

# Shadow Poems

*The series of poems that follows explores the idea that each of us has a shadow, part of us that's in some way cut off from our day-to-day selves, but which we can't get away from, a part that lies behind the face we present to the world. It is thus the hidden self. The secret me. The bit of me I perhaps don't like accepting. The bit I might be afraid of. Or can't control. Or simply don't understand.*

*The poems suggest that our best hope lies in coming to terms with our secret selves - not in denying them, not in running away from them, not in locking them up. Maybe our shadows are not the enemy after all. In which case, how much energy we waste in policing the border between us and our hidden selves - which may not be the enemy after all. How much richer our lives might be, how much better human life might be, if we could make friends and join forces with that which is in shadow.*

# Shadow 1

**I can say this with real pride :  
noone but I  
throws my shadow.**

**I call it my country, my field  
of operation. I cannot  
call it home.**

**I spot it sometimes, usually at night,  
leaping the wet rocks  
as the tall seas break and pursue ;**

**or poised for a moment on the bare grey bough  
calm after that stoop for eternity  
out of the wind, the clutch of the mist ;**

**or sidling with gleeful expertise  
through the ranks of the juggernauts -  
this whole brutal caravan.**

**There is no holding it  
no shaping nor naming of it ;  
it is my best hope**

**the one element  
that cannot be harmed  
cannot be reduced.**

**All risk is survivable  
and all manner of disaster  
so long as my shadow plays.**

**It holds my true life  
and will outlive me.  
It will live forever.**

Rogan Wolf  
July 1993

## **Shadow 2**

**My shadow leaps on me  
each time I sleep  
to devour me.  
Yet still my mornings  
find me whole  
and at each waking  
there my shadow hangs  
like an empty pull-over  
against my wall -  
wholly at my disposal.**

Rogan Wolf  
April 1994

## **Shadow 3**

**It is not just you  
I meet  
as I enter -  
that face you've fixed  
for the world's alarms  
those tools you deploy  
for the day's display -  
it's not only  
your smile  
that greets me  
at the door -  
your shadow  
like an unrolling carpet  
rushes across the floor  
and flings itself into my arms.**

**These days your shadow  
hits me like an unguided brick  
while you in the distance  
treading your private boards  
shimmer like a child's fantasy  
a mere colouration.  
To which should I go  
to seek redress ?  
Which emptiness ?**

**How can I rendez-vous**

**with this shadow you've disowned ?  
How can I make love  
to a shimmer, a mist ?**

Rogan Wolf  
May 1st 1994

# My Shadow

My shadow dogs me.  
It furthers me  
like a falcon's stoop  
like a fly fisherman's cast  
like moonlight across calm water.

My shadow seethes with strange life.  
When I walk it dwarfs me.  
When I sleep it engulfs me.

How have I allowed  
my shadow to grow so tall ?  
It rises from my lamp  
like a vast giggling genie.  
“Your wish is my command,  
O Master ,” my genie roars.  
And I quail.

It winks at me  
each evening  
and for that moment  
I see nothing  
anywhere in the world.

I threw my shadow  
all over town.  
It leaned across at me  
from each echoing underpass

**from each foul lift-shaft  
from each despairing alley-way.**

**I scattered my shadow like seed  
across the fields  
and the seed bounded from the earth  
like a mob of heroes  
who chased me and harried me  
and reduced me before the whole world.**

**I caught my shadow by the throat  
and flung it into a pit  
and packed the pit with sand  
boulders and rich cement  
and when all had set  
hard as rock  
I turned to escape, shrieking with relief.  
A hand formed of new rock  
seized my heel.  
I stood there above my pit  
locked in my shadow.**

**What dances we might have performed.**

*Rogan Wolf*



## Shadow 5

If ever I wake one morning  
and find my shadow gone away  
I'll know the world has ended.

For my shadow is even more  
earth-bound than I am.  
Having nowhere to fall,

to stretch out, to conjure,  
it would simply lose heart  
and fade from the picture.

Like an artist whose canvasses  
have all been stolen  
it would have nothing left

upon which to busy itself.  
But really, so little would change.  
I'd hang there as usual,

in the midst  
of all, avoiding sharp edges  
where possible.

**There'd be only this difference :  
across the Universe no trace of my shadow  
which knows the Earth so much better than I.**

*Rogan Wolf  
3<sup>rd</sup> June 1994*

# Shadow Six

For Jan

**I have this enemy  
my “inveterate foe”  
my enemy Number One.**

**Whenever we meet my enemy  
wastes me. I become zero.  
All meaning drains from me.**

**I become a flatness on the road  
a vague ugliness in the air  
an abortion. And I have nothing**

**I can call on, no wild cards  
no reserve forces, no hidden energies  
to throw into the field.**

**I call my enemy “Number One.”  
I don’t know what it looks like  
for it borrows any form**

**it chooses. And is it “He ?” or “She ?”  
It is random and boundless.  
It is All. All is “It”.**

**And I never have warning  
of an encounter. No clouds  
of dust on the horizon,**

**no slow rumble of feet, no tensing  
of greased muscle, no pause in sound.  
Simply my shadow deserts me.**

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**And suddenly I lose my footing.  
My ground just goes, my hold on space.  
I look about me. I'm not here.**

