"STALLED BY OUR LASSITUDE": TIME AND ATTUNEMENT IN WILBUR'S "LYING"

Richard Wilbur's poem "Lying" deals with two kinds of lies. Most obviously, he addresses the traditional accusation that poets tell lies. He's probably aware of the implication in Plato that all poets are liars (39), and of Plutarch's assertion that "poets tell many lies" (194). Wilbur defends poetry, and in particular the use of metaphor, as "tributary to the great lies told with the eyes half-shut / That have the truth in view" (lines 70-72). This defense, like the accusations, is traditional, and most readers will grant the legitimacy of poetic invention in the service of truth. From the very beginning of the poem, however, Wilbur contrasts the relatively innocent lying of poetic creation with a more subtle, and ultimately more dangerous, form of lying: boredom, a state-of-mind entangled with the human experience of time. My central purpose in what follows is to illuminate why boredom vexes Wilbur. I'll begin by looking at Wilbur's introduction of the issue. Then I'll draw on several philosophers, especially Martin Heidegger and Jean-Luc Marion, as a means of foregrounding the implications of boredom. I let Marion interpret Heidegger since Marion, comfortable with his Catholicism, makes use of theological implications of Heidegger's thought about which Heidegger himself remains ambivalent. In a third section, I'll use this philosophical discussion to explicate key portions of Wilbur's poem, focusing especially on Wilbur's recognition that at the heart of boredom is a rejection of God's goodness in creation. As an alternative to this false view, Wilbur commends wonder as the appropriate response to the created world. In conclusion I'll draw on Hans-Georg Gadamer's distinction between the "empty time" of boredom and the "fulfilled time" Gadamer associates with both liturgical practice and poetry. Among other things, Gadamer's adaptation of Heidegger will help me bring out why Wilbur juxtaposes the allegation that poetry lies with the assessment of boredom as a fundamental lie. Because poetry as an act of finite, secondary creation fundamentally echoes God's activity in his primary creation, poetry is not intrinsically deceptive. It is, rather, at least potentially, a means of access to truth suited to human finitude. Though the essay cannot address all the riches of Wilbur's poem, its concentration on the issues of boredom, time, and attunement may clarify for readers one of the key unifying strands of the poem, enabling greater enjoyment and understanding of the poem as a whole.[1]

READERS COMING to the opening lines of "Lying" are likely, because of the poem's title, to focus on the false claim presented here: "To claim, at a dead party, to have spotted a grackle, / When in fact you haven't of late, can do no harm" (1-2). The opening infinitive "to claim" hints at a lie even before the lie is spoken. The second line acknowledges the lie — "in fact you haven't" — but excuses it as benign. The following lines indicate that the lie will improve the party and enhance the liar's reputation without disrupting established relationships of trust. The particular claim, "I saw a grackle," though contrary to fact, is socially trivial and morally inconsequential because it is easily confessed and correspondingly easy to deal with. The little scenario imagining the lie thus initiates the poem's defense of creative expression, and particularly metaphor, as a potentially useful social form of misrepresentation not fundamentally at odds with truth and trust. At their best, counter-factual devices such as metaphor may be truth-conducive and beneficial. Wilbur makes this point by means of a cascading sequence of metaphors in the poem that cumulatively illustrate the contribution of metaphor to human meaning-making (see Tate).

The poem's analysis of lying includes more than metaphor, however. A more threatening form of lying, boredom, comes to light as the poem develops. Because we don't usually categorize boredom as lying, the point is easily overlooked, but once we're paying attention, its seriousness appears as early as the first line; the occasion for the lie about the grackle is "a dead party." To help us notice, Wilbur repeats the idea that the party may be hazardous: as a participant, the second person "you" addressed by the poem goes on "talking with toxic zest" (7). On a first reading, we are likely to hear both "dead" and "toxic" as conventional exaggeration, yet both words highlight a seriousness that additional details of the poem confirm. In *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, one of the works by Martin Heidegger that has improved my understanding of Wilbur's poem, Heidegger asks whether it is "merely an exaggerated and exaggerating way of putting things when we talk of a consuming, deadly boredom" (96). His answer, and Wilbur's, is an emphatic "no."

