

Poems for memorization Fall 2006

1. Limericks

a.

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?”
(by Stephen Cass)

b.

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.

2. Loveliest of Trees, the Cherry Now

A. E. Housman English (1859-1936)

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.

3. Winter Song

Aaron Kramer American (1921-1997)

Under a willow
close by a brook
her lap for a pillow
her eyes for a book

she like a drummer
practiced her art
all spring and all summer –
the drum was my heart.

Hear how the willow sighs to the sun:
It is over and done with, over and done!
Hear the cold brook, that can hardly run:
It is over and done with, over and done!

Under what maple
close by what lake
will she lie next April?
Whose heart will she break?

4. Ronald Wallace American (1945-)

Blessings

occur.
Some days I find myself
putting my foot in
the same stream twice;
leading a horse to water
and making him drink.
I have a clue.
I can see the forest
for the trees.

All around me people
are making silk purses
out of sows’ ears,
getting blood from turnips,
building Rome in a day.
There’s a business
like show business.
There’s something new
under the sun.

Some days misery
no longer loves company;
it puts itself out of its.
There’s rest for the weary.
There’s turning back.
There are guarantees.
I can be serious.
I can mean that.
You can quite
put your finger on it.

5. Infant Sorrow

William Blake English (1757-1827)

My mother groaned, my father wept,
Into the dangerous world I leapt;
Helpless, naked, piping loud,
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my father’s hands,
Striving against my swaddling bands,
Bound and weary, I thought best
To sulk upon my mother’s breast.

6. The Spindle Song (From *Guy Mannering*)

Sir Walter Scott Scottish (1771-1826)

Twist ye, twine ye! even so
Mingle shades of joy and woe,
Hope and fear, and peace, and strife,
In the thread of human life.

While the mystic twist is spinning,
And the infant's life beginning,
Dimly seen through twilight bending,
Lo, what varied shapes attending!

Passions wild, and follies vain,
Pleasures soon exchanged for pain;
Doubt, and Jealousy, and Fear,
In the magic dance appear.

Now they wax, and now they dwindle,
Whirling with the whirling spindle.
Twist ye, twine ye! even so
Mingle human bliss and woe.

7. Irreparableness

Elizabeth Barrett Browning English (1806-1861)

I have been in the meadows all the day
And gathered there the nosegay that you see
Singing within myself as bird or bee
When such do field-work on a morn of May.
But, now I look upon my flowers, decay
Has met them in my hands more fatally
Because more warmly clasped, – and sobs are free
To come instead of songs. What do you say,
Sweet counsellors, dear friends? that I should go
Back straightway to the fields and gather more?
Another, sooth, may do it, but not I!
My heart is very tired, my strength is low,
My hands are full of blossoms plucked before,
Held dead within them till myself shall die.

8. Incurable

Dorothy Parker American (1893-1967)

And if my heart be scarred and burned,
The safer, I, for all I learned;
The calmer, I, to see it true
That ways of love are never new –
The love that sets you daft and dazed
Is every love that ever blazed;
The happier, I, to fathom this:
A kiss is every other kiss.
The reckless vow, the lovely name,
When Helen walked, were spoke the same;
The weighted breast, the grinding woe,
When Phaon fled, were ever so.
Oh, it is sure as it is sad
That any lad is every lad,
And what's a girl, to dare implore
Her dear be hers forevermore?
Though he be tried and he be bold,
And swearing death should he be cold,
He'll run the path the others went....
But you, my sweet, are different.

9. In A Disused Graveyard

Robert Frost American (1874-1963)

The living come with grassy tread
To read the gravestones on the hill;
The graveyard draws the living still,
But never anymore the dead.
The verses in it say and say:
“The ones who living come today
To read the stones and go away
Tomorrow dead will come to stay.”
So sure of death the marbles rhyme,
Yet can't help marking all the time
How no one dead will seem to come.
What is it men are shrinking from?
It would be easy to be clever
And tell the stones: Men hate to die
And have stopped dying now forever.
I think they would believe the lie.

