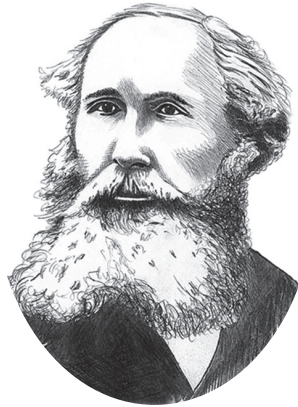


The Poetry of Physics

Professor Tait, Loquitur

by James Clerk Maxwell



James Clerk Maxwell (Great Britain, 1831-1879) derived mathematical laws explaining electricity and magnetism in terms of force fields, a "great revolution," as Einstein said, "in the conception of reality."

Will mounted ebonite disk
On smooth unyielding bearing,
When turned about with notion brisk
(Nor excitation sparing),
Affect the primitive repose,
Of + and - in a wire,
So that while either downward flows,
The other upwards shall aspire?
Describe the form and size of coil,
And other things that we may need,
Think not about increase of toil
Involved in work at double speed.
I can no more, my pen is bad,
It catches in the roughened page—
But answer us and make us glad,
THOU ANTI-DISTANCE-ACTION SAGE!
Yet have I still a thousand things to say
But work of other kinds is pressing—
So your petitioner will ever pray
That your defence be triple messing.

String Theory

by Maria Terrone

The world's not constructed of particles but tiny loops, say the String Theorists. This is their Holy Grail, the big idea unifying all natural forces. They worked at warp speed, but the loose ends weren't tied in time for the new millennium. My theory: the world's a giant spool of string unraveling since Day One. When we're tangled by problems, stomachs in knots, the string has caught on cosmic debris. Turning within, medievalists found meaning in phlegm, blood, bile; but now, sensing that we merely reflect what's outside, we say we're strung out. In the riotous 60s, as the string snagged again & again, nervous hands tied macramé that almost strangled the world. Sometimes, our days roll out smoothly. The earth's spin pulls us from our beds, snipping the threads of dreams. We scatter to work, laugh; kick off our shoes at the end of each day. The world unwinds too, and together we inch towards the untethered space beyond our last turn.

© Maria Terrone. First published in *VIA* magazine and included in the poetry collection *A Secret Room in Fall* (McGovern Prize, Ashland Poetry Press, Ashland, OH). Maria Terrone is an American poet and writer. She is the author of three collections of poetry: *Eye to Eye* (2014), *A Secret Room in Fall* (2006), and *The Bodies We Were Loaned* (2002), plus a chapbook, *American Gothic, Take 2* (2009). She has been nominated four times for a Pushcart Prize, and her work has appeared in more than 20 anthologies. She is married to William Terrone (Sigma Pi Sigma, Hofstra University, '68). www.mariaterrone.com. mterrone@nyc.rr.com.