

THE SOUNDS A SHADOW MAKES



DR. MICHAEL A. ROBERTS

The Sounds a Shadow Makes

Collected poems

By

Dr. Michael A. Roberts

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Dedication

To Cayce, Kathryn, and Angela

To Dan and Steven

To Bruce and Mom in heaven

Collected poems

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I. SHADOWS

(Darkness: real and imagined)

The Sounds a Shadow Makes

The whines and the wails
Suppressed, concealed in darkness...
From the shadows comes the sound
Of camouflaged cries,
Unseen suffering from unknown depths,
Despair in black attire,
Wishes as whispers
With no salvation in silence...
There is a beautiful, painful symphony
Played on instruments of torment,
From the fringes of the blackness.

Quiet Mornings

I think of you most on quiet mornings,
before the mayhem of daily life
brings my thoughts to
empty tasks...

You return to me when a sound or scent
made familiar by you crosses by
and, for a moment, we are reunited,
And I pause for indulgence and immersion.

At night, as the world prepares for moonlit tranquility
And the shadows unfold their veil of darkness,
I reassemble my fractured thoughts from the day's mind-storms
And try to collect the butterflies of memory we shared,
Before the freedom of sleep escorts me to another quiet
morning.

Silent and Still

I went to meet her again today
In that quiet place upon the hill...
She was there beneath the magnolia tree
Waiting silent and still...

I was nervous and awkward,
My words scattered and shrill...
Sunlight crept through the magnolia leaves,
As she listened, silent and still...

I became self-conscious and flustered,
My words lost meaning and will,
The shadows crept across the meadow
While she remained silent and still...

Finally my mind submitted,
A starving heart impossible to fill...
A butterfly landed delicately on the stone
Where she lay silent and still.

Reflections

Reflections are better than shadows because they allow fall trees
with orange-red leaves
to spread a colorful canopy over the glassy current of mountain
streams

And puddle-jumping youths to eliminate their mocking twins
With plunging vengeance, muddy drops exploding down their
foreheads.

Reflections permit the careful tailoring of lines and plainness
For the insecure divorcee on her latest dinner.

It is the rare chance to see ourselves in our cars,
The others idling in rush hour.

Shadows do not entertain, amuse, or satisfy.
The do not answer questions.

They are a mystery of darkness,
Flat, black, ominous,

Bending us against objects and reality
In a dance de noir, mindless, without self-reflection.

We Walk

(The walks we take now are in my mind.)

The creaking boards of the wooden walkway are still familiar.

The breeze from the river still chilly across morning dew.

The smell of jasmine and honeysuckle just as fragrant.

The feel of your head against my shoulder is still real.

Your hands as soft and voice as melodic.

The sound of the current over the mossy rocks still a hymn.

Our pace still slow and meandering.

The sun still peeks from behind the maples.

Frogs and lizards still scatter from our approach.

Our footprints mark history through this course.

But each day, around sunrise, through the window,

Shines the rays of truth on your empty pillow.

And the shadows of reality drag me toward a lesser destiny,

Like a scarecrow blown helplessly across a barren field.

The Passing

What right has Heaven
to you?
Who granted the afterlife
the privilege?
Maybe you were destined
For early eternity,
But I am crumpled now
In the shadow
Of your absence,
And crippled now
by my own persistent
humanity

Exodus

I sat a suitcase on a busy city sidewalk,
And sat on top, waiting for an outbound transport.

People walking absent-mindedly bumped my case
In their zombie-like trance.

Crowded city buses paused for a moment, spewing exhaust
onto me,
as vacant-eyed mummies entered and exited the tube.

Yellow jitterbugging taxis splashed me with curbside mud
as frenetic bio-pods hail and halt them and lunge into back
doors.

Finally, I stood from my suitcase and looked around,
as the sidewalks were claimed by shadows, rats, roaches, addicts.

I walked back toward a life I was trying to escape
Feeling almost alive now.

The Watcher

The pale, featureless face
in the window at night
watches me

Like a candle moving about in a jack-o-lantern.

