

# Still Life with War

Richard Collins

*“Do you see the way that [horizontal shadow]  
eats into the figure, like a disease?”*

— Francis Bacon

All those Renaissance skulls and rotten apples  
Don't fool me. Death and decay, disintegration,  
Are ripenings, food for thought, every day.

We now live in the autumn of autumns,  
Late in the day, when the old tribes find it  
Easy again to justify anything, even

Genocide, as though it were the mere  
Drowning of superfluous kittens.  
Every generation, it seems, loves its genocide.

The world in its thirst for meaning reifies  
Identity (nation race gender religion),  
Even though each of us is a melting, even though

We are a blur to ourselves, even as we open wide  
Our bleeding mouths to scream. Because even  
The victorious can claim to be victims

So long as they scream louder than  
Their victims. Like a bowl of fruit on a table,  
Mute, consumable, to be eaten with humility,

Like sins, immaterial, invisible  
To the microscope of our finer emotions,  
Its moral lens cloudy as a cataract. A quantum

Take on what is ever amoral. Let's face it:  
Our shadows stalk us. So don't tell me about  
Perspective. Don't tell me about two sides

To every story. We may not like to kill,

But it's what we all believe in  
More than life, still.