# A Visit to William Blake's Inn Study Guide

## A Visit to William Blake's Inn by Nancy Willard

BOOKRAGS

# Contents

# Overview/Setting

A Visit to William Blake's Inn—attractively printed on speckled paper to simulate an ancient text—consists of a brief prose "Introduction" followed by some seventeen gently whimsical poems which imagine the famous writer and engraver William Blake (1757-1827) as the keeper of a magical inn in which angels make the beds, dragons are bakers, cows sleep on clouds, sunflowers move about the various rooms and arrange themselves, and tigers and owls are numbered among the guests.

The overriding appeal of this book is not its plot, theme, or characterizations but the playful lyricism of the poems themselves. An accomplished poet for adult and young adult readers alike, Willard ably captures the vivid and wide-ranging imagination of a seven-year-old, a dream-like imagination unfettered by logic. Children and young adult readers will be charmed by these warmly resonant poems with their elliptical references to Blake's works. They will be charmed as well by the evocative artwork of Alice and Martin Provensen which accompanies and illumines Willard's text.

# About the Author

Nancy Willard was born June 26, 1936, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the daughter of Hobart Hurd Willard, a famed university chemistry professor and researcher, and Marge Sheppard Willard. An author of poetry, juvenile literature, criticism, short stories, and a novel, Willard has said that she grew up in a lively home that was a little like William Blake's Inn.

Willard started writing at an early age.

She and her sister Ann put out a precocious two-person newspaper, the "Stony Lake News," at the family's summer retreat in rural Michigan. Her first published poem appeared when she was seven, and her miniature book "A Child's Star" was reproduced in Horn Book magazine while she was still in high school.

Willard attended the University of Michigan where she received a bachelor's degree in English and a doctorate in medieval literature in 1963. She also holds an advanced degree from Stanford University and has studied art and lan guage in such far-flung locales as France, Norway, and Mexico.

A steady stream of honors has followed in the wake of Willard's prolific literary production, including a Hopwood Award (1958); a Devins Memorial Award (1967); Lewis Carroll Shelf awards (1977 and 1979) for the "Anatole" collections, Sailing to Cythera and The Island of the Grass King; and the prestigious Newbery Medal and Caldecott Honor Book awards (1982) for A Visit to William Blake's Inn: Poems for Innocent and Experienced Travelers. This book also received a Special Honor Book Plaque from the Society of Children's Book Writers (1981) and was nominated for an American Book Award.

Married to photographer Eric Lindbloom, Willard lives with her husband and son in Poughkeepsie, New York, where she teaches creative writing at Vassar College.

# Plot Summary

*A Visit to William Blake's Inn* is a Newberry and Caldecott Book Award-winning children's book of poetry by a beloved children's book author and Vassar lecturer. Using some of William Blake's most venerated characters and rhythmic and rhyme patterns mirroring William Blake's, this cleverly illustrated, slim volume is imbued with Blake's most pervasive quality, a sense of fun, delight, and other-worldliness.

This is a collection of loosely related poems for children, which makes it a small but intense and delightful book. There is no actual plot line. However, well-loved Blake-ish characters, such as the dragons, the angels, the rabbit, the cat, and even the King of Cats all appear throughout the verses in relation to the Inn. The poems are additionally linked by the beautiful illustrations of the Inn imagined to belong to Blake, drawings which are done on yellow-tinged paper with color marks resembling handmade or onionskin paper. The style of the paintings resembles 18th century illustrations that might have been appropriate in Blake's time.

# Frontispiece

## Frontispiece Summary

This verse sets the stage for the magical nature of the rest of the poems. The Sun, Moon, Star and Air have a conversation. The Sun asks if the others will come. The Moon answers "soon." The Star wants to know how far it will be. However, the Air says it is already there.

## Frontispiece Analysis

The illustration here shows the little boy, who is the traveler in the poems in the book. He is dressed in a charming short-jacketed sailor outfit with a sailor hat and a lace collar. He carries a hatbox and a simple suitcase and stands ready to go. The little poem demonstrates that the boy is going to take a journey not of this world, because the heavenly elements are talking to each other. Although this little verse does not rhyme and does not possess standard scansion patterns, it is tight and coherent as a little piece of its own. It sets the stage for the journey to come, to Blake's inn.

# Introduction, "Introduction to William Blake's Inn"

## Introduction, "Introduction to William Blake's Inn" Summary

Nancy Willard starts the reader out right by explaining how her book was born. As a seven-year-old, she was being babysat during a bout of measles. Like most kids, she wasn't ready to sleep at bedtime and asked for a story.

The babysitter, Miss Pratt, like most childcare providers at nine o'clock at night, was too tired to give her much of a narrative. She and Nancy gaze at the glow-in-the-dark stars pasted on the ceiling and quoted the first verse from Blake's famous poem, "Tyger, Tyger, burning bright." Nancy wants to know more about Blake, and Miss Pratt tells her that he died over two hundred years ago.

A couple of days later, Nancy receives a copy of Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience.* Nancy thinks it has come from Miss Pratt, but she's not sure, because the title page bears the following handwritten message:

"Poetry is the best medicine. Best wishes for a speedy recovery. Yrs, William Blake"

## Introduction, "Introduction to William Blake's Inn" Analysis

From this simple beginning, Nancy Willard sets the stage for a fantasy book of poems. Did William Blake really send her the volume or was it the babysitter, Miss Pratt? The fact that Nancy cannot *really* be sure sends the reader with her into a delightful world of fantasy creatures and an old-fashioned, cozy, comforting inn that *maybe* belonged to the famous poet, William Blake.

The dialog between the child Nancy and the babysitter Miss Pratt is lively and believable. "Lights off. I'm going downstairs," says the babysitter, leaving Nancy to gaze at the glowing ceiling stars and to wonder about what's real and what's not, a perfect setting for nighttime dreams and for an imaginative book of poetry to emerge much later in life.

# Poem 1, "William Blake's Inn for Innocent and Experienced Travelers"

## Poem 1, "William Blake's Inn for Innocent and Experienced Travelers" Summary

This title is a direct reference to the names of two of Blake's most famous books of poems, *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience.* This poem is in the poetic form the Virelai, which is a song form from French poetry with a line scheme of ABBAA in iambic quadrameter.

The poem contains three verses and sounds like it could be sung! Line one is a simple declarative, "This inn belongs to William Blake," but the following lines are almost scriptural in sound, mostly because three of them start with "and" and the last one talks about taking "joyous rest." Lines two and three tell of the beasts Blake has tamed and the stars he's named, inferring that he exists before, during, and after the present time.

Stanza two continues the fantasy, introducing dragons. These are the cooks and bakers of the poem, burning loaves and turning the spits of meat, a particularly dragon-like act. Stanza three introduces the angels, who are appropriately in charge of the featherbeds and associated with feathery snow further away. Children in the falling snow make snowmen to honor Blake.

## Poem 1, "William Blake's Inn for Innocent and Experienced Travelers" Analysis

The reader might wonder if Willard could have chosen such an esoteric poetic form as the Virelai, until s/he recalls that Willard is a professor of literature and could easily know the forms. The poem is written simply and elegantly. It almost sings itself, especially in stanzas one and two where lines two, three and four all start with "and." Even without knowing Blake's poetry, one can appreciate the mythical creatures who perform the daily tasks in the Inn, such as baking and roasting.

The first verse introduces the reader to a restful, magical place and prepares him or her for a pleasant, renewing visit. Verse three reinforces the restfulness of the coming experiences, because "patient angels" in stanza three line one prepare the featherbeds, ensuring a heavenly sleep indeed. The angels' feathers even migrate outside and become floating snow for children to use to make snowmen, all in honor of William Blake.

This poem sets the stage for a world apart, a visit to an inn that seems to be a safe haven, a peaceful place, and most importantly a place of the imagination. William Blake was devoted to peace, harmony, kindness, justice, and the imagination, a place where

the spiritual may be more real than the literal. The reader accepts his mythical characters and pleasant inn, because they are in keeping with the character of these present poems and Blake's former poems, too.

The illustration for this poem shows William Blake welcoming the incoming visitor, the reader. The architecture drawn in a rather flat form reminiscent of 18th century book illustrations echoes England of the same period. The second floor shows two dragon cooks with glowing yellow eyes, and the reader will not be sure whether these fellows are to be trusted or not. Their faces look pretty fierce. Still, it's a safe place because of the angels on the top floor, although they are rather small compared to the dragons!

# Poem 2, "Blake's Wonderful Car Delivers Us Wonderfully Well"

## Poem 2, "Blake's Wonderful Car Delivers Us Wonderfully Well" Summary

In this simple poem of rhymed couplets, the passenger speaking in first person, arrives in a fantastic flying car. The driver, who is not identified in the poem but who looks in the illustration to be William Blake himself, is very polite. In stanza one, line one, he bows and takes the traveler's things, wearing a mackintosh, which is a British raincoat, and also wings. This first line reminds us that we're in a fantasy poem.

His raincoat and boots are the color of spring onions, and his cap, in stanza three, bears the title, "Blake's Celestial Limousine." Everything changes, when the traveler enters the car. His suitcases begin to purr, perhaps turning into Blake's fantastic kitties. Reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's nonsense in *Alice in Wonderland,* the reader is told impossible instructions, that his luggage must be carried flat on his hat, or "served with mustard on a bun." The traveler is worried, because s/he doesn't have a bun or mustard.

In the seventh stanza, the luggage obediently shrinks flat, further worrying the traveler. Blake's next words in the eighth stanza intend to put everyone at ease, since he is transporting only those he wants to take. The traveler trusts Blake enough to enter the carriage, which immediately becomes as wide as a soft grassy field. It is such a sweet experience that it seems like a wish that flies, only in the last line of the last stanza, the wish is real and comes true.

## Poem 2, "Blake's Wonderful Car Delivers Us Wonderfully Well" Analysis

These rhymed couplets are written, as the previous verses, in iambic Quadra meter. The rhymes are simple, exact, and never forced. Interestingly, the enjambment at the ends of the narrative lines continues the story without a capital on the following lines, while new sentences begin with a capital. In this way, Willard creates an easy sense of telling a story at the same time as writing a poem. The line, "and worn discreetly on your hat," referring to luggage, in stanza five, keeps the reader firmly in the realm of fantasy, so when the first person narrator steps into the flying car and the seats are soft and wide as a grassy field, it is hardly a surprise.

The illustration of the car is in the typical flat style, including either full-face or full-profile views of the characters. Blake again appears pleasant and accommodating though he is not the driver, just the escort. The flying machine is built like a bird, with tail feathers as

a rudder. The machine appears to fly with rotating flaps like a helicopter, although it also has wheels. It sports several pennants, as well as a British flag, and seems to be flying over Parliament. The illustration is clever and pleasant but also gives a sense of childishness quite suitable for this book's intended audience.

# Poem 3, "A Rabbit Reveals My Room "

## Poem 3, "A Rabbit Reveals My Room " Summary

This poem is written in anapestic rhythm in the form of a limerick, except for the rhyme scheme, which is a variation on limericks. The main difference is the first line of each stanza, which doesn't rhyme with the rest of the lines in each stanza or with any other line in the poem.

