

Transcript of Shahid's reading of "The Correspondent" (Boston, October 1997)

Because there is so much music in this building, I'll do a poem in which there is a reference to music..by which I mean Western classical music. (Aside: now you wanted me to say what? Something about Kashmir? Response is inaudible)

Well, very simply, in Kashmir, there's been a freedom struggle going on for the last 45-50 years, but it acquired melodramatic proportions in the last 6 or 7 years, and the poem is called "The Correspondent" with references to things going on at that time in Bosnia. I was going back to Kashmir in 1992 and at Frankfurt airport I saw the International Herald Tribune and there was a sign saying "Adagio for the Dead as City Burns" and what it was, there was a member of the Sarajevo orchestra, the Boston National Symphony, I think, and he had decided when the troubles began that he would sit, he would put on his formal wear and he would sit on the sidewalk and play Albert Noni's Adagio every day and people were putting flowers around him and he played this music every day on his cello, Albert Noni's Adagio. And this music was used very effectively in a film called Gallipoli with Mel Gibson, I mean there is a scene at the end when this music starts and you just have to start sobbing. So, "the Correspondent":

I say, "There's no way back to your country,"
I tell him he must never leave. He cites
the world: his schedule. I set up barricades:
the mountain routes are damp;
there, dead dervishes damascene
the dark. "I must leave now," his voice ablaze.
I take off—it's my last resort—my shadow.

And he walks—there's no electricity—
Back into my dark, murmurs *Kashmir!* lights
(to a soundtrack of exploding grenades)
a dim kerosene lamp.
"We must give back the hour its sheen, or this spell will never end... Quick," he says,
"I've just come—with videos—from Sarajevo."

His footage is priceless with sympathy
close-ups in slow motion: from bombed sites
to the dissolve of mosques in colonnades.
Then, wheelchairs on a ramp,
burning. He fast-forwards: the scene:
the sun: a man in formal wear: he plays
on the sidewalk his unaccompanied cello,

the hours tuned, dusk-slowed, to Albinoni,
only the *Adagio* as funeral rites
before the stars dazzle, polished to blades
above a barbed-wire camp.
The cellist disappears. The screen
fills—first with soldiers, then the dead, their gaze
fractured white with subtitles. Whose echo

inhabits the night? The phone rings. I think he
will leave. I ask: "When will the satellites

transmit my songs, carry Kashmir, aubades
always for dawns to stamp
True! Across seas?" The stars careen
down, the lamp dies. He hangs up. A haze
settles over us. He opens the window,

points to convoys in the mountains, army
trucks with dimmed lights. He wants exclusive rights
to this dream, its fused quart of furtive shades.
He's been told to revamp
his stories, reincarnadine
their gloss. I light a candle. He'll erase
Bosnia, I feel. He will rewind to zero,

Film from there a way back to his country,
Bypassing graves that in blacks and whites
climb ever up the hills. The wax cascades
down the stand, silver clamp
to fasten this dream, end it unseen.
In the faltering light, he surveys
what's left. He zooms madly into my shadow.

The one I just read to you, if you pay attention to it, it's a form called rima salutas, as the stanza,
once you've established your first stanza, all the other stanzas mirror it, so all the first lines
rhyme, all the second rhyme, all the third lines rhyme like that, about three fourths of the way
down, you know what's going on.

but this clip does not have his remarks on form (which come after his reading of the poem)
which are on the original tape.

Grace will grab another clip from 0013 with his remarks and then this transcript will be complete.