

Jeffrey Collins

AT THE ASTRONOMY LECTURE  
(for and after Walt Whitman)

After I heard the learned astronomer  
Lay down laws, dispel all  
My wild and outrageous and childish questions,  
And heard him calmly chatter of Kepler  
And the gushing whiteholes, and dynes,  
I presently sat still  
And let the Veil Nebula hang in my mind's night,  
Let novas, and the moons of Jupiter  
Do freely what they always do.  
I presently grew quiet  
And heard the voice of the learned astronomer  
Ramble on of apsides, umbras, quarks  
And Hubble's great Law of Recession.  
But when the learned astronomer left his board  
And the lecture room was Essential Emptiness,  
As before,  
I did not rise but watched in wonder  
A seventy-year-old-sweeper-of-floors  
Whose two teeth were companion stars  
Simply shining,  
Gayly with a dust broom erase  
All of Brahe, all the spectral graphs of light.  
And he was whistling.  
I must tell you that, alone, I stood  
And pounded my hands in uproarious applause  
For his equal sweeps of equal areas,  
For his simple uncarving  
And his simpler unknowing.

I praise the Learned Sweeper  
Who comes to dust our assumptions away,  
Who, with Song and Great Broom, and masterful Erasing  
Wipes all boards back to wonder.