THE WOMAN MATHEMATICIAN

Marion D. Cohen

Grateful acknowledgement is made the following publications, in which some of these poems have appeared:

Ikon, The Mathematical Intelligencer, Opposum Holler Tarot, Plain Brown Wrapper, Thirteen

* * * *

After a day a teaching Fourier series, she has nightmares that, instead of killing all the sines and cosines but itself, sine n-nought a kills ONLY itself, puffs everything else up forever. And she dreams instead of the Dirac delta being zero everywhere but zero, it's zero ONLY at zero. And the two-dimensional delta is like the sky at night, only one star. Then she nightmares that star filling up. She dreams everything dark and tall, the ground the bottom of a giant hole; she dreams it's time to fill the hole up. She lies there and dreams the entire bottom up, like the tall grass and sunflowers of her childhood.

She dream plants grow fast, the forest dense, a-sub-n's and b-sub-n's plagueing the board; she dreams the erasers are gone. She dreams she writes over; she dreams there is no other Riemann sheet, everything just gets squashed. She dreams the a-sub-n's and b-sub-n's leave the board, uperturbed as Escher animals leaving the canvas. They flit about the room and no a-sub-n can find itself. The air buzzes with c-sub-n's, d-sub-n's, n-sub-n's, and the students are growing restless.

"Get rid of them," they demand. "And get rid of them quick." But it's no use. They have begun.

She tries multiplying. She tries integrating. But they breed. They breed but good. They breed for blood. There is no room left.

* * * *

At a certain hour most evenings the cat comes down from the attic and follows her around. Chair to chair, room to room... there's the clang of the collar, then a muted clomping.

But not immediately. There's a distance, a delay. Half a room, half a minute. There's that silence, that knowing, and she's actually afraid, moving along there in the polarized dark, waiting for the jump of that darker spot.

But this is also a TWO-body problem. The cat's a pet, a friend, and she wonders what it feels like to BE a damned-spot. What it's like to always be alone in one house with only very tall beings, no one in her own image. She wonders whether the new pet cat even knows there is anything alive in the house.

The way she always comes nosing up, but then all of a sudden, at the slightest twitch, goes scampering up the stairs. Or rubs briefly against legs and fingers but then arches and jumps, across the floor in one scratchy slide. Or the way she purrs and meows at the same time.

It's as though the cat can't decide. Even when she comes down. Is she pursuing or fleeing? Is she reaching out of reaching in? Is she doubly alive or not alive at all? And those round eyes and equilateral-triangle ears, pointing like chubby arrows, never ceasing to point. And when she stands still like that -- quantized, CAUGHT -- No wonder, thinks the woman mathematician, no wonder Schroedinger chose the cat.

The woman mathematician and the woman cat regard each other. The mathematician asks the question: Are you frightenED or frightenING?

Can't you see? answers the cat. I'm both. I'm frightening beCAUSE I'm frightened.

The four eyes form a long rectangle, then a longer rectangle, and then a parallelogram, more and more skew, like a constellation af the Planetarium. Then the four eyes go out, as the mathematican scoops up the cat and takes her to the biggest chair, saying "That's what frightening ALWAYS means."

* * * *

She is listening, now, to Handel, Number 4 in D. She follows the swishings; they're like dual ocean waves, like the war between sine and cosine. And... well, don't call her batsy but... well, she KNOWS the instruments are together -- They wouldn't allow them on the recording if they weren't -- but... well, they don't SOUND together.

There's a single rushing, or a single dragging. She keep hearing a distance, a SPATIAL distance, SEVERAL spacial distances. The distance between the two instruments, the distance between them and the microphone, the distance between the phonograph and her, and finally the distance between her two ears. She keeps finding all the distances, detecting little gaps.

And if she tries to close off the gaps, if she tries to put the instruments together, it all still goes sloshing around. She wants to pause, gesture -- "Okay, now, let's start ALL OVER" -- but finally winds up throwing up her arms in resignation and sighing, "Well, Einstein SAYS there's no such thing as simultaneity."

Later, though, PLAYING the music... the distances disappear. Einstein's theory goes with them and everything is as simultaneous as it pleases. Time and space are not relative but quite absolute. It's like she's the origin, or middle-C's the origin, or the violin, or the metronome; it's like everything's identified with the same point.

