

# Shahada<sup>1</sup>

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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.

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