

Boundary Conditions

Royal Academy of Science, Paris, 1823

This is her moment of triumph:
a seat at the center, a node.
Mademoiselle Germain sits silent,
head upright, chaperoned.
Academy members rise
or dip; the speaker drones.

Steel plate hums to the bow
like silk stretched tight.
Who grasps the edge controls—
she claims— the waves inside.
She makes her hands unfold.
Her lips taste dry.

Sophie Germain was awarded the Royal Academy of Science's prix extraordinaire for research in elasticity, in absentia, in 1816. Her friend Joseph Fourier extended a formal invitation to the Academy's meetings in 1823, after his November 1822 election as Permanent Secretary.