

Classic Poetry Series

Rafey Habib
- poems -

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Rafey Habib(-)

M. A. R. Habib (Rafey Habib) is an Indian-born Muslim poet and scholar of literature who has also written numerous books of literary criticism. He was born in India, grew up in England and now lives in America.

He is a scholar in the areas of literary criticism, theory and philosophy. He is a Professor of English and the author of seven books, including three histories of literary criticism, a study of T.S. Eliot's philosophical background, and two translations of Urdu poetry. His own volume of poetry, *Shades of Islam: Poems for a New Century*, appeared in September 2010. His latest book, *Literary Criticism: From Plato to the Present: An Introduction*, was published in 2011.

His interests also extend to Islamic philosophy and literature, as well as postcolonial studies. He believes that it is a matter of some urgency to foster an improved mutual understanding between the Islamic world and Western cultures. He has given numerous talks on various aspects of Islam, such as *Islam and Democracy*, and is currently working with colleagues at Rutgers University to establish a cultural diversity of courses, including Islamic literature in English translation.

A Poem For Neda (Elections In Iran)

Neda.

Sweet voice,
Of freedom, unborn.

Your state totters.
A colour revolution.

Green, for life,
Of reason, faith;
Red for blood,
The price you paid.

And you have betrayed
Your colour, you
Whose voices rise
Above your people
Who cast your black sky
Over all voices;
Who hide behind
Arms and words;
Who cringe
Behind your flag.

Tears will find you out.

And you too, betray
Your colour, you who
Watch from afar,
In fear, who flirt
With freedom's name;
Who smile unshamed
As tyrants old or new
Play your cards for you.

Tears will blind your smiles.

You who love
Your daughters, sons,

Let the green of earth be
Your colour:
Let your love give birth
To the Islam which your poets dreamed.

Let your voice, which sang
Before, of golden Persia,
In Sa'adi, Hafez, Rumi,
Now return, to sing
Our future.

Let your sweet voice
Sing from the cold earth
Of sweet democracy
Buried in its birth.
Dreaming to be
Born.

Rafey Habib

An Autumn Garden

Fall is nowhere
More beautiful than here: green leaves
Tipped with red; rich orange divesting
Into yellow; green lawns strewn
With red and gold; the air still,
And the breezes quiet through the high trees
Against a calming sky of rare blue.

And your garden reclines in a beauty of its own:
Your eyes, no longer young, have seen sorrow;
Your mouth, no longer kissed so passionately,
Is sweet in its aching; your cheek is still soft, still burns
With love, still yearns
For something more.

And when will Autumn come to me,
Bringing its mists and its cold breath;
When will I be free
Of wanting you, and waiting
And waiting
For death.

Rafey Habib

Cloud

Who, through the deep cloud
Commands, in
Infinite Lordship;
Brooding
Breathing, behind the black tops of
Trees encolumned along the mountain height
Cascading into depth of valley,
Falling into forest, unfolding
Wealth of dazzling green, its richness
Sung by a sea of white-blue cloud.
Who, beyond the drifting shapes that sail the sky,
Beyond the finitude of Forms,
Are You?

Rafey Habib

Everest

Brooding.

Like a lonely god,
Too high for the world, reaching
Into the cloudless beyond.
Frozen in your own eternity, beyond
Mere heroism.

Sublime.

Human Reason – mantled in thought's long past –
Crouches against such height, old in its endeavour.

I can face you not in your whiteness which blinds the sunrise;
Nor in the harsh cold murmuring on your slopes;
Only through the dimming mediation of machines:
The mighty aircraft that bears me above your clouds;
The camera through which I capture you, holding you
Prisoner in my imagination, a trophy commemorating a false triumph,
A feeble regent of actuality, manipulable, reproducing you without shame
Disseminating you at my pleasure: god, man, hero.

In awe.

