

Important Questions on "Selected Poetry of Richard Wilbur"

Describe Richard Wilbur as a RELIGIOUS POET.

It has been Wilbur's ironic achievement to excel at precisely those literary forms that many contemporary critics undervalue—metrical poetry, verse translation, comic verse, song lyrics, and perhaps foremost among these unfashionable but extraordinary accomplishments, religious poetry. A practicing Episcopalian, Wilbur is America's preeminent living Christian poet. No other author in this neglected field has written so much over so many years with such consistent distinction.

At least a third of Wilbur's poems—light verse and translations aside—contain some conspicuous Christian element. Yet the nature of his accomplishments is both subtle and complex. Although Christianity provides the central vision of his work, he has written little devotional verse—overtly pious poetry, that is, that tries to replicate the act of worship. Instead, Wilbur characteristically uses the images, ideas, and ceremonies of the Christian faith to provide perspective on the secular world. Sometimes the literal subject of the poem is religious as in "Matthew VIII, 28ff." or "A Christmas Hymn." More often Wilbur subtly weaves his religious vision into a poem's language and imagery as in this stanza from "October Maples, Portland," which describes the autumn foliage of New England as symbols of divine redemption in a fallen world:

A showered fire we thought forever lost
Redeems the air. Where friends in passing meet,
They parley in the tongues of Pentecost.
Gold ranks of temples flank the dazzled street.

Although this stanza can be read as a literal description of the October foliage in Connecticut, the natural world also becomes a sacramental means of revealing the divine order. Note how the descriptive image of "showered fire" and word choice of redeems simultaneously portray bright red maple leaves and suggest the Pentecostal flame the Holy Spirit placed on the heads of Christ's Apostles. Indeed, as the townspeople converse on the tree-lined street where the trees form a metaphoric "temple," they both figuratively and symbolically "Parley in the tongues of Pentecost."

This stanza also demonstrates how Wilbur uses wordplay for serious ends. Few poets pun more frequently, but he rarely does so for purely comic effect. His creative obsession is to have important words serve double duty in a poem. Wilbur's best poems—like those of his mentor, Frost—often present a double structure. There is a surface plot or situation that unfolds in literal terms. Meanwhile underneath that accessible surface level is a subtext, an unstated but implied second meaning. "October Maples, Portland" literally presents a New England seasonal scene, but the subtext suggests a religious vision of life, death, and eternity. What connects these two levels of meaning are Wilbur's masterful puns and wordplay.

A SUSTAINED CAREER

Wilbur's late career has been one of quiet but steady achievement. Wilbur retired from teaching in 1986, and in 1987 he succeeded Robert Penn Warren to become the second Poet Laureate of

the United States. He now divides his time between two homes—one in Cummington, Massachusetts and the other in Key West, Florida. While many poets (like William Wordsworth) lose artistic vitality in middle age or (like Matthew Arnold) stop writing verse altogether, Wilbur is the rare poet who has maintained an unbroken high standard. His style and sensibility have not changed greatly after *The Beautiful Changes*—except for a slight darkening of tone in his poems of old age—but every volume has contained superb new work. The special consistency of his achievement was recognized when his *New and Collected Poems* (1989) won the Pulitzer Prize, making him the only living American poet to have won the award twice. His literary stature has even grown in recent years as a new generation of young poets interested in rhyme and meter have looked to him as mentor and model.

Critical Appreciation of “After the Last Bulletins”

Introduction and Theme

Wilbur is best known for his poetic intelligence and philosophy of life and this is well explicit in all his poems at large and in *After the Last Bulletins* in particular. Wilbur points to a very important fact of life of what is significant today may become insignificant tomorrow. He takes the newspapers for example and says that the newspapers which are fresh today and most welcome for and accepted for reading, become stale and useless the other day.

The poem is pictorial in nature, an example of imagery, which is a typical quality of Wilbur. He tells us what happens to the newspapers after they have been read thrown at different places. The editors publish the papers and fall into a delicious slumber, but their printed newspapers toss and tumble all over the city, get splashed by mud and torn by the spikes of railings. They are carried away by wind where it flows. They travel through streets, gutters and deserted places and faded insignificantly into nothingness. The papers, which are read enthusiastically in front of the eyes and placed securely on the shelves, are trampled down by feet after they have become outdated.

This is not the whole story. They are again printed and held important like the other day and this cycle keeps repeating all the times. The poet says that life is not motionless or stagnant. The old order is replaced by the new order. The old generation must give way for the new one. What is important today, will fall into nothingness tomorrow. That is the way of the world. Things have worked the same

way and will continue to be the same till the end. Things will keep like this forever. What is important in life is to keep pace with it.

