



**SHUT UP  
SLOW DOWN  
LET GO  
BREATHE**

**MARCUS MCCANN**



**Also by Marcus McCann**

POETRY BOOKS

*The Hard Return*

*Soft Where*

CHAPBOOKS

*Labradoodle*

*Raw Rind: Sad Songs for Occasions*

*The Glass Jaw*

*Town in a Long Day of Leaving*

*Force quit*

*The tech/tonic suite*

*petty illness leaflet*

*Basement Tapes*

*Heteroskeptical*

*So Long, Derrida*

**SHUT UP  
SLOW DOWN  
LET GO  
BREATHE**

Marcus McCann

2015 Marcus McCann

1983 –

Shut Up Slow Down Let Go Breathe  
poems

Typeset with BEBAS and Aparajita.

Printed on environmentally sustainable acid-free paper pulped and  
pressed by unionized workers.

Printed at Flash Reproductions in Etobicoke, Ontario.

*Cover images by Lulu Lovering, used under Creative Commons licensing.*



Published as part of Dusie Kollektiv 8

Dusie.org

Toronto, Canada

*; come, poor Jackself, I do advise  
You, jaded, let be; call off thoughts awhile  
Elsewhere; leave comfort root-room; let joy size  
At God knows when to God knows what;*

—Gerard Manley Hopkins

## In Praise of the Sun-Cloud-Rain-Lightning Icon

Pictograph of our actual days  
with a chance of everything.

Patience, honey. Air will send  
live updates.

Sit still with your unsatisfied heart.  
I know you want

“an answer”  
but

oh, to abandon odds  
for a thumbnail hinting  
all options are equal

so none is exactly likely.  
Or in the long view,

given infinite skies  
the probability of all events  
tends toward one.

But no. *To abandon odds*  
is to abandon panic, panic

that cancels picnics,

sticky bike trips to nowhere.  
The wheel has one bright spot  
and that is enough.

Add your applause

to the tentative plaudits  
of its makers:

imagine the colloquium  
at the Conference of New Meteorology

—convened in a field  
of thistles, bugged wind,  
rim lit up in pre-storm glow—

to adopt for the future  
an ideogram of doubt

and sing its song,  
maybe, maybe.



//

A tool to stitch strips  
in an overplucked

couplet. Rest

but not really. Your knees  
scooching air

from a sleeping bag.  
Did you know

a little breath  
can make serum?

Glyph which says  
pause

knowing pause  
can hide an independently  
beautiful, parallel

little leer,

can hide momentum,  
which wants you to

and does not want you  
to stop. // watches

poor human us,  
lazy, concrete lovers

and quietly pries open  
poemish soundbites. I wrote

“an // independently / beautiful,  
parallel // little leer”

thinking of a dam  
you and a wind  
can walk on.

I’m not saying mystery,  
I’m just sort of

incompetent.  
“Sort of // incompetent.”

See? Think, nap  
when a nap won’t take,

anticipation, pre-photo

preening, the handsome

fidgety glottals  
before a pickup starts,

half  
rest, quarter rest, stroke

stroke, in fill,  
stand-in.

## To Whomever Checks the Office's General Email Account

A phalanx of the literally ascending  
but proverbially stuck. Vladivostok elevator

to the less successful floors of Business in America.  
Among us one who tracks info at, office at, questions at

like a teen collects and doles out bowling shoes. Support  
at. Dear madam, dear operator, if it concerns you,

a mix of thanks and unease follows me  
like a hunter who doesn't know his rifle's empty.

Please administer to us who are angry, bratty, bored,  
whiny, irregular, mentally ill, unusually inventive,

truly abusive or angling for a refund.  
That is, all of us, virtually. On what wavelength

do you wait for petitions? Oh reactor,  
ghosts appear to believers,

not to us who could  
use a break. And so, in your signoff

pop the collar of the nameless: the team,  
customer service, x or y branch, on behalf of, or

thank you plus two carriage returns  
like a thin signet of white smoke.

## **Funk from the Man-Man Cave**

Pre-dawn penumbra of heavy air. Ogre aura  
folded like extra wools.

Wherever its magma, tephric drift

dusts its weepy, limping sulphurs, its smell  
part alluvial mud, part dorm fridge. Breezes, love  
of nomadics and the tin labyrinth of HVAC carry

the worst downwind. But not at night: a potpourri reaches  
its long forearm into our doffed civvies, sheets  
and the porous pulps our faces face.

Pre-sleep cuddling breaks  
but doesn't vanish, hovering mid-air  
in mixing particulate, seamed

with the impetuous ease of those beloved—  
and which too soon will recite new lines  
*return air, supply air, exhaust air* and carry on.

