

## Michael Symmons Roberts

Writer - Poetry, Non-fiction and Radio

**Michael Symmons Roberts** was born in 1963 in Preston, Lancashire, UK.

His poetry has won the Costa Poetry Award, the Forward Prize, and the Whitbread Poetry Award, and has also been shortlisted for the Griffin International Poetry Prize and the T.S. Eliot Prize. He has received major awards from the Arts Council and the Society of Authors.



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### Publications

#### Non-Fiction

Publication Details	Notes
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## DEATHS OF THE POETS

2017

Jonathan Cape

From Chatterton's Pre-Raphaelite demise to Keats' death warrant in a smudge of arterial blood; from Dylan Thomas's eighteen straight whiskies to Sylvia Plath's desperate suicide in the gas oven of her Primrose Hill kitchen or John Berryman's leap from a bridge onto the frozen Mississippi, the deaths of poets have often cast a backward shadow on their work.

The post-Romantic myth of the dissolute drunken poet – exemplified by Thomas and made iconic by his death in New York – has fatally skewed the image of poets in our culture. Novelists can be stable, savvy, politically adept and in control, but poets should be melancholic, doomed and self-destructive. Is this just a myth, or is there some essential truth behind it: that great poems only come when a poet's life is pushed right to an emotional knife-edge of acceptability, safety, security? What is the price of poetry?

In this book, two contemporary poets undertake a series of journeys – across Britain, America and Europe – to the death places of poets of the past, in part as pilgrims, honouring inspirational writers, but also as investigators, interrogating the myth. The result is a book that is, in turn, enlightening and provocative, eye-wateringly funny and powerfully moving.

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## EDGELANDS

2011

Vintage

The wilderness is much closer than you think. Passed through, negotiated, unnamed, unacknowledged: the edgelands – those familiar yet ignored spaces which are neither city nor countryside – have become the great wild places on our doorsteps.

In the same way the Romantic writers taught us to look at hills, lakes and rivers, poets Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts write about mobile masts and gravel pits, business parks and landfill sites, taking the reader on a journey to marvel at these richly mysterious, forgotten regions in our midst.

Edgelands forms a critique of what we value as 'wild', and allows our allotments, railways, motorways, wasteland and water a presence in the world, and a strange beauty all of their own.

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## Poetry

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### Publication Details

### Notes

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#### RANSOM

2021

Cape Poetry

**\*\*SHORTLISTED FOR THE T.S. ELIOT PRIZE 2021\*\***

**\*A FINANCIAL TIMES 'BOOKS OF 2021' PICK\***

Ransom, the new collection from Michael Symmons Roberts, is an intense and vivid exploration of liberty and limit, of what it means to be alive, and searches for the possibility of hope in a fallen, wounded world. The poems in Ransom display all the lyrical beauty and metaphysical ambition for which his work is acclaimed, but with a new urgency, a ragged edge to what the Independent described as his 'dazzling elegance'. At the heart of this new book are three powerful sequences – one set in occupied Paris, one an elegy for his father, and one a meditation on gratitude – that work at the edges of belief and doubt, both mystical and philosophical. The idea of 'ransom' is turned and turned again, poem by poem, seen through the lenses of personal grief and loss, cinematic scenes of kidnap and release, narratives of incarnation and atonement. This is a profound and timely book from one of our finest poets.

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Publication Details	Notes
<b>MANCUNIA</b> 2017 Jonathan Cape	<p>Mancunia is both a real and an unreal city. In part, it is rooted in Manchester, but it is an imagined city too, a fallen utopia viewed from formal tracks, as from the train in the background of De Chirico's paintings. In these poems we encounter a Victorian diorama, a bar where a merchant mariner has a story he must tell, a chimeric creature – Miss Molasses – emerging from the old docks. There are poems in honour of Mancunia's bureaucrats: the Master of the Lighting of Small Objects, the Superintendent of Public Spectacles, the Co-ordinator of Misreadings. Metaphysical and lyrical, the poems in Michael Symmons Roberts' seventh collection are concerned with why and how we ascribe value, where it resides and how it survives. Mancunia is – like More's Utopia – both a no-place and an attempt at the good-place. It is occupied, liberated, abandoned and rebuilt. Capacious, disturbing and shape-shifting, these are poems for our changing times.</p>
<b>DRYSALTER</b> 2013 Jonathan Cape	<p>Michael Symmons Roberts' sixth - and most ambitious collection to date - takes its name from the ancient trade in powders, chemicals, salts and dyes, paints and cures. These poems offer a similarly potent and sensory multiplicity, unified through the formal constraint of 150 poems of 15 lines.</p> <p>Like the medieval psalters echoed in its title, this collection contains both the sacred and profane. Here are hymns of praise and lamentation, songs of wonder and despair, journeying effortlessly through physical and metaphysical landscapes, from financial markets and urban sprawl to deserts and dark nights of the soul. From an encomium to a karaoke booth to a conjuration of an inverse Antarctica, this collection is a compelling, powerful search for meaning, truth and falsehood. But, as ever in Roberts' work - notably the Whitbread Award-winning Corpus - this search is rooted in the tangible world, leavened by wit, contradiction, tenderness and sensuality.</p> <p>This is Roberts' most expansive writing yet: mystical, philosophical, earthy and elegiac. Drysalter sings of the world's unceasing ability to surprise, and the shock and dislocation of catching your own life unawares.</p>
<b>CORPUS</b> 2004 Jonathan Cape	<p>Corpus centres around the body. Mystical, philosophical and erotic, the bodies in these poems move between different worlds - life and after-life, death and resurrection - encountering pathologists' blades, geneticists' maps and the wounds of love and war.</p> <p>Equally at ease with scripture (Jacob wrestling the Angel in 'Choreography') and science ('Mapping the Genome'), these poems are a thrilling blend of modern and ancient wisdom, a profound and lyrical exploration of the mysteries of the body: 'So the martyrs took the lamb./ It tasted rich, steeped in essence/ Of anchovy. They picked it clean/ And found within, a goose, its pink/ Beak in the lamb's mouth like a tongue.' Ranging effortlessly between the physical extremes of death - from putrefaction to purification - and life - drought and flood, hunger and satiation - the poems in Corpus speak most movingly of 'living the half-life between two elements', of what it is to be unique and luminously alive.</p>