

'Afternoons' - Philip Larkin

He was a man who was fearful of death and disliked any travelling abroad. He was a reclusive man who kept the curtains drawn to keep the sun from fading his books. He dies in 1985; he was to have all his diaries shredded. In the poem he writes he often seems like an outsider observing people's lives, as in this poem where he is watching mothers and their children in a play area.

The poem is set out in three stanzas. The first stanza the poet is explaining how the parent's youth is fading by the opening line. The lives of the young mothers are a very safe. This is because they are situated in a very safe area, with other mothers. They live in a safe community because it says in the last two lines of the first stanza

"At swing and sandpit
Setting free their children"

This is saying that they could let their children play without being hurt and that the mother's would have a friend to talk to and have some company if their own age rather than a two year old.

"In the hollows of the afternoons"

This means that the mothers had some free time and that the afternoons are meaningless and empty. This sentence is a metaphor.

In the second stanza there is more nostalgic than the other stanzas. The second stanza is telling us about the way the husband provides financial support. The women were the ones who did the chores at home, looked after the children and did the washing. It was the man's job to help the young mothers with money and with support of housing.

" Behind them, at intervals,
Stand husbands in skilled trades,
An estateful of washing.."

In the second part of the second stanza it says about how the wedding day of the mothers was the most important day in their lives in the fifties and sixties. They kept all of the photos as memories. The wedding was a big event and time for women in the sixties and fifties.

"And the albums, lettered
Our wedding, lying
Near the television:
Before them, the wind
Is running their courting places"

In the last three lines they are saying that the TV in the fifties and sixties were very rare, so they were the main source of entertainment. The wind before them was a sign of autumn and that it was beginning to come cold.

In the last stanza Philip is trying to tell us that there are still courting places but they are not being used by the older generation, they are being used by the next generation.

"That are still courting - places
(But lovers are all in school),
And their children, so intent on
Finding more unripe acorns,
Expect to be taken home."

The older generation are being replaced by the next generation. It is like the circle of life, the older generation die and the new take on motherhood and living, then they have children and the whole process happens again.

"Their beauty has thickened.
Something is pushing them
To the side of their own lives."

Lucinda Wride