Especially that last chord. "Okay, now GO," and it all pulls together, same time, same space. It all comes up, it all goes down, one big event, perfect, precise, not slipping and sliding at all.

* * * *

She dreams she's in the process of multiplying two two-digit numbers. And you know how, after multiplying the top number by the bottom right digit, and then, when you multiply it by the bottom left digit, and shift it one to the left, you know how sometimes, onc e you add them up, the answer has, not three, but four digits? Well, as she calculates in the dream, she wonders whether perhaps somehow digits get added to the RIGHT, making five or six.

And then maybe two more on TOP, making eight, or on bottom, making ten. Or maybe more in front, or back, twelve, fourteen... And then maybe the corners. How far, she asks, can two two's go?

Upon awakening she begins to answer: Not very.

Two plus two is four, two times two is four, two to the two is four, two two's in any of the higher processes still go no further than four.

Shaking herself some more, it gets better. All the other numbers go haywire. But two's stay put, two's keep control. Two's, like a paperweight, stay down. Two's, like a couple, stay home.

For going far there are higher numbers, for going wide there are lower numbers, for going deep there are complex numbers, but this is the place for two.

* * * *

And the way she sometimes finds it hard to accent only the first beat. Wants to play every note, every rest, as though it were the first, or the last, wants to slur nothing, to treat it all like Baroque. In this same way every MATH thing -- be it equation, expression, or single Greek letter -- be it a well-formed formula or meaningless string of equal-signs -- be it the grande theorem or the 104th line of the proof -- be it obvious, incorrect, a theory with one application, a theory with no application -- EVERY truth is beauty. Every un-truth is beauty. Everything undecidable is beauty.

She loves all. She loves each. Writes Theorem before, QED after -- a G-clef before, a double-bar after -- each.

* * * *

Her child has ‘wakened, or half-’wakened, in the late evening. He is sitting up and fumbling. picking at the quilt, running first the edges, then the middle, through his fingers. He is trying, she can see, to figure something out. And she knows what it is, to try to figure something out.

“Whatsamatter, Cutie?” she whispers, and he answers right away.

“Freaky somehow got inside the blanket.”

She smirks and laughs, but huddles. “Didn’t you put Freaky into his cage before you went to bed?”

“Yeah I did,” he murmurs, or half-murmurs, “but somehow he got inside the blanket, anyway.”

“Do you REMEMBER putting him in his cage?”

“I don’t know WHAT happened.”

“He can’t possibly get in the blanket; the blanket’s all sewn up.” Nonetheless she, too, begins to fumble.

Finally she gently nudges her child. “Go upstairs and check and see if Freaky’s in his cage.”

Then she waits. She pulls up the blanket, holds it by a corner, and shakes it, just a little.

Her child soon returns. “Yeah,” he tells her. Then he settles and she stays. “It’s okay, Sweetheart. You’re just tired; you’re just dreaming.” She tenderly shrugs, pats him with her entire arm, kisses him with the entire half of her face.

She checks the blanket again. Freaky COULDN’T be in two places at once. Or there couldn’t be two Freaky’s. Roots have multiplicities, singularities have multiplicities, but hamsters don’t have multiplicities. Also, you can identify the two opposite corners of a square but you can’t identify the inside of a quilt with the inside of a cage.

“Don’t worry, Bitties,” she continues, whispering and stroking. “It’s okay, Funny. Go to sleep now. It’s okay, Sweetheart. It’ll be okay.”

* * * *

If you ask her “Why math?”, she’ll say “Same as science fiction.”

Same fuss. Same fury. Same stretching-over-the-universe.

And not only infinity. But each and every count. Especially the single digits.

Each, separate, a pearl. Each, separate, a face. A nose, a bud. An insect, a cell.

Also, each a question-mark

in SOME language.

* * * *

Handel again, this time singing. Singing, not listening, singing right on top, singing right in there. Yet problems again, simultaneity problems. it's a rest, a dotted-whole rest, and she taps it out and wonders: Will the pitch come together with the word? And if not, which will come first?

