

NOTES

On August 1, 1966, Charles Whitman, after killing his mother, then his wife the night before, walked onto the University of Texas campus with an arsenal of guns and ammunition. He then proceeded to the UT Tower, where he shot and killed 16 people and injured 33 others. Over an hour-and-a-half later, three Austin Police Officers stormed the UT Tower, killing Whitman, and ultimately, ending his senseless rampage. At the time, the UT Tower shootings marked the worst mass murder in US history. The impact of this tragedy forced stunned police departments across the nation to develop Special Weapons and Tactics Teams, which today are known simply as SWAT teams. In the following two poems, we pay tribute to the men and women who lost their lives that day, and we still try to understand what pushes someone over the edge. These two poems should be entered in Poetry Interpretation. The drama mask icons simply serve as a suggestion to show the performer where to turn the page. The italicized stanzas in *Dark Shadows* are a fictitious re-enactment of Charles Whitman speaking from the tower. These lines should be performed with emotional levels and, at times, understated intensity. The two poems may be performed together as a poetic program, or *Dark Shadows* may be performed independently. Remember, this tragic incident is a part of American history, and many people lost their lives that day in 1966; therefore, please perform these poems with honesty and respect.

Numbers

August 1, 1966.

1 man,

Dozens of guns,

And countless rounds of ammunition.

1 tower.

1 tower celebrating its 13th Anniversary.

1 tower,

Standing 307 feet tall.

96 minutes.

It took 96 minutes

To end the lives of 16 innocent victims

And wound 33 others.

3 Austin Police Officers
Ended the tragedy
That stunned a nation of millions,

But most won't remember
The names of those killed.

1 name alone
Will forever be remembered.
Charles Joseph Whitman.

1 question will remain
At the forefront of American minds.
Why?



Dark Shadows

He looked down at his mother, Margaret. How still she lay.
He placed the note on the bedside shelf,
And noticed how the lamp behind him
Cast a dark shadow on the opposite bedroom wall
Making him look larger than life itself.



He drove home to his wife, Kathy. Sleeping,
She looked so peaceful. This would be the last gift
He would give her. Though it had no monetary value,
His love for her far outweighed the duty he had to perform.
He took the gun, caressed her temple, and pulled the trigger.
No wife should have to live the rest of her life in shame.



The next morning, he walked onto the UT campus.
His dark shadow followed him down the sidewalk
And again, made him look larger than life. No one
Noticed him as he carried his two overstuffed suitcases
To the Tower. No one even noticed.

