



University of Tikrit
College of Education for Women
English Department

Subject

Walt Whitman **When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer**

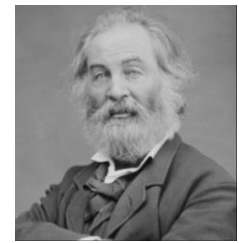
Fourth Stage

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Walt Whitman (1819-1892)



Walt Whitman 1819- 1892 American Poet

Whitman's poetry was collected in the "Leaves of Grass" which was first published in 1855, and lastly revised in 1892.

His innovations

Whitman looked for a new poetry that would include all the human experiences for the people in the new century. Therefore, he created his own poetic diction marked by:

- 1- Far-ranging in subject matter, images, and symbols
- 2- Bold in language both highly rhetoric and by the familiar usages of speech (including slang, coined words, and foreign borrowing). That will add the freshness and vigor + serve to celebrate all the fields of life.
- 3- Rejection of rhyme and traditional stanzaic forms of his time.

He believes that the poetic quality is not marshaled in rhyme or uniformity, but gives the free growth of material laws (to prevent the obstruction between the reader and the poet).

Instead of regular rhyme, Whitman substituted the verbal effects of oratory. He turned to rhetorical devices such as repetition and parallelism in forming his new free verse in a widely varying length.

When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer

BY WALT WHITMAN

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the
lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

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Whitman

Walt Whitman -- When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer

"When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" is a brilliant example of Whitman's poem. It is about romanticism, nature, and astronomy. It imagines an escape from a restricted lecture room to the glory of the night sky. The poem contrasts the limited scientific process with a personal and romantic interaction with the stars. A visionary poem contains a broad and transcendental vision into a short romantic poem. The poet's style serves as a contrast to the precise mathematical language of the learned astronomer and his scientific lecture. It relates to the poet's desire to stress a common and personal understanding of nature.

The poem explanation

In this poem, the speaker listens to an educated scientist. The speaker spelled out in such different internal rhyme as an attempt to capture the way people actually spoke instead of a high prose style. There is a distance between the speaker of the poem and the educated astronomer to whom he is listening. That suggests that the speaker uses a different or lower style of expression from the learned scientist.

The poem then presents materials related to astronomy and asked to manipulate mathematical equations, is full of mathematical diction, or word choice such as "proofs" and "figures".

It dramatizes the difference between **a scientific knowledge of the cosmos** and **a direct human experience of the stars**. Whitman notices an essential difference between intellectual knowledge of a subject and the sensory/emotive experience of it. The first way of knowing (represented by the astronomer) excludes emotion, the second (embodied in the speaker) invites it. The intellectualized experience of life marks and organizes life into these scientific fields. And it affects the speaker somatically: he is sick and tired of it. He isolated as an individual consciousness confronting the object of the astronomer's lecture .

Theme of Romanticism and the Scientific Process

The particular strand of romanticism and transcendentalism that Whitman invokes in "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" can be seen in poem's contrast between the value of the sensory imagination and the logical method of the scientific process in their approaches to the natural world.

The first stanza concentrates on the mathematical logic of the scientific process, and the poem details the breakdown of data from the real world as it is arranged and ordered by science.

Form of the poem

The poem uses a line length and poetic form in order to demonstrate its meaning, e.g., the first stanza become increasingly longer to convey long and inelegant meaning. On the contrary, the last stanza of the poem is in iambic pentameter, a traditional meter.

This stylistic technique may be a method of underscoring Whitman's theme of the value of interacting with nature as a categorical scientist or as an independent and creative observer.