The emotionless face impresses me
as hollow of thought,
void of purpose, but incredulous.

I often think as I pass
that it's one desire
is homicide,
For wasting my life outside the window.

Hide or Seek

Life reveals itself
In streaks of light.
What we experience
Exposes a fragility
Of mind and emotion,
Wisdom exposed
Through confessions and betrayal
Make us brittle and susceptible,
As a strawman beaten
By autumn squalls.
But we may retain residence
In the dark corners of ignorance,
Safe in the insecurity
Of denial and oblivion.
We choose
To live life in the shadows
Or as scarecrows.

Specter

Black night,
Blue shadows,
A crescent moon,
Scattered stars,
One writer,
In a window,
No words on his page.

Noir

“Your poems are really dark,”

She said...

I handed her a flashlight

And continued writing.

II. “IS”

(Metaphors and Definitions for Life)

Eternity

is

The personified, imperishable,
interlacing of wrinkled, crooked fingers
For a leisurely evening stroll,
On the fringe of rising tide,
Leaving the footprints
Of togetherness
Across a secluded beach,
As the sun sets
Over the waves.

Hope

is

Gently stroking her arm

And making plans

For many more years

Over the sounds

Of her breath

And her heartbeat

That the machines

Carry on.

Music

is

The cotton candy giggling of girls,
Squirring in their beds
With visions of bedtime stories
Lingering in their heads
And “goodnight, Daddy” whispers
As you turn off the light,
And watch them drift off to fairy land
From behind their door each night.

Regret

is

The sound of finality,
Of the closing door,
The sight of empty drawers left half-open,
The vanishing scent of her perfume
Lingering
From her path to the garage,
The folded letter left unopened
On the counter,
The credits rolling
From her favorite series,
The radiant, diminishing red glow
From the car's tail lights,
The hangers swinging empty, without purpose,
in the closet,
And the library of words in your head,
unspoken.

The boss

is

The little lady
With tangled hair
And puddling blue eyes
And quivering bottom lip
Who wants to know if
You can skip work
To stay home
And have tea
In the princess' castle.

Stubbornness

is

The turning away
From the kiss
That she offers in peace,
Contrition,
and reconciliation,
For a transgression
you committed.

Fate

is

Your circumstances

Void of choice,

A destiny

Void of voice,

A decision

Void of say,

An unexpected

dawn, day

A prearranged covenant

Void of trust,

Ashes to ashes,

Dust to dust.

Poetry

is

The light,
Nearly imperceptible
Sprinkling of words that
Settle undetected
And unsuspected
In the deepest crevices
Of your mind
Until some arbitrary instigation
Elicits a spontaneous recitation
From your mind
To your soul.

A Shadow

is

That thin, dark part of you,

That flat, black dimension

That emanates from and opposes

The lighter side,

Mysterious, ubiquitous,

An echo of you,

Dark, ominous,

Phantom of you,

That is not quite you.

Improvisation...

is

Finding a credible response,
when challenged,
a reasonable, spontaneous
response to the question
of just how much
you love her
still.

Aggravation

is

The alternating states
of “clear” and “congested”
“go,” “don’t go”
in both directions
of the highway
as you attempt
to exit
the parking lot.

Indifference

is

The feeling of not feeling,
The preference of not caring,
The ultimate objectivity,
The hallmark of not judging swiftly or harshly,
Lacking empathy, compassion, and pity,
Being unmoved by charisma, character, or circumstance,
Expressed without preference, bias, or emotion.
It is the disposition of cancer
And hollow men.

Fishing

is

The embodiment

Of patience and hope,

A marriage

of optimism and prayer,

An affair

between silence and persistence,

A distinctive endeavor

Where even defeat

Can enrich the soul.

Legacy

is

The dust of human kindness
we spread across the world
before the dust of our humanity
is spread across
the universe.

