Like a Novice Disciple

Muhammed Abdelnaby

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview

Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.7580

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Review by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.
Like a Novice Disciple

Translated from the Arabic by Spenser Mestel

-1- هذه البحيرة لم تكن مقدسة حتى قفزنا إليها.
This lake wasn’t sacred until we jumped in.

-2- يا درويش، خننني مريداً ولا تنس الليالي الباردة.
O dervish, take me as a disciple and beware the cold nights that approach.

-3- اليمامة ليست رمزاً، كم مرة سنقول هذا؟
The dove is not a symbol; how often need we repeat this?

-4- جنازة في مايو بنعش صغير، كأنه لوردة.
A funeral in May, a small coffin, as if it were made for a rose.

-5- يا لأناقة الحمار الوحشية، في حفلتنا.
How elegant the zebras at our party.

-6- هذه لن تكون معركتنا الأخيرة، عديني بهذا الآن.
This will not be the last time we fight each other; Promise me this now.

-7- النبع لم يجف. جرارنا انكسرت.
The spring didn’t run dry; our jugs cracked.

-8- أجنحة الكحول، قضها الصباح فعدتُ كسيحاً.
By morning light, the wings of liquor are cut; I’m crippled once again.

-9- تعلمتُ رقصة الدراويش وعلمتُهم رقصة السكران.
I learned the dervishes’ dance, and I taught them the drunkard’s walk.

-10- ابتسم لأخيك وهو يذبحك، هؤلاء عليه.
Smile at your brother while he slays you; make it easy for him.
Wake up, you lazy angel, you missed the Apocalypse.

On the same mattress, at the same time, Love and Loneliness awake.
They ignore each other.

Right now, inside my body, Joseph and Potiphar’s wife together. What confusion!

I found no tavern more merciful than my lover’s loins.

Here are my fingers, and they love you as well.

Sleep with your body, I told her,
You’ll not find a better partner.

The skull of the clown said it all, we laughed. Then silence.

This music, how does it not burst from within you as well?

Please, mother, let my books’ cockroaches live.

I asked his calf muscle: who are you?

The dreams in my bed have a different flavor. Come and taste for yourself.
نعم، هذا قميصي الأبيض، وهذا الأحمر دمك، ألا تتذكر؟
Yes, this is my white shirt, and this stain, your blood, or don’t you remember?

السمع هو الكنز، الموسيقى مجرد هبة.
Hearing is the treasure; the music is merely an excuse.

وقال لنا: تعالوا العبوا معي يا مراياي.
He said to us, “Come and play with me, my mirrors.”

امسح تجاعيدي بيدك، كلها ذكريات زائفة.
Wipe away my wrinkles with your hand. They’re all false memories.

في دفء فراشي، صوت الريح بالخارج يجعلني أهتز قليلاً.
In the warmth of my bed, the sound of the wind outside makes me rock gently.

السحابة ليست مجازاً، إنها فقط ماء ينتظر لحظته.
Clouds are not a metaphor. They’re just water waiting for its moment.

نعم، السيدة ربما مدعوة إلى حفلنا، بصحبة زوجها السيد مستحيل.
Yes, Mrs. Maybe is invited to our party, accompanied by her husband, Mr. No-Way.

العجوز يعرفون أكثر عن الجهل.
The elderly know more about ignorance.

افخلع ثيابك بسرعة، فقط لتتأكد أنك مازلت هناك.
Quickly, take off your robe, just to make sure you’re still there.

شوارع الليل أخواتي من الأم.
The night’s streets are my maternal stepsisters.

أنا كلمة أبي – في الظلمة – لأمي: هُسسَس
I am the word of our father, in the darkness, to my mother: Shhhhhhh.
The luscious smoke, from your mouth to mine; don’t be shy.

My aunt, the wind, please enter, even though my hut is made of straw.

Oh, his hand, his fingers, who is he?

I, too, tried to be in love, my goat!

Even on the body of insomnia I left my bite-marks.

Don’t ask for my last word; let me live.