



When I Consider How My Light Is Spent

Yousuf Zaigham

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When I Consider How My Light Is Spent And Other Poems is more Rumi-esque, Whitmanese and elegiac than a confessional or nature-fest tract. It carries epic and Rococo strains and boldfaced themes—metaphysical and political, interlaced with lyrical mascara and lipstick. This poetry collection deals with the timeless leitmotifs of love, beauty, dotage, death, panic of dreams for not finding one's niche under America's hardy and habanero sun. It grapples with the enigma of genius, sheds light on the raw agony of exile and diaspora in a new country where one has to start from ground zero, with no allies or buddies, no siblings or loyal anchors or links, where one lives in the tyranny of shadows and is riven by serial heartbreaks of false starts and dubious beginnings in crescendos of suspicions and brashy despair. And yet these poems never stop their Dionysian dance, never cease to seduce and enchant, and at times vex and tease as gadflies. The agons between the poet and God, between America and this bard continue sometimes like the twang and twitter of birds and violet drizzle of rain, other times as an agile exchange of thunderbolts and menacing Molotovs. Yousuf Zaigham toys with those recurrent themes with scathing self-deprecating drollness, tintured wit, random spells of rage and manic rancor, haunted by the endless envy of the "truly great". In these poems, the sluice of self-examination and self-questioning never stops like steering through Lombard Street with its tight and dizzying hairpin turns. Great titans of arts cameo frequently in his verses to offer a valiant hit parade of gods with all their magical mights, charismas, fault lines and Caravaggio short fuses. His poems draw us in and lift us from our everyday cycles of rote tedium and gummy ho-hum to an electric and ecstatic world, as in "America, I Have Watched Your Lauren Bacall Eyes" and showing how language can be deployed to conduct sublime commerce with God and his creation. The opulent choruses of East and West merge to create a richer and rousing music giving it a Wagnerian purchase. He talks to you in many tongues and many emotional accents, the poet who wrote Anatomy of Homelessness and A Rushed Beheading doesn't seem to be the same one who wrote The Colossus or Flaubert's Note To His Lazy Muse. The poet struggles to keep his poise and place in the Mighty Niagara of America's literary canon. His irreverence is inspiring and threatening like a raucous donnybrook and yet thrilling as a glitzy and galling pageant of gods. Yousuf Zaigham's poetry is America writ large—divine and vulgar, flame-thrower and rain-king, IED whisperer and sweet redeemer rolled into one nearly impossible package. When I Consider How My Light Is Spent And Other Poems will captivate the mandarins in academia due to the lushness of its cross-cultural allusions, enlivening jolts of its ideas and its daring to contest the received wisdom. This volume also will intrigue and indulge the reading enthusiasts of poesy who love great passions proffered in the most fertile and fetching diction. This collection will beacon those inquisitive souls who crave the diasporic experience of émigré artists who became Americans by choice and had to muddle through the equally stressful and exhilarating experience of being finally accepted. In Julie K. Shavin, a composer and author of, *Of Mortality a Music's* words, "Zaigham the poet is a juggler, dancer, singer, painter, puppeteer, magician, and more. A self-described "fecund fiend," he appropriates anything, real or abstract, then hones tenderly or, at times, forcefully, in a kind of tough love, to glorious form in stunning, often startling, imagery. Have at this feast! It's quirky and captivating, riddled with giddy and/or dark humor, pathos, longing, smarts, and, in the end, adoration for language and the world which produced it."

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