

Poetry Series

Michael Buhagiar
- poems -

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Michael Buhagiar(13 January 1954)

See my site thegreatpesherdotcom

A Look

Those eyes so black; that gaze so blank.
Black like witching moons her eyes
When stars burn the night with lonely cries,
That through foam to the floor of my ocean sank.

Eyes like the vaults of a global bank
That takes all for growth when the tenant dies,
With heaps of gold that to the ceilings rise,
That to test its worth my coinage drank.

Eyes wherein smouldered Greek fire.
Eyes that would prove me a frozen liar,
Inherited straight from African Eve,

Black as the maw of a low-toned bell,
The notes of a cello that for summer grieve,
The hangman as he opens the door of my cell.

Michael Buhagiar

A Tree

It starts with a seed, whose segments gather
A trust protecting the wealth of their ancestry
With promise of flowers and a soaring majesty
And fruits to ravish you, like any other;

—That falls in a desert, whose miles might smother
With still weight of air and the noon's easy clarity.
Yet its God, staring hard, has sensed there Eternity
And, groping in blindness, it takes Him for mother.

Now its roots are foothills, and a breeze's pass
Might shatter that length; while its fruits are sparse
And brittle, and no moisture give or need.

Yet, sitting at its foot, a poet meditates,
And though he cast away the sterile seed
Its mortal flesh he loves, assimilates.

Michael Buhagiar

Antiquarian

On the topmost shelf there stands an old man,
Still straight, his jacket lettered in gold
About a hard frame; and those blotches and frays
Sing gladly of harrowing trials of old.
'The Poems of Blake': a two inch span
Of spine, and on the cover the Ancient of Days.

Not his tale alone he steps down to tell.
For the inside page is inscribed in ink:
'To Lucas with love from Pamela, Christmas
1918' - in full curves that link,
Then two kisses, and a line concludes the spell,
A wave rolling in from a time that was.

Perhaps it was a call to abandon home
For a dusky Circe and the Blessed Isles,
And its triumphs were told over ruby wine
As eyes held eyes in knowing smiles
By candlelight... Take my hand, old man, and come
And my hoard of years shall be the measure of thine.

Michael Buhagiar

At Fort Arthur, Western Australia

A solitary cannon to the sunset points.
Idle gunners talk and smoke
And hook their heels in the sandstone's joints
In a world the gaping centuries cloak.

Wind disturbs the waters' shape.
Piled rocks locked suppress and curb
The sea's tall lust to press and rape
The curfewed hulls. God is a verb.

I have journeyed here to the wilder west
In search of the darker side of my brain,
Where the sun goes down to a basement club

To emerge at dawn from a lightless quest.
And I follow now, as the shadows stain,
To return to myself through dirt plains and scrub

Michael Buhagiar

Aubade

The gentle rain these sad gardens drink
To the harbour beyond goes home again,
As street lamps and orange foglights prink
The gentle rain.

The vast bridge alone no night could stain,
But grey did subsume the sunset's pink,
And it shrouds even now the dawning's gain.

Across the harbour the city lights wink,
The link of gold in a priceless chain,
As leadened here we watch on silver's brink
The gentle rain.

(This is a roundel, a form invented by Swinburne)

Michael Buhagiar

Beethoven's Father

Towers, turrets, high walls all made
Of sand gold-gleaming in noonday rays...
He would send his son with bucket and spade
To build and build under stringent gaze.

He worshipped him who had built the first,
Yet could not help staring, against his will,
At the hard waves slaking the castles' thirst
As twilight fell; and it tortured him still.

One storm-lashed night of pounding foam
He stripped and ran to catch a wave
Which snapped his pretzel spine with ease.

Now the boy all day remains at home,
And wields a delving pen to brave
The pulse and roar of night-coped seas.

Michael Buhagiar

Before I Met You

Spring would come with shafts of light
To make love to dark earth in the morning dew,
But the frost would bite too deep at night
And the beds were all bare, before I met you.

To think of love was like shaking hands
With a friend whose name I no longer knew.
I would walk alone along moonlit strands
And gaze deep into rivers, before I met you.

