

SPACECRAFT

John McCullough's first collection of poems *The Frost Fairs* won the Polari First Book Prize in 2012. It was a Book of the Year for *The Independent* and The Poetry School, and a summer read for *The Observer*. He teaches creative writing at the Open University and New Writing South, and lives in Hove, East Sussex.

PRAISE FOR SPACECRAFT

'Out of body, in the open brackets of the air, John McCullough crafts a space unsettled and vast as any voice has dared, charged with remembering and the equally perilous task of forgetting. This book breaks the relics, releases the departed souls and harrows hell and heaven alike in an ever-unlocking, ever-opening rush of fresh air. What a breath this body is. What a fresh, invigorating, breath—'

D.A. Powell

'The four parts of John McCullough's second collection capture four types of space: the linguistic or, simply imaginative; the intimate as the sheer presence of the erotic, then the absence mourned in the elegiac; and finally the exterior, that space we can inhabit, and call home. In each a cumulative mastery of conception and phrase-building is at work — from an initial poem which subtly eroticises the exclamation mark to a spirited reanimation of the word 'floth'er' (previously a twelfth century snowflake), he establishes an intimacy of lexicon, and indeed a sense that true definition — of self and others — is a physical act.'

W.N. Herbert

'Alive to the pathos in a punctuation mark, walking through dark places with a spring in its step, *Spacecraft* is a marvellous book. Driven by the perfect blend of curiosity and feeling, these are poems that pull off that rarest of balancing acts — with brio. Whether training his eye on outer space or inner life, John McCullough is a poet you need to know.'

Sarah Howe

ALSO BY JOHN MCCULLOUGH

The Frost Fairs (Salt Publishing, 2011)

Spacecraft

John McCullough

Penned in the Margins

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'1001 Nights' was commissioned for an event at the British Film Institute organized by Simon Barraclough that celebrated works including Pasolini's adaptation, *The Flower of One Thousand and One Nights*. The poems in Part II, 'Navigating a Space' are inspired by my first partner Andy Lee (1963-2009), and dedicated to his memory. 'Formations' was written for The Justin Fashanu Foundation.

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Spacecraft

I

FLYING MACHINES

!

It appeared without warning like an angel
or injury, this tall mark of havoc – a pillar of fire.
Already it is intimate with bishops, philosophers.
I watch it flout borders, stowed in the peppered
tails of sentences. It infiltrates vaults, prisons,
the bedrooms of kings. I have tried to resist
but it steals from my nib, its saucy eye
rippling in candlelight, dodging pumice
and knife. The abbot disapproves, names it
a feminine indulgence, the want of self-restraint.
It's like the secretary who greets me
each Tuesday, his hand travelling the road
of my spine. His tap on my rear makes verticals
govern my dreams. At night, I see one symbol
on vellum, filling sheet after sheet, inscribed
in blue light. My ankles vanish and I live
above my single foot. I find myself amorphous
at the end of a terrace, waiting till I'm near
him again, recover my form and can say
*Here I am – a hot fountain in the garden
of language; the scratch of the vanquished,
those undone by the world, staring back,
astonished, at the hand that shaped me.*

Flittermouse

That Old English word for *bat* returns
to me at sundown, beneath a screeching cloud.
Shapes zigzag while the moon watches, thirsts.
I think of you with Samuel Johnson's dictionary
beside a shelf, your long fingers splayed
across the spine. Unable to swallow
one entry, you squealed and burst the library's
hush, then froze, astounded by the echo.

You fled town three weeks later, disappeared
without a text or email. Flittermouse,
what happened? In which rooms do you track
down words like insects now, combing books
and specialist websites, open-eared,
as you wait for your own strange voice?

Some Days I'm Visited by a Church of Rain

The building wanders around the sky
then falls on top of me. Clouds are its ceiling,

droplets the choir. Inside, stones achieve
the ardent shades of stained glass.

Jagged pines melt and glitter. The broken air
remembers and I listen in the steam and hiss

of psalms for voices I have lost. I dream of striding
down the pavements' dazzling aisles for years.

Then I meet the clean smell left behind, recall
how only through forgetting can the church arrive,

and I come back to my small garden,
its chalky earth young, forgiven.