

Dr. Michael A. Roberts

Aftermath

*Reflections of
Near-life Experiences*

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Near-life Experiences*

COLLECTED POEMS

By

Dr. Michael A. Roberts

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About this book:



To Cayce and Kathryn for bringing meaning into my life.

To Angela for bringing depth to it.

To Dan and Steven for the experiences of living.

To Mom and Bruce for being with me in spirit.

To all my unnamed friends who elevate me.

Exordium and Terminus

Poems

I. The Spectrum 1

<i>Aftermath</i>	2	<i>Devotional</i>	16
<i>In Silence</i>	3	<i>Outfits</i>	17
<i>Confined</i>	4	<i>Social Media</i>	18
<i>Dirty Mary</i>	5	<i>Mom and Mary</i>	19
<i>Wardrobe</i>	6	<i>The Church</i>	20
<i>Juliet</i>	7	<i>The Pirate</i>	22
<i>Too Much</i>	8	<i>Optimism</i>	23
<i>Souvenirs</i>	9	<i>The Sniper</i>	24
<i>Nostalgia</i>	10	<i>Empathy</i>	25
<i>Irregular</i>	11	<i>Over and Under</i>	26
<i>Indulgences</i>	12	<i>11:11</i>	27
<i>The Congregation</i>	13	<i>Whispers</i>	28
<i>The Flat</i>	14	<i>Magnum Opus</i>	29
<i>Repose</i>	15		

II. Interconnectivity 31

<i>Privation</i>	32	<i>The Stare</i>	43
<i>The Key</i>	33	<i>Snowflake</i>	44
<i>We</i>	34	<i>Magic</i>	45
<i>Tensity</i>	36	<i>Sad Angel</i>	46
<i>The Chair</i>	37	<i>Letter to Mom</i>	47
<i>Purgatory</i>	38	<i>Ditto</i>	48
<i>Children First</i>	39	<i>Hearts</i>	49
<i>Fracture</i>	40	<i>Doors</i>	50
<i>Puppy Love</i>	41	<i>Castles</i>	51
<i>Clouds</i>	42	<i>Duty</i>	52

<i>Like Yesterday</i>	53	<i>Empty Spaces</i>	59
<i>Calling Kathryn</i>	54	<i>Heartbeat</i>	60
<i>Almost</i>	56	<i>Moonshine</i>	61
<i>Profile</i>	57	<i>Us</i>	62
<i>Rest</i>	58	<i>Clarksville</i>	63

III. Human Nature..... 65

<i>Rain</i>	66	<i>Creeping Fall</i>	72
<i>Storm</i>	67	<i>Spring and Fall</i>	73
<i>The Gathering</i>	68	<i>The Moon</i>	74
<i>Dusk</i>	69	<i>Puddles</i>	75
<i>Sandcastles</i>	70	<i>Decisions</i>	76
<i>Flowers</i>	71	<i>Undercurrent</i>	77

IV. Acute Humanity 79

<i>Rapture</i>	80	<i>Too Soon</i>	97
<i>Faust</i>	81	<i>Guardian Angel</i>	98
<i>Fatherhood</i>	82	<i>Musing</i>	99
<i>Remembered</i>	83	<i>Playback</i>	100
<i>Refugees</i>	84	<i>Restless</i>	101
<i>Gray Man</i>	85	<i>The Dance</i>	102
<i>Futility</i>	86	<i>Speculating</i>	103
<i>Fairytales</i>	87	<i>WWJD</i>	104
<i>Free Will</i>	88	<i>Moments</i>	105
<i>Old Age</i>	89	<i>Alibi</i>	106
<i>Oriented</i>	90	<i>Confessions</i>	107
<i>Letter to Cayce</i>	91	<i>A Day in the Life</i>	108
<i>A Minor Poet</i>	92	<i>A Little Insanity</i>	109
<i>Bridges</i>	93	<i>Consummated</i>	110
<i>Far from God</i>	94		
<i>Reflection</i>	95		
<i>Answers</i>	96		

Michael Roberts

I.

The Spectrum

Aftermath

Old age is the aftermath
Of a youth wasted
On expectation, excess, and excuses . . .
Our gray, wrinkled, and worn
Reflection is the consequence
Of the realization that the vow
To insert ourselves fully into
The potential of youth
Has been replaced by the prayer
Of holding onto as many breaths
As we can muster in the disappointment

In Silence

We can never be sure
If the silence between us
Means we keep things inside
Or keep things away . . .
If we have run out of things to say
Or if conversations are just in our heads . . .
If we are quietly focused on what's to be
Or living only on memories of what has been . . .

