

Commissioned for the Dil project (Halifax Square Chapel/Chol Theatre, 2007)

**A large Qur'an**  
**(similar to work done at Shiraz, Iran, in the 1370s)**

We stand among the lustre of tiles,  
adjust to the dim, cloister light  
as if waiting for the stretch of bats  
behind glass in the nocturnal house.

I ask my friends, some in jackets,  
some in kurtas, all hushed by ornament,  
to name their most beautiful,  
their Sesame of gold, crystal, silk.

I ask, though I know the answer.  
One stall in this priceless bazaar draws all:  
a cursive monument of ink and gilt  
whose frozen rhythm demands breath.

This crack of lightning shook Arabia.  
It's *Doctor Everything, voyage, mooring,*  
*the bride behind the veil, the deepest well,*  
the beginning and the endless.

My friends were once half faithful boys  
who struggled with the dots and swirls  
of compassionate and merciful syllables  
as the mullah droned out the summer.

Now, their cock crow is grandchildren.  
They know the Qur'an cleans hearts,

dips starlings in iridescent glaze,  
reveals the star maps of faith.

In Gladstone Street, Rhodes Street,  
five times a day they pray, wake  
the desert sounds, illuminate  
the hour, find light in their mouths.