

POEMS BY NEIL ELLMAN

Homage to Eugene Ionesco

Non-sequitous sequitur
manifestations
of the absurd
 a bald soprano
 not yet bald
 not yet realized
 not yet the yet of anything
 we have become
 rhinoceri
 an evolutionary
 joke
“a rhinoceros walks into a bar
and asks for a rum and coke”
 (you know the rest: the
 soprano isn't bald
 not even a soprano
 and the rhinoceros
 was us)

such is the tragedy of hair—
the comedy
 of a one-horned beast
 once us.

Indian Territory

(after the painting by Kenneth Noland)

Black Elk says,
“Everything tries to be round.”

The earth is round
but do blades of grass?

The sun is round
but does the face of a wolf?

And so the moon
even with its waxen face

“If time is round,” he asks,
“then why are the dead still dead?”

On a Riderless Mount

I dreamed of a naked odalisque
on a ruby-colored horse
between her thighs

I am a dreamer
I am a horse
I, bit by swollen bit
between her legs

I dream of a riderless horse
caressing wind
touching the skin of air

I dream
I kiss
I, a riderless mount
feel her waiting breath.

Mad Rush

I'm in a rush in a rush
can't wait
on roller skates
going fast very fast
whizzing past
in a rush I'm late
I'm a blur in a rush
can't stop I'm flushed
nonplussed
can't wait won't stop
in a rush for a date
can't be late
don't know where to go
where I've been
why I am
what's the rush
I'm in.

In the Vastness of Sorrowful Thoughts

(after the painting by Hans Hofmann)

in moments
of sorrowful thought

its vastness
circumscribes a single word

the color of regret
shift red
in finite solitude

how vast the wounds
of hate and loss

as I was nailed
upon your breasts

where I had loved
as you had loved me once.

September Song

A dime for your thoughts
old man

victory sweeter than the salt
that collects on your tongue

teeth:

he smiled
she thought again

victory is the rhetoric of someone else

he shrugged
she quivered to the other side of the room
taking note of his indifference
indifferently

in his mouth
in hers
they came upon a common sound

only words
not the taste she craved

and then

so much for platitudes

hers a victory of sorts
his defeat.

Adam

(after the painting by Barnett
Newman)

To the mouth of time
drifting down a river
in an endless course

in a dream
no paradise
without a sun
no shores
nothing as a guide

with compass points
always south
southward bending
still suckling earth

and so the river runs
carries me
past guardian forts
of empty parapets
in flame

and so I flow
into a roiling sea.

The Big 4

(after the Painting by Robert Motherwell)

1

The shape of 4 a claw
the sound of it a fist

2

after winter thaws
April, the angry month,
awakens the blood of spring

3

in elemental fire
the seasons fade—
we are the riders
of the apocalypse

4

such noble truths
so many hollow words
just one remains
a 4.