

## More Praise for *City of Incandescent Light*

Matt McBride has made a potent stew of precisely recurring imagery: sheep, bones, pears, divorcees. . . . The poems are arranged like seasons—as they appear, they reappear, the oft-recycled titles symbolizing the poet’s civilized and changeless despair, unassuaged by the garnish of time known as calendar.

His is a world in which humans endure the paradox of loving each other into divorcing each other, of making “cities” of multiple selves only to enclose the single self in solitude, of creating art as a means of posthumous haunting.

The poet’s final plea, “don’t bury me deep,” is the perfect bookend to the transparent, fragile and vulnerable “glass” life under the lights. McBride’s lights are there to underscore the darkness—and this is the book’s core theme—it is the darkness that is peopled, not the architected city. Darkness is where warmth is possible, thought is quiet, night is real, and dreams are safe from “commercials.”

*City of Incandescent Light* is so fascinatingly depressing that it comes across as playful. It is a horrible, ironic playfulness, yet edifyingly genuine, capturing the essence of a broken existence in a “full-circle” universe. McBride as commentator of this perennial journey gives us a language of heartbreaking apathy, both harrowing and irresistible. Read with caution: this is a poetry that doesn’t ring twice.

—Larissa Szporluk

# City of Incandescent Light

Matt McBride



Black  
Lawrence  
Press

*for C.A. Diltz and Richard McBride*

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# CITY OF PROGRESS

Each day another building  
materializes: a post-urban  
themed burrito restaurant,  
a payday loan kiosk,  
an abandoned gas station,  
shuttered in plywood.

Some believe  
there's a city behind the city,  
slowly revealing itself to us.

It's wondrous,  
really.

We carve busts  
of the lesser saviors  
in Styrofoam

as eye-winged moths  
beat against incandescent bulbs.

We are trying so desperately  
to outnumber the dead.

# CITIES SEEN ONLY IN PHOTOGRAPHS

Buried underneath a pear tree,  
the suitcase holds  
a 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.

## TWENTY FIFTEEN

After our last session  
with the marriage counselor,

we found a skeleton  
bleaching on the river's lip.

The trouble was  
our dreams were commercials

in the end.

It was only a deer—

died crossing the river  
before it froze.

After the police left we joked  
about being a divorced,  
private detective duo.

It was 2015  
for the first time in history,

and we stumbled like prom dates  
on new hooves.

# AUTOPSY PROCTOR

Note the silliness of skin, its pettiness and shame. Thirty minutes with a cheese grater and you'll be on to fresher fruit. You'll need an electric saw for the church of ribs. See how bone dusts to cloud. Now, unclasp the heart. It will feel like a knot of fish. Take the sad thumb of tongue as well. Save. Afterwards, the throat should be easy. Observe the bridge of the larynx, how like a wishbone it was.

# CITY OF THE VULNERABLE

You carry a sharpened melon baller  
and portion yourself to every stranger.

You watch 8-mm films of the rain  
on bedroom walls.

The dome light of every car  
stays on 'til dusk.

Dandelions dispense Chinese fortunes,  
things like *In less than a decade*  
*no one will remember what cottage cheese is,*  
or *Each man is a half-open door*  
*leading to a room for everyone.*

Satellites keep catching in the trees  
and periodically  
need to be poked out  
with broom sticks.

Every picture is of you,  
bitten by sheep.

# CITY OF THE ADVERTISERS

We keep handfuls of clean teeth  
in pant pockets.

Lawns are bleached eye 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.*

## TWENTY FIFTEEN

Because some years count double.  
Because we were bobbing for apples  
in gasoline.  
Because it felt like  
I was wearing concrete dentures.  
Because I'd spent most of the year as a pearl  
in the throat of a 747.  
Because the subtitles  
didn't match the dialogue anymore.  
Because I'd waited on the tarmac  
more than three hours  
and now had to deplane.  
Because I struggled to find words  
to say after "because."  
Because there was nothing we could do  
for the first time anymore.  
Because our divorce barely lasted longer  
than the lifespan of a bee  
but would soon move on:  
a guinea pig, a parakeet,  
us.  
Because I hoped  
you would be holding a sign  
for me at the airport.

# CITY OF MOTELS

On a taupe chair  
with no definitive edges,  
you watch clouds clot,

contemplate a 1992  
lost to rewinding VHS cassettes.

All you ever wanted  
was a box big enough to hide in.

The soap is tiny  
and shaped like various waterfowl.

The telephone ringing  
in the other room  
will be your only remainder.

# CITY OF INCANDESCENT LIGHT

Oily fingerprints embroider  
every surface.

The not-things  
double again.

You take X-rays of yourself  
to know what sleep keeps.

Inside this glass pear  
is an entire sky.

## TWENTY TWELVE

In the primaries,  
the boys were growing into  
better daughters.

There was that weird February  
where nothing moved

and all those cats  
with different-colored eyes.

Always, these  
memory extras.

Mostly, I thought of things to say  
down the necks of empty bottles.

I remember our faces  
looked nothing like dinner plates.

I remember the alarm  
was full of birds.

# CITY OF THE SLEEPERS

From seven streetlights,  
the dream pays us out—

a string that halves  
our grateful vowels,

a soul-leak,  
a song everyone forgot  
'til it became communal.

To dream  
there must be something  
in the room:

our bulbous hands

like surgical gloves  
swollen with Vaseline

or the smell of fresh paint  
from somewhere you can't place.

# CITIES OF THE PLAIN

The curling wallpaper  
is sutured awkwardly  
with Scotch tape.

Each year, we tear a sheet  
from the Yellow Pages,  
and whoever's name's longest  
is president.

A slow wind whittles  
the Styrofoam trees to pellets.

# CITIES MADE OF RUST

A meticulously erased sky.  
A riot neglected.

Our drivers,  
asleep at their wheels,

sail through  
an Etch-A-Sketch infrastructure.

The skin over our wrists.

The sound  
turning to snow.

Every memory  
a kind of wish for itself.

We walk the longest edge of ourselves,  
and it's hard, sometimes,

to distinguish the television's laughter  
from the fires.