2002

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.5553

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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 bewilderness
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.)