Wilbur explains his "no" in the next section of the poem. After the first eleven lines report the lie and excuse it, line twelve doubles back to correct a misperception. Apart from the correction, we might not notice our underlying assumptions: most readers, I suspect, will not hesitate over the expression "a dead party." We have attended such parties; we recognize boredom based on our own experience. But

Wilbur's speaker considers a correction necessary. According to line twelve, the lie about the grackle aims at making reality more interesting and thereby reveals that in the perception of the party-goers "the world is tiresome in itself." Why make a point of denying this perception? After all, it expresses a common way we human beings assess our experience (i.e. this party . . . , this meeting . . . , my life is boring). Here's why: because the belief that "the world is tiresome in itself" is a far more dangerous lie than the lie about the grackle.

Wilbur begins to explain by supplying a series of phrases that define boredom: "We know what boredom is: it is a dull / Impatience or a fierce velleity, / A champing wish, stalled by our lassitude, / To make or do" (13-16). These oxymora cumulatively identify boredom as more complicated than lack of interest; they represent boredom as suspending us between restless desire and an incapacity to take action to satisfy that desire. To elaborate a little, "dull" labels something as "arousing no interest,"[2] but "impatience" is "restive eagerness," connoting a *sharp* interest. "Velleity" names "the lowest level of volition," "a mere wish not accompanied by action or effort to obtain it." As an implicitly flawed manifestation of volition, velleity contrasts with the "simplicity of wish and will" — proper volition — which Wilbur ascribes to prelapsarian humanity in line 76. The problem expressed in these phrases approximates the philosophical problem, discussed by Marion in *In The Self's Place* (145-90), called "weakness of will," which asks why and how a person can believe something without acting on that belief; in *Being Given* Marion makes the related epistemological point that "the will determines what the understanding can attain" (305). As an example, Charles Taylor mentions that Karl Barth identifies the capitulation of ordinary German citizens to Nazism as "indolence" or "inertia" (*The Language Animal* 212). In Wilbur's third phrase, "champing" is biting "with restlessness or impatience," but the champing wish is stalled by "lassitude," "a state of exhaustion or torpor." The wish that is stalled is precisely the wish "to make or do." The restlessness of boredom, which Heidegger will also recognize, recalls the opening paragraph of Augustine's *Confessions*, where Augustine acknowledges to God, "our heart is restless till it rests in you" (3). Note also that Wilbur's phrase "to make or do" reproduces the standard concise definition for the Greek verb ποιέω, cognate with English "poem," so there's at least a hint here of a corrective for boredom.

Wilbur's list emphasizes two considerations concerning boredom. First, being boring is not self-evidently a characteristic of or caused by those things to which human beings attach the label "boring." In particular, the world cannot truthfully be described as boring. Secondly,

the definitions clarify the specific phrasing of line twelve, underscoring that the world is not tiresome *in itself*, but rather, the world is tiresome *in us*. As Marion bluntly asserts, "the lack comes from the one who is bored" (*Reduction and Givenness* 190). Being bored is specific to human beings; moreover, as Wilbur presents it, being bored exposes a problem *in*, as well as *for*, human beings.[3]

Heidegger's analysis of boredom in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* clarifies some of what boredom means in Wilbur's treatment. The core of *Fundamental Concepts* is an effort to understand what it means to be human, and Heidegger's argument runs parallel with his argument in *Being and Time*. To summarize roughly: human beings are those particular beings who are aware, or can become aware, of their own finitude and situatedness in a world; they are those particular beings who try to make sense of things as a whole. As Hubert Dreyfus explains, in *Being-in-the-World*, "Dasein is constantly, in its activities, making sense of itself and everything else" (29); in concluding he says, "Only Dasein makes sense of things," adding that "making sense of independent reality is something that we do" (256, 258). Framing in this way what it means to be human implies that human beings cannot be understood as isolable abstractions, but only in their various relations in and with the "as a whole," that is, with a "world" as constituted in human understanding.

