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REGINALD SHEPHERD

Five Feelings for Orpheus

I

Orpheus sits on the strumming esplanade
losing his head for water. Florid
light sounds noon, currents green

with overflowing sun and dumped
industrial wastes: the Chicago River turning
mineral, all emerald, tourmaline.

II

*The song: I don't remember
the park, how you rose, moon,
held it in your thin white*

*fingers and let it fall,
with only your pinprick eyes
to mark the spot.*

The song he can't remember
uses up the light, the night
delivers him unmothered, otherless.

III

There is a hell for every color
he can find, all knowledge rain
(pane of wet glass, one death

leads to another): grass body drenched
in waywardness, wind turning too quickly
back. The representation

exceeds the man in whatever night
he imagines, his bewilderment
eaten by greedy birds. He hears

and errs. *I think it will rain,*
therefore I am: married to a map
of world, and he is not song.

IV

Music has hollowed out a heart
in him, singing lack. A white rage
discards spent skin, leaves

only the left hand of the illegible: a notch
in cold escorts him into disbelief. He opens
the door to the poem and steps aside.

V

Orpheus falls apart in hell, finds him
adrift down the river of self
reversed: wakes up and goes to pieces

of the amniotic sea. (Eurydice
secreted under waves, who stepped off
a scarp of loss: drowned

out, her hoarded voice.) And the laughing rain
asks *Who have you ever loved?*,
as if to use up the distance between them.

Section III alludes to Ludwig Wittgenstein's statement, "If a man says to me, looking at the sky, 'I think it will rain, therefore I exist,' I do not understand him." (Quoted in Raymond Monk, Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius.)