Confined

I am closely examining
The small room
In which I find myself
Incarcerated,
Incommodious,
Not by authority,
Not for misconduct,
More of a sentence
For squandering a life
That proposed freedom
Every day

Dirty Mary

Dirty Mary stands
on the corner of the street,
 Sign in hand,
 syringes at her feet,
 Doing dirty deeds,
wearing dirty clothes . . .
Something for her veins,
something for her nose . . .
 Worshiping the god
 She has to please,
Behind a dumpster,
 or on her knees,
 Doing anything
for the love she craves,
 Holding a sign,
Saying “Jesus Saves”

Wardrobe

Happiness is a suit
We try on occasionally,
And admire in the mirror
At how it temporarily replaces
The wardrobe of sadness
That fills our closets

Juliet

It may not be often
That Romeo actually finds Juliet,
But it has been my observation that
Many Juliets may be available nightly,
For a variety of Romeos
With just the proper combination of
Alcohol, money, and desperation.

Too Much

The climate is too hot

Our souls are too cold

Our actions are too timid

Our dreams are too bold

Our voices are too quiet

Our discontent is too loud

Our accomplishments are too weak

Our failures are too proud

Our stress is too high

Our esteem is too low

Our minds race too fast

Our metabolism is too slow

Our time is too wasted

Our minds are too confused

Too much time spent befuddled

Broken and bemused

Souvenirs

We are forced into compromises,
Not solutions, merely disguises
The fulfilling of expectations
Giving up ourselves in negotiations . . .
We pass by mirrors with no reflection,
No evaluation or introspection,
Disoriented and lacking direction,
Concurring and conforming self-rejection,
Sacrificing our own desire and passions,
For societal norms, trends, and fashions,
A passenger in a vehicle others steer,
Stopping occasionally to collect a souvenir

Nostalgia

The fountain of youth would be worthless
If we could not take back to our youth
Our wisdom, experience, and resourcefulness . . .
Those who would wade into the waters of retroaction
Are consumed with a romanticized nostalgia,
A distorted retrospective of our former selves
That redemption and reformation could resolve,
The discontent and despair we are currently
Acquainted with and accompanies us

Irregular

On some days,
My hand can trace
The thoughts in my mind
That one may read
And, perhaps, comprehend

On other days,
My thoughts are scattered,
Formless and muddled,
And my hands create words
Even I cannot wholly comprehend

Indulgences

It is difficult to blame the outcomes of life
On the ubiquitous temptations of sex and candy
That distracted and seduced us in youth,
For these are the very commodities
That we would sacrifice for and gamble on
Had we the fortune and opportunity to indulge in
When neither can be reached or ascertained,
Nor are within our capacity to fully experience

The Congregation

You are a lamb among the sheep
In the shepherd's flock,
Herded to the shining kingdom
Of the afterlife with other strays,
To not be abandoned in the aftermath of life . . .
Solitary thoughts can be drowned out
By the hymns and hallelujahs of the congregated
Preparing for the rapture of the invisible hand,
Arms lifted, eyes closed, spirits soaring in anticipation . . .
You discreetly survey the occasion,
Noticing that you alone have your eyes wide open

The Flat

We curse not
For the tire
That has blown
On the interstate,
But for the hundreds of tires
That have blown,
The wheels that have come off,
And the repeated engine failures
in our lives

Repose

Life requires us, at times,
To be the snowman
Unflinching, unfazed,
Adapted to the cold,
Withstanding the blizzards

Because of this,
We welcome the sandman
Who, through mercy and compassion,
Takes us away from the frigidness
To the sanctuary of sleep and dreams

Devotional

If Jesus walked among us today,
He would choose the treks
That are rutted, knurled,
Traucherous, obstructed
Impregnable and disintegrating,
So that our own journeys
May be deliberate
And undisturbed

Outfits

Hope is often unassumingly
clad in the ragged, tattered

Attire of living . . .

