

W.S. MERWIN: INTRODUCTION

When a poet's reading at Brown is sponsored by such diverse groups as the Graduate Student Council, the Unitarian Church and the Brown University Libraries, one can be certain that the poet's work has relevance to many communities.

This will not be a tedious introduction to a poet whose work began to surface 30 years ago. No long mentions of awards or publications or teaching appointments. Yet it is perhaps useful to suggest before W.S. Merwin reads, that although his vision has resulted in many collections of poetry and translations enjoyed by a markedly diverse number of communities, that essentially, and despite the expected changes in thematic interest that any poet who has been prolific for three decades should experience, his poetry seeks answers to a question that unites all communities by pinpointing the central dilemma of our age.

This interpretation is by no means novel and the dilemma itself has recurred and always will recur throughout history. But we need continually to be reminded of the worth of the inquiry, particularly in an age where technology trespasses over the environment, where violent acts extinguish our leaders and where money is readily available for defense but not for the poor. So the question that W.S. Merwin refers his communities to and which will resound tonight (I think), may be phrased this way: who are we?