

SHANE NEILSON

## **TO ALL MY FOLLOWERS, I PROPOSE THE PHOTOSYNTHESIS-DOPAMINE HYPOTHESIS**

Fire asphodels from your mouth as if from the sleeves of third-rate magicians.

I see so much that you cannot see.

Our most basic affect forms a polarity: attraction and aversion. And our basic colour is green.

I see how we grow to the light,

go and

no-go.

The flowers in the field, the field of flowers—zooming in: asphodels—

I feel a marked intensification of core, the flat half-shake and half-shudder of never knowing whether what I see—eternity of beautiful colour and petal wing, wishes and wanting and blur of white, spatter of red against the green screen—qualifies as feeling.

I feel, O lord, your voice in my head, but I do not see you. I see the world only, the green and threatened world of sad and angry consolations.

## DRIVING ACROSS PENNSYLVANIA, I HAD A GREAT NOTION

Driving across Pennsylvania, “If It Makes You Happy”  
comes on the radio. I feel as poor as the scene: ragged wildflowers,

flags & fading Second Amendment signs cresting scrub hills:  
*We shall not be infringed!* But lo, it is from the lunatic fringe

that I come. With the red, white, and blue legacy tattoo  
multiplying on rundown Americana, and three schoolchildren

in the backseat wondering why Daddy’s blasting music  
on the drive home, reserving their god-given right to free speech

and protest, I begin to cry. *If it makes you happy, then why the hell  
are you so sad?* One reason: in the American grain are the flowers.

A day earlier, at the Top of the Rock, a couple elaborately got married,  
the tux deluxe groom throwing the train in the air for photographs. *Now!*

the bride ordered, and he let go of diaphany. She was alabaster,  
white grit, the flaw in the system that makes perfection work, this flaw:

Power must be swallowed by Love’s lips to birth the State.  
To the left side of the couple were bouquets of hydrangeas and lilies.

I want to lie, say the sky was rundown too, all the drama of New York  
tawdry, ramshackle, like country music pulsing heartfelt from a battered

back deck in New Brunswick, but in spite I report instead  
that it was as beautiful. The crowd’s eyes were on the train

& veil in the wind against the Empire State and none on the red  
and white basis that is my understanding of Crow’s song—flowers,

flags, the mutually assured self-destruction that is, uniquely, American love. *So what if everything's wrong?* The radio announcer informs us:

*In Lexington Park, a boy and a girl have been shot in Great Mills High School by a student who had a prior relationship with the girl.*

Love's lives, infringed forever. In the article I checked to confirm the shooting, it said: The notion of "it can't happen here" is no longer a notion.

This, too, from one of love's penitentials: *Sometimes I lives in the country, sometimes I lives in the town. Sometimes I haves*

*a great notion to jump into the river an' drown.* With my face as End is Nigh sign, hydrangeas my headrest on the roof of Empire,

and under the dome of shared consumption, of blue, I finally understand. Flowers against the face feel good, and we want the good to be our right.

Later, I step into the Guggenheim's reading room and learn more about a nation's reserving the right to make mistakes.

This choice origami flower: Rockwell's *Four Freedoms*. Oh Empire, I agree, Freedom of Speech and Religion, yes, wherever would we be

otherwise. But Freedom from Want and Fear? Why the horrible monopolists leaning in for their Thanksgiving feast? I hate

Rockwell's domestic white faces, even the little children! I hate them, I want them to be served to the furnace.

Why must Maternos and Paternos look down benignly upon their brood, two sleeping kiddos with *The Bennington Banner* mentioning the Blitz?

Christ, I cannot hate this painting enough, for it bombards my five-year-old self each time I look. *Yes*, little me says inside,

*That's just how it should be!* Citizens taking good care of their miniatures!  
Some great notion in "Freedom from Fear" escapes sentiment

and appeals to the shill in all of us—the self that hurts in Crow's song,  
*real low down*, the selves still tragically sad because we will it

even though we choose to be happy, right, drinking until we're thirsty again?  
On the drive home from Times Square's half-naked Banjo lady

I am here to inform you, Empire, that Freedom from Want  
means no one will be free to speak; and if free from Fear,

I will no longer be alive; nor any of my line; nor anyone else.  
For fear gives birth to children. I say to you and to those clothed in virtue:

there's no category difference between fears, only degrees.  
You may not take my fears and call them freedom, nor dress up freedom

*as care, as concern, as love*, for this is how all war starts—  
*as kindness, Maternos and Paternos* standing over our beds. I refuse  
the bed and instead will jump, hydrangeas trailing like a train and veil

from the top of Rockefeller Center.