Belief is often

Elegantly and flawlessly arrayed

In the regalia of denial

Social Media

I am no one, here, she said,
But when I am somewhere else,
I do not have to seek,
But consistently receive,
Compassion and understanding,
Superficial affirmations,
And self-deceiving approval
Through conformity and acquiescence
From anonymous and inconsequential
Sources

Mom and Mary

Mom and Mary
Don't talk on the phone,
They hold the receiver
In silent grieving . . .
Mom mourns the loss
Of her youngest son,
Mary suffers the loss
Of her daughter . . .
I listen at the silent sound
Of torment that is understood
Between them
In these quiet conversations

The Church

The church was nearly hidden,
Barely visible from the road,
But a chance glance caught my eye,
And seized my curiosity . . .
So, I swerved the car onto the shoulder,
Climbed over the barrier,
And made my way through the maze of trees
And over the endless stretch of exuberant brush . . .

The tiny church was once white stucco
But now yellowed by time,
With patches of green from layers of mildew and mold,
completely possessed by creeping vines,
And highlighted only by a fleck of light
Shining through the canopy . . .
The sanctuary doors were unhinged,
And all of the pews had been removed

From the unstable, rotting porch
I could see a stained and faded crucifix
On the wall behind what was once a pulpit . . .
I started to enter, seeking something still unknown,
But a snake was visible beneath the cracks in the foundation,
So I backed away slowly, then retraced my steps away
From the sanctuary and the little church,
Back down the path, and back to the car

And that was the closest I ever got to Jesus

The Pirate

I wonder if it's too late to be a pirate,
Like Kidd, Blackbeard, Bonny, or Bart,
Setting sail for adventure every day,
Life imitating art . . .
Becoming a legend of history,
Collecting treasure, bounty, booty, and gold,
An unsinkable ship and a loyal crew,
Intrepid, feared, and bold . . .
Riding the waves of fortune
When the waves are breaking high,
With a musket, sword, and parrot,
And a patch over my eye . . .
A pirate is being all that you can be,
Never dying, just fading away,
somewhere in the sea . . .
Instead of a frustrated poet,
Behind a keyboard late at night,
Grappling with images in my head,
And the words I have to write . . .

(Or maybe a Viking . . .?)

Optimism

What is the world to the optimist
But an unceasing parade of disappointments,
A daily dismantling of hope,
And a dispirited betrayal of trust in mankind?

It is an inevitable, painful circumcision
of Pollyannaism from misplaced conviction,
A battering assault that cultivates commiseration
For the unfounded faith in humanity

The Sniper

Life is often like a sniper,
Hidden, undetectable,
Not arousing suspicion,
Molding into the landscape
Of the everyday,
Too discreet to seem
Ominous or foreboding . . .
But once we become
Comfortable or complacent,
It controls the breathing,
Slows the heartbeat,
And squeezes the trigger

Empathy

Peering through a window
At the rain on an autumn day
 Makes us sad
 Because we are reminded
That it is the sign of trouble
 In another's life,
 And a reminder
 Of all the times
We were on the other side
 Of the window

Over and Under

There has been a frequency, in life, I have felt,
 To be overseen, yet under-noticed,
 Overused, but underappreciated . . .
 Feeling overwrought and under-attended,
Stereotypically overworked and underpaid . . .
We have over-prayed and been under-blessed,
 A lifetime overwhelmed and under-lived

11:11

I just missed
My wish
At 11:11,
Noticing, again
That the time
On my clock
Of life has
Always been
11:12

Whispers

The evidence is clear
That the devil in me
Shouts
While the angels in me
Whisper

Magnum Opus

All around us are monuments to vanity,
Tributes to human insanity,
Any discourse is pure profanity,
The sublime has supplanted mundanity,
Dystopia of ubiquitous inhumanity

II.

Interconnectivity

Privation

Love slips away more easily
Than it is discovered,
And what it leaves in its wake
Is a profound and pronounced emptiness
Far greater than the chasm
It filled when it was conceived

The Key

The key that held the promise
Of an eternal state of bliss
Between unified souls
Was placed unceremoniously
On the mantle
Beside the empty frame
That once held the picture
of our future

We

We have both grown tired
Of the breaking apart
And putting together
Of the puzzle of us
That is filled with
Colorful pieces
But never completely
Fits together . . .

We have both grown tired
Of the writing
And rewriting
Of the story of us
That is filled with
splendid chapters
But never a happy ending . . .

