

How Do I Love Thee?

Elizabeth Barrett Browning
(1806 – 1861)

Q & A

Themes

**Line by line
Analysis**

Summary

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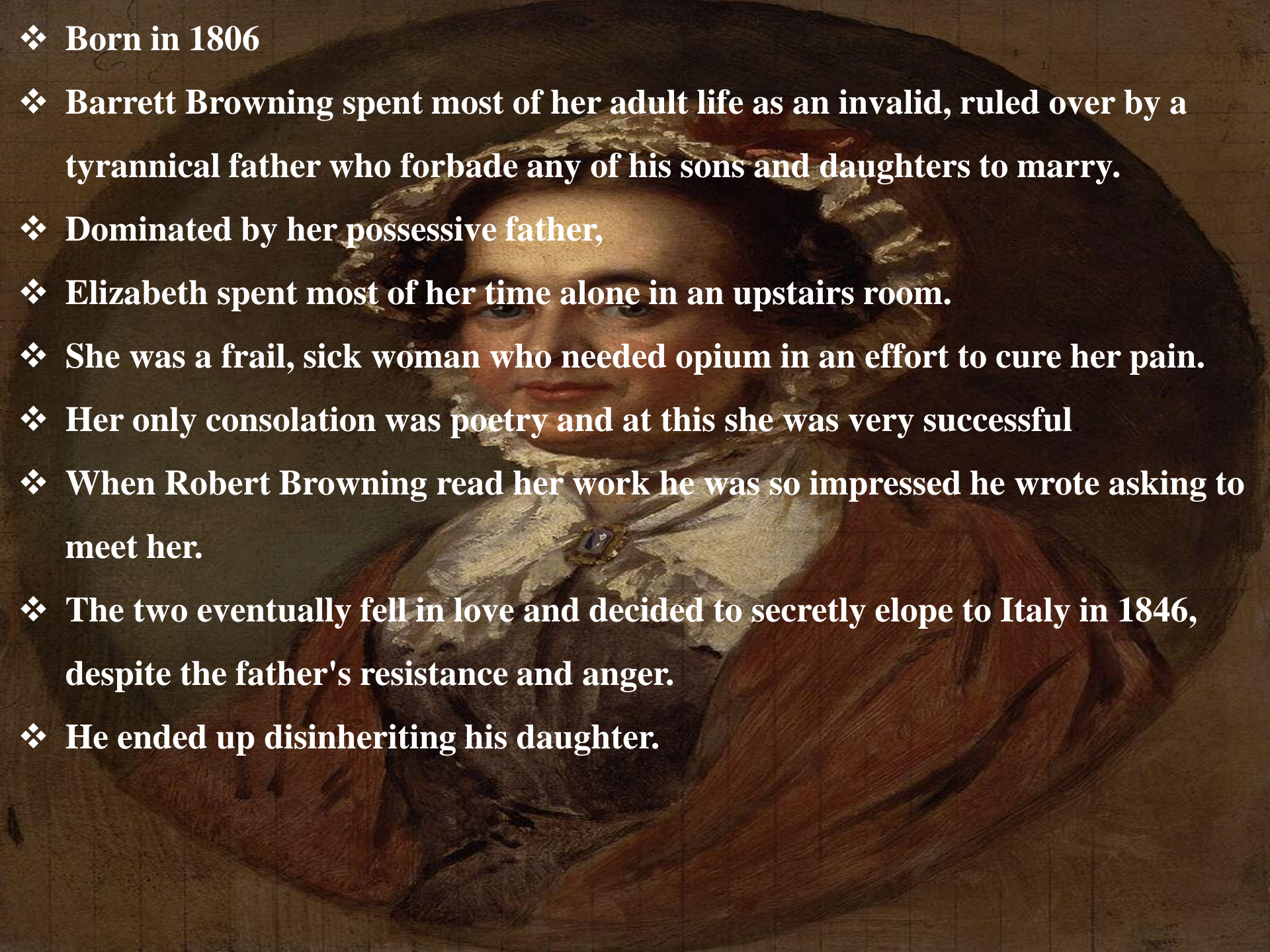
Poem



