

I have close to 1200 coins in my collection as I write this. The one that is the subject of this poem is special. I remember in the 1950's, when I was a numismatist before I sold my collection for \$50 (I was robbed) to get money to buy books for my first college semester, I came across an advertisement for a coin which had a piece of a meteorite embedded in it, but I couldn't afford it, so it continued to reside in my imagination. Then, when I restarted my collection a couple of years ago, I became determined to add such a coin --- and I did!

I recall a few years ago being in the Smithsonian natural history museum in Washington, DC and staring at a chunk of meteorite that was almost as old as the universe. It was by itself in a nondescript cabinet and nobody except me even stopped to look at it, much less allow his or her imagination to fantasize about what the universe, including our planet, was like when it landed. I didn't get the ignoring and I still don't

I have to give credit for the style I use in this poem to William Heyen, whose book of ecological poetry, *Pterodactyl Rose*, greatly influenced me here. I also have to acknowledge the influences of poets Walt Whitman and Robert Frost, whose works I allude to in this poem. The poems that I use as stimuli are reproduced below.

#### **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.

#### **Birches by Robert Frost**

When I see birches bend to left and right  
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,  
like to think some boy's been swinging them.  
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay  
As ice-storms do. Often you must have seen them  
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning  
After a rain. They click upon themselves  
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored  
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.

Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells  
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—  
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away  
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.  
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,  
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed  
So low for long, they never right themselves:  
You may see their trunks arching in the woods  
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground  
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair  
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.  
But I was going to say when Truth broke in  
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm  
I should prefer to have some boy bend them  
As he went out and in to fetch the cows—  
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,  
Whose only play was what he found himself,  
Summer or winter, and could play alone.  
One by one he subdued his father's trees  
By riding them down over and over again  
Until he took the stiffness out of them,  
And not one but hung limp, not one was left  
For him to conquer. He learned all there was  
To learn about not launching out too soon  
And so not carrying the tree away  
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise  
To the top branches, climbing carefully  
With the same pains you use to fill a cup  
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.  
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,  
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.  
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.  
And so I dream of going back to be.  
It's when I'm weary of considerations,  
And life is too much like a pathless wood  
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs  
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping  
From a twig's having lashed across it open.  
I'd like to get away from earth awhile  
And then come back to it and begin over.  
May no fate willfully misunderstand me  
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away  
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:  
I don't know where it's likely to go better.  
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,  
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk  
*Toward* heaven, till the tree could bear no more,  
But dipped its top and set me down again.  
That would be good both going and coming back.  
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.