CHAPTER IV

Family Politics and Neuroses : No Laughing Matter (1967).

Wilson's sixth novel, No Laughing Matter (1967) deals once again with a family saga set off against a historical background of British bourgeoisie middle class life, spanning a period of almost fifty years. It is the longest of Wilson's novels.

No Laughing Matter is divided into five books and nine distinct time-sections, each illuminating some particular moment at which the characters interact with their times. The time-slices (1912, 1919, 1925, 1935, 1937, 1942, 1946, 1956, 1967) are redolent with historical events.

The characters belonging to the Mathews family are the first generation Mathews – Granny M., and the spinsterish aunt, Miss Rickard. The second generation belongs to William Ackerly Mathews or 'Billy Pop' and the mother, Clara Madeline Mathews, mockingly named 'the Countess' by the children. The children make up the third generation – the eldest, Quentin, who has been away for sometime fighting in the war, 'plump little house proud' Gladys, handsome actor Rupert, the twins – the novelist Margaret and the domestic Sukey and 'the little black monkey' Marcus. A cockney servant Stoker appropriately named 'Regan' by the children is also a member of the family.

The family saga revolves round the life and career of the six Mathews children whose childhood has been far from normal with a self-pitying failure of a father and a temperamental, bitchy mother. Bitter and disillusioned, the children are far more mature for their age and they often long to let out their pent-up frustration by having recourse to daydreams and 'The Game'. As time passes, they grow up and choose their respective careers. The choice of their vocation reflects their childhood trait.
At the same time, historical perspective is woven into the texture of the family saga. Different time periods point to the major events of the time like the world wars, the period-in-between, the rise of Fascism, the Suez Crisis, the World Economic Crisis etc. Also, the different short plays interrupting the story refer to the prevalent literary scene of the times.

As the life and careers of the four generation Mathews family is traced, we are filled with sympathy for the failings of mankind. The emotions of the Mathews children who have never known filial love as reflected in 'The Game' is, indeed, no laughing matter.

Interestingly, childhood and the family have always been Wilson's favourite topics and he seems to draw largely from autobiographical elements when portraying a disgusting view of family life. His attack on the family in 'Mother's Sense of Fun' and in 'Union Reunion' in The Wrong Set finds an echo in No Laughing Matter. The head of the Mathews family is modelled on the writer's own father, and also goes by the same name. Margaret Mathews' literary career seems to be an extension of Wilson's own and, through her self-criticism, he explores some of his own problems as a writer. Her early stories are 'wonderfully nasty' like Wilson's early attempts at story-writing. Above all, the loneliness and sensitiveness of the Mathews children in the face of adult selfishness find a reflection in the portrayal of the character of Rodney, a small boy in the story 'Necessity's child' in Such Darling Dodos. Like the escape of the Mathews children into the rigours of the game to avoid the painful realities, Rodney also escapes into fantasy though of a violent kind.

The novel starts with a visit of the Mathews to the Wild West Exhibition in a scene recaptured from the Wild West set in a chapter named 'Before the War'. This visit is the only one of its kind for the Mathews family in that they experience moments
of happy carefree intimacy for the first time and which they will never know again:

In any case, what no recording machine yet invented could have preserved was the pioneer happiness, the primitive dream that for some minutes gave to that volatile, edged and edgy family a union of happy carefree intimacy that it had scarcely known before and was never to know again. (12)

Each one of the occupants of the wagon is preoccupied with day dreams of his El Dorado. Even 'the Countess' is happy and buoyant, a mood pretty unusual to her. Quentin takes on the role of 'guardian Reuben, proud watchdog eldest son alert and yet relaxed in his role'. To the second Quentin 'unity was all' (15), having been forgiven for not 'sharing in shabbiness and sudden violences' (15) because of his years at Granny M's at Ladbroke Grove. The third Quentin is the 'looker-on' who looks on objectively at things and at himself. Gladys dreams of running a general store in El Dorado whereas Rupert, 'the great golden eagle', longs to fly 'higher and higher up towards the mountain crags'. (17) Margaret buries herself in her novel, 'The Journal of Lady Margaret Carmichael, A Lady of Quality' which is in fact based on her own life. Domestic as she is, Sukey dreams of an English farm complete with boisterous children and creatures of all kinds. In turn, Marcus looks ahead and finds himself and his family riding an elephant ladled with rich jewellery and being heralded by everyone in El Dorado.