Heidegger's point of entry into these considerations is what he calls "attunement." The German is *Stimmung*, usually translated with "mood" or "temper" or — in the first English translation of *Being and Time* — "state-of-mind," but it is related to the German word for tuning an instrument; Heidegger's usage exploits the etymological implications. According to Heidegger, attunement determines — in a strong sense — a human being's relation to a world; it also offers insight into the nature and structure of that relation. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger focuses on anxiety (see Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World* 168-83), but in *Fundamental Concepts* his analysis focuses on boredom.

Because Alan Closson nicely connects several key ideas I mean to develop, I quote his summary as a means of previewing my own explication. Closson focuses on Heidegger's "Letter on 'Humanism,'" but the ideas he highlights persist in Heidegger's works. Closson reports that for Heidegger: "'The oblivion of Being . . . makes itself known indirectly through the fact that man always observes and handles only beings'" (n.p.). Essentially, the "oblivion of being" is the alienation of human beings from the rest of the world as this alienation becomes

manifest in human objectification of the non-human — or of the human other. As Closson explains, "For Heidegger this tendency of humankind . . . reaches a zenith in the modern era's obsession with scientific progress. . . . So long as humankind remains enamored of scientific efficacy," however, "it will remain 'homeless,' alienated from its primordial relation to Being." This problem is one of attunement, which will be restored by "sensitivity to language and to poetry specifically." According to Closson, then, "We cannot seek the truth of Being under our own initiative as subjects reaching out to grasp objects, but instead must discern its 'call' in language and respond poetically. The poet then, for Heidegger, is one who attunes herself to Being's call and transcribes the experience into poetry, thus bearing witness to the encounter." Significantly, the phrase "bearing witness" occurs also in Wilbur's poem.

The homelessness Closson mentions, human alienation from the world, gives rise to what Heidegger calls "homesickness," which, in *Fundamental Concepts*, he explicitly equates with boredom (80). Because Novalis had called philosophy "homesickness, an urge to be at home everywhere," Heidegger identifies "homesickness as the fundamental attunement of philosophizing" (5). He explains, "Philosophy can only be such an urge if we who philosophize are *not* at home everywhere." Being at home means being "at once and at all times within the whole. We name this '*within the whole*' and its character of wholeness the *world*. We are, and to the extent that we are, we are always *waiting for something*. We are always *called upon by something as a whole*.[4] This 'as a whole' is the world" (5).[5] The "call" is crucial; in the relationship with world that defines what it means to be human, world *claims* the human being, who can heed that call or neglect it. To heed the call means to make sense of one's place in the "as a whole." We might think of the claim of the world as analogous with the note sounded by the first violinist that aligns the sounds of the instruments in the orchestra as a whole. Heidegger explains that "we are driven in our homesickness to being as a whole. Our very being is this restlessness. We have somehow already departed toward this whole, or better, we are always already on the way to it," though we are also "simultaneously torn back by something" (*Fundamental Concepts* 5-6, punctuation adjusted). Because human beings are finite and time-bound, we are prone to falling out of tune. Heidegger's "always already on the way [and] simultaneously torn back" approximates the oxymora in Wilbur's poem, the restless stasis manifesting as "fierce velleity" and "stalled" wish.

Heidegger insists that we cannot answer our questions concerning man and his relation to world apart from attunement, which deter-

mines our questions and our perceptions. His initial attempt to define metaphysics, he concedes, has not yielded a definition. Instead, "Our question: What is metaphysics? has transformed itself into the question: What is man?"[6] This question likewise resists an answer: "man himself has become more enigmatic for us. We ask anew: What is man? A transition, a direction, a storm sweeping over our planet, a recurrence or a vexation for the gods? We do not know. Yet we have seen that in the essence of this mysterious being, philosophy happens" (7; see also pages 4 and 6). The question "What is Man?" coincides with the broader question concerning how humans relate to the "as a whole."

By raising these questions conjointly, Heidegger enters into conversation with a long tradition. Analogues in scripture (and in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which I consider further along) illuminate Heidegger's relevance for Wilbur's poem. Psalm 8:3-8, anticipating Heidegger, notices man's ambiguous status:

> When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also all the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the seas, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. (English Standard Version, formatting simplified; compare Hebrews 2:6-8)

Alluding to Genesis 1:28, the psalmist affirms man's divinely appointed place both within and over creation. In the psalm, the question "what is man?" registers humility and wonder in response to the awesomeness of creation and the dignifying grace by which God elevates human beings as his stewards over that creation.

