

Fires

Yesterday for the first time mist hazed the hills
but no, Rob said, it was California burning.
I wouldn't have known. From a thousand miles,
hoarse forest-eaters were breathing
blackmail on three States so hills were sour,
shrunk not veiled as if cowering for once.
Eyes ached at them. Thumps crumpled—
the military base spoke up for the baffled sun.

Back home last year, singed air overloaded dropped
from Russia. Earth spoiled; new fears grew.
Today though a river following our road like a dolphin
dived past poles shouldering telegraph wire
and small towns flag us down, streets broad as open hands.
The parks have pioneer relics, a grindstone, hoisted bell.
On a grass square, ranked streets at Payson wear
the flag's colors, paths slip a world in edgewise.
Trees spurt sun. Between *For Sale* signs
old as prayers and the highway murmuring Go,
what survives seems so entire of itself it could
last forever. Called to, the mind starts drawling.

Haze lasts too. From the edge of things
keeps coming in. With the first crackle of autumn rubbing
green edges red, bushes along the road are ghosts.

—John Davies