I stand, as you rise above night, black cloud
Sustained against your silver peak

Rafey Habib

Forest

On this
Inward shrine, I shall build
My peace.
No outward realm can tempt
My longing.
Against the sky, my will is
Frozen, in purity of Night:
No shadow of shame can touch me,
No joy can disharmonise
My elements of prison

Forest of light,
Beneath your glinting willows
I have lain, blind
To the sky's dazzling sermon;
At your edges I have heard
The crystal sea, whispering
Its remote call.

Rafey Habib

Freud's Dora

The high-handed man, solicitous
Untamed your demons; what passion
Seethed within you to be kissed again,
To be insulted, and restored,
Adored.

But now – your maidenhead intact –
You have only dreams, and no decipherer;
Only dreams to tell what might have been;
What young man, waiting across the seas
Would sail to claim your hand.

How I shall weep for you, gone as you are
Into a lonely death, like millions,
Without love, without love, without love.

Rafey Habib

Friends (Advice To My Children)

Few things will hurt you more
Than the envy of old friends.
Sometimes, their silence will reach you
Across vast oceans. You will hear it, weighing
In your own voice, asking why: why
Is there time for all the distractions the world delivers
But not for a word of concern.

Sometimes their very praise will
Hurt: "You must have been practising," or
"You are definitely better than before," as if you needed pity;
Any success will hurt them, deeply:
They will not forgive you easily:
They will need to pity.

They will need to speak.

Sometimes their anger will brood for years:
A joke or insult long forgotten - you thought -
Will return in deep disguise
As a snub, a lack of mention, a deliberate
Stalling of affection, a dinner party without
You, a vote placed
Elsewhere.

And if you should ever have a friend
Who outshines you:
Do not damn yourself
With faint praise of her.
Let her shining warm your heart
And bring smiling to your deepest self.
Do not begrudge her the tiny dazzling
In which she danced;
Share that moment, let it live in you both,
Before it dies forever
In the ordinariness which drowns us all.

Rafey Habib

Garment

And You, it seems, are not there:
A paler objectivity beckons,
A colder glance, a more distant
Pattern;
A dream of provisionality, to
Lull the terror of the object.

Not the first frenzied rush
Into the world's lap, the
Mistressing of otherness, the cold
Greek glare
Through fancy's yielding columns.

Not the implemental urge
Desecrating thinghood,
Sacrificing the world's inviolability
In fires lit against the sky:
Wonder damned by human need.

Not the indifference
Of the inward gaze, enduring
A subject's paralysis, betraying
To the outermost realm
A foreign lamp, flickering
On a golden edge.

Not earth as arena
Of warring gods, stale
To depose another's conquest,
Covetous of space and place, to
Still the world's face.

Not heaven as reward, sublimation
Of losses craving redemption, greed
For height, baptised as
Abstinence: cold steel in the promising sun
Of a remote shrine.

An older harmony, fainter

Rhythm, seep
From the old, old womb:
Bold road, lined with crucifixions,
Tears of flame, infolding the last
Garment before God.

Rafey Habib

Hedda Gabler

And who will wait for you, high lady
Who will wait for you?
Rich in your high feather and black dress
And rich in your taste for death?

Will history wait for you
Whose life was gone before its birth?
For you whose mansions and portraits
Stare from a past which will not waken?

Who will love you, Hedda Gabler,
Amid your pianos and tables and revolvers;
Amid ancient ceremony, the frenzy of Dionysiac
Memory, a world of high courage, reverie and passion.
What man now can ever hold your hand?

And who will weep for you, high lady
When the dust has buried your world;
And whatever breathes in bourgeois life
Is stained with dullness, bereft of your beauty;
Your heroes are gone:
No vine-leaved head to kiss your red red mouth.

Rafey Habib

Hijrah

A journey, broken
By night and thought
Of warring gods;
desert rock and sand conspired
To feed a vision inflamed
Beyond enchainment;
In a lonely cave, past and future
Kissed with light an old language;
An ancient heritage burned silently its tongue
In a place where shadows danced out Truth;
Dimensions froze in a poetry of wilderness,
Silent, yet meant for human ears.
His eyes upon the horizon
Of a darkened plain;
Eyes upon the horizon:
Wherever he turned, the desert night
Was spread with an archangel's wings.