Foolishness

is

The concubine of ego and pride
That ignores the feeling of dread inside,
That jousts with the voice inside your head,
Ignores the signs of sin and dread,
Prods the soul and dares the will,
Tempting fate and seeking thrill:
A walk-through fire, leaving you behind
Fool of heart, fool of mind.

Guilt

is

the serrated mind's echoes,
Whose tentacles tangle our memories,
and heavy black heart anchors our joy,
The sustained soul prison
That incarcerates our present in the past,
That unspoken confession of contrition
that prevents us from dancing freely
with the ghosts of unburdened conscience.

Free will

is

The gift of an unrestrained spirit
To be carefree and remorseless,
Ordinary or extraordinary,
Shameful or shameless,
Uninhibited and unshackled,
Autonomous and emancipated,
Allowing the butterfly to fly
Closer to the clouds,
And the moth to fly
closer to the fire.

Old Age

is
when we
have lived
long enough
to know
what is bad
And yet
still
do not
pursue it.

A Crescent Moon

is

A luminous reminder
of the forgotten and forsaken,
full and robust fixture,
inspirational and wished upon
orb of life,
replaced by this eroded,
splintered, shred
of life that was once
the full moon of promise.

Infinity

is

The apparition
we shelter in our mind
and cradle in our hearts
because we have survived
the jeopardy of passion.
For now we need time everlasting
to repair the fissure of our souls
And outlive the anguish of grief.

Peace

is

The absence of all sound
but the faint, rhythmic whisper of
your delicate measured breathing,

Void of all sensation

but the restful melodic refrain of
your sleeping heartbeat,

Unaware of any fragrance

but the familiar, distinct earthy aroma
of your hair under my chin...

Abandoned by every visual distraction
but the moonlight-outlined silhouette
of your shapely, sultry figure...

Vacant of any other thought

but the deep and pure contentment
of the you beside me

That lends me tranquility

Through my nights...

Halloween

is

Not the time when we are frightened
By miniature monsters and ghouls
Whose singular focus is securing
Provisions for a prolonged sugary feast,

It is

The time when we are confronted by
The ghouls in our past,
The ghosts in our heads,
And the hauntings of our regrets
That cannot be disguised
With sheets and masks.

Mercy

is

Being compassionate enough

And benevolent enough

To leave your heart

On the pillow

Where she sleeps

As you close the door

For the last time.

Weather

is

A disposition,

A state of mind.

Cold, rain, clouds, and sun

Are not the sensations of the skin

But the relative storms

In our thoughts

That manifest themselves

As guilt, regret, cynicism,

And occasionally, self-fulfillment,

Which determines the forecast of our lives.

A fool

is

Not the jester
Who exposes himself to public ridicule

Or openly pranks himself
For the amusement of others

Or visibly and shamelessly castigates himself
For approval, applause, and laughter...

It is he who
Privately discredits himself

By making his heart vulnerable
To the vulture of love and the raven of desire

Stumbling idiotically
Across the meadow of hope

And lying battered
Under the solitary tree

Of rejection

Tomorrow

is

Today's afterlife,
A redemption for the sins of
procrastination and sloth,
Forsaken ambition and opportunity,
Waste of youth and wonder,
Junkpile of intentions and purpose,
Rejection of passion and discovery.

Fall

Is

The time of our lives
When thin brittle carpet
Of dried brown leaves
Crunches beneath our feet,

And the whispers
of the cool autumn wind
Stir the chilled sensation
of self-awareness in us,

And the blinding sun
Hanging like a dangling pendulum
below the clouds
And the fall tide creeping away

From the shore like life's metronome,
Bring to our hearts
The nostalgia and regrets
Of wasted spring.

Blue

is

The color of inevitability,
Of misty eyes and broken hearts;

The experience of melancholy,
Of forsaken fantasies and fortunes;

The mocking ignominy,
Of misery and misfortune;

And the cold-water awakening
Of solitude and unanswered prayers.

A Zephyr

is

The unexpected soft, subtle breeze
Of forgiveness and reconciliation.

A temperate draft drifting down from heaven
That lifts our spirit and mind.