The question the psalmist asks is rather differently contextualized in the book of Job. In "Some Notes on 'Lying,'" Wilbur mentions the poem's "echo of Job, and its intended evocation of a whole passage" (142). He has in mind at least Job 39:19-25 and probably all of Job 38-40. Part of the point of the allusion has to do with the condition of humankind. In 7:17-18 the book's protagonist asks God, "What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him, visit him every morning and test him every moment?" Job's version of the question registers his fundamental sense of alienation: from God, from his environment, from his friends, and in some respects from

himself. God answers Job (affectively, if not logically) when he reminds him that although Job apprehends some things, as a finite being he is unable to comprehend all of creation, which ought to evoke in him wonder. The psalmist prefaces his question with "when I look at your heavens," and God reminds Job to look at the heavens, asking, "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion? . . . Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?" (38:31, 33). Job responds with appropriate awe.

The traditional question "what is man?" — a question which includes corollaries concerning human relations with God and the world — likewise frames Heidegger's analysis of boredom. There are three kinds of boredom, all "tied up with time and the problem of time," as he says (81). He characterizes the first form of boredom as "being bored *by* something." In the experience of this form of boredom, we are "held in limbo" as "time drags" for us (99); we are "left empty" because "things refuse themselves" to us: we are unable to find them interesting in order to divert ourselves (101-03). He illustrates with the experience of waiting for a train:

> We are sitting . . . in the tasteless station of some lonely minor railway. It is four hours until the next train arrives. The district is uninspiring. We do have a book in our rucksack, though — shall we read? No. Or think through a problem, some question? We are unable to. We read the timetables or study the table giving the various distances from this station to other places we are not otherwise acquainted with at all. We look at the clock — only a quarter of an hour has gone by. Then we go out onto the local road. We walk up and down, just to have something to do. But it is no use. Then we count the trees along the road, look at our watch again — exactly five minutes since we last looked at it. Fed up with walking back and forth, we sit down on a stone, draw all kinds of figures in the sand, and in so doing catch ourselves looking at our watch yet again — half an hour — and so on.
>
> (93)

In this first form of boredom our experience is that of losing time (128); the situation makes us bored by seeming to take time away from us (128). According to Marion's gloss on Heidegger, this first form of boredom "regrets losing time for [that which] does not deserve the expenditure" (*Reduction and Givenness* 173). It exposes, in other words, what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls "empty time" ("Relevance of the Beautiful" 41-42).

In the experience of the second form of boredom we find ourselves bored with something, perhaps in retrospect. In this form, we may not notice our boredom at the time because we repress our awareness that time is passing. Nevertheless, we are bored. Partly anticipating Wilbur, Heidegger offers a party as an example:

> We have been invited out somewhere for the evening. We do not need to go along. Still, we have been tense all day, and we have time in the evening. So we go along. There we find the *usual* food and the usual table conversation, everything is not only very tasty, but tasteful as well. Afterward people sit together having a lively discussion, as they say, perhaps listening to music, having a chat, and things are witty and amusing. And already it is time to leave. The ladies assure us, not merely when leaving, but downstairs and outside too as we gather to leave, that it really was very nice, or that it was terribly charming. Indeed. There is nothing at all to be found that might have been boring about this evening, neither the conversation, nor the people, nor the rooms. Thus we come home quite satisfied. We cast a quick glance at the work we interrupted that evening, make a rough assessment of things and look ahead to the next day—and then it comes: I was bored after all this evening, on the occasion of this invitation.
>
> (109)

In this passage, talk is an important feature of the experience of this second form of boredom, as he mentions "conversation" twice, and "chat" and "discussion" once each: we are close to Wilbur's "talking with toxic zest." Heidegger distinguishes the second form of boredom from the first by noting that in the first "what is boring is evidently *this* or *that*," while in the second "we are *not* able to say *what* is boring us" (114). In the second form of boredom we are held in limbo "by social rules and circumstances." In the first form time drags, while in the second form it passes without our properly heeding it (115). "In fact: we are involved in all that is going on, we are in there chatting away . . . [we are] swept along by whatever is transpiring there" (117). In this form of boredom "we abandon ourselves" (117). By recognizing this second form of boredom we understand more adequately that boredom has to do with the way we engage the world around us. As Marion explains, this form of boredom "consists in being oneself bored by oneself with regard to something: according to its corresponding temporality, [this] boredom assigns us to a present state devoid of any future" (*Reduction and Givenness* 173).

