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Selected Poems of Robert Frost

Presented to
the Faculty of Photographic Illustration
Rochester Institute of Technology

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Fine Arts

by
Peter Basti
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GATHERING LEAVES

Spades take up leaves
No better than spoons,
And bags full of leaves
Are light as balloons.

I make a great noise
Of rustling all day
Like rabbit and deer
Running away.

But the mountains I raise
Elude my embrace,
Flowing over my arms
And into my face.

I may load and unload
Again and again
Till I fill the whole shed,
And what have I then?

Next to nothing for weight,
And since they grew duller
From contact with earth,
Next to nothing for color.

Next to nothing for use.
But a crop is a crop,
And who's to say where
The harvest shall stop?
"The photographs are not illustrative."
They and the text are coequal, mutually independent, and fully collaborative, by their fewness, and by the importance of the reader's eye, this will be misunderstood by most of that minority which does not wholly ignore it. In the interests, however, of the history and future of photography, that risk seems irrelevant, and this flat statement necessary.
It is my earnest desire to relate to my reader some background information to support my opening quotation and to present a short history of Book Illustration.

Book illustration is by no means contemporary. Attempts to illustrate the written word can be found on Egyptian papyrus rolls as early as 1980 B.C. There is evidence that books (written on wood) in China, about the thirteenth and fourteenth century B.C., were likely to have been illustrative but none have survived and we must rely on the artifacts that have remained.

The sole purpose of these early illustrations were simply aimed to reach those who could not read and this function continued until the fifteenth century A.D. Art is essentially illustrative, therefore preceded literature, but here a distinction should be made between illustration and decoration. While illustration came first, it was followed, as literacy developed, by its abstract counterpart, decoration.

"The finest examples of early book illustration in Egypt were those of the 'Book of the Dead'.

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Each contained a collection of prayers, hymns, and magical formulae which were designed to secure the eternal happiness of the one in whose tomb they were buried. This Egyptian art, like Byzantine later, was curiously static, and although it seems to have reached a degree of technical perfection quite early, it developed early and remained strangely lifeless.2 This static period continued until the second century A.D. when one of the most profound events in the history of book illustration occurred, the paged book or codex. This new codex was especially favored by the Early Christians and it was these Christians who favored parchment instead of papyrus. By the fourth century, the codex was well established and the importance of illustrations increased until the single column picture became full-paged. By the tenth century, entire pages were frequently devoted to one or two pictures. Eventually entire stories could be read without the need of a text. Simply by looking at the pictures, the story was evident to those who were most illiterate. These illustrations supported the written
word quite literally, with as little deviation as possible. Since the medieval clergy were the only readers, an illustration's prime concern was to bring an understanding of the text to those who were illiterate (general populace).

"In the year 330, however, Constantinople became the capital of the Roman Empire and the long, strange history of Byzantine illumination began. This marked the end of illustration as the object of which is to clarify and the beginning of illustrations which seeks to beautify". 3

These new trends soon crystallized into forms which were prescribed by the church, which dictated subject, pose, and color of all sacred images, and these dictums were strictly obeyed. Throughout the seventh century the church monopolized the book production market and until the middle of the thirteenth century, nearly all books were written for and by religious orders. Because of this strong clerical control, the artist with a new idea contrary to church demands found that he could not get his ideas
published. In 1450, with the invention of the Guttenburg Press, the availability of books increased and by the sixteenth century books with illustrations could be found in every country of the known world. It was during the middle of this century that the printed book became a real competitor to the hand-written manuscript. With this great change, illustrations were no longer bound to the sanctified dictums of the church and trends towards modern day illustrations were becoming evident. As the literacy level of the general populace increased, the need for illustrative material decreased and illustration moved from blatant picture stories to sublime decorations.

In the centuries leading up to present, many improvements and developments occurred. Illustrations no longer told stories, but embellished what was already written. "Illustrations can only be justified if they add to a book something that literature cannot encompass." Thus, book illustration had reached its highest peak of perfection until 1855 when photography became a new (contributing influence) and a leading source of illustrations, though at first it was not

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totally accepted.