A gale that sails across dew-covered grass
And brings refreshment, invigoration.

A restorative, vigorous gust
That restores our hopes and daydreams.

Satisfaction

is

For me,

My daughters choosing

My lap

Over an otherwise

Empty

Couch.

III. RELATIONSHIP DYSPHORIA

Vehicle

Love is only one vehicle
on the freeway of emotions...
Its destination is no more urgent
than the excursion of angst we experience...
Its path no more paramount
than the traffic of fear and apprehension...
It does not exceed the miles
of sadness we navigate,
Its journey no more remarkable
than our daily commute,
anger and confusion...
But it is the road most likely
to leave us broken down
and isolated on the curbside.

Romeo

My love is not in the same league as Romeo,
It will not die with me,
It will not lead me to a place of forgotten self,
Its intensity never to be compared with an eternal flame...
It does not have a majesty from which legend will be created,
Historians will not document its legacy,
Scientists will not research its origins,
It will flicker subtly,
It will long for you, only a moment,
And follow you part way
On your journey from me.

Concerto

From time to time
my imagination flickers
To the potential pleasure
of a private recital:
arrayed as an angel,
conducting a sentimental symphony
and performing a medley of emotion
instead of another ice musical,
played by a snowman
on a frost-covered piano.

For Mom

Life's breezes
blow less
gently now,
and across
a noticeably
emptier
landscape.

Unspoken

The worry in your eyes
Hugs my mind
with far more firmness
Than your arms around
my neck.

Melancholy

I think I will cling to the sad thoughts a little longer,
The crackling of regret sweeter than resolution:
The mind-stings make the suffering stronger,
But hinder the rush to dissolution...
The cerebral tears help me sustain
The distance between the fire
That burns confirmation into my brain,
And the smoldering debris of desire:
I'll trade the anguish of contemplation
For any peace from abdication.

Daughters

Because I have known you,

I can leave...

Nothing is left unfinished.

I have no discontent,

no grievances,

no dissatisfaction.

No wish unfulfilled.

No desire unattained...

You are my daughters,

And blessed is the life

Of your father.

Hide-and-Seek

For Cayce

You found the best hiding spot ever,
But you were always bright,
Sneaky, independent, and clever.
I looked for you throughout the day
In every place I knew.
Others knew, but would not say.
I laughed at first, but began to worry.
I checked your room, the park, the swings,
Until my legs gave out and my eyes were blurry.
As I sat frustrated and puzzled without a clue
A beautiful lady approached, giggling at her father's dismay.
I laughed a little inside, still denying that she is you.

Poem for You

Instead of sending you roses,
I wrote you this poem.
Its impression is not dramatic.

A poem is not as pretty,
its smell is not as pleasing,
its beauty is not dynamic.

It was plucked from a fertile mind...
Instead of needing sun and water,
It needs imagination
and heart.

Kisses

Your kisses, honey,
Are like cutting my hair
With a butterknife:
Messy and uninspiring,
But sincere in effort,
And successful in aim.

The Kite

For Kathryn

From my hand
You break free
And sprint down the unblazoned trail,
Carrying your favorite crayon
To color your own world
And write your own story...
I try to follow,
But my old age
And your youthful enthusiasm
Have separated us,
And I am left to trail
behind your footsteps,
Resigned only as a remote witness
Of your colorful terrestrial vapor trail,
Dramatic and dynamic,
Like a kite
Liberated from its line,
Blowing happily
And indiscriminately
Towards the promises
On a distant horizon.

Verse

She was the best line
of the worst poem
I've ever written.

The Singer

Your voice echoes
With the songs
On your playlist,
Taking a journey
Through the rooms
Of our home,
Finally reaching me,
Faint but distinct,
On the terrace,
Reminding me
That there are so many
Other things
I love
About you.

Pictures

The pictures I keep of you
Are not in frames on the mantle,
But images in my mind,
Some grand portraits,
Others snapshots,
Witty captions in the margins.