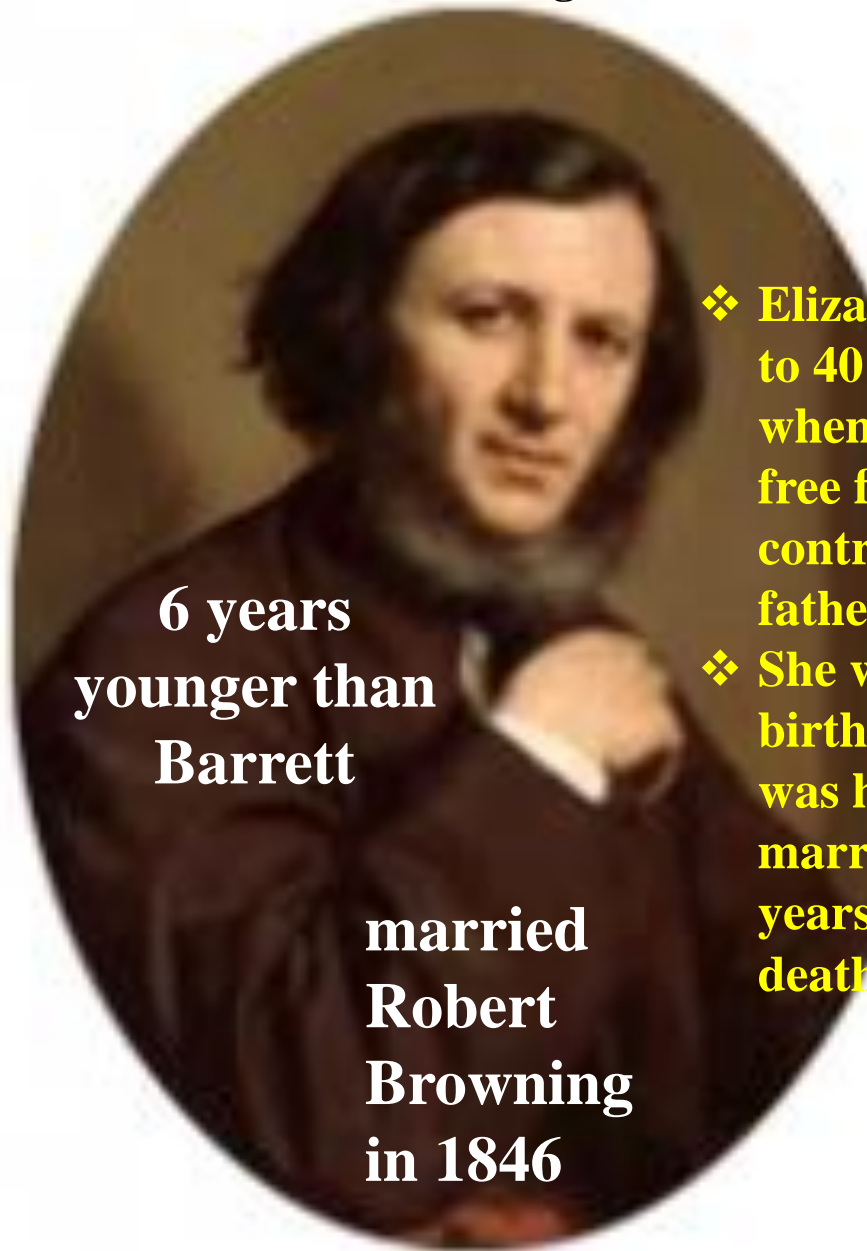
How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43)

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

**How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
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 use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With 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.**

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- A portrait of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a woman with dark, curly hair, wearing a dark, high-collared dress with a white lace or ruffled collar and a small brooch. She is looking slightly to the right of the viewer with a gentle expression. The background is dark and textured.
- ❖ **Born in 1806**
 - ❖ **Barrett Browning spent most of her adult life as an invalid, ruled over by a tyrannical father who forbade any of his sons and daughters to marry.**
 - ❖ **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 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



**6 years
younger than
Barrett**

**married
Robert
Browning
in 1846**

- ❖ **Elizabeth was close to 40 years of age when she broke free from the control of her father.**
- ❖ **She went on to give birth to a son and was happily married for sixteen years, until her death in 1861.**



Their marriage was not only one filled with love, but also respect for each other's writings.

At the age of 11 or 12 she composed a verse “epic” in four books of rhyming couplets, *The Battle of Marathon*, which was privately printed at Mr. Barrett’s expense in 1820.

Prometheus Bound, Translated from the Greek of Aeschylus; and Miscellaneous Poems, published anonymously in 1833.