The dreams of each character outline the personality of the dreamer, and tell us what each one of them expects from life. The new-found unity of the Mathews family makes the tenuous journey to El Dorado bearable and lively and it reminds us of the great pioneering happiness of the Wild West. In a way, the characters seem to prefigure
the events about to be enacted in each life though at the moment they are a cast on a roll desiring to be buried 'deep in this family day'. (16)

'The Laughing Mirrors' at the Exhibition enable the children to 'look' at and analyse themselves as they are mirrored. Gladys looks sour like her great aunt, Quentin comes up looking like a devil whereas Marcus' reflection is an image of his mother which frightens them all: 'It's Her. It's Her. And, frightened, they crowded around to confirm'. (25) This expression of fear by the children makes the relationship explicit. The mother and children relationship here is not what it should be. We recall here Alexandra Grant's address of her parents as 'Him' and 'Her' in Wilson's seventh novel, *As Il By Magic*. Sadly for the children, the adult mood has changed. Everything is measured in terms of money, loans and repayment. The children are expected to be on good behaviour as a repayment for the 'afternoon of [their] lives' (27). As Margaret says, 'We didn't know we were meant to repay you' reaffirming the fact that companionship, love, and happiness are not for sale.

Book Two is set in the year 1919 and it is a virtual war declared against 'the white slug (Billy Pop) and the black witch' (the Countess). The Countess whose very nickname suggests a lack of maternal instincts, has cheapened the name of 'mother'. A hint of comedy is evident in the way the children address her or talk about her. As Sukey says, 'Oh, she is the limit. She goes on exactly as though she was a real countess' (62), and Margaret matter-of-factly announces to the others, 'Her Serene Highness hasn't slept. The mere dropping of a teaspoon may mean death to her in her present anguished state'. (56) The bickerings and accusations thrown at one another by the adults sicken the children as much as they disgust the reader. The selfishness of the adults as they quarrel over the upkeep of the children comes to the fore and, as is seen, sides are changed with alacrity as per convenience. The gap in the attitude of mind between the two generations cannot be more explict than this incident. In
Quentin's warning to his Granny to be aware 'of a closed heart' (115) and of the effect of false moralising – the attitude of mind of a whole generation, of grandfather's times, 'weeping over little Nell and then letting little match sellers die' (115), lies the young generation's accusation of the old. As is wont even among the modern generation today, attacking the past for its 'empty postures, hypocrisy' comes naturally to the Mathews children now. And, typically, the failure of a few individuals is castigated as the failure of a whole class.

The pent-up anger, frustration, and pain of the children struggle to come out after the drowning of their kittens by their parents and Regan resulting in 'The Game' where each one of them plays the part of a character most relevant to him or her. 'Born of their need to relieve their pent-up shame, distress and anger in histrionics, to heal their hurts with homeopathic sting, and no doubt as well to indulge some sexual urges' (131), the Game went further that evening, played as never before as if they awaited some ritual.

The roles taken by each one of them is most suited to them. Rupert takes on Billy Pop's character, Marcus the Countess', Gladys impersonates Regan, Sukey 'does' Granny Mathews, a survivor of the early age who believes in all the gentilities she never practised. Margaret mimics Aunt Mouse whereas Quentin, the eldest and the newest to House No. 52, declared unanimously to be Mr. Justice Scales is the objective critic, the outsider who will deal with each case meticulously in dispensing with justice.

While fully exposing the inherent selfish trait of the adults - their hypocrisy, and money - mindedness, the Game sets the pace of the action. It conditions and nurtures the deterministic framework within which the six children develop their personalities. Though each tries to become something more than he is, he only succeeds
in working out magnifications of his childhood problem. While the daydreams seemed to portend the future, the Game attacks the irretrievable past, offering insights into the minds of the mimickers and the mimicked. As Malcolm Bradbury comments, '...the telling point in *No Laughing Matter* is the subversion of this - the family is not a communion or a coherence, its financial roots are weak, and the substantive relationship between individual and culture is itself unreal'.

Art as emanating from human need is also a theme explored in the novel. Seeking to fictionalize life, to channelise their raw emotion as a way of making their tenuous life bearable, the children get involved with art, which is 'The Game' here. But they forget that 'while fictions can heal hurts and create meanings, they remain, nevertheless, fictions: tools of life, not life itself.'

Book Three encompasses the years between 1925-38. The family that had presented a united front before the forces of materialism in the Family Sunday Play of 1919 is broken up. The children having grown-up by now, have chosen their respective careers. Margaret Mathews fulfilling her childhood talent, goes on to become a successful novelist and author of the Carmichael stories which tell the saga of her life at No. 52; and of her sister Sukey's wedding.

