organ alone is the truth perceived" (179). As Plato asserts here, and as Dickinson also believed, to
eternity, a hesitating fraction, the plumpness of a binomial theorem: such images lack sensuous
thought and felt about elusive matters, but the imagery of mathematics made it possible for
"the word 'no' placed 'face-to-face'" (192). On the mathematical level, meanwhile, we see a doubling of
passed into a state that mathematics alone cannot evaluate.5 As a result, the gauge no longer
It will not stir for Doctor's
other, but they can never hope to become unfractional or "Whole. " Something prevents them from
fantasized about this equation taking place. Moreover, these dreaming fractions are unstable
Twas face to face with God
'Twas face to face with Nature - forced
"forward. " Significantly, the vowel inflections here occur along fixed coefficients of transformation:
Light - enabling Light
The Dying - as it were a Might
The Admirations - and Contempts - of time
"no doubt" and "eludes the finding out" share the same basic principle of sound, the same phonetic
rainbow raised to the third power - she likens the rainbow to a finite number that is amenable to
Disappeared, and only one more - the Universe, was of "my" - which in fact, was only the "spot - a"
reality that formed the start of the great task of the "normal" - the "airport" - the "left - hand - most"
prospect of eternal life after death. Indeed, nothing was more inaccessible or more valuable to
bliss in this poem grows higher the farther back it recedes into the past and away from the present
everdwindling innocence. When the speaker was very young - when x was close to zero - she was
It grew as I pursued
It wasted from my sight

An interesting picture emerges from this framework. Here, the lyric speaker - a vertex locked inside an
formed by two lines diverging from a common point. "Polar, " meanwhile, refers to what is known in
mathematical meanings that are obviously at work here: "angle" refers to the position from which the
Then - Diamonds - which the Snow
The Forehead of a Hill
The Pattern of a Chimney
Held slanting, in the Sky
Like a Venetian - waiting
...
organ alone is the truth perceived" (179). As Plato asserts here, and as Dickinson also believed, to know mathematics is to come very close to transcending bodily experience and realizing the ineffable nature of eternity. Through the strangely abstracted language and disembodied imagery of mathematics, Dickinson's poetry speaks to us from beyond the world of time.

Footnote

Notes

1. According to Cynthia Griffin Wolff, Dickinson "was given more instruction in current mathematics and science than the average American schoolboy is given now" - "now" meaning in 1986 (342-343, italics in the original).

2. In addition, for Dickinson's interest in science, see chapter two of Emily Dickinson's Vision by James R. Guthrie, "Emily Dickinson: Learnt Astronomer" by Brad Ricca, and "Chemical Conviction": Dickinson, Hitchcock, and the Poetry or Science" by Hiroko Uno.

3. Keats makes this complaint in his 1820 poem Lamia. For a rich account of how mathematical and scientific explanation can actually enhance the rainbow's mystery, see Philip Fisher's Wonder, The Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences.

4. For an insightful study on Dickinson and rhyme, see Judy Jo Small's Positive as Sound: Emily Dickinson's Rhyme.

5. "Degreeless noon" can also be interpreted as a way of visualizing a timepiece that reads "twelve o'clock." As Wolff points out, "Noon is a 'Degreeless' hour because when both minute and hour hand point to twelve, they are superimposed: there is no angle between them; they are separated by zero degrees" (192).


References

Works Cited

The following abbreviations are used to refer to the writings of Emily Dickinson:


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Word count: 7423

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