The rabbit that shows the first person, a boy, to his room is just a little brown rabbit no bigger than knee-high to the boy. Arriving in the room, the boy notices that there's no bed in that room, only a big, shaggy old bear. The boy has real reservations about going to sleep in the embrace of a bear. He'd rather have the blankets, afghan and sheets of his room at home. The bear reassures him in italics, so the reader wonders if the bear is speaking telepathically.

The bear reassures the boy that his fur is soft and that his paws are good to sit on. The boy goes on with his objections, mainly that there is no clock in the room and no lock on the door. The bear reassures him poetically that he will be protected on all levels, even from "perilous starlight" and a cat outside the inn, one dangerous feline that belongs to the Moon. When it's time to wake up, the bear will blow in the boy's eyes, he says, in time to see the sunrise "with the man in the marmalade hat," a nonsense ending to a semi-limerick poem.

## Poem 3, "A Rabbit Reveals My Room " Analysis

Limerick form is always a little slapstick, anticipating a punch line at the end. True to form, this poem offers some surprises. The little brown rabbit balancing on his hind legs with his little brown forefeet dangling in front might be surprise enough, but he's nothing compared to the big, furry bear reclining in the room. This bear offers himself as a pillow, hardly a comfortable though to a little boy entering the room for a stay overnight.

The boy is intimidated enough to whisper to the bear instead of speaking up, a natural enough response. He's trying not to be impolite, but he wishes for the comforts of home, suggesting perhaps a bit of homesickness. The bear evidently doesn't even whisper, but speaks mind to mind to the boy, as suggested by the italics and lack of quotation marks or references to "said."

The bear reassures the boy that lying in his big, comforting bear arms will be as soft as the hay in the loft, a singsong response in the limerick tradition. The boy is reassured enough to continue with his requests, including a clock, a lamp, and an hourglass through which the actual hours pass. The boy's most important request however is a lock for the door, although the bear in the room might seem as threatening as anything on the outside.

The bear responds mind to mind once more, this time ranging far from the everyday imagery of home comforts. His promises to protect the child from "perilous starlight" and "the old moon's lunatic cat" suggest that there are dangers abroad indeed. In the morning, all this strangeness transforms into a perhaps more pleasant form of weirdness, "the man in the marmalade hat."

All these strange and unusual happenings occur in William Blake's inn, a place where evidently anything can happen. Through all these unpredictable occurrences, the reader is aware of poetic form holding everything together, which is fortunate, because these poems have entered the realm of the mystical world, reflective of Blake's reality two hundred years ago.

# Poem 4, "The Sun and Moon Circus Soothes the Wakeful Guests"

## Poem 4, "The Sun and Moon Circus Soothes the Wakeful Guests" Summary

This tight little poem is in a song form quite famous in the 18th century, the romance-six or rime couye. In the first stanza, the tiger wakes up at night and wants to know what that rumbling noise is that wakes him up. The rabbit replies in the second stanza, that it is a dancing moon entering the sky, "twirling on her toes." The third stanza contains a comment from the King of Cats, who's evidently afraid, asking about the flashing light that's keeping him awake. Our enterprising and soothing rabbit reassures him that it's just the Sun, crouching for a leap, preparing for his opening act.

By this time the first person boy is awake and alarmed. He rings a bell above his bed, loud enough to wake the dead, he says, summoning the rabbit. The rabbit appears to know just what the problem is and tells the boy not to make such a fuss, because two ancient friends of William Blake have arrived to cheer them all up. Just then three sunflowers stand up and turn their heads very slowly, with incomparable patience, all the more astonishing, because it's the middle of the night.

It is hard to know if it is night or day by the time the reader reaches the last stanza. The "old sun" is dancing, while the new Moon is singing. The boy protagonist claps his hands along with all the other creatures, and everyone falls asleep.

## Poem 4, "The Sun and Moon Circus Soothes the Wakeful Guests" Analysis

This is a poem in a rather rigid 18th century form, romance-six or rime couye, with syllables counting 8 8 6 8 8 6 and a rhyme scheme of AABCCB. This poem was very common as lyric verse in the 18th century, called common or ballad measure. Syllables are accented in the iambic form even though they are also counted syllables.

As in the other poems in this book, this poem crosses the boundaries between real and fantasy. The reader does not know whether it is day or night, and neither do the characters, which is the main content of the poem. Although the rabbit may seem to be the least and the least threatening of the creatures in this poem, he is the anchor and mainstay for everyone, reassuring and comforting them, even when there are frightening noises in the night.

The tiger is upset by rumbling noises, but the rabbit comforts him. The King of Cats is scared by flashing lights, but the rabbit explains it all. The boy rings his bell to add to the questions, and the rabbit says not to worry, that William Blake's ancient friends are here

on a visit. These are the Sun and the Moon, ancient indeed. Although it is night, the sunflowers concur by turning.

The last stanza is full of song and motion, as the Sun and Moon make music and dancing together. Everyone joins in, including the boy who claps, and the creatures who clap with their claws and even their fangs. Then, everyone just falls asleep.

This poem, being an old song form, almost begs to be sung aloud. It is full of motion and sounds, and invites a kinesthetic response from the reader. The illustration shows the Sun and Moon up at the same time, both of them charming, especially the big-eyed Sun. On the mian floor, working by candelight, William Blake, hatless, seems to be working out another verse and his assistant is printing it on an old printing press. The second floor reveals the tiger being reassured by the sweet brown rabbit. On the top floor, the cat seems to stand watch. The colors are earthy and warm and the illustration's flatness adds to its charm.

# Poem 5, "The Man in the Marmalade Hat Arrives"

## Poem 5, "The Man in the Marmalade Hat Arrives" Summary

This is another poem in the realm of high nonsense. A man with a marmalade hat, illustrated with big blobs of red marmalade circling the brim of a top hat in the drawing, arrives at the inn. He is said to arrive in the middle of March, reminiscent of the mad March Hare in *Alice in Wonderland.* He brings along a bottle of starch to straighten the bends in the road, and one can see by the expression on his face in the illustration that he's crazy enough to believe it. He also carries along a bucket and a mop, both awkward to carry. He must be tired, but he requests a room at the top of the inn.

Then comes the refrain, a celebratory verse asking readers and participants to beat a gong and a drum, to wake up everyone, to bring out the "keepers," and celebrate the arrival of the man in the marmalade hat. Nobody seems to care if he's crazy, because they all seem happy to greet him.

True to the items he carries, he rousts everyone out of bed to get their rooms cleaned up. He doesn't think this is the business of the innkeeper but instead takes it on himself to get the job done. He buzzes through all the rooms, getting everyone out of beds, including "badgers and hedgehogs and moles," asking them all to come away from their "hollows and holes" and celebrate the spring. The rousing refrain follows this verse.

## Poem 5, "The Man in the Marmalade Hat Arrives" Analysis

These are anapestic lines, the rhythm seeming to be set by the scansion of the first line, "the man in the marmalade hat." The rhyme scheme is no particular formal scheme from poetic theory, but it is reminiscent of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which is in iambic. This verse is in anapestic. Since the man in the marmalade hat seems to be in constant motion, the rolling, rollicking sound of the anapestic rhythm seems appropriate.

Stanza one line two suggests the truth, that the man in the marmalade hat is a little, if not a lot, crazy. For luggage, he carries a bottle of starch, but he doesn't use it indoors. Instead, he thinks he will use it to straighten out crooked roads. Additionally he carries items for cleaning, suggesting the action in the rest of the poem. Line six reveals that this is an uncomfortable load, "incommodious," as the man in the marmalade hat explains.

Then things are set into motion. William Blake is happy to welcome this man in the marmalade hat, and if the reader were the innkeeper, he would be happy too, because,

evidently, there will be some serious cleaning going on, always a plus to people in the lodging industry. In verse three, the man in the marmalade hat sets to work rousting everyone out of their beds, although the reader may wonder why, in line five, many of the residents seem to be underground animals.

The man in the marmalade hat is pretty irresistible, though. He calls everyone "my loves" and reassures them that winter is over, always a positive thing whether it is literal or metaphorical. The illustration reveals a couple of children on the roof with their gongs and drums, ready to make some noise. Up in the tower, badgers, hedgehogs and owls are emerging to the beckoning of the man in the marmalade hat, although the raccoon is still snoozing.

The man in the marmalade hat is nattily dressed with dancing slippers, evidently making it easier to flit from floor to floor as he cleans, dress tails, and his decorated top hat. William Blake is also dressed in tails and greets the man in the marmalade hat with an open hand. The rest of the family greets the man in the marmalade hat, but the little girl in the illustration is smiling out at the reader, reflecting perhaps the fun and amusement of taking in this boisterous visitor.

# Poem 6, "The King of Cats Orders an Early Breakfast"

## Poem 6, "The King of Cats Orders an Early Breakfast" Summary

This sweet little singing ballad of two stanzas is also in anapestic scansion. This poem is written or perhaps sung by The King of Cats. He *is* a cat, not the lion, who is the King of Beasts, and from the look on his face in the illustration, he is a friendly enough fellow.

In this poem, he is ordering breakfast, and an unusual breakfast it is. The first part of the order seems normal enough, though small, a roasted wren, in line one. In the second line, however, he wants "Brisket of Basilisk treat," which might either kill him or the cook if the Basilisk glances the wrong way. Line three mentions that his breakfast is "on the house." He understands this as a strange place to eat. The illustration shows him balanced on the very top of the house having breakfast. As he says, "there's no accounting for customs." He claims he doesn't want much really, just "a fat mole smothered in starlight" as well as a stew of nine mice.

The second verse echoes the sounds and sense of Lewis Carroll's nonsense in "How Doth the Little Crocodile." The King of Cats says that when he's done eating, he'll be as round and full as the Moon, and people may even confuse him with the Moon, especially since he's eating at the top of the house. People will make many comments, lines three through 10. People will think the Moon so resembles the King of Cats, including his paws and his "prodigious" appetite, which included eating a dozen lobster claws in the dead of night.

## Poem 6, "The King of Cats Orders an Early Breakfast" Analysis

This is a ballad in anapestic rhythm, almost begging to be sung. It would be sung by the first-person voice, in this case, the King of Cats. He needs some breakfast. When he asks for "Brisket of Basilisk," the reader knows that the King of Cats is also a mythical creature, since a Basilisk is a frightening legendary serpent, who can kill you with a look or a blast of his breath. Since the King of Cats *is* the King, though, there should be no worries for his health, though one might tremble for the cook's safety. The King of Cat's silly pun at the beginning on the saying "on the house" sets the stage for a light, funny poem.

Recalling that there are moles asleep in the upper regions of the house, the reader realizes that there could be some trouble with the residents of the Inn, if the King of Cats wants to eat a fat mole "smothered in starlight." This could be taken as a pleasant

poetic phrase or perhaps a cold-blooded one, if the King takes his moles neat. He also wants a heavenly nine-mouse stew.

Thinking about his breakfast to come, the King of Cats imagines how full he's going to be. People are going to confuse him with the Moon, he thinks, although they'll whisper about his size, presumably, because he is the King. Lines four through seven sound like lines from "How Doth the Little Crocodile" in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. The last line suggests that the King of Cats is ordering this full breakfast after a big midnight snack of a dozen lobster claws, fit food for a king but a little excessive for just a cat.

