

Collected Poems
by Mike Sennott

Nostalgic at Twenty

Remember those games us creative kids played
Before cardboard boxes became too clichéd?
The white trees, the white rooms, the white snow in the air
Were canvases, not the middle of nowhere.
We drew what seemed good at the time from the ether
And drawings and stories, songs all ran together,
The walls and floor filled with chaotic designs
On construction paper, in bold marker lines –
A decor like a speed-addled artist's apartment
Though it wasn't art, nor did we care what art meant.

But we came to fear being misunderstood.
We began to imagine what people would conclude
If they saw us content in our cold, blank town.
As idealists turn business, inventors sell out
So our fortresses rotted away into tables
And our handwriting became a little more stable
To show our ideas were worthy and refined.
We became too grown up for our poems to rhyme.

Now I remember my friends
are going happily off to war while
I am staring at a white dorm wall
and I feel like I did
when I was a kid
begging for two more years before bedtime.

Outside: A Cycle

I.

Every season brings with it a chance for transcendence,
a different way to accidentally stretch
beyond humanity for a single terrifying second.
One languid summer afternoon, my mind
wandered towards a concrete-gray cloud, leaving
an imperceptible trail in the stale air like a knife
through water. Unwanted daydreams flooded
through the gash from a radio ad, leaving me stranded,

unable to pierce the static or excuse through the strife
to the indefinitely vacated seat of my life.

II.

On certain disarmingly warm autumn days,
leaves fall from trees and grasp onto rising breezes
in vermilion fervor, straining to squeeze the last drop
of fire from life. Once, walking through a park
on such a day, I felt something burn out
with a soft crack. Outstretched branches curled
and shivered only slightly, yet I froze,
seizing with some vestigial instinct, and looked to the sky
in amnesiac longing as the silent crosswinds swirled,
wondering what once connected me to the world.

III.

When the ground freezes over, I tend to feel nothing
but a rage against the all-encompassing numbness
instilled by the elements and unerring daily routines.
One long winter I tried to escape into darkness,
burrowing into fictions, burning books
to stave off that cold with a cringe or a chill down my spine.
Since then, I tend to look back with detachment
on those efforts to replace despair with borrowed sadness,
understanding the difference between myself and the divine:
I can't know what to do with pain that's not mine.

IV.

Sometimes the only trace of sunlight left
when I step outside from hibernation
is the rust on burnt out blades of grass.
No unspent spark or lasting glint is left
for life-starved eyes. Then, even a slight
echo of birdsong would seem a rapturous scream,
exorcising me from my insular cycle,
plunging me through darkness and cold shock,
past each layer of crafted detachment and dream,
back into the shining waters of time's breakneck stream.

New England Night Drive

What Transcendentalists
don't tell you about
the sunset placing a
golden crown on the
trees and winds whispering
*Walk outside and
bask in the majesty
of autumn light, becoming
one with nature*
is that after
the sunset has faded
and darkness has leveled
the forests into an
indefinitely infinite desert
the landscape does not
stop calling.

The silence won't shut up.
It bangs on the windows
and darkness seeps
through the cracks,
reminding you that one
twitch of hand
or one
drowsy moment
or one break
in concentration
could cause your three
thousand pound steel
armor to crumple under
the billions of liters of
nothing
and leave you
one with nature,
which you will be
someday regardless.

You sigh and turn
the radio up so
you can focus
on the ground ahead
the headlights clear
like a machete
and hum to yourself
like you're going somewhere.

A Manic Depressive Poem

Sometimes I want to jump
 For joy as the world finds
From the highest building to
 Inside the brightest valleys, pure delight,
An unchanging pastoral scene.

Sometimes the nightlit world
 Pales in comparison to
My vision of nothingness,
 The supernova inside me - it
Dares me to sleep.

Even when each crack in the paint
 Is far too much to take,
flaws reality, I know
 It will be gone soon.
No fear. It will be gone soon.

