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FIRE UNDER THE ANDES

him on an Amherst platform he was steering his class towards the reading of Emerson by asking to define an "idealist." Is he a man who measures up from nothing, or one who measures down from everything? Might he be, especially if an artist, somewhere between the two? "I believe in what the Greeks called synecdoche: the philosophy of the part for the whole; skirting the hem of the goddess. All that an artist needs is sample. Enough success to know what money is like. Enough love to know what women are like. Enough time, he might have added, for creative puttering; enough thin books of verse to fill half a foot of shelf. Frost is always bedeviling his students with questions, but never with one—this is his cardinal principle as an educator—which he can answer himself. For example this poser: How many things can you do to a poem besides read it or write it? The class found one hundred and eight. Compare the passage in "A Fountain":

How had the tender verse escaped their outrage?
By being invisible for what it was,
Or else by some remoteness that defied them
To find out what to do to hurt a poem.

One of the outstanding facts about Robert Frost is that he and his verse were buried for twenty years in the rocky quietude of New Hampshire. It is not so sure that even now college students—