A prophetic gaze followed them, now
Who go, whose suffering has exhausted fear, whose steps
Are led by heavy memories:
tortured parents, murdered brethren, whose
Faith humbles the Unknown:
Pitiful their baggage, and lost in their
Knowing, yet attuned somehow
To a sanctity beyond the call of sense
And the politics of living.
Mothers, whose purity burns again;
Children, whose innocence
Impoverishes the promise of the world:
Pioneering a stillness
Fathered by and beyond Word.

Journeying toward the Other, yet
Breathing the dust of this-worldly time: treaties,
Marriages, songs, rites and feuds;
Blemished echoes of the Transcendent Voice;
Stepping onto the plains of Ohad
The old and new warred in his heart;

In mail and helmet, a warrior stared
Across the battlefield between
Two natures.

Rafey Habib

Hira

Enshrouded in the high mantle of night.
The darkness of idols, greed in business,
Abuse of orphans, widows, women.
Here, from the mountain, I see the darkness
That enfolds the world. Yet now
Another darkness descends on me,
A beating of wings, shuddering, as if
Beating in my own breath, heart, soul:
Shadow everywhere, shadows, all shadow.
What moment is this, opening into
The very soul of time, what mode of time
Unfolding the very breath of
Eternity. God. Worlds above, worlds
Upon worlds. What weight of universe
Descends upon me, spreading through me,
Breathing into my lips, through my language
A voice from so high yet so deep within
Shuddering in Angel breath: O vision
At the edge of vision, wherever I turn
The dark horizon is lit with the form of Angel,
Forcing me, wherever I turn, he stands,
Confronts, blinding, colossal, power of light
Burning before me yet deep within:
Archangel.

All the forces of mountain and desert
Cry into my heart; the black sky
Thunders in my throat:
All the sources of life, all sense, all
Power of reason, of beauty, the sublime
Freeze in this moment, in this cave,
All resources of language, lips, eyes, hands
Flow and freeze in this one command:
Read! Echoing inside me, pounding,
Read! My own voice. I hear
Myself, from deep within:
I cannot, I cannot read.
Again the echo, pressing louder, harder:
Read! The word, the world, bites

In my head, my frame shivering yet
Numb: I cannot read. Read!
And now, I know the power, know
The hour is too great: What shall I read?
Read in the Name of Thy Lord...
My being is cleft as dread
Spreads through this human form:
It is both Night and Day, the desert
Horizon rises to sky, all heaven
Burning over every grain of sand.
And here I stand, man
Transformed, yearning,
Shivering, breathless, touched
In spirit, breathing a word
The Word.

[Hira: The Prophet's First Revelation in the Cave of Hira on the Mountain of Nur]

Rafey Habib

Hymn

Glorious are You, in Your
Aloneness, your
Pale eternal splendour
Beckons, in whose
Depthless light my shadow
Burns
Hold me in Your moving stillness
Let my night pass in
Your day

Sublime are you, whose
Beauty burns in all Being
Exalting all substance
Through the far corners,
Who breathed Your light
First on the face of formlessness, and last
On the forms of Human Reason.

Serene are you, in Your
Otherness, your
Yearning depth embraces me
Your knowing pales before itself
Enthroned in realmlessness
Your wisdom's endless sea
Is adrift in my tears

Absolute are You in Your purity:
The pavilions of Night wear your perfect Form
From East and West Your lanterns rise
Light upon light

World upon world are You, Knower
Of destiny, harbinger
Of Time's still path
Who finds me bowed
In the rhythms of fate
Your splendour, it is in both worlds
Your light, it fills the far corners of Being:

Here, all is You; there, all is You.

