ROBERT FRANCIS
reads
his
poems
from
LIKE GHOSTS OF EAGLES
and
COME OUT INTO THE SUN
ROBERT FRANCIS reads his poems from LIKE GHOSTS OF EAGLES and COME OUT INTO THE SUN

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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ROBERT FRANCIS READS HIS POEMS

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FROM "COME OUT INTO THE SUN"

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Like Ghosts of Eagles: Poems 1966-1974 by Robert Francis

For L.S.
Whose constant expectation of poems has helped significantly to bring those poems into being.

The Mountain

does not move the mountain is not moved it rises yet in rising rests and there are moments when its unimaginable weight is weightless as a cloud it does not come to me nor do I need to go to it I only need that it should be should loom always the mountain is and I am I and now a cloud like a white butterfly above a flower.

Chimaphila, 1972

How easily I could have missed you
Your quiet blooming those July days
Noisy with the Democratic Convention
Long after your petals fall and your fragrance
Is only in my mind, after deep snow
I will call up again and again your name.

And all the other noises. All flowers
Are silent but some more so than others
And none more silent than Chimaphila
Whose petals are not sun-white daisy-white
But the subterfuge glow of forests
Dim with their dizziness, a nubbling flower.

A hundred blossoms and more I counted
Gathered in Quaker meeting, a hundred
Where in former years perhaps a dozen.

For you a late spring and a rainy summer.
Must rate as blessing. How otherwise
Should Nineteen Seventy-two have been so banner?

Chimaphila, the winter-loving (so the Greek)
But oh how summer-loving when the still air
Lingers and broods over your intense sweetness.

Clearly whatever my woodland soil offers
Is all you ask, you of all flowers.
So I can say that you return my love.
December

Dim afternoon December afternoon
Just before dark, their caps
A Christmas or un-Christmas red
The hunters.

Oh, I tell myself that death
In the woods is far far better
Than doom in the slaughterhouse.
Still, the hunters haunt me.

Does a deer die now or does a hunter
Dim afternoon December afternoon
By cold intent or accident but always
My death?

History

I

History to the historian
Is always his story.
He puts the pieces
Of the past together
To make his picture
To make his peace—

Pieces of past wars
Pieces of past peace.

But don’t ask him
To put the pieces
Of the past together
To make your picture
To make your peace.

II

The Holy See is not by any means
the whole sea and the whole sea
so far as one can see is far from holy.
The Holy See is old but how much older
the sea that is not holy, how vastly
older the sea itself, the whole sea.

The Holy See may last a long time longer
yet how much longer, how vastly longer
the whole sea, the sea itself, the unholy sea

Scrubbing earth’s uncelestiatical shores
as if they never never would be clean
like a row of Irish washerwomen

Washing, washing, washing away
far into the unmeasurably future
long after the Holy See no more is seen.

Henry Thoreau Henry James and Henry Adams
would never have called history bunk
not Henry James not Henry Adams.

Nor would Henry Adams or Henry James
ever have tried to get the boys
out of the trenches by Christmas.

Only Henry Thoreau might have tried
to get the boys out of the bunk
out of the Christmas out of the trenches.

For Henry Thoreau was anti-bunk Henry James
pro-bunk and what shall we say of Henry Adams
except that all four Henrys are now history?

On a Theme by Frost

Amherst never had a witch
Of Cows or of Grafton

But once upon a time
There were three old women.

One wore a small beard
And carried a big umbrella.

One stood in the middle
Of the road hailing cars.

One drove an old cart
All over town collecting junk.

They were not weird sisters,
No relation to one another.

A duly accredited witch I
Never heard Amherst ever had

But as I say there
Were these three old women.

Cats

Cats walk neatly
Whatever they pick
To walk upon

Clipped lawn, cool
Stone, waxed floor
Or delicate dust

On feather snow
With what disdain
Lifting a paw

On horizontal glass
No less or
Ice nicely debatable

Wall-to-wall
Carpet, plush divan
Or picket fence

In deep jungle
Grass where we
Can’t see them

Where we can’t
Often follow follow
Cats walk neatly.
The little man with the long nose
and the camera around his neck
has corn in his pocket for the pigeons
not that he loves them.

The little man with the long nose
will put a little corn in your hand
for the pigeons if you will let him
not that he loves you.

The pigeons will come and cluster
about your hand flapping and fanning
and feeding till not a kernel is left
not that they love you.

And the little man with the long nose
will take your picture and you will
put a little something in his hand
not that you love him either.

The Peacock

The over-ornate can be a burden as peacock
proves the weight of whose preposterous plumes
is psychological see how his peacock back is bent
hysterical he stamps his foot one more pavane
and I will scream he screams spreading once more
for the ten thousandth time that fantastic fan.

