

Poems for MODL Press
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MODEL

from Book of Magazine Verse

Poems

for rheumatic fever

for St. Thomas the Apostle Nursery School

for Ian McCulloch

for Stuart Ross' sixtieth birthday

for Spacecraftprojects

for MODL Press

Five poems for rheumatic fever

1.

Edwardian, she claims. A breakdown of the heart.

On the Niagara Peninsula, a full day and night
in Emergency; windowless shades of pale tan, fluorescence.

A migraine onset, and this low proportion

of energy: international normalized ratio,
automated vending machines,

continued pressure on the chest and brain.
Eighteen hours in,

admission. The same harmful
workings as a pulse.

2.

Amlodipine, nitroglycerin, warfarin. Traveller,
beware. The Greater Niagara General Hospital: five hundred
and forty kilometres from home.

3.

Shake, and see

what rattles. Blood test, tests; failed
IV drip, another vein blown. As fine
as silk, and impossible to pin.

4.

The faintest scent of peach, pre-dawn: prepped
for lumbar puncture, talk of meningitis. The evolution
of a complex thing. Warm,
the habit of air, our texts. This quartet
of endurances. A high pain threshold.

Left hand, lightly. Bruised. A third attempt for dye;
her Computerized Axial Tomography scan

in the Katz Scan Room, named for donors
with impeccable humour.

After seventy-two hours in isolation, her results,
a strategy: viral, not bacterial. Repatriation of days

into Ottawa General.

5.

Jennifer Moxley: I can hear nothing
from this shore.

Four poems for St. Thomas the Apostle Nursery School

1.

The years through which we banked two children
in your peopled safety: boots off, doors, the keypad lock. This

daily cartography

of free-range preschoolers. Heartbeats, settling slowly
into classrooms. Hello, sunrise. Mornings we arrive,

dream-selves, immersed

in weather. Layers of water, snow or soil, sun
drenched *in perpetua*. A displacement: unplowed paths

of shadows, liquid. Snowsuits, coats and hats, one hundred
mismatched mittens, shoes. How

do you manage? I follow, lag. Our girl ascends, from point
to rhythmic point.

2.

I gather schoolbags, thoughts; my keys. Today
they ask about the rain. Today they ask if they

can climb aboard these bordered plinths
of plowed snow. Today they ask

about my mother, dead these ten long years. How
did she die? Will you die too? I wonder. Mornings,

repeatedly, dispatch. They echo. I routine, best: same

as it ever was. A stretch of northbound traffic, daily pass
by teens en route to Ridgemont, south, as we

trudge north. Familiarity, breeds. Some greetings. Bobble
nod of heads, respond, respond.

3.

Full fathomed. To our two young ladies: your father lies
exhausted. Choral, through this fair

and inevitable sea-change. Worn coats cling, begin
to wear. Our two girls, summers green

and endless. Layered. Before they drift away, free agents.
Pulsed, re-packaged. Grade school,

Junior high, beyond. A stitch, in time, these blocks

of weeping buildings. I could be
long dead.

4.

Beyond the transparency

of unbaked walls, a cavalcade

of children's art. Her teacher distinguishes
brushwork, hand prints. Knots on the page. Here,

this is hers. This painted aggregate, a snowman; assemblage
of purple swirling green. This too. Each ardent splash

of rainbow glue, of glitter. Fingers splayed, outlined,
repurposed; construction paper carved

and coloured. Heartfelt. Safety scissors. Their daily bags
an archive trail of composition. They fill the house

with paper, laughter, songs. Complaining.

Four poems for Ian McCulloch

1.

North of the Mattawa, Trout Lake,
grey-eyed clear and distant; a moment

which, seemingly. The beginning
of the long dash. Time, and

endless.

2.

Accelerates: the arid drift
of Nipissing, September.

*We are caught now
in the mandibles of surviving.*

What light
on remaining colour.

3.

Culled, from geologic excess.
If I grow weary

of being resilient. Airlifted, how
the dawn unwinds.

4.

The efficiency
of syllables. The Trout Lake monster,

northern gateways, settlement. A pantomime
of balance, condition. This scrap

of bare earth.