Quench

My love is not what inspires you
to climb some unscalable peak
My love is not what motivates you
to find answers to unanswered questions;
My love is not what elevates you
To a spiritual level of peace and zen;
It is, instead, some tepid drink of water,
on a thirsty summer day.

Fuppy

You are uniquely engineered for locomotion:

Four legs and paws

adapted brilliantly by nature

And a swiveling tail

that not only portrays your level of happiness

But also serves as rudder

To navigate uneven and unfamiliar terrain,

Even with your nose gliding along the earth.

So the whole idea of “walking”

Is absurd, undermined, and falsely labeled

If I am carrying you.

The Candle

You say our love
Has been like a candle,
Illuminating, enchanting, hypnotic,
Burning in on itself,
Deep and through the core,
A casualty of its own intensity,
Eviscerated and hollow,
A brittle shell of testament
To passion igniting a wick.

Bluer

I cannot get more bluer than blue,
No one can be more you-er than you;
I cannot get more sadder than sad,
And I've never had-er more than we had;
I can't get more aloner than alone, but
You were outgrown-er and I was outgrown;
You could not be more goner than gone, and
Now you have moved more on-er than on;
Nothing could be more endier than end, and
He is clearly more friendlier than friend.

Reckless

I am hopelessly addicted
to the danger
Of dancing blindfolded
on wet rooftops,
Climbing to treetops and drinking lemonade
in lightning storms,
Driving the wrong way on one-way roads
with no headlights,
Playing Russian roulette
with six in the chamber,
Walking barefoot and whistling loudly
over rattlesnake dens,
Styling my hair with the blow dryer on high
in the shower,
And to giving us another chance.

Born Again

I was born in the fall
of my 36th year
When all I knew of life and the world
was rediscovered:
A nearly imperceptible pixel
of thought that
Morphed into the rage of conscience
And a torrent of reconfiguration that
Replaced my idea
of what I could be
without you.

Solitude

I spend most of my days now
Breaking the surface of the pond
Back and forth with my bare feet
 To disrupt the reflection
of myself in the light without you.

I find most contentment on moonless nights,
Creating shadow puppets on my wall,
Indulging in the solitary confinement
 of my imagination,
Listening to the night symphony of the crickets.

The Cypress

I looked back into the world this morning
And from what used to be our bedroom,
I discovered a distorted view
of the Bald Cypress tree across the river.

With roots exposed, it leans
instead of standing majestically, as before...
With bare, twisted, leafless limbs, it suffers,
Void of any signs of life.

The branches droop in defeat
Acquiescing to the wind and ice...
Its reflection in the river is like my own:
Deeply flawed, with indeterminate future.

Pity

The mournful whispers over the tombstone,
And the wistful whistling through the willow trees:
Is the impetuous wind weeping for me
Without you.

For Bruce

The shadow that follows me
cannot be seen..

It is part of me,
but lives as invisible vapor,
A ubiquitous presence
that is felt and sensed,

It is distinguished
from the physical world,
an inconspicuous breeze
that encompasses me,

lifts me up,

And cushions me

Against too much pain and sorrow.

Craving

The strongest craving I have
is to laugh at and ridicule the life I have now,
from a distance place, mindset, and experience,
With you, or maybe with the Devil,
because moving in the direction
of Heaven or Hell
is far better than the purgatory
of moribundity.

Lullaby

Now I can only
sleep
With the music
of your breathing
in my ear.

The Last Poem

I think this is the last poem
I'll write for you.
Their meanings have been drowned
In the black water of miscommunication,
The sentiment lost
in the suppressing shadows of ego,
And their essence disoriented
In the tangled junkyard of pride:
There is no virtue to poems
That are read but not understood.

A Moment

For Angela

Finally, in this tranquil moment,
I can concede that destiny,
Over wisdom or luck,
Is the ultimate explanation
Of our sustained connection and affection,
Culminating and divulged,
Reflecting, sorting, one by one,
Through the colors of this existential rainbow...
The years spun on gathering clouds,
Enduring ominous and creeping shadows,
Sustained at times
By only slivers of sunlight...
Yet, Despite the splinters
of occasional discontent,
Yesterday we were held together
By a shared sentiment and passion
And convictions pledged and unarticulated...

