

Dissecting “The Death of Euclid”; a collage by Mark Sanders – after a poem by Sarah Glaz.

The Death of Euclid

*“So great was Euclid’s fame that he was known to the
Greeks as ὁ στοιχειωτής, “teacher of the Elements”
D.E. Smith, History of Mathematics*

*And onto the barge decked with flowers
we lifted him our arms dark and
strong*

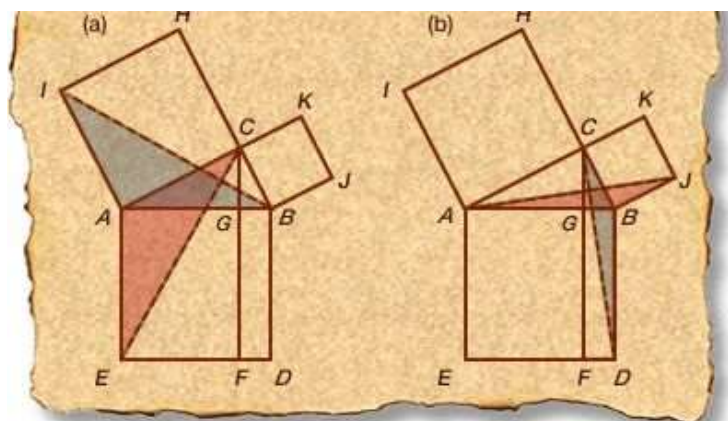
Much of the imagery used in this collage is explicit. The boat, top right, representing the funeral barge, with its broken windows perhaps indicating a death of sorts in itself; being carried by the figure beneath it.

*his body shrunk in its
shroud of warm roses*

Towards the bottom of the collage, the dead body is that of Euclid, amongst the roses.

*The Nile’s
sluggish brown flow*

The River Nile flows from the city of Alexandria into the Mediterranean Sea and it was in Alexandria that Euclid is believed to have spent most of his life. The map section of Alexandria is cut into the outline form of the “Windmill” diagram with which he proved The Pythagorean Theorem in *The Elements*. The Pythagorean Theorem states that the sum of the squares on the legs of a right triangle is equal to the square on the hypotenuse (the side opposite the right angle)—in familiar algebraic notation, $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$. The Babylonians and Egyptians had found some integer triples (a, b, c) satisfying the relationship. Pythagoras (c. 580–c. 500 BC) or one of his followers may have been the first to prove the theorem that bears his name. Euclid (c. 300 BC) offered a clever demonstration of the Pythagorean theorem in his *Elements*, known as the Windmill proof from the figure’s shape.



The postcard fragment, centre right, shows the Lighthouse at Alexandria, which was constructed during Euclid’s lifetime and is recognized as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

*Myth floating
in front of us like the cloud of God
We lifted his eyes towards heaven
where he saw the next generation
inherit*

The upper area of the collage is suggestive of the sky and the heavens. Floating in that space is the Space Telescope which bears Euclid's name; as generations far beyond his lifetime use his research and discoveries to forge ever forward in our own understanding of mathematics in the universe.

*And we mourned how
we mourned*

The mourners are gathered around the bottom of the picture and the body of Euclid.

*his fine-tuned mind
his irreplaceable jewels of thought*

The jewelled and starry backdrop to the central section of the collage represents this notion.

*Not
one of us came close in our search
for truth to match his erudition
Not one of us came close And
the barge groaned under his almost
weightless body once as if in pain
then clutched his mutilated heart
to its own*

The heart (Euclid's heart) floating in the upper centre, under observation from the Euclid Space Telescope as it watches, records and feeds back further knowledge.

Crocodiles circled silently

The strange boat (barge?) across the centre of the map fragment, is crewed by a host of crocodiles. This is a detail from a painting by Leonora Carrington entitled "How Doth the Little Crocodile" after a poem from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. Although best known as the author of the Alice stories, Carroll spent his life primarily as a mathematician.

plucking at wilted flowers

Explicitly, the wilted sunflowers (sun) in the "sky", top right.

*And the
procession started slowly heavy
with sighs ghost deep oars into
water and heaving*

Carrington's crocodile boat again.

*mud splashing
dipping and cutting a path upstream
we left on the shore rooted tangled
in tears*

The "bejewelled" backdrop to the centre of the collage, perhaps also reflects the tears at Euclid's death, as well as the supernovae of his work.

*our imaginations seeking
relief in words of reverence.*