Heidegger focuses on the third form of boredom, which he labels "profound boredom." Having characterized the first form as "becoming bored by" and the second as "being bored with," he distinguishes this third form with the phrase "it is boring for one" (136). This form has nothing obvious to do with a particular situation or occasion (135), so that, more emphatically than either of the other forms, this form has the "character of *manifesting how things stand concerning us*" (136). This boredom delivers an inescapable message to us:

> Whereas in the first case of boredom we are concerned to shout down the boredom by passing the time so that *we do not need to listen to it*; and whereas in the second case what is distinctive is a *not wanting to listen*, we now have a *being compelled to listen*, being compelled to listen in the sense of that kind of compelling force which everything *properly authentic* about Dasein possesses, and which accordingly is related to Dasein's *innermost freedom*.
>
> (136)

Heidegger devotes considerable space to explaining the message that profound boredom delivers. Centrally, the message concerns "*Dasein's being delivered over to beings' telling refusal of themselves as a whole*" (139). The "beings" he names here include everything that is, but most particularly all those things that make up material reality. Heidegger is concerned with "things as a whole" which, in *Fundamental Concepts*, means "world." So when Heidegger mentions "beings' telling refusal of themselves as a whole," he means that experience of this boredom exposes one as alienated from the world: we are no longer hearing the first violinist or the rest of the orchestra. A consequence of immersion in this kind of boredom is that we human beings are thereby limited with respect to our possibilities. Heidegger asks and then answers the obvious question: "What do beings in this telling refusal of themselves as a whole tell us in such a refusal?" In their refusal they withhold "the very possibilities of doing and acting" (140) — or, using Wilbur's terms, "lassitude" defeats our ability "to make or do." In this boredom, human beings fail to make sense of the world, fail to understand it as a coherent whole; they therefore fail to value things — or themselves — correctly and, as both symptom and consequence, fail to experience wonder. To put it even more simply, the call of boredom amounts to a wake-up call.

In contrast with Heidegger, who expresses ambivalence concerning the theological background that nevertheless informs his account of boredom, Marion foregrounds the Christian precedents that implicitly shape Heidegger's understanding. Marion quotes Pascal's assessment: "'without the hunger for spiritual things, one becomes bored'" (*Reduction and Givenness* 190). He further notes that St. Thomas Aquinas, "analyzing ἀκηδία, [Latinized as acedia, also known as 'sloth,'] stresses that its boredom . . . so weighs upon man's soul, that he wants to do nothing" (*Reduction and Givenness* 247, n. 71). In terms of Christian theology, boredom's failure to understand the claim of the world involves a more fundamental failure, failure to acknowledge God as creator. Moreover, boredom's desertion of the world and of the Creator amounts to desertion of the self as well. So Marion says, "Boredom, engulfing first and foremost the *I*, dissolves also the things, the beings of the world" (*Reduction and Givenness* 192), or as he puts it elsewhere, "Boredom's gaze strikes being in general with vanity" (*God Without Being* 119-20). Heidegger's earlier consideration of the question "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?" noticed the same effect: "The question is there in a spell of boredom, when . . . the stubborn ordinariness of beings lays open a wasteland in which it makes no difference to us whether beings are or are not" (*Introduction to Metaphysics* 1-2).

