

Haiku Review Essay: *School's Out* by Randy Brooks

by
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My college career has been a turbulent one. I started out at my dream school, The Boston Conservatory for a BFA in Multidisciplinary Stage Management. Then halfway through freshman year, my program was dissolved. I stuck around for one more year and then I transferred to Millikin University. And now my college career has been cut short by this global pandemic happening. The second half of my senior year, when I'm supposed to make the best memories of my college career, was wrenched away and replaced with shelter in place order and social distancing. So, in an attempt to make light of the current situation, where no one is allowed to be at school, I will be writing a review type paper on the book *School's Out* by Randy M. Brooks. It discusses all different parts of life. In the Author's Introduction, Brooks states, "I will always advocate summer vacations and sabbaticals because these are times when students and teachers can reconnect to the world, to life beyond the classroom, to nature" (Brooks 9). This book is all about reflecting on life outside of school. In the following essay I will analyze several of the over 200 little oases outside of school and connect it to how people can all use this time away from school to reflect on the good things in life instead of all this darkness constantly around us all the time.

Haiku is a very nostalgic kind of art form. Every line builds a story in the reader's mind and this book helps me appreciate the more bright and fun parts in my life. The first haiku I will be analyzing is as follows:

he opens his cupped palm...
a small tadpole with
a little wiggle left

R. Brooks, *School's Out*, p. 21

Between all the darkness and anxiety happening right now because of this global pandemic, this reading took me back to weekends with my father. I'm a triplet. Being the same age as my brother and sister, all of our adventures when we were younger together. On weekends with my father, the old lady he lived with had this enormous ingrown pool that was wicked overgrown and probably a cess pool for all things green and slimy. Every spring, we would find thousands of tadpoles rippling around in the big black pool cover from all different stages of metamorphosis. We lean over the edge of the pool, dip our little hands in the slimy green water and catch them. We filled five-gallon buckets with the same nasty water and kept them long enough to grow up and into full grown frogs and then we'd release them into the wild. This was a weekend ritual that we did every spring outside of school. The specific words "cupped" and "wiggle" create such a strong picture of such a simple thing. The language just takes me right out of my current situation and throws me back into the past for a lovely trip down memory lane.

The second poem I'd like to respond to is on page 24 of the book *School's Out*. It goes:

sisters bent over
the heating vent...
adult talk below

R. Brooks, *School's Out* p. 24

I really liked the poem. The word "cahoots" comes to mind for me. I shared everything with my sister when we were little. We did everything together. I remember staying up late and talking. We often would sit at the

top of the steps and listen to the mom's talk at night. I pictured a Christmas Eve night staying up as late as we could (at that age it was probably 11pm) listening for Santa Clause. All we heard were the mom's hushed tones and lots of curse words. We would later discover that was because they would set up all the presents. Anything my moms did together often ended in lots of cursing. It was a sweet memory that made me reflect on simpler more fun times and the best part was that it could have been anyone's sisters. The author writes in such a way that it allows the reader to create their own story and reflect on their own life. It gives the reader their own escape from life and from all the trials and tribulations of school.

There's this saying in the theatre world called "making you warm". It means, something resonates with you, it makes you feel something or gives you something to connect to. The next poem that made me warm was,

freckle-face grin...
apple blossom
caught in her hair

R. Brooks, *School's Out*, p. 35

One of the funny things about my siblings is that though we all shared a womb, we've all got different colored hair and different colored eyes. My sister is the red-haired green eyes one with a spray of freckles across her face like liquid Cheeto dust. Every year we go apple picking with the family. They tell us not to climb the trees but Emily, the wild child always ignored the rules and she'd end up with sticks and flowers in her red hair. I liked that this poem was apple blossom instead of cherry blossom. Cherries are cold and sweet. Something about apple makes this poem so much homier. With Apple comes cinnamon and you really get the cool brisk air of the fall day, with the warmth from all this spices that go good with apples in apple crisp and apple pie and all the smells of fall. They go with the warm freckles on the girl's (in my vision, my sister's) face. This is just another example as to how this book manages to take the reader out of the trials of their everyday life and allows them a sweet little oasis of nostalgia out of school.