A Critique of After the Last Bulletins

Introduction

Richard Wilbur is a modern poet and chooses modern themes and topics. He lives in the scientific age, but he doesn't speak about the scientific discoveries. He discusses facts of life. After the Last Bulletins is about various facts of life. The most importance aspect is of waste. Human efforts are geared towards collecting tons of information and provide it for the common mind. The people receive information and study it casually, throw it heartlessly. They don't enjoy reading the newspapers.

This printing of newspapers is cycled every day and it is taken to be routine matter rather than a serious one. Even this producing of newspaper is not done for a noble cause, perhaps only for the sake of routine or business itself. There seems to be a waste everywhere: in information technology, scientific knowledge and economic productivity. After The Last Bulletins criticizes man's preoccupation with modern media. Media has become very important in the 20th century and today its importance cannot be denied.

Though the poem is about Last Bulletins and the subsequent results yet it raises certain issues about the facts of life ranging from ignorance to knowledge, the blessing of sleep, waste in human life, degrading of human society and complexity of human nature. Some of these themes are obvious and are not easy to find out, but the rest of them difficult to understand thought the poem because of its ambiguity as is the case with most American poems because they are too intellectually designed for a common mind.

Development of Thought

Abundance of knowledge and ignorance

The poet speaks about the abundance of knowledge in the modern age. The production of newspapers and their presence everywhere actually symbolizes the abundance of knowledge scattered around and easily accessible to human mind. We do utilize this information and keep ourselves in touch with day-to-day happenings, but it is the irony of our life that despite this craze for gathering and collecting

information, man's knowledge of truth has really not improved. Man is as ignorant as he was before this abundance. Even if he has acquired this knowledge through various sources, he uses it in counter attitudes and opposites. We do collect facts, but we ignore the spiritual reality behind them. So we can say that man has advanced in the field of information technology, but he is spiritually declined. The more information he has, the more ignorant he has come to be. Despite this abundance of information which is flying all around, human nature is not understood and real peace is sought in the everyday activities.

Emergence of a New World

After the last bulletins the windows darken

And the whole city founders readily and deep,

Sliding on all its pillows

To the thronged Atlantis of personal sleep,

The ocean of sleep is very calm like the Atlantis. In sleep, a new world of ideas opens up in which the poem addresses some issues. The concept of new world and a new power is furthered through the imagery of winds, which rise as soon as we sleep and turn off our lights. In sleep, a new world emerges. This is the world of agitations and questions, which arise from our inner self in sleep, which challenge the people who are proud of their knowledge. Perhaps it is due to these that we drown ourselves in daily activities to avoid the prick of our conscience. In the world of nature, a new power is awakened and begins to act. The furious activities of the wind defy all the false achievements, vanities and superfluities of daily life. The wind shows absolute disregard for the newspapers and magazines of which we are proud. The wind ruthlessly tears them into shreds, flinging them. This new world in sleep questions our knowledge and challenges our achievements and shows powerless we are in nature.

Wilbur's naturalism is fully explicit here when he mocks at the collective knowledge of human existence and renders it a waste in front of the mystical and religious consciousness, which should be the ultimate aim of our life.

Corruption of Media

And the wind rises. The wind rises and bowls

The day's litter of news in the alleys. Trash

Tears itself on the railings,

Soars and falls with a soft crash,

The winds rise and hurl the newspapers into the streets. Newspapers become insignificant and before the power of nature. Nature is truth and media is corruption and falsehood. When falsehood strikes against truth, it perishes. The same is the case with the newspapers, they are torn apart by the winds and battered against the surfaces and the newspapers are unable to defend themselves, because they are corrupt and strengthless. Thus the winds reject all the media. They fly like uncontrolled flight.

Vanities and Real Character

The flying newspapers reach the park where we find plenty of human beings who have been symbolized here as the statue and the winds slap the newspapers on the face of the statue, as the poet says,

Unruly flights

Scamper the park, and taking a statue for dead

Strike at the positive eyes,

Batter and flap the stolid head

And scratch the noble name. In empty lots

Our journals spiral in a fierce noyade

Statues are motionless symbols of human vanity. The wind attacks the statue and slaps their faces. Here lies a lesson for man that decline is our ultimate fate. Greatness is sought in character, not in status otherwise they will be attacked by nature. Characters, good behavior, attitude and action will keep us alive even after death. Weather and winds demolish constantly. They don't accept our standard of greatness and reputation. Greatness lies in character and morality rather than in actual appearances and motionless outlook.