Two spirits forged in an unbreakable union...
Now the sun loiters peacefully
on the horizon,
A consequence of fate,
Unified in body, mind, spirit...

IV. TRANSIENT MORTALITY

Circle

We end as we began,
Gasping for air,
Signs of life displayed and indicated
by an atmosphere of beeps and bells,
The peaks and valleys on the screen
Foretelling a life that was to be
And now a record of a path that has been.

We lie, again, helpless and anxious,
Confused and crying,
Frightened and insecure,
Waiting for someone
who will put their arms around us,
lift us up,
And take us home.

Wisdom

The wisdom shared
between the clouds and water droplets
Never rains down on us
In time to sidestep the storm,
But in sufficient volume and force
To flood our world with remorse
And drown us in regret.

Death by Design

If we were to choose our method
And time of death, I would choose

To dissolve in the bank of a snow-covered river,
with snow owls circling curiously above,

Or fracture into a brisk salty breeze
Or ignite with the glare of a rising oceanic sun

To be absorbed into the crest of a majestic wave,
Furious, and salty, exhaling into the shore and oblivion...

Instead of here, and now, like this,
Undignified, frightened, desperate,

Clinging to the hope that in this final second
I was seen, and might be remembered.

The Doors

The elderly man in the oval glasses
sits stiff and straight
and stares at the entrances and exits,
through the double doors of doubt:
He only blinks at the buzz
of coming and going.

A small silver cross dangles outside his faded shirt,
The chain lost somewhere
In the network of wrinkles around his neck...
He clings to a transparent bag of items
That belong to the person behind the doors,
Pale and anxious, sterile and hopeful...

Finally, through the opened doors,
A familiar face with a purposeful walk
Approaches the man in oval glasses.
He kneels, pauses, and whispers,
And the pale man folds in the middle,
Clutching the bag in his blue-veined hands.

Leaves

An ideal life would be one
Where you never trade
The scattering of colored maple leaf piles
For neat, white stacks of copy paper.

Droplet

The saddest part of a thunderstorm
is the last drop of rain,
slipping purposefully down the vein
of a green palmetto leaf,
lingering for a moment at the tip,
to reflect
before plummeting
to an uncertain future.

Castles

It is better to erect tombstones
to audaciousness and intrepidity
in distant, foreign lands,
than to build castles
of timidness and apprehension
in our own back yards.

Man's best friend

An elderly man and a dog
Occupied my path on my latest journey,
And I stopped for a moment
To listen.
“What’s his name?” I asked,
Lightly petting the dog.
“Jasper... he’s not very social,
But he follows instructions well,
Stays close to the house,
Always obeys, eats lightly,
Likes to stare out the window for hours,
And gets excited on the rare occasion
When someone knocks on our door,”
Said the dog.
Then he handed me his paw,
We shook, and I continued.

Fireflies

The restless fireflies in my mind
make me pursue the dragonflies of fantasy,
the damselflies of destiny,
And a covenant with the cicadas,
Ignoring the needling of mosquitos,
To search for the songs of the katydids.

Lemmings

My frustration lies not
With those who drive slowly,
But with those who are content
To dutifully follow.

Skipping

A rock that is intended
for an opposite shore,
Skipping across the water's surface,
May find its own contentment
Merely halfway across.

Harmony

The clear current
Sliding over the flattest boulders
Takes exception to the notion
That harmony has never created art.

Prophet

She sat cross-legged on the grass in the park
as puddles gathered the spring raindrops,
desperate to share her thoughts on God,
Ignored by passersby with hurried steps and black umbrellas.

Her smile was genuine and her convictions plain:
She invited guests to her side with smiles and flowers,
But no one cared to hear a primitive version of prophecy and
grace.
Her mane dripped as she pivoted her head from side to side at
the sinners.