The next poem that made me warm was on page 37.

toes dangle in the lake...
watermelon juice
drips off his chin

R. Brooks, *School's Out* p. 37

I didn't picture anyone I know when reading this poem, but it made me think of summer vacations, sitting on the edge of a dock at sunset. Watermelon is such a fun summer fruit. And it's a messy fruit for sure. You really get the coolness from the water of the lake, and the juice from the watermelon, also the stickiness of the juice from the sugar in the watermelon. So that means you can taste the watermelon. I could smell the watermelon and I could smell the lake water. This poem just builds with every line. It engages all the senses making the poem a full body experience. Instead of nostalgia, like the other poems I've listed so far, this one takes the reader out of the grind of school and work by helping them see, smell, taste, touch, and hear the lake and the watermelon and the summer sun. It's such a great poem for such a scary and uncertain time. It's a great example of what the whole book does.

The next poem is another non-nostalgic poem for me I below

high as my arms
can lift him...
the moon still out of reach

R. Brooks, *School's Out*, p. 47

This poem has such a sweetness to it. I can almost feel the strain in my arms from lifting this little boy up as high as I can, though I imagine it's a lot different for a mother or father to hold up a son. But lifting a small child up in the air is such a picturesque ... well... picture. It's sweet and innocent and hopeful and again, it made me warm in this really difficult time where everyone is doing things differently. This is a sweet poem that's just so normal to me. When I picture a son with his mother or father, this is exactly what I picture. The moonlight is just so cool and comforting in this image that I get in my head. It's again, one of the great things this book does. It's all about poems not happening in school and it's nice to reflect on things that aren't school. It's so important to be able to take a step back and look and absorb the world around you which is what this book does. Not being able to enjoy school, this book helps the reader appreciate the things we can enjoy right now.

I found the below poem on page 59. It is also about the moon.

full moon
through the kitchen window—
two aspirins in my palm

R. Brooks, *School's Out*, p. 59

This poem also talks about a moon. That same cool blue soothing light shines through this poem, but instead of this being a sweet poem, this one had an air of exhaustion to it. Like what happens after a long day's work. I know after tech, taking a couple aspirin is a nightly ritual. You're so sore when you get home after such a long day on your feet that just to get to sleep that night you need a little help, and it's the only thing that's going to reset it so you can get up the next day and do the same thing. Frankly, you'll probably need two more in the morning with the sun coming through the kitchen window. When it stands alone, that's what I think of. But when one pairs it with the above poem, I think of something a little sweeter. I know for a fact that some of the things our parents do for us, we'll just never know. It takes a really selfless person to be a parent, to put a child before everything else in life is something that's always seemed very heroic to me and these two poems really reinforce that idea for me. In the first poem, maybe this kid really wants to go flying. And the dad, I personally see this more of a dad figure than a mom figure, is tired after a long day's work helping to provide for that child but even still, they'll pick the kid up to help them touch the stars even if their back wasn't as strong as it used to be. So, when he finally gets his kid to sleep, he needs a little help. I don't know, something about these two poems together really made me warm. It was sweet, and I love the coolness the reader gets from the moon light, and the visual of everything being washed in blues. Like there's no other light in the poem at all. It was just a very soothing reading experience for me which is why I chose to write about it in comparison to the above. It takes the reader out of the chaos going on in life and for just a moment, everything is quiet, and cool.

Another pairing I'd like to point out in this book are on the very next page. The first one is below, with its analysis. I will then write the second with its own analysis and then put them together.

riding down
the metro escalator
snowflakes

R. Brooks, *School's Out*, p. 60

This poem did not make me warm. Quite the opposite. It made me very very cold. I'm from New England. Boston winters are colder than any other winter I've experienced, and I've experienced them a lot of places. Having lived in the city for two years, I very clearly was taken back to the Harvard Square stop on the red line. One has to descend a very steep and old escalator to get down to one of the many levels of trains for this stop in Cambridge MA, just across the river. The biggest sense that was activated for me in this poem

was not feeling, however. Though I could feel myself pulling a scarf around my neck as you're sucked out of the wind tunnel, into the underground, it's sound that really came to me. Because of the use of metro, I could hear the trains, the brakes screeching, the sparks on the tracks cracking. It was like an out of body experience almost. Between the cold from the wind ripping off the river and the sound of the T on the tracks, it was like I was back home in Boston. But then, the last line comes into play, "snowflakes" (60). And the sound just stops. Snow is silent. It's one of the many beauties about it. And in reading this poem, I was descending into the train station, much like the format of this poem, wrapped up in a tunnel of freezing and screeching and then it just paused, for the snow flakes, and it was just total silence, watching them trickle down at the top of the escalator. It was such a clear imagine in my head and Brooks did that with engaging two senses so clearly and then all of a sudden, the last line just turns the poem on its head. It makes the reader stop and think, in silence, which is why this poem is my favorite poem in the book.