Products of a chequered childhood, and of inadequate parents, each child mirrors the inadequacies which ironically thwart his or her full and complete growth. Rupert, who mimics his father, goes on to become an actor, brilliant in his role of Andery, the parasite on his sisters in Chekhov's 'The Three Sisters', and who makes 'that fat white slug' (an image for Billy Pop) seem pathetic and loveable. But when he attempts to portray other contemporary characterizations that do not have any resemblance to his father, Rupert appears 'shallow, incompetent and an imperceptible failure'. And he, too, like his father, depends on his wife for emotional satisfaction.
Quentin, Margaret, and Marcus are constantly locked up in their isolation, their very wit and intelligence proving as barriers to their full growth. Quentin, the shrewd political judge, loses jobs as easily as he changes bed partners and even gets beaten up for his political views. Margaret who owes her career of a novelist to a strict perception honed after years of observing people and things around, cannot but seem to be different even though underneath her sharp tongue lurk strong feelings. She also becomes, like Aunt Mouse, an inveterate traveller. Gladys, always the victim-first of her father's sexual abuse in her childhood, and then of financial bankruptcy at the hand of her lover Alf for whom she even goes to jail, arouses our sympathy. Sukey, in her domesticated country house life, tries to escape the reality of war amid the false gaiety of her wartime talks about family adventures and her confiding talks with God about her favourite son, P.S. who is killed in Britain's imperial business somewhere in 'The Palestine'.

Marcus, deprived most of his mother's love and affection, invariably turns to something perverse—he becomes a homosexual, flitting from partner to partner until he becomes successful as an art business tycoon in Morocco. Through Marcus' childhood assumption of his mother's role, some psychological truths are stressed: the strange love-hate relationship between them, her shrewdness that has been transformed in him and her entourage of lovers reflected in his homosexuality. Feeling much his mother's neglect of him, Marcus imbibes some of her character in himself as is clear when Jack, his friend accuses him of celebrating 'Vulgar malice and Spite!' and sounding just like [his] awful mother.' (199).

The children learn some home truths the hard way in the process of finding their vocation. Quentin learns that sometimes it doesn't pay to be truthful, Rupert learns that for getting a role, one has to satisfy others as in the case of Alma Grayson, he exclaims astounded to know what is expected of him. 'But I couldn't possibly.
She must be over fifty. It'd be a kind of incest'. (180) Thus, what was, in some ways, Rupert's relationship with the Countess finds its continuity in his 'slightly successful relationship with Alma on and off stage'. (183)

Marcus' story touches us most, it being the story of so many in modern times. Described in Margaret's novel as 'so mysteriously lost for hours of the night among London's bright lights ... oh, so enjoying his winged arabesque and pas de chat' (200), his story cannot be more untrue:

'Do you want to know what I was doing lost among London's bright lights? I was flitting from one sordid old man to another trying to sell my bum'. (200)

This reminds us of Thomas Hood's poem, 'The Bridge of Sighs' where a young girl ended a similar life she lived forced by compulsion of society or family.

Margaret's romantic treatment of Marcus is discarded by him in favour of a more realistic one. He was all along 'living in a vaccum', longing 'to be noticed. It didn't matter how'. (201) Here, it is worth mentioning that of all the characters, it is Marcus alone who bears similarity to Rodney in 'Necessity's child'. Both long to be noticed, being objects of bitter parental reproach. All these examples, especially Marcus's, show to us how important a family is for the full and complete development of a person. The family stands for unity, companionship, and sharing which becomes all the more necessary in the self-oriented world of today.

'Parents At Play' - 'A lesson in Lamarckian Survival' is a Shavian playlet. It being 1925, the satiric thrust is on materialistic values which is in vogue. What is interesting here is that both the generations hold each other responsible for the lack
of communication. In direct contrast to the children's charge earlier, William Mathews calls them, 'a hard generation' and says, 'the war's responsible for that'. (211)

Quentin, Rupert, and Marcus seeking solace in the Game as played in their childhood find it no longer appealing as they have outgrown it. They no longer need to have recourse to such outlets to relieve themselves. Having become a staunch anti-Fascist and an authority on housing, Quentin's views on Communism take a thorough beating in Russia mainly because of the strange absence of many distinguished associates from previous visits. The failure of the Soviet experiment makes him disillusioned and cuts him off from his radical friends who are unable to 'understand' him.

