

Discourse On Rods and Cones:
Elegy for a Pilot

“The absence of the dead is their way of appearing.”

—Simone de Beauvoir

Peripheral vision
works better at night, say the biophysicists,
who are right about this.
A few grains of light fall through
the retina’s dark hourglass
and we catch the shooting star
from the rod-dense corner
of an eye.

Lighting up the frontal cones
requires a thicker current. This is why
when we turn to look, full-face and in wonder,
there is only absence.
Absence and grief. And the black-and-white
memory of a light that could have been
a meteor, that could have been a small plane
aiming for the river.

—for E. W.

Sandra Steingraber 8/17/97