

Poetry Explication of “Love Poem with Toast”

Wanting to be wanted: Miller Williams' direct, honest language in *Love Poem with Toast* forces the reader to examine the habitual ways in which one searches for meaning and happiness in life. Using repetition and interesting juxtapositions, Williams reveals the steadfast way in which the desire for love prevails in a world of constant distraction.

Williams begins the poem (lines 1-8) with a powerful juxtaposition of the actions of everyday life that are completed to cause and those that are completed to prevent. Williams implies that the speaker finds relief in having the ability to control some aspects of his life, and although they are mundane, he is still eased by the small characteristics of his life that can be controlled in an otherwise uncontrollable world. The speaker relies on the comfort of the constancy of “the alarm to wake..., the coffee to perc, [and] the car to start,” as he believes that each mindless, repeated distraction is important in helping him to simply get by. Williams explains that the remaining actions in life, those which are meant to prevent something from occurring, are merely another form of distraction. The speaker admits that he is influenced by the illusion of what he has in his control to prevent the uncontrollable from happening, like “keep[ing]...the skin from aging, the hoe from rusting, [and] the truth from getting out;” however, he reiterates that these actions do not provide for anything but further diversions. Williams clarifies that people ignore the fact that elements such as age and rust cannot be avoided by spending their lives searching for an impossible means of prevention. The speaker, however, sees the possibilities of a rust-free hoe or ageless skin as another form of control that may help him through one more day.

Williams further develops his exposition of the speaker's need for control by describing how the speaker's efforts to cause and prevent are all derived from the same desire to make life move forward (lines 9-17). He uses the simile “with yes and no like the poles of a battery powering the passage through the days” to describe the effect of simply wanting to be able to endure life. The image of a battery is symbolic of the way in which people live, as they use what they can control to power them through the day, yet the opposite pole of what they cannot control distracts them from an easy passage through life. The speaker's need for control over his life is paired with his desire for control, as he is continually working to discover the aspects which he

can manipulate, "wanting the water to boil [and] wanting to be home by dark." The elements under his control are juxtaposed by those he wants to prevent, "wanting not to lose the rain forest, wanting not to have cancer, wanting not to run out of gas." The repetition of his desire reveals that what he can control and what he cannot are equally powered by his yearning. Williams embodies the essence of not only the speaker, but the person so familiar to mankind who strives to find happiness and distraction through a false interpretation of what causes true bliss. The speaker's desire in the beginning of the poem is solely for causing the things he wants and preventing those he does not, whereas further into the poem his desire develops into a deep need to control his life and discover a way in which he can simply *live*.

Williams then exposes the speaker's principle need for love above all other distractions and desires (lines 18-22). The speaker emphasizes that despite his control over the crutches of his everyday life, he is never fully satisfied, as his need for love triumphs over all other needs. He clarifies that "each of us wants the other watching at the end," of our struggle for control, and through our wants for "the water to boil...the car to start, the skin [not to age]," we truly are searching for love, for someone "who want[s] not to leave [us] alone" in the disorderly world. Williams uses the metaphor "wanting to love beyond this meat and bone" to interpret the constant yearning for love away from a world of ordinary, concrete actions. Williams mentions nothing about love until the final portion of the poem to portray how the speaker's constant want for other things caused the failure of his love, as the only thing he truly wanted was lost among all other desires. While believing that youthful skin and a full tank of gas were important, he lost the opportunity to see love as the savior from those unimportant distractions. Now as "[the speaker] gaze[s] across breakfast [he can only] pretend" that his bland, daily actions are more important than the persisting power of the love he craves.