**I reach for anything I have,  
anything that makes me,  
anything that marks and shapes me.**

**I reach for my history  
my unique possession -  
it's gone it's an empty lift-shaft.**

**I reach for my voice  
my shaping words my answer my shriek  
and the words give in the wind**

**and all my forming my bite on the air  
collapses like a slack sail  
like a shower of teeth.**

**I reach for my rage my saving grace**

**and find nothing but a gasping franticness  
an incapacity, a self-immolation**

**and all that comes of my rage  
for survival is a rush to give ground  
and yield all to the poised advance of my  
destroyer.**

**I writhe in the air like a foreign element  
marooned here above ground  
hanging like a fish by the tail**

**held in triumph one Summer's evening.  
I am a transparency held to the sunlight  
open to any examination.**

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**And I cry to my shadow  
“Why *now* ? Why desert me  
*now* ? Each breath of my life**

**I have sought to escape you  
to fly weightless  
to exist in pure mind**

**to secure utter distinctness  
to achieve eternity.  
Must *now* be the time I at last succeed**

***now* when I need earth ?  
For my infidelity**

**you desert me to our ruin.”**

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**And Number One, deep in its steel case,  
lashing at forests, at continents, at cities,  
befouling ocean, air-wave, blood-stream**

**raising hordes  
of zealots to slaughter their fellows  
in the name of a phantasm**

**breeding the will to deceive  
tending the urge to piracy and plunder  
nurturing despair, aiding inertia**

**working deep in, working slowly  
to the very core, paring,  
particularising, severing, numbering,**

**Number One turns from its vast enterprise  
hissing in glee  
at my distress**

**and whispers :  
“From whence do you consider  
stem my victories ?”**

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**So there it is.  
Number One, my dread enemy  
waxes with *my* power. It wastes me**

**with a force that *I* bestow upon it.  
It is hate. It is fear.  
It feeds on hate. It feeds on fear.**

**So the fearless weakens it. The joyful wastes it.  
It exists because we want it to.  
We can *choose* to dispel it.**

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**Oh, I know you, Number One,  
lurking there in fat steel  
waxing and waning as the world turns**

**waxing and waning as terrors  
rise and settle, as the guard changes,  
as the wild dog slavers outside the walls.**

**I shall not pit  
myself against you tonight.  
Steel is not my strong-point.**

**I shall not feed you tonight.  
There are plenty who will.  
I shall turn to my love**

**and we shall reduce you  
with the force of our delight  
with the rich play of our lightness.....**

**So now Shadow, my rose, my fierce jewel,  
my ravenous eagle of the silent heights,  
let us dance together, let us rise together.**

*Rogan Wolf  
June 8th 1994*



## **Shadow 7**

**My shadow is what happens when, by getting to my feet, I place myself between the Sun and the Earth. It is the consequence upon the Earth of my standing here under the Sun.**

**The length of my shadow is determined a/ by my position relative to the Sun and b/ by the Sun's position relative to the Earth. Thus the length of my shadow is not wholly my responsibility. But much it is.**

**In getting to my feet and walking upon the Earth I am bound to create a shadow there. My shadow is the inescapable consequence of me being me, of Earth being Earth and of me being alive upon the Earth.**

**If there is anything in my shadow that feeds me, it feeds me not through my mouth, my eyes, my ears, my nose ; it feeds me through no organ placed in my head or associated with my brain ; it feeds me through my feet. I am joined to my shadow and to the Earth by my lowly, delicate feet. It is my feet which earth me and which complete the circuit made up of Sun, Earth and Self.**

**My shadow carries my shape and moves with my movements. But it has no features and it never speaks ; and all sorts of strange forms or colours could be hidden in its darkness. Its shape keeps shifting and often it simply disappears. But then it returns. When I**

**am happy I dance and with me my shadow dances. We dance together. When I am ill at ease, I labour and constantly I look back in dread and see my shadow pursuing me, threatening me.**

**Sometimes, then, my shadow seems to be my loyal and faithful friend, at others my implacable and inescapable enemy. To befriend my shadow would appear to be essential if I am to live successfully here on Earth.**

**If someone or something overshadows me, I receive immediate protection from the Sun and am relieved of the immense responsibility of my own shadow. On the other hand I am weakened, deprived of my energy and autonomy. It is as if my shadow has been stolen from me, eaten up by a stronger force.**

**And this in turn implies that my shadow is an important energy source and that I should retain that energy by insisting on my personal independence. Accordingly I must allow nothing and no one to overshadow me. For the Earth is sick and any creative source of energy which can retain wholeness must now devote itself to restoring the Earth.**

**So long as I stand upon the Earth, I shall cast a shadow there which will remain a perpetual mystery integral to my being. When through dying I cease to stand upon the Earth my shadow will be all that remains of me. All creatures who have lived on the Earth have left their**

**shadows behind them. All moments that have ever been experienced on the Earth have cast an eternal shadow there. The Earth in its brilliant lightness is thickly carpeted in shadow.**

*Rogan Wolf  
June 1994*