

Echo: Perfected

You're wondering if the paths through these hills
share a common starting point or whether they
meander and branch out to various points.
Interesting question.

Women, says a friend of mine, vary widely
(in sexual matters, he means), while men are
much more similar, standardized, maybe.

I am / you are / we are / she-he is
Again and again they are or will be
Perfected by the appearance of money,
which stands for something else.

There are intersections, sums and differences.
It is not grammar, believe me, constituting
a desperate attempt to create permanence
in a sort of flux.

Wood is consumed to ash by a process we call fire;
physical bodies also consumable under the stars.
Possible orders of function, grinding persistence.
Is it *doing* that does things?

And invention? All right never mind.
Too much noise inherent in the subject.
How about Body first? Mine, yours
an observed one, even: lover, egret, goldfish.

What threatens to overturn our minds'
equilibrium is not disorder but any order
that does not match the provisional ones
we construct for ourselves

They speak of "working landscape"
versus chaos, which itself is not random,
not without order of a highly complex kind.
But difficult to read.

Why is "anthropology"
the study of human cultures
while "gynecology"
is medical practice confined
to the female reproductive apparatus?

Why is "patrimony"
everything of value — physical,
civic, or spiritual —
passed on from previous generations
while "matrimony"
refers to the legal yoking of male
and female in bourgeois society.

Distinguishing characteristics of this body are:
one: veins, highly prominent.
two: a general boniness (emerging in my late 20s)
three: lack of melanin in the skin
so that it remains quite pale
or at most turns temporarily pink
when exposed to the sun,
then promptly reverts to beige.

And why am I telling you? This isn't
confessional poetry. Wrong decade.
How many "why"s can a poem (or any text
for that matter) sustain? How many "you"s

Is it possible some of those lost
or discarded pages were the critical ones
that might have supplied, even now,
the missing meaning?

Could they have contained the key phrase?
Are they perhaps alive somewhere, and growing,
like the children whose faces
adorn or deface our milk cartons
The way certain neighborhoods
in particular cities
take hold of the imagination
indefinitely haunting the dreamscape.

There's a special place in my heart
both for elegance and its reverse.
I'm addicted to a certain formalism
(my own definition, of course)

To aim for inelegance is
a kind of exercise — pathetic,
like a drunk trying to appear sober
is transparent and laughable.

A carefully ordered landscape
The surface of the sea.
Not opposites. You know.

While these forms have a life of their own
I think I think I think. These tasks are
— what's the word? — *arduous* to perform.

Stars, Belief and Blood

Like Miriam of the desert
(the second desert)
who came from nowhere,
really, and kept moving
under the wheeling night-jagged sky

Be grateful and pleased
Write between her lines,
if you must.

Take a pair of scissors
Cut up the pink shirt

Unfettered by any reactions

It's an old one, after all —
used Ralph Lauren
picked up at Flip when it still
existed.

Under the shirt: beige skin
(over bones, as we know)

Don't worry, this is produced
along with your blood,
which you did not design but make
and make.

Use it like ink to record
both Determination and Fear.

Remembering so many things
that you must have forgotten
a million more. These keep recurring
coming back, rotundly
cyclic . . . hence cynical.

Some belief is better than none.
All belief leads to trouble.
One's belief is worth fighting for.
No belief can ever be "true" . . .
An so on.

Anything just to keep on going,
not interrupt the rhythm
not stop the breathing
lines, words, salad
from being tossed

Even ersatz mementoes will do
for Invention.

From the *Contras* series

1. *Open & Shut*

No one lives in this world.
Each of us locked
in a broad, clear solution.
Beat against walls to find problems.
Not even him. He doesn't know his own
extremes. The key to his life is this
lack of self-recognition.
You've known others like him,
but never one so intensely
& arbitrarily bound to
things that are out of reach.

If only there was
a way to open and close.
I never learned the tricks
of that trade — and suspect
I will come more and more to regret it.
"Nonsense"
says the editor who always
stands behind my chair. (That's why
I face the doors: I wanna
catch her coming in some day.)

"No one's trapped," she snaps.
"Yeah," I say, (yes?)
"but I mean their *limits*."

Do it again. Talk about a way of
writing that slants to the left
Indicating
Reversal of the hemispheres
and a medieval indifference
and a way of making rhythm
vanish at the point where it appears.

2. *Displacement*

On the one hand the incomparable
comfort of eating, filling the mouth
As lovely as when a Baby pulls
the soft milk nipple and skin of its Mother
into itself. The whole feeling mouth.

And on the other: outside
in the cold, dark night each decision
lurks like a sentence; awaiting its verb.