Immortality of Human Existence

In empty spaces, newspapers gather our ideas, notions and general facts into the blank spaces. All the things in columns are meaningless. All the natural elements are cursing human beings. The law of nature is that we are mortals. Immortality is not for publicity. To whom are we propagating that we are immortal and after all why? We are violating the laws of nature. Night is always heavy on mortals if there is no good in us. We fear darkness as suggested in the following line:

After the last bulletins the windows darken

We are mortal. That is truth and reality. We must accept reality and modern world is the world of appearances. We even try to present realities as appearances.

Insignificance of Newspapers

Newspapers are important in our life, but the poet challenges their importance. The poet discusses that there is no point of printing the papers because a lot of energy is consumed and wasted in their production, as their ultimate goal is destruction. The newspapers go waste. They lack the universality of literary taste. Works of literature abide even today after many centuries. Shakespeare's Dramas, Milton's poetry and Jane Austen or Dickens' novels are afresh even after centuries. The only reason being they were mostly written for public awareness or societal change and development. They are universal, but the newspapers are insignificant because their basic aim is propagation, instigation, plot mongering and rigging. They are insignificant; therefore, they are tossed about in the dirty places of town.

Conclusion

This is an apt and just assessment of Tony Heywood. Wilbur's subjective bent is that he challenges the established norms. Here again, he satirizes the newspapers. But he also discusses that change is the spice of life otherwise, something significant today will become insignificant tomorrow. If a proper charm is not maintained in the quality of a commodity, its value diminishes. This is what we can say about *After The Last Bulletins* in economic terms. However, the poem is a good example of modern poetry and perfect representative of Wilbur's subject matter and technique. His imagery is unique and striking. The mundane topic of newspapers, exploited for serious purpose is the ample proof of Wilbur's genius in this poem.

Themes, Style and Technique of Wilbur's Poetry

Introduction

Richard Wilbur is living, white, male and, from all appearances, neither despondent nor mad. This is not a writer to whom glamour will attach easily. (I have cherished Wilbur's poetry for many years, but can recall only one detail from his personal life: he likes Ping-Pong.) Not coincidentally, the last decade to see him pre-eminent was the 50's, when Louise Bogan hailed him in *The New Yorker* as "composed of valid ingredients," and T. S. Eliot told an interviewer "I must admit to a continuing respect for Robert Lowell and Richard Wilbur."

Then public taste — courtesy of "Howl" and Lowell's "Life Studies" and the phenomenon known as Sylvia Plath — edged away from Wilbur, and from his dedication to urbanity and metrical poise. Wilbur, it used to be said, coasted along a little too smoothly; he wrote the poem *bien fait*. In our poets as in our lovers, too much technique leaves us first impressed, then cold and finally resentful, a pattern that could well describe the arc of Wilbur's critical reception over the past half-century. In the end, we would prefer to be ravaged, not finessed.

Well-adjusted poet

His "Collected Poems, 1943-2004" is now out, and it is the indispensable Wilbur, covering recent unpublished work, many of his children's poems and song lyrics, and all of his nine published volumes of poetry. In addition to being filled with light, music and wit, and a generous and very native aplomb, these poems form an argument, about how one goal of the well-lived life might be composure, rather than the mad flowering of a personal signature. This appreciation for composure emerged under keen circumstances, when World War II took Wilbur to Anzio and the Siegfried Line. There he began to "versify in earnest," as he later put it, and to recognize in poetry a means of "organizing oneself and the world." Over the subsequent years, as his peers donned leather jackets or publicly fell to pieces, Wilbur maintained a courtly reticence. His few political poems — "A Miltonic Sonnet for Mr. Johnson on His Refusal of Peter Hurd's Official Portrait," for example — are effective enough in their icy disdain, but fairly mild in their outrage; and his one

exercise in appearing louche, “A Voice From Under the Table,” while a virtuoso performance and an utter delight, in the end stays pretty upright. In short, throughout a career that spans some of the more contentious decades in American history, Wilbur has felt no compulsion to register dissent, horror, disgust or, really, neurotic perturbation of any kind. Over so well-adjusted a poet, suspicion is bound to hover. Can you inspire something more than our admiration?

Richard Wilbur and Robert Frost

What follows, then, is Wilbur, from his wonderful “Seed Leaves”:

Here something stubborn comes,

Dislodging		the	earth	crumbs
And		making	crusty	rubble.
It	comes	up	bending	double,
And	looks	like	a	green
It	could	be	seedling	maple,
Or		artichoke,	or	bean.
That	remains	to	be	seen.
Forced	to	make	choice	of
The	stalk	in	time	unbends,
Shakes	off	the	seed-case,	heaves
Aloft,	and	spreads	two	leaves
Which		display	no	sure
And		special		signature.