Formerly, when an engraver had a work to reproduce it was absolutely necessary for him to see it...his art was that of transposition...Photography has come to change all that. It has facilitated the task of the engraver who for the most part has not even seen the work he reproduced...a photograph forms a perfect gamut in which nothing can be changed without losing everything...Photography is a reproduction; it becomes a betrayal.\(^5\)

But, despite these arguments against it, photography was here to stay and has become an important asset to the art of illustration.

The earliest photographers made exalted claims for their craft. "In 1844, Fox Talbot wrote a book entitled 'The Pencil of Nature' which contained pasted-in photographs as illustration."\(^6\) By 1857, the first English book containing photographs was applied to lithography, notably John Pouncy's 'Dorsetshire Photographically Illustrated.' By the end of the nineteenth century such inventions as the Calotype in 1855, the photogravure in 1879 and the half-tone in the eighties, made photography the leading source of book illustrations. All these new processes, now available to the printer, had
far-reaching affects on the possibilities for photography. At the turn of this century, photography had reached such a high degree of perfection that it had to have an immediate and profound affect on the graphic arts. Up to this time only artistic interpretations could be considered illustration, but now this new form of art, the photograph, emerged to join in the ranks of illustration.

My dissertation will now center on the role of the photograph as a means to illustrate, and to better understand this field one must explore the comments and accomplishments of many major contributors.

(eg.) Ansel Adams
    Richard Avedon
    Margaret Bourke-White
    Alvin Coburn
    Walker Evans
    Edward Weston
    Edward Steichen
    Paul Strand

There are, however, certain problems in this area, namely the small amount of recorded information by these photographers about their own works, as illustrative material. This inability to record such pertinent information is due partly to the photographer's individualism and to his attempts to have his photographs be more than a visual accompaniment to the written word.
By staying away from what others are expecting to see and using their own creative abilities, these photographers give to the viewer something of the unexpected. If one cannot express himself in photographs, no accompaniment in words can help express the idea better. When asked to define, "What is a great photograph?", Ansel Adams stated:

A great photograph is a full expression of what one feels about what is being photographed in the deepest sense, and is, thereby, a true expression of what one feels about life in its entirety. And the expression of what one feels should be set forth in terms of simple devotion to the medium—a statement of the utmost clarity and perfection possible under the conditions of creation and production.

It is always the desire of the individual photographer to convey his own approach and maintain this inner expression which sets him apart from others in his field. Aaron Siskind elaborated by stating:

It makes no difference what the subject matter is. The idea, the statement, is the only thing that counts..... I care only for people- I'm interested only in human destiny. It just happens that I work symbolically—not directly with people as subjects....Perhaps it is that the forms, the shapes (in signs)
communicate more, and are more important than what was originally said of them.\(^9\)

This approach was also expressed by Nell Dorr in the introduction of her book, *Mother and Child*:

Language is a matter of symbols. If one understands the symbols, he understands the language. The symbols may be written or spoken words, they may be musical sounds; or they may be pictures. Pictures that are born in the mind of the artist are not easily translatable. But pictures that are "camera-born" (if they are taken true) are as universal a language as there is.\(^9\)

In clarifying Siskind's view, this statement presents a new problem: What is meant by "camera-born"? It can be assumed that all* "pure" photographs are taken through a camera, but to be "camera-born" means something much more. It is through the camera that the photographer creates his final image and all his planning must be accomplished at this point in order to create a pure image

\*"pure" photographs - are those photographs that are created within the strict limitations of the medium.\(^{10}\)

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which can be followed through from start to finish. "Until the photographer has learned to visualize his final result in advance, and to predetermine the procedure necessary to carry out that visualization, his finished work (if it be photography at all) will represent a series of lucky--or unlucky--mechanical accidents. It is learning to see photographically--that is, learning to see his subject matter in terms of the capacities of his tools and processes, so that he can instantaneously translate the elements and values in the scene before him into the photograph he wants to make."11