The illustration shows a table balanced on the top tower of the inn. Some dishes are being brought up to the king via a ladder, both by the same boy, in duplicate, that is staying in the inn and speaking in first person in the first poems. The covered dish might contain just about anything, but there's also a serving bowl of fruit, which after the comments of the King of Cats, he may not really enjoy. The night sky sparkles with a smiling Moon, some comets, and some glowing stars. In an adjacent tower, the rabbit looks out at the reader, while two birds, perhaps thrushes, gaze out either side.

# Poem 7, "The Wise Cow Enjoys a Cloud"

## Poem 7, "The Wise Cow Enjoys a Cloud" Summary

In this very short poem, someone is talking to a wise cow. From the illustration, the reader may surmise that the questioner is William Blake himself. The cow is standing up in the clouds, perhaps having just jumped over the Moon. The questioner asks where the wise cow slept last night. The cow replies in stanzas two and three that she slept by catching her horns on a rolling cloud and making herself a bed. In the morning, she ate the cloud up on freshly buttered bread.

## Poem 7, "The Wise Cow Enjoys a Cloud" Analysis

The scansion is a combination of anapestic and iambic rhythms. It consists of three little couplets with the second line of each rhyming with all the other second lines. It is a simple, sweet conceit. The cloud says she gored a cloud and made it into a bed for herself but ate it up, raw, in the morning, on buttered bread. This is a poem to create a smile.

The illustration may seem to be a bit unnerving, because there is a full-sized cow up in the sky.

She is standing on gossamer white clouds, with a shining star overhead. William Blake offers her the bread and butter, while the little boy looks on, along with a couple of happy serving girls. The village stands below, including the ever-present weather vane.

# Poem 8, "Two Sunflowers Move into the Yellow Room"

## Poem 8, "Two Sunflowers Move into the Yellow Room" Summary

This poem is written in dactylic form in the voices of the beautiful sunflowers. They talk to William Blake, another demand from the seemingly endless demands Blake receives as innkeeper. The sunflowers are tired of being outside, traveling all the time, and they want to have a more stable environment, a room with a view. They take a room with a window, arranging themselves there, and set to watching the Sun from there, "counting the steps," as the Sun moves across the sky. Although they are positioned in a vase, they also take root in the carpet, moving perhaps as slowly as the woven topaz tortoises there.

This poem only contains two stanzas. The first is the sunflowers speaking. They shine with dew, so it must be early in the morning, asking William Blake for a room, using his first name, so they must be familiar friends. The poem, in ballad form, is simple and uncomplicated but satisfying in its solid rhyme scheme and suggestive imagery.

## Poem 8, "Two Sunflowers Move into the Yellow Room" Analysis

This is the first poem in the book that occurs in dactyls. These are generally more solid, more slow, perhaps more pedantic than the commoner iambic and the songlike anapestic rhythms. The poem takes the form of a simple ballad, ABCB, though it does not come across as singable as some of the other verses.

The sunflowers seem a little tired, because they say, "Ah, William," like a sigh. Of course, William is rather magical and can understand cows, rabbits and sunflowers, like these. They say they're tired of traveling. While they're in the room, they still track the movement of the Sun throughout the day, "counting the steps of the sun," but perhaps, it is more restful indoors for them. They cannot contain their wandering habits altogether though since they put out roots into the carpet. There they join a parade of "topaz tortoises," a lovely combination of vowels and consonants, which are patterns woven into the rug but somehow also in motion. The sunflowers join the turtles in their journey.

Here the reader sees a close-up of William Blake, with reddish hair and receding hairline, sitting at his writing desk, pen in hand, thinking about the sunflowers right next to him. He has evidently granted their wish, because they appear in a pot with a trailing root-stem. William sits in an arched doorway, legs crossed, a small paper in his hand,

perhaps the written request of the flowers. The sun shines up in the sky, but the city is far in the distance in this scene, which is all yellow and orange, like sunflowers.

# Poem 9, "The Wise Cow Makes *Way, Room,* and *Believe*"

## Poem 9, "The Wise Cow Makes Way, Room, and Believe" Summary

This is a poem with varying rhyme schemes in iambic form. This poem is a delightful play on words. Here is the Rabbit once more in charge, doing various kinds of "making" for the various characters, mainly William Blake, the Wise Cow, and the marmalade man.

In the first stanza, the Rabbit calls the familiar phrase usually reserved for royalty and the rich, "Make *Way!"* He wants people to make way for William Blake, the good poet. The Wise Cow doesn't actually know how to make something she's never seen, which is somehow "way." All she knows is grass and hay, so she figures she will have to make "way" out of those things. Perhaps, it will be a nest made out of grass or hay so William Blake might lie down and have a little nap like a field mouse.

In the second stanza, the Rabbit calls, "Make *Room!"* She wants people to make room for the tired marmalade man, who has spent all this time cleaning up the inn. The Wise Cow is more perplexed than ever, trying to figure out how to make "way" and also to make "room" at the same time. She says that living outdoors, the weather is the main good thing. She will make *room* as if it were a loom and the marmalade man can weave some good weather out of that.

Finally, the Rabbit calls, "Make *Believe"* so that making believe will create a good entrance for all his relatives and relations. The Wise Cow has figured all this making out by now, or so she thinks. She says that "believe" will be a boat with feet *and* with fins. Though this is the first time it is mentioned, there must be a moat somewhere around the inn. The Rabbit suggests they all leave the moat and get on this wonderful boat with all the "ways" and "rooms" they will need, to take a voyage with their great captain William Blake.

## Poem 9, "The Wise Cow Makes Way, Room, and Believe" Analysis

Poets love puns and so does the Rabbit. The Wise Cow is a more literal type of creature and does the best she can to keep up with all this wordplay, especially since she feels that somehow she is obliged to follow all these commands from the Rabbit.

First of all, the Wise Cow tries to obey the command to "make way." She has never evidently heard the term in common use so she tries to figure out what it must mean to her, a creature, who lives in the fields among the grass. She gives Blake the best gift

she can think of, a cozy, quiet nest of grass and hay to take a nice nap out in the field, nestled as softly as field mice "in a cap."

Secondly, the Rabbit tries to get some room, perhaps a little resting room, for the Man with the Marmalade Hat, who's been slaving all this time, cleaning up the inn, and perhaps more, because in addition to "mopping" the floors, he has also been "mapping" them, a conceptual worker indeed. He also has spent the day reorganizing all the cupboards and drawers. It is likely true that the Wise Cow doesn't really understand the magnitude of all this work, but she does know one thing, the constancy of the outdoors, particularly the weather. Since the Marmalade Man has been working all these other miracles, perhaps he will make another miracle by weaving weather on a loom called "room."

In the third stanza, the Rabbit wants people to "make *believe"* so there will be room for everyone, particularly his relations. The Wise Cow has the idea by now and understands that making believe can let people travel places, perhaps places never known or seen before, as implied by the symbolism of the words, "make believe." The Cow says that *Believe* will be a boat, one that can walk, float fly, and even roll on wheels, as shown in the illustration, to take people everywhere. Everyone can get on it, "great and small." Of course, William Blake will be the captain, not only because he owns the inn, but also because he is the great master of imagination.

The illustration shows this magical boat. Not only does it have feet, wheels and a sail, but it also has a great hot-air balloon so it can float in the air. The Marmalade Man stands nearby with his tools and plans, ready to get in. Some of the animals are already loaded on, as are the children and William Blake himself with a telescope, ready for adventure. Townsmen stand nearby to watch the spectacle, and the boy, along with an angel, on the facing page hold banners in celebration of the upcoming journey.

# Poem 10, "Blake Leads a Walk on the Milky Way"

## Poem 10, "Blake Leads a Walk on the Milky Way" Summary

This is a poem in mostly anapestic form though there are several iambs sprinkled along the way, somewhat like the stars that are featured in the poem. William Blake is taking several of the characters on a night excursion, a walk on the Milky Way. Stanza one introduces the characters on the walk by showing what Blake gives to each, silver shoes to the rabbit, golden gloves to the cat, emerald boots to the tiger and also to the boy, who is writing in first person, and iron boots to the rat.

In stanza two Blake inquires to see if everyone is ready, noting that the night is quite cold, inferring that everyone should have warm things on. He mentions that they would all start the journey as children but may end up finishing it, when they are old. Stanza three shows Blake hurrying everyone up to get to the horizon, right at the line between morning and evening. There the "slippery stars" were hopping around under their "hapless" feet, which gives the sense of the wanderers not truly being in charge of where they're going.

In stanza four, the rabbit comments that he is so cold that his paws are turning blue and that he might even lose his "thumb," though rabbits don't possess thumbs. In stanza five, the cat notices that the many stars are falling all around them. He makes the practical suggestion that they should use the stars to catch a ride back to the inn where they can be comfortable again. In stanza six, the tiger notices some green light emanating from stars and calls it "emerald." He thinks that he'll take some of them back to drape around his room. The boy comments that everything is so wonderful that he may never sleep again, never separating night from day.

In stanza seven, the reader meets up with the only glum one in the party, the rat. He wishes he had just stayed home in bed. He predicts that nothing that is gathered on this trip can even last, because only fools try to get things from heaven, things that will never last. In stanza eight, Blake hands out some rewards. He gives silver stars to the rabbit, golden stars to the cat, emerald-green stars to the rabbit and to the boy, but only a handful of dirt to the rat, the fellow who complained he would never get anything anyway.

# Poem 10, "Blake Leads a Walk on the Milky Way" Analysis

This is another sweetly singsong poem with mostly anapestic scansion, with just a few iambs sprinkled in to create some moments of emphasis. It is written in ballad form, ABCB. The lines are cleverly natural and easy to read, mostly without enjambment, although some lines do carry over.

In stanza one, the first person, also the boy in the picture, mentions that Blake hands out some gifts, which he does again in the last stanza. Each first line of each stanza is capitalized, while the others are not. In the first stanza, the second through fourth lines all start with "and," giving a scriptural or mythical sense to the verse. The gifts that Blake gives are made of precious things, all except for the rat's, which is made of iron. The mythical nature of the journey is emphasized in stanza two line four, when Blake comments they may all be old by the time the journey is done, perhaps inferring that it is the journey of a lifetime.

Each of the characters seems to be having a different experience. The rabbit is very cold and fears he'll lose the use of his right thumb. The cat seems a bit conniving, trying to figure out ways to capitalize on the beauties all around him. The tiger seems to be similar, although he just wants to garner the beauties for himself. The boy however realizes that this experience is so priceless that he may keep himself awake forever, just to hold onto it. Staying awake is therefore a symbol for being alive to the loveliness around us.

However, the rat is not having any fun at all. He just wishes he'd stayed at home in bed. He is sure that you cannot gather anything good in heaven, another symbolic reference to the mythical or spiritual nature of the journey. At the end, Blake gives out gifts similar to the ones he's given out in the first stanza, silver and gold and emerald. To the doubting rat, who cannot see anything good in heaven, he only gives a handful of dirt.

# Poem 11, "When We Come Home, Blake Calls for Fire"

## Poem 11, "When We Come Home, Blake Calls for Fire" Summary

Blake opens this short three-stanza poem with an apostrophe, a request directly made to "Fire." The request continues throughout the entire poem. This poem is in ballad form but has AABB for a rhyme scheme and iambic scansion. Each stanza begins with a capital letter except for the last one, since the last line of the preceding stanza is an enjambment carrying over to the last stanza. The second line does begin with a capital.

