

Richard Wilbur

(1921- )

Altitudes (1956)

1

Look up into the dome:  
It is a great salon, a brilliant place,  
Yet not too splendid for the race  
Whom we imagine there, wholly at home

With the gold-rosetted white  
Wainscot, the oval windows, and the fault -  
Less figures of the painted vault.  
Strolling, conversing in that precious light,

They chat no doubt of love.  
The pleasant burden of their courtesy  
Borne down at times to you and me  
Where, in this dark, we stand and gaze above.

For all they cannot share,  
All that the world cannot in fact afford,  
Their lofty premises are floored  
With the massed voices of continual prayer.

2

How far it is from here  
To Emily Dickinson's father's house in America;  
Think of her climbing a spiral stair  
Up to the little cupola with its clear

Small panes, its room for one.  
Like the dark house below, so full of eyes  
In mirrors and of shut-in flies,  
This chamber furnished only with the sun

Is she and she alone,  
A mood to which she rises, in which she sees  
Bird-choristers in all the trees  
And a wild shining of the pure unknown

On Amherst. This is caught  
In the dormers of a neighbor, who, no doubt,  
Will before long be coming out  
To pace about his garden, lost in thought.