

LISA LAJEUNESSE

Ode to Polynomials

for Sarah Glaz

Terms

arrayed for battle
their powers displayed
on banners
carried by the worthiest knights

Lines are drawn by sign
(though shadowy odd powers
plot to switch sides at zero)

Coefficients,
puffed up with magnitude,
swagger forward
the greatest presumes dominion over all
as though a handkerchief bestowed
by a fine lady
can win the day

The fight is stacked
for these are ancient adversaries
still
a delicate balance of coefficients
and the curve rises and falls
as each prevails in turn
before the anointed
seizes control

at fourteen
with graph paper in hand
like an ant crawling over the surface of calculation
while a higher self, watched in wonder
awaiting the next value to turn the tide
trusting the real numbers
that sinuous song
to dance the curve through its changes