There's also Zeno's problem, always half of the way to go. It's not like stuttering -- she knows she'll get there, but when? She's tempted, that is, to make it too soon. And she's tempted to make it too late. As for the exact instant, that's a moving target.

Not quite slipping and sliding, at least not back and forth. Skidding might be the word, skidding from under her, or making ready to, as she will begin to step on it. It will spin briefly on the diameter between her foot and the floor.

She counts it out, backwards, five, four, three... there seem to be more numbers between zero and one then between one and two. She keeps on counting -- now, now, more now, counting to the true now, the now to end all nows.

It's a rest, and long one, but she's not resting. She's hovering, flying, a helicopter, a hummingbird, flapping to fainting, flapping to flopping. Long wings against sparse air, the correct now a point, without the leeway of a quarter note, or even an eighth, a point like the head of a pin

on which even one angel

in actuality

cannot dance.

* * * *

The One-Dimensional Man, Some Questions: Is his face along or across his body? Is his mouth along or across his face? Can his lips part? Can the corners turn? What she means is: Can he smile?

* * * *

They are trying to make a seven-letter word. They are forgetting who will get the points and just working together. They have a blank plus O G S I L N. There's a P on the board, a fairly unencumbered P, also an E, more about that later. She has already considered SLOOPING and SPOOLING (using the blank for the other O) and SINGLO (Well, her friend is a tenor...) They have also given much thought to STOPPING (But there aren't enough blanks, and one too many L's). And they have exhausted both the ING and the ION trick; LEGIONS especially has exhausted them, since the E (Remember the E?) to which they want to attach it lies just far enough from the wrong edge. GOSLING and SLOWING are presenting the same problem.

And they are saying that the board should be infinite, there sholdn't be these mundance boundaries, words shouldn't get in the way of one another. Scrabble should be pure, more absolute, more like math.

They keep at it, they try LOGSIN (which is math but not in the Scrabble dictionary, besides it's not seven letters) and SOILING and CLOSING, but LOSING (a permutation of their letters) is where they seem to be, LOSING plus a blank.

They keep going, they think of SLOPPING, wishing it were SLAPPING, likewise LOSTING and SCOLING and LOCINGS and BLOSTING. It keeps coming back to that confounded O, which won't be a confounded A. It keeps being like trying to prove a theorem, or find a counter-example. There keeps being that same snag.

And so they realize that Scrabble IS absolute truth. Scrabble, or part of Scrabble, is a branch of math.

And language is math.

And people are math.

They don't know it but they're math.

Even if they have edges.

Even if they get in one another's way.

* * * *

Anxiety?, she shugs to her students. Sure, she can see anxiety. Think after all, what could happen. You could, for example, have just this morning placed the documents in your brief, could have locked and double-locked that brief; then, on the final hour, they can be gone. God can take them while you're not looking. And God can steal the sun; he can steal everything BUT the sun. God can do anything, good or bad.

So sure, anxiety. She'll allow anxiety. But MATh-anxiety? No.

They say they don't trust math. Math is the ONLY thing they can trust. God, for example, can drop the sky on your head and nobody else's but he can't make a dent in the invert-and-multiply rule. Or he can take a woman trying to conceive and turn her eggs to dust but he can't make a stone so heavy that he can't move it.

True, she continues, long division can get too long but it's not that anything's wrong; it's just that the numbers are big. And if it doesn't come out even, that's not their fault either; it's supposed to be that way.

Believe in math, she assures them. Math really works. Trust in math. Math is a friend.

But they have to watch out for PHYSICS. Physics can get a bit slippery. For example, two million tosses of a coin could come out all tails. Or God can fix our eyes, or the velocity of light, so we can't see violet, let alone ultra-violet. Or change H-2-O to H-2.1-O; we'd all die of thirst.

Yes, she concludes, physics is a sky one. SHE wouldn't buy a used car from physics, either. But math --math is as dependable as your own mind.

Fear nor math. Math will serve us well. Hold tight to math. Math is all we've got.

Grab quick for math

while it's still here to grab.