Picasso and Matisse
(circa 1960)

At Vallanais and Vence, Picasso and Matisse,
A trifling eighteen miles apart.
Each with his chapel, one to God and one to Peace,
Artfully pursue their art.

What seems, not always is, what is, not always seems,
Not always what is so is such.
The Party and the Church at absolute extremes
Are nearly near enough to touch.

At Vallanais and Vence, Picasso and Matisse,
One old, one older than before,
Each with his chapel, one to God and one to Peace,
Peacefully pursue their war.

The Pope

The Pope in Rome
Under St. Peter's dome
Is the Pope at home.

Pomp is his daily fare
Poised in his papal chair
Quite debonair.

The great bell peeling,
The cardinals kneeling,
The soaring ceiling—
All that display
Does not dismay
The Pope a single day.

City

In the scare
city
no scarcity
of fear
of fire
no scarcity
of goons
of guns
in the scare
city

Blood Stains

blood stains how to remove from cotton silk from all fine fabrics blood stains
where did I read all I remember old stains harder than fresh old stains often indelible

blood stains what did it say from glass shattered from metal memorial marble
how to remove a clean soft cloth was it
and plenty of tepid water also from paper

headlines dispatches communiqués history
white leaves green leaves from grass growing
or dead from trees from flowers from sky
from standing from running water blood stains

Cromwell

After the celebrated carved misericords
And various tombs, the amiable sexton
Shows you by St. Mary's door the stone
Where Cromwell's men sharpened their swords.

Was it not a just, a righteous, war
When indiscriminate Irish blood
Pierced for the greater glory of God
Outside St. Mary's door?

If righteousness be often tipped with steel,
Be rightly tipped, psalm-singing men
Will help themselves to holy stone
To whet their zeal.

So you have both: the mellow misericords
Gracing the choir
And just outside the door
The swords.

Epitaphs

The Proud and Passionate Man
Stiff both in passion and in pride
He culminated when he died.

The Fisherman
Now comes the fisherman to terms
Who erstwhile worked his will on worms.

The Furled Lady
What can this careful lady think
Who always wore in winter mink
Here on a day as cold as doom
To leave her mink wrap in her room?

The Butcher
Falleth the rain, falleth the leaf,
The butcher now is one with beef.

Everyman
Preacher or lecher, saint or sot,
What he was once he now is not.

The Undertaker
The man who yesterday was seen
On death to fatten on death grows lean.

The Tomb of a Well-Known Soldier
Here lies the military mind,
Alas, not all of it there is,
Though while he lived he was inclined
To act as though it all were his.

The Preacher
He called on God to smite the foe.
Missing his aim, God laid him low.

Old Lady Patriot
How calm she lies in death, how calm
This one-time champion of the Bomb.

The Diplomat
Here lies a diplomat, alas,
Brought to one more complete impasse.
Three Old Ladies and
Three Spring Bulbs

I wouldn’t be buried in anything but black
silk said Anne over her teacup
as the December afternoon dimmed to dusk.

I wouldn’t be buried in anything but a white-
satin and ermine-lined incorruptible cypress
casket said Bertha over her stock quotations.

I wouldn’t be buried in anything at all
said Clare at the open window my ashes—
will sift as light as pear petals or snowflakes.

But Crocus, Hyacinth, and Tulip
brooding in autumn leaf-fall said I wouldn’t
be buried in anything but good black earth.

Snowspell

Look, it is falling a little
faster than falling, hurrying
straight down on urgent business
for snowbirds, snowballs, glaciers.

It is covering up the afternoon.
It is bringing the evening down
on top of us and soon the night.
It is falling fast as rain.

It is bringing shadows wide
as eagles’ wings and dark
as crows over our heads.
It is falling, falling fast.

The Half Twist

What the camera did
To what the diver was doing

Alone by the lamp I
Contemplate I watch

What the camera did
To what the diver was doing

Not bird quite
And not quite human

What the camera did
To what the diver was doing.

When I Come

Once more the old year peters out—
all brightness is remembered
brightness.

(When I come, Bob,
it won’t be while just on my way
to going somewhere else.)

A small pine bough with nothing
better to do fingers
a windowpane.

(When I come, Bob—)

Against the wet black glass a single
oval leaf fixed
like a face.

His Running My Running

Mid-autumn late autumn
At dayfall in leaf-fall
A runner comes running.

How easy his striding
How light his footfall
His bare legs gleaming.

Alone he emerges
Emerges and passes
Alone, sufficient.

When autumn was early
Two runners came running
Striding together

Shoulde to shoulder
Pacing each other
A perfect pairing.

