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Telling Life from Art

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Telling Life from Art

I remember watching television,
a huge pillow in my lap
while I punched it in a fury
each time the villain
in a cowboy movie
snuck up behind the hero.
People should face each other
if they wanted to fight,
I thought when I was seven.

My mother would rush into the room,
out of patience with the pummeling
that crashed out of me;
she would calm me, for a moment,
by saying it was only a movie,
only happening to someone
who wasn't real.
But I knew better.

I have learned to hide my snarls,
the bites I used to give
with watch-dog ferocity
to that ragged sack of feathers
my mother kept for me to tear apart
in tantrums of justice outraged.

I watch more quietly now,
while newscasters catalogue
the daily horrors of children abducted,
bodies found mutilated,
policemen firebombed
for praying in the wrong churches,
villages smashed to rubble
because they call their churches mosques
or synagogues or churches.

After a while I turn the station
or switch off the set
and shake my head;
if I let myself I could shake it right off,
but I have learned my mother's lesson
all too well, perhaps,
and tell myself it is happening
to other people
and is therefore only a movie,
not the terrible, the real thing.