In the first stanza, Blake calls the fire a "handsome creature" and asks him to shine. He requests that the hearth, the place where the fire is made, become a warm home that warms everyone. He acknowledges in lines two and three that he has confined the fire with its "hissing tongues," but that he would like the fire to help everyone nonetheless.

In the second stanza, Blake notes that when the wind blasts around the inn, especially the doors, every corner is cold except the warm corner where the fire burns. During the winter, everything goes to sleep under the snow, but the fire will keep all the little "pilgrims" warm, referring to poem 10, where Blake has taken some of the characters on a wonderful, long journey. He notes that none of the creatures has ever done the fire any harm, and enjoins them to raise their paws a bit to "toast their toes," and also praise the fire that warms them up.

## Poem 11, "When We Come Home, Blake Calls for Fire" Analysis

This poem continues the semi-story of the book. Blake took some of the characters on a wonderful nighttime mythical trip in the heavens to gather some fantastic things. Now the travelers have come home and it is cold. Blake speaks to the fire to get everyone warmed up. He compliments the fire on being handsome, perhaps softening things up with a compliment. He acknowledges that he's confined this wild, handsome creature to a hearth but requests that the fire serve everyone nicely nonetheless by keeping them warm.

The compliment continues in stanza two. Blake notes that everything everywhere is so cold. The fire, that handsome fellow, is the only remedy. Even the whole earth falls under the spell of bitter, cold winter, and only fire can help those who need help. Finally Blake seems to appeal to the manly nature of fire by referring to the other creatures as "little pilgrims," who never did the fire any harm. They will praise the fire as it keeps them warm.

This almost reads like a hymn. Although the lines are short, with only four stresses per measure, it reads more slowly than some of the other poems, because it is in slow-seeming iambs. While the former poem seemed to rush and soar, this poem seems to ground everyone and slow them down, get them ready for a nap. Like everything else in this book of poems, the fire itself seems to have a personality of its own, and Blake speaks to that.

The illustration shows smoke coming from the chimney in the inn as well as all the other chimneys in the city. It is a rather smoky picture. The picture is a view of Blake working in his office, while Mrs. Blake is doing something in the adjacent room in her apron and cat. The travelers are all cuddled up together on the floor by the fire, even the recalcitrant rat. Everyone except for Mr. and Mrs. Blake are having a little snooze.

# Poem 12, "The Marmalade Man Makes a Dance to Mend Us"

## Poem 12, "The Marmalade Man Makes a Dance to Mend Us" Summary

This is a short little poem of two verses in the familiar ABCB ballad form. It is the first time that the reader ever hears the voice of the Marmalade Man, who is piping a song on his flute and singing to the characters. In stanza one, he addresses the characters with capital letters to all their names, such as Tiger, Rabbit, and so on. He is telling the creatures to mend their ways, usually a religious remonstrance, and to follow him through "mist and maze."

In stanza two, he continues to call out orders. The fox and hound are to go together, "paw in paw." The cat and rat are to make up and be best friends. The lamb and tiger should just walk together, and everyone should dance, because "dancing starts when fighting ends."

## Poem 12, "The Marmalade Man Makes a Dance to Mend Us" Analysis

This may be the most overt reference to Blake's religious inclinations. Blake was quite a millennialist, hoping that someday the scriptures would come true and the lion would really, truly lie down with the lamb. In the first stanza, The Marmalade Man addresses specific characters from the poem, while in the second stanza, he talks to enemies generically.

Interestingly, not Blake but the Marmalade Man makes these requests. The reward here is not just heaven, which some of the characters have had the special privilege of traversing, but joy, singing, dancing. The Marmalade Man calls himself the needle, a symbol for someone who leads, but also a nice visual symbol supported by the flute that leads the parade. That the characters should follow the Marmalade Man "through mist and maze" infers that the journey may not always seem easy or direct. The final line of the poem gives the message that we can dance together, when we stop fighting.

The illustration spans two pages. The characters all seem to be there, plus a few more, including a hound dog and a dancing lamb. All the creatures' expressions seem just a touch solemn, perhaps dour, except for that happy lamb and its friend, the tiger, who gazes directly out at the reader. Even the sunflowers have joined the group, balanced on the back of the Wise Cow, whose eyelashes are particularly charming.

# Poem 13, "The King of Cats Sends a Postcard to His Wife"

## Poem 13, "The King of Cats Sends a Postcard to His Wife" Summary

This is a poem in ballad form with the rhyme scheme AABB throughout. The rhymes are simple and natural. In the first stanza, the King of Cats begins like a traditional husband, telling the wife things she'd better do or not do. Line one tells her to keep her whiskers clean and crisp. Line two tells her to make sure that the mice remain fat, presumably so the King of Cats can have some to eat, when he gets home. Lines three and four enjoin her not to get fat like some common kitchen cat, also presumably a concern of the traditional husband, who wants to ensure he's got a good-looking wife.

Stanza two asks after tasks the wife should do. Line one asks if she has set the kittens free; in other words, are the babies weaned and set off on their own? Line two seems a bit poignant, wondering if the kittens ever ask about their daddy who's away. Line three asks if the catnip is growing well, while line four asks if she's attended to patching up the garden wall.

Stanza three launches into the mystical world the King of Cats shares with William Blake at his inn. Gone are the references to the common everyday matters discussed in the other verses. The King of Cats tells his wife that clouds are "gentle walls" concealing gardens on the other side of them. He wants all the tabby cats, presumably commoners compared to himself, the King, that he eats all his meals with the master, William Blake. They eat "in splendor on the shore," possibly the shoreline between the mystical and the literal world. The King of Cats wants the tabbies to know that he is sleeping well.

In stanza four the King of Cat begins moving directly into the world of the magical and mystical. He wants the tabbies to know that he has traveled so far in Blake's magical car, despite the pounding of wind and rain, that he might not be able to get back home again. Stanza five begins a set of messages to particular cat friends. He sends a thousand sunsets in a box to the cat, who winds the clocks. In stanza seven, he sends to the cat, who brings ice to his home, the shadows of a dozen mice. He adds the advice to eat these shadows with dip as one would eat potato chips. Stanza eight sends to the cat, who guards his door a net for catching stars and other things, particularly "catnip from the other side," clearly a richer and more fantastic catnip.

# Poem 13, "The King of Cats Sends a Postcard to His Wife" Analysis

This is one of the few poems that speaks at length in the voice of one of the characters. The reader has met The King of Cats throughout the poems but just in passing, mentioned briefly as the poems progress. This is a pretty lengthy statement in his own voice. It reveals his personality. He tends to be pretty bossy and traditional in his relationships but this is changing because of the magical nature of his experience with William Blake.

The King of Cats is writing a postcard, a small piece, so it is instructive seeing what he wants to share. He gets right to business therefore and shares his immediate concerns, things that he wants his wife to attend to, interestingly including details about her personal appearance. He also wants to make sure things get done around the property and that the kittens are at the right stage in their lives, though he also wants to make sure they remember him. He is more than a little proud of his connection with William Blake, so he brags just a touch about the things they do together.

Soon, however, the King of Cats gets into the meat of what's going on with him. He's venturing further and further into the spiritual world provided by William Blake in the wonderful setting of his inn. He imagines that he might never get home, so far has he journeyed with Blake in the mystical world. As he has had these experiences, he can confidently send home presents to cats still there. He sends the shadows of mice, sunsets, a net for catching stars and even high-potency, celestial catnip.

This poem is written in iambic scansion with four stresses to each line, with the rhyming scheme of AABB. Although none of the poems up till now has had AABB rhyme schemes, the following two in the book are also in that form. It is not clear why, unless it is, because the book becomes increasingly mystical till the end and the AABB sort of holds it together.

This illustration stars none other than the King of Cats himself. He sits at tea with William Blake, both smiling for the "camera," Blake gently and the King of Cat grinning like a Cheshire. He is proud to be included here. His friends appear in little stamp-sized drawings at the bottom of the illustration, happy with their gifts. The background includes the script of the King of Cats' postcard to his wife.

# Poem 14, "The Tiger Asks Blake for a Bedtime Story"

## Poem 14, "The Tiger Asks Blake for a Bedtime Story" Summary

This poem has the exact rhythm and rhyme of the famed "Tyger, Tyger, burning bright" by William Blake. This is the rather rare trochaic rhythmic form, with two-syllable scansion with emphasis on the first syllable. Much more poetry in English occurs in iambic form with the emphasis on the second syllable.

This poem is a confessional. The tiger has been doing a little stealing, nothing much, just some food items. The tiger calls upon Blake to get his roar back and restore his good health. The tiger thinks that his petty pilfering has caused an elemental ill for himself, which may very well be true in the spiritual and mystical world where Blake lives. In stanza one, the tiger talks to William, writing late in the cold night, since the grate is cold and sooty. The tiger requests a story from Blake, thinking that narrative will restore him to health.

Then come the confessions. Stanza three reveals that the tiger ate "half the roast and all the bread" one day, thinking that Blake would never notice. Stanza three contains the admission that the tiger stole three lumps of sugar from the tea tray. Stanza four connects these minor thefts with the tiger's loss of health and well-being and in it, the tiger suggests that only William Blake can tell good enough stories to bring the tiger back to health.

Stanza six begins with the familiar, "Now I lay me down to sleep," the beginning of a child's prayer. The tiger will go to sleep with the other creatures of the inn and beyond. Instead of dying before he wakes, the tiger mentions dreaming before he wakes, hoping he will dream of William Blake.

## Poem 14, "The Tiger Asks Blake for a Bedtime Story" Analysis

This is a childlike expression of faith by the biggest creature at the inn and the most famous character from William Blake's poetry, the tiger, here spelled conventionally, although Blake spells him "Tyger." This poem has four stresses to the line, but they are trochaic, with the stress on the first syllable of the pair instead of the second as in the more usual iambic meter.

This poem reveals a very tender tiger despite his threatening size. He is worried, because he seems to have lost health, particularly his roar. He lives in the mystical, magical world of William Blake so he has concluded that Blake's storytelling will restore

his health. This is a charming idea and one that fits with traditional, tribal peoples, too, that storytelling is healing.

Whether the tiger is right or not about his health declining because of petty theft, he believes that he's sick because of his infractions and he wants Blake to heal him by telling him healing stories. He says, "I knew the fault was mine" in stanza four, line two. Since the tiger and Blake live in a world of spiritual values, perhaps the tiger *is* ill from stealing since it breaks a spiritual law, although the reader no doubt has compassion for a tiger, who's always hungry.

The tiger says that he lies down to sleep with "bear and rabbit, bird and sheep" in stanza five, line two. Here is a fairly direct reference to a millennial world where the lamb lies down with the lion. The tiger is not the king of the beasts, but he's a very close relative and of course he has the potential for being a dangerous character. His misdeeds seem very small compared to what a tiger s actually capable of. In the illustration he is sitting with a bird in his paws and a goat by his side, indicating his relative harmlessness. Like many people who are reforming their lives, the tiger is obsessed by minor misdemeanors, as he intends to be totally good.

The illustration is a good example of this book's artists' disregard for proportion. The tiger is huge, as is the bear sleeping behind him. The rabbit is proportional but William Blake and he other teeny creatures sleeping in their rooms, including the wide-awake boy, are much too small for actual proportion. There is a huge floral decoration, perhaps a floral tree, at the top of the inn in this picture. The colors are warm, but the rooms evidently are not, considering Blake's cold fireplace.

