



Selected Poems

Francis Ponge, Germaine Brée (Editor), Margaret Guiton (Translator)

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Through translations by two major contemporary poets and a scholar intimate with the Ponge canon, this volume offers selections of mostly earlier poetry —Le parti pris des choses, Pièces, Proèmes, and Nouveau nouveau recueil—as representative of the strongest work of this modern French master.

Selected Poems Details

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From Reader Review Selected Poems for online ebook

S. says

Pure. Gorgeous. Prose poems about ordinary things that make them deeply, intimately, intricately interesting.

Rainey says

Read the poem in which ripe berries are an analogy for creative inspiration... it'll blow your mind.

Rogers Hartmann says

LOVE. A must read. The translation from French to English is stellar. Ponge makes me want to learn French.

PGR Nair says

POETRY OF FRANCIS PONGE

I consider it as one of my miraculous reading encounters to have discovered this great poetry book of Francis Ponge. I first read about it in Italo Calvino's book, "Why read Classics?"

Ponge possesses a unique way of seeing. For him, seeing comes before words. Reading him gives us new eyes to see ordinary objects. He is almost ascetic in his approach to things of the external world. He is at once a spectator and participant in the exterior world. He zooms in on things and comes up with a vision that appeases and astonishes us. Ponge wants us to look afresh at all that surrounds us, to respect and love it, so that there can be the proper harmonious relationship between the human and nonhuman. In that way he can be called a renaissance poet who creates a new humanism. Interestingly, the subjects of his fables belong to a lower world than of Gods and heroes of antiquity.

His prose poems prod us to meditate - "Yes, I am a plant, a leaf, a pebble or an oyster". Through it, like a scientific professor, he creates a new form and a poetic encyclopedia that accounts for man's universe and justifies the creator.

Let us see two of his poems in this book

THE CRATE (Le Cageot)

"Halfway between cage (Cage) and cachot (Prison cell) the French language has cageot (Crate), a simple openwork container for transporting fruits that is sure to sicken at the slightest hint of suffocation.

Constructed so as to be easily demolished after use, it can't serve twice. So it doesn't last even as long as its highly perishable contents.

On all the street corners, near the market it shines with the modest glow of white wood. Still brand new and a bit aghast at the awkward situation, dumped irretrievably on the public thoroughfare, it is, all in all, a thoroughly likeable object-yet one whose fate doesn't warrant our overlong attention."

THE PLEASURES OF A DOOR

"Kings never touch doors.

It is a joy unknown to them: pushing open whether gently or roughly, one of those great familiar panels, turning to put it back in place-holding a door in one's embrace.

....the joy of grasping one of those tall barriers to a room by the porcelain knob of its belly; the quick contact in which, with forward motion briefly arrested, the eye opens wide, and the whole body adjusts to its new surroundings.

With a friendly hand you hold it a bit longer, before giving it a decided shove and closing yourself in, a condition pleasantly confirmed by the click of the strong but well-oiled lock spring."

There is a braveness to efface the artist in his poems and to merge the object and the language into one. He considers the verbal world of language as valid and as the external as the physical world. In Ponge's world, it is the word , in its singular form, which reveals a life beyond functional existence. For Ponge, word and world are intertwined and there are two ways of understanding our existence: Words illumine the world, and the world illuminates the words. This viewpoint I think forms the core of his writings.

In his prose poems, he offers a view of life transcribed into mute symbols around us-Pebbles, trees, flowers, sea, candles, oyster or even cigarettes. He expresses their mute character in moral terms. He recognizes their mortality, vulnerability and bestows on them a heroic vision by projecting more than what they are. His words sculpt them. As a result we see them like figures emerging from stones or as characters from a novel. 'They are heroes ", Ponge says in 'Snail', 'beings whose existence itself is a work of art.' This is exactly why I like him so much.

Ponge has rare sensibility and brilliance to dwell on objects without a desire to possess it or to immerse it with his personal disappointments or desires. His objectifying poetic process aims to grasping thing-in-itself. Do not mistake me here. Ponge is no partisan of art for art sake.

Man arbitrarily placed in the world, makes an arbitrary choice by allowing himself to survive in it before being arbitrarily removed from it like the crate, used only once and then tossed on the trash heap. The poet having chosen literature to make his life meaningful, which can only partially convey his meaning like the work of any man, can only partially express man the cosmos.