Out of leaves falling
Over leaves fallen
A runner comes running

Aware of no watcher
His loneliness my loneliness
His running my running.
COME OUT
INTO THE SUN
Poems New and Selected
For Joseph Langland
prime mover and
first friend of this book

Dolphin
In mythology the restraint shown by dolphins
Is praiseworthy. Forgoing the pretentious they are
Content with only a little more than
Truth. They do what actual-factual dolphins
Have been known to do in times
Past or present: pilot a ship
Or ride a small boy bareback smiling.

Conversely real dolphins seem influenced by myth
As if the overheard story of Arion
Could furnish endless inspiration in a dolphin's
Daily life. Such was Opo of Opononi,
Opo of the Antipodes, Opo who let
Non-dolphin fellow-bathers stroke his back.
And when he died New Zealand mourned.

Having achieved, after how many ages, dry
Land, these blisks returned to live successfully
With sharks and devilfish. Having achieved dry
Land they achieved the sea. And this
Was long long before the first myth.
Today the uninhabitable for us, thank Dolphin,
Is that much less uninhabitable and inhospitable.

In weather foggy-shaggy in mid-Atlantic
Watching their water sports, tumbling, leap-frog
Who could be wholly in the dolphines
Dolphins? A rough sea chuckles with dolphins
And a smooth sea dimples, Delf blue.
Delphinium-blue blooming with white morning-glories,
The sea relaxes. They tickle the sea.

Love Conquered by a Dolphin could equally
Be called A Dolphin Conquered by Love.
The seacast holds the god coat
But his moony upward-rolling eyes tell
Who is the more hopelessly caught. Preposterous?
The antique sculptor shrugs: with so ravishing
A god what could poor dolphin do?

From the large brain intricate as man's
And slightly larger one could predict intelligence
And from intelligence superior to a dog's,
An ape's, an elephant's, one could predict
Language, but where is science to predict
(Much less explain) benevolence such as Opo's,
Opo riding a small boy bareback smiling?

Nothing less than forgiveness dolphins teach us
If we, miraculously, let ourselves be taught.
Enduring scientific torture no dolphin has yet
(With experimental electrodes hammered into its skull)
In righteous wrath turned on its tormentors.
What will science ever find more precious?
The sea relaxes. They bliss the sea.

Coin Diver (Funchal)
He takes it first with his eye like a sparrow hawk
all the way down to water and a little way under.
Tossed out of heaven a dime is less than a dime
but silver larger than life in the diver's palm.

He holds it up. Larger than life and clearer
than any money has a right to look.
He taps his forehead to salute the donor
who over the rail from under the clouds peers.

Another coin cuts water. Cat-wise he waits,
he waits for stillness and a certain depth
Then with the least fuss possible he follows
but loses it this time, poor deep blue devil.

But does he? Does he? His innocent palms are empty.
He grins: the silver safe between his toes.

"Paper Men to Air Hopes and Fears"
The first speaker said
Fear fire. Fear furnaces
Incorporators, the city dump
The faint scratch of match.

The second speaker said
Fear water. Fear drenching rain
Drizzle, oceans, puddles, a damp
Day and the flush toilet.

The third speaker said
Fear wind. And it needn't be
A hurricane. Drafts, open
Windows, electric fans.

The fourth speaker said
Fear knives. Fear any sharp
Thing, machine, shears
Scissors, lawn-mowers.

The fifth speaker said
Hope. Hope for the best
A smooth folder in a steel file.

Edith Sitwell Assumes the Role of Luna
or If You Know What I Mean Said the Moon
Who (said the Moon)
Do you think I am and precisely who
Pipsqueak, are you

With your uncivil liberties
To do as you damn please?
Boo!

I am the serene
Moon (said the Moon).
Don't touch me again.

To your poking telescopes,
Your peering eyes
I have long been wise.

Science? another word
For monkeyshine.
You heard me.

Get down, little man, go home,
Back where you come from,
Bah!

Or my gold will be turning green
On me (said the Moon)
If you know what I mean.

Old Man's Confession of Faith
The blowing wind I let it blow,
I let it come, I let it go.
Always it has my full permission.
Such is my doctrinal position.
I let it blow, I more than let it,
I comfort give, aid and abet it.
Young long ago I would resist it.
Today, full circle, I assent it.

When the wind blows, I let it blow me.
Where the wind goes, why there I go me.
I teach the wind no indoor manners
But egg it on with flags and banners.

Whether it expedite or slow me
When the wind blows I let it blow me.
Blow long, blow late, blow wild, blow crazy
Blow paper bag, blow dust, blow daisy
Blow east, blow west—I let it blow.
I never never tell it No.

THE ORB WEAVER

PITCHER
His art is eccentricity, his aim
How not to hit the mark he seems to aim at,
His passion how to avoid the obvious,
His technique how to vary the avoidance.
The others throw to be comprehended. He
Throws to be a moment misunderstood
Yet not too much. Not errant, erratic, wild,
But every seeming aberration willed.
Not to, yet still, still to communicate
Making the latter understand too late.