stockings on the mantle...
the child's eyes follow sparks
up the chimney

R. Brooks, *School's Out*, p. 60

This is the very next poem on p. 60. On its own it's a really nice poem. With the stockings, that obviously brings the reader to Christmas time, another time, outside of school. Everything seems festive and happy. This poem really invokes smell. I can smell, the fire. I can hear it crackling, but the best image is the sparks. Instead of just talking about them, I actually see them reflected in the child's eyes, as they go up the chimney, hopefully back to Santa Clause. It's a really beautiful painting that this simple poem creates. I picture a child on Christmas eve wondering how Santa is going to come down that chimney if there is a fire there. The light in the child's eyes, is just reinforced by the sparks, like the excitement is manifesting itself in something physical. It is really well written. But the real poetry is when you compare the two poems.

I firstly would like to discuss the movement of the two. To me poems don't always move but these play so well together they create a cycle. People read left to right and then down, and that is what this first poem does. The first words are riding down, and then the next line is another step down and then the next is another step down, very similar to an escalator. It so seamlessly pulls the reader down to the end of the poem, and then it leads you to the next one. But the last line of that poem is "up the chimney" (60). The readers eyes follow the sparks up the page with the child's eyes right back up to the top of the first poem which then brings the reader back down the page. These two poems create a cycle right on the page, and it is truly masterfully done.

I also like the sense work in these poems. The snowflakes and the sparks create virtually the same visual image. Though snow falls down and sparks fly up, the picture they create is somewhat similar. Black with spots of color, either white or orange respectively. Both of the images play off each other very well, one creating a sense of warmth and hope, going up and the other creating a sense of cool and wonder, flowing down, but virtually they are the same image. With sound, one is so loud right at the beginning and then it goes totally silent, creating a sense of wonder. The second poem has a more constant sound but with the spark cracking and flying up, that two creates a sense of wonder in the poem, looking forward to Santa coming down that chimney the same way, the first poem has the reader descending in an escalator.

I really like the story that they both tell when you put them together as well. I can see a father on his way home from a long day of work in the city, taking the train home and their child patiently awaiting their father's return, watching the fire. Both give the reader a sense of hope and wonder, which I mentioned above and when one puts them together, the package glows even brighter. It takes the reader out of all the difficulties happening in life for a small sanctuary of bliss. It's nice. It's just a really nice experience, outside of all the chaos of life.

The final poem I'd like to write about is at the end of the book on page 94.

aspen leaves
shimmer over the riverbank—
hummingbird hovers

R. Brooks, *School's Out*, p. 94

This is just a really calming poem. I kind of pictured it from the point of view of the hummingbird. An explosion of fall colors reflecting off the river. The word shimmer could either be the leaves reflection in the water or the reflection of the hummingbird on the water. You could read it either way, but I like picturing all those beautiful colors. The hummingbird is so small and fast and there's so much energy in them with how fast they flap their wings. I think it plays really well off all the fiery energetic colors of the leaves in the poem. I like the birds eye view the reader gets of the river from the point of view of the hummingbird. I hear the trickling of the river and the buzzing of the hummingbird wings. It's just a really pretty and simple poem that electrifies the senses.

All in all, life is really complicated right now, and this book is such a great example of a bunch of different little patches of life outside of all the chaos. It discusses all different parts of life from being a child, to going to funerals. It discusses nature, life on the farm, life on the city. There is something that everyone can connect to no matter where they are from and it allows people to pause and reflect on their lives and thinking about all the things that make life beautiful outside of the chaos.

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Works Cited

Brooks, Randy. *School's Out*. Press Here, 1999.