

THE TRIUMPH OF CANCER

Chris McCabe's work crosses artforms and genres including fiction, non-fiction, drama and visual art. His poetry has been recorded for the Poetry Archive and he was shortlisted for the Ted Hughes Award in 2013. He has published four collections of poetry, including the highly praised *Speculatrix* (2014), and his work has been described by *The Guardian* as 'an impressively inventive survey of English in the 21st century'. His psychogeographic books about London's cemeteries, *In the Catacombs* and *Cenotaph South*, are published by Penned in the Margins. With Victoria Bean he is the co-editor of *The New Concrete: Visual Poetry in the 21st Century* (Hayward Publishing, 2015) and his first novel, *Dedalus*, a sequel to *Ulysses*, was published by Henningham Family Press in 2018. He works as the Librarian at the National Poetry Library, Southbank Centre.

ALSO BY CHRIS MCCABE

POETRY

The Hutton Inquiry (Salt Publishing, 2005)

Zeppelins (Salt Publishing, 2008)

THE RESTRUCTURE (Salt Publishing, 2012)

Speculatrix (Penned in the Margins, 2014)

AS EDITOR

The New Concrete: Visual Poetry in the 21st Century
(with Victoria Bean; Hayward Publishing, 2015)

NON-FICTION

In the Catacombs (Penned in the Margins, 2014)

Cenotaph South (Penned in the Margins, 2016)

Real South Bank (Seren, 2016)

VERSE DRAMA

Shad Thames, Broken Wharf (Penned in the Margins, 2010)

FICTION

Dedalus (Henningham Family Press, 2018)

The Triumph of Cancer

Chris McCabe

Penned in the Margins

LONDON

PUBLISHED BY PENNED IN THE MARGINS
Toynbee Studios, 28 Commercial Street, London E1 6AB
www.pennedinthemargins.co.uk

All rights reserved
© Chris McCabe 2018

The right of Chris McCabe to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act 1988.

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Penned in the Margins.

First published 2018

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International

ISBN
978-1-908058-60-7

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---------------|----|
| Crab | 15 |
| X-ray | 16 |
| Cell | 17 |
| Balloon | 18 |
| Mrs Merton | 19 |
| Snooker | 20 |
| Cancer | 21 |
| Clatterbridge | 25 |
| Heimlich | 26 |
| Snowglobe | 27 |
| Cinema | 28 |
| Pinthover | 29 |
| Metastasis | 30 |
| Alice | 31 |
| Love | 34 |
| Chipfork | 35 |
| Kipper | 37 |

| | |
|-------------|----|
| Hedgehog | 39 |
| Starling | 41 |
| Lungworm | 42 |
| Pornography | 43 |
| Worm | 44 |
| Easter | 45 |
| Oncologist | 47 |
| Hodgkin's | 48 |
| Slug | 49 |
| Wound | 50 |
| Brick | 51 |
| Face | 52 |
| & | 54 |
| Light | 56 |
| Voice | 57 |
| Campfire | 58 |
| U-bend | 59 |
| Sea | 60 |
| Lemon | 62 |

| | |
|------------------|----|
| Owl Pellet | 63 |
| Rabbit | 64 |
| Car | 65 |
| Vertigo | 67 |
| Library | 70 |
| Cure | 73 |
| August | 74 |
| Anarchitecture | 75 |
| Straw | 76 |
| Body | 78 |
| Cemetery | 79 |
| No Word | 81 |
| Bowie | 82 |
| Pink | 83 |
| Stockings | 85 |
| Coupling | 86 |
| Anchor | 87 |
| Ditch | 88 |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | 89 |

For Sarah and Pavel, in everything

‘This body of ours, this disguise put on by common jumping molecules, is in constant revolt against the abominable farce of having to endure. Our molecules, the dears, want to get lost in the universe as fast as they can!’

LOUIS-FERDINAND CELINE, *Journey to the End of the Night*
(transl. JOHN BANVILLE)

'For out of much more, out of little not much, out of nothing nothing: in these sprays at all events there is a new world of inscape.'

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS, *Journal*, 1871

The
Triumph
of
Cancer

Crab

In a tropic of crabs what bad shorts
and high socks did you wear as you wiped blood
from your finger, cut by the claw
of forearm guns that clutched back at the tides
of the only sea that could sway them?
That crab the Greeks used to give cancer its name,
how it spreads sideways out, like fingers, outwards;
karkinos, Hippocrates called it,
that could only be treated with a cauterized tool
called the Fire Drill. The summer's elastic starched;
you laughed, saying you're fine, it's a nick,
as we watched the reddened fleck break & asked
can we keep it dad, we asked & asked
as you put the crab back,
the crab you always put back.

X-ray

Pierre & Marie Curie met in 1894 through their fascination with magnetism. They married a year later. *Radium, be near to me.* Where so many patients have seen their death through radioactivity they saw each other. Like the writer that chokes on their pen, the breakthrough fluid Marie held in her hands killed her [leukemia]. Their daughter, Irene, disappeared into the future.

One evening, decades before, Pierre had walked through rain along the Rue Dauphine & slipped under a horse-drawn cart, crushing his skull unto death. *Radium, be near to me.* His father & lab assistant both said the same thing : his mind was elsewhere, thinking of a cure for cancer.

Cell

it, it, it, it, it, it, it
it, it, it, it, it, it, it
it, it, it, it, it, it, it
it, it, it, @ it, it, it
it, it, it, it, it, it, it
it, it, it, it, it, it, it
it, it, it, it, it, it, it

Balloon

Balloons are stillborn cysts
resistant to sustenance;
they sucker-up to the teat & start to swell,
suckling limp with a flaccid feebleness.
They flare with growth, all-belly,
stretch their magenta to a viscous puce,
sucking-up each drop in a taughtening façade
until their death poises pertinent to a touch.
They halt, withdraw : a plastic vellum
on which the world is writ.
The runt hisses a filthy Latin,
puckers its mouth into a wrinkled O
tight as a carp's & stares :
its starved eye intent only on eating.

It flies to the pen of its siblings.

Mrs Merton

i.m. Caroline Aberne, 1963-2016

born with cancer of the eyes
as if to watch
what grows in silence
as if to see to what waits to disperse
at the centre of perception
in the luminous world
where the outline of the sun
is the same black ring
as the after-image
of the liquid rings
that cast a shadow back
to the globe of Saturn

Snooker

i.m Paul Hunter

‘cancer, we now know, is a disease cause by the
uncontrolled growth of a single cell’

SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE

the tight static under the light
and the stellae of dust around
the baize as the balls are placed
in the triangle & the player stands
back astonished to see the red
mutate into reds & the white
swallowed in reds endless reds
the baize lost to primary ivories
no space for hand for cue for control
the balls fly out across slate bed
the player leans forward into chaos
leans forward moves no more a cloth
is pulled across. this could run all night.