# Poem 15, "Blake Tells the Tiger the Tale of the Tailor"

## Poem 15, "Blake Tells the Tiger the Tale of the Tailor" Summary

Answering the tiger's request for a tale to take away his sins and help him go to sleep, Blake tells him a moral tale to help him relax and also to see the nature of things. This is written in mostly paired rhymed couplets, but there is a refrain that adds an unrhymed line to the pattern, speaking in the voice of the tailor. This poem is written in iambic Quadra meter with in AABB form.

Stanza one opens the story, with a phrase resembling "once upon a time." This sets up a story of a tailor, who needed to build a house, but only used materials familiar to him. In this stanza, it's bat's wool, mouse fur, moleskin, and a few magical things "that glimmer, skim and dart." Stanza two sets up the refrain of the tailor, who says, "It's best to work with what I know. Shears, snip. Thread, go. I'll have a house in the morning." This refrain points up the magical nature of the tailor's work, because nobody can build a house from evening to morning, even with soft tailor's materials.

Sure enough, the house gets finished and the tailor and his wife move in. They line the whole house with onionskin, whether the material from onions or the paper. The chairs are made of velveteen, snails' feet and hair from comets, a truly heavenly material. Again in stanza four, the tailor reiterates that he only builds with stuff he knows, never "bricks and boards."

Stanza five mentions a bed made of robins' wings that he caught in a custom-made trap made of twigs and lime. Then follows the refrain, having nothing to do this time with "nails and knotholes." However, at night, the tailor and his wife cannot sleep because of all the noises of cries and chirps, presumably from the creatures who lost their lives making the materials for the tailor's house. Might this be a pointed tale for the voracious tiger?

The tailor's wife immediately knows what's wrong. She says that they can't restore "fur and fury" and other things to the creatures who lost their lives, they had better leave this noisy place and perhaps go stay with Blake at the inn. The tailor can't figure out these mysterious matters, the spiritual pain of creatures that have lost their lives. He agrees to go to Blake's inn in the morning. However, that night the April winds blew the tailor's soft house apart, and the "wet wind" is wearing the bat's wool and comet's hair that had comprised the house.

Blake benefits from the residence of the tailor by having a nice new suit made of "shifting lights." The tailor has become so "clever" that he can even sew light and dark together. This is the effect of living with Blake, who is spiritual and mystical. The final

refrain differs from the others now that the tailor lives with Blake. The tailor tells living things to "take their rest" and asserts that "all things are new in the morning."

## Poem 15, "Blake Tells the Tiger the Tale of the Tailor" Analysis

The tiger has been troubled by his sins, however minor the reader might consider them, since the tiger has simply been pilfering food, albeit from his beloved employer William Blake. The tiger wants Blake to tell him a story so he can get his health back and Blake complies. Hidden in this story is the moral that if you take things, especially for unseemly purposes, you can suffer. However, you can make things right, because "all things are new in the morning" (stanza 12, line five).

The singsong rhythm and rhyme of the verses might be enough to lull the tiger to sleep without even addressing his losing his roar. The story of the tailor might at first glance seem to make natural sense. What else might a tailor make a house from except materials that he knows? However, there is a thinking error here. One cannot make a strong enough house from fur, fabric, and mystery, such as the hair from comets. The tailor insists that he must stick with what he knows. However, natural consequences follow this decision and his house blows away. There is a particularly nice line where the "wet wind," formerly bare, now wears the "wool of bat and comet's hair."

Living with Blake, the tailor has learned even more amazing skills, such as stitching light and dark together. He knows better, since he doesn't take life anymore unnecessarily. The tailor realizes that one can change behavior and make "all things new in the morning." This poem is perhaps the preachiest of all the poems, because the tiger's lesson is very clear, not to take what is not his.

This is a rather long poem, presumably to act as a lullaby. The repeated refrain adds to the mesmerizing effect of the poem. In the picture, the tailor and his wife are working on something made of white fabric, maybe even light, as suggested in stanza 11. Blake watches the work from a tower in the inn, as does the tiger, who is smiling here, evidently restored to health. Interestingly, the picture is bordered with a design including sunflowers and spider webs, which provide substance without destroying anything.

# Poem 16, "Epilogue"

## Poem 16, "Epilogue" Summary

This poem includes rhythmic patterns from all the other poems, including anapestic, iambic and trochaic. The rhyme scheme continues to be AABB in the three verses. There are four lines in the first verse, five lines in the second verse, and six lines in the third verse. This poem is a farewell from the boy, who has been first person throughout the poems. In this poem he acknowledges that his journey and stay at the inn have been a spiritual journey.

Stanza one begins by telling the reader that the adventures are all at an end. The boy is leaving the inn on the hill and everyone else is leaving, too, going back to their homes, wherever they may be. Stanza two says farewell to the cow, cat, rabbit, tiger and the "sullen rat." All those who stayed at the inn will be able to tell their children about their adventure walking the Milky Way. Stanza three bids the reader to take his or her own journey. If by chance he or she reaches Blake's inn, which they will recognize, because a rabbit makes the bed and dragons bake the bread, the reader should rest a little for the sake of the writer, and give love to William Blake.

## Poem 16, "Epilogue" Analysis

Stylistically, this poem combines rhythmic patterns from all the poems, anapestic, iambic, dactylic and trochaic. The rhyme pattern is simple, the traditional ballad form of AABB, although the last stanza contains not four lines as the first two, but six.

Stanza one calls the place where the inn stands a "holy hill," reminding the reader that what has taken place is a spiritual experience, not a worldly one. For some reason, everyone must leave, which is often typical of spiritual experiences. After the mystical experience, people must go bake bread and wash the dishes themselves. The writer reminds those who stayed at the inn that they'll have great stories to tell their children and things to teach them from what they've learned at Blake's Inn.

After having the experience of reading the poems, the reader is advised in the last stanza to begin his or her own journey. Hopefully, he or she will arrive at a lovely inn, which they will recognize as Blake's by the familiar items throughout the poems, including a rabbit host and dragon bakers. Instead of asking the reader to pursue high spiritual goals, however, the writer simply asks him or her to take a little rest "for my sake," it says, and to give love to William Blake

There is not an illustration to go with this poem. However, on the facing page is a short epigraph, an actual quote from William Blake, which is his advice to travelers. The reader is reminded to have a face which "gives light" so he or she can eventually "become a star," another wonderful reminder that our worldly world around us interfaces

with the spiritual world. This epigraph is illustrated with a nice vase of our old friends, the sunflowers.

# Characters

## William Blake

Although none of the characters in these poems is developed in the usual narrative sense, by hearing their voices and by watching the few actions that are revealed, and by looking at the illustrations, the reader may make some conclusions about them. William Blake, for example, is the owner of the inn named after him. The reader meets Blake in the introductory story by Nancy Willard. Her babysitter reads her "Tyger, Tyger, burning bright" and later sends her a copy of Blake's poems with an inscription from who knows? Blake himself? Poem one introduces Blake as the owner of the inn. He is revealed as a powerful character, who tames beasts, names stars, and provides rest for weary travelers. He is in charge of two dragons, who cook for him. He is acquainted with angels with wash and shake the featherbeds. He stands at the door welcoming people into his inn. He commands a rabbit, the King of Cats, a tiger, dragons, and a visiting Marmalade Man, who takes on the job of cleaning up the whole place.

William Blake is so magical that he can take other characters for a walk on the Milky Way, but he is down-to-earth enough to provide fire, nourishment and rest for weary travelers. He sups with the King of Cats and has enough magic and mystery to keep him there even though he has long been away from his family. Blake can tell a bedtime story to heal an ailing tiger and put him to sleep. Through the eyes of all the other characters, the reader learns that Blake is unpredictable and totally reliable at the same time. The pictures reveal a courteous individual, who pays attention to propriety and details, while he traverses the Milky Way.

## Dragons

Dragons appear first in Poem 1, where they are said to turn the spit, brew the beer and bake the bread, sometimes burning it. When the King of Cats orders an early breakfast in Poem Six, the reader will assume that the dragons are preparing it, especially the "Brisket of Basilisk Treat." They reappear in the Epilogue, just as a reference to the aspiring traveler, something for him or her to look for if they happen to find an inn like Blake's.

## Angels

Angels are characterized as "patient," as they wash and shake the featherbeds, not only doing housekeeping, but somewhere causing snow to fall like feathers. Perhaps, they are present in the heavens, when the travelers traverse the Milky Way. At least, the illustration suggests it.

## The Boy Speaking in First Person

The little boy appears in the frontispiece, standing expectantly with his luggage and dressed in his short-waisted sailor coat. He speaks in first person in Poem Two, when he boards the wonderful car that flies him to the inn. He is more than a little discouraged, when his suitcases mysteriously shrink up as small as envelopes. He is uneasy stepping in, but he loves the wide, beautiful car, as big as a meadow and as soft. When the rabbit shows him his room, he is understandably unhappy to see a bear instead of a bed. He can hardly speak so he just whispers. He longs for the safety and comfort of home, but the bear reassures him. He is frightened, when the Sun and Moon are out at the same time, but the rabbit reassures him and soon he falls asleep. Soon he becomes a participant rather than an observer. When everyone goes for a walk on the Milky Way, the boy rides the back of the tiger and he naps on the tiger's back, when they all get home. The boy seems to listen in, when Blake tells the tiger his story. At the end of the poems, the boy seems much more mature. He realizes he has been in a holy place and offers that reassuring experience to any other travelers hoping to venture to Blake's inn.

## The Rabbit

The rabbit shows the boy to his room. He looks just like a normal brown rabbit but obviously he is magical. He kindly reassures the boy, when he is frightened at night (or day), when the Sun and Moon appear at the same moment. The rabbit shows himself to be a fine punster in Poem Nine, when he calls upon the Wise Cow to make way, make room, and make believe. The rabbit receives silver shoes in the Milky Way trip. He dances along with the Marmalade Man and learns that "dancing starts where fighting ends." He is willing to go off to sleep with the tiger, when he asks for his bedtime story. Finally, he receives the boy's fond farewell, when everyone must go home. The reader will assume that the rabbit stays with Blake in his inn, unless the whole thing is imaginary.

## The Tiger

The tiger appears in many of the poems and illustrations. By nature he would be one of the scariest characters, but he seems to be trying hard to reform himself. He is walking through the door at the introduction, which seems appropriate since Blake's "Tyger" is the writer's childhood introduction to Blake. Although the tiger is not mentioned in the text of Poem 4, he is present as one of the sleepless residents in the illustration. Similarly, he goes for a ride on the magic car, when the rabbit is making puns in Poem 9. He goes for a walk on the Milky Way in Poem 10, receiving emerald boots from Blake. He shows up snoozing in Poem 11, warm by the fire after the long trip. He receives the Marmalade Man's advice to mend his ways in Poem 12, and evidently he takes it to heart, because he is troubled in Poem 14, worried, because he's been snatching Blake's food, when he is supposed to be delivering it. He has lost his roar. And he begs Blake to heal him by storytelling, which Blake offers in Poem 15, learning

not to grab what is not his. He receives the boy's fond farewell, along with other characters, in the final poem.

