

soon becomes an open book.
 To lose themselves within each other
 is the same as seeing oneself in a mirror—
 how long can you love yourself?
 A dying fire needs another log to stay aflame.

And now—after so many years have passed—
 as they make yet another bid to escape their freezing
 hell,
 they scarcely note the groans and grunts
 emanating from the t.v. screen
 that have quietly joined their midnight whispers.

REVELATION

“Read!” you had said—
 can you recall now?—
 “Write!” you had said—
 but did you ever teach me what you said?
 And I,
 O Creator of All Existence,
 sat there for years on end,
 in that Hira² of maddening thoughts, anxious
 about what had been and what is.
 Finally a light burst forth in that blind cave, and
 I learned:
 one doesn’t need a cloth to wipe one’s tears;
 and one doesn’t need eyes to have a vision.

THE STORY OF ONE NIGHT IN A JOURNEY

He told me all the various tales of intimacy
 and longing,
 all the different beds that he had warmed,
 and all that had appealed to him [...]

²Name of the cave near Mecca where the Prophet Muhammad used to remain secluded and where he received his first revelation. —*Tr.*

in different peoples across the world.
 (He could still recall their “measurements”)

He told me about all the nights he had stayed up till
 dawn
 and all the evenings he had spent with “intellectuals”
 (He could still recall each one’s name)
 and all the other many hours he had spent
 discussing the Romans and the Greeks.

The candle’s light was a mystery web
 on the walls where a yearning’s shadow also flickered.
 The room was hot; but outside
 there was a chilling wind,
 and a freezing rain was rattling the door,
 betraying what lurked in the hearts.
 Desire had forced its way into his leopard eyes.
 But I was wondering what I should call him:
 My darling sister, or my brother divine?

MID-LIFE CRISIS

I have reached a strange stage in my life.
 Here, there’s no comforting home,
 no enemy,
 no fear of loss or gain.
 My heart is transfixed—perfectly balanced.
 I know what happened in days passed
 and what shall happen in coming days—
 my eyes have seen it all.
 My pockets bulge with foreign coins,
 but my heart is empty—a beggar’s bowl.
 My journeys have left me here,
 stranded at this point in the galaxy
 where my shadow splits before me
 into a thousand different paths.

—Translated by C.M. Naim