## Easy Living While Everything Else Moves

Magpies dress like pigeons on a gap year,  
slack at measuring pressure,

barometric, gradient and merely parental.  
On Banff Avenue, two flirt with a friend

but she says, *Come back in ten years*  
*when you're nice*. Nearly everyone

grown to maturity passes through being twenty.  
Ding. My phone warns me young men

are grappling with feelings about my sex ad:  
*Lie down with snowboarders, wake up*

*with fleece*. Your heart will invent worries  
if the normal ones resolve. A red balloon

moseys at the gentle to downright dopey  
end of the spectrum. But for the nipple

where the air got in, it would spin  
in perfect circles. Attaboy. At last,

night flops down like a hiker on a couch  
and we all help pull her boots off.

## Use the Smallest Chainsaw Suitable for the Job

Greg chokes its motor, hangs  
its suffocating butt end  
off my hand.

Backhoe's ear bone. A metal  
ferret snoozing. A rumour  
about your love

which is true. I get a nose full:  
greased, sheeted tin,  
shed shoes

and a note of charred pepper.  
At 13, I was surly about  
this work

because my soft parts embarrassed me.  
Now I let a motocross  
attitude

be my guide to Revenge by Living.  
I raise a flag over the sunlit,  
friction

blackened, hashmarked chain  
and into the leaves  
it launches



an anthem wicked and normal.  
Gloves like silt under  
pressure.

Another name for backhoe  
is *rear actor*.  
Dad says

the first rule of getting out  
of a hole is stop  
digging.

When I bury the saw's hooked teeth  
in saplings three dimensions  
shift.

The idea of "weekend" sits  
on the blade's edge  
like a man

climbing into your lap who wants  
you to fuck him.  
Woodchips

roughen the underbrush,  
Greg's sweats.  
The first rule

of getting out of a hole is  
to ask am I in a hole?  
Boots

with a note scrawled in mud  
scrawl in mud and  
sawdust.

The note is nonsense or I don't  
understand it but probably  
it's nonsense.

## Cover Letter

A graceful arrangement of the baubles of enthusiasm.  
Why you matter, retail. An explanation of how  
you were gingerbreaded from the dough of their firm at birth.

Your motto is *avoidio missteppus*. Your interest in grammar  
grows abnormally. You long for font synergy.  
Your other motto is *Chuck Norris does not apply for jobs; jobs*

*apply for Chuck Norris*. In take two, you trim  
your illustrious history to six slick bullet points. Later,  
you cut the least glimmering facet and lean on autocorrect

like a crisis counsellor. The person you are describing  
is awesome, you realize, or pathological. Your draft reflects you  
the way a can of Diet Coke does. You delete *If I were a question*

*I would be burning* because it is an awkward topic sentence.  
In draft three, you shift the Most Polished Paragraph  
into the Power Position. It is above you. You count to ten.

You mamabird your rebuttals into the beaks  
of imagined objections. You pour in “professional register”  
as if from a tap of weak beer. Sincerely, you write, sincerely.

Sincerely...

## Resignation Letter

Pour your feelings into the cement mixer of restraint.  
Delete the vignettes of your crying jags, anger  
at management—discount the post-work, day-drunk  
unloading on your friends by the probability  
they like your kvetching. Yes, you watched your boss's quirks

dry into burrs. She ground ambition out of you  
like orange pigment out of a beetle. Let go. Be resigned.  
You were a blade's whirl until stopped by a rock. Yes, facts  
hamstrung you. "Processes" needed "overhaul."  
The job's promise dimmed like a sitcom

leaning on gimmick. At some point, it flipped the trip switch  
of your ambition. Repeat after me: *I am a house  
and quitting is a circuit breaker.* You are extracting yourself  
from your job like a good tooth from a bad mouth.  
From your former job, I mean. What a lovely phrase.

## On Not Being Able to Sing

Voice like an underwater turbine speaking  
American English. A voice *manmade*. Rock Hudson

scarred his vocal folds—on purpose, at twenty,  
oh Hollywood!—to make a tone in oratory

like a crew over the next dune thumping on drydocked  
boat hulls. It filled the lake of his singing voice with slag.

Rock Hudson and The Little Mermaid  
have this one thing in common. As for me,

I don't have one song I can barter with.  
Little, stomped-on harmonica. Puff of noise

you can squeeze from a rabbit with all the melody of a poem  
about Marcus McCann written by Marcus McCann.

Can all coyotes sing, or do some mouth their howls  
like I do the national anthem? The song inside me—

not to get heavy—is a theme that circles me  
Alzheimerally. I can't always express

the upbeat choruses that tent on the cliff's edge  
of my solitary and social selves. I apologize

for smothering the fun out of karaoke. But not really.  
I peel packing tape from the skin of audiences:

Imagine the foreboding when, after singing  
*The Greatest Love of All* in rhythmless monotone,

the host calls my name to sing—wait for it—  
*The Greatest Love of All* again in the second set.

## Shores of One Island

Through bramble, we caught poplars exhaling. White fur  
soap bubbles, hundreds, as if pure light detached from flora

could with only an inkling of an earthly arc canoe through air.  
They weren't in my *idea* of the beach

but we might as well give ourselves to their whimsy.  
That was the first lesson. We undressed and lay. Tiny yogis

in ermine coats headed for transcendence: they carried themselves  
the way we'd hoped to treat our day's vacation.

