

Classic Poetry Series

Robert Friend

- poems -

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Robert Friend(1913 - 1998)

Robert Friend died on January 1998 in Jerusalem, Israel, of cancer. He was born in 1913 in Brooklyn, New York, to Russian immigrant parents. After studying at Brooklyn College, Harvard and Cambridge, he taught English literature and writing in the U.S., Puerto Rico, Panama, France, England, and Germany.

Robert Friend settled in Israel in 1950, where he lived the rest of his life. He taught English and American Literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem for over thirty years, at the same time becoming well-known as a poet (writing in English) and as a translator of Hebrew poetry. His poems and translations have appeared in many periodicals, including The New York Times, Encounter, The London Magazine, The New Yorker, The Atlantic, Partisan Review, Poetry, Ariel, Commentary, The Jerusalem Post, and The Jerusalem Review.

His first published volume of verse, *Shadow on the Sun*, appeared in 1941; other books of poems and translations followed, including *Salt Gifts* (1964), *The Practice of Absence* (1971), *Selected Poems* (1976), *Selected Poems of Leah Goldberg* (1976), *Natan Alterman: Selected Poems* (1978), *Somewhere Lower Down* (1980), *Sunset Possibilities and Other Poems by Gabriel Preil* (1985), *Dancing With a Tiger* (1990), *Abbreviations* (1994), *Flowers of Perhaps: Selected Poems of Ra'hel* (1994). A posthumous volume of translations, *Found in Translation: A Hundred Years of Modern Hebrew Poetry*, edited by Friend's literary executor, Gabriel Levin, was published in 1999. *Dancing With a Tiger: Selected Poems 1941-1998*, Edited by Edward Field, was published in 2003 by Spuyten Duyvil, NY and Menard Press, London."

Awards include the Jeannette Sewell Davis Prize (Poetry, Chicago). *Found in Translation: A Hundred Years of Modern Hebrew Poetry* is a Poetry Book Society Recommended Translation.

Personal: Mr. Friend, who was gay, had many friends in Israel, England and the United States. He was passionately devoted to his large family of cats (who play a prominent role in his poetry). He kept in close touch with his family in the United States, which includes one sister, three brothers, nine nieces and nephews, and nine grand-nieces and nephews.

According to the Jerusalem Review, "Robert Friend is generally considered to be the most prominent figure among English language writers in Israel." To his many friends and fellow writers he mentored (including the American poet

Edward Field), he will be remembered not only as a gifted poet/translator, but, indeed, as an excellent friend.

Exorcism

I know who's scratching at the door.
Clock, there's no use yawning.
More than boards are loose in the floor—
I wasn't born this morning.

Beneath your gurgle, Water Tap,
I hear the water slither.
I know you well, Barometer,
and all your inner weather.

Soap, you're not all lather,
and Cane, you're more than stick.
I know who hangs on you, Clothes Hanger.
I know you, wicked Wick.

I hear your silence, Telephone.
I know your meaning, Saw.
O wily, absent-minded Fly,
I've heard your voice before.

I have turned about thrice,
blinded the mirror,
snipped the end of my laces
with a rusty scissors,

trod on my shadow,
strewn on my pillow
three seeds of the fern
and a leaf of the willow.

Be gone, ogre of the Candle,
djinn of the grinning Fire;
be gone, harpy of the Lintel,
worm of the winding Wire.

Cerberus of the Threshold,
run howling through the town;
imp of the Ingle, shrivel;
nymph of the Mirror, drown.

Die, demon of the Cupboard;
fly, spectre of the Stair;
and die, you lean Clock's warden
who whispers in my ear.

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