Although Heidegger maintained a distinction between his philosophy and Christian theology, the ideas I've been describing maintain traces of biblical influence, including an awareness of the same creation theology that informs Wilbur's poem. Late in *Fundamental Concepts*, in fact, Heidegger invokes a biblical theology of creation in order to clarify some of the features of his account of "world":

> Here I would just like to give a very general indication of the context in which . . . the problem of world initially arises. The most familiar aspect of the problem reveals itself in the distinction between God and world. The world is the totality of beings outside of and other than God. Expressed in Christian terms, such beings thus also represent the realm of created being as distinct from uncreated being. And man in turn is also a part of the world understood in this sense. Yet man is not simply regarded as a part of the world within which he appears and which he makes up in part. Man also stands over against the world. This standing-over-against is a '*having*' of world as that in which man moves, with which he engages, which he both masters and serves, and to which he is exposed. Thus man is, first, a part of the world, and second, as this part he is at once

> both master and servant of the world. (176-77 and see 272-73, where he discusses Romans 8:19; see also Wrathall 199)

Here again Heidegger addresses the question "what is man?" The problem of world which Heidegger has in view is the problem of humankind's relation to world, the problem of being attuned to it, properly heeding its claim.

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare provides a succinct illustration of a human not being attuned. King Claudius sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to Hamlet to find out what is troubling him. Hamlet's reply echoes both the eighth psalm and the experience of Job in ways that are suggestive for our understanding of Heidegger as well as of Wilbur. Having discerned their purpose in interrogating him, Hamlet explains,

> I have of late — but wherefore I know not — lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercise; and indeed it goes heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory. This most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire — why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god — the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?
>
> (2.2.285-98)

Like the psalmist, Hamlet recognizes in man something akin to "heavenly beings." He knows that man as animal is the highest of the animals. Furthermore, he knows he ought to be awed by the heavens and by the man beneath the heavens; he knows that this awe ought to condition — to attune — his assessment of man; yet his awareness fails to produce the appropriate affect.[7] Hamlet's analysis of his own condition might be effectively glossed, in fact, by a sentence from Heidegger's "What is Metaphysics?": "Profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference" (87; for discussion see Marion, *God Without Being* 115-26). Physically, Hamlet is "at home" in Denmark, but affectively he is absent, removed "into a remarkable indifference" or, as he himself puts it, surrounded by a "congregation of vapours."

Heidegger again uses fog as a poetic image for human alienation from the world in *Fundamental Concepts*. He asks, "Do things ultimately stand in such a way with us that a profound boredom draws back and forth like a silent fog in the abysses of Dasein?" (77). As Marion explains, "boredom drowns in the mist of indifference not only beings, but above all the differences among beings" (*Reduction and Givenness* 174). As a consequence, "'beings no longer say anything [to us],'" or, to express it a little differently, "'beings no longer claim [us],'" no longer call us:

> beings in effect no longer speak, since they retreat and fade as in a fog; they steal away from any speech that they would receive and, even more, any claim that they would exercise; the indistinction that confuses them with beings as a whole smothers above all the sound of the slightest word; henceforth there is nothing to say about beings as a whole, precisely because no beings any longer present themselves, but only a vague whole. (*Reduction and Givenness* 182, citing "What is Metaphysics?")[8]

A little later Marion asks, "From where does there rise the indistinct and sticky cloud that dismisses without killing, that leaves intact in annulling?" He answers, "From boredom alone" (192).

The fog image pulls us back to Wilbur's poem. Wilbur characterizes boredom by means of an allusion to Milton in lines thirty-seven through forty: "There is what galled the arch-negator, sprung / From Hell to probe with intellectual sight / The cells and heavens of a given world / Which he could take but as another prison." Wilbur has in mind the opening section of *Paradise Lost*, Book Nine. Having escaped the lake of fire, Satan infiltrates the newly created earth. He can see that earth is glorious (even, he says, "like to Heav'n, if not preferr'd," 99), but knows that he is alienated from earth; like Hamlet, he is condemned to a Heideggerian homesickness. Observing earth's beauties he concludes, "I in none of these / Find place or refuge; and the more I see / Pleasures about me, so much more I feel / Torment within me, as from the hateful siege / Of contraries; all good to me becomes / Bane, and in Heav'n much worse would be my state. / But neither here seek I, no nor in Heav'n / To dwell" (118-25).[9] In other words, Satan carries hell with him. As Wilbur clearly means for us to recognize, Satan's condition is essentially boredom, understood as an inability — which arose from a refusal — to experience wonder.

