

Poems for Memorization Fall 2005

1. Limericks

A mouse in her room woke Miss Doud
Who was frightened and screamed very loud
Then a happy thought hit her
To scare off the critter
She sat up in bed and just meowed.

A psychiatrist fellow from Rye
Went to visit another close by,
Who said, with a grin,
As he welcomed him in:
“Hello, Smith! You’re all right! How am I?”

A flea and a fly in a flue
Were caught, so what could they do?
Said the fly, “Let us flee.”
“Let us fly,” said the flea.
So they flew through a flaw in the flue.

A mosquito was heard to complain,
“A chemist has poisoned my brain!”
The cause of his sorrow
was paradichloro-
triphenyldichloroethane.

2. Dreams

Langston Hughes African-American (1902-1967)

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly. Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

3. Loss And Gain

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow American
(1807-1882)

When I compare
What I have lost with what I have gained,
What I have missed with what attained,
Little room do I find for pride.

I am aware
How many days have been idly spent;
How like an arrow the good intent
Has fallen short or been turned aside.

But who shall dare
To measure loss and gain in this wise?
Defeat may be victory in disguise;
The lowest ebb is the turn of the tide.

4. Eye Mask

Denise Levertov Anglo-American (1923-1997)

In this dark I rest
unready for the light which dawns
day after day,
eager to be shared.
Black silk, shelter me.
I need more of the night before I open
eyes and heart
to illumination. I must still
grow in the dark like a root
not ready, not ready at all.

5. A Light Breather

Theodore Roethke American (1908-1963)

The spirit moves,
Yet stays:
Stirs as a blossom stirs,
Still wet from its bud-sheath,
Slowly unfolding,
Turning in the light with its tendrils;
Plays as a minnow plays,
Tethered to a limp weed, swinging,
Tail around, nosing in and out of the current,
Its shadows loose, a watery finger;
Moves, like the snail,
Still inward,
Taking and embracing its surroundings,
Never wishing itself away,
Unafraid of what it is,
A music in a hood,
A small thing,
Singing.

6. a. The Soul unto itself

Emily Dickinson American (1830-1886)

The Soul unto itself
Is an imperial friend –
Or the most agonizing Spy –
An Enemy – could send –

Secure against its own –
No treason it can fear –
Itself – its Sovereign – of itself
The Soul should stand in Awe –

6. b. Sometimes with the Heart

Emily Dickinson American (1830-1886)

Sometimes with the Heart
Seldom with the Soul
Scarcer once with the Might
Few – love at all.

7. Sweet Disorder

Robert Herrick English (1594-1674)

A sweet disorder in the dress
Kindles in clothes a wantonness:
A lawn about the shoulders thrown
Into a fine distraction –
An erring lace, which here and there
Enthrals the crimson stomacher –
A cuff neglectful, and thereby
Ribbands to flow confusedly –
A winning wave, deserving note,
In the tempestuous petticoat –
A careless shoe-string, in whose tie
I see a wild civility –
Do more bewitch me than when art
Is too precise in every part.

8. Joy Sara Teasdale American (1884-1933)

I am wild, I will sing to the trees,
I will sing to the stars in the sky,
I love, I am loved, he is mine,
Now at last I can die!

I am sandaled with wind and with flame,
I have heart-fire and singing to give,
I can tread on the grass or the stars,
Now at last I can live!

9. The Broken Field

Sara Teasdale American (1884-1933)

My soul is a dark ploughed field
In the cold rain;
My soul is a broken field
Ploughed by pain.

Where windy grass and flowers
Were growing,
The field lies broken now
For another sowing.

Great Sower, when you tread
My field again,
Scatter the furrows there
With better grain.

10. When Love Flies In

Walter de la Mare English (1873-1956)

When Love flies in,
Make – make no sign;
Owl-soft his wings,
Sand-blind his eyne;
Sigh, if thou must,
But seal him thine.

Nor make no sign
If love flit out;
He'll tire of thee
Without a doubt.
Stifle thy pangs;
Thy heart resign;
And live without!

11. The Best of It

Kay Ryan American

However carved up
or pared down we get,
we keep on making
the best of it as though
it doesn't matter that
our acre's down to
a square foot. As
though our garden
could be one bean
and we'd rejoice if
it flourishes, as
though one bean
could nourish us.

12. A Leaf Bronislaw Maj Polish (1953-)

A leaf, one of the last, parts from a maple branch:
it is spinning in the transparent air of October, falls
on a heap of others, stops, fades. No one
admired its entrancing struggle with the wind,
followed its flight, no one will distinguish it now
as it lies among the other leaves, no one saw what I
did. I am the only one.

13. He wishes his beloved were dead
William Butler Yeats Irish (1865-1939)

Were you but lying cold and dead,
And lights were paling out of the West,
You would come hither, and bend your head,
And I would lay my head on your breast;
And you would murmur tender words,
Forgiving me, because you were dead:
Nor would you rise and hasten away,
Though you have the will of the wild birds,
But know your hair was bound and wound
About the stars and moon and sun:
O would, beloved, that you lay
Under the dock-leaves in the ground,
While lights were paling one by one.

14. Wild Swans
Edna St. Vincent Millay American (1892-1950)

I looked in my heart while the wild swans went over.
And what did I see I had not seen before?
Only a question less or a question more;
Nothing to match the flight of wild birds flying.
Tiresome heart, forever living and dying,
House without air, I leave you and lock your door.
Wild swans, come over the town, come over
The town again, trailing your legs and crying!

15. a. Sanctuary Dorothy Parker American
(1893-1967)

My land is bare of chattering folk;
The clouds are low along the ridges,
And sweet's the air with curly smoke
From all my burning bridges.

15. b. Experience Dorothy Parker American
(1893-1967)

Some men break your heart in two,
Some men fawn and flatter,
Some men never look at you;
And that cleans up the matter.

15. c. Faute de Mieux Dorothy Parker American
(1893-1967)

Travel, trouble, music, art,
A kiss, a frock, a rhyme –
I never said they feed my heart,
But still they pass my time.

16. Love Equals Swift and Slow
Henry David Thoreau American (1817-1862)

Love equals swift and slow,
And high and low,
Racer and lame,
The hunter and his game.