

2016 Poem: "The Juggler" (Richard Wilbur)

Prompt: Read carefully the following poem by Richard Wilbur, first published in 1949. Then, write an essay in which you analyze how the speaker describes the juggler and what that description reveals about the speaker. You may wish to consider poetic elements such as imagery, figurative language, and tone.

all we do, grow older, appreciated by loved ones for life's work, energy runs out, contemplation of past successes

* Shifts of gravity + energy (of juggler):
#1 = balls @ rest
#2 = going up
#3 = max height
#4-5 = slowly falling + abrupt landing

could represent life cycles/stages of life

The Juggler — performs for audience

* theme - world may be sad - enjoy good times when they're there; allegorical wake up call to enjoy life!

A ball will bounce, but less and less. It's not a light-hearted thing, presents its own resilience. Falling is what it loves, and the earth falls So in our hearts from brilliance, Settles and is forgot.

#1 - more familiar we are w/ world, the less special

It takes a sky-blue juggler with five red balls

symb. defying nature/reach-sky-is-sky

To shake our gravity up. Whee, in the air The balls roll round, wheel on his wheeling hands, Learning the ways of lightness, alter to spheres Grazing his finger ends, Cling to their courses there, Swinging a small heaven about his ears. > godlife

#2 - juggler in complete control

metaph. lesson 10 = theme

But a heaven is easier made of nothing at all Than the earth regained, and still and sole within The spin of worlds, with a gesture sure and noble He reels that heaven in, Landing it ball by ball, And trades it all for a broom, a plate, a table.

#3 - finishes act & exchanges balls for domestic items (ball)

Oh, on his toe the table is turning, the broom's Balancing up on his nose, and the plate whirls On the tip of the broom! Damn, what a show, we cry: The boys stamp, and the girls Shriek, and the drum booms And all comes down, and he bows and says good-bye.

#4 - appreciate the juggler abruptness of show - exempl. quickness we forget good things

If the juggler is tired now, if the broom stands In the dust again, if the table starts to drop Through the daily dark again, and though the plate Lies flat on the table top, For him we batter our hands > clap Who has won for once over the world's weight.

#5 - juggler as human; learned life is hard - but there are moments of happiness

easier to think of heaven than life 15

rhyme sch. ABCBAC Sestet

Contrasts: up + down
rest + motion
heaven + earth
juggler + audience (our)

From Ceremony and Other Poems (1950) in Richard Wilbur, New and Collected Poems, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988