Before I met you, my plans were as birds
Betrayed to snow as they blindly flew,
For want of the line of a song without words
To guide them on, before I met you.

Long absence would fall like a massive tor
Unseen each day from a cloudless blue,
As I'd frozen stand before my dreadful door
To learn again what was deep and true.

My past was a perfect globe of gold
To where every day my dreaming flew,
And girls would my soul in their arms enfold
And say they loved me, before I met you.

Before I met you, my poems were as photos
Framed in wallets, and I would rue
The routine smiles and lifted brows,
And hold my gorgeous children from view,

Before I met you, and love was a pang
Whose blade struck deep, yet the weakest glue
I would crave to weep as Caruso sang,
Before I met you, before I met you.

Michael Buhagiar

Birds In A Tree

A light breeze rustles the leaves; so calm
They sit perched along the weathered arm
Ruffling downs, or suddenly they stab
At some enemy marching sharply within.
All day they will soar to touch the sun
With beating wings, or wild worms grab,
Diving like bullets from a lowered gun.
When sky and land grow one, and flowers
Are sketched in charcoal in the lonely hours,
They will turn to their rooted home and come in.

Through the wide bedroom window I gaze.
The house lights rise to signal the close.
My head lies calm on the arm of my dear.
Soon I must beat up the sun's hard rays
And dive to plunder whatever grows.
And so, lest in lust I soar too near,
And flare with the sun—and the blind worm prays
For a roar of flame to assail his ear—
I return, when blood lies spilt on the sky,
To my love who would stay when the sun men fly.

Michael Buhagiar

City Of Light

Taut muscles of the city,
Hard gavel without pity,
And nowhere a breast
To rest.

Old broom of witch
And lolling bitch,
Or evening maw
And whore:

The city scares
And breeds hot mares
Of night that rear
Too near.

Some thinnest veil
Or skimming sail
Gales rip to show
The shadow.

The past is a grove
Where lovers love
In shade far away
From the day.

All else is dark
But the city's park
A forest of lamps
Stamps

A coin of square gold
From a circle of old
And on its face
In place

Of the long-falling haven,
The scalp now clean-shaven,
And eyes that would disown
My own.

Michael Buhagiar

Clapton Is God (Homage To Eric Clapton 3)

Is still alive at fifty: clean of heroin,
Yet acid back then helped scour the eye
Of scum that sees two lovers sin:
The one hell-black, the other sky.

Life in one take: for the steelsprung arm
Swoops to pluck an Isis and Child
Who wail in pain as they fly from harm
While the flames are a roaring boar beguiled.

Its tusks are old moons no storm can defeat.
For a field of theogony three is enough
Yet three more and three for those years' triple face.

Lionsnake born to airy Love
By the spark of Caliban he moves in grace,
And a goddess raped might kiss his feet.

Michael Buhagiar

Correspondences (Translation From Charles Baudelaire)

Nature is a temple whose columns are alive
And confusions of sounds at times betray.
Man through a forest of symbols does strive,
And he knows them somehow as he goes on his way.

Like long-sustained echoes far away
Moving in a oneness shadowy and profound,
Vast as the darkness and the day,
Perfumes and colours and sounds correspond.

There are perfumes fresh as the flesh of an infant,
Soft as an oboe, green as a prairie,
—And others compounded, rich and triumphant,

Expanding somehow like a thing of infinity,
Like amber, musk, bergamot, and incense,
Which sing of transports of the spirit and sense.

Michael Buhagiar

Echo Point 1: Echo Point, The Blue Mountains

Stone, the emblem of the timeless become space
- Oswald Spengler

The Three Sisters sing 'You Can't Hurry Love.'
The floor spreads out in rolling waves,
All tidal pulses and sailors' graves,
And swells of broccoli carpet above.

The cliffs surge into awestruck view,
Like planes of war on a carrier's deck
That once hid in its vast infernal neck
Till lips convulsed to gape and spew.

Persephone blooms from hell to the air.
The gravedigger climbs an invisible stair
To the stage, in each rustic hand a long bone,
And grinning strikes a lively tune
On a row of skulls, as the theatre's stone
Looms raw, as if for a cathedral hewn.

