

Astronomy “In Perfect Silence”
in memoriam Professor George Wallerstein

A million-petalled flower of being there, Seattle,
beside Bagley Hall in a time long ago,
can you see the magic in the water,
Drumheller Fountain, Lake Washington, Mt. Rainier
even as students rush inside to class? Never
forget what enthusiasm for a subject can do:

gone the professor’s name but not these lessons--
how Intro to Astronomy never left me.
Important to look up at the stars, each day,
just to remember our insignificance. All term,
know that we’re mere specks. Keep reading,
learning about blue dwarfs, red giants, binary stars, our silver

moon and other celestial bodies, constellations, comets,
nebulae, all the ways scientists study
our universe from a distance. Where is earth’s
place if everything’s streaming away?
Quasars and quarks—these aren’t the only
rich mysteries. There’s more. Dark matter, black holes,

serious topics still to be figured out. In the book, star charts,
timely as always. I step out with one, frigid January,
under a brilliant sky. Auriga, Capella, Pleiades, and there’s
Venus rising. A skyscape admired each time.
Walt Whitman was right: somehow to balance
excitement with knowledge. Seeing night skies again:

yearly, monthly, daily—gazing overhead, still awed,
zealous, “I look’d up in perfect silence at the stars.”