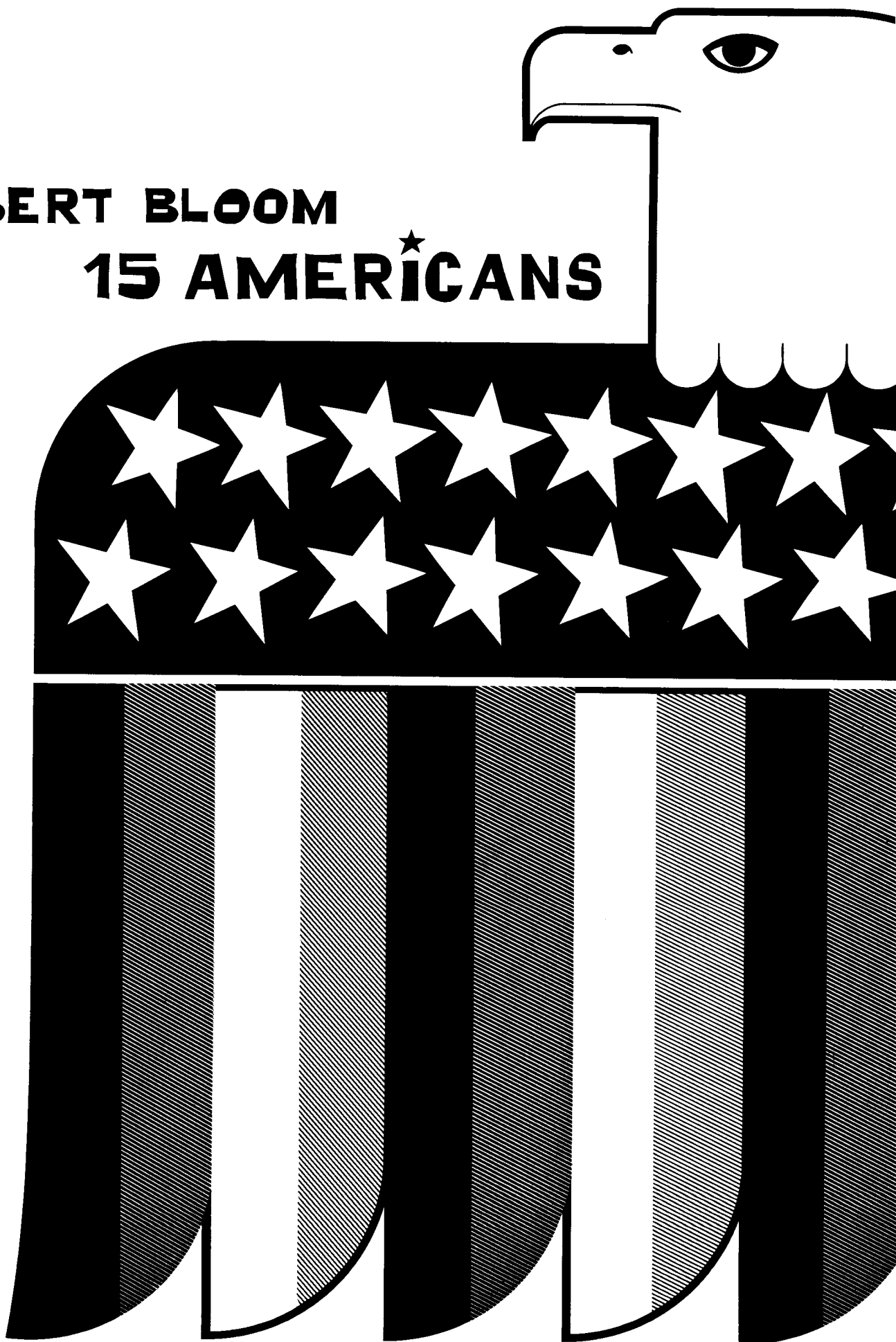


ROBERT BLOOM
15 AMERIC[★]ANS



THE ARTIST

I? Max Gregory, 40. How do you do? Born:
Odessa. Travelled: Bucharest, Athens,
Buenos Aires, New York.

Experience: a wife
most of the time, I prefer it, but not the
same one for a life. I paint women, I
study them: men, too.

It's technique,
technique, there's no technique! What I mean:
not Dali, but to paint a face, a portrait,
the woman the way she is.

Like Goya!

Romantic, I know. I am. Max Gregory, round,
anxious, romantic.

I *like* people, you
know. I like to talk to them: boys, girls,
men, women, especially women.

I was four-
teen, you know: my father said: it's okay,
good, here, use this, don't get sick.

I
learned early. Things must begin right—
early, in the cradle, in the mother's
belly!

That early!