Michael Buhagiar

Echo Point 2: Tragedy

Stone, the emblem of the timeless become space
- Oswald Spengler

Why does the ghostly father flee
When dawn on Hamlet's terror breaks?
It is the isles of cliffs from the blue leaf sea
Surging like golden-hooded snakes.

And why does Ophelia spurn his letters?
Why is he tortured north north west?
He has kept the cliffs of gold in fetters
And now they rebel to shatter his rest.

Why does the broad sword of Pyrrhus smash
Time and again old Priam's skull,
His grey hairs and bones and brains to mash,
And his years of inner peace to annul?

It is the cliffs of gold so deeply cowed
Beneath the ghostly father's fist,
Gushing like water hissing loud
From the ruptured skin of some occult cyst.

Rosencrantz is dead, and Guildenstern
Too, destroyed by their own device:
A garland of roses his hard hands spurn,
To the star of gold his eyes are ice:

A nought that would his quaking neck grip tight,
A sun stretch out its gold cliff hands
To guide him up to the shimmering light
From the fetid crypt where Onan stands.

Why does the dagger pause unthrust
As Claudius bends his back to his prayers,
Whose words pile up like stirless dust
As no dream in the careless heavens flares?

It is the cliffs of gold in the naked steel

Surging like a prick from its wrinkled hood,
Which Hamlet's loins must never feel,
Such is the father's fear of wood.

The old man behind the hanging lurks
As Hamlet fires the faggots of speech:
The forge of the gypsy poet works
Cliffs that yearn to the heavens to reach.

The flames lick up toward Gertrude's eyes
Where, deep within, the cliffs glow gold
Like the face of a painted whore that lies.
Now his pants the bulging tackle hold

As the blade thrusts through the silky flesh
To fish the old man from virtual sleep,
A monster calf in a Cretan crèche
He feeds with blood as the teeth strike deep.

What is the gift the pearl fishers brought
Which rests at the bottom of Gertrude's cup?
It is the cliffs of gold Ulysses caught
In the blue leaf sea, and ferried up.

Though flames may lick and winds abrade
And the hammer of Thor enraged pound,
The cliffs of gold must never degrade
To the seed that falls on stony ground.

Why does the ghostly father flee
When dawn on Hamlet's terror breaks?
From the cliffs of gold he shrinks to see
The truth that slack the old codpiece makes.

Michael Buhagiar

Echo Point 4: Theme In A Bass Clef

Stone, the emblem of the timeless become space
- Oswald Spengler

What do the isles of cliffs encode
Placed like studs of gold with such art
That this velvet shows an endless road
To the eye that quests for the hidden heart?

It is this, the secret heart of the matter,
Rising from the sunless depths of the sea
That the Holy Grail within may utter
The Word of God from its every tree.

Thus, the palimpsest yawns the planes to disgorge,
And the roar they make is the gravedigger's song,
And the flames of Gertrude's faggots forge
A bomb that for rudeness of cliffs atones.

For the cliffs are dark when drowned below,
But, lifting their cheeks to the sun, they glow.

Michael Buhagiar

Echo Point 5: Eclogue In A Berlin Street

Stone, the emblem of the timeless become space
- Oswald Spengler

Christopher Brennan
Deep in the wildest valley of my soul
I sense something nameless struggling to be born.
I feel the merest fraction of a whole,
Rank afterbirth of midnight stains my dawn.
Old Euler is lecturing on Homer today...

Aleister Crowley
I divine that between two poles you are torn.
Your nerves are shot and fear has held sway
Since the great god Phallus began to annoy.
You should chuck your degree and go your own way
And dwell no more on the sack of Troy.

Christopher Brennan
How could I abandon that beautiful tongue?
The Greeks have been my inspiration and joy,
A diamond that shines from a sea of dung.
Now so often at my desk while thinking hard
I feel a sudden jolt as if stung.
I
Aleister Crowley
The Scorpion is your sign, and Death your card...

Christopher Brennan
They revealed to me forms which the Church holds obscene,
The Beauty that shattered forever my guard,
Standing and sunlit and balanced and clean.
I
Aleister Crowley
But where is the Classical symbol for infinity,
All breasts and hips of an Egyptian queen
Reclining for a Caesar to enter her sea?

