

*My head weighs on me.
Sleeping the whole day
I lived for thirty years.*

*I am entitled, maybe,
to strut, walk joyfully.
Haha! A degree
of inwardness even,
for the bow in my back
becomes a target
for “psychological reasons.”*

*It signifies
the unbroken sac
I carried my short life in*

*the satisfaction
of much sucking, doughnuts even
and the canteenfuls of tea with milk
the white pain with black*

*despite all that
I confront the formidable abyss
asking:
Were you not more worthy
of a steeper, sustained trajectory
religious salesmen on all sides
fistfuls of stones and words.*

*I say to the silence:
O formidable quiet
you were deserving
of more noise, at least
a couple of storms*

*deserving of more birds to the bullet
and to death:
you, sick man of the age
you let me down, morning and night*

*a god
who failed to hear me
trivial desires
mere whims even
for silk-like hair
a cloak like Batman's,
the gang, ambushed by the law
tossing me the briefcase
failing me again
in my desire for death*

*he it must be who chose me
to discover paradise
in the formidable abyss beneath
and to love falling*

*having fallen in love before
truly
meaning sacrifices, pillows
betrayal
happiness even
loving you proves doubtful
it could be the same god
chose me
for an ordeal yet to be named*

*though this
hardly prevents me
telling you
you are the most beautiful among women of the old world
and you withheld, that March,
neither a womb nor the Nile at my birth
and beneath a small moon and five stars
a whale swallowing the scorpion
you saved me from the dragon*

killing pain with pleasure

*so here I am,
the scent of you in every metropolis
at every water*

*is this the Thames?
It can't be the Nile
so don't fall in
wetting our two obelisks, needles within my soul
leaping in moonboots from their pedestals*

*and the Nile?
Never resembles the sea
so that the embers of the nargile sting like flies –
let The Garden Flower dry in a lapel
and take me to Alexandria
your eyes trued for seeing
prepared for oblivion
innocent of contrast*

*imagine how often I forgot my eyes
in inundated cities
and in friends, overcome by love*

*Nagi says to me:
never allow a soprano ecstasy to break our glass
nor fill it with wine from a cellar of wounds*

*Mohab says:
welcome the Cinderella who clings to her shoe
leaving the stab behind*

*I say have you spared me the pain
vanquished the dragon
for the sake of one more night
in Cleveland Park Avenue
cleansed by tears and acid
where the oud shines in dark locations
among the masks I brought from West Africa*

and others from within myself?

*Here, loneliness takes the stage to produce an Other,
a portrait of the artist as a suffering man
a small Dorian Gray
shielding himself in the white heat of love
white arms
white paper
entrenched sleep.*

*Sleeping the whole day
I lived for thirty years
a futurist poet in the past perfect
in the past simple
a shoemaker on Fulham Broadway
and a blacksmith now
with moustaches, a stoked fire
but not the sailor yet.*

*Here,
an oriental graveyard
- in a hat
and with rain -
since 1910
the era of King Edward
still expecting sorrow
cadavers springing beneath carpets
spaces once occupied
by toothbrushes
two world-war-proof coats*

*How many smiths before me
also alone
smoked the air of these rooms
becoming more lenient toward God
and tougher on language*

*which Hamlet, which Daedalus
or Prufrock
had his fingers crushed in the windows of history*

*whenever you crooned in a sleeping bag
above this acid and tear-washed street!*

*here,
since 1910,
in the era of King Edward
graves would sense which beings to embrace
the colour of those to come on silk-roads
exchanging the samba for neck-ties
seminal fluids for quinine
Arabian Nights for structuralism
chains
for solitude*

*once a generation, we go for the sun
armed with knives and the decline of ideology
shouldering our cassettes
with Sett Om Kulthoum and Sama'ai thakil
Heavy Metal, Marley, or the Gipsy Kings
and at night
Jesus is re-crucified
and Gracios ces la Vida*

*listen,
the stone also
moans
likewise a young man ploughs his body with deprivation*

*listen,
all water
is for your secret trees and the flower of orgasm
for your internal bleeding in the open air
your sons and daughters
your mother, your father, your grandmother
for your uncles and their descendants
your other lovers
your other beloved*

for whom I have reserved my heart and two kidneys

*equally
I desire you as mine
but this is my weakest muscle,
the withering one,
a hand my other hand tied
to dry out, to fall
silent, and in slow motion*

*my scream beyond screaming
more distant
beyond pain
death
beyond fruition
post- the modern and the post-modern*

*with an eyelash
I shall sweep the threshold
a deluge of water
for the stampeding of Romantica.*

Nasser Ferghaly was born in Alexandria in 1964 and has worked in Arabic television news in London since 1990. His poetry has been published in major Egyptian and other Arabic journals and newspapers, such as *al-Karmal*, *Mawaqif*, *Ibdaa*. In 1990 he founded the imprint *al-Arabaiyun*, which produced four periodicals and six book-length publications. A book of new poetry by Ferghaly will appear in the same series later this year with the title 'Romantica'.

David Kuhrt is a calligrapher and signmaker. His poetry has appeared in *Mediterraneans*, *Agenda*, *PN Review*, *Babel* and elsewhere.