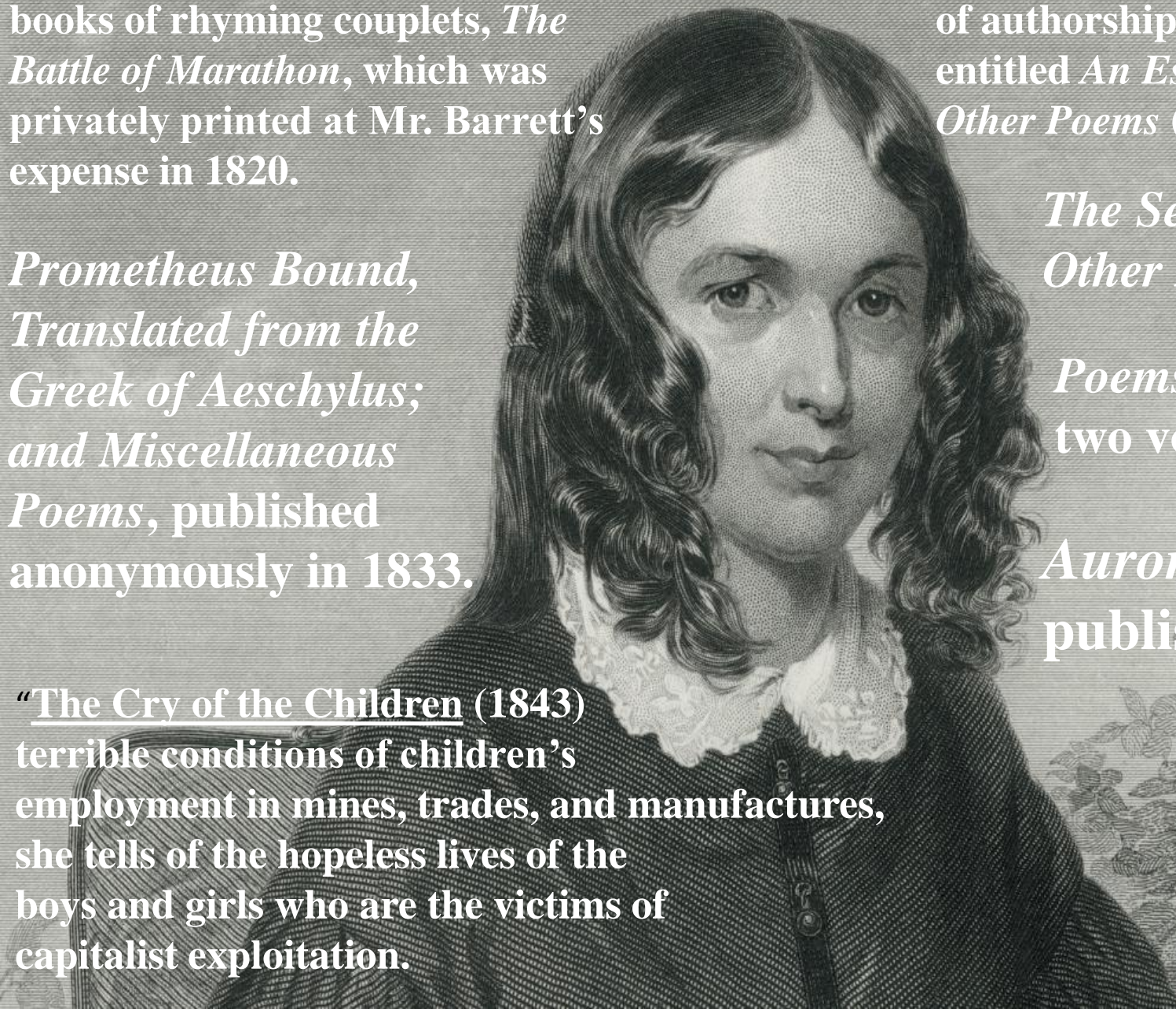
“The Cry of the Children” (1843) terrible conditions of children’s employment in mines, trades, and manufactures, she tells of the hopeless lives of the boys and girls who are the victims of capitalist exploitation.

At the age of 20 Barrett offered to the public, with no indication of authorship, a slender volume entitled *An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems* (1826).

The Seraphim and Other Poems (1838)

Poems, published in two volumes in 1844

Aurora Leigh was published in 1857



How Do I Love Thee?

