominion over the earth could have been made into such a beast of burden by his fellowmen. And so it continues today, with most of the world's peoples subjugated and brutalized by others of their kind, and constant revolutions by the oppressed who, having once succeeded in getting to the top themselves, begin their own oppressions of the underclass. Stevie Smith (Smith, 1985) pays homage to one of the oppressed of our own time in her poem “Alfred the Great” :

Honour and magnify this man of men
Who keeps a wife and seven children on 2 10
Paid weekly in an envelope
And yet he never has abandoned hope.

Perhaps if Alfred and his wife had practiced birth control things would have been a little easier for them.

A key to escaping the cycle of oppression is education, which can be either a peaceful means of getting to the top or a means of escaping less desirable work for work more fulfilling which offers more perks. Yet even education does not always help one to escape the grind of daily work, and even jobs which are initially perceived to be prestigious can later be found to be just as demeaning, exhausting and empty of meaning as the work one is escaping. Thus Lawrence R. Sipe (Sipe, 2000) decries

...the alarming strong move toward a conception of school, and of literacy, as having to do *solely* with preparation for success in the workplace. For example, a New Jersey federally supported educational initiative, the School-to-Work model, envisions schools in which *everything* in the curriculum (including literature) is directed toward the world of work. One of the examples given is that a discussion of Dickens' A Christmas Carol “would lead to a discussion in ‘Communicating with supervisors’” and that a “reading of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* would be used to discuss ‘Communicating with clients and customers’ ” ...Reducing literature to a solely entrepreneurial perspective totally ignores its life-informing and life-transforming power for children, and its ability to “defamiliarize life,” so as to help us imagine the possibilities of social change and a more just social order.

“Twenty years of schooling and they put you on the dayshift” : not much has changed since Bob Dylan wrote that line.

Once having graduated, of course, one embarks upon the demeaning process of finding work. The Silhouettes (Goldstein, ed., 1969) perfectly capture the drag of having to hustle for a job in their 1957

hit “Get a Job” :

Every mornin' about this time
She gets me out of my bed
A-cryin' “Get a job.”
After breakfast, every day,
She throws the want ads right my way,
And never fails to say:
“Get a job” ...
And when I get the paper,
I read it through and through
And my girl never fails to say
If there is any work for me,
And when I get back to the house
I hear the woman's mouth
Preachin' and a-cryin'
Tells me that I'm lyin'
'Bout a job
That I never could find.

This song reflects the situation of many men who, having been fired or laid off due to restructuring, pretend to their families that they still have some place to go to work each day while desperately searching for something new, a situation which turns “work” into just another four-letter word. The Kinks, a British pop group, also sing about the plight of unemployment, the unemployment of the working class in Britain, in their song “Dead End Street” (The Kinks, 1966/1972):

...Out of work and got no money...
What are we living for?
Two-room apartment on the second floor,
No money comin' in,
The rent collector's knockin' and tryin' to get in.
We are strictly second-class, we don't understand
Why we should be in Dead End Street,
People are livin' in Dead End Street,
We're gonna die in Dead End Street...
No chance to emigrate,

“Toads” — 仕事に関する詩 —

I'm deep in debt and now it's much too late,

We folk want to work so hard, we can't get the chance...

The British working-class who actually have jobs are hardly better off in the songs Ray Davies, lead singer of the Kinks, has written about them. A good example is “Shangri-la” (the title alluding to the Tibetan paradise on earth described in James Hilton's novel), which is biting sarcasm and compassion at once:

Now that you've found your paradise,

This is your kingdom to command.

You can go outside and polish your car

Or sit by the fire in your Shangri-la.

Here's your reward for working so hard:

Gone are the lavatories in the back yard.

Gone are the days when you dreamed of that car,

You just want to sit in your Shangri-la.

Put on your slippers and sit by the fire,

You've reached your top and you just can't get any higher,

You're in your place and you know where you are,

You're in your Shangri-la.

Sit back in your old rocking chair,

You need not worry, you need not care,

You can't go anywhere...

The little man who gets the train

Has got a mortgage hanging over his head,

But he's too scared to complain,

'Cause he's conditioned that way.

Time goes by and he pays off his debts,

Got a TV set and a radio,

For seven shillings a week...

And all the houses in the street have got a name

'Cause all the houses in the street, they look the same,

Same chimney-pot, same little car, same window-pane.