She assured forgiveness to those who mocked her or tossed
coins.

Our eyes met momentarily through the café window,
And I immediately glanced down behind my book,
Becoming too aware of my own flesh to dust.

When the sun danced across the clouds,
And the rainbow perched in the patchy sky,
She gathered her thoughts on salvation
And dissolved, barefoot, into the human landscape.

Stoicism

Our view from here has never changed,
Our comprehension beyond never grew.
A scattered life needs its pieces rearranged
When there are passions to renew.

A dream holds potential we can weave,
But a promise holds weight we need to hold,
And desire is no reason to deceive,
And vows should never be left cold.

The world won't wait for a curious mind,
Honeysuckle does not seek a hummingbird,
A miracle does not wait for us to find,
A poet is not sought out by the word.

But our souls lay bare without conviction,
Our heavenly fate rests on affirmation:
Wanderlust can be an enduring affliction,
But disillusionment keeps us from salvation.

The Space Between

The space between the smoke and the fire
Is the passion with which we chase desire.

The space between shadows and the night
Is the eagerness with which we pursue light.

The space between puddles and rain
Is the degree to which we can endure pain

The space between a stranger and a lover
Is the heart you share with one another.

The space between what one does and what one remembers
Is the tolerance our mind has for the embers.

The space between being happy or elated
Is the company with whom it's celebrated.

The space between being together or apart
Is just a matter of taking or giving heart.

The Veil

We should temper our excitement
Around the unveiling of the mysterious
Meanings of life,
Hidden from our eyes and understanding,
Because once the mantle is raised,
And the truth is revealed,
The revelation may just be
That we are freaks
In this show.

Puppets

If anyone asks
How I am spending my time,
Please explain that
I am preoccupied with
Converting my memories
Into grotesque and disfigured
Shadow puppets
And projecting them
On the wall of life.

Inspid

It has taken me
Nearly all my life
To comprehend,
And accept,
That this state
Of ordinary
Is not
a temporary condition.

Watches

The next time you check your watch,
Think less about the face
And more about the band.
For while the face
Tells us about now,
The band is a reminder
That mortality is fixed and finite,
With its own invisible hand
Tightening around our throats.

Sunlight

The sun takes
both shadows and icicles.
It takes the shadow from the scarecrow,
lonely in the barely fields,
and the ice from the snowman,
unforgiven in the hailstorm.
It illuminates what we cannot see
And revives what we cannot feel:
A promise of elucidation and salvation
In an unassuming sliver of light.

Lunacy

It's time to embrace insanity,
Set aside ego and vanity,
As we watch the world unwind.
It helps if you can lose your mind,
Unrest, disorder down like rain,
Protect yourself and go insane.
With hysteria and chaos on the brink,
Stop yourself before you think,
Forget the urge to succeed or thrive:
Lunacy will help you survive.

February

February is the state of life

In which we often find ourselves.

We have managed to distance our thoughts

From the hellish trouble-vortex of winter,

Emotionally frozen and clinging to stability,

Perilously, like an ice-covered birch limb.

But February also has us not yet realizing

The full potential of spring,

The manifested resolve of a carefree spirit,

And complete emersion in the freedom of being,

Without reservation, hesitation, or despondency,

Lying just past our thawing, outstretched fingertips.

Marionette

In her life, she was a marionette.
Her strings pulled by the thoughts of others,
She danced at the demands on her beauty,
And bowed for the flattery of figure,
Each person a puppeteer,
Each relationship a performance.

The years of pulling and tugging
Left her wires frayed and tangled,
And when she was liberated
From judgement and expectation,
She crumbled.
No encore.

Footprints

Few moments are as somber
And futile as footprints on a beach...
They reflect a common condition
Of expression for the sake of the aesthetic,
Emblematic of wandering without purpose,
An impulse to leave our own impression
On a society where we are measured
By our spray-can graffiti expositions,
superficial philosophies, and playdough axioms,
Which, like the footprints in the sand,
Will soon enough be forsaken and dismissed,
unconditionally terminated
By a capricious and indifferent tide.

