

# Bamiyan

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*Afghanistan's ruling Taliban said Saturday it has blown up most of the massive, ancient Buddhas at Bamiyan, despite worldwide pleas to spare them.... Taliban Information Minister Quadratullah Jamal ["Power-of-Allah, Handsome"] said Saturday that the fundamentalist movement's troops used rockets and mortars to destroy the head and legs of the sandstone statues, which are carved into the side of a cliff in central Afghanistan. "Our soldiers are working hard to demolish their remaining parts. They will come down soon," said Information Minister Quadratullah Jamal.... "They were easy to break apart and did not take much time."*

*—CNN, March 3, 2001*

## **Light of Asia**

We still have him, in the plains, on an early lintel,  
as an absence at the center of each story:  
a flower, footprints, a wheel between kneeling deer.

But his words grew difficult to see.  
It was hard to hear his hands. And so they began

to define and carve the balanced postures  
and proportions of his princely torso:

the head with its raised crown, the long-lobed ears,  
soft half-lidded eyes, half-smile, the dexterous  
gestures of compassion,

blessing, protection, absence.

**Al Hafiz (The All-Preserver)**

*March 2001*

Long ago  
their legs were bludgeoned,  
arms broken to stumps, hands  
shattered and mortared into walls,  
their faces hacked off by some avid brief commander  
named "Sword of Faith" or "Servant of the Avenger"  
who lacked not zeal but ordnance.

But now it's done.  
The idols are broken and cast down.  
In the name of Allah, the Merciful, The Compassionate,  
the All-Preserver, His servants  
have put out of his misery  
each amputee in his niche.  
Each torso blasted to dustlight.  
The faithful may pass undistracted.  
And suddenly the vanished trunks and limbs  
fill every screen, and the world  
turns its great light on the valley.

Their image falls across me like a blade, and there lies  
everything your hands said.



**From the Niche of the Great Buddha,  
Overlooking the Valley**

*January 1972*

Fields bare of wheat and barley,  
of melon, apricot, almonds.  
Snow, glint of river, lines  
of poplar, the sound of one boy's hand  
tapping a wheel-rim.



## **The Expression on the Cliff's Face**

First incandescence,  
then a wish, and distance.

A light that time cannot displace:  
his hands, then a blush and incense.

When you have lost what God cannot replace  
lay waste, in your wake only ash and vengeance.

A niche. That light. His kiss.  
Everything since has been cash and nonsense.

To see, dissolve his face.  
Bring despair to the task, and ordnance.

**Tora Bora (Black Dust)**

*December 2001*

From where I sit now it is hard to see.  
There are the years like a veil,  
like snow across a television screen.

Like this journalist on my television screen  
speaking, in snow, from a valley, you still  
block my view of our valley, a torso  
between the light and me, a colossus.

In fact there is no longer that view of our valley.  
Only a blank niche, and elsewhere,  
in another province and a different valley,  
a camera trained on armed men  
moving uphill, in snow.