- sonnet number 43 taken from *The Sonnets From the Portuguese*, a book first published in 1850.
- Robert Browning often referred to his wife as his little Portuguese
- This poem is classified as a sonnet because it contains fourteen lines of poetry and has a fixed rhyme scheme of abba abba cdcd cd.
- One can assume that Barrett Browning is also the speaker of the poem, since it is well known just how deeply she and Robert Browning loved and cared for each other.
- The speaker is talking directly to her beloved in the sonnet; she uses personal pronouns such as “I” and “you.”
- Although the poem is traditionally interpreted as a love sonnet from Elizabeth Barrett Browning to her husband, the poet Robert Browning, the speaker and addressee are never identified by name.

In the poem, the speaker is proclaiming her unending passion for her beloved. She tells her lover just how deeply her love goes, and she also tells him how she loves him. She loves him with all of her being, and she hopes God will grant her the ability to love him even after she has passed.

the theme of love,
from a woman's perspective.
the emphasis is on the reinforcement of the speaker's love for someone; there is no mention of a specific name or gender, giving the sonnet a universal appeal.

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways

- ❖ The speaker begins the poem by asking the question, “How do I love thee?” and responding with, “Let me count the ways.”
- ❖ One may assume that the speaker is either musing out loud—as one might do when writing a letter—or responding to a lover who may have posed such a question.

- ❖ The entire sonnet addresses this lover, “thee,” who may also be considered the listener.
- ❖ As it is known that Elizabeth Barrett Browning dedicated this poem to her husband, she is assumed to be the speaker addressing her husband.

I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.

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.

**I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.**

- ❖ **The author's love is eternal both day and night. She expresses her love on a more ordinary level.**
- ❖ **The poem becomes much more grounded and down-to-earth in the description of the next way to love.**
- ❖ **As the speaker explains, she loves her beloved "to the level of everyday's / most quiet need."**
- ❖ **This is a reminder that, even though she loves him with a passionate, abstract intensity (see lines 2-4), she also loves him in a regular, day-to-day way.**
- ❖ **The speaker completes the description of this everyday love with two images of light: "by sun and candle-light."**

I love thee freely, as men strive for Right; I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.

- ❖ **Well, in a way it is, because everything we do is a choice, but in another way, people try to do the right thing because they think they ought to.**
 - ❖ **So, if the speaker's love is just as "free" as being ethically good, then maybe it's not quite as free as we thought.**
 - ❖ **Next, the speaker tells us, "I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise." That is, her love is "pure" in the way that being modest and refusing everyone else's admiration is pure.**
 - ❖ **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.**
 - ❖ **Perhaps the speaker is also implying that she's not proclaiming her love in order to be applauded by her readers.**
 - ❖ **She's not seeking praise for writing a great poem about love; she loves without wanting any reward or commendation.**

I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.

“old griefs”

past that you still
feel really angry
about.

Passion

use all the "passion"
and intensity of that
bitter feeling and
convert it somehow
into love.

**bitterness being
converted into love**

childhood's faith

A child believes everything

**Now imagine if you could
divert that kind of energy
into loving someone.**

**Yes, the speaker loves her
beloved in that way, too.**

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints –

"lost saints"

the people you used to believe in that you don't have faith in anymore. people who let you down, whether they're famous people or just friends or family members who you once had a really high opinion of and now, well, they seem merely human.

- **"With my lost Saints" she is referring to those people in her life that she trusted and loved, which in the end, betrayed her. When she says "Saints" she is referring to the glorification she put on them, how much she trusted them increasing the power of their betrayal.**
- **So this kind of loving is also about faith:**
- **before you were disillusioned about them, and channel that into loving someone?**

**I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! –**

- ❖ **she loves him with every smile that crosses her face – her happiness is always an expression of loving him, even when she's smiling about something else.**
- ❖ **But it's not just her happy moments that go into loving him; it's the sad ones, too (the "tears") and even the regular, unemotional moments –**
- ❖ **the continuous "breath" of life. Even breathing in and out seems to be a way of loving in this poem.**

implies that no matter what is going on in her life, whether something horrible happened or it's just a normal day, she trusts him to stay by her side and that she will love every minute of it.

