

# 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*