* * * *

On the other hand, she reflects, what about the paradoxes? Not only Russell's and Skolem's but the one about Godel's proof that all cannot be reduced to one versus the indesputable fact of one world. What about those paradoxes that really ARE paradoxes? THEY can't be trusted. THEY aren't friends.

And suppose, because of the paradoxes, the universe decides to give up and take her with it. She's afraid, in other words, that the paradoxes will kill. She's even more afraid they will hurt.

So she suggests a propogation of truth. Yes, the truth of the inconsistency of existence has to have to propogate. And it has to have not gotten there yet. Also, it has to be possible to run from it.

The rate of propogation of truth must not be zero. Truth has to take some time. It can't be permitted to run rampant. No, it can't ALL be math -- whereby no sooner does a-square plus b-square equal c-square than it's a right triangle. There has to be some reaction time; there has to be some warning.

She needs a thicker medium. Something with friction, gravity, magnetism. Something to reflect, refract, or otherwise detain the paradoxes. Physics might be tricky but it's just this trickiness that saves the world. It's just the physics-ness of physics that holds back the paradoxes.

Just like it's the time-ness of time that holds back the dawn.

* * * *

Her Theory of Complimentary Objects:

Definition: Two objects are said to be EQUAL if they have precisely the same properties.

Note: An object can either be named (as, for example, apple, happiness, the number seven, the word "seven") or defined in terms of its properties.

Definition: If an object does not possess properties that lead to a contradiction, then that object is said to EXIST.

Note: Most object do not exist.

Definition: If every property of an object X is also a property of another object Y, then X is said to be a SUB-OBJECT of Y.

Note: If X is a sub-object of Y, and if Y exists, then X does not exist. Also, if X exists, then Y does not exist. (However, X and Y can both not-exist.)

Definition: The COMPLEMENTARY object of an object X is defined to be the object having all properties except those of X. For objects that exist, this is also the object whose properties are precisely the negations of the properties of X.

Theorem: If an object exists, its complement does not.

Notes and further notes: If an object takes up space, then its complement takes up the rest of space. However, its complement also takes up no space at all. In general, if an object is a set, its complement is its complementary set, as well as not a set at all.

The situation is further complicated by the Axiom of Choice.

Undaundted, however, she likes to think of opposites -- the opposite of space, the opposite of time, the opposite of existence itself. It's not that she needs it. She's just interested in opposites. She likes to seek opposites that are opposite in every way. Also, subsets that are sub in every way. Including the set

with no properties at all.

* * * *

Every x equals one x

and there's something slippery in that

something bordering on panic.

And suppose we HAD to say one x, suppose we were forbidden to say simply x.

And then, by the same token, we had to say one one x, one one one x, and so on.

Suppose every x had to bear this tail.

Suppose every x had to pull that chain.

And suppose those chains got all entangled.

And that's why things keep tugging at each other.

That's why things can't leave each other alone.

* * * *

She has a nightmare about being dead. Just standing there, surrounded by bare space.

She knows she's dead because her hands won't hold flowers. And she can see ultraviolet. And all the sounds are a half-tone higher. Also, the ground won't touch her feet, but is repelled like the wrong pole.

Moreover, the surface of the earth is warped, not waiting for the horizon but shimmering right here, down beneath her eyes. And the sky's surface billows, boils up craters. The lines, too, have become wires and veins. And whatever is not lines is growing lines. The points, even the points, are fighting for space. The splinters, the bug squashings, the spitballs of the world, all trying not to intersect and if so only in one point. Also, the only three-space which is the world itself is a soft grey whale squirming for escape.

She's dead and no one's coming. she dead and no one's calling.

Like one early evening, decades ago, her mother was late summoning her for dinner.

The road got wider and the grass bent in prayer.

Now she keeps looking, keeps shuffling. She's listening, she's waiting, she's scared, she's dead.

She's dead and she doesn't know what to do.

* * * *

Her child has entered the philosophical stage. “Maybe all this is just a test.” “Maybe God wants us to be bad.” “Hey, the universe CAN’T end because there’ll always be space.”

He pauses. “Gee, what if there were no space?” He moves closer to her. “That would be scary.”

