

Her Many Occupations

—All these years I've been writing novels, I've felt like an elephant trainer.

—Why an elephant?

—The ideas just sit there, heavy and still, and you have to make them work.

—And why is that like training an elephant?

—An elephant isn't exactly pliable.

—How does it feel when you write other things?

—After writing novels, writing anything else makes me feel like I'm running a flea circus.

—So you prefer elephants to fleas?

—I didn't say that.

—Well, do you?

—Both is dangerous work.

—Why dangerous?

—Because poems and stories are invisible and novels so formidable.

—So why not just quit writing?

—I couldn't do that. I'd have no purpose.

—But writing sounds like it makes you so unhappy, so put-upon.

—I didn't mean to suggest that. I was just trying out metaphors for this new piece.

—What is this new writing?

—An essay.

—And what animal handling is essay-writing comparable to?

—It's like arranging flowers for a still-life.

—Flowers aren't animals.

—That's true.