Rafey Habib

Light: A Passage From The Qur'an

God is the Light
Of the Heavens and of the Earth;
His Light is a parable, of
A Lamp within a niche; without the lamp, a glass
Haloed as a brilliant star, lit
From an olive tree, blessed;
Whose soil is neither East nor West;
Its very oil would shine forth
Though untouched by fire:
Light upon Light.
God raises to His Light whom He will;
He engenders parables for men, He
Whose knowing is beyond horizon.

His Light abides in houses, sanctified
For the adoration of His Name. There
Is He glorified, morning and evening
By those whom trade nor profit can
Divert from remembrance of their God
Or from steadfastness in charity and prayer;
Whose sole fear is for the Day
When heart and vision awake
In a new world
Where God rewards their deeds
Giving ever more from His Grace
For God furnishes measurelessly
Those whom He will.

But behold the unbelievers:
Their deeds are like a mirage
In the burning desert: the parched man's eyes see
Water in the distance; approaching, he finds
Nothing;
Beside him, he finds God, before Whom
He must answer: God,
Whose reckoning is swift.

Or, like darkness on a fathomless sea,
Wave over wave, overcast by cloud:

Darkness upon darkness;
If a man stretch out his hand,
He can scarce see it.
For those deprived of God's Light
There is no Light.

— Holy Qur'an XXIV. 35-40.

[Translated by M.A.R. Habib]

Rafey Habib

Mosque

Here, within your white, white walls
I can stand
Alone with You, the Alone;
Away from the whispers of the world
That bleed in my own heart;
Away from fleeting and fancy,
From the torment that thirsts
In my own soul.

I have felt you, near the rivers of my heart,
As if on the verge of a great promising.
I have sought you, bitterly, in broken lives
Of people twisted over by the world's disasters;
I have not heard your voice, even faintly,
In the loud ramblings of imams who explain
Your justice as if it were a trite thing.
I know you are not trite or easy:
The path to you is always long;
I know I am never fit for your presence,
I am forever beneath your language,
I am unworthy of your paradise;
I am not fit to fall before you.
But when
O when will you hear
The voices raised of those
Who have erased their lives in your service,
As if on the verge of an eternal reckoning;
Who have killed their ambition
Brought their lust to kneel
Who have murdered their passion
In the coldest of blood-feuds.
When will you hear the cry of
Those who have died for you?

Rafey Habib

Mother

One day you will not be there, sitting
on your armchair, cutting coriander, as I sit
On the sofa with my laptop, typing
and not talking. One day I will need you
to forgive my silences and inattention,
To be there to make tea for, to massage your
Swollen leg, to run to pick up your phone.

I am sorry for all my absences, all the times
I should have been there, when you were
In pain, or returned from hospital, or needed
Groceries. Caught up in the cares of
World and career, e-mails and promotions and
Bank statements. Do not let your absence
Fall upon mine just yet: let me let you
See what you have been to me, what you are

And always will be.

Rafey Habib

Old Flame

Beautiful, O woman not mine, you
Awake in me that old passion, the demon
I thought, with Plato, lay dormant, mimicking
Death; you cannot know how many years
Of memory you bring to live again in me; but
It is all vain; there is no purpose now; the god of love
Has fled, left us, abandoned in our selfishness;
There are no more lonely haunts, romantic spots
Where we – you and I – could share each other, no
Caves or inlets or islands beyond the reach of crazed capital
Suffusing its poisonous vapour over the fields of
The possible; all before us is desert;
The rule of fear and perpetual war to prolong
The work of power, of greedy hands, who have reached
Into our very hearts and attuned all passion to practical things,
Scorching the soul's own terrain within the general conflagration
Of self-interest; I cannot love you, for I too am mechanism, who can barely
Feel my own existence; barely rise from the torpor of self-deceit:
My steel heart will not care for itself:
How could it care
For a fragile thing like you?