We have both grown tired
Of the deconstructing
And reconstructing
Of the foundation of us
That reaches
High towards the heavens
But is never very stable

Tensity

So many demands
For promises and apologies
Strain and stress
The spirit and the soul
That were once invigorated
By the invitation to love you

The Chair

She stares across the table
At the empty chair
And at his unattended coffee cup,
As if waiting for it to say something,
While it was already saying far more
Than she could accept

Purgatory

These days,
I find myself between
A rock and no place . . .
Being like this is hard.
The rock is no longer
What we had in the beginning.
It is testy, dubious, clouded,
Compromised, diluted, and unfamiliar
Yet still better than
The nowhere without you

Children First

If we had been children together, first,
We would have continued to like each other
In that childhood innocent manner,
Where forgiveness is just assumed,
Not earned, and never withheld

Fracture

The ordeals multiply and escalate,
Apologies unfelt and unspoken,
Separation for feelings to fester and percolate,
Emotional residue for the toxic and broken . . .
The home will fracture and splinter
With a bitter slamming of the door . . .
The frigid feel of conjugal winter
When words and feelings don't matter anymore . . .
The fleeing ghost of today and sins of tomorrow
Echo in the hallways, tainted and hollow

Puppy Love

In all my experience,
I never encountered
 A dilemma,
 A burden,
 Or an enigma
That could not be
 Alleviated by
A round of enthusiastic
 Puppy face-licking

Clouds

“What does that cloud look like?”

She asked.

“A dragon . . . maybe . . .

A griffin . . . possibly . . .

A phoenix . . . perhaps..

But definitely something

Magical, mythical . . . ”

I replied.

“What does it look like to you,”

I queried.

“Rain,” she said,

Closing the car door . . .

The Stare

What enchanted me most were her eyes
That looked to the distance behind me . . .

I rose to my feet, to my own surprise,
To go and somehow ingratiate I to she . . .

Her stare was fixed, intent, and black
Like a silent outlet of an inward scream,
And so to my seat I retreated back,
Surrendering her to someone else's dream

Snowflake

Her love came upon me
Like a quiet, unexpected snow drift,
Moving in lightly, almost transparent . . .
Her touch was like an insulating warm powder,
Her kisses were like snowflakes,
Delicate and unique

She left as she arrived,
Quickly disappearing in a morning's sunrise
A faded masterpiece now covered with ice,
Leaving only the sensation of cold
And the memory of a landscape
That was once pure and beautiful

Magic

Of course, I believe in magic . . .
You appeared from nowhere,
Spectral and flamboyant,
Something about you was supernatural . . .
I was charmed and enchanted,
The feelings were levitating and transcendent,
Knowingly deceived, but entertained,
Suspending disbelief, but engaged,
Even as I looked closely and followed intently,
You disappeared before my very eyes,
Completing the illusion

Sad Angel

The sad angel sits with majesty and grace,
While lines of anguish cross her face . . .
She manages her composure somehow
When painful thoughts crease her brow . . .
She stares into the distance now and then,
Wondering what might have been,
Quiet tears appear in her eyes,
The sounds of sorrow with deep, deep sighs,
A quivering lip or biting her cheek,
Never a painful word she'll speak
About things she is missing or never had,
Lying in my arms, manifestly sad

Letter to Mom

The number you had for decades is
Still in my phone, but dormant . . .

I scroll to your name

As I used to do—

“I am still doing well,

It makes me happy

that you are proud,

Your granddaughters

Are doing amazing things,

I agree—things are *not*

What they used to be,

In fact, I *do* remember that thing

I did when I was small,

Sure, I will never forget the struggles

That we had to overcome,

I *also* wish we had more time

To spend with each other,

Yes, of course, Mom, I will be there

To mow your lawn on Sunday . . . ”

Ditto

My shadow has always been a miniature,
An exact diminutive duplicate
Impersonating my voice,
Mimicking my mannerisms,
Espousing my philosophies,
Adopting my attitudes,
Simulating my expressions . . .