The debt to Robert Frost (“Seed Leaves” is subtitled “Homage to R. F.”) is so unhidden, but so unanxious as to hardly count as a debt. Borrowing the strict trimeter of Frost’s “To Earthward,” the poem’s short lines render it visually narrow, like the stalk it describes. Wilbur, however, takes Frost’s hardened Yankee pessimism, narcotic as it can be, and flips it on its head. In “To Earthward,” the poet, having once “lived on air,” slowly reclines toward death, to the earth. In “Seed Leaves” the poet recalls the struggle of the still young, against the impulse to cling to their own untested promise, to flower into open air. But the poem is also, in its buttoned-up way, a confession. In English, as in most European languages, “leaf” is a synonym for page; the two spreading leaves are meant to remind us of an opening

book, in this instance one without any “sure / And special signature,” and therefore surely Wilbur’s own youthful work. Throughout Wilbur’s poetry, one can pick up cadences and preoccupations from Frost, themes from Yeats and Stevens, Auden’s clarity of diction and purpose, and more distant notes from Marianne Moore, Rilke and Browning. The animus behind Wilbur’s writing isn’t originality, then; it is praise. What does Wilbur mean by praise? In the early sonnet “Praise in Summer” from his first book, Wilbur had asked, “Does sense so stale that it must needs derange / The world to know it?” He was querying the metaphor-making power of the poet: Why reach for outlandish imagery when the brute facts of nature appear sufficiently incredible unto themselves? Wilbur’s answer — phrased as a question — was beautifully, perfectly equivocal:

Should it not be enough of fresh and strange
 That trees grow green, and moles can course in clay,
 And sparrows sweep the ceiling of our day?

Only in metaphor do sparrows sweep the ceiling of our day, so the answer to the poem’s question is: Well, yes and no. If properly disciplined, our powers of metaphor-making help us see how fresh and strange the natural world really is. But if we become mere virtuosos, we are left inspecting our own talents, locked once again within the confines of language and the human ego.

Nature in Wilbur’s poetry

Praise, for Wilbur, then, is our freshest relationship to nature, to the creation, but one arrived at only through the delicate balance of vision and artifice. It is also a social, or a shared vision. In Wilbur’s melancholy recounting of the Beowulf myth, the hero’s ascension is so total, so heroic, as to void the natural world of its organic quality: “The land was overmuch like scenery.” And in one of his finest poems, the masterly “In the Field,” the poet recalls wandering through the dark the night before with a friend, talking about ancient constellations and the Big Bang, until the two have spooked themselves with the drift of their conversation:

It was the nip of fear
 That told us when imagination caught
 The feel of what we said, came near
 The schoolbook thoughts we thought,

And faked a scan of space
 Blown back and hollow by our spent grenade,
 All worlds dashed out without a trace,
 The very light unmade.

How like Wilbur to toy with the menace of the sublime, the mad unmaking of an imagination in overdrive, but to rescue the experience with amity. The following day, the same friends wander through the same field, amid flowers “dense and manifold.” The great daylight beauty of “daisy-drifts” and “strews of hawkweed” rescue the two from their nocturnal fright, but only because they make a “mistake”; by believing the “hearts’ wish for life,” and not the cosmic void, is the “one / Unbounded thing we know.”

Distinguishing Features of his poetry

“Let me try to list some of the virtues that distinguish the poetry of Richard Wilbur. First of all, a superb ear (unequalled, I think, in the work of any poet now writing in English) for stately measure, cadences of a slow, processional grandeur, and rich, ceremonial orchestration. His ‘musicianship’ is of so fine and conspicuous a kind that it has often been ignored, and sometimes even mocked by those who are militantly tone-deaf. Next, a philosophical bent and a religious temper, which are by no means the same thing, but which here consort comfortably together. Wit, polish, a formal elegance that is never haughty or condescending ... And an unfeigned gusto, a naturally happy and grateful response to the physical beauty of the world, of women, of works of art, landscapes, weather, and the perceiving, constructing mind that tries to know them.”

Imagery, Tone and Syntax
 Once their fruit is picked, The cornstalks lighten, and though Keeping to their strict
 Rows, begin to be The tall grasses that they are— Lissom, now, and free
 As canes that clatter In island wind, or plumed reeds Rocked by lake water.
 Soon, if not cut down, Their ranks grow whistling-dry, and Blanch to lightest brown,
 So that, one day, all Their ribbonlike, down-arcng Leaves rise up and fall
 In tossed companies, Like goose wings beating southward Over the changed trees.

