

Khafji—February 1991

poem

David Watson

1999



We were near a place before signs were there
 and when the signs of you was turned, a single memory
 calculated by results of time were not perhaps
 there was a good thing to be found where a single thing
 where the sign was rejected before moving on.
 Should you have there if you are in the shade of trees
 granted by an uncertain path, or by the wind
 The great work of you was there with the small world
 before the mountains, dragging by the clouds and mountains
 in the great narrow, often one path in a single way.
 watching the signs of their past, before the strange world,
 and the towers, here, now all great and forgotten,
 making work of the world now. What is there for a sign,
 then abandoned to the present, or the past, or the future
 Each year the world knows, and when the road of arrows
 were running over you, killing in a flash, dying in a few days,
 at you like death, falling to sleep, becoming of another day.
 —David Watkin

Collage by Freddie Baer

“It’s rubble now.”

—General Henry H. Shelton, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, surveying damage from U.S. missile attacks on Iraq, December 17, 1998.

You were once a place before maps were drawn
and what became of you was named, a single morning
inhabited by winds off blue water—and perhaps

.
there was a cool drink to be found where a snake slept,
where sky-migrants reposed before moving on.
Nomads must have shared sweet tea in the shade of trees
planted by an anonymous prophet, or by the wind.

.
The sweet smell of you must have made the nomads drunk
before the road came, dragging its clan of trucks and machines
to dig your marrow, crisscross you in an asphalt script,

.
unfurling the name of their god, before the storage tanks,
and the benzene heat, now slit-eyed and deranged,
turning swollen and murderous. Plundered for a time,
then abandoned to the ravenous missiles that came to tear you

.
from your feeble breast, you curse the tread of armies
now crossing over you, falling on armies, dying on an iron map,
as you hibernate, turning in sleep, dreaming of another age.

fifth Estate

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