

ROBERT FRANCIS

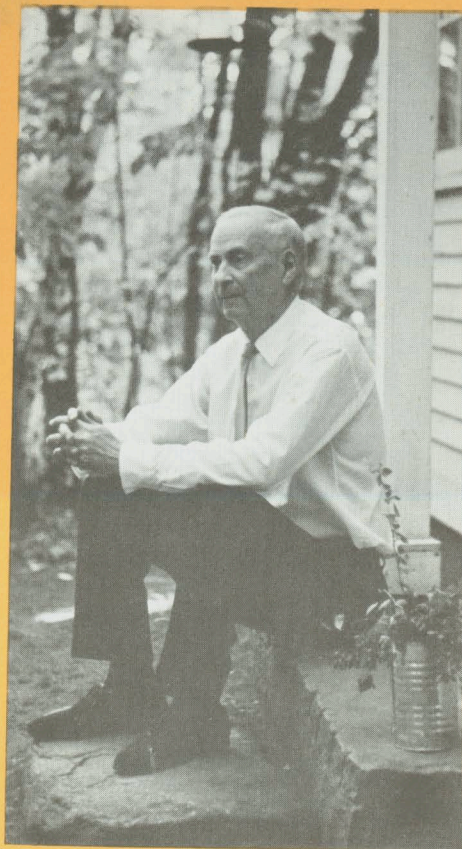
reads
his
poems

from

LIKE GHOSTS OF EAGLES

and

COME OUT INTO THE SUN



FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9729

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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FROM

"COME OUT INTO THE SUN"

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FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9729

FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FL 9729
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ROBERT FRANCIS reads his POEMS from "LIKE GHOSTS OF EAGLES" and "COME OUT INTO THE SUN"

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ROBERT FRANCIS,
born in Upland, Pennsylvania, has spent his
childhood in Massachusetts, and almost fifty
years in Amherst.

1932--Graduated with honors from Harvard
University, where he also holds a Master of
Education degree.

Mr. Francis has taught English in Amherst
High School, other public and private second-
ary schools, Mount Holyoke College, and the
American University in Beirut. He led summer
workshops at the Chautauqua Writers' Confer-
ence and Morehead College in Kentucky.

1938--Received the Shelley Award of the Poetry
Society of America.
1942--Received the Golden Rose Award of the
New England Poetry Club.
1955--Selected as Phi Beta Kappa Poet at
Tufts University.
1957-8--Lived in Rome on a fellowship from
the American Academy of Arts & Letters.
1960--Selected as Phi Beta Kappa Poet at
Harvard University.
1967--Received an honorary Ph.D. from the
University of Massachusetts in Amherst.
1967-8--Received the Amy Lowell Poetry
Traveling Scholarship, and visited Italy
and England.

Robert Francis has published both poetry and
prose, including We Fly Away (prose), a
monthly column on everyday topics which
appeared for over sixteen years in the
Christian Science Monitor, literary criticism
in numerous periodicals such as the Saturday
Review, The Atlantic, and Forum. His poems
have also been published widely in such
magazines as The New Yorker, The Transatlantic
Review, Poetry, The Virginia Quarterly Review,
Voices, and Yankee.

1936--Stand With Me Here (poetry)
1938--Valhalla and Other Poems
1944--The Sound I Listened For (poetry)
1948--Come Fly With Me (novel)
1950--The Face Against the Glass (poetry)
1960--The Orb Weaver (Wesleyan University
Press; poetry)
1965--Come Out Into the Sun: Poems New and
Selected (University of Mass. Press;
poetry)
1968--The Satirical Rogue on Poetry
(University of Mass. Press; essays)

1971--The Trouble with Francis (University of
Mass. Press; autobiography)
1972--Frost: A Time to Talk: Conversations and
Indiscretions Recorded by Robert Francis
(University of Mass. Press)
1974--Like Ghosts of Eagles (University of Mass.
Press; poetry)
1975--Robert Francis Reads His Poems (Folkways
Records)

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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.*

SIDE 1

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.

Like Ghosts of Eagles

The Indians have mostly gone
but not before they named the rivers
the rivers flow on
and the names of the rivers flow with them
Susquehanna Shenandoah

The rivers are now polluted plundered
but not the names of the rivers
cool and inviolate as ever
pure as on the morning of creation
Tennessee Tombigbee

If the rivers themselves should ever perish
I think the names will somehow somewhere hover
like ghosts of eagles
those mighty whisperers
Missouri Mississippi.