It is necessary to realize that in book illustration, the great photographs are ones which can stand alone and create definite responses from the viewer. Since there are no set rules for this the experienced photographer will have pre-determined the impact of his finished product. It is also important to know that the words may evoke connotations and so may the photographs, and certain combinations of the two can produce unsuspected
meanings. This concept, in which the total effect seems to go beyond the material encompassed by either medium has been labeled the "additive principle" by Nancy Newhall, and the success of his principle depends upon, "the independence and interdependence of the two media.\textsuperscript{12}

In 1941, Edward Weston was asked by the Limited Editions Publishings Company to make a series of photographs which would illustrate an edition of 'Leaves of Grass' by Walt Whitman, which they planned to publish. In accepting, Weston wrote:

...This I should tell you; there will be no attempts to "illustrate", no symbolism except perhaps in a very broad sense, no effort to recapture Whitman's day. The reproductions, only 54, will have no titles, no captions. This leaves me great freedom--I can use anything from an airplane to a long-shoreman...\textsuperscript{13}

Weston's aim was "...not to illustrate but to create a counterpoint to Whitman's vision."\textsuperscript{14}

Of course, a photograph is a visual image and not a series of words and sounds and any feeling which can be created by them is analogous to the results a poet desires. The photographer's
method closely resembles that of the poet's, and it is the photographer's responsibility to present objects with a new and fresh outlook. When confronted with such a question, "What is photographic beauty?" Weston said:

The photographer's power lies in his ability to re-create his subject in terms of its basic reality, and present this recreation in such a form that the spectator feels that he is seeing not just a symbol for the object, but the thing itself revealed for the first time. Guided by the photographer's selective understanding, the penetrating power of the camera-eye can be used to produce a heightened sense of reality--a kind of super realism that reveals the vital essences of things. This statement, however, overlooks the fact that each viewer has his own emotions and will be struck by one photograph, while another will create no response, or at least that which was not intended by the photographer. Responding to questions about this, Minor White commented:

To the innocent, well meaning young photographer, audiences response to his photographs is a disheartening experience. They see what they wish to see, not what he thinks that he is showing them.

As a compliment to photography, the introductory
notes by D. Levertov in 'On My Eyes', (co-authored by H. Callahan (photographer) and L. Eigner (poet) states:

I disdain to judge (as I would with another poet) which are "good" and which are "bad" poems. Each poem is in fact a searchingly experienced area, having the form of its limits-- it is for the reader to stay with it, to realize in his own response the connection between object and object.17

Therefore one of the best combinations for successful imagery would be the combination of photographer and poet. This joint complimentary effort, inspired by similar feelings yet approaching the same subject through different means, would be ideal. By approaching the subject in this way the reader would have the added information of both artistic endeavors which would help him formulate his individual interpretation. But this only means that a joint partnership could present the clearest and closest interpretation of what is being said, for even when the artists work separately, perhaps years apart, the same perfection in illustration could be obtained.

In observing the reader's approach to the
combined work, little concern should be given to the reader because he will come to some sort of conclusion. In the book, 'Words and Pictures', Wilson Hicks gives this observation of a typical reader:

Thus there is a fundamental difference in the acts of eyes and mind which words and pictures are read. A "visual structure", for example a single black and white photograph, is taken in all at once by the reader. He may not thoroughly comprehend it at the first look, but at least he gets the general idea and, with a quick promise to himself to return to the picture, he goes on to the words. His eyes may move rapidly through the caption, or they may move slowly, depending on his perceptive capacity. Whatever the individual reaction, the important point is that picture and words not only are read in different ways, they are read at different times, however close together those times may be. The picture is almost invariably read first; the common habit is for the reader's eyes to move back and forth from picture to words and back again to picture until the meaning expressed in each medium is completely understood. It must be realized that these photographs do not parrot the words. They can stand alone and add to the poem more information for the viewer to grasp and understand. They are therefore recognized as having their own aesthetic meaning.
By this method of non-illustration the book takes on a new form and becomes a book of poetry and a book of collective photographs. Even though the original intent was to present a unified penetration of poems and photographs, and it does in essence, the power of both media tends to substantiate each other's effort.