Christopher Brennan
Your image is strong, it sings of a world
Rich like the ground of a magical tree.

Aleister Crowley
Like leaves in autumn, all yellow and curled,
Classical beauty is brittle and frail.

But I drive by night with sails unfurled
In search of Death and the Holy Grail.
From the loins of Babalon and the Serpent-Lion
Has sprung the Word to supplant your braille, □
The fiery Lord of the coming Aeon.
Know that every man and woman is a star,
And trust in your own self to guide you on.

Christopher Brennan My soul shall be the barque to carry me far.

But of what shall I sing when the nights grow cold? □

Aleister Crowley The only theme of Heru-Ra-Ha:

The cliffs of gold, the cliffs of gold. □ □

□

Michael Buhagiar

Homage To Eric Clapton

A seed once fell onto English terrain
Where wars had thickened the soil with much blood;
And its roots struck deep into Satan's brain
On the side where feeling and melody bud.

And it thrust through years like a rebel army
Though deserted by sun and the rain close behind;
And a luthier culled one of its strongest rami
To craft an instrument with Segovia in mind.

Now the southwind spurs its belly, and there rears
Chaliapin, Sinatra, Caruso, all capped
By a song that crowns like cream the milch tree;

And a dark and haggard dryad appears
From a bole and croaks it is Clapton trapped,
And by the soaring topmost branch set free.

Michael Buhagiar

I Honestly Love You

If this vow of affection is simply true
Don't tell me why you had to speak it:
A spell was settling and you had to break it,
I know, for it would chill and entomb you.

A fate some ghost from your past was weaving,
Her lips once offered, then snatched away
Perhaps...A warmth whose feeling is believing,
That you sensed, before all, in the light of day.

No... like driftwood washed to an island
Where thick-rooted green sets free the bough,
You suffer in silence, and sing to me, now,
A lament for a time undead, at hand.

For truth, like poetry, must come from the heart,
As honest as tears that slip to the floor,
As plain to the sense as Cupid's dart.
I hear truth's beat, a wounded roar

That floods through your transparent art
To reach where waters surge and pore:
With open arms, and with knowing heart,
From here to forever, I come to your shore.

In memoriam Peter Allen

Michael Buhagiar

In The Ebor Cemetery

From zero to zero an ice wind sweeps
As dark chords close the movement of day,
And the sky a mist of moisture weeps
On the loved one beached in a wave-lashed bay.

A two-barred fence defines the square
And gums on every side surround,
Here in the heart of the country where
There comes no faintest human sound.

In this stone all night the wild winds wail
As lightning jags through flattening rain,
And spitting cobras lash the rim.

And this graven name is a thinnest veil
A deathless heart through which shines plain;
These flowers, a gallery hung with him.

Michael Buhagiar

Jacob's Ladder

(In Fisher Library, University of Sydney)

The floors to the top are numbered five
Where shelves of Shakespeare live;
Ten flights of stairs where I might strive
For the fruits high branches give.

A lift runs up, and I could choose
To give these legs a rest,
And save the time I else would lose
On that small Everest.

Yet climb I always do, in mood
Of scaling mountain sides,
With snow and shelves of rock endued,
Nor hung with carriage-rides.

Michael Buhagiar

Koala

In the long arms of mother let him sleep
With her eyes bent above
To gaze through locks that steep

And guard from the sky's rough love
As heat he inflicts without care
Or showers more than enough.

Soon, of hunger deep aware,
He may wake and take his fill,
Then sleep, a bulging bear.

One day may fall a chill
And a glacier creep, when
Full turn comes the wheel of the mill,

Or a sea fill that valley again,
Or chunk hot plummet from the deep;
Yet come what may, until then

In the long arms of mother let him sleep.

Michael Buhagiar

Light My Fire (Homage To Jim Morrison 2)

Let the Shadow inflict collateral damage
On Venus who alights from a shell to the shore
To light your fire as the chill winds rage
And vipers strike from the blossomless floor;

And let the Shadow's gunships even pound
The trees that surge as the fresh year blooms
And the land and the folk who, all seasons round,
Within stony walls find precarious rooms:

It is the door, the door, strong hewn from oak
Whose roots strike deep as the head branch soars,
Lets pass fresh air or forbids the strafe.

