

This extract from Larkin's famous poem explores **the concept of two metaphorical toads**: **one**— representing the dark, brooding and **external "toad" of work**, which cannot be shaken off; **the other**—representing Larkin's own **internal toad-like approach to work**.

Larkin wonders why he cannot help but allow this toad of work to "squat on [his] life". He longs to "drive the brute" off with a pitchfork, and live a life of reckless abandon, involving "The fame and the girl and the money".

However, he ruefully admits that his desire to shout, "Stuff your pension!" can never be realised, because a similar, "sufficiently toad-like" creature "squats in [him], too".

In the closing lines, he shares the insight that lies at the heart of the poem:

"But I do say it's hard to lose either,/ When you have both."

A person cannot escape from the toad of work, when they have both the 'toad-ish job' and the 'toad-ish attitude'. These co-existing toads can trap us in a cycle.

And so... in a typically joyful, Larkin-esque manner... we are led to the central question:

To work to live, or live to work?

***(Extracts from)* Toads**

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.

...
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 of 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 do say it's hard to lose either,
When you have both.

Philip Larkin

