



Larkin - 'Church Going' – Focus on Tone

1.

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
My cycle-clips in awkward reverence,

How does he feel and which quotes show that best?

Bored and unimpressed. This is just 'Another church' with the usual 'matting, seats and stone'.

His tone is dismissive: 'some brass and stuff / Up at the holy end'.

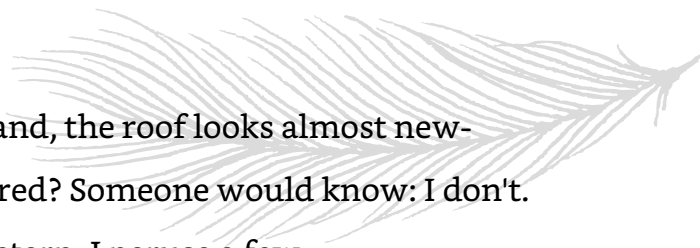
Affected by the atmosphere: 'a tense, musty, unignorable silence'

Awkward and a little uncomfortable. He feels he must show some sort of respect, even though he is not religious: 'I take off my cycle-clips in awkward reverence'.

Indifferent: 'Brewed God knows how long'. Maybe God knows, but Larkin doesn't and doesn't particularly care.

2

Move forward, run my hand around the font.



From where I stand, the roof looks almost new-
Cleaned or restored? Someone would know: I don't.
Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce
'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant.
The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

How does he feel and which quotes show that best?

Unimpressed and wants to distance himself from any knowledge of this place.

As he looks at the roof, he wonders if it was cleaned or restored but quickly says 'Someone would know: I don't'. He wants to make it perfectly clear the church means nothing to him.

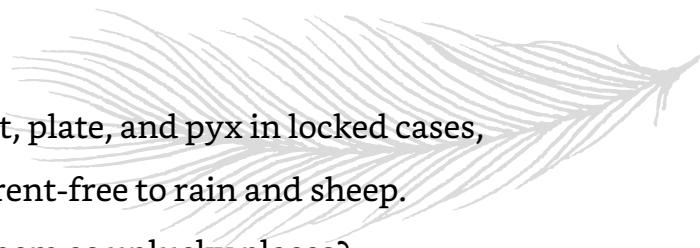
Gently mocking: He stands up on the lectern and imitates a priest, saying 'Here endeth'. The echoes 'snigger briefly', reflecting Larkin's mocking tone.

Self-conscious: He realises he has spoken 'much more loudly than I'd meant'.

Deliberately dismissive: He puts 'an Irish sixpence' in the donations box. It is valueless in England which seems appropriate considering Larkin sees the church as 'not worth stopping for'.

3.

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,
And always end much at a loss like this,
Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,
When churches fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show,



Their parchment, plate, and pyx in locked cases,
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

How does he feel and which quotes show that best?

Reflective: He says 'Yet stop I did: in fact I often do'.

Curious: Larkin wonders why he is drawn to churches. The repetition of the word 'wondering' highlights his curiosity. The stanza ends on a question mark. Larkin does not have the answers, but he seeks them.

Engaged: He uses the word 'we' rather than 'I'. Language reveals he knows more about churches than he let on when he was keen to appear dismissive. Rather than talking about 'brass and stuff' and 'the holy end', he now says 'parchment, plate and pyx'.

4.

Or, after dark, will dubious women come
To make their children touch a particular stone;
Pick simples for a cancer; or on some
Advised night see walking a dead one?
Power of some sort or other will go on
In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;
But superstition, like belief, must die,
And what remains when disbelief has gone?
Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky,

How does he feel and which quotes show that best?

Unimpressed by any sort of religious or spiritual belief: 'dubious women'



Certain: 'superstition, like belief must die'. The word 'must' emphasises certainty.

Has a bleak vision of the future: All that will be left, he is sure, is 'Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky'.

5.

A shape less recognizable each week,
A purpose more obscure. I wonder who
Will be the last, the very last, to seek
This place for what it was; one of the crew
That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were?
Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,
Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff
Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?
Or will he be my representative,

How does he feel and which quotes show that best?

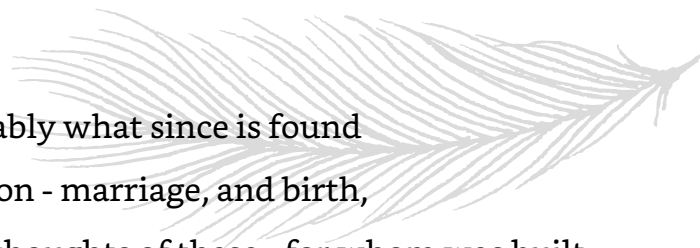
Philosophical: Long sentences and a lack of clear endings between stanzas show how preoccupied he is with his current trend of thought.

Curious: Notice again the use of the word 'wonder' and the questions marks.

Still maintaining his trademark cynicism: 'ruin-bibber, randy for antique'; 'Christmas addict'.

6.

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground
Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt



So long and equably what since is found
Only in separation - marriage, and birth,
And death, and thoughts of these - for whom was built
This special shell? For, though I've no idea
What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,
It pleases me to stand in silence here;

How does he feel and which quotes show that best?

Acknowledges the importance of the church. Recognises the role it plays in marking key moments in life: 'it held unspilt/ So long and equably what since is found / Only in separation – marriage, and birth/And death'.

Recognises importance of the church but the fragility of belief systems: The church is a 'special shell'. It is 'special' but cannot shield its people forever and will, like a shell, eventually break.

Keen to show he is detached but admits the church has a certain charm and can affect him: 'For, although I've no idea/What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth/It pleases me to stand in silence here'.

7.

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognised, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.



How does he feel and which quotes show that best?

Respectful: repeats the word 'serious'.

Meditative: No questions here, but a slow pace with end-line stops.

Serious: Language is formal: 'blent, 'robed', 'gravitated'.

Note: Larkin said he never had faith, but he admits 'One longs for those miracles' of 'the happy ending – rising from the dead and all our sins forgiven'. He describes 'Church Going' as 'a humanist poem, a celebration of the dignity of ... well, you know what it says'.

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