

a lecture in ten dimensions

FLATLAND



Lyric Excerpts

1. Do Not Strive
2. Hindered by the Circumferences of His Birth
3. Length
4. I Have Four Sons
5. You Have Broken the Law

A Pentagon in Flatland puts a lowly Square back in his proper place.

1. Do Not Strive

TAGON (A PENTAGON)

DO NOT STRIVE.
DO NOT STRIVE.
IT WILL LEAD TO YOUR DOWNFALL.
MY DUTY'S VERY CLEAR:
ONE MORE MENTION OF HIGHER ASPIRATIONS
AND I MUST HAVE YOU ARRESTED.
ARRESTED, PUT ON TRIAL AND
SUBSEQUENTLY INTERSECTED TO DEATH.
DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

QUARRKANT (A SQUARE)

Yes.

TAGON

Yes, sir.

QUARRKANT

Yes, sir.

TAGON

Join me in reiterating the Oath of Order.

QUARRKANT/TAGON

THREE SERVES FOUR AND
FOUR SERVES FIVE AND
FIVE SERVES SIX AND
SIX SERVES SEVEN
IN SAECULA SAECULORUM,
SAECULA SAECULORUM.

LESSER ANGLES ACQUIESCE TO THE GREATER,
EACH SIDE TO ITS SUPERIOR.
YIELD TO THOSE MORE PERFECT,
WE YIELD TO THOSE MORE PERFECT THAN WE!

We serve those whose advanced geometry gives hope that our
ancestors' ancestors ancestors shall one day achieve unity of
curvature and infinitude of angle.

TAGON

FOR WE, THE BENT, THE ANGLED,
SERVE THE ANGLELESS ONES
POLYGONS BELOW THE CIRCLE,
EACH IN OUR LOGICAL PLACE.
FROM SON TO SON TO SON TO SON.
AMEN.

QUARRKANT

WE, THE BENT, THE ANGLED,
SERVE THE ANGLELESS.
WE SERVE THE CURVED.
POLYGONS BELOW THE CIRCLE,
EACH IN OUR OWN PLACE,
EACH TO HIS OWN PROGRESSION
FROM SON TO SON TO SON.
AMEN.

The Square contemplates his lowly lot in life.

2. Hindered by Circumferences of His Birth

QUARRKANT

WHY SHOULD A MAN BE HINDERED
BY CIRCUMFERENCES OF HIS BIRTH?
FOR ARE WE NOT ALL CAPABLE
OF ACHIEVING MORE ON EARTH?
WHY AREN'T WE ALLOWED TO BE MORE
THAN JUST A WORKING CROWD,
IF NOT ALL OF US, THEN ONE OF US.

IMAGINE ALL THE LOST POTENTIAL
SINCE WE'RE NOT ALLOWED TO TRY.
THINK OF ALL THE BRILLIANT MINDS
GONE TRAPPED INSIDE, WITHOUT REPLY.
WHY PREVENT CREATIVE LEADERS
RISING FROM THE LOWER RANKS?
THINK OF ALL THE UNHEARD THOUGHTS.
THINK OF ALL THE LOST LEADERS.

SO WHY MUST A SQUARE BE ONLY A SQUARE?

THINK OF THOSE WE HAVE LOST:
ARCHITECTS, SCIENTISTS, TEACHERS, INVENTORS
OR SURGEONS OR JUDGES OR JURORS AND MENTORS
WHO WROTE NOT A WORD.
THEY COULD HAVE HELPED.
THEY COULD HAVE LEAD AND COUNSELED US,
GUIDED US, GUARDED US,
BUT DUE TO SOCIETY'S LAWS,
BOTH POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC,
WE'RE GIVEN NO CHOICE
AND SO NEVER ARE HEARD.

AND AS FOR ME...
MY NEEDS ARE VERY SMALL.
I NEED HARDLY A THING AT ALL.
A FEW SHORT HOURS OF LEISURE,
AND MAYBE A COUPLE OF DOLLARS
LEFT AT THE END OF THE MONTH.
MAYBE BUY SOMETHING NICE FOR THE FAMILY,
EVEN AS SELDOM AS TWICE A YEAR.
TWICE A YEAR, ONCE A YEAR, PERHAPS
AFFORD A SHORT VACATION
OR A PAIR OF BOOTS
OR MITTENS
FOR MY SONS.

BUT MORE THAN THAT
A LITTLE RESPECT
WHICH COMES TO A FOREMAN
INSTEAD OF A WORKER.
A LITTLE RESPECT
WHICH COMES TO A FOREMAN
EVEN AS SELDOM AS TWICE A YEAR.

TWICE A YEAR, ONCE A YEAR, PERHAPS
OBSERVE A SHORT DISPLAY OF CURT BUT KIND RESPECT.
IS THAT TOO MUCH TO ASK FOR?
MAYBE A LITTLE RESPECT?

The Square visits the world of Lineland, where he is astonished to learn that Monarch of Lineland believes there can be only one dimension in the entire universe.

3. Length

TAGON

THERE IS ONLY ONE DIMENSION.
THERE IS ONLY ONE DIMENSION
AND IT'S CALLED LENGTH.
LENGTH!
IT CONSTITUTES THE WHOLE OF THE WORLD,
INDEED, THE WHOLE OF SPACE,
THE WHOLE OF ALL.
LENGTH IS THE GOOD
AND THE BAD
AND THE BIG
AND THE SMALL.
LENGTH IS ALL.
LENGTH IS AL!

FROM NOW AND FOREVER,
FROM NOW AND FOREVERMORE
IN PERPETUA SIC TRANSIT GLORIA.
AMEN.

QUARRKANT

Don't be absurd. Or rather, don't be ignorant. You're nothing but a line.

TAGON

NOTHING BUT A LINE?
OF COURSE!
THERE'S NOTHING ELSE THAT I COULD BE
BUT A LINE.
NOTHING ELSE.
NOTHING ELSE BUT A LINE.

QUARRKANT

But I am a line and another line and another line and another line, an infinite number of lines. I am infinitely again as infinite as your world. You, in Lineland, how do you perceive your fellow citizens?

TAGON

What do you mean, how do I perceive them? As a single point, of course. How else can I perceive them, but as a single point?

I CAN SEE MY NORTHERN NEIGHBOR
TO THE NORTH,
MY SOUTHERN NEIGHBOR
TO THE SOUTH.
THERE IS ONLY
ONE DIMENSION
AND IT'S CALLED
LENGTH!

SINCE I AM THE LONGEST LINE
IN THE UNIVERSE, NAY,
IN THE WHOLE OF SPACE,
THE WHOLE OF ALL,
I AM ITS MONARCH!
I AM ITS LEADER!

UNTIL MY SON COMES OF LENGTH.
AT WHICH TIME I WILL SECEDE.
FATHERS GIVE WAY
WHEN THEY'RE INFERIOR.
EVERY LINE YIELDS
TO ITS SUPERIOR.

which is as it should be.

SONS EVER GROWING AND STRENGTHENING,
EACH TO HIS OWN LENGTHENING.

The Square's not-very-bright Wife revels in the news that she has four Sons (a fact that she keeps forgetting).

4. I Have Four Sons

LINEA

I HAVE FOUR SONS ,
FOUR SONS I HAVE .
ONE FOR EACH DAY OF THE WEEK !
I 'LL PLANT FOR THEM A GARDEN .
LA LA LA LA LA LA LA
LA LA LA LA LA LA
LA LA LA LA LA LA
I HAVE FOUR SONS .

I PRAY A PRAYER FOR THEM
THEY 'LL NEVER GET HURT ,
NEVER FEEL PAIN .
PRAY THAT THEIR GARDEN
WILL ALWAYS HAVE PLENTY
SUN AND RAIN .
LA LA LA LA LA LA LA LA LA
I HAVE FOUR SONS .

Square's Gospel of Three Dimensions is considered heresy in Flatland, and he is sentenced to be executed. On the eve of his execution, his Wife visits him to say goodbye.

5. You Have Broken the Law

QUARRKANT

YOU SAID YOU THOUGHT
THAT THIS IS YOUR FAULT.
IT'S NOT.
I'M GOING TO BE EXECUTED
BECAUSE OF A THOUGHT.
A THOUGHT WHICH SCARES PEOPLE.
A THOUGH OF A MORE PERFECT WORLD.
A MORE PERFECT WORLD
WHERE INSIGNIFICANT SQUARES LIKE ME
AND MERE LINES, MERE LINES LIKE YOU
AT LAST CAN BE INFINITE AND FREE.

LINEA

That sounds good.

QUARRKANT

Does, doesn't it?

(TAGON returns.)

TAGON

Time's up.

QUARRKANT

Give us a moment to say goodbye?

TAGON

Of course.

(TAGON withdraws.)

QUARRKANT

My Wife. My simple, dear, sweet Wife. I wish we had more time.

LINEA

Me too.

QUARRKANT

IN THIS WORLD OF OURS,
THIS LIMITED WORLD OF OURS,
YOU'RE THE CLOSEST THING
TO PERFECTION
THAT I'VE KNOWN.
THROUGH YOU
WITH YOU
LIFE HAS BEEN WORTH LIVING.
I HAVE NO REGRETS.
I HAVE NO BLAME.
I FEEL ONLY LOVE AND LIGHT WITH YOU.
GOODBYE, MY LOVE, GOODBYE, MY SWEET.
MAY THE FUTURE BE AS WOND'ROUS AS THE PAST.
THINK ON ME.
THINK ON ME AND THIS AND THIS:
MAY YOU GREET EACH DAY
WITH JOY,
WITH JOY AND BLISS.
GOODBYE.
GOODBYE.

LINEA

You'll be back in time for dinner, though, right?

QUARRKANT

So close.
GOODBYE.
GOODBYE.