The neighbours call and say the things that you should know,
They say their lines, they drink their tea and then they go,
They tell your business in another Shangri-la.
The gas bill and the water rates, the papers on the door,
Too scared to think about how insecure you are,
Life ain't so happy in your little Shangri-la.

The working-class man the Kinks sing about in this song has been conditioned by the class system to work hard for a designated place in society which is exactly the same as that of everyone else in his social class (the only thing that distinguishes his house from others on his street is that each house on the street has a different name). The neighbours are officious, making sure that he toes the line and does what is expected of him, and reveal his secrets to other neighbours. He's afraid that he will lose his job, his position in society, his worldly goods (which he buys on the instalment plan) if he complains about the system that regulates his life, while at the same time he is afraid to face his fear and the knowledge such fear would bring about how empty his life is. His life is a constant struggle to pay his bills and he is constantly threatened by notices on the door which tell him what will happen if he doesn't pay his bills on time. The Kinks first sing directly to the working man in this song, then sing about him to us, the listeners, and then directly to him again, emphasizing, I think, the man's connection to us: we are him, he is us.

John Lennon followed up on Ray Davies' song with his own, equally scathing song, “Working Class Hero” (Lennon, 1970):

...There's room at the top, they are telling you still,
But first you must learn how to smile as you kill
If you want to be like the folks on the hill.
Oh, a working-class hero is something to be.

Both Davies' “Shangri-la (“You've reached your top”) and Lennon's song allude to the John Braine 1957 novel (which was later turned into a film), *Room at the Top*, one of the first and most successful novels of the “angry young men” in Britain who ruthlessly tried to climb their way out of the working class into a higher one. Anger at the class system, and the lack of social mobility because of it, later fueled more angry pop songs, in the 1970s, by such British punk/ new wave groups as the Sex Pistols, the Jam and the Clash.

Then there is the job interview: an interview for a job which one desperately needs but doesn't really want. William Matthews (Matthews, 1998) delineates this predicament in his horribly funny

“Toads” — 仕事に関する詩 —

poem “Job Interview,” which he prefaces with a couplet from Byron:

Think you, if Laura had been Petrarch's wife,
He would have written sonnets all his life?

--*Don Juan*, III, 63-4

“Where do you see yourself five years from now?”
the eldest male member (or is “male member”
a redundancy?) of the committee
asked me. Not here, I thought. A good thing I

speaking fluent Fog. I craved that job like some
unappeasable, taunting woman.
What did Byron's friend Hobhouse say after
the wedding? “I felt as if I had buried

a friend.” Each day I had that job I felt
the slack leash at my throat and thought what was
its other trick. Better to scorn the job than ask
what I had ever seen in it or think

what pious muck I'd ladled over
the committee. If they believed me, they
deserved me. As luck would have it, the job
lasted me almost but not quite five years.

The preface from Byron, of course, ties in with the metaphor of the job sought as “some unappeasable, taunting woman” whom one wants only until the conquest is achieved: then one finds that what had seemed so desirable is really not desirable at all. Just as Hobhouse felt Byron's marriage was a big mistake, the speaker of “Job Interview” realizes, after getting the job, what a mistake it has been to get it. Yet even as he undergoes the interview he realizes that he'll hate the job. He wants the job because he needs it, but when a better job comes along he'll drop the old one immediately, which is why he doesn't see himself at the same job five years in the future. Matthews gets a lot of mileage out of words: “male member” is a polite term for “schmuck,” which is undoubtedly what the speaker

thinks each committee member is. Furthermore, the word “redundancy” not only indicates that the committee members are all male (there are no females in positions of power at this particular institution), but also recalls the British meaning of redundancy: the loss of a job due to a company’s reorganization or restructuring. Fortunately (?), the speaker passes the interview, due to his speaking “fluent Fog”: he has mastered the art of obfuscation, of being articulate and eloquent enough to deceive. As Oliver Goldsmith said, “The true use of speech is not so much to express our wants as to conceal them.” Yet the speaker despises himself for his deception as well as the committee members for being duped, although he doesn’t want to face up to his self-hatred: “Better to scorn the job than ask / what I had ever seen in it or think/ what pious muck I’d ladled over the committee” --muck for the schmucks. “If they believed me, they/ deserved me.” And as he works each day he knows he is the company’s dog with a leash around his neck that is slack at present but which can be pulled taut to strangle him at any time. “As luck would have it” --bad luck? good luck? The implication is that it is more bad than good-- “the job / lasted me almost but not quite five years.” In the end, he discards the job before it discards him: a slim victory.

