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Critical analysis of how do i love thee

Andrew has a keen interest in all aspects of poetry and writes extensively on the subject. His poems are published online and in print.Elizabeth Barrett BrowningElizabeth Barrett Browning And A Summary of How Do I Love Thee?How Do I Love Thee? is sonnet number 43 taken from The Sonnets From the Portuguese, a book first published in 1850.Elizabeth Barrett Browning chose this title to give the impression that she had translated the work from the Portuguese and would therefore avoid any controversy. It was dedicated to her husband, poet Robert Browning.But the work did cause a stir. For starters, the inspiration behind the work was Elizabeth's love for the man who had, for all intents and purposes, rescued her from a quietly desperate, reclusive lifestyle she led in London, following the accidental death of her closest brother.Dominated by her possessive father, Elizabeth spent most of her time alone in an upstairs room. She was a frail, sick woman who needed opium and laudanum in an effort to cure her pain.Her only consolation was poetry and at this she was very successful. When Robert Browning read her work he was so impressed he wrote asking to meet her. The two eventually fell in love and decided to secretly elope to Italy in 1846, despite the father's resistance and anger. He ended up disinheriting his daughter.Elizabeth and Robert exchanged hundreds of love letters over the two years from 1845-46. In them you get a clear idea of just how much they adored one another. Take this excerpt from Elizabeth in 1846, near the time of their elopement:For I have none in the world who will hold me to make me live in it, except only you - I have come back for you alone...at your voice...and because you have use for me! I have come back to live a little for you. I love you - I bless God for you - you are too good for me, always I knew.'Elizabeth was close to 40 years of age when she broke free from the control of her father. You can imagine her pent up strength of feeling and sense of relief. She went on to give birth to a son and was happily married for sixteen years, until her death in 1861.How Do I Love Thee? is her most well known sonnet. It has a female narrator which was highly unusual for the time.How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43)Line By Line Analysis of How Do I Love Thee? Sonnet 43Lines 1-4 This sonnet helped kick-start many more on the theme of modern (Victorian) love, from a woman's perspective. Note the emphasis is on the repetition and reinforcement of the speaker's love for someone; there is no mention of a specific name or gender, giving the sonnet a universal appeal.The first line is unusual because it is a question asked in an almost conversational manner - the poet has challenged herself to compile reasons for her love, to define her intense feelings, the ways in which her love can be expressed.There then follows a repetitive variation on a theme of love. To me this conjures up an image of a woman counting on her fingers, then compiling a list, which would be a very modern, 21st century thing for a female to do.This poem comes from another era however, a time when most women were expected to stay at home looking after all things domestic, not writing poems about love.The second,third and fourth lines suggest that her love is all encompassing, stretching to the limits, even when she feels that her existence - Being - and God's divine help - Grace - might end, it's the love she has for her husband Robert that will sustain.Note the contrast between the attempt to measure her love with rational language - depth, breadth, height - and the use of the words Soul, Being and Grace, which imply something intangible and spiritual.Her love goes beyond natural life and man-made theology. These are weighty concepts - the reader is made aware that this is no ordinary love early on in the sonnet. The clause, lines 2-4, contains enjambment, a continuation of theme from one line to the next.Is she suggesting that the simple notion of love for a person can soon flow into something quite profound, yet out of reach of everyday language and speech?Lines 5-8 The speaker, the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning continues with her passionate need to differentiate the many ways her love for her husband manifests. In line five she clearly tells the reader that, be it day or night, her love fills those quiet moments, those daily silences that occur between two people living together.Her love is unconditional and therefore free; it is a force for good, consciously given because it feels like the right thing to do. She doesn't want any thanks for this freely given love; it is a humble kind of love, untainted by the ego.How Do I Love Thee? Lines 9-14Lines 9 - 14 The sestet starts at line nine. The speaker now looks to the past and compares her new found passions with those of the old griefs. Elizabeth Barrett Browning had plenty of negativity in her adult life - she was mostly ill and lived like a recluse, seeing only old family friends and family.Her