In his poem 'Pebble', he says that the pebble, the final offspring of a race of giants, is of the same stone as its enormous forbears. If life offers no truth, it nonetheless offers possibilities. For trees, there may be no way out of their 'treehood', 'by the means of trees'-leaves wither and fall-but they do not give up. They go on leafing season after season. They are not 'resigned'. This is the first lesson, 'the heroic vision', as I mentioned earlier, and their first weapon against mortality. Snails, Flowers and Pebbles – all express an indomitable will and a striving for perfection by whatever means are unique to them: the tree has leaves, the snail its silver wake, man his words. Man also possesses all the 'virtues' of the world he lives in: the fearful fearlessness of the shrimp, the stubbornness of the oyster, the determination of water, the cigarette's ability to create its own environment and its own destruction. Rather than using things as images of human

attributes, he covertly uses human attributes as images of things around us (This is quite interesting) .

Ponge underlines that the ultimate weapon is the work of art, the sublime regenerative possibility, which man carries within himself, like the oyster its pearl, the orange in its pip. His poems are not 'morals' in any didactic sense, but they are lessons, models of exemplary virtue to follow.

I am sure that next time when you observe a crate in a busy market or hold the knob of your door, you will pause to ponder and salute its being with a benign smile.

R?ta Kazlauskait? says

I think the translations could not really convey Ponge's genius.

Matt says

I read a couple of Ponge's poems online and was struck pretty forcefully that reading him in that format doesn't really work, because the poems are just too dense to really sit with them online, at least if you're me and can only rest your eyes in one place for a second or so before you have to skim forward. So I got this book, which really delivered on the promise of those tight, gnomic paragraphs I saw online.

This collection is in two sections, "Siding with Things" and "Pieces," and I think I preferred the work in "Siding," for the way it felt more focused, more impacted and mysteriously dense. There's a level of cerebral jumpiness and wit that crops up in poems like "The Cigarette," "The Crate" and "The Trees Decompose in a Sphere of Fog" that I haven't seen anywhere else, that I take as being the distinguishing mark of Ponge's work.

I like a lot of the work in "Pieces," too, but some poems, especially the longer works, like the two Spider poems, I feel like I've seen elsewhere, in Romantic work like poems by Shelley, Whitman, and even O'Hara. I don't think there's anything wrong with these poems, and I'd certainly lean on them if I was teaching a selection of Ponge because they are lucid and explicit about the goals of these poems. But I feel, too, that they are in their form and their movements, their inclusions and exclusions, less particular, peculiar, and distinct. It feels like a handful of poets could've written them.

Still, a great collection, and one I found deeply rewarding and that I hope to come back to again.

Christine says

Everyone should read this book immediately

This is a book of prose poetry that far exceeded all my expectations and it is a book that made me think about everything around me very excitedly

Some of the translations are a little bit out of control but ultimately it's fine

Allison says

At his best, Francis Ponge's poems are delightful reads, full of surprises, turns, and humor. They explore a variety of subjects with apt metaphors and under a closer lens than poets often dare. "The Mollusk," "The Cigarette," "Bread," "Snails," and "Notes Toward a Shellfish" are stand-outs, in my mind, examples of the reaches of a subject. Ponge's diction, at its best, succeeds in unencumbering readers to be carried away by words. Though many of Ponge's later poems in this Selected seem to me dense drudgery (maybe a reflection of his personal life which, I believe, at that time was one of a recluse), *Siding With Things* is a beautiful collection. I certainly will return to Ponge's ugly-beautiful explorations of shells, secretions, and the scale of things.

George says

always himself but a little like dr williams and elizabeth bishop.
wonderful prose poems which he some times lineated as poems

Mark says

I suspect the problem is the translation, but I'm far from bowled over. A lot of the pieces feel like first-go journal entries that haven't gone through their editing process yet. The repetition of ideas like the horse's long legs being as if on high heels feels like he's trying to draw more out of the tepid metaphor. I think that he catches his stride with "Pebbles" and "Swallows," but the translation, again (and it may be impossible to really translate), loses so much of the real pop of the French rhyme and half-rhyme and almost proto-hiphop rhythm in those pieces. It was an engaging, curious and strange read for me, but the jacket notes, in retrospect, seem like pure hyperbole.

Melting Uncle says

Prose poems that reframe everyday objects into strange and cool abstractions. When you put the book down, the world of stuff feels pleasantly unfamiliar. Sometimes in the long pieces I would realize I was reading 10 pages about a pebble and it started to feel tedious. But I'm glad to have met this book and hope I can keep with me just a little bit the playful sense of unlearning how exactly reality fits together.

Rich says

A pioneer in the international history of prose-poetry.

Ben Loory says

i read The Nature of Things at the beginning of the year and loved it, but somehow this larger collection just bored the hell out of me. i went and compared some of the poems that appeared in both books, and sure enough, this book's translation is just nowhere near as good. i mean who knows, maybe it's truer to the original, and the fault is ponge's, but who cares: this book is just really, really, *really* dry and boring.

Matthew says

the rain, the smoke, the thing itself

Brian Wasserman says

awkward translations, some of the descriptions are interesting, but none of the topics are particularly charming..probably why Ponge remains obscure
