

BPJ

BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL VOL. 55 N°1 AND 2
FALL/WINTER 2004/2005

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The Rhinoceros

I rode to the Zoological Society, & by the greatest piece of good fortune it was the first time this year, that the Rhinoceros was turned out.

—Charles Darwin, letter to Susan Darwin

An avalanche might begin like this
with leaves for ears sprung
from pavement

and a twig for a tail. No tufts, bald
as a hammer, a pewtered
room

sucking breath over windowsills,
with platters for kneepads.
Almost

bovine, an element of winter, the flame
of its heart burning steadily
in a windless

place. Trotted out like some distant shore
of unspeakable curiosity
for unbelievers

to believe in. Never hiding its gaze
in the arm of some recurring
doubt

but wreathed in certainty, an empire
of one nibbling the grass.