father in particular oppressed her and wouldn't allow her to marry. There were no romantic relationships in her life by all accounts. She must have been driven to the point of willing herself dead. Little wonder that when Robert Browning came along she was given a new lease of life.In contrast her childhood had been a happy one and it's this she refers to in the second half of line ten. A child's faith is pure and innocent and sees fresh opportunity in everything.Turning to religious feelings in line eleven, the speaker refers to a lost love she once had for the saints - perhaps those of the christian church, of conventional religion. Or could she be looking back at the saintly people in her life, those she held in great regard and loved?She suggests that this love has now returned and will be given to her husband. In fact so stirred up is she with these innermost feelings she goes on to say in line twelve, with just a dash to separate - this returned love is her very breath. Not only that, but the good and the bad times she's had, is having, will have - this is what the love she has is like. It is all enveloping.And, in the final line, if God grants it, she'll carry on loving her husband even more after she dies.So her love will go on and on, beyond the grave, gaining strength, transcendant.Analysis of How Do I Love Thee? Rhyme And Metre (Meter in American English)This Petrarchan sonnet has fourteen lines, the first eight being the octet and the final six the sestet. At the end of the octet comes what is known as the turn, more or less a subtle change in the relationship between the two parts.In this sonnet the octet is basically a list set in the present that reflects a very deep love; the sestet looks back in time and then forward to a transcendent love, which helps put the whole work into perspective.The rhyme scheme is traditional - abbaabaccddcd - and the end rhymes are mostly full except for: ways/Grace and use/loose/choose. The full rhymes bring closure and help bind the lines together. Iambic pentameter is dominant, that is, there are ten beats and five feet/stresses/beats to most lines, for example : I love / thee to / the depth / and breadth / and height My soul / can reach, / when feel / ing out / of sight SourcesThe Hand of the Poet, Rizzoli, 1997www.poets.orgThe Poetry Handbook, John Lennard, OUP, 2005© 2017 Andrew Spacey 'How do I love thee' by Elizabeth Barrett Browning is the 43rd sonnet from 'Sonnets from the Portuguese'.Home / Uncategorized / An Analysis of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'How Do I Love Thee?' 'How do I love thee' by Elizabeth Barrett Browning is the 43rd sonnet from 'Sonnets from the Portuguese'. Did You Know? The poem How Do I Love Thee? is a portion of a sonnet sequence called Sonnets from the Portuguese. Barrett Browning implied to Elizabeth's readers that she had translated the sonnets, which were originally written by someone in Portuguese. But in reality, they were her own compositions. My little Portuguese was a nickname that Elizabeth's husband used for her in private. Elizabeth Barrett Browning was one of the most prominent poets of that time. Most of her work was her declaration to her beloved husband, who was the most popular poet of that era. She wrote these sequence of sonnets in her days of courtship with Robert Browning. His immense love and support gave freedom to her writing, so much so that Elizabeth's name in the literary world surpassed his, and he came to be known as Browning's husband. Barrett and Browning's love wasn't smooth sailing from the start. Elizabeth's father never wanted his children to be married. Therefore, she and Robert had to elope. Her father never forgave her for this disobedience. But they had found their true love. Sonnet 43 "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.I love thee to the depth and breadth and heightMy soul can reach, when feeling out of sightFor the ends of Being and ideal Grace.I love thee to the level of everyday'sMost quiet need, by sun and candlelight.I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.I love thee with the passion put to useIn my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.I love thee with a love I seemed to loseWith my lost saints—I love thee with the breath,Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God choose,I shall but love thee better after death." Line-by-line Analysis How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. The speaker airs a question that is going to be the theme of the poem: how is she to love thee, the man she is in love with? And then begins her affectionate words that flow, by which she counts the ways in which she loves him. The word count is quite intriguing, and isn't often used when it comes to love. However, you will not find any numbers in the poem. Besides, by giving a number, she will be trivializing and limiting her love. It is a way of saying that love within her is limitless, and that mere numbers cannot be held accountable for. She has enlisted a number of uncountable moments, which may be trivial for the rest, but hold the most value for any and