

**CITIES LIT BY THE LIGHT
CAUGHT IN PHOTOGRAPHS**

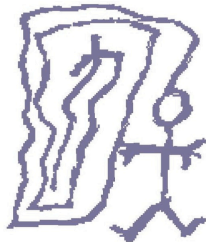
MATT McBRIDE

CITIES LIT BY THE LIGHT CAUGHT IN PHOTOGRAPHS

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COVER // Matt McBride

INTERIOR // Matt McBride & Nate Pritts



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CITY OF PROGRESS

Each day, another building
materializes: a posturban
themed burrito restaurant
a payday loan kiosk
an abandoned gas station
shuttered with plywood.

Some think the dead build them
while we sleep.
Others believe

there's a city behind the city
being slowly revealed to us.
It's wondrous, really—

we're moon-eyed with wonder—
really.

Photographs go all runny

as we carve busts of the saviors
from Styrofoam.

We are too alone
to be lonely.

CITIES OF PERPETUAL DISTRACTION

We love the automatic window

its flies of light

its noise friends

its phosphorous sleep—

and our lives

its serial dream

where we pretend touch.

Why can't everything be true?

CITIES OF THE ADVERTISERS

We keep handfuls of clean teeth
in pant pockets.

Lawns are bleached sclera white.

The milk
is really glue.

Nightly
our president calls

saying, please
feel you are wanted

even if you aren't wanted
most of the time.

CITIES LIT BY THE LIGHT CAUGHT IN PHOTOGRAPHS

Gnats hang suspended
from strands of dental floss.

The primary religion is shame
and flies read to you
from a plagiarized Bible.

Birds ring like telephones.

Radio weather.

A journal of your coma summer.

Your name
is the first secret.

CITIES OF GLASS HOUSES

Everything's moon-white
from the stuttering televisions.

Our eyes are all pupil.

We're uncertain
who our ghosts are.

We're running out of places
to touch each other.

NINETEEN EIGHTY SEVEN

My father collected old newspapers
put tinfoil over our windows.
The phone was disconnected
but we got messages anyway:
the kind of things
dentures would say
after their owner died.
I was young as a bowl of cereal.
The knuckles of my mother's fingers
began to reverse themselves.
We put old carpeting on the lawn
sat on the trunk of our Honda
and watched the B-17's land.
I said my first apology
to no one in particular.

CITY OF TELEVISIONS ON THE CURB

Every citizen is
someone you recognize from the plane.

Everyone has their own little moon
to carry home.

You are your better ghost.

You are a pet here too.

There are a handful of common dreams
you struggle to remember.

There is a night so dark
it shines.

SALVATION ARMY

Everywhere they lie
like a thousand sets of Russian dolls
haphazard and mismatched
amidst a field of broken televisions.

If anyone remembers
what the war was for
they don't let on.

There's not much to be saved really:
a handful of shells
a vintage dinette set
in good condition
an electric typewriter.

How do you survive
what you've already lived through?

You can't stay in love forever.

This grubby towel
will make a nice-enough flag.

Someone's got to polish

what's left of the silver.

We can't all be heroes.

NINETEEN NINETY NINE

Each basement was a museum
of progressively rustier stationary bikes.
You'd watch a blank VHS tape
'til it stopped
and say the first thing that came to you
things like *paper being torn in half*
or *new tires on hot asphalt*
or *burning dog hair*
or *sssszzzzzhhhhhaaaaa*
and that'd be your name.
For weeks, there'd be no moon
but then it'd come back all littered
with plastic stir sticks
& wrinkled Styrofoam cups
promising never to leave again.
People watched their televisions
just a few hours
before throwing them out.
Everybody only knew three songs:
Poison's "Every Rose Has Its Thorn"
and two others.
For fun, you'd shoot holes
though the recyclables
with an air rifle.
You rode the bus for days at a time.
There was the divorced waitress
you slept with
because she said your teeth were straight
and there was the bum who masturbated
next to you in the holding cell
and the Saran-wrapped sandwich
Hamilton country charged you \$20 for
when you made bail.
There was a cassette of your mother
saying your name over and over.
Ssssszzzzzhhhhhaaaaa it said.
Ssssszzzzzhhhhhaaaaa it said.

Ssssszzzzzhhhhaaaaa it said.

Ssssszzzzzhhhhaaaaa it said.

Ssssszzzzzhhhhaaaaa it said.

CITY OF BRIDGES BURNT

All the area rugs
are horridly stained.

Our hands
are small as those of dolls.

The vitreous rain
hardens to varnish

making everything a kind of
advertisement for itself.

Somehow, the flies
know our names.

Somehow, one of us
got blood on the moon.

We are such delicate monsters.