She moves closer to him but thinks about what she knows, what mathematicians know, the kind of maturity mathematicians have to have. She thinks about vector spaces, topological spaces. She thinks about what space means to a mathematician, how it’s not something you stare into nor wave your arms about in. How it’s just a set, a set of thoughts. How points aren’t spots but thoughts in the set, how everything’s just thoughts.

In all these spaces there could still be numbers, and number-triples. There could still be addition, multiplication, distance, lines, circles, and things shaped like flowers. There could even, she supposes, be things isomorphic to eyes, and other things isomorphic to arms. So then there could be things isomorphic to staring and waving.

She wants to convey all this to her child. So she says, “If there were something else instead of space, would we still CALL it space?”

Her child shrugs.

“So maybe,” she continues, “maybe this ISN’t space.”

Yes, she thinks, and maybe these aren’t eyes and maybe these aren’t arms and maybe this isn’t me and maybe that isn’t you. They satisfy, true, the same properties, do the same things, and in math that’s all that counts. But suddenly -- she’s thinking alone again. -- suddenly everything looks like a skeleton. Everything seems iron, CAST iron. Or BITS of iron, filings, grains, slipping through a timer, both parts of the timer, down ‘way down. It’s a honeycomb, hexagons, like just before you faint.

She is NOT fainting, she is not even frightened, not even worried. Only... well, only disappoined. Again. And then... well, dead. Again.

Then her child shifts. “Thanks,” he says. “Thanks for having me. I mean that. Really. Thanks for having me.”

And so she shifts. And everything softens up. Things get padded, warmed, pulled back up. Colors ooze back in and everything seems HAD. Or having. And she stops being disappinted and becomes surprised. Again. And alive. Again.

* * * *

What drove her into math was not Fermat's Last Theorem. She's always preferred the Goldbach Conjecture, Russell's Paradox, and Cantor's stretched-out one-dimensional lace. And what she loves are extensions, generalizations. And, in seventh grade, the different of two squares being the product of the sum and difference. And more obvious things, like the center of a circle being inside the circle and the number of sides of a polygon being the same as the number of vertices.

What drove her into math

what keeps her into math

are not problems, not puzzles, not things that need to be solved.

Not the mystery of the unknown

but the mystery of the known.

Zero, one, and the generations after that.

* * * *

Other early influences: The point of light in the livingroom, African violets
on Sheridan and Seventh, those dark red shapes when you close
your eyes real tight

and that spot, that nightmare, of many bloody colors.

* * * *

Late influences: The horror of odd versus even, and that dream of 64 square-ones.

* * * *

“Aw come on,” she dreams she prods herself. “Usually you can stretch-across-the-universe; why, this time, can’t you even stretch to the moon?”

But her arms won’t reach, won’t pull an inch, won’t even pass in FRONT of the moon. Finally she realizes: The secret is to make hands grab, not arms stretch.

Hands can be wherever they want.

And indeed she soon has the moon in her hands; moreover, she makes her arms begin to stretch, quickly, easily, to accomodate her waiting hands.

But, from the moon, her eyes are still far.

* * * *

This afternoon she has been reading category theory so this 2:00 A.M. the category whose objects are the objects in her room hangs. Yes, the category whose objects go bump in the night bumps. And the morphisms flit, like misquotos or minnows.

In the category Her Room every pair of objects is two birds swinging a banner. In particular, every object has wings and can fly. It twinkles with its isomorphisms, especially the identity. In other words, every object is a star.

She superimposes Her Room upon its dual. Every object becomes both a departure and a terminal. The two-way roads slither and the journeys grow in all directions.

She fills the dark with tiny cars. She blows it up with paths. Her Room is becoming some category, and the morphisms are driving out the objects. Yes, she drowns Her Room in its own Morph. Her things will soon have no space to go bump.

* * * *

She is troubled today, tortured. If she's such a child-like poet, how come her child won't read her poetry? If she's such a good teacher, how come he won't let her near his homework? If she's so good at being happy, how come he doesn't like to sing? If she's so good at having temper tantrums, how come he's better? If she's such a good mother, how come every morning he's as grumpy as a husband? If she's such a good mathematician, why can't she solve this problem-child?

The answers are all patent. He's a Separate Individual. There are Special Stresses. They Never Promised Her a Rose Garden.