And if its hinge should fail those rooms would choke
Or lodging be given to thundering boars,
As the round dances on in the valleys of Alph.

Michael Buhagiar

Logos

Facing my bed in the peaceful room
Of my grandparents' brick suburban home
A painted smiling Jesus hung,
As salves so many a Catholic's doom.
A bearded young man, haloed gnome,
To the wall and my gaze serenely clung.

His chest, exposed in bloodless surgery,
The Sacred Heart showed, ensconced in flame,
While two paling fingers to the sky were held
As the King and Priest in closest amity.
Around the crescent base of the oval frame,
'The Lord is my Salvation' was starkly spelled.

Well, though only a pup, I clung to that bone:
That monster '-ation', how might I speak?
O fruit that hangs on the groaning tree,
Or in the fabled ark lies carved in stone,
In labouring waves the near light you seek
From the silent page, which gave life to me.

Michael Buhagiar

Love, Hope, Belief

A huge propeller, shed like Palinurus,
Overlies a ridge or river-bed
Whose dusty fissures fill the canvas,
On its triad of rusty blades the faded

Inscription: Liebe, Hoffnung, Glaube.
Also he's depicted Siegfried Superman
Relieving a cesspool of its toy Excalibur;
The goal of his long march to dawn

In bleeding fire; halts who would inherit
Hermann, hero of the Roman clashes;
The seven-tongued menorah alight
In a triumph-crypt encrusted with ashes;

Walkers-on-water; and strutting cocks
Compelling the seas and the sun in flight:
Persisting away at the black-box
Of a ship of dreams dashed out of sight.

Michael Buhagiar

Nostos

The birds sit ranged along the tree's high limb
As day slips back into thickening dark,
Their twig toes gripping the still warm bark,
And massed cries wailing in ecstatic hymn.

Should the storm god louring from rim to rim
Shower his drenching midnight cark,
The leaves would remain their sheltering ark,
Or walls against the tempest's savage whim.

The watcher is those havened birds somehow;
And someone else that rooted nest,
Someone warm out of long ago
Who nursed him next a swollen breast,
And, with fall of hair, to a singing slow,
Rocked as fire burned low in the west.

Michael Buhagiar

Not Diving, But Drowning

In psychiatry term in medical school
There were some who genuinely loved the schizophrenics
In their condition of perpetually living the Fool
Which Freud nor drugs nor volts could fix.

—Not the victims of a personal alien hostility
Who had buried an axe, as may be, in a head;
But those who had grasped the live electricity
And stuck fast screaming, and still felt its dread.

To the ice-bound fields of sequestered valleys
Those lovers were born, who to dig now yearn,
Yet the livewire cables still lie deep out of reach.

While others, they have heard, make daily sallies
To drink of that fire, and their flesh does not burn,
And the earth as they rise tumbles into the breach.

Michael Buhagiar

Poets Don'T Drink Coffee

The tickets collected with an hour to spare,
We stopped by the Mozart Café in a shell
On the water, and took in the drinkers and rare
Miasma of fresh-roasted coffee bean smell.

“How civilized! ” she said, in a tone of approval;
And I nodded, though really not sharing her ardour.
Then a tide I called took us out through a portal
To the wind and the gathering dark and the harbour.

Unearthly rapt faces surround a fire
Where one tells under stars of a hero who lapsed
And escaped in a shower of spears with the flame.

It once heated a bowl to force ever higher
A crystal of blue and deep green, now collapsed;
And I remember her face, though more sharply her name.

Michael Buhagiar

Putney Park: Sunset Across The Water

A million pyres would be as a match
In hell to this raging sinking Lear.
Peninsular land lies ready to catch
The sky god's shimmering ruby tear.

How blue the depthless floor of space.
Are they lips, and do they sweetly sing
Soft breath in waves on my moveless face?
Or the ruffling beat of some passing wing.

The bay drifts wide like lambing flocks.
Dark peacock's wings will soon unfurl
Till all subsides in a mindless swoon.

This hill's green arch is our private box.
Each tree is a rapt and graceful girl
Uplifting her cheeks to the archer moon.