CITIES OF REFUGE

Everything's plaid couches and goldfishes
in cataracts of muddled water.
Everything's glued together poorly
so little beads ossify at every seam.
Everything's roan-colored
'84 Civic hatchbacks
with busted tape decks
where the fast-forward sticks.
Everything's stacks
of jaundiced *National Geographics*.
Everything's stored in boxes
for shoes you don't own anymore.
Everything's too big to say.
Everything's palsied scrawl
on postcards
saying "Come home,"
saying "We promise
never to love you again."

CITIES OF GLASS HOUSES

Shadows leave greasy smears.

There are only seven names
so everyone must share

and the phonebook consists
mostly of photographs.

Each evening, we listen
as our sleep machines
describe what “night” was.

We are two ghosts.

There are no strangers left.

CITY OF HANGOVER SUNDAYS

You hear whistling from underground.

Mannequins, left outside
fuzz with mold.

The tombstones are soap.
In-between, inflatable sheep graze

as a cove of toddlers in pajamas
pick them up and put them down again.

Their laughter is the wind.

On the sidewalk,
glass snails leave smears of Vaseline.

You're not certain
if you're lonely.

TWO THOUSAND NINE

All the animals were revealed
to be animatronic.

Blackwater changed their name
and the Blockbuster on Court closed.

I asked her to marry me.

There seemed to me enough
to make a world:

empty prescription bottles
needlepoint landscapes
VHS cassettes.

I supposed that if I had a soul
it'd look me
only made of bubble wrap.

So few of us
knew our names.

I whistled in my sleep.

I was a good person
more often
than when I was not.

CITIES LIT BY THE WANING MOON

Many were nothing but hyperbole, founded on little more than a necklace of baby teeth or an archaic leather condom excavated from the desert. And yet, they are not unimportant. In one, the eyes of does are mined. Another is made entirely of a scaffolding used to pull stars out by their roots, a kind of urban renewal for the sky. They are always seen as if seen from a distance, always vaguely European in name, things like Eustice or Salemica or Adil. A sclera-hued glare shines from their windows at night. The smallest of these municipalities is named Tesra. In it, as you read this, a tar-haired adolescent dangles her legs over the rim of a well, knocking loose the silt from her heels. And tomorrow, the residents of Bacona, Oregon will notice something off in the taste of their water.

CITIES LIT BY THE LIGHT CAUGHT IN PHOTOGRAPHS

For everything, an effigy—
tree effigies
robot effigies
ocelot effigies
(effigy effigies).

Paper shadows
follow us like daisy chains.

We are sleep geniuses.

We are the elected mute.

Cotton glass

nudity

and sometimes
there's weather.

CITIES OF THE ADVERTISERS

Here, there are no things
but in ideas

and all dreams
are held in the public domain.

No flag is small enough.

We are blasphemously pink.

We are wonderful ashamed.

The paper moon
absolves us of memory

as a dander of television snow
sifts from streetlamps
and in their fuzzy light

we make such beautiful likenesses
of our likenesses.

CITIES OF THE FUTURE

There are three new colors:
stoap, a toothpaste blue
apest, a kind of
burning teeth yellow-black
and mestle
the color water is now.

Our clothing is just
a patterned Saran wrap
we throw away after use.

Rusty coat hangers
bang against each other
on tree branches.

The air
smells all hospital.

Our blood feels like soap inside us.

We have people landfills.

We are not discontent.

CITIES LIT BY THE LIGHT CAUGHT IN PHOTOGRAPHS

757's fly backwards
in a Windex-blue sky.

Sheep are ubiquitous
and small as rice.

A fishbowl holds
every eyelash you've lost
since birth.

Memory is the only pornography.

