

# READER GUIDE: MARCUS MCCANN'S SHUT UP SLOW DOWN LET GO BREATHE

# INVISIBLE PUBLISHING

Trade Paperback

ISBN: 978-1-92674-393-6

Price: \$16.95

Trim: 4.75" x 7" / 96 pp

289 Main St, Ste 1

Picton, ON K0K 2T0

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Distributed to the trade by

Canadian Manda Group

1.855.MANDA.CA



Hello readers! Thanks for reading *Shut Up Slow Down Let Go Breathe*.

I have a wonky ear for word sounds. I tend to like consonant clusters and big thumping plosives, sounds like T, D, G, P, K, and B. Pop-pop-pop. You can hear that really clearly in a poem like “Wreck of a Street Racer.” But I tried in some poems in this collection to do the opposite, to create sounds that are calming, or at least less jangly. Some poems, like “Never Straighten,” alternate between the more gumboot-in-a-washing-machine style and its quieter opposite. Whether or not you noticed it, it’s there, and I wonder what effect, if any, that had on you.

I also wonder if you laughed at all while reading this book. When I read aloud from the book at events, I sometimes ham it up. “Cover Letter,” for example, is always good for a laugh. Humour helps people let their guard down, and there are some difficult truths buried in the jokes. But it’s also just for fun. Poems are serious fun, and I hope some of the joy of playfulness comes through in my work.

There is a lot of figurative language in this book. Left unchallenged, I would write poems about inanimate objects all day, and every poem would just be a list of comparisons. Early in the collection is a poem about ear plugs, which takes more or less this form. I love that metaphor is always imperfect. That imperfection gives poems energy, in my opinion. It makes writing more dynamic. When I say, “As for my body, I was a bad tenant in an okay apartment,” you know exactly what I mean. It’s true, but it’s also not true, isn’t it?

There are love poems in this book, but they all seem to be tinged with a heavy kind of sadness. I wonder what you think about that. If you look at “Receiving Robert Earl Stewart’s The History of Baseball from a Lover by Email,” the first stanza is about some kind of depression. The narrator is sad about the state of the world. Then cancer, and a metaphor about terrorism. How could it still be a love poem? What does it mean to live in this world, with all its injustices and heart aches, and still have love?

Good luck with *Shut Up Slow Down Let Go Breathe*. I do very sincerely hope you enjoy it.

Sincerely,  
Marcus McCann