The Voice of the Rain

Walt Whitman

And who art thou? said I to the soft-falling shower,
Which, strange to tell, gave me an answer, as here translated:
I am the Poem of Earth, said the voice of the rain,
Eternal I rise impalpable out of the land and the bottomless sea,
Upward to heaven, whence, vaguely form'd, altogether changed, and yet the same,
I descend to lave the droughts, atomies, dust-layers of the globe,
And all that in them without me were seeds only, latent, unborn;
And forever, by day and night, I give back life to my own origin,
And make pure and beautify it;
(For song, issuing from its birth-place, after fulfilment, wandering
Reck'd or unreck'd, duly with love returns.)

impalpable: something that cannot be touched
lave: wash; bathe
atomies: tiny particles
latent: hidden

© NCERT not to be republished

Think it out

I. 1. There are two voices in the poem. Who do they belong to? Which lines indicate this?
2. What does the phrase "strange to tell" mean?
3. There is a parallel drawn between rain and music. Which words indicate this? Explain the similarity between the two.
4. How is the cyclic movement of rain brought out in the poem? Compare it with what you have learnt in science.
5. Why are the last two lines put within brackets?
6. List the pairs of opposites found in the poem.

II. Notice the following sentence patterns.

1. And who art thou? *said I* to the soft-falling shower.
2. I am the Poem of Earth, *said the voice of the rain.*
3. *Eternal I rise*
4. For song … *duly with love returns*

Rewrite the above sentences in prose.

III. Look for some more poems on the rain and see how this one is different from them.

Notes

This is a nature poem celebrating the coming of the rain.

Understanding the poem

- Voices in the poem
- Sense of the poem
- Relating to the process of rainfall scientifically (across the curriculum)
- Noticing sentence structure in poems
- Comparison with other rain poems

© NCERT not to be republished