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From the Private Zoo

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From THE PRIVATE ZOO

RATTLER

The burden of the snake is more than moon
more than the weight of myth
heavier than curse but the snake moves
in the shine of fear.

Horses of the mind rear back
from the whip bright in the dark.
The lash of moonlight falls in an s
of silver and rattle.

It is the lure to death white enemy
in the night brightly thrust
against me who watch foreknowing
the curve of death in the dust.

RHINOCEROS AND HIPPO

What horn makes the difference?
What rolling eye regards the whole?

Rumpwise they look the same,
allowance made for life in pool, on plain.
Their legs are trees, bodies are mountainous
and crusted, bearing birds. Continents
of animal they rise like Africa to tablelands.
Landmass and fundamentals of beast their movings turn
as the earth floats on ocean in a measure of stars
counted but capable of sudden and furious cataclysm.

What surge of hate impales the world on tusk?
He puts his faith in armaments and goes about
armed to the nose which sniffs suspiciously
the alien elements beyond the reach of thought.

What gentleness assumes the world is gentle?
Because his eye is big, he sees much more
and thinks about it first but knows avoirdupois
has an authority that he can use at times.

Only an ark, a ship as lumbering as they,
can carry rhinoceros and hippopotamus as ballast.
Only a patriarch can use their weight to purpose.
At Ararat with weary hope Noah
with no admonition to good behavior
sends them down the gangplank on their way
knowing their analogies are girth, tonnage, and stance,
and among the virtues size has its own chance.

What curling lip savors the salt of quiet?
What tooth rips the vein in anger?

DONALD WEEKS

FRIDAY, LAST LECTURE

We have tried to sum up the various forces at work
In the period after the peace, the epoch of anger.
We have seen pacts formed, and pacts that were not subscribed;
Statesmen succumbing to an ethical languor,
And amateurs who stood at one side and jibed;
And, at first in the background, the figure with the bludgeon,
The helmeted man who carried the helpful dirk,
The small ambitious who muffled himself in dudgeon,
And the silent person whom conscience did not irk.

From our vantage point of knowing how all ended
We have viewed the gestures that faith and charity made
With detachment suited to the clearer vision
That comes from looking on a naked blade;
And we have felt justified in our derision,
Seeing what troubles followed, seeing that storm
Arose in a quarter where the sun descended
Behind clouds even then beginning to form.
We of some shrewdness would have known what wind impended.

It remains, then, to formulate the laws
By which the subject of study shall own our science.
No more, now that the truth is discerned,
Are we to be troubled by that stubborn defiance
The world displayed the day before we learned.