Name: Block:

**Narrative Poetry**

**“A Tale of Starvation,” by Amy Lowell**

There once was a man whom the gods didn't love,
And a disagreeable man was he.
He loathed his neighbours, and his neighbours hated him,
And he cursed eternally.

He damned the sun, and he damned the stars,
And he blasted the winds in the sky.
He sent to Hell every green, growing thing,
And he raved at the birds as they fly.

His oaths were many, and his range was wide,
He swore in fancy ways;
But his meaning was plain: that no created thing
Was other than a hurt to his gaze.

He dwelt all alone, underneath a leaning hill,
And windows toward the hill there were none,
And on the other side they were white-washed thick,
To keep out every spark of the sun.

When he went to market he walked all the way
Blaspheming at the path he trod.
He cursed at those he bought of, and swore at those he sold to,
By all the names he knew of God.

For his heart was soured in his weary old hide,
And his hopes had curdled in his breast.
His friend had been untrue, and his love had thrown him over
For the chinking money-bags she liked best.

The rats had devoured the contents of his grain-bin,
The deer had trampled on his corn,
His brook had shrivelled in a summer drought,
And his sheep had died unshorn.

His hens wouldn't lay, and his cow broke loose,
And his old horse perished of a colic.
In the loft his wheat-bags were nibbled into holes
By little, glutton mice on a frolic.

So he slowly lost all he ever had,
And the blood in his body dried.
Shrunken and mean he still lived on,
And cursed that future which had lied.

One day he was digging, a spade or two,
As his aching back could lift,
When he saw something glisten at the bottom of the trench,
And to get it out he made great shift.

So he dug, and he delved, with care and pain,
And the veins in his forehead stood taut.
At the end of an hour, when every bone cracked,
He gathered up what he had sought.

A dim old vase of crusted glass,
Prismed while it lay buried deep.
Shifting reds and greens, like a pigeon's neck,
At the touch of the sun began to leap.

It was dull in the tree-shade, but glowing in the light;
Flashing like an opal-stone,
Carved into a flagon; and the colours glanced and ran,
Where at first there had seemed to be none.

It had handles on each side to bear it up,
And a belly for the gurgling wine.
Its neck was slender, and its mouth was wide,
And its lip was curled and fine.

The old man saw it in the sun's bright stare
And the colours started up through the crust,
And he who had cursed at the yellow sun
Held the flask to it and wiped away the dust.

And he bore the flask to the brightest spot,
Where the shadow of the hill fell clear;
And he turned the flask, and he looked at the flask,
And the sun shone without his sneer.

Then he carried it home, and put it on a shelf,
But it was only grey in the gloom.
So he fetched a pail, and a bit of cloth,
And he went outside with a broom.

And he washed his windows just to let the sun
Lie upon his new-found vase;
And when evening came, he moved it down
And put it on a table near the place

Where a candle fluttered in a draught from the door.
The old man forgot to swear,
Watching its shadow grown a mammoth size,
Dancing in the kitchen there.

He forgot to revile the sun next morning
When he found his vase afire in its light.
And he carried it out of the house that day,
And kept it close beside him until night.

And so it happened from day to day.
The old man fed his life
On the beauty of his vase, on its perfect shape.
And his soul forgot its former strife.

And the village-folk came and begged to see
The flagon which was dug from the ground.
And the old man never thought of an oath, in his joy
At showing what he had found.

One day the master of the village school
Passed him as he stooped at toil,
Hoeing for a bean-row, and at his side
Was the vase, on the turned-up soil.

'My friend,' said the schoolmaster, pompous and kind,
'That's a valuable thing you have there,
But it might get broken out of doors,
It should meet with the utmost care.

What are you doing with it out here?'
'Why, Sir,' said the poor old man,
'I like to have it about, do you see?
To be with it all I can.'

'You will smash it,' said the schoolmaster, sternly right,
'Mark my words and see!'
And he walked away, while the old man looked
At his treasure despondingly.

Then he smiled to himself, for it was his!
He had toiled for it, and now he cared.
Yes! loved its shape, and its subtle, swift hues,
Which his own hard work had bared.

He would carry it round with him everywhere,
As it gave him joy to do.
A fragile vase should not stand in a bean-row!
Who would dare to say so? Who?

Then his heart was rested, and his fears gave way,
And he bent to his hoe again. . . .
A clod rolled down, and his foot slipped back,
And he lurched with a cry of pain.

For the blade of the hoe crashed into glass,
And the vase fell to iridescent sherds.
The old man's body heaved with slow, dry sobs.
He did not curse, he had no words.

He gathered the fragments, one by one,
And his fingers were cut and torn.
Then he made a hole in the very place
Whence the beautiful vase had been borne.

He covered the hole, and he patted it down,
Then he hobbled to his house and shut the door.
He tore up his coat and nailed it at the windows
That no beam of light should cross the floor.

He sat down in front of the empty hearth,
And he neither ate nor drank.
In three days they found him, dead and cold,
And they said: 'What a queer old crank!'