

THOMAS MCGUIRE

Garden Plots

*Fuck her fucking flowers, Gicamdi cried as I tried
to make a point about the pastoral in Walcott and Césaire.
Daily people were dying in the streets & gutters.
Pastoral's just one more way of taking cover
in the course of taking over.*

Fostered in the rain shadow of Kilimanjaro
but ivy-league trained,
Gicamdi railed like this for near an hour
against the wealthy white woman he'd heard
on Radio Kenya during a brutal year of revolution.

*From somewhere in her compound, somewhere
behind iron-grated windows and bits of glass
grouted into the fortress walls around her house
that idiot lady rambled on and on complaining
to the talk show host about her troubles growing bougainvillea.*

Every spring since then, Gicamdi's echoed in my ear
and I've repressed my flower fetish.
Who needs to add more guilt
when there's guilt enough to go around?
And I've come to half believe what Ho Chi Minh
said about his need for more poets
who could lead a charge, sharpen bayonets.

What with war, though, shattering Iraq
and scattering her children from Oxaes to the River Jordan,
what with sloughing glaciers raising sea level,
and me still grieving for my old man
who's been planted in the earth
pushing daisies for two years now
I start to wonder what's the harm
of a bit of color,
a little excess in the garden.

So this sheepish spring I'm raising flowers.
Years past, I justified my garden plots by rearing apples,
chives, tomatoes, cucumbers for pickling & canning.
I rarely saw much fruit for all my labor:
this sub-alpine elevation stunts all such growing.
Now I'm splurging, sowing a few perennials—
cornflowers, coreopsis, columbine—
but mounds of annuals, the kind of water-wasting
hopeless blooms that in these mountain parts
will fade in fall and not revive next spring:
cosmos, sweet peas with their sexy
scent and tendrils, & bleeding heart.

With every toss of seed
I start to feel a hint of hope—
just a momentary flash;
isn't that the only honest hope
when folks keep falling in the streets,
falling by the thousands
in Mosul, Jahalabad, Calcutta?
And when at last the flowers bloom,
that color splash is cruel;
it comes so slow, then quickly passes,
for in high country parts like these
even when it's spring
winter waits and watches.

THOMAS MCGUIRE is a poet/translator and Seamus Heaney scholar. Recent work has appeared in *The North American Review* and *New Hibernia Review*. He is a contributing editor for **WLA**.