

BRIAN SWANN

*The Lark in the Clear Air*

Under a sky drifting into a color  
that could bend a tree, a no-color  
heft like painter's white, the voices  
of old men rise and fall, until the air  
corrodes and spits, rearing to a wreak.

That ends the talk. Hands over mugs,  
they dash inside, from where they watch  
the hunchback open the gate and stop,  
out of breath. They wave him in, and he  
stomps in, wet. When the sun revives,  
"uncertain as a baby's bottom," they drift  
back out, reclaiming the bench under  
the pub's dim lights, while, unnoticed,  
the heavens wheel, spilling out signs,  
like ads for eternal life. "Time, gents."

They rise reluctant and wobble off.  
One tries to whistle "The Lark in the  
Clear Air." One does a little jig. The third  
breaks wind. "Music of the spheres," he says.  
Who says this is no country for old men?