

Philip larkin "days"

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Philip Larkin " Days" " Days" by Philip Larkin is a ten line poem that is deceptive in its simplicity. This article considers Larkin's poetic method in this remarkable short poem. Philip Larkin (1922-1985) wrote the poem " Days" in 1953. The poem was published in Larkin's highly successful collection of poems entitled, *The Whitsun Weddings*, in 1964. " Days" is a curious poem. At first reading, it appears to be a simple, almost child-like dialogue. However, on second glance, the poem raises several disturbing questions as Larkin returns to his constant theme of mortality and the pointless brevity of life.

The Structure of " Days" The poem " Days" consists of two short stanzas. The first stanza is six lines long and asks two separate questions. " What are days for?" and " Where can we live but days?" In between the two questions is a four line answer to the first question. There is however no indication as to who is asking, or answering, these questions. Stanza two is shorter, consisting of only four lines and provides an answer to question two. This answer however is far more enigmatic (and disturbing) than the first.

Use of Voice in " Days" Although Larkin does not provide any clues as to the identity of the voice or voices the reader hears in " Days", there is a clear distinction between the voice that asks the questions and the voice that answers. The voice that asks the questions could be the voice of a child. The questions, superficially at least, are simple and naive, foolish even. The second voice is different, and appears to change during the course of the poem. The answer to the first question: " Days are where we live", implies a matter of fact, placatory tone as the simple question is answered by an equally simple (though worrying) answer. At first, the voice appears to be kindly, positive even, telling the questioner that days are " to be happy

in." In the final lines of the poem, this second voice adopts a worldly, macabre tone, almost mocking and cruel, as it dryly observes that the only place people can inhabit, apart from days, is death. Larkin's Language in "Days" The language of the poem is extremely simple. As is often the case with Larkin, he adopts a casual, conversational tone so that in line seven, the second speakers says " Ah," as if really addressing another person. Most of the words in the poem " Days" are monosyllabic: " time", " we", " are", " for" and " live." The word " days" is repeated three times and this repetition forces the reader to think about the meaning of the word. In line two, the speaker tells the questioner " Days are where we live", raising interesting questions about the nature of time, how it is measured and its artificiality. Days are not a place, not a " where", but a when and it is this paradox that leads to the bleak response to the second question. Once a person no longer has any days left to live in, the only other place that person can occupy will be the grave. Themes in " Days" The chief theme in " Days" is the futility of existence. As in many of his poems, Larkin examines with brutal honesty the inevitable truth that all life must end in death. The single image in the poem is of " the priest and the doctor" coming " running over the fields". This disturbing image implies that once a person has run out of days, the only solution is death, and if this is the case, then what is the point of filling endless days with living? The only detail in the poem is the line that describes the " long coats" of the priest and doctor. This makes them appear sinister, frantic individuals, hurrying across fields towards they dying patient. Their haste seems indecent, as if they are greedy for death, not intent upon healing, or comforting. This curious poem is one that readers find

themselves returning to again and again. It offers no comfort, but forces the reader to consider painful truths and perhaps to see life a little differently. Larkin is no sentimentalist, but in sharing his fears and doubts, at least there is a commonality of despair and a community of hopelessness.