These lines reveal a universal texture of growth through imagery, tone, and syntax.

The final process of ripe corn is revealed through images of the corn stalks. A reader can even hear the crispy, scratchy sounds that the husks make. The image is of the time after husking. This gives a sense of reverence to the simple and earthly growth process.

The tone of the lines in each of the stanzas offers a sharpened, yet lingering sound of cornstalks in a field. Early in the poem, the stronger emphasis on every other syllable gives an effect of stiffness, while later in the poem, the emphasis changes with the use of words with longer sounding vowels. This creates the flow of swishing sounds; it also creates the pattern of growth of the cornstalks.

The syntax Wilbur uses in the poetry is easily identified with by readers despite their differences in age, culture, or creed. The syntax raises the symbolism of the imagery to another level, which is that similar patterns occur and can be understood by all. The symmetry of life can be revealed and discovered by all. Richard Wilbur demonstrates through his poetry that which he heralds as the common moments of anyone's life.

Resonating Quality of his poetry

A Wilbur poem is written to resonate with universal experience – he writes that “the poet speaks not of peculiar and personal things, but of what in himself is most common, most anonymous, most fundamental, most true of all men.” So, in ‘A Barred Owl’, “the wakened child” from the first stanza who is scared by the eponymous bird becomes, in the second stanza, “a small child” as the poem moves into a universal sense from the owl’s call. Simultaneously, the poem’s awareness of the owl moves from the ominous cry to both a domesticated, safer interpretation and an admission of the darker, natural violence.

Whether it is nature, as here or in ‘Mayflies’, or in Wilbur’s observations of town life and recollections of childhood, it is this universal kernel of an experience that he aims to tease out. ‘Transit’, for example, finds the poet stunned by a moment of beauty as a woman leaves her home, and, wishing that moment frozen, finds his surroundings, buildings, even the sun collaborating in that wish. His openness to the things of the world is best expressed in his own description of what he might be (from ‘Mayflies’): “one whose task is joyfully to see”.

Poetic

Style

Wilbur's elegant poetic style makes 'fears bravely clear'

It was an elegant opening for the 39th season of the International Poetry Forum last night in the person of Richard Wilbur.

The assistant dean of American poetry at 84 (100-year-old Stanley Kunitz still reigns), Mr. Wilbur embodies the formal, traditional and lyrical language of an era fast passing, a time when poetry was as much about the sounds as it was the subject.

His first book, "The Beautiful Changes," appeared in 1947 and since then, the poet said last night, he had always remained in the present.

"But, I have to admit that at last, I'm returning to a time and a place called the past," he said, prefacing his beautiful reading of "This Pleasing Anxious Being," a title taken from Grey's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," about his childhood, a time of "lap-robles and tire chains."

"The past," he said, "is where safety lies."

Much of his work last night had an elegiac quality to it, poems about the fall with barn owls, Indian corn, bare trees and crows' nests in those bare trees.

The language of his autumnal images — "the moiled expanse of tossed hay" — was carried throughout the reading of his own poems.

An accomplished translator, he also read works from Bulgarian and Brazilian poets and stumped the audience at the Carnegie Library Lecture Hall with riddles in Latin.

Mr. Wilbur believes that "one of the jobs of poetry is to make our fears bravely clear" and by framing those concerns in his elegant style, he makes them beautiful as well.

Conclusion

According to Salinger, Richard Wilbur is known for having the “killer-diller line” (Padgett, 149) because he almost always finishes his poems with a line that causes the poem to reach a crescendo. Wilbur’s poems are about many things, but the main inspiration behind his poems is his life. He writes about his early childhood, which was spent on a rural farm. He also writes about his life as a soldier in WWII. Wilbur even writes about how he traveled across the country, hitching rides, during the great depression. Wilbur’s poetry was greatly influenced by personal friends Robert Frost and F. O. Matthiessen. Wilbur combines the use of meter and rhyme with complex yet understandable paradoxes. Babette Duetsch once commented, “Here is poetry to be read with the eye, the ear, the heart and the mind” (Padgett, 150). Wilbur also writes verse drama, and is known for creating a rhymed, English version of the French classic, the *Misanthrope*, by Molière.

Critical Apprecian of [Marginalia by Richard Wilbur](#)

Introduction

and

Theme

The poem is philosopising an important reality of life and puts forward his statement which is scientifically true that all forces of life are centrifugal (i.e. tending away from centralisation, as of authority). The force of life is pressurised to the borders or poetically speaking, to the margins of life. Because our energies and qualities lie in the center of life, we cannot utilize then in the best possible manner. Our dreams, visions, desires do lie in the center, but it is a reality of life that their achievements are centrifugal. The reality of life is developing or progressing from the center outwards.