In 1938, Archibald MacLeish produced a book, 'Land of the Free', which was for all intents and purposes a book of poems illustrated by photographs.

The original purpose had been to write some sort of text to which these photographs might serve as commentary. But so great was the power and stubborn inward liveliness of these vivid American documents that the result was a reversal of that plan.\(^{19}\)

In conclusion, Beaumont Newhall, while discussing the photographic image stated:

In wealth of detail there is almost always something with which we are familiar, perhaps the mere texture of a rock or weathered wood. From there we go on to believe that which we cannot understand.\(^{20}\)

Thus to create a successful book illustration, one must do more than just recreate what has been written, he must create something that adds to the meaning of the book as well as stand-

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ing alone. The photographs are there to help the reader understand and interpret the poem and vice versa. "Photography practiced by the artist becomes a vehicle for the penetrating emotional expression of reality and dynamic process for giving form to ideas."\textsuperscript{21}
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4. Ibid, p. 16.

5. Ibid, p. 299.


THE ARMFUL

For every parcel I stoop down to seize,
I lose some other off my arms and knees,
And the whole pile is slipping, bottles, buns,
Extremes too hard to comprehend at once,
Yet nothing I should care to leave behind.
With all I have to hold with, hand and mind
And heart, if need be, I will do my best
To keep their building balanced at my breast.
I crouch down to prevent them as they fall;
Then sit down in the middle of them all.
I had to drop the armful in the road
And try to stack them in a better load.
DESIGN

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,
On a white heal-all, holding up a moth
Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth-
Assorted characters of death and blight
Mixed ready to begin the morning right,
Like the ingredients of a witches' broth-
A snow-drop spider, a flower like a froth,
And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white,
The wayside blue and innocent heal-All?
What brought the kindred spider to that height,
Then steered the white moth thither in the night?
What but the design of darkness to appall?-
If design govern in a thing so small.
ONE STEP BACKWARD TAKEN

Not only sands and gravels
Were once more on their travels,
But gulping muddy gallons
Great boulders off their balance
Bumped heads together dully
And started down the gully.
Whole capes caked off in slices.
I felt my standpoint shaken
In the universal crisis.
But with one step backward taken
I saved myself from going.
A world torn loose went by me.
Then the rain stopped and the blowing
And the sun came out to dry me.
THE SECRET SITS

We dance round in a ring and suppose,
But the secret sits in the middle and knows.
TRIPLE BRONZE

The Infinite's being so wide
Is the reason the Powers provide
For inner defense my hide.
For next defense outside

I make myself this time
Of wood or granite or lime
A wall too hard for crime
Either to breach or climb.

Then a number of us agree
On a national boundary.
And that defense makes three
Between too much and me.
A PASSING GLIMPSE

I often see flowers from a passing car
That are gone before I can tell what they are.

I want to get out of the train and go back
To see what they were beside the track.

I name all the flowers I am sure they weren't:
Not fireweed loving where woods have burnt-

Not bluebells gracing a tunnel mouth-
Not lupine living on a sand and drouth.

Was something brushed across my mind
That no one on earth will ever find?

Heaven gives its glimpses only to those
Not in position to look too close.
DEVOPTION

The heart can think of no devotion
Greater than being shore to the ocean-
Holding the curve of one position,
Counting an endless repetition.
SAND DUNES

Sea waves are green and wet,
But up from where they die,
Rise others vaster yet,
And those are brown and dry.

They are the sea made land
To come at the fisher town,
And bury in solid sand
The men she could not drown.

She may know cove and cape,
But she does not know mankind
If by any change of shape,
She hopes to cut off mind.

