

THE SLAUGHTER OF ELEPHANTS

*Consider what you will find
in the black garden*

— W. S. Merwin

There is one truth

It is the used warm breath
flowing in storms from the long delicate nose
flowing from the small mouth without a word

It is also a cry
half trumpet half crude scream
half child who wants to be man
that we have grown to call music or impotence
and that is neither

Truth is not a part of language

It is not a part of the jeweled ivory tusks
flowered from the head ready to be picked
as if the skull is a mindless garden of roots

The poacher will tell you
he has taught his victim
the word for money for sacrifice
he will tell you the animal
went down on two knees
to articulate its weakness
he will tell you the bullet
obliterated the huge body
created an inner explosion
that resulted first in heart failure
and then in the merciful
burning of each scrap of breath
leaving the earth as it is

he will tell you
the sound the animal made
after the explosion
was an attempt at sound
an exceptional failure

(The Comanche
spoke to the buffalo
after they killed it
saying *please*
we too are dying
look through to our hunger
and our nakedness with your eyes
saying there is an actual world
in which death remains to feed on us)

There is one truth
anything is meant to be saved
flat earth
generations of the dead or dying
the elephant
smaller than a mountain
there is one truth
if they all disappear
ton by ton
the end of the world
which they would say has arrived
would be no occasion
for their huge spirit to rise
and profusely bless and bless