

Rhinoceros

Ants and birds trace patterns in the dirt, but
these creatures,
Armageddon in their shoulders, slip out of sight,
Sun at the meridian, and we are afraid to move
During the interregnum of the afternoon
Lest we encounter their colossal shadows,
Centres of gravity that flatten the grass
And range with unimaginable violence
Over the countryside we have rashly entered.

It is a landscape from which men are absent,
But not because they have migrated to the towns.
The stumps and trunks of trees clutter our path, and
in the odd clearing
Evidence remains of human habitation,
Thatching grass and roof-poles not altogether
destroyed by fire.
In these villages they paused and then disappeared,
Swept up like shadows in the aftermath of the sun.

We do not mind where we go, provided we do not
meet them,
The missing people who occupied this savannah.
Trespassing in their pillaged territory
We might find the rhinoceros, we might hear him
Stamping the earth to tears.

HAROLD FARMER