

Poems for memorization and reading aloud Spring 2006

1. Stars, Songs, Faces

Carl Sandburg American (1878-1967)

Gather the stars if you wish it so.
Gather the songs and keep them.
Gather the faces of women.
Gather for keeping years and years.
And then...
Loosen your hands, let go and say goodbye.
Let the stars and songs go.
Let the faces and years go.
Loosen your hands and say goodbye.

2. The Raven Edgar Allan Poe US (1809-1849)

3. I Look into My Glass

Thomas Hardy English (1840-1928)

I look into my glass,
And view my wasting skin,
And say, "Would God it came to pass
My heart had shrunk as thin!"

For then, I, undistrest
By hearts grown cold to me,
Could lonely wait my endless rest
With equanimity.

But Time, to make me grieve,
Part steals, lets part abide;
And shakes this fragile frame at eve
With throbbings of noontide.

4. I Talk to my Body

Anna Swir (Świrszczyńska) Polish (1909-1984)

My body, you are an animal
whose appropriate behavior
is concentration and discipline.
An effort
of an athlete, of a saint and of a yogi.
Well trained
you may become for me
a gate
through which I will leave myself
and a gate
through which I will enter myself.
A plumb line to the center of the earth
and a cosmic ship to Jupiter.
My body, you are an animal
for whom ambition
is right.
Splendid possibilities
are open to us.

5. When I Watch the Living Meet

A.E. Housman English (1859-1936)

When I watch the living meet
And the moving pageant file
Warm and breathing through the street
Where I lodge a little while,

If the heats of hate and lust
In the house of flesh are strong,
Let me mind the house of dust
Where my sojourn shall be long.

In the nation that is not
Nothing stands that stood before;
There revenges are forgot,
And the hater hates no more;

Lovers lying two and two
Ask not whom they sleep beside,
And the bridegroom all night through
Never turns him to the bride

6. Questioning Faces

Robert Frost American (1874-1963)

The winter owl banked just in time to pass
And save herself from breaking window glass.
And her wings straining suddenly aspread
Caught color from the last of evening red
In a display of underdown and quill
To glassed-in children at the window sill.

7. kitchenette building

Gwendolyn Brooks American (1917-2000)

We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan,
Grayed in, and gray. "Dream" makes a giddy sound,
not strong
Like "rent," "feeding a wife," "satisfying a man."

But could a dream send up through onion fumes
Its white and violet, fight with fried potatoes
And yesterday's garbage ripening in the hall,
Flutter, or sing an aria down these rooms

Even if we were willing to let it in,
Had time to warm it, keep it very clean,
Anticipate a message, let it begin?

We wonder. But not well! not for a minute!
Since Number Five is out of the bathroom now,
We think of lukewarm water, hope to get in it.

8. Cologne

Samuel Taylor Coleridge English (1772-1834)

In Kohl'n, a town of monks and bones,
And pavements fang'd with murderous stones
And rags, and hags, and hideous wenches;
I counted two and seventy stenches,
All well defined, and several stinks!
Ye Nymphs that reign o'er sewers and sinks,
The river Rhine, it is well known,
Doth wash your city of Cologne;
But tell me, Nymphs, what power divine
Shall henceforth wash the river Rhine?

9. Lazy Man's Song

Po Chu-i Chinese (722-846)

Translated by Arthur Waley (1889-1966)

I have got patronage, but am too lazy to use it;
I have got land, but am too lazy to farm it.
My house leaks; I am too lazy to mend it.
My clothes are torn; I am too lazy to darn them.
I have got wine, but am too lazy to drink;
So it's just the same as if my cellar were empty.
I have got a harp, but am too lazy to play;
So it's just the same as if it had no strings.
My wife tells me there is no more bread in the house;
I want to bake, but am too lazy to grind.
My friends and relatives write me long letters;
I should like to read them, but they're such a bother
to open.
I have always been told that Chi Shu-yeh
Passed his whole life in absolute idleness.
But he played the harp and sometimes transmuted
metals,
So even he was not so lazy as I.

10. A Little Tooth

Thomas Lux American (1946-)

Your baby grows a tooth, then two,
and four, and five, then she wants some meat
directly from the bone. It's all

over: she'll learn some words, she'll fall
in love with cretins, dolts, a sweet
talker on his way to jail. And you,

your wife, get old, flyblown, and rue
nothing. You did, you loved, your feet
are sore. It's dusk. Your daughter's tall.

11. My Friend, The Things That Do Attain

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey English (1517-1547)

My friend, the things that do attain
The happy life be these, I find:
The riches left, not got with pain;
The fruitful ground; the quiet mind;

The equal friend; no grudge; no strife;
No charge of rule, nor governance;
Without disease, the healthy life;
The household of continuance;

The mean diet, no dainty fare;
Wisdom joined with simpleness;
The night discharged of all care,
Where wine the wit may not oppress:

The faithful wife, without debate;
Such sleeps as may beguile the night;
Content thyself with thine estate,
Neither wish death, nor fear his might.

12. Rearview Mirror

Robert Morgan American (1944-)

This little pool in the air is
not a spring but sink into which
trees and highway, bank and fields are
sipped away to minuteness. All
split on the present then merge in
stretched perspective, radiant in
reverse, the wide world guttering
back to one lit point, as our way
weeps away to the horizon
in this eye where the past flies ahead.

13. Ape With A Cape Duncan Wyllie

Ape with a cape
Stands there flashing his maybes at her
How rude, keeps her guessing

She can't cage him in
To her world, make her safer
So, she searches the jungle
For riper bananas

Cape falls from ape, revealing all
Drops her fruit for him
To come running back
To this kind of wild.

14. People Like Us

Robert Bly American (1926-)

There are more like us. All over the world
There are confused people, who can't remember
The name of their dog when they wake up, and
people
Who love God but can't remember where

He was when they went to sleep. It's
All right. The world cleanses itself this way.
A wrong number occurs to you in the middle
Of the night, you dial it, it rings just in time

To save the house. And the second-story man
Gets the wrong address, where the insomniac lives,
And he's lonely, and they talk, and the thief
Goes back to college. Even in graduate school,

You can wander into the wrong classroom,
And hear great poems lovingly spoken
By the wrong professor. And you find your soul
And greatness has a defender, and even in death
you're safe

15. Epitaphium Erotii

Robert Louis Stevenson Scottish (1850-1894)

Here lies Erotion, whom at six years old
Fate pilfered. Stranger (when I too am cold,
Who shall succeed me in my rural field),
To this small spirit annual honours yield!
Bright be thy hearth, hale be thy babes, I crave
And this, in thy green farm, the only grave.

16. Evil

Langston Hughes African-American (1902-1967)

Looks like what drives me crazy
Don't have no effect on you –
But I'm gonna keep on at it
Till it drives you crazy, too.

I can't go on
I really can't go on
I swear
I can't go on
so I guess
I'll get up
and go on.