We have our dreams, desires, myths and visions of a standard life, but we cannot materialize our dreams because the force of life is centrifugal and all our dreams lie in the center of our mind.

The basic idea of the poem is that things concentrate at the edges ... all other details seem to present of a cinematic presentation of the idea. The poet gives an example of pond, then of sleep and finally concludes that our sleep takes us away from the world of reality to the world of imagination which is replete with all sorts of desires, but we cannot perform during sleep to get our desires. The end of our journey is death and our energies are expanding towards this goal.

A

Critique

of

Marginalia

Introduction

Things concentrate at the edges; the pond-surface

Is bourne to fish and man

Things concentrate at the edges is the basic message of the poem. The poet brings round this point to his readers in a graphic manner using the example of water pond and sleep both of which are examples common enough for an average mind to understand. But the philosophical point, which the poet makes, is unique and seldom touched upon by the poets. This is a typical quality of modern poets especially Americans who tend always to choose striking topics for their poems. Marginalia tends to present the reality that things exert their pressures to the edges and this is amply proven by the men and fish along with other botanical life in the water which are driven by the centrifugal force to the edges rather than staying in the center (centripetal). Sleep also takes us from the conscious world to the unconscious world, which is an example of centrifugal force in life. The poem has imaginative quality along with realistic touches. There seems to be a clash between imagination and reality. It is a fact that center is important for the generation of products and results, but all its energies are pressured to the edges, so for the existence of life, life must pace along with time and naturally progress ahead for better and standard life. The progress and advancement of life lie in the coping with the rim of whirlpool rather than enjoying its center.

Development

of

Thought

An Attack on the traditional concept of Nucleus
Wilbur is not simply a poet, but a philosopher who attacks the traditional concept of central significance of nucleus. Traditionally people have upheld the importance of center and nucleus. That is why Theodore Roethke hails Wilbur in the followings words, "Not a graceful mind - that's a mistake - but a mind of grace, an altogether different and higher thing." Scientifics have discovered that the death of nucleus is the death of whole cell. They have believed in the centripetal forces rather than the centrifugal ones, but Wilbur challenges and says:

Things concentrate at the edges;

What he means is that complexity, richness, beauty and ugliness of the world exists not at its center but at its boundaries. It is the boundaries, which have held the center tight. Though the center is an emissary of light, knowledge and development yet our riches are centrifugal in the words of Wilbur. So the most important area for progress is not the center but the edges, which are ever expanding, evolutionary and revolutionary.

The Limits of Man and Animal
He uses a number of images to drive home his idea. He uses zoological and botanical imagery very common in modern American poetry introduced by the advancement of science. Wilbur says,

The pond-surface
Is bourne to fish and man

He uses the image of pond, its surface and edges. Edges serve as the ultimate boundaries separating the world of the fish from that of human beings – the world of land differed from the watery world. It is not the central water of the pond which defines the limits of man and the fish. Their limites are symbolised by the borders – the edge of the pond.

Not only this zoological, but also the botanical life such as slime, moss, impure vegetation or décor, music or pattered light, in other words all the beauties and ugliness all concentrate at the edges as ascertained by Wilbur in the following lines:

In textile scum and damask light, on which

The lily-pads are set; and there are also

Inlaid ruddy twigs, becalmed pine-leaves,

Air-baubles, and the chain mail of froth

Dreams

Vs.

Reality

The poem nicely presents the theme of dream and reality, knowledge and ignorance, sleep and every day life, fact and imagination and the opposite forces:

Descending into sleep (as when the night-lift

Falls past a brilliant floor), we glimpse a sublime

Décor and hear, perhaps, a complete music,

But this evades us, as in the night meadows

The crickets' million roundsong dies away

The poet supports a state of mind which is conscious and unconscious at the same time, half-way between sleep and wakness, imagination and reality. Again these points ascertain that the deeper we go in sleep, or higher we ascent to imagination we will find the reality at the edges not in the center. Music heard becomes appealing, the more we head towards the farthest bounderies of the song and hear that a chorus is singing for us.

Complexity and High End of Life

As Marginalia is a thought-provoking poem, the poet marginalizes and philosophizes life. According to the poet, life is an ocean, which ends in a whirlpool. All our qualities are centrifugal and cannot stay in the center; they must have an outlet towards the borders for sustenance.