Alas, many people are not so lucky as to be able to quit a job once they have it. Many of them have families to support. They may realize the immensity of the burden before they undertake it, as does the speaker of C. Day Lewis’ grim parody of Christopher Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” (Stallworthy, ed., 1978):

Come, live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
Of peace and plenty, bed and board,
That chance employment may afford.

Or they may realize it after they have undertaken it, as with the speaker of Carl Sandburg’s “Mag” (Sandburg, 1970):

I wish the kids had never come
And rent and coal and clothes to pay for
And a grocery man calling for cash,
Every day cash for beans and prunes.
I wish to God I never saw you, Mag,
I wish to God the kids had never come.

They may realize it far too late, as the speaker of Gary Snyder’s “Hay for the Horses” does (Hall, ed., 1972):

He had driven half the night

“Toads” — 仕事に関する詩 —

From far down San Joaquin
Through Mariposa, up the
Dangerous mountain roads,
And pulled in at eight a.m.
With his big truckload of hay
 behind the barn.
With winch and ropes and hooks
We stacked the bales up clean
To splintery redwood rafters
High in the dark, flecks of alfalfa
Whirling through shingle-cracks of light,
Itch of haydust in the
 sweaty shirt and shoes.
At lunchtime under Black oak
Out in the hot corral,
--The old mare nosing lunchpails,
Grasshoppers crackling in the weeds--
'I'm sixty-eight,' he said,
'I first bucked hay when I was seventeen.
I thought, that day I started,
I sure would hate to do this all my life.
And dammit, that's just what
I've gone and done.'

Many workers keep their discontent about their work to themselves, like the worker in Matthews' poem, for fear of incurring the wrath of their employers. Scott Adams, the Bard of employee discontent, plays on this theme to perfection in his very funny *Dilbert* comic strip. In a recent segment, Dilbert (Adams, 2000), the cynical, perpetually disgruntled employee, confronts his boss, a humorless supervisor with two tufts of black hair standing on his head like the horns of a devil, in a performance review. The supervisor accuses Dilbert: "You didn't show any initiative this year." Dilbert retorts, "That's your fault for creating an atmosphere of fear and distrust. You, you, you." After Dilbert has left the supervisor's office, the supervisor writes on a notepad: "Note to self: Increase fear."

Auden dedicates a memorial to a "model" worker who never complained in "The Unknown Citizen" (Auden, 1976):

“Toads” — 仕事に関する詩 —

(To JS/07/M/378

This Marble Monument

Is Erected by the State)

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One against whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint.
For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.
Except for the War till the day he retired
He worked in a factory and never got fired,
But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.
Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,
For his Union reports that he paid his dues.
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)
And our Social Psychology workers found
That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.
The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day
And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way.
Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,
And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.
Both Producers Research and High-Grade Living declare
He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Instalment Plan
And had everything necessary to the Modern Man.
A phonograph, a radio, a car and a frigidaire.
Our researchers into Public Opinion are content
That he held the proper opinions for the time of year;
When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war, he went.
He was married and added five children to the population,
Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation,
And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.
Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

Throughout the poem end rhyme is used, yet the number of lines that rhyme with each other is con-

stantly changing. As the poem is not broken up into stanzas, its rhyme scheme may be characterized as follows: ababacc; deeffd; gghh; ijji; klk; ll; and mm (the last two lines being a couplet summing up the poem). One of the effects of this rhyme scheme is to establish a regular rhyme pattern and then suddenly change it for another one. It is as if the powerful of this world are saying, See, we are in control, we will regulate your lives and you are at our mercy; and just when you have been lulled we will surprise you; you can't count on regularity and must always be on your guard. Of course, creating irregularity in the midst of regularity is also a way for the controllers themselves to guard against those who, in apprehending the order of things, wish to take advantage of it in order to subvert the system.

As with all poetry, much of the meaning of this poem lies more in what is unsaid than what is said. The title of the poem is an allusion to monuments to unknown soldiers: those soldiers who have died for their countries but whose identities remain, regrettably, unknown to those they saved. But in this poem there is nothing regrettable to the State about its unknown citizens. The State doesn't care how its citizens feel about it insofar as those citizens are pliant and obedient. And if those citizens are saints in “the modern sense of an old-fashioned word,” what does that tell us about the original meaning of the word “saints” and how its meaning has been subverted? We are left to read between the lines, but when we do are in no doubt of what Auden means in his condemnation of the repressiveness of totalitarian systems.