THE POLITICIAN

He wore dark lenses, paid two bodyguards,
and fully expected a bullet—cut
a handsome figure, nevertheless, and paralyzed
his public.

He had the dice in that town,
and *could* not drop them; people should know
that of their leaders, or what's a leader
for?

Suave, continental, in a continental
district, he owed them something—say, his
life—in small return for tribute while
he lived it.

Someone had set him up with a bag
of bills, but tricks were old hat.

Now he was
rarely seen in disreputable company, flattered
the national committee, and sent his
daughters to Vassar and cotillions.

He had
a private plane at the airport and a private
helicopter to take him to it. But his face
was ashen and he passed water twice in the night.

Not even elections could put him right.



THE SURGEON

I like my work.

The scalpel cuts clean
to the core, the rot's excised, and there's
an end.

The barber of Tübingen (on my
father's side) had a knack with cupping—
it's all written down. But what did he
do with the blood?

There's a lot of it
here, all cancerous, it can't be used, and
the sweet tricks of nurses throw up.
They have their uses, but not on this table.

Give me an old freak for a plain day
of the week.

I had one case with the marrow gone—
the marrow!

What could I do, stuff her
bones? And then the kin came to: *But*
doctor, you didn't tell us!

What am I? A barber? A witch?

I'm a surgeon. I cut out the rot.

Who knows how it comes?

THE PROFESSOR

Brilliant at thirty, through at thirty-six,
 he had the air of putting servants down,
 but democratically played chess with all
 and was a proper liberal.

 Blond shock
 of Iowa corn was his head—inside, the
 kernel of something dead. Moot as equal
 signs he moved and trusted what was proved.

They all went on: Helen in tight pants and
 flats, Dad who sat and stared. Stan had
 made good in Hollywood; perhaps Somebody cared.

And Alice who went to Vermont, and married
 a renegade teacher; hadn't he loved her once,
 that slight pathetic creature? And bought
 her books? And made her bed? And left
 a photo in her stead?

 Had he not once said
No! to all, and struck a blow, and fought
 for fun? And the clear, clear thoughts!
 And the barricades!

*But nothing will leave
 us alone.*



THE MINISTER

It's a liberal church—we joke among
 ourselves that God's moved down the block.

All right. But don't *you* laugh. His ways
 are strange, and if He's got to go
 a while, don't think He won't be back.

Perhaps He's sorting sheep for me—big,
 black ones, with useless wool—I've
 hardly any left.

 The sleek white lambs
 are comfortable, and deadly kind.

 I like
 infected herds, rams that never suckled,
 ewes that moan and frolic in the night.

Something moves in them that gives my God
 delight.

THE DIRECTOR

I had an eye in high school and it got me
here, through picture mags and newsreels.

They were all glad to help me along, those
fellows, knowing they were doing it
for themselves, which is what people are.
I make no bones about it.

The first
was done on loan with volunteers, and liked
alike by family and friends. My wife
had money and the next one got me in: I
have a gift for timing and detail,
also the greatest affection for everyone
in this biz, from scriptwriters up.

At one time I thought I'd stick to man's
plight, the human condition, and ado-
lescent stuff, but spectacle's the meat.

It takes time to learn: one divorce and
thirty birthdays. Next month: Alexander
on the original sites.

Bring your tent.

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THE ACTOR

I don't mind bad light in the dressing room;
it's right for an old face, and anything
goes on the road.

It's the boxes discourage:
having them up there, those husks, those shells,
tapping the roots, tapping the rain.

I'm
no fountain for fish, not at sixty, and never
was. It's time to get something back—
especially for Lear,

an empty old man,
but I have no daughters, and how does one rage
in a void?

Well, it wasn't the money, I'm
glad to say. How wasted they are who've got it!
There's juice here! If it has to dry,
I like it like this.

And didn't they take
from me always?

THE TEACHER

It's turning thirty into one; the way they
 come to me, I can't see they've had
 houses,
 and everyone must leave the room.
 Do you know what this profession is?
 Saying *don't*, and trying to say *you do*.

First grade's the worst: they think I'm
 mother waiting there to kiss them. Be-
 tween that and sixth is in-between of read
 a word and stop a fight.

Even recess is
 time in for nursing, what with milk that's
 got to wean or else.

I'm tired.

What if
 schools were playpens? There's just a chance
 they'd want to learn.

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THE NURSERYMAN

I met a man in Sausalito—great, blond
 forearms, a face full of frowns.
 He was standing by the water, hands on hips,
 taking it in—the islands, the bridges,
 the harbor.

I thought he was a friendly cop,
 or a sculptor, ready to cast San Francisco
 in a fistful of clay.