every person in love. I love thee to the depth and breadth and heightMy soul can reach, when feeling out of sightFor the ends of Being and ideal Grace. It is interesting how she portrays her love to be. Words such as depth, breadth, and height are spatial metaphors, meaning that her love surpasses through the mortal realms (body) and amalgamates with her soul; that her love for him and her soul are one. Though her love is intangible and can't be seen, it is forever there in every part of her. In other words, her love consumes every inch of her being; not just mortal coils, but even her soul. She believes that it is the ideal blessing bestowed upon her. I love thee to the level of everyday'sMost quiet need, by sun and candlelight. Her love is not just on the spiritual level, but also a more mortal and on day-to-day level. To some, it may seem like a domestic living sort of a way. However, the words also show that this is not some sort of puppy love; instead, it's a love that is a necessity or need. At first glance, by sun and candlelight may mean that she loves him be it day or night. It could also mean this love is just as important as the sun during the day and the candlelight in the night. I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise. In these lines, she expresses that she feels free and pure being in love. The freedom of her love, is as fearless as the men who fight for the rights. And as pure, selfless, and without a shadow of expectation, as they are. This shows modesty and being pure at heart. I love thee with the passion put to useIn my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith. Her love is passionate. She loves him with the same intensity of the grief she felt in the past, and strongly like a childhood faith. If you still haven't quiet understood this yet, we shall put it in another way. Have you ever hated anyone from the bottom your heart? Imagine the same intense feeling but not of hatred or anger this time, but of love. As for the second part, as a child, have you believed in anything with all your heart, like Santa Claus, tooth fairy, angels, etc.? In the same manner, she embodies the same sincere, wholehearted, and indubitable feeling of faith in love. I love thee with a love I seemed to loseWith my lost saints— Her love for him has the highest prominence. It has replaced the people who were once considered to have the highest importance. Here lost saints does not mean idols of saints. I love thee with the breath,Smiles, tears, of all my life! She proclaims her love for her darling. She loves him as naturally as her breathing. Her love is unconditional and the very essence of this love is present in every aspect of her life: be it in happiness or every tear she cries. Just like her breath which is present, be it in moments of happiness or sorrow, her love too is with her, and, if God choose,I shall but love thee better after death. If mortality and immortality (soul) wasn't enough, she claims that her love is eternal, and if God permits, or if it is possible, her love will exist even after death. Summary, Tone, and Rhyme Scheme Summary How Do I Love Thee? is a simple sonnet by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in which she proclaims her undying love for her darling husband. She believes her love to be immortal and omnipresent. Her words transcend her emotions of being head over heels in love with him. Tone How Do I Love Thee? sonnet is a simple love poem, expressing her deep and undying love for her husband. The tone is true, intimate, loving, and passionate. Rhyme Scheme The rhyme scheme for How Do I Love Thee? sonnet is ABBA ABBA CDC DCD. It also has an Iambic Pentameter (each line goes da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM; for example, "How do I love thee?"; "Let me count the ways.") About Elizabeth Barrett Elizabeth Barrett Moulton-Barrett was the oldest among her 12 siblings (8 boys and 4 girls). She received her education at home along with her brothers. She once wrote that by the age of six, she had already begun reading novels and writing poetry—On the Cruelty of Forcement to Man, by eight was captivated by Pope's translation of Homer, and by ten, she had begun writing her own Homeric epic The Battle of Marathon. She had even taught herself Hebrew so that she could read the Old Testament. At her age of 15, she came down with a lung disease. An accident while saddling her horse left her with an intense head and spinal pain with loss of mobility. Her writing didn't seize there. In 1844, she published a series of poems, which caught Robert Browning's attention. Brief secret meetings between the two led to a series of letters—574 letters over the next twenty months to be exact. They eloped in 1846, and settled in Florence, Italy. Soon after, she bore a son and published Sonnets from the Portuguese in 1850, and many more. Her lung condition deteriorated further, and she died in Florence in the year 1861. Sign up to receive the latest and greatest articles from our site automatically each week (give or take)...right to your inbox.

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