The ostensibly model citizen seems to have been compliant in every way the State demanded: he wasn't a scab, harbored no nonconformist views (as far as the State knew), paid his union dues (with the implication that he ultimately paid dues of a heavier kind), responded properly to advertisements by buying State-approved products, and so on. But there are suggestions of veiled discontent in the poem: he “liked a drink,” for example. Did he drink solely out of social conviviality or did he partly drink to assuage his unhappiness? Was his stay in the hospital connected at all with his mental state, and what does it mean to say that he was “cured” of his unspecified malady? Did his private opinions differ from those he publicly espoused? Does the fact that he never interfered with his teachers' brainwashing indicate that he was content with their methods, or merely resigned to them? The controllers' rhetorical questioning of themselves (unless there is only one controller using the imperial “We”) as to whether the unknown citizen was really free or happy is not serious, since the questions are dismissed out of hand as soon as they're raised. The controllers are smug in their certainty that they would have been able to detect any discontent or malfeasance immediately and nipped it in the bud.

If anyone has captured in a poem the plight of most workers--workers who would like to find an alternative to working, or at least the kind of work they are employed in, but who just don't see a way

“Toads” — 仕事に関する詩 —

out--it is Philip Larkin, in the brilliant “Toads” (Larkin, 1988):

Why should I let the toad work

Squat on my life?

Can't I use my wit as a pitchfork

And drive the brute off?

Six days of the week it soils

With its sickening poison--

Just for paying a few bills!

That's out of proportion.

Lots of folk live on their wits:

Lecturers, lispers,

Losels, loblolly-men, louts--

They don't end as paupers;

Lots of folks 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*.

Ah, were I courageous enough

To shout *Stuff your pension!*

But I know, all too well, that's the stuff

That dreams are made on:

For something sufficiently toad-like

Squats in me, too;

Its hunkers are heavy as hard luck,

And cold as snow,

And will never allow me to blarney
My way to getting
The fame and the girl and the money
All at one sitting.

I don't say, one bodies the other
One's spiritual truth;
But I dare say it's hard to lose either,
When you have both.

Larkin wonderfully restyles the sound of everyday conversation with his approximate end rhymes (abab) and irregular meter. The image of work as a poisonous toad beneath which one is held captive encapsulates perfectly the loathing which many workers feel for their work and the predicament in which they find themselves. The metaphor of wit as a pitchfork captures both the sharpness of wit and its prosaicness in the service of everyday, often uncongenial, tasks. One can also relish the pleasure Larkin takes in alliteration: the “s” of six, soils, sickening, the “p” of poison, paying, proportion, the “l” of losels, loblolly, louts, and so on.

Larkin alludes to Shakespeare when he asserts that the pension one works for is “the stuff / That dreams are made on” (the original is “We are such stuff/ As dreams are made on, and our little life/ Is rounded with a sleep,” the closing lines of *The Tempest*). Many workers, like Larkin's speaker, like Johnny Paycheck, wish they could say, “Take this job and shove it,” but the need for security, fear of the future, prevent them from doing so. For the toad of the poem is not only the oppression of work but the cowed nature of the worker himself, his feeling of being powerless to change his fate combined with the conviction that he is not brilliant or smooth enough to fast-talk his way into getting the worldly success he wants. In the end, says the speaker, it's not that the oppression of work necessarily makes you into the person you are, but that the oppression of work plus self-doubt make it difficult, if not impossible, to rid yourself of either.

Edward Arlington Robinson reminds us in “Richard Corey” that, if workers are oppressed, the higher-ups may not be any happier (Williams, 1959). A factory-worker narrates the poem, telling us how universally-admired and envied the factory owner, Richard Corey, was:

...And he was rich--yes, richer than a king,
And admirably schooled in every grace:

In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Corey, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

Robinson's elegant use of iambic pentameter and an abab rhyme scheme contributes to the calm flow of the poem which leads us to an ending as sudden and dramatic as a newspaper headline. Yet perhaps familiarity-- “Richard Corey” is a very famous poem--has robbed us of some of the power of the poem as originally read by its first readers. It has become too easy to give a pat response to the poem: rich people are as unhappy as we working people are, and if we realized that we'd be content with our lot and pity them. But I don't think Robinson intended his poem to be read so easily. Workers are oppressed, so are the captains of industry. Life is difficult and complex for all, and happiness is elusive. I think the poem is a reflection on the subjective nature of happiness and human desire and the difficulty of finding what will actually lead one to fulfillment and a sense of well-being.

