

## EIGHT POEMS BY NEIL ELLMAN

### **Bird of the Spirit**

*(after the painting by Morris Graves)*

Bird of the spirit carry me home  
to the place where I was born  
in the darkness that preceded the light  
and I was no more than a passing thought.

Fold me in your wings  
and bring me back to that other time  
when time itself stood motionless  
and the universe awaited a word.

Let me be with you in that soundless void  
too much in touch with death  
so far removed from life  
where we can be as one

where I can wander as a spirit  
and you a bird  
each without direction  
but knowing how the journey ends.

## **Endless Muse**

She, my endless muse,  
can give too much of herself  
then empties of her words  
and dies, like me, for poetry.

The mother of my verse  
she swaddles me with metaphors  
of wine-dark seas and butterflies  
and fills my mind with her conceits.

I cannot breathe  
or write without her aid  
my words no longer mine  
I write what she has given me.

I die in her embrace  
my powers gone  
defeated by her need  
for me to emulate her every word.

## **Bird Effort**

*(after the painting by Jackson Pollock)*

If a butterfly  
can snap its wings and make the skies  
grow dark across the sea

it takes no more  
than the effort of a hummingbird  
to nudge the earth  
from its endless course

imaginne, then, what men can do  
with their shoulders  
to lthe wheel  
and minds directed to the sky.

## **I, Poet**

I write poetry  
people say  
they can see it in my eyes

the way I walk  
determined  
one foot at a time

looking down  
for metaphors  
and pennies on the street

in my dress  
each article chosen  
to complement the rest

I wish that they  
would read it in  
my words as well.

## Ekphrasis

The poet knows  
when words are right  
how they burn  
onto a page  
their shape and hue  
between the lines  
and fields of white  
without a word.

The artist knows  
when shapes  
make sound  
how the noise of red  
and splashes of blue  
speak words  
that cannot be said  
without a brush.

## Fixing the Big Bang

I cannot fix it  
there are no tools  
no wrenches, pulleys  
or counterpoints

the universe is falling apart  
star by star  
galaxy by galaxy  
from its start

expanding, accelerating  
far too fast  
too immeasurable  
for the reach of a hand

to bring it back  
where its belongs  
in the sky we know  
in the ageless symmetry

of now  
and forever  
that never was  
and never will be again.

## **Dying Plants**

*(after the watercolor by Paul Klee)*

Too soon they shed their bloom  
wither and die after a season in the sun  
bowing to its promise  
of still another year to live.

Not for any sin  
committed or omitted  
they die for the simple fact  
of having lived

their sacrifice  
to the gods of wind and rain  
without compensation for their death  
but the taste of bitter earth.

## **Bad Times**

*(after the painting by Philip Guston)*

What difference does it make  
good times or bad?

Heaven or Hell  
you're just as dead.

Hours drag on much the same  
a blur of slaughtered sheep

empty bottles of gin  
and smoke-filled eyes

we count the days by X's scrawled  
on a calendar and wall.

It is Sunday, we think,  
when buzzards soar above our heads

and cast their shadows  
in our thoughts.

It is raining, we think,  
we'll never leave this bed.

What a time this is  
in the best days of our lives.