Ultimately, time can, without fracture,
Unyoke even the most resolute bond,
And fragments are abducted by the wind,
So, while I am grounded here, aging,
My shadow runs free about the world,
A spirit unrestrained, manifestly perpetuating
And projecting the best qualities that I once possessed,
Loving me without condition or parallel

Hearts

I can think
Of no other outcome
From pouring out one's heart
Than living with it empty,
And spilled upon the ground

Doors

It became clear to me
Later in life
That the doors we open
Are closed behind us
And locked from outside,
So we find ourselves, often,
Standing in the middle
Of an empty room
Of our choosing

Castles

Throughout history,
Castles have been constructed from
Earth and wood,
Stone and clay,
And even sand and water,
But the only element
that can truly fortify a castle
Is what's protected within the walls

Duty

I feel like I owe you sad days,
Obliged to engage the emptiness,
Compelled to embrace the loneliness,
Committed to the desolation,
In debt to your memory and absence,
Guilt lived daily through living,
A penance paid in grief and tears

Like Yesterday

I am ashamed
That I have lost
Count of the days . . .
They are only marked
By dreams and memories,
Both of which
Cause me to weep

Calling Kathryn

You answer my call with a giggle
Before I have uttered a word,
And it is the music of that laughter
That jumpstarts my heart . . .

The voice of a young lady
Is still unexpected after all these years,
And I glance at the name I have dialed
To make sure it is you . . .

On the other end of the line,
In my mind, as we speak,
Is the blue-eyed little cherub, ready for me
To rescue her from another failed sleepover . . .

As the phone rings throughout the day,
I wait with the same anticipation
That I used to outside your room,
For you to wake and life to start . . .

“No, I’m not doing much,
I know, you *do* have a *lot* going on,
I understand you have to go, and yeah,
Maybe *tomorrow* we can get ice cream . . .”

Almost

I almost said I loved you, after,
And it may have stopped the away stepping,
But words should not be used as tools
In moments of passion or desperation . . .

I almost said I loved you in the beginning,
And it may have brought your heart to mine quicker,
But words should not be used as a device
To expedite one's desires or wishes . . .

I almost said I loved you, all along,
And it may have made you happier,
But words should not be used as an umbrella
To block the rain of disillusionment

Profile

Perhaps you should have made more noise . . .
The world seems to remember the imprudent,
The flamboyant, the obstreperous, and arrogant,
While you were unassuming, understated, and cerebral,
And these poems are not enough
To recount you fairly to the world
Or keep your memory alive

Rest

I resist the temptation to wake you
And remind you that the day has begun
Because I know waking you brings you
Face to face with the sadness
And burdens of the day,
From which only sleep,
And an occasional dream
Can provide a temporary
Reprieve

Empty Spaces

It may have been a lack of bravery
That kept me from filling the empty spaces
Between the raindrops in a thunderstorm
On a ship sailing for an unknown horizon,
In an abandoned house overlooking a marina at sunrise,
In the empty garden swing under the giant oak,
In the chair on the front row of a symphony,
On a bench in New York in winter,
In the crowd before the Mona Lisa,
In the pews on any Sunday morning,
In your heart when you were grieving,
And in your arms when they were reaching for me

Heartbeat

Before you,
I had never known
Anything that was alive
To not have a perceptible heartbeat
Or encountered
Anything that had a heartbeat
That was not fully alive

Moonshine

Our love was much like moonshine—

Powerful and raw,
Intoxicating and addictive,
Mysterious in its origin,
And risky when consumed

Us

We have made gods of the least of us,
We are governed by the worst of us,
We follow the most inept of us,
We have faith in the most deceitful of us,
We trust the least responsible of us,
We are guided by the most blind of us,
I wonder why we think so little of us. . . .

Clarksville

45 years later, you wrote that
You escaped the toxic union
In a conspicuous and public uncoupling,
Revealing emotional torment
Mental cruelty and self-doubt,
Intimate abandonment and physical isolation,
From the him that you moved to
When you left the emerging us
For the promise of Clarksville,
And let go of my hand
At 16

III.

**Human
Nature**

Rain

The rain is where I feel at home now.
I chase dark clouds across every landscape,
Pursuing the deluge that will
soak me in sorrow,
And drown me in despair,
And mock me in my baptism of grief
In the wake of your departure

Storm

I prefer to be awakened by the rain . . .
The transition from the storm in my life
 To the storm outside my window
 Makes the day tolerable and uniform . . .
The weight of my burdens and the heavy downpour
Are compatible, complementary, appropriate . . .