A Health to Earth

and her magnificent digestion
like a great cow she chews her cud
nothing defeats her nothing escapes

the owl ejects an indigestible
pellet earth ejects nothing
she who can masticate a mountain

what is a little junk to her
a little scrap like a great cow
she chews it over she takes her time

all man's perdurable fabrications
his structural steel, his factories, forts
his moon machines she will in time

like a great summer-pasture cow
digest in time assimilate
it all to pure geology.

Chimaphila, 1972

How easily I could have missed you Long after your petals fall and your fragrance
Your quiet blooming those July days Is only in my mind, after deep snow
Noisy with the Democratic Convention 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 subdued glow of forests
Dim with their dimness, a nodding 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.

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**Overhearing Two on
a Cold Sunday Morning**

We left our husbands sleeping,
Sun in our eyes and the cold air
Calling us out, yet not too cold
For winter to be rehearsing spring
At ten o'clock in the morning.

Like harps the telephone poles hum
And the glass insulators dazzle.
We left them warm in bed dreaming
Of primavera, dreaming no doubt
Of fountains, fauns, and dolphins.

Chickadees dance on the wind. They
Are young, our husbands, especially
As they lie sleeping. Sometimes
We imagine we are older than they
Though actually we're a little younger.

We have come up into the upper light.
We have come out into the outer air.
We could almost for a moment forget
Our husbands. No, that is not true.
Never for a moment can we forget them.

Soon we will go back to them and shout
"This is a beautiful day!" Or if
They are still sleeping, whisper it
Into their ears or on their lips.
We do not often leave them sleeping.

Silent Poem

backroad leafmold stonewall chipmunk
underbrush grapevine woodchuck shadblow

woodsmoke cowbarn honeysuckle woodpile
sawhorse bucksaw outhouse wellsweep

backdoor flagstone bulkhead buttermilk
candlestick ragrug firelog brownbread

hilltop outcrop cowbell buttercup
whetstone thunderstorm pitchfork steeplebush

gristmill millstone cornmeal waterwheel
watereress buckwheat firefly jewelweed

gravestone groundpine windbreak bedrock
weathercock snowfall starlight cockerow

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 peaces.

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 uneclesiastical shores
as if they never never would be clean
like a row of Irish washerwomen

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

III

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?

IV

The great Eliot has come the great Eliot
has gone and where precisely are we now?

He moved from the Mississippi to the Thames
and we moved with him a few miles or inches.

He taught us what to read what not to read
and when he changed his mind he let us know.

He coughed discreetly and we likewise coughed;
we waited and we heard him clear his throat.

How to be perfect prisoners of the past
this was the thing but now he too is past.

Shall we go sit beside the Mississippi
and watch the riffraft driftwood floating by?

On a Theme by Frost

Amherst never had a witch
Of Coös 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.

One was prone to appear
At the door (not mine!):

"I've got my nightgown on,
I can stay all night."

One went to a party
At the president's house once

Locked herself in the bathroom
And gave herself a bath.

One had taught Latin, having
Learned it at Mount Holyoke.

Of course Amherst may have
Had witches I never knew.

The Bulldozer

Bulls by day
And dozes by night.

Would that the bulldozer
Dozed all the time

Would that the bulldozer
Would rust in peace.

His watchword
Let not a witch live

His battle cry
Better dead than red.

Give me the bullfinch
Give me the bulbul

Give me if you must
The bull himself

But not the bulldozer
No, not the bulldozer.

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.

Trade

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 1950)

At Vallauris 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 Vallauris 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.

Light Casualties

Light things falling—I think of rain,
Sprinkle of rain, a little shower
And later the even lighter snow.

Falling and light—white petal-fall
Apple and pear, and then the leaves.
Nothing is lighter than a falling leaf.

Did the guns whisper when they spoke
That day? Did death tiptoe his business?
And afterwards in another world

Did mourners put on light mourning,
Casual as rain, as snow, as leaves?
Did a few tears fall?

The Righteous

After the saturation bombing divine
worship after the fragmentation shells
the organ prelude the robed choir after
defoliation Easter morning the white
gloves the white lilies after the napalm
Father Son and Holy Ghost Amen.

City

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

FISHERMAN

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

THE FURRED 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?

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.

UNDERTAKER

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

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.

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.

DIPLOMAT

Here lies a diplomat, alas,
Brought to one more complete impasse.

Against a falling snow
I heard him long ago

A young man who could prove
Old Goethe could not love

Old love he both denied
And equally decried.

If I were young and cold
I'd be afraid to scold

The old in love for fear
The god of love might hear

And hearing me might freeze
My five extremities.

Going to the Funeral

Death hushes all the bigwigs the big shots
the top brass the bashaws the bullet-proof
bosses the shoguns in long black dreadnaughts
come purring the magnates shipping oil
the magnificoes Oh my God the unimpeachables
the homburgs the silk hats the sucked cigars
death hushes death hushes the czars the nabobs
and still they come purring the moguls the mugwumps
the high-muck-a-mucks Oh my God Oh my God!

