

## TORTOISE-SHELL

Along the back of the baby tortoise  
The scales are locked in an arch like a bridge,  
Scale-lapping, like a lobster's sections  
Or a bee's.

Then crossways down his sides  
Tiger-stripes and wasp-bands.  
Five, and five again, and five again,  
And round the edges twenty-five little ones,  
The sections of the baby tortoise shell.

Four, and a keystone;  
Four, and a keystone;  
Four, and a keystone;  
Then twenty-four, and a tiny little keystone.

It needed Pythagoras to see life placing her  
counters on the living back  
Of the baby tortoise;  
Life establishing the first eternal mathematical  
tablet,  
Not in stone, like the Judean Lord, or bronze, but  
in life-clouded, life-rosy tortoise-shell.

The first little mathematical gentleman  
Stepping, wee mite, in his loose trousers  
Under all the eternal dome of mathematical law.

Fives, and tens,  
Threes and fours and twelves,  
All the volte face of decimals,  
The whirligig of dozens and the pinnacle of seven,  
Turn him on his back,  
The kicking little beetle,  
And there again, on his shell-tender, earth-touching  
belly,  
The long cleavage of division, upright of the  
eternal cross.

And on either side count five,  
On each side, two above, on each side, two below  
The dark bar horizontal.

It goes right through him, the sprottling insect,  
Through his cross-wise cloven psyche,  
Through his five-fold complex-nature.

So turn him over on his toes again;  
Four pin-point toes, and a problematical thumb-

piece,

Four rowing limbs, and one wedge-balancing-  
head,

Four and one makes five, which is the clue to all  
mathematics.

The Lord wrote it all down on the little slate  
Of the baby tortoise.

Outward and visible indication of the plan within,  
The complex, manifold involvedness of an  
individual creature

Blotted out

On this small bird, this rudiment,

This little dome, this pediment

Of all creation,

This slow one.