Quentin's attitude towards politics at this time is praiseworthy but brutal towards sex but the two are inextricably mixed. His behaviour towards a young girl art student whom he picks up after a political speech says it all:

And when she said, in a naive, schoolgirl's downright way, that, for her part, she couldn't see how it was possible to be anything but a party member, to be anything else was failure to comprehend the logic of history, he forced her into bed again almost brutally. He thought with excitement of her reaction when she read his article the following Friday in the The New Statesman, giving his analysis and his prophecies concerning hidden events in Russia. (264)

With the threat of war looming nearer and nearer, people everywhere begin to lose their sanity and give in to moments of madness and inhuman dogma.

Marcus has hitherto remained outside the world of Fascism but now, thanks to
a series of accidental events, is drawn into the anti-Fascism movement. At a fashionable party, he 'felt ashamed to have believed in his innocence, that such views were only held by black shirted bruisers and corner boys' (289) Surprised, he shows pluck by holding out on his own and declaring his homosexuality: 'I think you'd better know that I'm a pansy boy. And the man I live with is a Jew'. (290) Later on, when caught up accidentally in the Bermondsey riots between anti-Fascist supporters and the police, he joins in 'to kick them, to smack their faces in order to drive away that silly pretence of disdain and officers' courage, he wanted to shout at them to go, for they had no bloody right down here where their suburban fears and graces had no place in a warm packed instinctual world'. (328) Looking in disgust at the melee - the rearing horses, the crowd's shouting, the fireworks, the rival singing, youths seized and led off jeeringly by the police, Marcus wonders:

Was this what Picasso's wonderful Guernica stood for, this Roman holiday? No form, no rich colour, no pale elegance.

Nothing. Nothing to satisfy in this shapeless human muddle.

(329)

This absence of form or rich colour in the Roman holiday stands directly contrasted to The Old Men at the Zoo when Bobby Falcon's 'Victorian Holiday' is ablaze with colours, forms, patterns, and gaiety.

Rupert's attempts to relate Malvolio the fool to Malvolio the desperate agonized man in his performance in Twelfth Night and Margaret's to relate Aunt Alice, the Victimizer to Aunt Alice, the Victimized for her novel, give them answers to the question of how far an individual can shape the national destiny as well as the inherent relationship of the techniques of life and art. While waiting for his turn to speak from the Kingsway Hall platform at an anti-Fascist rally of the thirties, Rupert becomes
a 'better' artist by divining felt humanity in a rare moment of compassion. Not liking Herr Birnbaum, a German refugee writer of children's stories, for his rudeness to him, Rupert is yet moved when Birnbaum speaks from the platform:

How could he have judged the man solely by his manner and words in a short meeting? He should have been indulgent from the start to such a ... But indulgence pulled him up. What appalling patronage. No, the truth was that the great story teller was an odious, conceited boor. But he had his vocation, his special powers, and what Hitler had done to that vocation was odious, wicked and infinitely pitiable. To sweeten the man in order the better to resent the outrage upon him was unpardonable sentimentality ... (380)

And indeed, that evening his performance is so astounding that Margaret sitting somewhat unwillingly in the audience, leaves him a note of appreciation:

'Rupert, my dear darling, it was so good Don't have any doubts. I thought from the crits that you had honeyed it all over, but you have n't - he's odious and worthy and when he's brought low it's unbearable and as soon as he's up again he's odious once more. Thank you ever so much - you've solved my problem. Mag...' (382)

Her problem is, of course, of her novel and she hurries home

'to let Aunt Alice fall apart into all the various unrelated persons that she now knew bobbed up and sank down like
corks in the ocean inside that old raddled body as inside all
our bodies ...' (382)

The truth that almost simultaneously strikes both Rupert at his art and Margaret at
work with her novel is the abiding fact, that 'no thing is just one thing and no tool for
apprehending truth is the only or even a wholly adequate tool'.

'Postscript to Book Three' is set in late April 1942, dominant talk at the time
being the war and its effect on the Mathews children.

In the next chapter titled 'Pop and Motor' in the tradition of Beckett and 'The
Theatre of the Absurd', an era passes with the death of William and Clara Mathews in
an air raid. Significantly, their casual extinction is seen in terms of a human catastrophe
by the authors.