I prefer this experience of life and rain
 To the stark awareness that awakens me
When the beautiful dream of us in a distant past
 Is shocked into a graphic reality,
 Like a lightning bolt
 of consciousness and despair

The Gathering

If colorful fall leaves,
With the collaboration
Of vigorous autumn winds,
Gathered in the skies,
Instead of at our feet,
We would spend
Much more time
With our eyes toward Heaven,
Rather than down
At our shoes

Dusk

It is inevitable that each day
Is pinched between orange and black,
A transition from color to onyx,
As melting paint on a canvas landscape . . .
The moon uses promises of romance and mystery
To seduce the sun into relinquishing its celestial dominion,
And while we celebrate the emergence of the stars,
We are unaware that the shade is taking over . . .
The shadows are coming to life,
And the glory of each day is overshadowed
Behind the wonder of the darkness

Sandcastles

I watch children
Build and rebuild
Sandcastles on the beach,
Ignorant to, or defiant of,
The unquestioned destiny
Of the influence of the tide
On the castle's fortune

And being reminded
That once, in my youth,
The joy of building and creating
Superseded the fear of losing,
No matter the vulnerability
Or provisional state of being,
I, too, faced the tide, intrepid

Flowers

It's profound, I suppose,
That the most
Fragrant,
Redolent,
Rapturous
Aromas
I have experienced
Come from
Fresh flowers
Placed on cemetery markers

Creeping Fall

The subtle breeze blows
Across the open fields of our later years,
And begin to rustle the leaves of our lives,
And stir the sands of our minds
To make us aware
That fall is creeping in
And soon winter will arrive

Spring and Fall

We never greet the fall
As we greet the spring,
The sleeping rise at the angels' call,
Not the slumber that fall may bring . . .

Spring brings color and life anew,
And fall will foreclose,
Spring provides flowers in the morning dew,
Taken by fall to decompose . . .

Spring is warm showers of rain
That collect into puddles in for the fall,
The accumulation of disappointment and pain
That is the destiny of us all

The Moon

Beware of those who promise you the moon,
It is a pretense to placate you with hope,
A distraction from the negligence of the more easily-attained
Gifts of conversation, companionship, and affection . . .

Beware of those who ask for the moon,
It is a futile task to fulfill the dissatisfied . . .
You will never match its glow or fantasy,
And those who wish it doom you to the effort

Beware of those who praise the moon,
The artists, wolves, owls, and poets,
Attach yourself to the more pragmatic,
Like a rooster celebrating the sunrise

Puddles

Rain was once our invitation
To the emerging puddles of celebration
Of the vigorous optimism of youth
And the unsoakable splashing of water
And fearless flinging of mud . . .

But today, the rain only
Bathes me in childhood nostalgia
And late life melancholy,
As the letters on stone slabs
Fill to capacity

Decisions

When the sun is visible on the horizon
On an otherwise stormy day,
We have to weigh the decision
If the chance of enlightenment
Is worth the risk of merely getting drenched

Undercurrent

Beneath the beautiful and benign surface,
 Below the placid veneer of life,
 There is an ominous undercurrent
 That is undetectable and innocuous,
 Until the unsuspecting moment
When we are lured beneath the canopy,
 And our souls are towed
 Helplessly toward temptation

IV.

Acute Humanity

Rapture

Midnight is when the hauntings
Of regret and remorse
Prey on my conscience
As I lie vulnerable and alone
In a state of physical deprivation,
And my emotions close in
In, on my thoughts
To conjure the ghost of us
As an apparition of lost rapture

Faust

I often find myself
Contemplating the fate of Faust,
As I am willing to bargain
My mortal soul
To have the wish of
My daughters holding each hand
On an unhurried stroll
Along the ebbing tide
At sunset
Granted

Fatherhood

It is not the act of dying
That occupies my mind
In my older age,
But rather the afflictive thought
That the afterlife will not
Offer me the blessed experience
That being your father has provided

Remembered

As I stroll among the weathered tombstones
Reciting epitaphs in a contemplative perusal,
I have decided on my own textual legacy,
Which will read in its entirety
“He wanted to be remembered as someone
Who would never be remembered”

Refugees

We all approach eternity as refugees,
Our hearts are tattered from the relentless
tugs-of-war of passion and mending,
Our minds are singed from the incessant
Anxiety of decisions and consequences,
Our souls are singed from the pitiless
Anguish of bereavement and despair,
Our feet are frayed from the unforgiving
Trek across the serrated and callous landscape . . .
We arrive at our destination of indifference and discontent
Fatigued and jaded, sanguinely seeking sanctuary

Gray Man

The gray man exists somewhere,
Wedged between shadows and nihility . . .
Invisible and malleable, he emerges
On occasion to atone for sins charged and debited . . .
His dreams are limited to asserting himself
Against the accusations, indictments, and denunciations,
Standing secure, unyielding, and resolute,
Emanating from the darkness like an austere scarecrow