I wanted to touch the world so lightly.  
To hammer it home, we made a game of metaphor:

crumbs of clouds, porcupines sculpted  
from milkweed, souls en route to an orgy...

and I thought we'd hit the groove of lyric. But it sedimented  
in the literal sense—breeze rhinestoning us

with unstoppable, obsessive fluff everywhere we sweated  
plus our mouths and eyes. And when we stood, we saw

seeds had filled the shallows of the lake. We shuddered at the sight:  
endless, gooseshit coloured, and sort of waving at us.

But these are different shores of one island.  
There is no way off it. And as we packed the poplar seeds,  
  
slowburning like a guitarist at a campfire  
whose one drunk song is *Helpless*, went on and on and on.



## **Opportunity Is One More Thing to Feel Anxious About**

In my head, you stand beside bolted-down chairs  
like you're resting deliveries on a boot.

Your deliveries are a bag of worry. At airports,  
every door is smaller than the last. Guards judge

*what* you can't carry on, but only your heart  
can judge *when*. Look at me. So sentimental.

I'm like a peach turning purple. Somewhere  
a door is so small nothing fits through it but you.

A window helps you reflect. Is it even  
made of glass? Some days are like writing

a poem just by staring at something a long time.  
The cross of TVs and your bag strap open

needling fields. You want what you've done  
or do to be a source of love.

## The Jeweller's Made Uncountable Examples

Settled in a corona of late night  
bedroom more muddy  
Madawaska effluvia  
than bachelor pad,

sit for a portrait of the self  
as sea cucumber.

To accrete its themes,  
search skin tag online.

No, don't. Search nuzzling sponge.

I get it.  
Sex is magical,

in that it requires  
misdirection.

So cue the bi

sected shot: on one hand, tender  
exposure

—sweet as a drunk palm  
finding yours on a night walk—

on the other, impervious catcall  
unsolicited bravado  
in darkling air.

Look,  
you say, *I don't want  
to be recognized,*

but don't you?

Oh, dear stranger qua stranger,  
I hear the frequency  
on which you hum.

I've seen the world's one  
dick pic.

Until I cottoned on

I thought the pleasure  
was merely the pleasure

of putting your fingers  
through a whole cake.

Now,

inching  
my phone up my chest

as if peeking at a pocket pair—  
through the flush  
I hear

*Put down your guard,  
your smarmy talk, whatever  
good you try to do*

*I'm pointing at you,  
and you, all of you,*

*all of you, every one.*

Earlier versions of “In Praise of the Sun-Cloud-Rain-Lightning Icon” and “/” first appeared in *Jacket2*; “To Whomever Checks the Office’s General Email Account”, “Funk from the Man-Man Cave” and “Easy Living While Everything Else Moves” first appeared in *Riddlence*; “Cover Letter” first appeared in *The Puritan*; “Resignation Letter” first appeared (briefly) on the *Arc Poetry Magazine* website; “On Not Being Able to Sing” first appeared in *The Steel Chisel*; “Shores of One Island” first appeared in *Matrix Magazine*; and “The Jeweller’s Made Uncountable Examples” first appeared in *This Magazine*. Thank you to the editors of each.

The epigraph is from Gerard Manley Hopkins’ sonnet “My Own Heart Let Me Have More Pity On” first published in *Poems*, 1918.

The title of “The Jeweller’s Made Uncountable Examples” is borrowed from Mark Doty’s “A Display of Mackerel” in *Fire to Fire* (2008, HarperCollins).

“Opportunity Is One More Thing to Feel Anxious About” is about/for/to/on Paul Sutton.

Thank you to those who looked at these poems in draft form. I am especially indebted to Andrew Faulkner for “pushing each tooth to see if it wiggles.”

**Marcus McCann** is the author of two books of poems and a number of chapbooks. He has won the John Newlove Award and the EJ Pratt Medal. A former artistic director of the Transgress! Festival and the Naughty Thoughts Book Club, he is a part-owner of Toronto's Glad Day Bookshop. [www.marcusmccann.com](http://www.marcusmccann.com)  
[@mmccnn](mailto:@mmccnn)

**Dusie** is an online poetry journal based in Geneva and/or New York. Dusie Kollektiv #8 was a poetic exchange between 43 poets which took place in February, 2015. An archive of the Kollektiv can be found on [dusie.org](http://dusie.org).



A man in a dark jacket and cap is looking upwards in a forest. The scene is filled with falling leaves, creating a sense of movement and atmosphere. The text is overlaid on the image in a white, serif font.

*A MIX OF THANKS  
AND UNEASE  
FOLLOWS ME*

*LIKE A HUNTER  
WHO DOESN'T  
KNOW HIS  
RIFLE'S EMPTY*

**DUSIE.ORG**

~  
Dusie  
Kollectiv 8