

someone tweeted f. scott fitzgerald reciting ode to a nightingale

by Gary Percesepe

poor son of a bitch

he recorded it in his last year
forty-four with skin like paper
probably in a self-recording
phonograph booth in LA
or somewhere in southern california
where the light is a daily reminder of all
you cannot have
like zelda in custody
his own private paradise
lost a thousand times or more
and he recites from memory this—what?
this ode gone off the rails
the keats is unmistakable but he begins in
such a low key
his voice the hushed tone of priests
even at his death he dreamed of death
and every art a sacrament
did people once believe such things?
scott did
he wrote to get the girl
and look!
the girl was got
and unstoppable fire
made her a torch
she burned alone
on the mental ward one day

if the river was whiskey
it only went downhill
their journey was beautiful & damned
but now you listen
as he begins well
the words barely breathed
his voice pure purchased princeton
the meter the line the exquisite pain
of knowing his last flight
like the nightingale he laments
will set hell on fire again
*my heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains
my sense as though of hemlock I had drunk
o scott! o zelda!*
we could drink a case of you
*that i might drink and leave the world unseen
and with thee fade away into the forest dim so then
fade far away dissolve and quite forget
what thou among the leaves hast never known
the weariness the fever and the fret
here where men sit and hear each other groan*
but scott has stopped reciting
he lost his place
his neurons misfiring again
he stumbles to a line he thought he'd never forget
and ends the poem in the middle
no second act or third only this last fragment
where youth grows pale and spectre-thin and dies