THE BASE STEALER
Poised between going on and back, pulled
Both ways taut like a tightrope-walker,
Fingertips pointing the opposite.
Now bouncing tipsie like a dropped ball
Or a kid skipping rope, come on, come on,
Running a scattering of steps sideways,
How he teeters, skitters, tangoes, teases,
Tautens them, hovers like an ecstatic bird,
He's only flirting, crowd him, crowd him,
Delicate, delicate, delicate—now!
Eagle Plain

The American eagle is not aware he is
the American eagle. He is never tempted
to look modest.

When orators advertise the American eagle's
courage, the American eagle is not listening.
This is his virtue.

He is somewhere else, he is mountains away
but even if he were near he would never
make an audience.

The American eagle never says he will serve
if drafted, will dutifully serve etc. He is
not at our service.

If we have honored him we have honored one
who unequivocally honors himself by
overlooking us.

He does not know the meaning of magnificent.
Perhaps we do not altogether either
who cannot touch him.

Hogwash

The tongue that mothered such a metaphor
Only the purest purists could despair of.

Nobody ever called swill sweet but isn't
Hogwash a daisy in a field of daisies?

What beside sports and flowers could you find
To praise better than the American language?

Brushed by American foreign policy
What shall I soothe me, what defend me with

But a handful of clean unmistakable words—
Daisies, daisies, in a field of daisies!

The Mouse Whose Name is Time

The mouse whose name is Time
Is out of sound and sight,
And nibbles at the night.

He nibbles at the summer
Till all of it is gone.
He nibbles at the seashore.
He nibbles at the moon.

Yet no man not a seer,
No woman not a sibyl
Can ever hear
Or see him nibble, nibble.

And whence or how he comes
And how or where he goes
Nobody dead remembers,
Nobody living knows.

While I Slept

While I slept, while I slept and the night grew colder
She would come to my bedroom stepping softly
And draw a blanket about my shoulder
While I slept.

While I slept, while I slept in the dark still heat
She would come to my bedside stepping coolly
And smooth the twisted troubled sheet
While I slept.

Now she sleeps, sleeps under quiet rain
While nights grow warm or nights grow colder
And I wake and sleep and wake again
While she sleeps.

Suddenly I tried to breathe and cry:
Before you put me down, before
I finally die,
Take from the filing folders of my brain
All that is finished or begun—
Then I remembered that this had been done.

So we went on, on
To our party-partying on the hill
Of the blue breath, gray boulders, and my burial.

Cypresses

At noon they talk of evening and at evening
Of night, but what they say at night
Is a dark secret.

Somebody long ago called them the Trees
Of Death and they have never forgotten.
The name enchants them.
Always an attitude of solitude
To point the paradox of standing
Alone together.

How many years they have been teaching birds
In little schools, by little skills,
How to be shadows.

Bluejay

So hard-eyed, so undonable a bird
To be my pastoral father's favorite—
skulker and blusterer
whose every arrival is a raid.

Love made the bird no gentler
nor him who loved less gentle.
Still, still the wild blue feather
brings my mild father.

Summons

Keep me from going to sleep too soon
Or if I go to sleep too soon
Come wake me up. Come any hour
Of night. Come whirling up the road.
Stamp on the porch. Bang on the door.
Make me get out of bed and come
And let you in and light a light.
Tell me the northern lights are on
And make me look. Or tell me clouds
Are doing something to the moon
They never did before, and show me.
See that I see. Talk to me till
I'm half as wide awake as you
And start to dress wondering why
I ever went to bed at all.
Tell me the walking is superb.
Not only tell me but persuade me.
You know I'm not too hard persuaded.

Gold

Suddenly all the gold I ever wanted
Let loose and fell on me. A storm of gold
Starting with rain a quick sun catches falling
And in the rain (fall within fall) a whirl
Of yellow leaves, glitter of paper nuggets.

And there were puddles the sun was winking at
And fountains sassy with goldfish, fountain, sunfish,
And trout slipping in streams it would be insult
To call gold and, trailing their incandescent
Fingers, meteors and a swimming moon.

Flowers of course. Chrysanthemums and clouds
Of twisted cool witch hazel and marigolds.
Late dandelions and all the goldendusts.
And been all pollen and honey, waps gold-banded
And horns that dangling their legs, cruising the sun.

The luminous birds, goldfinches and orioles.
Were gone or going, leaving some of their gold
Behind in near-gold, off-gold, ultra-golden
Beeches, birches, maples, apples. And under
The appletree the lost, the long-lost names.

Pumpkins and squashes heaped in a gold-gold sunset—
Oh, I was crushed like Creon, Midas-smothered
And I died in a maple-fall a boy was raking
Nightward to burst all bonfire-gold together—
And leave at last in a thin blue prayer of smoke.