10. Complete Destruction

William Carlos Williams American (1883-1963)

It was an icy day.
We buried the cat,
then took her box
and set fire to it
in the back yard.
Those fleas that escaped
earth and fire
died by the cold.

11. Mirror

Sylvia Plath American (1932-1963)

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
Whatever I see I swallow immediately
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.
I am not cruel, only truthful –
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long
I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,
Searching my reaches for what she really is.
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.
I am important to her. She comes and goes.
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old
woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

12. Another Postponement of Destruction

Henry Taylor American (1942-)

Banging out the kitchen door, I kicked
before I saw it a thick glass baking dish

I'd set outside for dogs the night before.
It skidded to the top step, teetered, tipped
into an undulating slide from step
to step, almost stopped halfway down, then lunged
on toward concrete, and I froze to watch it
splinter when it hit. Instead, it kissed
the concrete like a skipping stone, and rang
to rest in frost-stiffened grass. Retrieving it,
I suddenly felt my neck-cords letting go
of something like a mask of tragedy.
I washed the dish and put it in its place,
then launched myself into a rescued day.

13. Be Glad Your Nose is on Your Face

Jack Prelutsky American (1940-)

Be glad your nose is on your face,
not pasted on some other place,
for if it were where it is not,
you might dislike your nose a lot.

Imagine if your precious nose
were sandwiched in between your toes,
that clearly would not be a treat,
for you'd be forced to smell your feet.

Your nose would be a source of dread
were it attached atop your head,
it soon would drive you to despair,
forever tickled by your hair.

Within your ear, your nose would be
an absolute catastrophe,
for when you were obliged to sneeze,
your brain would rattle from the breeze.

Your nose, instead, through thick and thin,
remains between your eyes and chin,
not pasted on some other place –
be glad your nose is on your face!

14. One Need Not Be A Chamber To Be Haunted

Emily Dickinson American (1830-1886)

One need not be a chamber to be haunted,
One need not be a house;
The brain has corridors surpassing
Material place.

Far safer, of a midnight meeting
External ghost,
Than an interior confronting
That whiter host.

Far safer through an Abbey gallop,
The stones achase,
Than, moonless, one's own self encounter
In lonesome place.

Ourself, behind ourself concealed,
Should startle most;
Assassin, hid in our apartment,
Be horror's least.

The prudent carries a revolver,
He bolts the door,
O'erlooking a superior spectre
More near.

15. At Last the Secret Is Out

W. H. Auden English-American (1907–1973)

At last the secret is out, as it always must come in the end,
The delicious story is ripe to tell to the intimate friend;
Over the tea-cups and in the square the tongue has its
desire;
Still waters run deep, my dear, there's never smoke
without fire.
Behind the corpse in the reservoir, behind the ghost on the
links,
Behind the lady who dances and the man who madly
drinks,
Under the look of fatigue, the attack of migraine and the
sigh
There is always another story, there is more than meets the
eye.

For the clear voice suddenly singing, high up in the
convent wall,
The scent of the elder bushes, the sporting prints in the
hall,
The croquet matches in summer, the handshake, the
cough, the kiss,
There is always a wicked secret, a private reason for this.

16. Elemental

D. H. Lawrence English (1885-1930)

Why don't people leave off being lovable
Or thinking they are lovable, or wanting to be lovable,
And be a bit elemental, instead?

Since man is made up of the elements
Fire, and rain, and air, and live loam
And none of these is lovable
But elemental,
Man is lop-sided on the side of the angels.

I wish men would get back their balance among the
elements
And be a bit more fiery, as incapable of telling lies
As fire is.
I wish they'd be true to their own variation, as water is,
Which goes through all the stages of steam and stream and
ice
Without losing its head.

I am sick of lovable people,
Somehow they are a lie.