Larkin later offered a revision to “Toads,” “Toads Revisited” (Larkin, 1988), in which the speaker sees work as a comfort of sorts. Rather than be one of the shirkers who are “dodging the toad work / By being stupid or weak,” he sees work as being something which offers relief from self-flagellation and obsession with mortality: “Give me your arm, old toad,” he says, “Help me down Cemetery Road.” Rather cold comfort, it seems, but comfort nonetheless.

Some people do escape work altogether, unable to face the daily pressures and responsibility of work, although whether that makes them stupider or weaker than those who stay is debatable. They drop out of society and become, willingly or not, outcasts. Charles Bukowski is the patron saint of outcasts who chuck their jobs for the vagaries of the road, and he has perfectly described (Bukowski, Lamantia and Norse, 1969) the horrible bosses that drive one out the door:

...the bosses, yellow men
with bad breath and big feet, men
who look like frogs, hyenas, men who walk
as if melody had never been invented, men
who think it is intelligent to hire and fire and
profit, men with expensive wives they possess
like 60 acres of ground to be drilled

or shown-off or to be walled away from
the incompetent, men who'd kill you
because they're crazy and justify it because
it's the law, men who stand in front of
windows 30 feet wide and see nothing,
men with luxury yachts who can sail around
the world and yet never get out of their vest
pockets, men like snails, men like eels, men
like slugs, and not as good...

getting your last paycheck
at a harbor, at a factory, at a hospital, at an
aircraft plant, at a penny arcade, at a
barbershop, at a job you didn't want
anyway.
income tax, sickness, servility, broken
arms, broken heads--all the stuffing
come out like an old pillow.

Those who are left behind will never realize, says Bukowski's alter ego, Henry Chinaski, how precious the escape from work is (Bukowski, 1987): "...as my hands drop a last desperate pen in some cheap room they will find me there and never know my name, nor the treasure of my escape."

Charles Causley celebrates another such escapee in "Riley" (Causley, 2000), a poem about a hermit:

...He paid no rates, he paid no taxes,
His lamp was the moon hung in the tree.
Though many an ache and pain had Riley
He envied neither you nor me...

What strange secret had old Riley?
Where did he come from? Where did he go?
Why was his heart as light as summer?
Never know now, said the jay. Never know.

The use of loose iambic tetrameter and the simple vocabulary contribute to the lilting feel of this poem, its light-heartedness. Riley as a person is not only unknowable because he keeps to himself so

that no-one knows very much about him, but also because all the circumstances that lead people to choose different ways of living are ultimately unknowable. One may envy Riley's freedom from work and the tyranny of employers, but how many workers really want to live the life of a hermit? Most people end up with work which is a compromise between the life they'd like to live and the one they have to live. Many people trade the hours they work for the freedom it gives them to temporarily escape on holidays to places they dream of in their working hours. A good example of this is Harold Norse's poem “Piccolo Paradise” (Bukowski, et. al.), in which the speaker celebrates his and his lover's temporary escape to Italy:

...we've made up
for months
of loneliness
hard work
nastiness
of 'superiors'...
*e cosi...*that's
how it goes
but at least
we're ahead of the game
we've stolen a march
on the dead the herd

if the return to grayness
sharp tempered weapons
of those who force life
into corners
is more than we can bear
remember this
the wine
the ladder
of stars that climb
vesuvius outside
my window
the waves

banging into smooth
tufa caves
& the opera
as we lay together
remember

The meandering shape of the lines suggests the shape of Italy itself on a map, and the reflections, one by one, which the speaker relates to his lover. He speaks of the kind of memories most of wish to have, to be able to look back on fondly when, if everything goes right, we are finally able to retire and spend our last days doing what we really want to do.

Why, though, does he speak of “my window” when the lovers shared it, as they shared their room? It is perhaps because the “window” refers not only to the literal window of the room, but to the window of poetry with which he recreates their mutual holiday bliss in a poem which is proudly his even as he dedicates it to her.

Work, as Twain said, is what we are obliged to do, while play--the happy creativity of mind and body united in a favorite pursuit--consists of whatever we are not obliged to do (but want to do). If we are lucky and play our cards right, we realize the happiest of fates: work that combines what we have to do with what we want to do. And, in that case, the toad that squats on our lives is magically transformed into the frog prince with whom we want to spend the rest of our days.

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