Book Four covers the years 1946 and 1956. By this time, the war is over, and
No. 52 is up for sale. Th children gather for the last time at the house to settle the
estate and try to salvage whatever is there from the 'dust and pinched memories'.
They enter as a cast of unknown characters, their identity not revealed but this time,
the dreamers of the daydreams are solid physical figures dwelling on accomplishment
instead of potentiality. Striking familiar postures before familiar pieces of furniture -
Rupert at the out-of-tune grand piano ; Sukey at the kitchen stove, each once of
them dwells on and analyses the effect of No. 52 on their lives. For the last time in
their lives they slide once more into the routine of the Game. At first, the mimicry is
simply a repeat performance - a revival of earlier times. Then Quentin, resuming his
nursery role as Mr. Justice Scales, delivers the ultimate judgement :

'... William Ackerley Mathews, your sins are forgiven
you. Clara Madeline Mathews, your sins are forgiven
you. Maud Iseult Mathews, your sins are forgiven
you. Florence Stanley Rickard, your sins are forgiven
you. Henrietta Peebles Stoker, your sins are forgiven
you. Give them all harps and haloes'. (423)

Marcus is unable to bear Quentin, the judge's inadequacy of judgement and borrows
Sukey's fox fur stole, drapes it round his shoulders stylishly and for the last time,
becomes his mother, the Countess:

'Billy', he called, 'Billy, is that God prosing away there,
impertinently forgiving us all ? Turn Him out of the
home at once. Just because He's always been out of all
the fun and game is no reason why he should bring his
great self-pitying clay feet in here, ruining my carpet
.. ' (424)

The Game this time marks a superb climax to the novel though it doesn't end here. It
also displays Marcus' wit to the full while at the same time being a telling comment
on the final relationship between the two brothers. And as Jean Sudrann has
commented,

"It is a fittingly complex resolution of the way in
which the novel has continuously played art against
life, art through life, and life through art. For through
the art of the Game, truths have been told that life
itself can only silently recognize, pausing for a
moment before 'getting on with things'. The
indeterminate phrase marks the limits of life and
suggests yet another definition of the relationship: life will get on with things, art will then give those 'things' their names".4

Book Five dealing with the year 1967 brings the novel to an unexciting close. The Edwardian daydreams of the children's El Dorado turns out ironically to be the desert wasteland of Mogador. Except for Rupert and Sukey, the others are bitten by the bug of wanderlust.

The continuity of family is fulfilled only by Rupert and Sukey who have children, and then grandchildren. Gladys marries almost at the age of fifty whereas Quentin and Margaret never even get close to forming a family. Of them all, it is only Marcus who carries on the relationship with art, having collected quite a few valuable paintings by now.

In the final passage, Arab Hassan, Marcus' friend prophesises about the final image of the national collapse even as he dwells on his promised inheritance of the perfume business from Marcus:

... It was not as if, when he was owner, he would pay low wages or any foolish old-fashioned thing like that, if Marcus feared it, on the contrary Miracle Germany - Stuttgart, Dusseldorf, Frankfurt - all that he admired most in the modern world, even his favourite journal Time magazine urged high wages, but also seemly ambition, high profits and determined management. (464)

As time passes, the Edwardian West Kensington daydreams will end and in its place
will endure values of Miracle Germany and Time magazine, recalling what James Baldwin has to say: 'Nothing is more undeniable than the fact that cultures vanish, undergo crises; are, in any case, in a perpetual state of change and fermentation, being perpetually driven, God knows where, by forces within and without.' And, this in essence, is No Laughing Matter and is on a similar footing with other apocalyptic visions of England's fate like the ending of the English Zoo in The Old Men at the Zoo.

As regards the Mathews children, what comes through their daydreams, moments of failure and achievement, is their unity and feeling for each other. Margaret defends Quentin in the face of criticism for his socialist stance:

Whatever my brother Quentin has written, he's had a good deal of reason, I am sure. From start to finish. Quentin's been concerned with getting at the truth ever since he was a boy. I can tell you this, Mr. Smalley, if your objectors don't appear with Quentin, they don't appear with me. Or with my brother Rupert. (353)

and then again,

'No. I won't have wombs dismissed with a little irony...'

(354)

Even though the Countess and Billy Pop are despicable in their behaviour towards the children, the way Wilson has clothed them in glory is admirable. The Countess, in all her assumed gentility and regality attracts us by the way she carries herself. The comparison with Lady Macbeth is no accident. Even at the age of seventy, she hasn't lost her touch, 'moving so beautifully...'. With the death of these vibrant,
life-loving Mathewses, the curtain finally comes down on an exciting part of the novel. The sanctity of marriage is often violated by the Countess but what is admirable is the way she stands by Billy Pop all through. In her characterization, the author has indeed once again successfully defended his claim of superior treatment of women in his fiction.