Futility

We begin life as aspiring water droplets
Propelled by some fountain of optimism
Toward our goals, dreams, and aspirations,
But despite the strains of expectation,
We eventually realize the futility of our endeavors,
And the gravity of reality pulls us back to Earth,
And we are relegated to the pond below
Where we become part of the collection
Of unrealized dreams and disappointed dreamers

Fairytale

In later life,
Time feels like it was stolen,
When, instead, it was gambled away
Chasing an elusive happiness orthodoxy
Fabricated by faux prophets,
Sacrificing our individual,
Idiosyncratic amusements
That was, regretfully, apportioned
Chasing ghosts
Instead of dragons

Free Will

The view from inside the hourglass
Is a poignant lesson
In the contrast between
The interned,
Whose destiny is determined
And ineffectual to effort or enthusiasm,
And the autonomous,
Whose fortune is free,
Whose effort is languid,
Who has the liberty
To let the privilege
Deteriorate from neglect
And indifference

Old Age

Old age has come to ravage us,
To tame the young and savage us,
To change the landscape of our faces
With “worry” lines and “troubled” traces,
It slows down the music in our head,
To make us lie awake in our bed,
It rustles the leaves in the autumn wind,
A reminder that we are near the end

Oriented

It has been the hallmark of my life
That I am drawn to
Unpretentious sideroads,
Inconspicuous paths,
And camouflaged passages

There's an intoxicating fascination
With an irresistible
song of mystery,
seduction of chance,
and gamble of potential

The addiction lures me
From the common and conventional . . .
I accept the invitation without exception . . .
I am often unsure of where I am,
But I have never been lost

Letter to Cayce

All these years later,
What I miss in life
Is the smallness of your hands
As I guided you around the big world,
And the bigness in your eyes
As you took in all the wonders before you . . .
The miles of smiles behind a high-pitch voice,
Expressing the glory of each new experience,
And the sighs at night
As you drifted away, carried in my arms,
As the enormity of the day had worn on you . . .
But mostly, the size of you in my life
That exists now in big, bold memories

A Minor Poet

When I cannot find the words to say,
I phrase my thoughts in this way,
When I cannot tell you what I mean,
I hope these images can be seen,
When experiences are strange or intense,
Figurative language helps them make sense,
So many metaphors toil and bleed
That on my tombstone it will read
“Though you might not know a poem he wrote,
Here lies a poet of minor note.”

Bridges

I understand now
That too much of my life
Was spent sprinting toward
Far away bridges,
Enthusiastically anticipating
The connections to be made
And challenging canyons to be crossed,
Never pausing on the bridge
Currently under my feet,
Just never glancing back
To notice those behind me
Were smoldering and disintegrating

Far from God

How far we are from God
Cannot be measured in feet or miles,
But how familiar we are
With the distance
From our knees to Heaven

Reflection

The image at the end
Is of a solitary silhouette
Reflecting from a snow-covered hillside,
Shivering more from uncertainty than cold,
Assessing, reassessing, measuring, and surveying
A life that could have been against a life that was,
A unique collection of were-s and if-s,
At dusk, pondering under a hazy winter moon,
White stars in the sky, orange river in the valley,
Wondering if it was all it could have been,
All it was supposed to be,
Or if we had any choice in the matter

Answers

Although we may not know it,
At any time,
On any day,
For any reason,
We are only moments away
From all the answers
To all our questions

Too Soon

One day soon
(any day will be too soon),
You will belong to the world . . .
The world will show up at your door,
And call and text endlessly,
And will want your presence,
And will ask to go places,
And will take up your time,
And occupy your mind,
And tempt you with adventure,
And you will find for yourself
A happiness and a place
In that world that will come,
Yet tonight, you will sleep
On my shoulder throughout the night,
And I will be your world,
A little while longer

Guardian Angel

Rest now,
The weariness shows on you . . .
Diligently following my caravan
Of disappointments and broken dreams,
Escorting me down the winding road
Of loves lost and losses at love,
Enduring the gray and ashen days
Of disbelief and despondency,
Pausing only in the slivers of sunlight
Or on an occasional star in the darkest night . . .
Lie now, and take ease,
Unfasten, your loyalty is without question . . .
Unburden, your comfort has been ubiquitous,
Unseen, yet a palpable and omnipresent
Witness to the saddest sideshow
Ever assigned to a sentinel

