

# This Is Cactus Land

by Sam Rasnake

*We are children of our age,  
it's a political age.*

—*Wisława Szymborska, "Children of Our Age"*

There's a wind that won't quit.  
Sand, given time, levels everything.  
Something slips away from us  
in the night.

Smoke in Rumaila.  
Fedayeen. Madina. Screaming Eagle.  
Fox News: Are you apprehensive  
Are you apprehensive  
Are you apprehensive  
Are you  
You

A British body here, American there,  
Iraqi, Iraqi Iraqi...

Meanwhile, the professor studies  
Jewish law, looks out his window  
across the Seine, thinking  
of a German fable in the line  
from Goethe: "I cannot,  
I cannot regain my balance" —  
making all connections.

Silence is the great and lonely enterprise.



Soundbites. Telewriter. The press  
directs the war. And the general,  
seasoned in linguistics and  
his Pocket Aristotle, explains  
the difference between  
tactical and operational.

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Under sand, the war head looms  
in tie and western suit.

There is no school today.  
There's no building today.  
No child.



Alert: Orange. And oil for food.

Next.

"War in Iraq  
And no one gets us closer than CNN  
Stay informed"

We love the soundtrack.  
The commercial for trucks,  
fat burners, and Footlocker,  
that's our favorite.  
A chance for the refrigerator run.



Kane, his feet on the desk, his shirt,  
showing the day at cuff and collar,  
presses clanking behind him, says,  
"You provide the prose poems.  
I'll provide the war.

No question about the outcome.  
We're gonna get 'em."



And lemurs, steady in deep foliage,  
eyes to the one trail,  
wait for darkness on their limb.

This is the way the world ends—:  
Not a bang, no whimper,  
but with a streaming ticker  
at the bottom of our screens,  
telling us who we are.

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