**and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.**

- **what about the time when she's not breathing? You know, when she's dead?**
 - **The speaker's final claim is that, if God lets her, she's going to love her beloved even more intensely "after death."**
 - **Of course, the poem isn't totally clear about whether the speaker or the beloved is the one who's going to die.**
 - **That's left ambiguous, but it could really be either or both of them – the point is that, even in death, this speaker is going to find a new way of loving.**
- **This is a very dramatic ending to such a romantic poem**
 - **What she's saying is that if God gave her a choice between her own life and his, she would choose for him to live and that when she is dead, she can finally love him to the depth that he deserves, without anything standing in her way.**
 - **That she could finally pay him back for all the things he did for her, by giving him her life, for eternity.**
 - **Not only that, but she creates the image of their love, being infinite, that it will continue even after death tears them apart..**





- ❖ 'Sonnet 43' is a romantic poem.
 - ❖ poem she is trying to describe the abstract feeling of love by measuring how much her love means to her.
 - ❖ expresses all the different ways of loving someone and she tells us about her thoughts around her beloved.
 - ❖ The tone of the poem is deep, in a loving way.
-
- The poem is about love
 - the speaker counts how she adores her beloved.
 - To her, love is a powerful force that can conquer everything in the universe.
 - As an epitome of her expression of love, she details the ways how her love will get stronger with every passing phase of life.
 - She attempts to discuss the depth of her passion by drawing analogies between her love and religious ideals.
 - Later, she expresses the unique quality of her enduring love when she says that her love will get better after death.

- **Love is portrayed to be intangible;**
- **it can even be felt even after one settles in the cold grave.**
- **Love according to Elizabeth is not an earthly concept because she loves freely**
- **and purely**
- **Elizabeth's love extends to heights of all the lengths and breadths that her pure soul could possibly reach.**
- **She expresses her love for her husband to be from every part of her soul and the poetess in the process is stretching out her arms to show that he means the whole world to her.**
- **Her world revolves around the love of her life and she insists that death can separate her from her lover but it cannot separate her love for Robert.**
- **Love is eternal, unconquerable and the highest power in the world.**
- **Her love is not a slave to momentary passion**
- **She is fully controlled by the emotion of love both internally and externally.**

- ✓ **In the sonnet, Barrett Browning repeats “I love thee” over and over again rather than using different words for love.**
- ✓ **This is to enforce the already existing knowledge about the strength of her love, and that what she feels is love, nothing more and nothing less.**
- ✓ **Also, by repeating it she is enforcing it on the readers that she loves him and there is nothing else to do about it, nothing that will make her change her mind.**
- ✓ **Also in the poem, no gender is implied.**
- ✓ **This is a very powerful key factor to the poem because she uses no gender markers such as him, her, she, he which makes it possible for the poem to be read out loud to any gender with any sexual preference.**

- ❖ **The main message of this poem is that the poet wants to describe her very powerful feeling of love for someone.**
- ❖ **This poem causes the reader to almost explore the poet's passion for her feeling of love, due to the strong words used by the poet and by the repetitive statement "I love thee".**
- ❖ **This poet paints many images in the readers mind when stating things such as: "I love thee to the depth and breadth and height."**
- ❖ **This creates an image in the reader's head of this endless love in all directions.**
- ❖ **The next thing the poet does is that she describes her constant feeling of love by comparing it to light from the sun, therefor at day, and candle-light, therefor at night.**
- ❖ **With this line, the reader can almost picture her constant love, by just pretty much thinking about the sun light and the candle light.**

- The poem is a sonnet, a 14-line poem
- the poem's structure follow the form of an Italian sonnet, consisting of an octet - the first eight lines, and the sestet, the final six lines.
- In the octet the poem's speaker lists the depth of her love through hyperbole, or exaggeration, a fitting poetic device for a love poem.
- The sestet discusses a more mature love, a love that transcends all, including death.

Love's Reach

- ❖ **"How Do I Love Thee?" is a sonnet about various kinds of love**
- ❖ **it's fitting that the poem opens with the image of an overarching, infinitely expansive love.**
- ❖ **The speaker's devotion stretches as far as her soul can reach.**
- ❖ **It's broad enough to touch "the ends of being."**
- ❖ **The speaker's love matches that of brave men "striving for right," and it's utterly pure, untouched by any hope of gain.**
- ❖ **The speaker long ago lost her faith in the saints who had formerly inspired her.**
- ❖ **Now she places the same loving faith in her partner. She feels this love "with the breath, / Smiles, tears of all [her] life."**
- ❖ **And if God allows it, she says firmly, she expects her love to grow even stronger after her death.**

❖ Love Through Time

- ❖ "How Do I Love Thee?" contains repeated references to the passing of time.
- ❖ First, the speaker says her love is constant throughout "sun and candle-light." The phrase means "both day and night"—that is, constantly.
- ❖ But the meaning of the passage would have been completely different had the speaker suggested that her love continues both "night and day."
- ❖ A day is a figurative beginning; night, which is often called "the close of day," is a symbolic end. It's therefore significant that "candle-light" is listed after "sun."
- ❖ Candles are lit at the waning of the day, and this love will still exist as life itself begins to fade.