Four poems for Stuart Ross' sixtieth birthday

1.

Each of your birthdays, in turn, highlight

such universal constants: poodles, pigeons,
sparrows,

haircuts. Writer going to hell! The name
telegraphs, withers. This amplitude of highways

that bear significant weight across lakeshore,

and the inability
of metaphor. I open

my mouth.

2.

For such an occasion, one centres the mind.
We reconfirm altitude,

amplitude, position: Amherst

and Hardscrabble; the Upper Canada
Academy. These strongholds

of Family Compact, and a garage
packed with chapbooks. One late, late night

in 1979: you began to formulate an outline,
calculating digits

in your father's office. The light
of his photocopier.

3.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the largest centre
in Ontario. The city of Cobourg,

and the stretch of two centuries to finally evolve
from quiet lakeside

to quiet lakeside. What the poodles in the state of Oregon
and Wisconsin combined

had dreamt into being. The conspiracy

that followed. What it had most likely been
all along.

4.

Happy sixtieth birthday: neither words
nor mere numbers

but outlaws

and vaudeville stars, performing
on an endless, perfect stage. The concession stand

is raining. The books have gained sentience,
and can't sell themselves fast enough.

Poodle.

Four poems for *Spacecraftprojects*

1.

In the beginning was the imagination, the classic enemy
of boredom. A lavish absence

of artificial light.

Can I see stars? Do I know English? Stories, away
from the semantic charge.

A revelation, visually
in place, in space. A fixed act, sequence

of discarded scraps.

Imagine: once we looked up, without
the thought of force.

2.

To determine we are horizontal
in the language. Perceiving only dots

across horizon-line. They say to realize
is to unearth. Is ours a measure

to reach beyond

for improvement or ruin? Warm hands, pulling hot
and cold dead planets

down to where we drown.

If this a means. A means
of access.

3.

Shadow shapes itself, provides
a deeper shadow. If one aligns, perhaps,

a different order: Saturn, Mercury, Ganymede. *Fly me
to the moon.* Firmly focused

on infinity. Mark the first word, and the first
in space. These foreign bodies, exile. Formed

by rhythm, language. Changed,

for the viewing. No matter what we do,
obsessions rise, and coat

the surface of this inquiry.

4.

To shift a little distance. The children flutter,
decorate their bedroom door with scraps of paper,

carving stars and planets, birthday hearts,

writing out their names. All I want to do

is work.

Four poems for MODL Press

1.

If the language must be said,
what can't

be said? To ask:
who ducks

a wordless cruise

around what corner. What poem,
happens.

2.

The books
you made. Lacuna

of kitchen tables, prairie greenspace,
excess meanings, cavalcade

of footprints marked
as points. A single

point.

3.

Cities, breed. I saw you,
once. Calgary,

Vancouver,

Toronto. You made your piece
a piece

with wheels.

4.

Incisive
and

unlikely.

Would never claim
this font

contagious.

Born in Ottawa, Canada's glorious capital city, **rob mclennan** currently lives in Ottawa, where he is home full-time with the two wee girls he shares with Christine McNair. The author of more than thirty trade books of poetry, fiction and non-fiction, he won the John Newlove Poetry Award in 2010, the Council for the Arts in Ottawa Mid-Career Award in 2014, and was longlisted for the CBC Poetry Prize in 2012 and 2017. In March, 2016, he was inducted into the VERSe Ottawa Hall of Honour. His most recent poetry titles include *A halt, which is empty* (Mansfield Press, 2019) and *Life sentence*, (Spuyten Duyvil, 2019), with a further poetry title, *the book of smaller*, forthcoming from University of Calgary Press. An editor and publisher, he runs above/ground press, *periodicities: a journal of poetry and poetics* and *Touch the Donkey*. He is editor of *my (small press) writing day*, and an editor/managing editor of *many gendered mothers*. In spring 2020, he won 'best pandemic beard' from Coach House Books via Twitter, of which he is extremely proud (and mentions constantly). He spent the 2007-8 academic year in Edmonton as writer-in-residence at the University of Alberta, and regularly posts reviews, essays, interviews and other notices at robmclennan.blogspot.com.

MODEL PRESS 2020
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