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Comments and Letters

I much appreciate your sending me the the *Humanistic Mathematics Network Journal*, but I have a gripe concerning Issue #19 (March 1999). Whether one prefers male or female math, hard or soft math, one cannot be a mathematician unless one respects definitions. And I submit that, by definition, the verses on pp. 42-43 are NOT limericks.

Yes, each stanza has five lines and most have rhyme scheme "aabba"—the "b" lines each one poetic foot shorter-but these stanzas do not consistently have lines for which a single foot contains one stressed syllable and two unstressed ones. And, the author is not free to move the stresses at will from their natural positions in spoken English. The author published his work at a point where he should have polished it further.

You may recall me from your having published my collection of mathematical references in literature (HMNJ #13). Periodically, "humanistic" mathematicians wonder why the world produces so littie mathematical poetry. The reason, I submit, is that most mathematicians who attempt poetry do not take it seriously. They produce doggerel and it satisfies them.

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In Future Issues...