❖ Lines 9 through 12 in the sestet describe loves of the past.

❖ The speaker mentions "old griefs" that have now been replaced by true passion. She says she loves her partner "with [my] childhood's faith."

❖ This suggests a pure, unquestioning devotion—but one that the speaker thought she had outgrown.

❖ Similarly, the speaker outgrew her love for "lost saints"—forms of worship that no longer have meaning for her.

❖ The sonnet's final line turns to the future. The speaker's current love is all a person could ask for. God permitting, however, the love she feels will not die when she does. Instead it will become even stronger.

Love as Faith

- **Browning's upbringing was solidly Christian. However, her family were not members of the state Church of England.**
- **As Congregationalists they rejected the Church of England's concept of priestly hierarchy and believed in a freer interpretation of Christian tenets.**
- **Browning was raised in a denomination that valued independence in its adherents.**
- **Even so, she found herself questioning church teachings as she grew older.**
- **She was particularly troubled by her father's belief that the world was innately corrupt and evil. In the 1830s she began reformulating her religious ideas.**
- **For her, humans were innately good, not evil, and the natural world was proof of God's blessings.**
- **"How Do I Love Thee?" is framed, beginning and end, by standard Christian thinking.**
- **Humans have souls; some form of life continues after death if God permits it. But the poem's sestet makes clear Browning's religious views have evolved since her childhood.**
- **She has shed her "childhood faith" in the supernatural and her love for her "lost saints."**
- **Those feelings now revolve around her beloved, an earthly human being.**

- **The first line of Sonnet 43 sounds rather casual. "Let me tell you something," the speaker seems to be saying.**
- **The fact that the first line opens with a question suggests that perhaps her lover has even asked how or why she loves him.**
- **Now she's answering him. "I" comes before "thee" in this poem, for the speaker is definitely the main character.**
- **"Thee" is never identified or even described; the sonnet is concerned solely with the speaker's emotions.**
- **The speaker's comparisons are also hyperbolic: exaggerated and overly emphatic. Love is impossible to quantify, but "I love thee to the depth and breadth and height / My soul can reach" is essentially saying, "My love is infinite." The declaration "I love thee with a love I seemed to lose / With my lost saints" can similarly be seen as exaggerated. The speaker loves with a religious fervor.**

Sylvia Plath



- **Sylvia Plath (October 27, 1932 – February 11, 1963) was an American poet, novelist, and writer of short stories.**
- **Her most notable achievements came in the genre of confessional poetry, which often reflected her intense emotions and her battle with depression.**
- **Although her career and life were complicated, she won a posthumous Pulitzer Prize and remains a popular and widely studied poet.**

- ❖ Sylvia Plath was born in Boston, Massachusetts.
 - ❖ She was the first child of Otto and Aurelia Plath.
 - ❖ Otto was a German-born entomologist and a professor of biology at Boston University.
 - ❖ Aurelia was a second-generation American whose grandparents had emigrated from Austria.
- Three years later, their son Warren was born, and the family moved to Winthrop, Massachusetts in 1936.
- ❖ While living there, Plath published her first poem at age eight in the *Boston Herald's* children's section.
 - ❖ She continued writing and publishing in several local magazines and papers, and she won prizes for her writing and artwork.
 - ❖ When she was eight, her father died from complications after a foot amputation related to long-untreated [diabetes](#).
 - ❖ Aurelia Plath then moved their entire family, including her parents, to the nearby Wellesley, where Plath attended high school.
 - ❖ Around the same time as her high school graduation, she had her first nationally published piece appear in the *Christian Science Monitor*.

