

## **the script of storms**

songs for soprano and orchestra after texts of Fawzi Karim (1945-2019)

I.

*The eye turns black...*

*I was born in a mellower year,  
A year when people still paused at the smell of corpses.  
Now I smell the roasting of a thigh ...  
He pours on more kerosene  
And the fire glows and the smell of flesh gets stronger.*

*... my father said, 'Whoever goes sniffing out corpses would want to be rid of their stench.'*

*But it was a mellower year;  
A year when people still paused.  
A year that saw the barrier go down between me and that smell.*

II.

*... the script of storms ...  
The panic of rabbits.*

III.

*Passing through the clouds  
I peer down on the city  
Its roofs are stacked with the nests of storks while its palms are fans for its siesta,  
Lending it shade and a breeze for the streets,  
There are boats unmoored ...*

*... now it's clear that the city looks more like a corpse  
Hovered over with wings that end in claws.*

IV.

*You, who avoid coming close,  
We would advise you to tremble.  
Although you see in our cities ruins and skeletons,  
We are not victims of some past epidemic.  
Nor were we ever fodder for lost wars.  
No, we are your mirror.*

V.

*On the river's bank there's a death squad ten strong,  
ten they have killed;  
And someone is weeping there.  
I know the water only by the reflection of each star.*

*Time marching briefly with swift steps reaping his human crops.  
I imagine me without a mouth, without even a lung.  
Useless as a witness*

*Rowing away into darkness towards the open sea.*

VI.

*Me this, isolate sculpture.*

*I'm cold.*

*My plinth is the void.*

VII.

*And wet were the willow groves on sandy, sodden banks nearby,  
Wet and rusty were the carved arms of the benches, the short arms of the lamp posts.*

*Wet was the smell of the grill ...*

*And staking out the ground,*

*Wet were wooden fences that run between one cafe and the next,  
Between each bar and the sidewalk;*

*Fences ...*

*Fences that wend behind wisteria and hoard the webs of spiders...*

VIII.

*I place my forehead on the plate glass-front*

*And peered in at the darkness...*

*And there was nothing there for me to look for.*

*... see some corpses floating down ...*

*Be frightened, brother. I am.*

*I'll simply go on smouldering*

*And spread this smoke around.*

*Let everything go hazy...*

*Another died within his coat as he tore at his insides...*

*For what? For nothing. Nothing...*

*Blown away like spindrift...*

*No, we are your mirror.*

IX.

*And peered in at the darkness ...*

*And there was nothing there for me to look for ...*

*The silence is sour, and remote as some fountain of wool;*

*My feet are so light they hardly make a sound.*

*How do I answer the call of the current ...*

*I will drink out the bottle until the scent bleeds out of me  
and the soul can be seen through my body ...*

*... for a friend they burnt in a pool of acid,*

*Or for someone left like a scarecrow*

*standing guard over a minefield.  
Skulls and fragments of bone,  
Wreckage ...  
given thicker presence by the mud.  
You can't get away from the sight of those mouths  
where the breath is stilled.  
Is there to be some revivification of their torn bodies?*

*Is the dawn to be?*