Then something comes to her, courtesy of Halmos. "I'm not a problem solver. I'm a theory creator."

"I'm a theory creator," she mutters again. She mutters it bitterly.

But then she mutters it yet again. This time joyfully. Of course! She was ALWAYS a theory-creator. She was NEVER a problem solver.

Maybe it's a factor of two. Maybe it's a factor of two million. Maybe time is really three-dimensional. Maybe there's no connection between a cube of space and the object it contains. Maybe two is the first un-lonely number. Maybe her mother's womb was a Klein bottle. Maybe everyone has his or her own linear operator, and the eigen-values of that operator correspond to the loves that person has.

These theories are not fashionable mathematics. And she was never a fashionable mathematician. In particular, instead of being a problem solver, she has been a problem creator. A theory, in fact, IS a problem. A theory is a problem SCHEMA. She has created more problems than solved. Including this problem CHILD.

Maybe he's a solipsist. Maybe he's an existentialist. Maybe he really IS from Mars. Maybe he's just another one of the theories she's created.

Maybe he needs her to not be a child-like poet. Maybe he need a new bike.

Her theories stalk the night. Find their way, perhaps, to some other mother, some other child. As for her, as for him, they are the wrong road. He's the problem child and she's the problem adult.

She IS a good teacher, good poet, good mother, good mathematician. But she is not a problem-solver; she is a theory-creator. "I am a theory creator," she says

again, then again

this time at peace.

* * * *

She is teaching Sturm Liouville. She multiplies the mu-equation by nu and the nu-equation by mu.

But not enough goes away. So she multiplies both equations by zero, and then subtracts (just in case).

It's all zero, she tells them. Lines are zero, circles are zero, R-three is zero. Zero-to-the-zero is not one but zero. The set containing zero is not one but zero.

There is nothing to learn, nothing to teach. There's been a terrible mistake.

* * * *

As though it were SHE doing the deceiving.

As though it were she who started the rumor that all teachers know all
and know that they know.

And as though it were she doing the weaving.

As though it were she who invented the equation u-sub-double-x equals
one-over-k times u-sub-t and then, not satisfied with that bramble bush,
as though she concocted the boundary and initial conditions.

And as though it were she who separated the variables, only to get
slap-happy and put them back together.

Yes, the terrible tangled web THEY weave
when first THEY practice to deceive.
And the terrible tangled net SHE climbs.
The terrible bubbling pot of slime.

* * * *

She is working, now, on a decade-old problem: Which symmetric reflexive binary-relations can be extended to partial orderings? Given, that is, squiggle, when does there exist a partial ordering wedge such that x squiggle y if and only if either x wedge y or y wedge x?

She has made headway. It all depends on whether or not squiggle admits a closed determining chain of odd length. NOW all she has to do is find out which symmetric reflexive binary relations don't admit closed determining chains of odd length. And after that she'll work out the construction of wedge.

How did she get here, anyway? In the land of thought, which is so many dimensional, how does a particular line happen upon any one spot, marked by X but surrounded by X-to-the-X?

She is lost, stranded. Not in the sense that she can't find the way back. More like that time out in the field. The field of her fifth September, the slobbering rain, the sharp grass, destination slowly fading into rumor. She wasn't really lost -- The way back was the straight line behind her. -- She was only STUCK, on the straight line BEFORE her.

Lost, now, trapped, in that same sense. It's the WILL she can't find back.

And she knows very well how she got here. It had all started with otm theory, and the generalized division that had led to. Does, conversely, every generalized division give rise to an otm, she'd had the nerve to ask, and as punishment she now has to quest for wedge.

And before all that there were functions and... well, points, different points... It all had to do with PHYSICAL things, then adding the things -- apples, inches. It had to do with space, space existing, then being filled to the gills. Oh, she knows it sounds far-fetched but it came from something starting up time, thereby chosing one over zero, creating the set consisting of zero, not letting zero just STAY zero.

That THAT's why she has to know which symmetric binary relations don't admit closed determining chains of odd length. Yes, it's the next morning and she . . . not exactly hates herself, is just a NEW self, in a new place.