Our riches are centrifugal; men compose
 Daily, unwittingly, their final dreams,
 And those are our own voices whose remote
 Consummate chorus rides on the whirlpool's rim,
 Past which we flog our sails, toward which we
 drift,
 Plying our trades, in hopes of a good drowning.

What ever do, what ever our professional skills, interests and hobbies are, life finally moves towards the whirlpool of death. Each human being in life has a tiny boat, which is set on sail on the ocean of life. E very one is using his particular skills plies his boat. He weaves a web of his future dreams and desires. These visions and dreams are out human experiences. The goals and targets are set for us and they call us for a deceptive center. We drown while moving towards the unknown region of death.

Style, Imagery and Technique

Wilbur's style is modern and perfect. The sentences are short, the poem runs like an essay giving an introduction, presenting and developing an argument and concluding the presented material with a final message. Wilbur has touched upon a scientific topic and reinforced it with natural imagery. The scenic imagery of water pond and the things grown upon them has been fully exploited not only for the aesthetic pleasure for a romantic mind, but also supporting the main argument presented. The image of sleep is superbly presented to give the poem a dream-like

quality and further enhance the point discussed earlier. Doubtlessly, Wilbur technically proves himself a perfect craftsman in this poem. Technically, the poem is a masterpiece of English literature.

Conclusion

Marginalia is a state of mind catalyzed the social changes and hybrid cultures. Though we are awake and asleep which are the two contrary states of human mind, but the best ends can be achieves in hypnotic states. Life is going on and its force which is centrifugal will continue drawing things at its edges, but until and unless exploited properly, our riches will only remain dreams and visions and we cannot materialize them. In society, every thing is in motion and the best resources lie at the edges. The glory of man is to lift himself up to the standard and achieve that Sublime and Décor that Wilbur speaks of. Though the margins are at the highest point, yet diligent and constant state of mind can achieve that unattainable target.

Critical Appreciation of [Still Citizen Sparrow by Richard Wilbur](#)

Introduction

and

Theme

Still Citizen Sparrow is a direct shot to the modern civilized people who uphold the views that vulture is an ugly and evil animal. The poet counters the argument and believes that although vulture is believed to be a filthy and dirty animal, yet she is endowed with the rarest qualities ever gifted to any other bird. It is vulture, which hovers the whole sky and watches natural environment and keeps it clean. Vulture was also present at the time of Prophet Noah when he preached his people and was rejected by them. Ordered by Allah, he built a boat, his people jeered at him, but he put all samples of living organism in his boat. The Great Deluge appeared and destroyed every non-believer. The same vulture was with him when Noah's boat landed at the mountain and initiated a new age of enlightenment. People never come to terms with vulture, but the poet gives a long speech containing good words on the qualities of this animal. The poet avers that some animals though look ugly outside, yet are beautiful for their traits. The real beauty is of good action, not of outer physical charm.

Because vulture builds a new world by cleaning the environment, it is associated with the prophet Noah who also built a new world. In this way, vulture becomes symbolic of the beginning of a new world of faith and gives us message that we must also be builder of a new world in which we should contribute as much as we can.

A Critique of Still Citizen Sparrow
Introduction

The poet supports the creature, which is thought to be the ugliest creature. The poet attacks the common perception of people about this bird and presents his arguments in favor of this animal. He gives the bird masculine qualities and addresses him as 'He' rather than 'It', which shows the importance of vulture in the poet's mind and in the human kingdom. Though vulture looks ugly, bald-headed and always living on dead rotten flesh of various stinking animals, yet it has a beauty which no animal, bird or human being can match. That virtuous or beautiful quality is cleanliness, which according to Islam is half completion of faith.

The Sparrow is still citizen only outwardly beautiful, but performing no practical function in society. On the other hand, the great responsibility of disposing of the city waste is left on the vulture. The poet also criticizes the modern man who whose angle of vision needs to be corrected and who may welcome clean and beautiful guests at his home, but shun the trash collectors, as a result of whose efforts, the environment is made clean and beautiful.

The bravery of vulture is also evident when the whole earth was submerged in water and this vulture flew and flew over the surface of water, this venture could have killed the sparrow, but it was vulture who sacrificed for them all (other animals, birds and human beings) and made the earth once again a living abode by cleaning the rotten stinking flesh. This is the real inward virtue of vulture for which he should be remembered rather than for his physical appearance.

Development of Thought
The physical description of the vulture

If you see the vulture cruising in the sky, its movement is so attractive, its wings so wide, it looks almost regal. It doesn't have to move its wings. None among the birds is so powerful and fine vulture.