Part of the point of my reading of Wilbur is to clarify that he is not the kind of Christian who thinks that "this world is not my

home." Rather, as he expresses it in the title phrase of his most familiar poem, "love calls us to the things of this world." This understanding is orthodox. The Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck, for example, clearly asserts that "With their Christian confession . . . Christians find themselves at home also in the world. They are not strangers here and see the God who rules creation as none other than the one they address as Father in Christ" (*Reformed Dogmatics* 1.320).

As Wilbur expresses the problem in "Lying," though Satan can see the "given world" clearly enough "with intellectual sight" (the phrase suggests a strict rationalism which denies the legitimacy of insight), his subjective location — his attunement — makes it impossible for him to appreciate the world for itself. As Marion observes, "In order to see, one must first want to see" (*Being Given* 305.) So Wilbur continues:

> Small wonder that, pretending not to be,
> He drifted through the bar-like boles of Eden
> In *a black mist low creeping*, dragging down
> And darkening with moody self-absorption
> What, when he left it, lifted and, if seen
> From the sun's vantage, seethed with vaulting hues.
>
> (41-46)

The phrase "black mist low creeping" is quoted from *Paradise Lost*, but where Milton says that Satan crept "as" a black mist, Wilbur says he crept "in" a black mist. Satan's perspective, in other words, reduces everything to obscurity — the fog of boredom. His "pretending" points not only to Satan's effort to disguise himself, but also to pretense, "arch-negation," the *foundational* lie which denies the goodness of what God has made.[10]

In Wilbur's poem, Satan's pretense relevantly represents the suppression of truth described in Romans 1:18-20; there it is human beings who fail to recognize God's self-revelation "in the things that have been made" (1:20, ESV). The Miltonic Satan of Wilbur's "Lying" appears as a desperate analogue to the party-goers of Wilbur's opening lines; their inability to appreciate the created world weakly mirrors Satan's antipathy towards creation.

Wilbur juxtaposes poetic "lying" with boredom because poetic "lying" is the best means we finite human beings have to speak truth about the world, since the world as a whole exceeds comprehen-

sion. Several comments from Gadamer's "The Relevance of the Beautiful" are helpful here. In terms partly shaped by Heidegger's account of boredom, Gadamer distinguishes "our normal, pragmatic experience of time" from what he calls "festival time." He characterizes our normal experience of time as the time we experience when we "'have time for something.' This time is at our disposal; it is divisible; it is the time that we have or do not have, or at least think we do not have. In its temporal structure, such time is empty and needs to be filled. Boredom is an extreme example of this empty time" (42). As I've argued, Heidegger's third form of boredom makes us responsible for recovering a sense of wonder with regard to the mystery of the world. Gadamer offers a complementary description of this recovery of wonder when he contrasts empty time with "festival time." He says, "There is . . . a totally different experience of time which I think is profoundly related to the kind of time characteristic of both the festival and the work of art. In contrast with the empty time that needs to be filled, I propose to call this 'fulfilled' or 'autonomous' time." Gadamer thinks of "festival time" in terms of our being pulled out of our experience of ordinary time (time that we must fill) and into the event of the feast. Josef Pieper similarly asserts "that music, the fine arts, poetry — anything that festively raises up human existence and thereby constitutes its true riches — all derive their life from a hidden root, and this root is a contemplation which is turned toward God and the world so as to affirm them" (11). To put all this in terms of my argument, Gadamer and Pieper agree that what distinguishes a work of art is that it counters the "empty time" of boredom by providing access to the "fulfilled time" in which we see the world as it is — in Pieper's explicitly Christian terms, we see the world as God's. Poetry, and specifically metaphor, draws us into festival time.

Gadamer's pair "empty time" and "fulfilled time" develops the traditional distinction between χρόνος and καιρός. With reference to profound boredom Heidegger says, "It is boring for one. In this, the time that entrances as a whole announces and tells of itself as that which is to be ruptured and can be ruptured solely in the *moment of vision* in which time itself, as that which properly makes Dasein possible in its actions, is at work" (*Fundamental Concepts* 149). As Simon Critchley explains, "What Heidegger calls 'the moment of vision' . . . can be approached as a translation of the Greek kairos, the right or opportune moment. Within Christian theology, the kairos was the fulfillment or redemption of time that occurred with the appearance of Christ" (n.p.; see also Dreyfus, "Better Source"). In Marion this moment of vision becomes the anamorphosis that alters the perception of the perceiver,

thereby transforming the perceiver into one who sees and then bears witness (see *Being Given* 119-31). If a poem communicates such a moment of vision to readers, the poet must have experienced already the vision to which she bears witness.