Suspension

Where bees bowing from flower to flower
In their deliberation
Pause

And then resume—wherever bees
Cruising from goldenrod
To rose

Prolong the noon the afternoon
Fanning with wings of spun
Bronze

Sweetness on the unruffled air
Calore and colore
Where bees

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

Shoulder to shoulder
Pacing each other
A perfect pairing.

Out of leaves falling
Over leaves fallen
A runner comes running

Aware of no watcher
His liveness my liveness
His running my running.

Yes, I was one of them. And what a cast
Of characters we were, a medley, hodgepodge,
No two with the same tongue, same skin, same god.
You would have guessed a carnival was coming,
Itinerant bazaar. Bazaar? Bizarre!

And the gifts, those blessed gifts, the gold for instance,
What a fine sample of irrelevance!
For if the child had actually been royal
He would have had more gold already than all
Our camels could bear. But if he was in fact
What all the evidence of our eyes declared
He was, a peasant baby, why then our gold
Was for the first robber who came along.
Or barring that, say the poor father tried
To buy a blanket for the kid, a warm
Blanket, picture the shopkeeper and his sneer:
Aha! just how did you come into *this*?

As for the frankincense, it would have taken
More than a ton of it to quell the reek
In that cowbarn. Yet I must say the steaming
Dung (and watch your step) and the cows themselves
Their warm flanks, their inoffensive breath
Made that cold spot appreciably less chilly.

I said I was one of them. Let me take that back.
If I was one of them or one *with* them
In going, I wasn't when we left for home—
Our separate and strangely scattered homes.
They had more faith than I. That is the way
They saw it. I, I was less credulous.
They found what they set out to find, believed
What they were ready, were programmed, to believe.
Do I sound superior? I don't mean to be.
I know as well as the next man that faith,
Some measure of faith, is needed by us all.
Pure doubt is death.

It was a long journey,
Long both in going and long in the return.
Tell me, why do we travel? Is it to find
What no one anywhere will ever find?
Or is it rather to find what we could just
As well have found at home? Travel? Travail.

Of course, to say the child was not a prince
Is not to say he may not, somehow, sometime,
Rise from his class, conceivably become
A peasant leader, a rebel, yes, a name.

Such things are not unknown. Or let us say
Someday a poet. There have been instances.
Who knows? A holy man? Yes, even a prophet?

Oh no, I don't rule out the chance our journey
—In spite of all I've said—still may have been
A little better than mistaken.

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. Foregoing the preposterous 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 times 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 beasts 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 doldrums
Doleful? A rough sea chuckles with dolphins
And a smooth sea dimples. Delft 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 seabest holds the god coiled

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 bless 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 cleaner
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.

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, arrant, wild,
But every seeming aberration willed.

Not to, yet still, still to communicate
Making the batter understand too late.

"Paper Men to Air Hopes and Fears"

The first speaker said
Fear fire. Fear furnaces
Incinerators, 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, lawnmowers.

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 pecking 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 assist 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.

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 virtues, 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 purist 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?

Bruised 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.
He nibbles at the day
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 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.

Come

As you are (said Death)
Come green, come gray, come white
Bring nothing at all
Unless it's a perfectly easy
Petal or two of snow
Perhaps or a daisy
Come day, come night.

Nothing fancy now
No rose, no evening star
Come spring, come fall
Nothing but a blade of rain
Come gray, come green
As you are (said Death)
As you are.

Burial

Aloft, lightly on fingertips
As crewmen carry a racing shell—
But I was lighter than any shell or ship.

An easy trophy, they picked me up and bore me,
Four of them, an even four.
I knew the pulse and impulse of those hands,

And heard the talking, laughing. I heard
As from an adjoining room, the door ajar,
Voices but not words.

If I am dead (I said)
If this is death,
How casual, how delicate its masque and myth.

One pallbearer, the tenor, spoke,
Another whistled softly, and I tried to smile.
Death? Music? Or a joke?

But still the hands were there.
I rode half on the hands and half in air.
Their strength was equal to my strangeness.

Whatever they do (I said) will be done right,
Whether in earth and dark or in deep light,
Whatever the hands do will be well.

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-parting 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 bandit-eyed, so undovelike 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 whistling up the road.
Stomp 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 saucy with goldfish, fantails, 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 goldenrods.
And bees all pollen and honey, wasps gold-banded
And hornets 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 appletrees the lost, the long-lost names.

Pumpkins and squashes heaped in a cold-gold sunset—
Oh, I was crushed like Croesus, 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.

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