

KNOW YR STUFF

Poems on Hedonism



Calum Rodger

know yr stuff

When I was a boy
they gave us at school
a little blue book
it was well fucking cool

a bright neon blue
with a lustrous sheen
I'd never seen a blue like it
I was barely thirteen

on the cover it said
in a sans serif face
'Drugs: Know Your Stuff'
it was totally ace

each popular drug
had a double-page spread
all the highs and the lows
how they might make you dead

strange hallucinations
pathways bombed and blocked
comedowns and euphoria
this thing called 'loved-up'

there was alcohol, cannabis
ecstasy, trankies
etc – but no plant food
this was the nineties

their names were emblazoned
in radical fonts
sparkling and shimmering
making me *want*

typographically mimicking
the supposed effects
of the drug represented
by the mad white text

which was superimposed
upon a visual abstraction
depicting the anticipated
neural reaction

looking back on it now
even then, it was kitschy
but I was naïve
and getting real twitchy

and here was a volume
containing all possible worlds
existential intensities
and – possibly – a way to meet girls

but that's just a digression
this discourse has its object
and I don't wish to adulterate
my quintessential project

the best parts were the street names
like a dozen for each

'so this is how they talk', I thought
'on the streets'

cannabis had loads of them
each stranger than the last
one of them was 'shit'
that knocked me out in class

it's strange seeing shit
justified in ink
I barely notice now of course
barely even think

but that day shit got real
I'd seen it written down
I sucked it in and spoke it out
it's still my favourite noun

ecstasy had some good ones too
like 'disco biscuits'
which was great for me
cuz I was bored of Twixes

'ADAM' was another
half-anagrammatic
just ripe for a story
so unalphabetic

and so it went on
from gear to booze
linguistic explosives
on a very short fuse

at the back was a table
with every drug in a list
as if to help collectors
note what they'd missed

'could it be done?'
I started to scheme
'am I embarking
on an impossible dream?'

'all my sticker albums
remain incomplete
but that's an object fetish
a weak form of deceit'

'I want deceit pure
and this is the source'
I uncapped my biro
and plotted my course

it took me a decade
but I got the whole set
and though I don't know its value
I'm not dead yet

and I just can't imagine
how my existence would look
if my Social Ed teacher
hadn't given me that book

for that was the day
Metaphysics arrived –
such is the power of literature:
some books just change your life.