

Shahada¹

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Inside our textbooks
there is a calligraphed verse
that reads:

lá iláha illá alláh

which is either a belief,
or a threat, or some elegant
music for the tongue to play.

My professor teaches
an opinion about it
that he's eager I share
and I do,
with the bartered certitude of a soldier
or a scolded child.

I pick up the pencil
either to trace the arabesque
or to snap the lead
or to hold an instrument
that after years of use and misuse
will wear down to nothing.
And I repeat what I know.

1 The Muslim profession of faith: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah."