

Mathematics 3810H – Ancient and classical mathematics

TRENT UNIVERSITY, Winter 2016

Assignment # π

Sonnet

Due on Monday, 30 October.

A *sonnet* is a poem with fourteen lines, usually in iambic pentameter, and which may use any of a number of different rhyming schemes. Two examples are given below. One is Edna St. Vincent Millay's *Sonnet xlv* about Euclid and the perception of beauty. The other, by Roger Zelazny, seems to be, at least in part, a parody of or homage to — it's hard to decide which! — *Sonnet xlv*, and might not be in the absolutely best of taste . . .

Sonnet xlv

Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare.
Let all who prate of Beauty hold their peace,
And lay them prone upon the earth and cease
To ponder on themselves, the while they stare
At nothing, intricately drawn nowhere
In shapes of shifting lineage; let geese
Gabble and hiss, but heroes seek release
From dusty bondage into luminous air.
O blinding hour, O holy, terrible day,
When first the shaft into his vision shone
Of light anatomized! Euclid alone
Has looked on Beauty bare. Fortunate they
Who, though once only and then but far away,
Have heard her massive sandal set on stone.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Lobachevsky alone has looked on Beauty bare.
She curves in here, she curves in here. She curves out there.
Her parallel clefts come together to tease
In un-callipygianous-wise;
With fewer than one hundred eighty degrees
Her glorious triangle lies.
Her double-trumpet symmetry Riemann did not court –
His tastes to simpler-curvedness, the buxom Teuton sort!
An ellipse is fine for as far as it goes,
But modesty, away!
If I'm going to see Beauty without her clothes
Give me hyperbolas any old day.
The world is curves, I've heard it said,
And straightway in it nothing lies.
This then my wish, before I'm dead:
To look through Lobachevsky's eyes.

From *Doorways in the Sand*, by Roger Zelazny.

1. Your task, should you choose to accept it, is to write a sonnet touching on the history of mathematics, preferably one that doesn't take itself too seriously. [10]