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James Matthew Wilson

At Season's End

for Cecilia Rae

Take down the ornaments and let them drop
Atop each other in the crate,
Amid loose rifts of glitter and bent hooks
Where, for another year, they'll wait.

And, turn the tree, unwinding the dimmed lights,
Then wrap them in a tighter spool,
Before the heap of branches is dragged out
To bridge the gutter's icy pool.

The soft matte warmth of the poinsettia's blooms
Dries in one corner to sick green,
And even Ceci, lost in her dolls' world,
Knows what her father's motions mean.

The room grows bare, the floor is swept of needles,
But her new dollhouse full of voices
Raised up in imitation of those carols
We sang last week. Each doll rejoices.

Yes, every moment is piled up and stored
In attic, basement, or in mind,
As if time, fled upon its fading note,
Left something of itself behind.

James Matthew Wilson

In The Fullness Of Rhyme

Some say that it's okay to slant,
While other poets swear one can't.
The former conjure some excuse
For every assonant abuse,
The latter, rather, want good order:
A well-kept path and guarded border.
While one can't write by guide or chart,
The artist gives the law to art.

Thus, he must know enough of rhyme
To tell the caviar from the slime,
The well-coifed head from the rough mullet,
The silver from the leaden bullet.
And though the bad he would not shoot,
What's good he'll pluck for his own fruit,
And every line will weigh with those
Sweet rhymes that our first poets chose.

The Love of God

The love of God is earlier than man,
Present to us before we were to it.
The love of God sustains and nourishes
And puts in being what had never been
Save that it was first loved, and being loved

Had being at all. The love of God comes down,
And walks among his creatures as their friend,
And dies among his children in their rage.
The love of God has journeyed into hell
And all once closed is opened by that love.

The love of God stands fearsome over our heads.
The love of God has entered in our breasts;
And there, the love of God will dwell, where he
Was from the first the center of ourselves,
For all things turn about the love of God.

The Wisdom of Old Men

Up north, in winter, at the snowy deer camp,
The old men circled always near the fire,
Kept company with the crack of burning logs,
Their backs leaned in and smooth beneath plaid flannel.

And what they were about, I do not know,
Who darted in and out with skis or sled,
Or tramped knee-deep through silent, buried woods
To follow deer tracks miles from the cabin.

Their slowing bodies cool and stiff, they may,
With nothing left to do, have only sought
The heat that sweated from the barrel stove,
Its blackened sides and flickering mouth ajar.

But, even in my youth, I saw them there,
As those charged with remembering days past,
With pondering the clockworks of the world,
As gear on gear ground through their ordered circles;

Those who descended to a place of freedom,
Where we may wonder at what has been made,
As Nestor, old, among the furious Greeks,
Sat by and spoke above his warming hands.