Rafey Habib

Return

The moon turned over Hindustan,
A foreigner wept:
"Consider, Lady Moon, with a queen's sobriety
The poet, stood on this untilled soil
Watching your wilful promise
Steal across the sky;
He, in palaces, has known your bliss;
Has sung of your magic in his kiss.

Now, as you turn over Hindustan,
Where can you go?
All above is spread an ancient night;
Great fortresses guard the sleeping past;
Your palaces echo no more
With dignity of imperial claims;
The pearls that behung your walls
Are all gone, stolen;
The anguish of an imprisoned king, his
Royal gaze across a narrow lake toward sunlight:
All locked in the stone temples
Of your history.

I have seen the foreign faces
Drenched in the colour of my own conscience:
Long, regretful plains, sinking
In their indolent richness:
My poor city with its stallkeepers
Crawling towards dawn,
Your unending labour wearies me.
What, Simaitha, was in your cold Greek heart
When Delphis' lips left you?

Consider, Lady Moon, the warriors
Once banqueting on this silken soil;
The "maiden" moving through poets' verses,
Pouring wine into their dreams:
Her silhouette is stilled in your light.

Who is this beautiful woman

Who pays me an homage of kinship;
What scent hangs wild, like flowers, from her hair;
I am dulled in images of the world
Fed from creation's sleep.

She, who whispered to me
Her history
Has fallen out of your
Design;
I cannot help but smile for her,
For us, who ventured to spoil
The unlittered clarity of the old vision:
Consider, Lady Moon, when I shall have lost her.

Queen Moon, you upon whom
Kings have thrown their gaze,
Look now upon a pilgrim's homeless way.
I wonder what the imam thinks beneath his Arabic
Where time has taught the tongue to sing
Faster than the heart can follow;
I have knelt before each doctrine
Voiced from your past; I have washed my feet
In your pools, amid your gardens,
I have felt the edge of deceit
Slide along the moment of each act.

Consider, Lay Moon,
My Hindustan:
The false gods who wait over her,
As you turn toward the Western world:
Consider, Lady Moon, whence came my love.

Rafey Habib

Snow

Perhaps this is the way
Our world will end: not
In biblical flood, or burning
Apocalypse, but in deep beauty:

Silken white soil, brightened dusk,
All softened, houses, roofs, trees:
Magical kingdoms, greeting-card worlds
Asleep at our world's window.

And this is death, in its deep white beauty:
Falling within us, falling forever,
Over the heart's granaries, stored
Against hardship, an always future,

Unused. So many grains, so many
Urgings of love, each alive in
Uniqueness, waiting, always
Waiting for perfect moments

Which smile and are gone. White
Crystals will cover us, and the god
We stored, against pain and loss:
Deep white beauty, absolute.

Rafey Habib

The Dead

For one moment, you lived
Lived in the knowledge of death.
As the snow falls through the universe,
One look, one form at the garden's edge, one poor boy
Told you of life's mystery, and was gone.
All that is left is already dead:
Routine, drudgery, husbands, parties, speeches:
Only music remains to voice
The true shape of memory, of the sorrow that is your soul.
Such love will not come to you again:
Its absence will fall
Through the depths of all being
Through all of your days.

Rafey Habib

To A Secular Cynic

You think you are modern.
You think you are tolerant, humane, enlightened
Beyond the benighted reign
Of other-worldly groping
After false hope and certainty.
You think you are practical, pragmatic, cool,
Scientific, true heir of Enlightenment, breathing
Only rational air.

But your modernity is old, foretold, foregone
In Aquinas and John Donne, Ibn Sina and Ibn
Rushd, al-Ghazzali and many more; your
Tolerance ends sharply at the blade of difference, a
Name for fear of all but conformity.
You think you think for your
Self but you have no
Idea where your ideas were made; your
Pragmatism a code (read Dante) for expedience,
Convenience, and absence of all value. You believe
Nothing, and your morals - if any - come
From the dark night from which you think you have
Emerged. The sun in whose dazzling you drown yourself
Is the bland light of indifference, of ignorance.
Your humanity, your science rest on
Blind, abstract, dog-eared
Devotion.