He understood things from the outside in,
 and I liked him because I understand
 things from the inside out—and for a long
 while he talked while I listened, because
 that is the way of outside people with inside
 people, stopping now and then for me to
 fill in the gaps in the way he thought.

His name was Murdoch; he had lived in
 Sausalito all his life; nor had he married
 in fifty years.

I would like to be as strong
 as he was, carry great pots of earth on my
 shoulder, plant shoots of lilac and rho-
 dodendron, smile carefully once in a very
 long while.

THE PAUPER'S BOY

It's my cousin's brown sweater with buttons.
I have to wear it.

Another thing is long
underwear, and the sleeves shrink.

I may
have a new mother soon, father said. But he
doesn't mean it. Only when the lady comes,
he says that.

When it's just me, he says:
Alice looked nice.

I know where she went.

It was last winter,
and she lay a long time in bed. I couldn't
touch her anywhere; but once, she touched
me, like snow on my face.

Where she grew up,
mother said, the boys went barefoot, and
the sand blew all day, like rain from the sun.



THE PHOTOGRAPHER

No patience with portraits and set-ups—
I have to get it the way it is. Not like,
but *it*.

That series on the kid, getting
a new pair of shoes. It missed, but one shot
came off—the old sneaker. I know when
I'm good.

It's no buck, shooting pix. I'm
on gage, and I can't lick that. Spot shots
are spot meals, and not even a rep.

But
the click! There's nothing like it!

I got
that body on the highway with a ten buck lens,
and five grand insured, waiting for takers.
The darkroom's a dungeon.

Give me the instant,
the moment, when everything comes into focus!

THE REPORTER

I never get to say anything: I mean,
anything worth saying.

It's not
like Broun's day: stand up with a
bottle and shoot off your mouth.
Ever read him? I mean that man said it!

The country's changed. We're tight-lipped:
don't butt in the next guy's racket.
It hurts. I mean: it *hurts!*

Take
gambling: fifty billion and who cuts in?
Uncle? You? Me? Nuts. But try
to say it. *Oh, no, mustn't touch!*

But
any baddy cuts a slice and my job, too!

I'll bet my hunch on papers, though:
they're tops for kitty litter.

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THE SCIENTIST

One of my teachers in high school got
hung up on bell jars—I don't know
when, but long before I knew him—
and fuddled away his motion on any-
thing he found to fit in under.

I have to say I liked the man—pre-
suming, if I must, on adolescent
rights—and doted on the way he dusted
them (the bell jars), as if each mote
blown off would wipe away a failure.

He must have died long since, (as I long
since began to live), but truthfully,
he taught.

I can't forget the simple
repetitions of his hands—I say it
kindly—as if an ape had learned
a shell game.

I'd like to find the stone
he looked for.

THE DERELICT

On the coast a man stood by his car, shaving.

I don't know what he was doing there,
any more than I was. "Take a ride," he said,
as I came past.

But something in him
stopped me. He had a look of trouble, the kind
that gets the next one into something *he*
can't get out of.

"Thanks, but walking's my
line."

He'd have his talk though. That was
plain.

"Got the time?"

I stopped.

"Just did
thirty days," he said. "In Oregon. They're
mean up there."

"I'll bet."

The shore was
lined with fishing smacks and schooners.

"I'd
like to kill myself," he said. "Swim out past
all this muck. Would you?"

"Kill myself?"

"Stop me." He had a black, beseeching look.

"No. I'm not a justice. If dying's what you
want, perhaps you should."

I didn't wait
for him to seize me. That kind would kill for
nothing but its own despair.

When his moods
come on me, I pack in the past and walk some-
where.



THE UNDERTAKER

That language had a word for *bull* that took
 his chest in—a double bellows, blown
 (as like as not) from bowels of blackened air;
 emptied with a fearful sigh and leaving
 him less buffalo than hide.

Good to his mate,
 with young or without, and better to their
 brood (who sniffed all kinds of petals),
 he got to be the biggest on the block, and
 even ran for office.

You could tell why,
 if you knew those people. They had a taste
 for menace, doffed their hats to property,
 and viewed the law with more alarm than flesh
 gone back to seed.

He lost the run, though
 slander put the tax-collector in to manage
 life, and ever after stomped and pawed his
 circle with even braver horns.

He had no face
 to speak of—pocks and pallor—was easily
 hurt by random looks, and loved a wicked
 joke.

In the back of his parlor, among the
 red-mouthed dead, he put his feet to soak.



ROBERT BLOOM *was born in Newark in 1925. Following service in World War Two, he was graduated from the University of Chicago. He lives at present in New York City. His poems have been published in Poetry, Prairie Schooner, Chicago Review and other magazines. His sequence of poems, FIFTEEN AMERICANS, received Second Prize in the RAMPARTS Poetry Contest.*

