MICHAEL
BRADBURN-RUSTER

THE SHADOW OF GABRIEL'S WING

POEMS

FOREWORD

BY

ALAIN SAINT-SAËNS

2021

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Michael Bradburn-Ruster.

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FOREWORD

The Shadow of Gabriel's Wing, Michael Bradburn-Ruster's collection of poetry, makes me think of French painter Jean-Antoine Watteau's painting, 'Embarkation for Cythera.' It is an invitation to travel through history and mythology, dreams and fantasy, soul and love. The Notes at the end of the volume reveal the acuity of the research that the poet completed while composing his pieces of creative work. There, Michael reveals that he is all at once an historian and a theologian, a phenomenologist and an archaeologist.

But above all, he is a magnificent poet. Rhythm and musicality, silences and echoes, guide us through the labyrinth of his artisanal, luminous verses, as Ariadne's thread guided Theseus on his way back, after having killed the Minotaur. 'Darkness sings,' writes the poet. Maybe so ; nevertheless, the moon enlightens shadowy territories, as it does in Caspar David Friedrich's painting, 'Man and Woman Contemplating the Moon' (1824), with which the poet chose to adorn his book's front cover. References to German Romanticism are evident throughout the book, in currents of wit, humour, and the adulation of beauty. Bradburn-Ruster's

poetry furthermore reminds me of Friedrich Hölderlin's, so much influenced by Ancient Greek poets Alcaeus and Asclepiades of Samos, and Novalis', another German Romantic poet he quotes to qualify his own poetry : 'The communion between the finite and the infinite.'

By many aspects, Michael Bradburn-Ruster, a mature man and poet, is 'The Wanderer above the Sea of Fog' (1817), as depicted in another of Caspar David Friedrich's paintings. In our terrible days of Covid-19 pandemic, Michael Bradburn-Ruster examplifies 'The Function of the Poet', as defined by French poet Victor Hugo in 1830 : 'In such times gone awry, from far / The poet brings tidings of better days.'[1]

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[1] *Le poète en des jours impies /*
Vient préparer des jours meilleurs.

THE SHADOW OF GABRIEL'S WING

POEMS

According to the twelfth-century Sufi Suhrawardī, the angel Gabriel possesses a right wing of pure Light, while the left is mottled with dark: this imperfect world below is the "song and shadow of Gabriel's wing."

—Sachiko Murata

...Or was this an angel showing me
A world that none of us can see?

—Anna Akhmatova

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Mirabilium

Meantime let wonder seem familiar...
—Shakespeare

Aperture

for Geneviève Laurenceau

The water in the ancient well
is cold, and whether it is clean
or not, the clouds alight and sip

the dark. Their swanlight shapes align
with roots the mirror veils, a wisp
or lobe aloft in visual

accord with filaments that seep
through fracture, gnarled fibers, sullen
meanders dense with thirst. Jewel

of realms that coalesce, tranquil
sonata, icon's echo, clasp
us in your faithful discipline.

Sospiri
(Elgar)

for Justine Kennedy

Everything is a sigh...
—Nicola Benedetti
...the poetry...of longing.
—August Wilhelm Schlegel

On the vast breath of time the forests rise
and ocean surges—forms congeal, dissolve.
A bloom on stem, a comely limb: brief fires
that flare and fade on tides of toil and love.
Might the whispered caress of virgin snow
or the leopard's perilous grace endure?
We—wonder's witnesses—linger but now,
cherish what perishes, yearn... surrender,
while galaxies unfathomed scintillate
in realms that never will remember us.
How else respond? Just lift the hand in flight
to graze that swell our breast cannot embrace,
offer a gasp of awe, a poignant sigh:
invocation of all we cannot say.

Ananta Raga

for Ravi and Anoushka Shankar

The entire world gleams...
—Abhinavagupta

Out of divinity's
silence, rags of echoes,
vines that trace vestiges
of verse on barren stone:
within the desert cave
flows a womb of water,
amid a nest of coals
flowers a tongue of flame,
and music without end
seems again to begin.

Not merely aesthetic:
sublimely ascetic:
listening, we forget
to remember our grief,
and bondage of pleasure
yields to beauty's nectar,
no longer erotic:
ecstatic sacrifice.

Alāp: veil raised in sleep,
glimpse of the sacred voice,
five fingers transfigured
into a lotus throne,
each finger become one
of the five syllables

carving the path that leads
beyond light and darkness.

Saffron and turquoise join
sapphire and turmeric:
so fire affirms poise,
soft rain murmurs passion,
purusha and *prakriti*
embrace, intertwine,
unleash earth's hidden streams,
give birth to tender grain,
awaken the flame inscribed
in the heart's ashes:
pulverized sun, mirror
of moon's liquefaction,
palace of symbols
whose ruins invent gardens.

Tāla and *rāgā*:
from the rhythm arises
the aroma. *Rasavant*,
flavour of rapture,
fragrance that transmutes time
into eternity,
as four hands scintillate,
dance in Chidambaram:
Golden Hall, cloudless heart,
still center of the world.

With one thousand eight hundred
names you praise the One,
Vīrabhadra dancing
over the blazing ghats
on whose burning-ground

corpses nurture the cosmos:
visions and illusions
created, cremated.
When the cup was shattered,
water filled the parched mouth.
Body smeared with ashes:
shadow that perishes;
concealed in that body
presence without measure.

Young woman, ancient man
drink from the same river
whose undivided source
reflects a single face:
Ardhanārīshvara,
radiant amalgam
both female and male, form
of the unmanifest
Lord who bestows fever
and banishes evil.

Kālīdasa knew: one
of His eight modes is sound.

Tablā and *sitār*:
weft and warp of earth's carpet.
Drum that consecrates time,
dissolves it in color,
clay filled with flakes of breath,
articulate petals.
Gourd that becomes *garbha*
trembling with seeds of stars:

instrument of knowledge,
devotional compass,

incandescent tissue
of sympathetic strings,
utterance of incense,
delicate plenitude.

The daughter does not dwell
in her father's shadow:
both are inhabited
by the pulse of planets
and the lakes' quiescence,
by night's luminous tide,
serenities of snow,
sonority of smoke,
sorrow's fathomless web,
clarity's vertigo.
Body: vibrant crystal,
tree where our lives alight.
On the branch the ripe fruit
became bird, and took flight;
now she, like her father,
resides in resonance.

Once the man vanishes
melody will not cease
to kindle the silence,
sustain and ravish us,
return us to that place
we never discovered,
where grace alone abides,
horizon and heaven.

Anugraha is all:
with East and West erased,
farewell turns to summons:
Come, embody the art