

Chard de Niord

THE BAILIFF OF THE HEAVENLY COURT BRINGS GERRY TO THE LORD'S ATTENTION

Have you considered your servant Gerry,
how he races between one town and another.
He is in awe of himself at 70.
How suddenly youthful and thin he looks!
He is flame on wheels, night on air,
crying to his beloved, "The skin of my soul
is soaked in oil and burns down the day."

He is savoring the breaks of light in the fog,
imagining real places on earth,
luminescent signs to turn around, turn around.
How long, he wonders, can I go on living
as such a healthy, afflicted man?

He is petitioning you from the roof
of a house in a storm, clutching a wire
in one hand and a turtle dove in the other.
He has grown devout in your disregard.

He is singing an old refrain as if it were new,
something he calls his secret song.
The eves are trembling as he sings
with newfound range. He is shocking
his children, boring the angels.

He claims you're in love with Gomer,
the beautiful whore, which is why you knock
on hotel doors and sing in banks and cause
such pain in righteous men.

He is praying for the eighth coincidence
of a lightning bolt to strike him down,
a little drama from the olden times
to blur the line between your mercy and anger.

He has acquired near perfect pitch
next to the chimney,
tuned himself with a broken fork.
“Death,” he sings like the soul of the boy.
“Death and death again.”

A mouth has grown in his side to accompany him.
He is a chorus unto himself.
His wasted body burns the dark, powerful in its bones.
He is a wealthy man with a few quarters
in his pocket and a stain on his shirt.

He has been tested now.
You’ve lost your bet.
He says it’s not what you take away
that hurts in the end
but what you give,
as if he were you and not a man.
And this were heaven instead of earth.
And the buffalo chips had sunk instead of risen.
And one woman was not enough.