

R E G I N A L D S H E P H E R D

Brightness Falls

1.

The body in question was a boy,
of course, and not to be interpreted
(a singing interim called summer, interposed
between sunlight and world, circumstantial
warmth repeating *s* sounds), the body unquestioned
was white (again), slow-blooming indecision
inclined toward sun (*shall I be this? have I been
that?*), and not fully unfolded as of mid-morning.

2.

The boys take off their clothes
and then the sun comes out, like that,
they try to inhabit the absence
of rain, fill in blank clouds
with their bodies, white skin
which is flowering money
(spent on a small town
swimming hole afloat with leaf
-shaped shale chips, slivers),

3.

accepted all over the world
of privations (currents and currency), tender
for all kinds of good and yielding too
(*I touched him into here*): their copper,
silver, gold, their precious metal
skin a slick of sun and repetition,
clinging water kissing them to light, late
spring unclad with limbs ascatter.

4.

Flesh of anticipation, disappointment,
flash of nickel, platinum and bronze: they slip
into the shallow current or clamber
down shale shelves, the falls

churning and churning (slurring
description white and brown, misted
gold when sun hits them),
but never comes close

5.
to consuming them. (Careful
of the trick tide, rip tide,
undertowing innocence towards
drown and crash-on-broken
-rocks.) They let the water
overtake themselves (sibilant,
susurrant) and then they
overcome, shake wet light from hair.

6.
Gully of purple cress, spring cress ditch
foams down the stress-cut slope.

Kinds of Camouflage

for Robert Philen

1. DÉJEUNER, WITH HERBS
Then I am sitting naked on damp grass
(it rained in my yesterday)
while two white gentlemen
in black frock coats share lunch
around me, passing chèvre, cold andouille,
and baguettes, passing bon mots
in French, in someone's nineteenth century,
my muddled impression of one. I can't
understand a word. There must be
a picnic basket somewhere, lined with
a red and white checked cloth,
some visual cliché, although
I know the cloth's pale blue, pale echo
of a sky that isn't there. They hardly
notice me (two men now passing apples, and
a bottle of medium quality red wine), or no,

S H E P H E R D

I exaggerate, they don't see me
at all, my body naked to the breeze
too cold for noon although it may
be May; my skin responds
in kind and gets no answer, a situation
I am used to. Brownd warmth of my flesh
tones is quickly cooling, and the day
is downcast, overcast: the basket's
been tipped over, grapes, peaches,
and some fruit I can't make out
spill over, shadowing green. I hate poems
about food. I am a painting
by now, varnish smudged and darkening
in storage, and getting hungry fast.

2. FIELD GUIDE

Above the highway we drove home
between two hills of snow (from one
classical town to another), a bird
you couldn't recognise at first
when I asked, *What is that?*.

Something trailing confused you,
threw you off track, a streamer,
scrap of dragon kite, festoon or
crimson plume. *Oh, it's a red-tailed
hawk, with something caught
I can't make out. Dinner, anyway.*

A piece of will defeated
in the wind, some little life's
fluttered surrender. Perhaps
a red squirrel, rare colour
around here (you told me
that), I could have thought
but didn't. The hawk
won't be hungry for long, we're almost
home. It will be again.