Focus on the individual is not the only motif of Wilson's fiction. It also successfully chronicles the historical events of a period of at least fifty years though largely drawn on traditional family lines dealing effectively with the complex web of human emotions. Not really in the vein of dispassionate commentary, they are rather richly evocative of the times in which the actions described in the novel take place. Alongside the social perspective are outlined minute details regarding the personal attitudes and behaviour of the British Upper middle class bourgeoisie which change with the passage of time. This is what lends a special aura to No Laughing Matter.

As in The Old Men at the Zoo, Wilson here, once again, treats the twin problems of the public and private life on the individual. Both of them constantly impinge on an individual's life making it difficult to say where one ends and the other begins. Simon Carter's public life as an administrator in the zoo clashes with his private life with the result that he suffers. Gerald Middleton's self protective remoteness and Slyvia Calvert's lifetime of service are both accounts of individual lives lived and yet are undying symbols of an older England wherein the public and the private are intertwined perfectly. Too often, Wilson does not offer us any solution to the resolution of these two diversifications of life. Entities like society, class and history have always cast their influence on the individual. The healthy way out for the healthy self would be to interact with all these diversities while at the same time retaining his self-identity.
The problem of evil has always taken enormous dimensions in Wilson's novels. Both in *The Old Men at the Zoo* and *No Laughing Matter*, the Nazis have become the symbol of political or public evil. In the earlier novel, the Uni-Europeans led by a certain Blanchard-White take up the reins of power and stoop to acts of bestiality and inhumanity. Such acts of codified self-glory have been associated with the Nazis. In the novel under study, all the Mathewses excluding the Countess speak up for the Jew who creditably, is a symbol of humanity in a world of inhumane dogma and brutality.

K.W. Grandsden holds the technique of the novel responsible for its weakness. He finds the 'chronological narrative itself only intermittently engaging' and the short play 'denoting a criticism of England between the wars, a failure of creative nerve that the times could not redeem, a tendency to lapse into imitation and parody, to settle for the second-hand'.

But this view does not hold good with us.

Though a dense and allusive novel and Wilson's most expansive, the abundance of pastiches and parodies only add to its charm and often lends a comic breather in-between serious matters. References to Shakespeare are explicit - in Stoker's nickname of 'Regan' and in comparisons of the Countess with Lady Macbeth. The scene of the drowning of the Kittens and the dialogue that follows between the Countess and Regan also remind us of the murder scene of King Duncan and the effort to wash off the blood from the hands by the murderers.

The precise sources of *No Laughing Matter* is not clearly stated but there can never be any doubt that the past provides much of the 'free memory' which also arms the novel with an emotional conviction. Disclaiming any one-to-one similarity between
Billy Pop and the Countess and his own parents, Wilson admitted to similarities in the social pretensions and poverty of his family and the elderly Mathews.

Among the two characters in the play, Marcus and Margaret resemble Wilson the most. Vividly drawn, their lives explore the 'assimilation of humour into a deeper sense of human and social awareness'. Both of them, sadly misunderstanding each other in the final pages, are yet similar in one more way - the visiting grandchildren, Adam and Lucilla and Hassan, Marcus's 'friend' are about to push them aside just as they had pushed aside Billy Pop and the Countess.

Technically, No Laughing Matter is Wilson's perfect show in which the interest never flags even towards the end of its rather long narrative. Though Bernard Bergonzi found a 'palpable weariness' in the latter part, this is more because of their brief treatment arising out of the reflection that the lives of the Mathews children are drawing to a close than because of any structural lapse.

Emotionally, the picture of life that the novel presents is matured, balanced and moving. Avoiding too much sentimentalism, the book touches on each character's life and career, cleverly juxtaposed and contrasted in terms of the laughter motif. At the same time, it carries along the public resonance being related to the events of the story.

No Laughing Matter is thus an extended version of the psychological causation begun in Late Call. Even an unfortunate person attempting to break off the shackles of the 'self' becomes praiseworthy and truly brave in our eyes. The book's total effect is not negative. The usual victor this time is not Time, but the hard, strong, and indomitable human spirit. Seen from this angle, No Laughing Matter can be confidently termed Wilson's major triumph.
Notes and References:


3. Ibid., 136.

4. Ibid., 139.
