

WEDDING WIND - PHILIP LARKIN

Introduction

The poem is full of joy, expectation, and excitement of the young woman on the brink of her new life. The wind is a symbol of renewal; the past is being transformed; a time of enriched experience is beginning.

Larkin stands apart from the persona of the young woman. She is the speaker; it is her story.

Two separate experiences are recounted by her. They form a narrative that comprises her wedding night and the first morning of her married life. Ironically her new husband is absent throughout the poem. He is looking after the nuts and bolts of the real farm. She is looking to herself and the joyful powers she is beginning to take responsibility for; the power to be a lover, a wife, a mother, a co-owner of the farm.

The two stanzas trace the sequence of her growth from a simple girl

"and I was sad
That any man or beast should lack
The happiness I had."

To a speaker of profound questions..

"Can it be borne, this bodying forth by wind
Of joy my actiond turn on....?"

A strong narrative sequence unites both stanzas; first night, first day. Think of The Book of Genesis; of Eve. Consider what must have been on her mind during the first morning in Eden – her joy at knowing herself to be the treasure house of all future generations. Larkin appears to suggest that the girl is partaking of the same self-realisation as Eve. Note the biblical echoes of,

"Can even death....conclude
Our kneeling as cattle by all generous waters?"

Wind in the poem is energy. In stanza one the speaker remembers the high wind first and then the noise of the door banging in the wind. Her new husband is not part of her recollection – he is absent bolting the stable door. In the first stanza she recalls the first night of her marriage. Often in the lore of marriage the first night is spoken of with special significance; as consummation and initiation - but not in this poem.

Unexpectedly she tells us the simple truth; she felt a bit stupid when he had left,

“leaving me stupid in the candlelight”

She recalls seeing her face in the “twisted candlestick” but yet she admits to

“seeing nothing”.

It may be that she is telling us that it is not until the next morning, “Now in the day”, when she experiences the wind as she feeds the chickens that she fully realises its meaning as a symbol for her own new energy and delight.

Notice that there is no honeymoon. She must look to her chores as must her husband;

“He has gone to look to the floods, and I
Carry a chipped pail to the chicken run,”

This might be seen as tedium but the change she undergoes is an inward, spiritual one.

It leads her to ask those profound questions (they are really statements) which end the poem.

1.

“Can it be borne, this bodying forth by wind
Of joy my actions turn on, like a thread
Carrying beads?”

The thrill of her excitement is so intense that only the wind is big enough to embody it, “bodying forth”. The meaning of her life is clear to her now. Even her simple actions like feeding chickens feel as if they are part of a greater unified whole, “like a thread carrying beads.”

2.

“Shall I be let to sleep
Now this perpetual morning shares my bed?”

The sexual joy, the romance, her ownership of the farm, the very newness of her situation makes her so giddy, so thrilled that she feels she will never be able to calm down again so that she may sleep. The windy morning symbolises all that is new and energetic in her life.

3.

“Can even death dry up
These new delighted lakes, conclude
Our kneeling as cattle by all-generous waters?”

She feels immortal. The brimming lakes symbolise new life to be enjoyed almost forever. Her gratitude for this new life is expressed in the image of the grateful cattle kneeling as they drink their fill – a picture of Eden on the first day?