Education and Marriage

- After graduating high school, Plath began her studies at [Smith College](#) in 1950.
- She was an excellent student and achieved the position of editor at the college's publication, *The Smith Review*, which led to a stint (ultimately, a wildly disappointing one) as guest editor of *Mademoiselle* magazine in New York City.
- Her experiences that summer included a missed meeting with Dylan Thomas, a poet she admired, as well as a rejection from Harvard's writing seminar and her initial experiments with self-harm

- ❖ By this point, Plath had been diagnosed with clinical depression, and she was undergoing electroconvulsive therapy in an attempt to treat it.
- ❖ In August 1953, she made her first documented suicide attempt. She survived and spent the next six months receiving intensive psychiatric care. Olive Higgins Prouty, an author who had successfully rebounded from a mental breakdown, paid for her hospital stay and her scholarships, and eventually, Plath was able to recover,
- ❖ graduated from Smith with highest honors,
- ❖ won a [Fulbright Scholarship](#) to Newnham College, one of the all-female colleges at Cambridge.
- ❖ In 1955, upon graduating from Smith, she won the Glascock Prize for her poem “Two Lovers and a Beachcomber by the Real Sea.”

- ❖ In February 1956, Plath met Ted Hughes, a fellow poet whose work she admired, while they were both at the University of Cambridge.
- ❖ After a whirlwind courtship, during which they frequently wrote poems to each other, they married in London in June 1956.
- ❖ They spent the summer on their honeymoon in France and Spain, then returned to Cambridge in the fall for Plath's second year of studies, during which they both became intensely interested in astrology and related supernatural concepts

- ❖ In 1957, after her marriage to Hughes, Plath and her husband moved back to the United States, and Plath began teaching at Smith.
- ❖ Her teaching duties, however, left her with little time to actually write, which frustrated her.
- ❖ As a result, they moved to Boston, where Plath took a job as a receptionist at Massachusetts General Hospital's psychiatric ward and, in the evenings, attended writing seminars hosted by the poet Robert Lowell.
- ❖ It was there that she first began to develop what would become her signature writing style.

Early Poetry (1959-1960)

- ✓ “Two Lovers and a Beachcomber by the Real Sea” (1955)
- ✓ Various work appearing in: *Harper’s Magazine*, *The Spectator*,
The Times Literary Supplement, *The New Yorker*
- ✓ *The Colossus and Other Poems* (1960)

- ❖ Lowell, along with fellow poet [Anne Sexton](#), encouraged Plath to draw more from her personal experiences in her writing.
- ❖ Sexton wrote in a highly personal confessional poetry style and in a distinctively female voice; her influence helped Plath to do the same.
- ❖ Plath began to more openly discuss her depression and even her suicide attempts, particularly with Lowell and Sexton.
- ❖ She began working on more serious projects and began considering her writing more professionally and seriously around this time.

- ❖ In 1959, Plath and Hughes embarked on a trip across the United States and Canada. During their travels, they spent some time at the Yaddo artist colony in Saratoga Springs, New York.
- ❖ While at the colony, which served as a retreat for writers and artists to nurture creative pursuits without interruptions from the outside world and while among other creative people, Plath began to slowly feel more comfortable about the weirder and darker ideas she was drawn to.
- ❖ Even so, she had yet to completely broach the deeply personal, private material that she had been encouraged to draw upon.

- ❖ At the end of 1959, Plath and Hughes returned to England, where they had met, and settled in London.
- ❖ Plath was pregnant at the time, and their daughter, Frieda Plath, was born in April 1960.
- ❖ Early in her career, Plath achieved some measure of publishing success: she had been short-listed on several occasions by the Yale Younger Poets book competition, her work had been published in *Harper's Magazine*, *The Spectator*, and *The Times Literary Supplement*, and she had a contract with *The New Yorker*. In 1960, her first full collection, *The Colossus and Other Poems*, was published.

DADDY

You do not do, you do not do
Any more, black shoe
In which I have lived like a foot
For thirty years, poor and white,
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo

- ❖ The poem starts with the speaker declaring that she will no longer put up with the black shoe she has lived in, poor and scared, for thirty years.
- ❖ She uses the second person throughout the poem, saying "you," who is "Daddy." So that means that she's comparing her father to a shoe that she's been living in very unhappily – but she's not going to put up with it anymore.

Daddy, I have had to kill you.

You died before I had time –

❖ The poem no longer seems like a nursery rhyme in this stanza. In line 6, the speaker tells her father that she has had to kill him, as if she has already murdered him.

