

**James Matthew Wilson**

**First Day of School after Christmas**

The frosted grass winks light  
And crunches underfoot,  
As day reclaims from night  
The shade of leaf and root  
And lends it to our sight.

We cross the backyard's plain,  
You and I off together,  
As we did in fall rain  
And in the warmer weather,  
And as we shall again.

I steam the air with words  
That fathers tell their daughters,  
Taking the part of birds  
Who've fled to lapping waters  
Or lands of grazing herds.

But you say little back,  
Will sometimes smile, if just;  
The grind beneath our track  
Of winter's crystal crust  
Attends the speech we lack.

A father dreads that space,  
Wherein comes awkward silence,  
Where what was set in place  
Seems jostled by some violence  
And strips the dawn of grace.

And yet, we still walk through  
This chill that blankets all.  
For, what else could we do,  
But hear late blue jays call  
And watch the day renew?

James Matthew Wilson

### **Inhabitants**

I know. You've spent this whole day wandering  
Through clumps of trees and seen the sunlight shine  
Until that gushy heart is all a-swing  
At God's deft needlework, so soft and fine.

Yea, like some vicar mounting to his nest,  
You sigh and stutter sweet and gentle words  
That all is love, but we are loved the best  
(A bit more even than those charming birds!).

But man's hands spoil everything they touch;  
And someone following after you will spoil  
The scene with shifty eyes and thieving clutch  
And make you weep we're sprung from common soil.

Then you will preach a different sort of text,  
Just like the naturalist who turned explorer:  
Each painted face he saw left him perplexed,  
And made him feel his brotherhood with horror.

**When**

When noisome crowds turn out to flood the beach,  
And with their flesh despoil all in reach;  
When some boy burns his hand and squeals with pain  
Only to touch it to the stove again;  
When, waiting for a carousel at the park,  
You see pale, tattooed bodies purpled dark;  
When this drunk stranger brags with all his force  
About his past adulteries and divorce;  
Will you look on it all, just as you should,  
And, in that sordid wreckage find the good?

When you turn over leaves upon the vine,  
Where lantern flies cling, gorging each veined line;  
When great winds shake the trees and cut the power,  
Leaving you in the darkness of the hour;  
When, in the nursing home, your mother dies  
Cut off from muttered prayers and useless cries;  
When every argument begets a roar,  
And every careless thought erupts in war;  
Will you maintain what once was understood,  
That, even now, the world as such is good?

And when they hunt him through the soaking heat,  
To leave him crumpled on a bloody street;  
And when, behind calm eyes, he seems to gloat,  
And press his weight down on another's throat;  
And when you see them standing calmly there,  
Indifferent as his last word dies in air;  
And when the glass is cracked, the streets aflame,  
With no words spoken but that burning name;  
Will you stand as the Lord of All once stood,  
And somehow say that things are very good?

James Matthew Wilson

## **The Children of Hamelin**

Within the mountain that became their home,  
The children lifted up their cries in pleasure,  
Their laughter bouncing, golden, free to roam  
From wall to wall, as they enjoyed each treasure;  
More was prepared for them than taste could measure,  
From candy floss to rocking horses, all  
Piled high about the glittering, echoing hall.

They dueled with wooden swords and painted shields;  
They dined on berries, cream, and golden cake,  
While lounged on blankets they called battlefields,  
Unsure if they were dreaming or awake,  
But knowing every wish was theirs to take,  
And that the song descending with its trance  
Possessed their tired limbs and made them dance.

So great the harmony and clamorous din  
That filled up every moment of their day  
And made the weeks, then seasons, seem to spin,  
They could not hear those noises far away,  
As their abandoned parents knelt to pray  
Then later, raised chapped fists up with a cry  
At the uncomprehending, empty sky.

The stony streets of Hamelin sank in quiet,  
The alleys emptied even of their rats,  
Where once plump clerks and merchants had run riot  
With sales of wine and wares, fine gowns and hats  
To please the daughters of aristocrats.  
Now only starving felines stretched in places  
That once were filled with flushed and cunning faces.

The fountain's waters were shut off for good;  
The old men disappeared behind stone walls;  
While women, bent and sad, did what they could  
By stationing the square and park with dolls  
Whose arms forever spread to catch thrown balls,  
Forever reached for some long-vanished treat,  
Ears straining for the vanished sound of feet.