Rafey Habib

To A Suicide Bomber

You do not speak for me:
You who soak yourselves in blood
Are far from the prophet's mantle.

You who act beyond the Book
Are far from the Word.

You do not speak for me:
You who do not know, and kill,
Murder your own soul.

You blew up a young girl.
A mother's heart will bleed forever.
A father's will is broken.
Because of you their world is ended.

What good have you done?

Your own wife, young,
Curses you in her sleep, her nightmare.
Your children betrayed
To a myth; they do not know where you are,
Where you have gone; they still ask for you.
Your parents dragged
Through your empty dream.
Because of you their world is ended.
You have brought not paradise
But hell: hell to all around you.

What good have you done?

Because of you, I am reviled;
Because of you, your own people suffer;
Because of you
Oppression speaks louder.
Because of you, my religion reels in shame.

Because of you, two countries lie in ruins.
Because of you, a deserted nation suffers.

Because of you, the corrupt have grown stronger.
The bigots can speak without shame.
Because of you, the good people the world over

Have no name.

With each act of your violence,
Your enemies grow stronger, harsher
More justified in killing and conquest.
Each life you take weakens your cause, turns
An indifferent world against you.

You call yourselves holy warriors:
But you have never read the Holy Book
Never tried to understand
Never struggled with yourself.
You took the easy way:
And what will you say on the Day of Days?
What will you say to your Lord, to
Those you killed, to your family?
What good have you done?

It is not you who bear
The prophet's sword; the
True sword is a word, a thought, touched by light
Forged in wisdom and
Relentless in love.

It is not you who wear
The prophet's mantle but those who
Strive , armed not with bombs but with patience, with
A Book, high in words and deeds.

You do not speak for me
Or the sweetness of my God;

You do not speak for me.

Rafey Habib

To My Wife Yasmeen

I shall fall in
Love with
You again.
For the first time
Your black eyes
Across a sunlit court,
As you sit drinking tea
And feel my secret gaze.

I wish we could happen again,
This time through chance, through
A world's rhymeless wonder.

O let me see you
As an unknown face
From an unknown past,
An unveiled vision.
The shock of your beauty
Dazzling, unfamiliar,
Stinging, bringing
Love to my weary eyes.

Rafey Habib

To Yasmeen February 14, 2003

What I have loved in you
Is a world shimmering, like a white sea,
Unmoved, sailing upon itself,
Whose unknown depth of richness
Pearls from below.

In my heart, I ache for you
Like land seething, seeking its own shape
Substance craving form,
Idea knowing itself as end.

And I have nothing – no substance, no form, no
Words
To sing again in Love's dimension:
After your eyes,
After your beauty,
All language is lost;
All is shadow, all is chaos, borne
Helpless on Love's endless voice.

Rafey Habib

To Yasmeen, After Nine Years

The Years have not dared to
Touch your Beauty
Which sings in the music of eternal spheres;
In you, all is harmony, radiance, wholeness;
In you, Being knows its end, its first and final cause:
There are no edges, no shadows, no burden of excess,
Your stillness moves and your motion stills.

Who am I who could love you?
Who could outform space and time,
Outsense intuition,
Outreach the infinities of Reason?

The vast cycles will move without my words;
The ancient mysteries still sing,
Your voice flowing in their silent notes:
The universal poem
Which Love, not I, can sing.

Rafey Habib

Too Late

If, in ten years, you should come to me, broken,
Your following relationships failed, your
Thighs bloated with cellulite, your cheeks fattened, your spouse
Uncaring; if then you should tell me
You wished you had given yourself to
Me, that night, all those years ago, when
Sitting on a couch I had touched your cheek; if
The emptiness of all these years is what it has taken
To make you wise, to open your
Eyes to what you really want; if in
Dreams between then and now, you have known
Your real desire; if it is now, in your diminished
Beauty and heightened knowing that you wish to give yourself to me,
Then know: know that it was not your beauty
That I wanted, nor now your wisdom: I craved
Compassion, expressed in tender touch: the very thing your years
Will not let me offer now.