Musing

When autumn leaves
Fall toward the Earth,
It is not a dive,
Rather, they float
In a soft, drifting zig-zag
Reflecting, and taking in the world
One last time
Before their commitment
To the ground

Playback

I dread the thought
That at the moment
When my body is surrendering
The spirit,
My life's journey will not
Play back in a flash,
But in a slow, measured pace,
So each mistake and regret
Will be painfully relived
In my retreating conscience

Restless

My bed sits empty night after night
While I wander around the house
Because I cannot afford to rest,
And I am not ready to sleep,
The adrenaline in my brain
Is activated by a dread
Deep into my dreams
Shadows will come
To overwhelm me
Before I have made
My peace

The Dance

When you dance with the devil,
He always holds you tightly . . .
It's a celebratory tango of passion and alacrity
Between the condemned and the condemner,
Where the eternal outcome is understood and unspoken . . .

As a partner, Jesus is more aloof . . .
The distance is greater, at arm's length,
And the embrace is less firm, ambivalent . . .
It is the eternal waltz of pursuit and salvation,
One partner clearly leads and the other obliged to follow . . .

When we choose a partner,
The devil will pursue us when the music starts,
Still Jesus must be sought,
Usually at the end of the night,
When the music has stopped

Speculating

I wonder if death will float over me

Like a feather,
Lightly touching
And softly settling

And

I wonder if it will be a collision,

A violent transition,
An abrupt separation
From knowing to unknowing

WWJD

As I look around my world
And at modern history,
I wonder if a better approach
Would have been to let Jesus live
And be the living embodiment
Of righteousness and kindness,
Instead of a martyr
That allows us sanction in advance
For sinful and immoral behavior
With a deathbed reprieve

Moments

It often said
That life is full of moments
That we wish we could sustain
Or live over and over . . .

As it turns out,
Life, is itself,
An unsustainable moment
That we can never live again

Alibi

My enduring alibi is that I was busy—
Busy “doing” in place of “living . . .”
My testament will reveal
Obligations, tasks, and appointments,
Work, chores, and missions,
Errands, duties, and projects . . .
So, I simply failed to RSVP,
And disregarded all the invitations,
Because I allowed the busy-ness of life
To keep me from living

Confessions

There is reason, enough, to believe
That confessions are concealers
That ease our conscience
And meliorate our minds,
Ostensibly, a redeeming gesture
For sins, known or unknown,
Assuming humility and contrition
Over ego and pride,
And maybe a prospect of disguising
A replete revelation of true transgression

A Day in the Life

Life begins with renewed optimism
At the beginning of each day,
While hope is reinforced with the light
With the rising sun in the morning . . .
There is an invigorating confidence
Experienced at mid-day,
Still a creeping anxiety comes upon us
In early afternoon,
And denial is conspicuous
By early evening . . .
A quiet despair settles over us
As shadows creep across the moon,
We sleep with our arms around melancholy
Throughout the night

A Little Insanity

What my life was missing most
Were the Van Gogh's,
Where the "Sorrowing Old Man"
(At Eternity's Gate)
And the tortured artist
Were inseparable,
And suffering and passion were as
Indistinguishable as art and artist . . .
And we could have weaved a web
Of stories from the Yellow House . . .

I met the acquaintance of no Don Quixote's,
Who prefer the illusion over authenticity,
And a chivalrous knighthood held value
When the entire world was keeping their senses . . .
Instead of exploring impractical idealism
(Thank you, Cervantes)
Conquering the present was less interesting
Than the tilting at windmills,
But we could have narrated our own tales,
Gracefully navigating La Mancha

Consummated

As the hourglass empties,
As the path starts to narrow,
As the sun starts to fade
As the shadows begin to settle in,
As a new chill starts to fill the air,
We brush away the debris of living,
Let us not glance back, think, and utter
“If only . . . ”



Dr. Michael A. Roberts is an English Professor in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. He has spent his career teaching various aspects of literature, such as American Literature, American Authors, Literary Criticism, Introduction to Literature, and Literary Movements and Eras. He lectures and conducts workshops around the country on various aspects of literature, composition, and history. He cites his first and ongoing inspiration as being a father to Cayce and Kathryn. He enjoys traveling in summer to historic places with his wife, Angela. He spends his free time trying to build a reputation as a person of consequence.





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