Recall that according to Wilbur "lassitude" keeps us from "making or doing" (15-16). Right after describing Satan's boredom, Wilbur asserts that "Closer to making than the deftest fraud / Is *seeing* how the catbird's tail was made" (47-48). The deftest fraud is Satan's pretense. Wilbur contrasts Satan's *making up* with the better *making* that rightly regards what is made — a seeing that then bears witness concerning what one has seen. Such bearing witness is, in fact, the heart of what human beings, and in particular poets, are called to, their appropriate response to the claim that the created world makes on them (consider again Romans 1:18). Wilbur says as much back in lines sixteen through eighteen: "In the strict sense, of course, / We invent nothing, merely bearing witness / To what each morning brings again to light." Marion has something similar in mind when he says "A great painter never invents anything" (*In Excess* 51). The sense of this calling is everywhere in Wilbur's poetry, from the early "Praise in Summer" (published in 1947) where he says that we are "most surely called to praise" (1), through "Mayflies" (published in 2000) where he says he has "been called to be . . . one whose task is joyfully to see / How fair the fiats of the caller are" (21, 23-24). Because we are finite and time-bound, we need the non-literalness of metaphor to get at the truth of the world and of God, but this is our proper creativity, antidote to the alienation at the root of our boredom. By bearing witness in poetry, we exercise properly human creativity, as Wilbur suggests with his concluding allusion to Genesis 1:2; with poetry we give credit "to the dove that hatched the dove-tailed world" and thereby "[shame] the devil."[11]

NOTES

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1 For brief comments on "Lying" see Michelson 208-09; Jeffrey 184-95; Lundin 9-10 and 90; for a somewhat fuller reading of the poem's use of metaphor, see Tate.

2 Quoted phrases come from the relevant entries in *The American Heritage*

Dictionary, New College Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981). I adjust capitalization and punctuation to suit my syntax.

3 Curiously, Wilbur does not include *ennui* in this list of synonyms for boredom. However, ennui figures prominently in "A Baroque Wall-Fountain in the Villa Sciarra," so that "Wall-Fountain" ought to be read as a companion to "Lying." On ennui, see also Marion, *Reduction and Givenness* 191.

4 Formally, Heidegger's "we" sometimes refers to human beings in general and sometimes to philosophers more particularly; while he recognizes differing capacities, on the points I develop, Heidegger regards all human beings as potential philosophers.

5 Similarly, in the "Letter on 'Humanism,'" "Homelessness is the symptom of oblivion of being" and "oblivion of being," means alienation from the "as a whole" (258).

6 In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* Heidegger observes that Kant compresses the fundamental questions of philosophy into the question "What is man?" (8). See Merold Westphal, 59; in a note on this passage (80, n. 8), Westphal mentions Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Heidegger says, "Kant reduces the three questions of authentic metaphysics to the fourth, what is man" (145.)

7 For a relevant comparison of acedia with modern malaise, see Taylor, *Secular Age* 299-321.

8 In this passage, Marion is comparing fog with the nothingness of anxiety rather than with boredom, but Heidegger's occasional conflation of boredom with anxiety and his use of the fog image for both suggest that Marion's description applies as well to boredom as to anxiety.

9 "To dwell" here resonates with Heidegger's appropriation of Hölderlin's phrase "poetically man dwells" and with the problem of homesickness sketched above; see "Poetically Man Dwells" and Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World* 40-59.

10 As Marion observes, "the pretense of not seeing does not prove that there is nothing to see. It can simply suggest that there is indeed something to see, but that in order to see it, it is necessary to learn to see otherwise…." *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner and others (New York: Fordham UP, 2008) 124.

11 The final phrase alludes to a speech by Hotspur in Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV*, 3.1.56-60.

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