**Afternoons – Philip Larkin**

Summer is fading:  
The leaves fall in ones and twos  
From trees bordering  
The new recreation ground.  
In the hollows of afternoons  
Young mothers assemble  
At swing and sandpit  
Setting free their children.

Behind them, at intervals,  
Stand husbands in skilled trades,  
An estateful of washing,  
And the albums, lettered  
Our Wedding, lying  
Near the television:  
Before them, the wind  
Is ruining their courting-places

That are still courting-places  
(But the lovers are all in school),  
And their children, so intent on  
Finding more unripe acorns,  
Expect to be taken home.  
Their beauty has thickened.  
Something is pushing them  
To the side of their own lives.

**Analysis**

This poem connects the idea of seasons with the passage of time. “Summer is fading” immediately evokes a sense of loss in the emotive verb “fading”. Even the day is in its decline in the “afternoon” and the plural on the title gives a sense that the scene painted in the poem applies to many days, and to life in general.

The poem focuses on “young mothers”. Though these women are in fairly well off positions, with “husbands in skilled trades”, higher than the old middle-class women in ‘[Faith Healing](http://www.allinfo.org.uk/levelup/faith.htm)’, their lives are like the “hollows of afternoons”: there is a sense of the emptiness in domestic life, in which they now nothing but “an estateful of washing”. That they are “Setting free their children” gives a sense of their own entrapment, and desire to break away.

The seasons mark how time changes their lives. “The wind / Is ruining their courting places” now, as autumn and winter approach, and the juxtoposition of “And the albums lettered, / Our Wedding, lying / Near the television”, shows that their marriages and love have now, somehow, been pushed aside and reduced, casually placed beside the “jabbering set” (‘[Mr Bleaney](http://www.allinfo.org.uk/levelup/mrb.htm)’) to never be viewed.

Despite still being “young”, their lives have been superseded, for those places are “still courting places / (But the lovers are all in school)”. Now they have entered into the snare of domesticity, children have replaced their place. Instead, their “children, so intent on / Finding unripe acorns” (a hint that though they are young now, they will eventually grow into the same cycle) “expect to be taken home”. The verb “expect” commands the women; their children and the thousand other domestic necessities trap them. “Their beauty has thickened” is a wonderful metaphor for captures the signs of age, the beauty of youth filling out…

The final two lines sum up the rest of the sad, sympathetic poem: “Something is pushing them / To the side of their own lives”. They have now become spectators in life (shown in their “assemble” to*watch* the children in the first stanza), and are powerless to prevent the unknown and threatening “something”, domesticity.

“Afternoons” by Philip Larkin explores the subject of freedom. In the poem, Larkin writes about the lack of freedom people have once they are married. Through Larkin’s use of tone, word choice and rhythm, he engages my interest in the idea of freedom.  
  
The title “Afternoons” at first suggests that the poem is about the middle of the day. However, it actually is a symbol of the middle of life where things are winding down and the excitement of married life has passed. This impression is continued in the first line of the poem,   
“Summer is fading”  
Larkin is also comparing life to a year where the middle of life is autumn when the brightness of the summer has passed.  
The title and the first line of the poem imply that once you get older and are married, the exciting part of life has passed and you slip in an everyday routine.  
The idea that everyone is in a routine continues as the first stanza carries on. Words such as “assemble” highlight the routine and that it is planned showing that the freedom that once existed has been replaced by a schedule that is strictly kept to.  
The alliteration in “s” reinforces the rigidity of their day,  
“swing and sandpit setting free”  
The rhythm of the phrase is very rigid which emphasises how the daily routine is followed step by step.  
In this stanza, Larkin engages me in the subject of freedom successfully as he strongly suggests that freedom disappears once people reach married life. The word choice and rhythm in the stanza convey that once people are married there is a pattern to their life that is strictly kept to.  
In the second stanza, Larkin implies that freedom to be individual is lost once you enter married life,  
“ at intervals stand husbands in skilled trades”