

DAVID MCGIMPSEY



ASBESTOS
HEIGHTS

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THE CANONICAL NOTEBOOKS

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for my father, John McGimpsey

*all the flowers in Ville D'Anjou
& the New York Yankees.*

NOTEBOOK I

A HARKENING OF FLOWERS

'Hath sorrow struck so many blows upon this face of mine
and made no deeper wounds?' – Richard II

*Some drink grappa in Old Trieste
Some publish novels with a vanity press
But I love noodles*

*Some name their country homes 'Le BelleBelle Rive'
Some name their yachts 'O Big Mighty Steve'
But I love noodles*

*Some like the taste of mackerel in a can
Some can't write essays without quoting Lacan
But I love noodles*

*Some like to consider nude curling the hardest sport
Some like to call the tansy flower common yellow mugwort
But I love noodles*

*Some love a poem that speaks of rare flowers
Some wake up and say, 'Ohmigod! Gotta shower!'
But I love noodles*

Lettuce

For poetry's sake, let us consider
iceberg lettuce a flower, much as I
considered (for poetry's sake) college
a place where I would find value in life.

I can't say whether or not my whole year
was good for bouquets of iceberg lettuce,
blooming in beds of bacon and mayonnaise,
just that I remember their quiet, cold heads.

Stamen, anther, filament – I clammed up
for most of the summer. It wasn't so bad.
I missed the old provocations of rage,
moved on, and didn't gain too much weight.

Imagine the bride is holding her lettuce
and, then, tosses it to the eager crowd.
For poetry's sake, I really have to say
I am happy for her among the crispy petals.

Lichen

What I remember about the lichen
were its inevitable invasions.
It would cover Taco Bell franchises
if you didn't respect it and kill it.

Dogwood blossoms were different, I think.
In April, in Georgia, I could smell them
while looking up to the sky, calling
any scramble of stars *Sagittarius*.

From April came May and then other months
that also demonstrated my general facility
with the Gregorian calendar. By October,
I was puking all the cow grass I ate.

Lichen is a perfect combination
of algae and fungus, whereas we were
the perfect combination of liver
and peaches. We sure were a freezerful.

Scarlet Geraniums

A beach towel I bought in Barcelona
had a crest of scarlet geraniums.
Who would I give that to besides the one
I didn't give the Kim Kardashian towel to?

Scarlet geraniums are not natural
to Ville D'Anjou, Quebec. 'You're amazing,
but you will always hurt those who fall
for your charm. You won't mean to, but you will.'

The cover of Ted Hughes's *Birthday Letters*
has a similar strew of geraniums,
but he wasted no time singing his anthem,
'This One Goes out to the One I Fucked Up.'

I bought duty-free Iberian ham
rather than beach gear, which only affirmed
the Spanish maxim: *You always end up
eating the Iberian ham you love.*

Blackberry

Eventually, my critique was refined to
'I hope all you sickening snobs just die.'
I ate blackberries every morning (once)
and held on to my earned, mature insight.

What people generally liked about me
was the thought they could do my job.
The quality my closest friends loved most
was that I was 'a generous tipper.'

I read on some site blackberries were good
for the lungs. I knew they tasted really weird.
Fruits that taste good have soda pops based on them.
Isn't that right, Diet Sierra Mist Kiwi?

Did I mention all the blackberry smoothies
and drinking them in one gulp, imagining
I was steadying myself on Jesus's shoulder?
Jesus, of course, would just have Diet Sprite.

Canola Flowers

If you tore off the tops of canola –
yellow canola flowers – would you
jump in a tub of canola margarine
just to make the best of despair?

Do you miss those bed-bound Sundays we had?
You'd read classic American novels
and when it was Henry James you would scream
at the heroine, 'Oh, just bend over!'

Into the acacia you go, scowl mouth.
Into the acacia with you, whatever
Jonathan Franzen novel with the girl
who chews the cuffs of her new blue blouse.

Like *heartfelt*, *canola* is a made-up word.
It brings together *Canada* and *oil*.
It's a tub of fun you'll be glad to call
I Can't Believe It's Not More Meaningful.

Columbines

In the kingdom *Plantae*, in the 'You stink, Ophelia' class, four of five columbines mark the spot where I finally decided to increase my social media profile.

O, Annie Facebook, Clarissa Twitter - we're going to the prom! I shed real tears just because my poem for Beyoncé was rejected by the *Malahat Review*.

Could the columbines be mashed into scent, giving me a resilient mountain freshness? The answer, after that long flight to Paris, was a resounding *absolument pas*.

Still, I knew I was going to pluck and pluck, and I plucked until plucking became my life, well beyond any interest in sowing and its much-funner cousin reaping.

Tulips

Corduroy once ruled the kingdom of pants.
I was still writing poetry back then.
Or, whatever it was I did back then
that made people say, 'That's not poetry!'

The tulips my father planted back home
bloomed steady most Easter-times, sure as
the plans I sketched out to start feeling good
got crumpled alongside a map to Rome.

Casting 'foul light upon neighbouring ponds'
was not my cup of Sprite, but I enjoyed
choking with anxiety whenever
the seasons made a definitive change.

Fall was all university khakis
and old Nantuckets braying, 'Hey, Corduroy!
Your footgame burger garbage is garbage!'
until it was finally footgame season.