

Fall Prose & Poetry Recitation

For each season of the year we try to commit some verse or a prose selection to memory. There is no better way to relish the beauty and power of our native tongue or reflect with delight on the truth that makes us free.

Past selections have included David Middleton's "Of Magnanimity," Christina Rossetti's "In the Bleak Midwinter," a letter of counsel from Thomas Jefferson to a young lad, the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, both "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" and "To a Young Lady" by William Cowper, "To the Reverend Sister Marianne" by Robert Louis Stevenson, and last season's "Holy Sonnet XIV" by John Donne.

For the fall, we will take up "The Poet" by William Gilmore Simms (1806—1870). The South Carolinian embodied the mind of the Old South in the antebellum period and gave leadership to his region's abortive quest for independence from the U.S.

The Poet

William Gilmore Simms

Thou art a Poet, and thy aim has been
To draw from every thought, and every scene
Psychal, and natural, that serene delight
Wherewith our God hath made his worlds so bright,
The sense of Beauty—the immortal thrill
Of intuitions throned above our Will—
The secret of that yearning, dim, but strong
Which yields the pulse to Hope—the wings to Song.

Even after almost three millennia of written literature, poetry retains its appeal to the ear as well as to the eye; to hear a poem read aloud by someone who understands it, and who wishes to share that understanding with someone else, can be a crucial experience, instructing the silently reading eye ever thereafter to hear what it is seeing.

(John Hollander, ed.; *Committed to Memory: 100 Best Poems to Memorize*; p. 1)