She yawns, sighs, stretches. She's not dreaming. God really DID make the integers, and people SHOULD be tempted to divide them and take roots. And there really WERE points and lines, filling up space again and again. Amidst the matter at hand they might have gone into hiding but they WERE here, honest, and she really DOES have to know which are the admissable symmetric binary relations. She's not psychotic, she's not obsessive. The question does exist, so does the answer, and whichever ones they are, they're plodding along; she really does need to find them.

* * * *

Another decade-old problem: If a collection of sets has the property that any two are either disjoint or one completely inside the other, also that any sub-collection consisting entirely either of pairwise disjoint sets or nested sets is countable, then must that collection itself be countable?

She didn't make it up but it's still her problem. And, being a theory-creator rather than a problem-solver, she knows it will always be her problem. A chronic problem. One she will have to learn to live with.

Which means she'll have to learn to live with both possibilities.

(1) The picture of all those little bubbles -- lengthwise countable, cross-wize countable, diagonal-wise countable -- but somehow, altogether-wise, running amuck. As though maybe, somehow, there are an uncountable number of stars or even, on Judgement Day, an uncountable number of souls.

(2) She also has to live with the other picture, the restriction-picture, the bubbles contained after all, not that many -- of stars, of souls -- maybe everything only countable after all.

She must live with the burden of both. They way all creatures must live with the various double-burdens. Of boredom versus stress. Loneliness versus responsibility. Guilt versus powerlessness.

Maybe not in the same way, maybe not as much. but it matters. It's a process she must go through, all five stages. She has to learn to live with that chronic progressive problem, with its two opposite pictures side by side, and it matters. It actually matters.

* * * *

She is no workaholic. She is no digger. Yet tonight she forsakes nail-biting

for this barrel of a-b-c's.

She picks at them. She collects them. But not like stamps. She doesn't, for example, trade them. She simply HAS them. She has to have them all.

She needs a picture of them, a group portrait. All of them focused and smiling.

She has to own them, know them, as deft as though they were one.

Yes, math as mannerism. She has to have a hand, with these beauties as fingers. Has to hold a vase,with these cuties as flowers. So she forsakes the family, forsakes the friends, even forsakes chocolates, to spend the epsilon-hours gulping this alphabet soup.

She COULD use a calculator. She COULD consult a colleague. She COULD look it up in a number-theory text. But -- don't you see? -- she has to do this alone.

She is no addict, she is based-in-reality, but God created these lambies

set them out to green-pasture

and maketh her

to lie down.

* * * *

She is no neurotic. She is no psychotic. She is no Woman Obsessed.
But tongiht -- no, toDAY -- she forsakes even the miniscules a b c's

for the maxicule ABC's. All day long acute angles are elbows, obtuse angles more tactful wedges, straight angles cheese slicers, and reflex angles the ultiimate exile. All afternoon two lines bulge with three angles, and similar triangles hide like the spaces between objects. There are stars without constellations, and lines not parallel but which have yet to intersect.

She COULD use vectors. She COULD use exponentials. But only seeing is believing.

She has to be a giant brain, hold it all in one scoop. Has to be an autistic savant, count it all in one blow.

She is no Plath but auxillary lines keep sprouting and thickening. She is no Sexton but this black art will be the death of her. She is no Poe but wouldn't it be something, if math turned out to be bad?

For here scampers Little Blonde Curls, her most-recently borne. "Happy! "Happy!" "I'm a baby. I'm a baby." "I love you." "I wanna hug you." "I wanna eat on you" -- and he does, but her eyes, today, are for this hellkite, this iron butterfly, this reeling repeating chair.

She is no schizo but the lines are beginning to schiz. She is no werewolf but each space might contain a moon. She is no vampire but this is a matter of blood.

She is no cafe-genuis but afternoon has turned midnight. She is no suffering-artist but this is science. She is no Woman-Under-the-Influence but she needs everyone to shut up.

She is not O.D.-ing but, Little Blonde Curls,

Close-Up-Profile

Squiggle, Squaggle

Little-Binky-Yes --

Scamper, Little Blonde Curls

and shine, Morning Glory Eyes.

She is not O.D.-ing but somebody

please

come quick.