

Dean Young

BIRD SANCTUARY

For a while we didn't know what to call it
but we were all after it so we had to call it something.
Seen Vladimir, we started asking in metal shop.
Vladimir, we'd say, watching the first snow.
Was it longing for something in our childhood
or was it the sense of the world made new
and ready for our ruin? If you were Achilles,
it was either sulking in your tent or
struggling with a strange river.
Vladimir, it turns out, is entirely
in the mind. Well, maybe.
A guy I used to shop-lift with
once made a model of the Eiffel Tower
out of sugar cubes but halfway through
he realized toothpicks
would be a more expressive medium.
The Vladimir was gone but when he finished
and got his B+ anyway, we put it out
in the rain and the Vladimir returned
as it dissolved. Wabi some Japanese poet
called it, wondering why Americans paint
their barns when it takes years of exposure
to get them to look so full of wabi.
At first there was an actual Vladimir
on space-station Mir watching ants trying
to behave in zero gravity but when
his nose clogged up, Igor replaced him.
Imagine sneezing inside a space helmet.
Theoretical scientists spend a lot of time
colliding things, trying to locate Vladimir
until half decide Vladimir doesn't exist
so there's a big feud about funding.

During the past, Vladimir was called
phlogiston and everyone and thing had it,
especially if you burst into silver flames.
Imagine being a tree made into a thousand
matchsticks. Once on a ferry going to Larkspur,
we stood in the spray watching fog paw through the city.
Even now, we love each other.

IF THOU DISLIK'ST WHAT THOU FIRST LIGHT'ST ON

I had come to the house, in a cave of trees,
I had dreamed of the perfect grey pants,
I have a life that did not become,
a young sister made of glass.
I have been here before,
I have done it again.
I like a church, I like a cowl,
I like the look of agony.
I love the old melodious lays,
I love to listen to you talk to the cat,
I love it when they demonstrate the oxygen masks,
never messing up their hair.
I met the Bishop on the road,
In a coign of the cliff between high and low,
In a dark time,
Among wolves and periwinkles,
In a station of the metro,
In Breughel's great painting, The Kermess.
Indeed I must confess,
Indigo, magenta, color of ghee,
what the hell is the color of ghee?
In June amid the golden fields,
what task Hermes assigns
we can not tell for here the papyrus rips.
In some unused lagoon, some nameless bay,
In spite of all the learned say,