## The King of Cats

The King of Cats appears peripherally in Poem 2, as he sits on the car and makes the luggage begin to purr. He appears again in Poem 4, where he awakens in alarm when the Sun and Moon appear together at the same time. He is the star in Poem 6, when he ordered an early breakfast. He eats items real and mythical and seems fairly demanding, although it is important to remember he is a monarch. Due to the fact that he eats these unusual items, the reader will understand that the King of Cats is a member of the spiritual household of Blake. The King of Cats goes on the walk on the Milky Way, although the reader only knows it's Him because of the picture; otherwise, he is mentioned only as the cat. After the journey, he curls up by the fire in the illustration. In Poem 12, the King of Cats joins the Marmalade Man's dance. He stars again in Poem 13, where he is writing a lengthy postcard to his wife. Again he appears as a spiritual, mythical being from the things he says.

## The Sunflowers

The sunflowers are unusual characters, which are much more than decoration. They are volitional and vocal. They are first introduced in Poem 4, where they try hard to follow the Sun even though it sharing time and space with the Moon. Poem 8 is devoted totally to the sunflowers. They are tired of being outside in the weather and having to move around all the time. They ask William Blake to be taken indoors, in a room with a view. They arrange themselves at the window and follow the Sun from there, rooting in the carpet among the woven topaz tortoises. They ride the cow's back in the dance of the Marmalade Man. Finally, they are the beautiful illustration in the final selection of the book, an excerpt from Blake himself.

## The Man in the Marmalade Hat

The Man wears a hat decorated with either fruit or marmalade. It is hard to tell from the illustration. His face is wild and crazy, but he is an amazing person, who carries cleaning materials with him. He shows up in Poem 5 and starts to clean the entire inn, a great blessing for an innkeeper. He seems to be bringing in new life, fresh air, cleanliness and hope! Later in Poem 12, he provides an activity that creates one of the major themes of the book. He wants everyone to follow him in the dance, pointing out that "dancing starts when fighting ends."

## The Wise Cow

From what she says, the Wise Cow seems wise, because she lives in the moment. The reader meets her in Poem 7, where she says she sleeps on a cloud and then eats it raw

on buttered bread in the morning. This is pure whimsy, not conventional wisdom. The Wise Cow can be literal, however, as in Poem 8, where she tries to make sense of the rabbit's puns, including making "way" from hay, making "room" from weather, and making "believe" from a boat. She is turning metaphors into literal things, thus making them symbolic. The Wise Cow participates in the Marmalade Man's dance of healing as well.

## The Cat

In addition to the King of Cats, a cat appears at times in the poems. The rabbit says that the old Moon owns a "lunatic cat" that the boy needs protection from. On the walk on the Milky Way, the cat receives a pair of golden gloves as well as a golden star, and she suggests that the group go for a ride on a star. The cat becomes friends with the rat with the dance of the Marmalade Man. There are many cats referred to in the King of Cats' postcard home.

## The Rat

Even though the rat makes peace with the cat, he is rarely mentioned and almost never in a friendly way. He is so surly on the walk on the Milky Way that he just gets dirt and iron boots for a gift, while the others get nice gifts.

# Objects/Places

## Blake's Inn

Blake's Inn is the setting of most of the action in the poems, although there is a notable exception, when the characters take a walk on the Milky Way. It seems to be a transmutable place. Sometimes rooms are big; other times, they are small. The reader can see Blake at work in some of the rooms, and can often see characters asleep or not throughout the book. The inn is rendered in the illustrations in approximate 3-D in the style of many 18th century illustrations. More than its physical nature, however, its spiritual nature is the main content of the poem. This is a place where one learns lessons, sees things anew, and gets a chance to have a rest. Things don't always make literal sense, but they are always interesting and mind opening.

## Featherbeds

In Poem 1, the angels shake featherbeds, as they make up the rooms. These featherbeds shed feathers that show up as snow far away. Children make snowmen out of these to honor Blake.

## Blake's Wonderful Car

Blake's car appears in two of the poems, one bringing the boy to the inn and the other taking people to the Milky Way. It has wheels, a bird's head and tail, helicopter-like spinning blades, flags, including a British flag, stairs for entry, and variable space for its passengers. Later in the book's illustrations, it features a hot-air balloon.

## The Fire

When the group gets home from a nightlong walk on the Milky Way, there is a lovely, warm fire to curl up by and rest. The travelers are cold in the night and the fire warms them up. He is called a "handsome creature," with "hissing tongues" and "bright behavior." Poem 11 is all about the fire, ending with a call for praising it/him.

## The Boy's Room

In Poem 2, the boy makes the transition from his comfortable, predictable home to his room at the inn. The rabbit kindly helps him make that transition by promising him safety and security, replacing his familiar items with those that will be safe and appropriate for his stay in the inn. Even the bear, who will embrace the boy, becomes safe with the rabbit's explanations.

## The Luggage

When the boy's luggage turns as small and pale as an envelope, it worries the child a great deal, but it also symbolizes the shift from a safe, literal physical world to a more encompassing and instructive spiritual world where just about anything can happen. When this luggage begins to purr and tell the boy that it should be served with mustard on a bun, the boy knows he's left this world for quite another.

## The Driver

The driver of the car wears a mackintosh, which is British usage for a raincoat, and wings. The raincoat, as well as the boots, are the color of green onions, quite a surprise, shown elegantly in the illustration. The cap he wears reads, "Blake's Celestial Limousine."

## The Bear

Without question, a small boy would tremble in fear to find a bear in his room, and even more so, when he learns that he will sleep in the bear's arms. The rabbit calms the boy down and the bear speaks telepathically to the child, reassuring him that he will be warm and safe.

## The Sun and Moon in Tandem

What could be more convincing that one is in a different world than day and night at the same time? Their presence together shakes everyone up, and all the characters are upset and cannot sleep. The kind rabbit calms them all down, but the reader knows that this is a world strange and exciting.

## The Bottle of Starch

The Marmalade Man has traveled with a bottle of starch, not for clothing, but to straighten out the bends in the road, a charming and impossible image.

## The Diet of the King of Cats

This King of Cats wants some strange things to eat. He wants to eat a fat mole, not an unusual thing for a cat, but he wants it smothered in starlight. He wants a stew made of nine mice, precisely. He wants a Brisket of Basilisk, a mythical request to be sure. He smiles that he is going to resemble the Moon, so round will he be after eating all these things, especially since he has arisen for a midnight snack of a dozen lobster claws. Evidently Blake's inn has a wide variety of foodstuffs available.

## The Topaz Tortoises

This is luscious poetic language, as well as imagery, that would appeal to the child reader, a carpet with jewel-like tortoises running through it. The sunflowers take root among these tortoises and the reader receives an image of movement and color that is delightful.

## The Milky Way

The reader only sees the Milky Way in the illustration. The experience of the travelers makes up this poem, but since it is a magical journey, the travelers are changed forever. They receive precious gifts, all except the rat of course, who is so sullen that he only gets dirt and boots of iron suitable to his attitude. The other travelers are transformed by their gifts and by the heavenly experience.

## The Postcard

The King of Cats writes an elaborate postcard to his wife. The text is actually too long to fit on a postcard, but the text makes the reader smile at first with all the homey and patriarchal suggestions that the King of Cats makes to his wife. Soon it becomes apparent that the King of Cats has moved out of the literal world he's trying to hold onto with this message to his wife. He's out of this world, into sunsets in a box, shadows of mice, and a net for catching stars. The postcard literally goes out of this world.

## The Tailor's House

When the tailor stubbornly sticks to what he knows, his house is blown apart by the storms and winds. Blake rescues him. Interestingly, the tailor never gives up his stance on sticking with what he knows, but he ends up living with Blake because of it.

## The Holy Hill

In the last poem of the book, Blake's inn is revealed to be set on a "holy hill." This is a place where individuals may rest and also grow, learn and teach, and be transformed by experiences and events without precedence in the literal world.

# Social Sensitivity

Willard's poems in this award-winning volume, while attractively spiritual and child-like, are never childish. That is, they tend to avoid cloying sentimentality and contrived whimsy, more often portraying the intelligent and visually allusive mind of a child as it actually is, rather than as condescending adults might imagine it. Willard's tone is compassionate and sensitive, consistently respecting the feelings, dignity, and good sense of the poet's young audience.

# Themes

## Heaven Gives Us Gifts

William Blake was a forthright religionist, a strong Christian with mystical leanings, and this book reflects that point of view. In a way he might be compared with Saint Francis of Assisi, also a Christian but very mystical as well, particularly connected to the natural world including the creatures all around him. Throughout this book, the poems maintain the reader's strong connection with the natural world but also keep reaching for the stars, quite literally in some cases, as when some animals go for a nighttime journey with Blake and he does actually give them some stars. The Man with the Marmalade Hat works very hard to clean the inn, so he doesn't put on airs in the least. He also is the one that enjoins the creatures to stop their fighting and start having some fun with music and dancing, and in the larger sense, to grasp the goods from heaven by getting along and having peace among each other.

The animals may seem dubious, but they're willing at least to follow the Man with the Marmalade Hat and give it all a try. Blake provides earthly comforts and warmth but points to the heavens for the real goods, the really good things in our existence. When the rat disdains them, Blake gives him his just reward, just some dirt. This is not a punishment but a reminder that true gifts do come from heaven but you have to be willing to receive them. In the final poem in the book, the reader begins to understand that earthly things may easily come apart, but not the good gifts from heaven. It may be this interesting, dynamic interaction between heaven and earth that makes *A Visit to William Blake's Inn* so enduring and what makes it an award winner. Spiritual themes are powerful and appealing but not very easy to render, and Willard has struck that delightful note of spirituality that includes fun and mystery.

## The Spiritual or Mythical World Is All Around Us

At the end of this book of poems, it is clear that the characters can only stay in Blake's inn for a short time, actually the undetermined time it takes to experience the poems herein. In this short visit, the reader might wonder why certain stories, experiences and thoughts were chosen. Part of the nature of the spiritual world rendered by Nancy Willard is the immediacy of that world. Whatever is going on in the moment is what is important, and the mystical or spiritual nature of the experience is what matters. Thus, dragons can bake, brew and roast the meat. Angels make up featherbeds and create faraway snow. The little traveler overcomes his fear, which is based in the literal world, even though his one solid item of trust, his luggage, diminishes and pales. This demonstrates that the physical world cannot totally be trusted, but the spiritual world certainly can. When the boy enters Blake's wonderful car, it is as soft and wide as a beautiful meadow. It is a wish come true, literalized and physicalized. When the boy reaches his room, he is understandably frightened because a childhood fear, a bear, reclines there instead of a bed.

However, the rabbit reassures the boy that the bear is not something to be feared. In fact, the rabbit will protect the boy from all kinds of dangers, including "perilous starlight." Sun and Moon appear at the same time, a dandy cleaner shows up and makes the whole world new, literally and spiritually. When the King of Cats orders breakfast, he includes all sorts of things, including "brisket of basilisk" in his menu. The Wise Cow sleeps on a cloud and eats it up raw and the reader understands that the Wise Cow is trying to make us smile. The tiger makes a connection between his petty thievery and a spiritual ill, and Blake tells him a story, which is not entirely logical, because although the tailor seems to be doing the right thing, he ends up doing it all wrong but can take haven with Blake in his inn nonetheless. This is not a rigid world of woe and punishment according to fundamental religiosity. This is a world where the spiritual infuses the physical and makes everything interesting and safe. It is likely that the immediacy, whimsicality and unpredictability of the spiritual world takes people away from preachiness instead of toward it. Indeed, at the end of the book, the couplet borrowed from Blake gives the challenge of having light in the face in order someday to become a star. This is not dogmatic doctrine but it is delightful and spiritual and hopeful, exactly the nature of Nancy Willard's book.

