

PONDER FIRE

I wonder if phlogiston theorists
were lovers, if it began when they
were set off, like the brown grass

on the hills a little north of here.
It takes so little, a touch, to burn.
They had it right, sly Becher

and Stahl, the principle is fire.
Wood, coal, and lovers, and metal
too are rich in it, it's what's

expelled in a flame. And the stuff
left behind, spent ashes (and they
were right too in the slow burn

of rust) is emptied, lax, the head
of a long untuned drum. An inconstant
agent at the heart of this plausible

theory, sometimes free, sometimes
much combined with the base, antsy
to move out, but often held, dearly.

Its losing can banish weight, as you
coming on me, do. It can add stones,
the thought this consuming day will end.