The poet says,
And at the tall

Tip of the sky lie cruising. Then you'll see

That no more beautiful bird is in heaven's height,

No wider more placid wings, no watchful flight;

He shoulders nature there, the frightfully free,
It seems so free and bearing the burden of the world upon his shoulders because its wings and shoulders are so strong. The ordinary world of birds cannot imagine the way it flies up in the air. The poet's description of the vulture develops a soft corner among the human beings for the vulture and we begin to love this bird for his not only physical qualities, but also moral virtues.

Still Citizen Sparrow is an animal poet is highly symbolic and satirical of modern man's angle of perception, which he is habitual to adopt. The poet says, Pardon him, you

Who dart in the orchard aisles, for it is he

Devours death, mocks mutability,

Has heart to make an end, keeps nature new. The poet attacks the sparrow angrily and tells the sparrow to mind his language about the vulture and be respectful to him. The sparrow lives in orchards, wide and open furrows. How can you judge the real worth of vulture? Ordinary people and birds are afraid of the rotten dead meat of animals; vulture is courageous and takes up steps to perform the last rituals of the dead beings. But we are timid; we stay back and simply mock the people who perform such great duties. We are selfish and cowardly and they are brave and responsible. It is a tribute to vulture because he cleans what we have made dirty and evil by our own actions and actually the dirt have expelled from our existence and so we are dirty, not those who are also forward to clean. This is their highness and dignity and they deserve our respect. These people include: gutter cleaners, dusters, trash collectors and sweepers who don't find respectable status in our society while they are more respectable than us. We only dandy our beauty and boast of our physical appearance and don't even imagine how filthy dirty nature will become without their existence.

The poem exposes the double standards of people. We respect those who spread rubbish, but hate those who clean it. Actually, dirty are the people who spread dirt and respectable are those who clean it. The whole society is in disorder. Religious Symbolism

The uses religious symbolism to bring round the same theme and point. The poet says,

Thinking of Noah, child heart, try to forget

How for so many bedlam hours his saw

Soured the song of birds with its wheezy gnaw,

And the slam of his hammer all the day beset
 Noah was regarded mad by people, but the hero's intelligence and understanding is far more
 superior to that of an ordinary man. The other birds kept on chirping, but the hero was not
 deflected from his mission. People called him crazy, but he didn't stop. So man should be
 committed to his mission. Self-restrain is important. Noah's journey was not pleasant when he
 looked down he saw destruction and death everywhere. It was only a heroic mind that could feel
 this pain. The poet through this religious symbol wants to bring before us an important point.
 The world is divided into two kinds of people: those who observe and those who perform, those
 who talk and those of act, those of sleep and those who wake and those of think and those who
 act. It is unto us what line of race we want to choose.
 Talk and Action

Sparrow symbolizes talk and vulture symbolizes action. Throughout the poem, the poet uses
 various words to keep the sparrow shut, which is at all times babbling and chirping aimlessly.
 The poet satirically attacks the sparrow,
 Pardon him, you

Who dart in the orchard aisles, for it is he

Devours death, mocks mutability
 And he further says,
 Forgive the hero, you who would have died

Gladly with all you knew; he rode that tide

To Ararat
 Action speaks louder than words could be taken as the message of the poem. The sparrow's
 repeated chirpings produce no healthy effect on the environment; rather it may distract the
 attention of those who are busy with their studies or engaged in a serious task. Merely talks bring
 no results; action in human life is important which brings development and welfare. Our nature is
 constantly in change, this change causes pollution, filth and stench, which can only be resolved
 with proper action. Vulture shoulders responsibilities effectively and puts humanity to shame for
 its passivity and lethargic state.
 Style, Technique and Imagery

Wilbur's approach in this poem is fresh and fine. He uses animal imagery like Ted Hughes, but
 his treatment is different. The symbol of Noah bracketed with the Vulture is superb and
 reinforces the concept. The poem has been divided into four line stanzas each one bringing up a
 new aspect of vulture, his qualities and function. The rhyme scheme is striking and classical. The

four-line stanza rhymes as a b b a. The diction is forceful and proves the poet's point of view effectively. The diction and use of such words as: lumber, cruise, rotten office, frightfully free, the slam of his hammer and rocked give a cinematic vision of the overall story of the vulture's world.

Conclusion

Still Citizen Sparrow is a thought-provoking poem and proves intellectual genius of Wilbur who is famous for writing, which we may call intellectual poems. The poet believes that we must give the devil his due. Though vulture is physical ugly and is found on trash eating dirty items, but there are also two sides to every thing and we must take up the good side. We must look at the bright side of the picture rather than the black one.