Rafey Habib

Valentine War

And who will write songs of love for you
When war has scarred all song.
When the bombs have burned enough children,
scorched their cities, disfigured their deserts,
When the tyrants have played out their game of oil and empire,
Leaving the earth's fields drenched in blood, the air poisoned,
the atmosphere shaking with terror, prisons echoing with torture;
When the greedy kings of commerce have squeezed their grip
on the resources of the world;
When the hate-spewing media have drained the human voice
Of all song:
What love is left in me?

What love has left in me I leave for love:
No commerce will it have with the hatred,
The demon, that possesses the vile voice
Of self-anointing leaders. Let their violent words
Pass over us, beneath us, mere noise; our love
Will not yield to their anger, will not see itself
Mirrored in their fuming, bitter, scowling faces.

Let them blacken the green earth, burn up its beauty,
Let them darken the sky with their death-seeking missiles;
They cannot take our world from us; we will be there
When they are finished. We will rebuild what the monsters have deformed;
Our love will stand when their hatred has spent itself;
And when their voices are silent, hoarse with screaming,
We shall sing those songs of love once more.
Then, my love, shall I write love songs for you.

Rafey Habib

Valentine's Day

I wish I could say, I love you
Like before; but I
Don't. I wish I had your twenty-year old body,
Cheeks soft and fresh, lips pouting,
And eyes too dark, fathomed in uncertainty.
Beneath that wholesome surface,
Fire.
Beneath that sweetness, beneath that honesty,
Desire:
A turning outward, a desperation...

I know you have it in you,
Just close your eyes
To your past, to your family,
Your boring worn-out traditions; step
Outside of time, beyond
The reason of religion. Step into
Your self, the self that will not be gagged or
Dragged by centuries
Of mere words, the self that
Is still free. Bring her,
Like a new bride, bring
Her to me, smiling,
And let me with my heavy passion
Suffocate that smile, releasing its
Heat.

Rafey Habib

Whisky Priest

Stumbling, small
Without wine
of revelation, with brandy, fumbling
in time's tiresome spaces
was it you
who was crucified?

Descended from the rock
Caught between rocky places
denying, flowing with fear of God's untaught
Face, descending on criminals
With unsought grace, were you
the thief
who was saved?

Who could live such wild contradiction
Eternity and time, spirit and
blood, stooping before the majesty of fiction
broken bleeding wrists hanging from wood
what good in the story did you?

Stealing meat from a dying dog, lying
like those condemned with you, and, yes
Mass and Communion at a price; and yet
you are the Church, the patriot's enemy,
indifferent to the poor, can you - you
be ready for the cross?

Rafey Habib

Yet Another Valentine's Day For Yasmeen, 2007

Here we go again: they want flowers,
Heart-shaped chocolates, rosy ornaments,
Dinner with candles, a
Holding of hands, another year pretending
Our marriage is perfect.

And when you married me, you must have
Known I would never do
These things that are done
By other men.

And now, some years later, you know
I will not falsely praise you; I will not
Speak to you with hallmark cards, or
Place diamonds on your hand; I will
Not promise that I will be true or sing
Your praise in stupid rhymes.

And we are too old to pretend:
Our marriage is not perfect: sometimes
You want to be held when all I want to hold
Is books;
You never like my cooking or cleaning;
You hate my driving, especially when I tear
Through red lights; I am impatient, selfish, proud
And I don't like it when you talk loud.

And, after all, there is no need to pretend:
No consumerism shall consume
What I feel for you.
All the words on all the cards in all the world
Could not express your beauty.
And my words of love will be
Whispered to no woman
In all of heaven or all of earth.
Only you.

Rafey Habib