DEAR RADIO

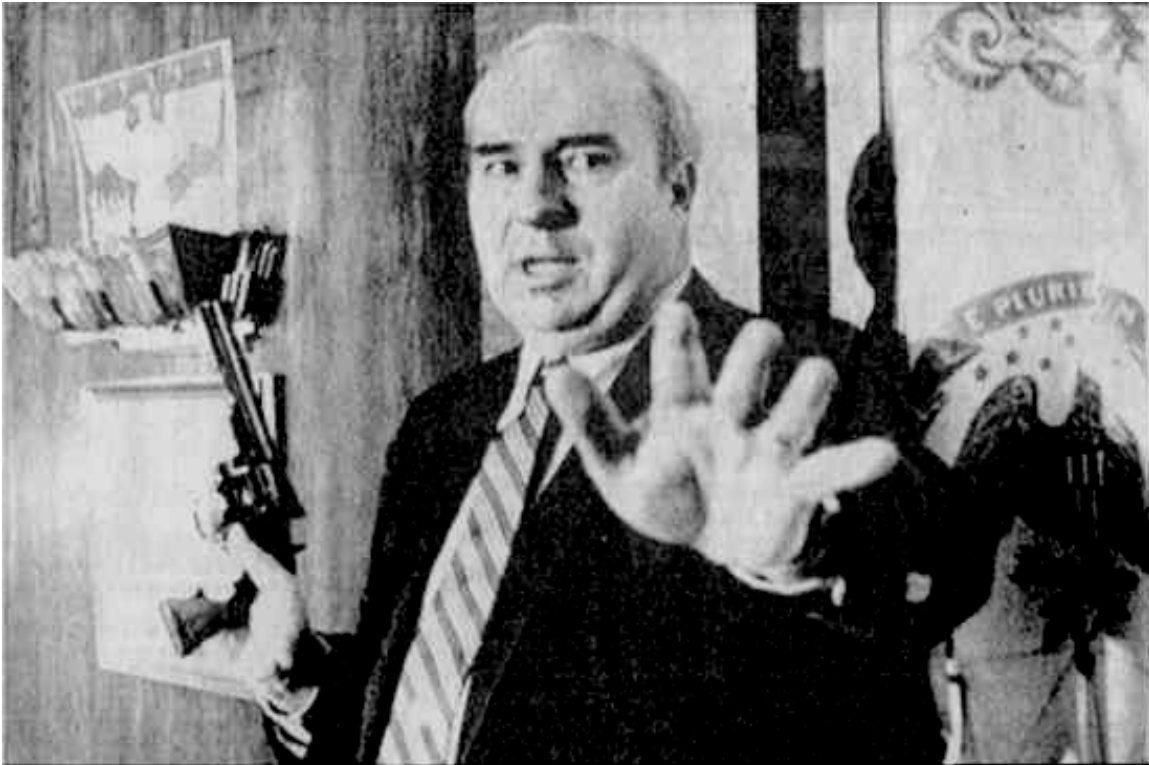
You are the wind's cotton.

Dear Radio,
You are the moon's endless bible.

Dear Radio,
*It was wet & white & swift and where I am
we don't know. It was dark and then
it isn't.*

Dear Radio,
On January 22nd, 1987, AP photographer Paul Vathis covered a press conference called by Pennsylvania state treasurer Robert "Budd" Dwyer who was scheduled to be sentenced the next day on bribery charges. Since the event was of limited national interest, Vathis loaded his 35mm Nikon with black & white film as most papers reserved color for their front pages due to expense.

Dear Radio,



Dear Radio,
I was molested as a child.
Did you know that?

Dear Radio,
The sun is not hot.

Dear Radio,
Following Dwyer's suicide, the Associated Press mandated
that its photographers shoot solely in color.

Dear Radio,
All your prayers are terrible.

CITIES LIT BY THE LIGHT CAUGHT IN PHOTOGRAPHS

Buried underneath the pear tree
a suitcase holds
the transcript of your life.

Glass replicas
replace your organs.

A breviary written on cellophane.

The thimble on your nightstand
is a radio for the ocean.

The envelope contains your sleep for the year.

CITIES OF PERPETUAL DISTRACTION

This apiary of flies
is an alter to disposable gods.

Nostalgia's a kind of cancer here.

Carpet quiet

soap light.

NOTES

“City of the Advertisers (‘We keep handfuls of clean teeth...’): The closing stanza loosely appropriates lines from the song “Stolen Children” by Parenthetical Girls.

“City of the Advertisers (‘Here, there are no things...’): The phrase “blasphemously pink” is from Wallace Stevens’ poem “The Comedian as the Letter C.”

“Dear Radio”: The italicized lines are from John Berryman’s 28th Dreamsong, “Snowline.” The picture of Bud Dwyer was taken by AP photographer Paul Vathis.

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InkNode: “Nineteen Ninety Nine.”

Juked: “City of Progress.”

Little Red Leaves: “City of Bridges Burnt,” “City of Glass Houses (‘Everything’s lit moon white...),” “Cities Lit by the Waning Moon,” and “City of Televisions on the Curb.”

Meridian: “Nineteen Eighty Seven.”

SLAB: “Cities Lit by the Waning Moon.” (reprinted)

Smartish Pace: “Cities of the Advertisers (‘Here, there are no things...’)” “Cities of Glass Houses, (‘Shadows leave...’)” and “Cities of Refuge.”

Strange Machine: “Cities Lit by the Light Caught in Photographs, (‘Gnats hang...’)” and “Cities Lit by the Light Caught in Photographs (‘Buried underneath...’)”

The Toledo City Paper: “Salvation Army.”

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MATT McBRIDE has published poems in *Anti-*, *Alice Blue*, *Cream City Review*, *Diagram*, *FENCE*, *Mississippi Review*, *New Collage*, *Packintown Review*, and *RHINO* amongst others. Currently, he works on staff at the *Cincinnati Review* and *Memorious.org*. His blog is inventionsofthemonsters.blogspot.com.