Appraisal

I wake up every morning
Face down on the floor
because my dreams
kick me aside.

I admit, this is a different way
of looking at life...
It prompts an honest
evaluation of where I am...

My best intentions
have fallen short,
And my aspirations
have yielded
To a sobering, somewhat
ugly reality:
Disillusion and dismay.

Free Cell

It's an inconvenient fact
That so much effort is spent
On rescuing us from jails
that others perceive as constraints
On our personal freedoms and choices.

Your endeavors of intervening, however,
Do not rise to the level or meet the standard
Of contentment and peace I experience
Playing solitaire in a prison
Of my own making.

Dirt Road Odyssey

Not many who have known me
Have found me...
I have been here all along,
Walking beside a parched, dusty road
With the sun at my back,
Dreading only the passing
Of an occasional automobile
That stirs the dust,
Making me blind and parched,
With the driver
Looking in the mirror as he passes
With a moment's curiosity
About who I was,
Where I was going,
And why I was so far
From home.

Penumbra

Sometimes, we blister
From the light of scrutiny
That the world shines on us...

I prefer the shade
of non-conformity,

A vantage point from which
I can watch the ants of anonymity
Scurry toward notoriety and glory,
Compromising the subdued and sober
Serenity of the penumbra,
Of which I am
A permanent resident.

Mr. Terry Dooley, *Youth Pastor/Musician-*

I was familiar with Dr. Roberts' work after purchasing the two chapbooks that preceded this one. When this piece became available, I couldn't wait to read it. These "scribbled lines" take you on a rollercoaster journey through the author's thoughts, rhythms, and rhymes while imploring you to examine your own interpretations. Pain, wit, hope, and darkness coexist freely among the pages of this book, beckoning the reader to look inward at their own emotions and thoughts. As the author states, poetry "challenges each of us to continue living."

Ms. Angela Hines, *Teacher-*

His collections are complex. His poems are a diverse collection of social and cultural criticism, contrasted with a celebration of those aspects of life that give it definition. The author sets the framework with the mood but allows the reader to fill in the spaces with personal interpretations and form a personal relationship with the poetry. These collections I will read many, many times

Mr. J. Danny Beall, *History Professor-*

Written by a soul who observes, contemplates, and misses little as he captures life's dance between hope and heartache.

Kathryn Alexis, *Student-*

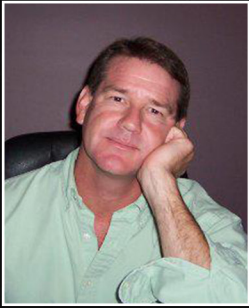
Unique And Original! I have loved poetry since I was little, but so much of the contemporary poetry reads the same, contains common themes (often like therapy or life advice). His poetry cannot be defined by one style or one poem. His collections are definitely intellectual without being high brow. Funny, profound, poignant, and accessible collections. You can read them over and over

Steven C. Roberts, *Computer Programmer-*

I enjoyed his thoughtful books. He is one of my favorite authors of any genre. The author has insightful anecdotes and I encourage all readers to add his books to their collections

Pippin, *Anonymous reader-*

Dr. Roberts' collections have a prominent place on my bookshelf. There are poems to suit every mood, and I have lost count of how many times I have read these cover-to-cover



Dr. Michael A. Roberts is a Professor of English in Myrtle Beach, SC. After years of teaching literature courses, he began publishing original poetry in 2020 after a chance conversation with his daughter, Kathryn. His literary influences are EE Cummings and Modernist authors, and his muses are his daughters, Cayce and Kathryn. "The Sounds a Shadow Makes" is his fourth collection of poetry. Dr. Roberts hopes that he inspires his readers to think as well as read. His poetry is meant to encourage "engagement in meaning," whether in life or literature.

He currently lives a very quiet life with his wife, Angela, and puppy, Sheldon, on the Waccamaw River in Conway, SC, where he spends time still trying to figure things out.