The City

At home in the middle of nowhere, I can see the city far off in the distance.
I'm not surprised by the scale so much as by its very existence.
The lights burn together as a singular crowd
like a low-hanging sunset-backlit amber cloud,
a lost soul trapped inside a golden shroud with only cursory resistance.

As I move closer to the city, time speeds up slowly to a constant blur.
When everything is always on, day and night cease to really matter.

There's so much to soak in I could never again
want to see something that's already been.
I start to forget what's meant by the word "when" and what boredom and waiting once were.

Then I rise from the streets to a standardized suite in an unstained glass hotel,
as a thin wisp of lost smoke kept afloat by the waves from a slow cymbal swell.
Countless skyscrapers stretch in the same direction,
outracing the light from each others' reflections
on towards the stars and onwards towards Heaven, already well past far as Hell.

I cannot bring myself to sleep, the walls and streets and my eyes are too bright.
It must be a spectrum higher than light – are x-rayed bones even this white?
I should feel chastened and I should feel austere,
seared with sublime overwhelmedness and fear:
after all, anyone who's anyone is here and I seem to be as well tonight.

But I honestly just feel surprised anyone at all could live amidst this romance
without falling clear into an ocean of light or a fearless deerlike trance.
I cannot see myself becoming jaded and witty,
I cannot see wonder as deserving of pity.
I look like some kid forever new to the city and I don't stand a chance.

Variations on Rock Music

i. Guitars Poetica: A Rock Poem

It's anthemic! A pandemic! Academic punk polemic!
An angelic psychadelic magic spellic throwback relic
to pre-drumsticks, pre-guitar-picks, pre-generic rockin' lyrics.
Screw prosaic pop mosaics. Get archaic! Get trochaic!
Don't need howling, don't need growling! Read a rousing octet scowling!
Triolets and sonnets blazin! Varied phrasin! It's amazin!
It's exciting! It's uniting sound and sight and damn good writing!
Get aesthetic, energetic, alphabetic! Get poetic!

ii. How I Arrange My Favorite Albums

Highly Refined Pirates

Kid A

Loveless

Alligator.

Emergency! & I

Doolittle.

Funeral.

Illinois,

The Lonesome Crowded West –

This is a Long Drive for Someone With Nothing. To Think About

The Moon, and Antarctica

Feels

Elysium.

Is This It?

The Tyranny of Distance?

OK Computer,

There's Nothing Wrong With Love.

Turn on the Bright Lights!

Change!

iii. Optional Encore Triolet (140 bpm)

Ready? 4/4. 1 2 3 4

Let's go, come on, yeah, whoa, hey.

Fans wanted more, it's the encore

ready for four (1 2 3 4)

lines of some more loud, grandiose score

to the time spent reading triolet.

Ready? 4/4. 1 2 3 4

Let's go, come on, yeah, whoa, hey.

Ode to the Physicality of the Mind

O rolling tides of chemicals

conducting charged light across

the fault lines in our heads;

O winding wire pathways
carved deeper by the thought,
becoming set,
etching our selves into ourselves;
O tireless cells and signals
building memories with care,
revising recollections
with creeping blur and sepia glow –
Guide us to the utopia
of equilibrium!

Thank you for overseeing
the countless miniature reactions
that comprise our lives,
sparing thought from trivial concerns!
Thank you for the slow decay
of sight and sound and memory,
automatic nepenthe
to ease the transition
out of stale and weary life!
Thank you for shrinking happiness
to the size of a pill,
instant transport to the Nirvana
of equilibrium!

Who could refuse your loving guidance,
spurn the contentment you reward us?
You purr *You need me always*
just to think yourself a soul.
Who could deny that declaration,
consecrating fluctuations,
railing at your boundaries?
Save us from such desperation –
sing us to sleep, imagination!
Commission odes and lamentations,
fear and lust and t.v. stations.
Distract us 'til you find for us
equilibrium.