Men left her a ship to sink:
They can leave her a hut as well;
And be but more free to think
For the one more cast-off shell.
A SERIOUS STEP LIGHTLY TAKEN

Between two burrs on the map
Was a hollow-headed snake.
The burrs were hills, and the snake was a stream,
And the hollow head was a lake.

And the dot in front of a name
Was what should be a town.
And there might be a house we could buy
For only a dollar down.

With two wheels low in the ditch
We left our boiling car,
And knocked at the door of a house we found,
And there today we are.

It is turning three hundred years
In our cisatlantic shore
For family after family name.
We'll make it three hundred more.

For our name farming here,
Aloof yet not aloof,
Enriching soil and increasing stock,
Repairing fence and roof;

And hundred thousand days
Of front-page paper events,
A half dozen major wars,
And forty-five presidents.
Forgive, O Lord, my little jokes on Thee
And I'll forgive Thy great big one on me.
The old dog barked backward without getting up.
I can remember when he was a pup.
I have been one acquainted with the night.  
I have walked out in rain- and back in rain.  
I have outwalked the furthest city light.  

I have looked down the saddest city lane.  
I have passed by the watchman on his beat  
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.  

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet  
When far away an interrupted cry  
Came over houses from another street,  

But not to call me back or say good-by;  
And further still at an unearthly height,  
One luminary clock against the sky  

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.  
I have been one acquainted with the night.
NEITHER OUT FAR NOR IN DEEP

The people along the sand
All turn and look one way.
They turn their back on the land.
They look at the sea all day.

As long as it takes to pass
A ship keeps raising its hull;
The wetter ground like glass
Reflects a standing gull.

The land may vary more;
But wherever the truth may be-
The water comes ashore,
And the people look at the sea.

They cannot look out far.
They cannot look in deep.
But when was that ever a bar
To any watch they keep?
THE BIRTHPLACE

Here further up the mountain slope
Than ther was ever any hope,
My father built, enclosed a spring,
Strung chains of wall round everything,
Subdued the growth of earth to grass,
And brought our various lives to pass.
A dozen girls and boys we were.
The mountain seemed to like the stir,
And made of us a little while-
With always something in her smile.
Today she wouldn't know our name.
(No girl's, of course, has stayed the same.)
The mountain pushed us off her knees.
And now her lap is full of trees.
THE LOCKLESS DOOR

It went many years,
But at last came a knock,
And I thought of the door
With no lock to lock.

I blew out the light,
I tip-toed the floor,
And raised both hands
In prayer to the door.

But the knock came again
My window was wide;
I climbed on the sill
And descended outside.

Back over the sill
I bade a 'Come in'
To whatever the knock
At the door may have been.

So at a knock
I emptied my cage
To hide in the world
And alter with age.
The witch that came (the withered hag) 
To wash the steps with pail and rag, 
Was once the beauty Abishag, 

The picture pride of Hollywood. 
Too many fall from great and good 
For you to doubt the likelihood. 

Die young and avoid the fate. 
Or if predestined to die late, 
Make up your mind to die in state. 

Make the whole stock exchange your own! 
If need be occupy a throne, 
Where nobody can call you crone. 

Some have relied on what they knew; 
Others on being simply true. 
What worked for them might work for you. 

No memory of having starred 
Atones for later disregard, 
Or keeps the end from being hard. 

Better to go down dignified 
With boughten friendship at your side 
Than none at all. Provide, provide!
IN NEGLECT

They leave us so to the way we took,

    As two in whom they were proved mistaken,
That we sit sometimes in the wayside nook,

With mischievous, vagrant, seraphic look,

    And try if we cannot feel forsaken.
WIFE OF

JOSEPH A. FRENCH.

Died Sept. 9, 1846.

aged 28 years.

Remember, O Friend, we shall meet in
Our watery home, no more to part.
Yet drop the tears of hope for us in vain.
We never bid you tears again.

LOUISA A.
PERTINAX

Let chaos storm!
Let cloud shapes swarm!
I wait for form.
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