

THE PAINTING OF WINGS

*The bird is an instrument functioning
according to mathematical laws,
and man has the power to reproduce
an instrument like this with all its movements.*

Leonardo da Vinci

I.

More like copious field notes than paintings,
Leonardo finishes few, and even those he considers
works in progress that stopped progressing,
like lava that spewed from a fiery vent,
then congealed into a cold parody of motion.
Regretfully, he recalls his half-fledged angel,
painted years before careful observation
and anatomical sketches of hawks and swifts
riding effortlessly on rivers of wind
revealed to him that flight is achieved
by force of air, not physical strength.
Weighed down by short muscular wings
that jutted from his scapula, the angel
would have been forced to deliver
the annunciation message on foot,
trudging across a landscape, lovely yet awry,
to kneel at last before the Virgin who reads
from an out-of-perspective Bible. All wrong.