## Formal Poetry Can Appeal to a Wide Audience, Including Children

Writer Nancy Willard may have been an exceptional child, since she grows up to be an exceptional writer for children. When at age seven she hears the verse of "Tyger, tiger, burning bright," she is hooked. The babysitter opens the door to an imaginative world, which may or may not be real, as she inscribes the gift of *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* as being from William Blake himself. As the Blake poems create such a magical reality for Willard, her poems continue to create a similar, parallel world through formal poems. In our literary world, scanned, rhyming poetry is not particularly in vogue. Imagism was the catalyst that, and many poets, especially young people and those writing for young people, avoid structured poetry as being hackneyed and predictable. However, it is very hard to write well-scanned, well-rhymed poems, as rapsters daily demonstrate. Getting the syllables perfect and natural is no easy task. Nancy Willard has taken on the job and does it flawlessly, with almost no misses throughout this volume. If the reader thinks this is easy, s/he should try just one stanza of rhymed couplets and it will become clear. Willard goes a step further and utilizes poetic forms typical of the 18th century, particularly song forms. The rhythms and stresses are nigh-perfect, whether her lines are end-stopped, such as in Poem 4, stanza 3, line 1, "The King of Cats sprang up in fright," or enjambed, as lines 2 and 3 in that same stanza, "'What is this fitful flashing light/that will not let me sleep?"' Willard is particularly apt at using the ballad form to tell these lightly linked stories, and when he opens with, "There was a tailor built a house/of wool of bat and fur of mouse," the reader, whether child or adult, is captivated. Looking closely at these poems, the reader will realize that the words are structured carefully while seeming effortless, and the result is not only award winning but also with lasting appeal for generations.

# Themes/Literary Qualities

As more than one critic has noted, the nonsensical spirit of these verses seems to owe more to such poets as Lewis Carroll (a childhood favorite of Willard's), W. S. Gilbert, and Edward Lear than to the often dark and complex Blake. Nonetheless, the book's preface, expanded by Willard's subsequent acceptance speech at the Newbery Medal award ceremonies, makes it clear that ever since a babysitter gave her a volume of Blake's poetry when she was seven years old, the poet has been much on her mind. Willard reports that she began building a model of an old country inn from scraps of cardboard some years before she decided to write a book of poems featuring Blake. Willard often listened to recordings of Blake's poetry as she constructed the inn in her living room, and such poems as Blake's "The Tyger" have haunted Willard's imagination and dreams since childhood. It is not surprising, therefore, that William Blake ultimately came to preside over Willard's fanciful inn.

Again, the poems in this volume depend for their success chiefly on their delightful lyricism and the arresting nature of their images. Nonetheless, they do reflect certain themes found in Willard's adult works. For example, Willard has written a well-received scholarly book (Testimony of the Invisible Man, 1970) in which she compares the poets William Carlos Williams, Francis Ponge, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Pablo Neruda; in that book, Willard praises these otherwise disparate writers for their common reverence for concrete detail and their respect for pedestrian, everyday objects as conveyers of truth.

Similarly, the poems of A Visit to William Blake's Inn display a like-minded attention to and celebration of the particular nature of concrete things, which are valued for themselves alone, not for ideas which they might suggest or represent: Fire, you handsome creature, shine.

Let the hearth where I confine your hissing tongues that rise and fall be the home that warms us all.

When the wind assaults my doors every corner's cold but yours.

When the snow puts earth to sleep let your bright behavior keep all these little pilgrims warm.

They who never did you harm raise their paws a little higher and toast their toes, in praise of fire.

Combined with this emphasis on the literal qualities of commonplace things is another theme found in Willard's poetry and prose—namely, unembarrassed praise for the powers of the imagination. Willard's poetic world is one in which magic, dreams, transformations, metamorphoses, and the hidden designs of unseen powers all play crucial roles. Admission into Blake's inn requires one to abandon the "luggage" of logic. The wonderful car which transports the young narrator to the inn turns out to be a "wish that only flew/ when [he] climbed in and found it true."

This vision is finally a religious one (Blake's inn is built atop a "holy hill"), and can be found as well in Willard's adult poetry and in her aptly-titled novel, Things Invisible to See.

# Style

## Points of View

As this is a group of linked poems, the points of view shift whimsically within the general framework of the inn. Poem 1, "William Blake's Inn for Innocent and Experienced Travelers," is told in third person. The poem simply explains some of the magical and wonderful aspects of the inn. Poem 2, "Blake's Wonderful Car Delivers Us Wonderfully Well," is told in first person, in the voice of the little boy traveler. The reader only knows it is a little boy because of the illustration. Otherwise it could be Nancy Willard's voice equally well. Poem 3, "A Rabbit Reveals My Room," is also told in the same first person as Poem 2. Poem 4, "The Sun and Moon Circus Soothes the Wakeful Guests," is told in third person up till the last stanza, which shifts into first person again, the little boy. Poem 5, "The Man in the Marmalade Hat Arrives," is told in third person, but the reader hears the voice of the Marmalade Man speaking as well, giving an indication of his lively and loving character.

Poem 6, "The King of Cats Orders an Early Breakfast," is spoken completely in the voice of the King of Cats, who proves himself to be an imaginative fellow with one foot in the literal world and one foot in the world of fantasy. Poem 7, "The Wise Cow Enjoys a Cloud," is written as a dialog between the first person and the Wise Cow herself. It is wry and whimsical. Poem 8, "Two Sunflowers Move into the Yellow Room," is told in third person with one of the two stanzas spoken in the voices of the sunflowers. Poem 9, "The Wise Cow Makes *Way, Room,* and *Believe,"* is told in third person, but the voices are the rabbit and the Wise Cow. Poem 10, "Blake Leads a Walk on the Milky Way," is told in third person, with several of the characters giving voice in conversation with the first person again.

Poem 11, "When We Come Home, Blake Calls for Fire," is written in first person, but the reader will hear more of Blake's voice than that of the little boy. It is hard to tell who the speaker is in this poem. Poem 12, "The Marmalade Man Makes a Dance to Mend Us," is told in the voice of the Marmalade Man, while Poem 13, "The King of Cats Sends a Postcard to His Wife," is totally written in the voice of the King of Cats, who is more than a little immersed in the spiritual mystery of Blake's inn. Poem 14, "The Tiger Asks for a Bedtime Story," is told in a rather shamefaced voice of an errant tiger, while Poem 15, "Blake Tells the Tiger the Tale of the Tailor," is a narrative told in Blake's voice. The "Epilogue," Poem 16, is told in first person again, though a first person much matured by the experiences at the inn. The parting couplet in told in the literal voice of the poet, William Blake.

## Setting

These poems are set in various places, depending on the poem. Poem 1, "William Blake's Inn for Innocent and Experienced Travelers," is set perhaps outside the inn,

looking in, if one is to trust the illustration. This poem gives a good sense of what the inn is about in just a few words. Poem 2, "Blake's Wonderful Car Delivers Us Wonderfully Well," is set in and about the wonderful flying car belonging to Blake, in all its glory. This car becomes so big and wide that it is like a meadow with soft grass. Poem 3, "A Rabbit Reveals My Room," is set inside the inn in the little boy's room. Poem 4, "The Sun and Moon Circus Soothes the Wakeful Guests," set inside the inn, in the rooms of the various characters.

Poem 5, "The Man in the Marmalade Hat Arrives," is set in and about the inn, as the Marmalade Man sets about cleaning things up and stirring up the characters, too. Poem 6, "The King of Cats Orders an Early Breakfast," is set in the room given to the King of Cats, right at the top of the inn. Poem 7, "The Wise Cow Enjoys a Cloud," is set in the inn, possibly in the room of the Wise Cow but perhaps in a common area as well. Poem 8, "Two Sunflowers Move into the Yellow Room," is set in the room that the sunflowers take for their own, a yellow room with a wonderful carpet with topaz tortoises in it. Poem 9, "The Wise Cow Makes *Way, Room,* and *Believe,"* is set somewhere in the inn but it is really not certain where, because the characters are dialoging but not from a particular viewpoint. However, the illustration puts them in Blake's wonderful car. Poem 10, "Blake Leads a Walk on the Milky Way," takes place on the Milky Way.

Poem 11, "When We Come Home, Blake Calls for Fire," is set inside the inn, in a common room, where everyone cuddles up together, warming and resting after the big trip. Blake is there writing and his wife is nearby, probably cooking, according to the illustration. Poem 12, "The Marmalade Man Makes a Dance to Mend Us," takes place on the move, either inside or out, in an impromptu parade behind the Marmalade Man acting as Pied Piper. Poem 13, "The King of Cats Sends a Postcard to His Wife," seems to be set in Blake's tearoom, according to the illustration, but could be written from the room of the King of Cats, since it is a longish message to his wife. Poem 14, "The Tiger Asks for a Bedtime Story," is set in the room of the tiger, evidently, though it could be in Blake's room as well. Poem 15, "Blake Tells the Tiger the Tale of the Tailor," could be set anywhere in the inn. It is not clear. The "Epilogue," Poem 16, is set somewhere outside the inn, looking back at the experiences and looking forward to new ones.

## Language and Meaning

Since Willard is very good at writing seamless verse with impeccable scansion and syllabification, and because this is a children's book, at first it may be possible to miss the elegant and mature use of language in this book. Dealing with spiritual themes, sometimes the verses have a scriptural cadence, such as "and many are the stars he's named/ and many those who stop and take/their joyful rest with William Blake." In this line, Blake becomes a God figure, a symbol that is richly repeated throughout the verses. The image of the wide, soft, grassy interior of the wonderful car reflects the symbolism in the last volume of C. S. Lewis' Narnia series, *The Last Battle,* where the outside is so much smaller than the inside. The car becomes a wish that then becomes true, a nice image and symbol for experiences that are given bigger and better than one could ever hope. In Poem 4, "The Sun and Moon Circus Soothes the Wakeful Guests,"

the images are outrageous, but perhaps the reader doesn't see it completely, because the language is so natural. However, stanza 4, lines 2-3 read, "'The sun is opening for his act/and crouching for a leap," which is a gorgeous, dance-like image. Similarly, in slow motion, in stanza 7, lines 2-3, the sunflowers "stood up and slowly turned their heads/with patience unsurpassed," again giving a wonderful, slow-motion sense of movement. These moves relate later to Poem 5, "The Man in the Marmalade Hat Arrives," where the Marmalade Man asserts "dancing starts where fighting ends.

In Poem 7, "The Wise Cow Enjoys a Cloud," the Wise Cow is being playful, but the tight language and simple imagery points out that in the spiritual world, anything is possible, even sleeping on a cloud, almost every child's daydream, and then having it, fluffy and creamy, on toast for breakfast. In Poem 8, "Two Sunflowers Move into the Yellow Room," the opening line in stanza 1, "Ah, William, we're weary of weather," gives alliteration and assonance as well, a lengthening of vowel sounds that suggests lassitude and weariness. They resume the movement they have given up, however, by running along with topaz tortoises in the rug, another version of the dance. In Poem 9, "The Wise Cow Makes *Way, Room,* and *Believe,"* there is a lovely interplay between the symbolic language of poetry and the literal world of the Wise Cow. She doesn't understand the subtleties of the "make" puns so literalizes them in a way that could be instructive for anyone attempting a spiritual path, which is to translate spiritual or mystical concepts into everyday living.