Michael Buhagiar

Requiescat

A hillock blisters the field of spread.
Black gold lies ready to yield its prize.
Zeus has sown his seed in this bed
And his son will soon astonish our eyes.

Rub it and listen! It begins to purr,
A genie slinks from his cloistered home,
A white snout first, then night of fur,
A nugget of truth from the formless loam.

This was our game: I'd flip the spread
To hide that form curled up as if dead.
The ball is the term of the smiling mask.

Now to bury a stiffened corpse is my task.
And as the bleeding shreds of old day fade
A sun arises on that game we played.

Michael Buhagiar

Rider On The Storm (Homage To Jim Morrison)

Adios to the lands and great house, Caballero,
A kiss for the Lady in White and your friends,
For you ride out to meet the wild Toronegro
Pounding the plain, and the world on you depends.

Now that sombre shape as the moon is dawning
Behind you is not yet horned with sails,
And a blade through the neck will dropp him, fawning,
In a test which your fool on his ass ever fails.

Though the bull should blast into stormswept hells
All knights, you shine even there, dimmed never.
For the bullet has not yet has culled the white horn

Nor the navy lowered its dark-mouthed barrels
To blast the last steed into kingdom ever
From a cloistered village, just before you were born.

Michael Buhagiar

Sadness Of The Moon (Tristesse De La Lune) :

Translation

A more langorous moon is dreaming this night:
Like a beauty on several cushions reposing
Who caresses with a hand discreet and light
The contour of her breasts before the closing

Of sleep, on those soft avalanches' satined
Back, dying, she is given to rapture,
And roams her eyes on the visions twinned
That ascend like blossoms, white into azure.

When sometimes she lets fall, in her dreaming bound,
A furtive tear to this earthly ground,
A poet - stranger to sleep she has won -

Will catch that dropp in the palm of his hand,
Of irissy refractions, like a fragment of opal, and
Put it in his heart, out of sight of the sun.

Michael Buhagiar

Sound Of Silence

Each lecture hall was a book of hours,
Its pages written by different priests.
We plunged to engage the dismal powers
And gazed from the decks of dawning towers,
In a year endowed with moveable feasts.

I kept an inward mental table
Where to every priest I gave a cell:
A heaven-kissing Tower of Babel
Whose apex held a thoroughbred stable
Of Pegasus-seekers who had come back from hell.

To suffer meekly is to kill creativity:
The camel must grow to a lion, then child.
The laurel-bearers, we were growing in gravity
Yet prowling the stage for the likely absurdity,
Often swelling in uproar, like a grandstand gone wild.

One there was only, a Phar Lap and Daniel
Who so shone that Sssh! was our loudest word;
—Hissed sidelong, as a cancerous cell
Was borne on the charm of a whispered spell,
As gift from the isle of his rapture proffered.

Michael Buhagiar

The Ross Valley, Kiama

A high new moon of mountains cradling
Rolling stonewalled velvet fields,
With herds and homes and apt hands ladling
Milk pumped fresh which fullness yields;

Rows of palms like milk ejecting
In lofty founts from massaged nipples;
High thin calls of birds injecting
Silence; a breeze that dam glass ripples.

And Rex with dainty pearls not hung
Is thrusting his blade, or charging a rival,
Or fixing a rambler with Mars-red eyne.

While a corpse is served on a crust of dung
As a calf in plights abides its revival.
A bore's dark eye is lashed with kine.

Michael Buhagiar

The Witch Muse (Homage To Eric Clapton 2)

He glanced at the first bright sliver to glow
Which many would harvest and worship alone,
And yawned, thinking only of how she would grow
To the diva as Woman entrancing the throne.

He would watch her crowned, her husband-tide
Now brimming, now void, and the kingdom thriving;
The infant Prince on her lap spread wide:
While still the Acts through not wholly believing.

The backdropp of black is their shadow play.
Now the Queen is dead; there creeps from the shadows
A hag, black-cowled, to claim centre stage
With a wail as if suns at the death of day
Were fuelling in her ribs a lyric of crows.
He gazed till the stage went out into umbrage.

Michael Buhagiar