

## Orans

Perhaps this Earth,  
that blue marble shrouded in uniformity,  
was once a simpler thing,  
just as tolerance was once a sentence to labour,  
a granite rock to be broken,  
and understanding a matter of dividing the foreign  
by the lowest common denominator (with no remainder),  
as two is split by one.

Those outspread hands in the catacombs  
once praying for peace now plead for their lives,  
while the beaked dove,  
that old symbol-bearer,  
flaps about with something  
green in its mouth.

They pile up, these reductions  
of dove and branch, poppy and crane,  
like packets awaiting content.

Must everything be drawn and quartered,  
abstracted, reduced,  
the fine bones of a Milanese pigeon  
now a poster-sized Picasso,  
broiled down to a  
black line on a white page?

From outer space  
we turn to face the other,  
like a gun on its turret,  
groaning and grinding —  
is it any wonder they flinch  
and raise their hands?

We face them as if open to their gaze,  
but we cannot see them.  
They are obscured by clouds,  
by depressions in the ground.

Come! We will descend together,  
not as a flock or a squadron,  
not as some collective noun  
on some unholy mission,  
but as verbs, those doing words,  
conjugated in the imperative.

I see their skin is not like mine —  
I am waxed and plucked, steamed clean,  
a free-range chicken,  
while they are dimly lit, ashen even.

From far away  
every ocean is calm,  
continents stand united —  
there are capitals and generalisations,  
while here in the lower case  
all are particular, moody, historical  
and wholly unavoidable.