In Poem 10, "Blake Leads a Walk on the Milky Way," when the action becomes most difficult to believe, the poesy becomes the most simple, ballad form with AABB rhyme scheme. However, the language is sophisticated. Stanza 3, lines 3-4 read, "The slippery stars went skipping/under our hapless feet," giving alliteration and imagery of rapid and escalating movement, almost out of control. After this wild ride, Poem 11, "When We Come Home, Blake Calls for Fire," is very sedate and calming, perhaps the most sophisticated poem linguistically. It begins with an apostrophe, an address to the fire. The image of the hissing tongues of fire, rising and falling, is contained and colorful. Stanza two almost has the cadence of "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep," but the language is more mature. "When the wind assaults my doors/every corner's cold but yours," may be the most awkward line in the book, but it also slows the pace of the wild ride on the Milky Way. Line 4 of the stanza enjambs into line 1 of the third stanza, "let your bright behavior keep/all these little pilgrims warm," giving the poem almost a sense of the epic. "They who never did you harm/raise their paws a little higher/and toast their toes, in praise of fire," ends this stanza and at the same time gives a sense of coziness and elevated spirituality.

Poem 11 contains a lovely conceit of the need for people to mend their ways. The Marmalade Man symbolizes himself as a needle and the other characters the thread, so they can follow him to a better place by dancing. Poem 12, "The King of Cats Sends a Postcard to His Wife," proceeds in ballad form, AABB rhyme, and the King of Cats seems to think that he will never get home again. He is certainly playing with far-out images, such as sending gifts of a thousand sunsets in a box, the shadows of a dozen mice to be eaten like potato chips, and a net for catching stars. However, at the end of the book, all the characters are required to leave the inn, so Poem 11 gives a sense of

how far-reaching spirituality can feel although the practitioner must always "carry water" after enlightenment.

Poem 16, The "Epilogue," contains some lovely language, such as "from this holy hill must go/home to lives we left below," lines 3-4 of stanza one, the repetition of the "h" sounds seeming like prayer and perhaps breathlessness. The last stanza again repeats the scriptural cadences of the first poem in the book, "if you reach a lovely inn,/ if a rabbit makes your bed,/ if two dragons bake your bread,/ rest a little for my sake," in lines 2-5.

This is a book of true poetry, capturing and releasing the imagination by careful, tight language. The symbols work at many levels, both for children and for adults. The language and style provide pleasure for many readings, over many years.

## Structure

These poems are very loosely linked. They move in a vague narrative from arrival at the inn to a seemingly enforced departure, but the meanderings in between do not seem to have a plot line at all. What links them together is familiar characters, settings, which are repeated throughout, but even more than that, the thematic material of mystery, and spirituality links them. This is a peculiar kind of spirituality based not in preachiness or "ought-to's," but one based in personal responsibility, as well as the obligation to enjoy each moment in truth and genuineness. Most of these poems are in ballad form, though Poem 1 takes the form of Virelai, is a song form from French poetry with a line scheme of ABBAA in iambic quadrameter. Most of the other poems are in ballad form with either anapestic or iambic rhythm patterns.

# Quotes

"Poetry is the best medicine." Page 13.

"Two patient angels wash and shake/his featherbeds. . . ." Page 14.

"My suitcases began to purr." Page 17.

"I will keep you from perilous starlight/and the old moon's lunatic cat." Page 18.

" . . .the morning rang/as creatures clapped with paw and fang," page 20.

" . . .equipped with a bottle of starch/to straighten the bends in the road, he said," page 22.

"Winter is over, my loves, he said." Page 22.

"My tastes are simple and few." Page 24.

"and they both took root in the carpet/where the topaz tortoises run." Page 28.

"believe shall be a boat/having both feet and fins." Page 30.

"but a handful of dirt to the rat." Page 33.

"and toast their toes, in praise of fire." Page 34.

"Dancing starts where fighting ends." Page 36.

"Clouds are gentle walls that hide/gardens on the other side." Page 38.

"Have you set the kittens free? Do they sometimes ask for me?" Page 38.

"Only William Blake can tell/tales to make a tiger well." Page 40.

"If I should dream before I wake/may I dream of William Blake." Page 40.

" . . .It's best/to work with what I know." Page 42.

"All things are new in the morning." Page 43.

# Adaptations

Of Willard's many works, the one that most closely resembles A Visit to William Blake's Inn is The Voyage of the Ludgate Hill: Travels with Robert Louis Stevenson (1987). Again, a series of delightful verses reminiscent of Gilbert and Lear concern themselves with a prominent figure of English literature and an assortment of talking animals. The volume is also illustrated by Alice and Martin Provensen.

A filmstrip adaptation of A Visit to William Blake's Inn is available from Miller Brody.

# Topics for Discussion

1. In the poem "Blake Leads a Walk on the Milky Way," all the heavenly travelers are rewarded by Blake except the rat, who receives only "boots of iron" and "a handful of dirt." Why is the rat singled out in this way?

2. In "Blake Tells the Tiger the Tale of the Tailor," the tailor repeatedly insists "It's best/ to work with what I know."

What does the tailor mean by this? Does this philosophy finally get him in trouble? What can the reader learn from the tailor's experience?

3. Some of the fun of these poems grows out of Willard's taking figures of speech quite literally. For example, the "King of Cats," told that his breakfast is "on the house," climbs to the inn's rooftop to receive his meal. Can you find other devices used by Willard to inject humor into her poetry?

4. In the midst of these playful and generally happy poems, a darker tone is struck in this stanza from "Blake Leads a Walk on the Milky Way": He inquired. "Is everyone ready?

The night is uncommonly cold.

We'll start on our journey as children, but I fear we will finish it old."

What is the meaning of this stanza?

How does that meaning run counter to the general tone of the collection as a whole?

5. Nancy Willard reports that her book grows out of the fact that, as a child, she was captivated by the poetry of William Blake. (Two other favorite writers of hers were Lewis Carroll and George Mac Donald.) Do you have a favorite poet, one who has exerted a comparable influence on your own life, your way of looking at the world?

6. In many books for children, the illustrations accompanying the written text are considered very important. Is this true of this book? How does the art of the Provensens add to the young reader's enjoyment and understanding of Willard's poems?

# Essay Topics

These poems are all formal in style. Discuss the pros and cons of reading and writing formal poetry.

*A Visit to Blake's Inn* deals with spirituality and the mystical, as they interface with the natural world. Discuss the approach to spirituality in this book of poems.

It is difficult to write scansion that reads naturally and also rhymes. Find examples in the poems that work particularly well. Try writing a few stanzas, as well.

William Blake appears as if in a role of a benevolent God on a holy hill. Choose examples from the poems that support or refute that view.

Find examples of the various rhythms in the poems, including iambic, dactylic, anapestic and trochaic. Explain these forms.

Most of the characters in these poems are not human, but animals. Some are even plants. Is this an effective technique? Why or why not?

The Wise Cow in Poem 9 is trying to understand some puns, plays on words. The particular form is "make," as in "Make way!" and "Make room!" Think of some other "make" puns or wordplays and explain them.

# Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Locate a volume of Blake's poetry and compare some of his poems with Willard's. For example, compare Willard's "The Tiger Asks Blake for a Bedtime Story" to Blake's own "The Tyger" (1794).

2. In a similar vein, read James Daughterty's biographical novel for young adults, William Blake (1960). How does the "real" Blake in that biography compare to Willard's Blake?

3. Willard draws her subtitle for this book from two collections of Blake's poetry, Songs of Innocence (1789) and Songs of Experience (1794). Review poems from these collections. Which one is closer in tone, content, and spirit to Willard's book? Is there a sense in which Willard's subtitle is misleading?

4. Blake has a reputation as a complex poet. Generations of readers and critics often have found him extraordinarily difficult to understand. Clearly, then, Willard's delight in Blake's poetry grows out of something other than his intellectual complexity. What other qualities of Blake's verse may attract Willard (and might attract any reader, young or mature)? In other words, does the intellectual content of a poem have to be thoroughly grasped in order for a poem to be enjoyable? Is it even necessary for a poem to have a profound meaning; might it be enough that the poem, in its sounds and images, is beautiful to hear, say, and think about?

5. This book of poems—like J. M. Barrie's play Peter Pan, J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy The Lord of the Rings, and the movie E.T.—can be termed an example of fantasy, meaning literature that portrays characters and events that exist outside the boundaries of normal reality. Is the only function of such works, therefore, one of allowing us to escape from the rigors and concerns of everyday life? Or can fantasy make us see our real world from a different perspective and thereby allow us to learn something new about it?

6. Compare this book with other of Willard's works. For example, read Willard's novel Things Invisible to See (1984). What similarities do you find between the novel and A Visit to William Blake's Inn? In what ways does Clara Bishop's house in Ann Arbor resemble Blake's fantastic "Inn?" In Things Invisible to See, does God play a role roughly similar to that of William Blake in A Visit to William Blake's Inn? What similarities do you find between the two books in terms of Willard's tone—that is, the attitude she brings to her characters, to life, and to her audience.

# Further Study

Commire, Anne, ed. Something About the Author. Vol. 37. Detroit: Gale, 1985. Contains an illustrated entry on Willard, drawing chiefly upon her own comments on her life and craft.

Evory, Ann, and Linda Metzger, eds.

Contemporary Authors: New Revision Series. Vol. 10. Detroit: Gale, 1983.

Includes a brief review of the critical reception given Willard's works.

Hall, Donald. "Clouds for Breakfast."

New York Times Book Review (November 15, 1981): 51, 60. An appreciative review of A Visit to William Blake's Inn.

Marowski, Daniel G., ed. Contemporary Literary Criticism. Vol. 37. Detroit: Gale, 1986. Contains excerpted critical comments on Willard's books, including remarks by noted poet Denise Levertov.

Mendelson, Phyllis Carmel and Dedria Bryfonski, eds. Contemporary Literary Criticism Vol 7. Detroit: Gale, 1977.

Contains commentary from a variety of critics, including excerpts from Hilda Gregory's 1976 Prairie Schooner article on Willard.

Willard, Nancy. Angel in the Parlor: Five Stories and Eight Essays. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983. The title essay contains useful autobiographical information about Willard's childhood in Ann Arbor and her thoughts about writing.

Things Invisible to See. New York: Knopf, 1984. Willard's first novel, a fine book in its own right, offers interesting thematic and stylistic echoes of her works for children.

"A Visit to William Blake's Inn: Newbery Medal Acceptance Speech."

Weston Woods, 1982. A sound recording of Willard's acceptance address, in which she speaks fondly and evocatively of her childhood (including her early fascination with the inviting concept of an "inn"), her home life as an adult, and the prolonged genesis of A Visit to William Blake's Inn.

# Copyright Information

**Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction**

Editor
Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design
Amanda Mott

Cover Art is "Pierrot," 1947, by William Baziotes Oil on Canvas, 42 1/8 x 36 Donated by the Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund, ©, 1996 Reproduced with Permission from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)
ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)
ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature□Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction□19th century□Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction□20th century□Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3□dc20 96-20771 CIP



Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996