

## The invocation

By Rizwan Akhtar

*Oh Thou whose home is every melancholy heart  
I have brought other homes too just for thy sake.  
(Faiz Ahmad Faiz)\**

Men wear self-patronising smiles  
and starched white clothes  
in running waters wash  
their furling beards

the heart is their prayer mattress  
arteries clogged with straws  
here and there foreheads brush  
the blood-pumping edges tremble  
the rind-crust-ed skin throbs

finger indexing upwards  
he dances to the Arabic lilt  
the azan makes its way  
through streets of Lahore

in the dusty horizon  
the cloudy peripheries  
(cast by the twilight)  
diminish  
he collapses on the footsteps  
with melancholic ease  
someone acknowledges  
his refusal  
to join the congregation

eliminated from the ranks  
his beggarly patched body  
cudgelled and cursed  
laughingly he asks for 'more' ...

evening touches

the Badshahi masjid\*  
the fragrance from the relics\*  
travels out of the arched openings  
the moon forgets its shadow  
on the cave's spidery mouth  
he picks the footprints silently.

\* literal translation of the couplets taken from the last poem of Faiz Ahmad Faiz from *Nuskha Hai Wafa-Kulliyat e Faiz* (Oeuvre). It is a *naat* written in Persian. The *naat* in Urdu is written in praise of Muhammad (pbuh).

\*allusion to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) relics preserved in the Badshahi Masjid

\*the mosque commissioned by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in 1671 and completed in 1673 in Lahore.