

Unsound Science:

POETRY BY ROBERT SONKOWSKY



ROBERT SONKOWSKY

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The image on the front cover of this book represents the “Twisted Ladder” or double helix of the DNA molecule. It also looks like equipment from a children’s playground, or from a terrorist training camp.

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Poetry By Robert Sonkowsky

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ISBN:	Softcover	978-1-4500-0752-8
	Ebook	978-1-4500-0239-4

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Preface

Acknowledgements and Apologies

Acknowledgements

My life has been too long, and the time remaining will be too short, and the space on this page is too short for me to annotate the overwhelming gratitude I feel for everything everyone has done for me toward this book of poetry. So I'll mention only the names of those who have helped me most recently. Besides, the poems themselves came from a well-spring of praise for all of them going back to less recent names, to ancestors, to Adam and Eve and their predecessors. So thank you, to Randy Hughes, Claire Dael, Marnie Mojares of the Xlibris Organization for production assistance and sales; to Gwen Goldsmith of St. Mark's Cathedral, Minneapolis, for musical ideas; to the Formalista e-newsletter and *Trellis Magazine* for metrical ideas; to poets Don Churchill and Steve Cribari for poetic assistance and friendship; to Susan Travis and Susan Whitestone of St. Mark's for all of the above; to Marilyn L. Taylor, Poet Laureate of Wisconsin, not merely for dispelling my fear of subsidized presses, but especially for the profound inspiration of her poetry and of her character; to my wife for the 53+ years of marriage behind the poems and for verbal assistance in their actual composition.

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Apologies

In addition to these poems, my statements on the back cover of this book with photograph, and other premeditated deceptions—not to mention (ahem!) my appearance in the on-line archives of Garrison Keillor’s “Prairie Home Companion”—you could google other results of the unsound science by which I am endeavoring to entertain with masks. So, in a mood, transient I promise, of blatant disregard for theatrical and literary taboos, I am showing you this photo of myself putting on my make-up for the role of Anselm in Moliere’s *The Miser*—neither actors nor poets should burden their audiences with rehearsals, drafts, or autobiographies:



I Wonder



I wonder how my childhood home looks now.
Dilapidated? Bent and gray, like me?
Inside do wooden floorboards creakily
re-echo ghostly footsteps remembering how
my Dad and Mom would walk from room to room,
my little brother toddled everywhere,
his lighter treads yet registering his pair
of baby shoes, while I would thump and zoom?

Outside does sun still shine or snow still fall
on sidewalks, bushes, flowers, trees, and lawn?
Do kids still play around there? Are they gone?
I must go home, the very house, to know
by knocking on the door and pleading for
a tour of floors to stave my thirst for more.



The Other Side



When I was a boy, there was a ghost in the attic of a house
 In my neighborhood. We could sometimes catch sight of it in attic windows.
 I knew then how scary and mysterious was the world beyond
 the grave. But I forgot or repressed it as I adolcesced and became
 more manly. The earlier feelings behind the goose-bumps
 of voyeuristic boyhood were tamed and received the usual
 habitations and names in various contexts, learned,
 literary, or religious. I grew up in Appleton, Wisconsin,
 a town that sees Harry Houdini as distinct
 but is not otherwise otherworldly. I grew unsuperstitious.
 but in the fourth year of my high school Latin course,
 I studied Virgil's *Aeneid* and descended in Book
 the Sixth with Aeneas and his guide, the Sybyl, the dark
 shadows of the underworld. We kids were struggling with vocabulary,
 syntax, and the mechanics of verse and its rhythm, but Charon,
 the ferryman, transported shades, across
 the Styx. He is a messy, red-eyed, filthy-bearded, filthy-
 cloaked, and deathless divinity, who is funny, yet scares
 the hell out of me to this day, poling the water
 separating the dead, like Michael over the Jordan.



Unsound Science



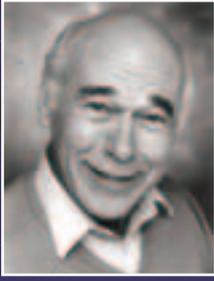
“In a laboratory dim/ a mad scientist created him”

There once was a time
when *insana scientia*,
except for Adam and Eve
and except for Prometheus,

did not exist.
Today, however,
Mad Science

has come into its own:
the rest is refuse.





Robert Sonkowsky's creative second-grade teacher, Miss Malarkey, in Appleton, Wisconsin, was his first love. She taught spelling by asking her pupils to compose stories and poems from the spelling-word-lists and to read them aloud standing before the class. As a shy young boy, and future actor and poet, he enjoyed, already then, speaking non-autobiographically, with what would one day become a Stanislavskian basis in the imagination of real life.

Robert remembers two lines from the poem he wrote for Miss Malarkey about a MONSTER:

“In a laboratory dim
a mad scientist created him.”

Now, seventy years later, he uses the phrase “mad scientist” and the implied abstraction, “mad science: (= “unsound science” – see page 11) as the title and broadly inclusive theme of the present selection of his poems. These range from the childhood spookiness of that “monster” poem to allusions to real science, with a lot in between, including love and even religion; from strictly formal verse to free verse, always with high regard for oral reading.

After grade school he graduated continuously through Appleton's McKinley School, Appleton High School, Lawrence College; the Universities of North Carolina (Chapel Hill) and of Rome (Italy); post-doctoral positions at the Universities of Texas, Missouri, Wisconsin, and finally Minnesota, where he is Professor Emeritus of Classics and Theatre.

His acting career includes credits at The Attic Theater (Appleton), Lawrence College Theater, Carolina Playmakers (Chapel Hill), Durham Theater Guild, Indian Mound Theater (Berea, Kentucky), Tidewater Drama Theater (Virginia Beach, Virginia), University of Minnesota Theater, several small Minneapolis theaters, The Guthrie Theater, Theatre de la Jeune Lune, La Jolla Playhouse.

For details, academic and theatrical see Wikipedia; his agent's website <http://www.wehmann.com/profile.php?id=483>, his University resume <http://cnes.cla.umn.edu/people/profile.php?UID=sonko001>.