❖ But then in line 7, the speaker says that he died before she "had time." Here she means to say that "before I had time to get to know him," or "before I could make him proud."

❖ Either way, it is shocking that the speaker claims she had to kill her father. After hearing this violent sentiment, we can assume that she's sad that he died and she's angry as well.

MARBLE-HEAVY, A BAG FULL OF GOD

- ❖ After that the speaker's father is dead, the phrase describing him, "Marble-heavy," helps imagine the corpse and heaviness of a corpse, or even a marble gravestone.
- ❖ The "bag full of God" refers that the speaker is saying that the skin around our bodies is nothing but a bag.

Ghastly statue with one gray toe

Big as a Frisco seal

And a head in the freakish Atlantic

Where it pours bean green over blue

In the waters off beautiful Nauset.

❖ These lines show us that the phrase "Marble-heavy" was partly meant to set up an image of the speaker's father as a statue. But he's not a normal statue.

❖ Then Plath shows us that this statue is gigantic. One of its gray toes is as big as a San Francisco's seal. But its head is all the way across the United States in the Atlantic.

I used to pray to recover you.

Ach, du.

- ❖ After we've gotten the image of the father as a statue, stretching across the US, the speaker says that she used to pray to "recover" him.
- ❖ "Recover" means "regain," and a second meaning of "get healthy again."
- ❖ The phrase in German actually means "Oh, you."
- ❖ Plath's father was a German immigrant, which probably explains why she's writing this little sigh in his language when she thinks of praying to get him back from the dead.

In the German tongue, in the Polish town
Scraped flat by the roller
Of wars, wars, wars.
But the name of the town is common.
My Polack friend

- ❖ In stanza 4 of *Daddy* , the speaker begins to wonder about her father and his origins.
- ❖ The speaker knows that he came from a Polish town, where German was the main language spoken.
- ❖ She explains that the town he grew up in had endured one war after another.
- ❖ She would never be able to identify which specific town he was from because the name of his hometown was a common name.
- ❖ This stanza ends mid-sentence.
- ❖ The speaker begins to explain that she learned something from her “Polack friend”.

Says there are a dozen or two.
So I never could tell where you
Put your foot, your root,
I never could talk to you.
The tongue stuck in my jaw.

- Here, the speaker finishes what she began to explain in the previous stanza by explaining that she learned from a friend that the name of the Polish town her father came from, was a very common name.
- For this reason, she concludes that she “could never tell where [he] put [his] foot”.
- It’s clear she will not ever be able to know exactly where his roots are from. She had never asked him because she “could never talk to [him]”
- After this, the speaker then explains that she was afraid to talk to him. She states, “The tongue stuck in my jaw” when explaining the way she felt when she wanted to talk to her father.

It stuck in a barb wire snare.

Ich, ich, ich, ich,

I could hardly speak.

I thought every German was you.

And the language obscene

➤ In this stanza, she continues to describe the way she felt around her father.

➤ She felt as though her tongue were stuck in barbed wire. “Ich” is the German word for “I”.

➤ This reveals that whenever she wanted to speak to her father, she could only stutter and say, “I, I, I.”

➤ She then describes that she thought every German man was her father.

➤ This reveals that she does not distinguish him as someone familiar and close to her.

➤ Rather, she sees him as she sees any other German man, harsh and obscene.

An engine, an engine
Chuffing me off like a Jew.
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.
I began to talk like a Jew.
I think I may well be a Jew.

- ❖ In Stanza 7 of *Daddy*, the speaker begins to reveal to the readers that she felt like a Jew under the reign of her German father.
- ❖ This is a very strong comparison, and the speaker knows this and yet does not hesitate to use this simile.
- ❖ The oppression which she has suffered under the reign of her father is something she feels compares to the oppression of the Jews under the Germans in the Holocaust.
- ❖ For this reason, she specifically mentions Auschwitz, among other concentration camps.
- ❖ She then concludes that she began to talk like a Jew, like one who was oppressed and silenced by German oppressors.
- ❖ Then she concludes that because she feels the oppression that the Jews feel, she identifies with the Jews and therefore considers herself a Jew.

The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna
Are not very pure or true.
With my gipsy ancestress and my weird luck
And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack
I may be a bit of a Jew.

- In this stanza, the speaker continues to criticize the Germans as she compares the “snows of Tyrol” and the “clear beer of Vienna” to the German’s idea of racial purity.
- She concludes that they “are not very pure or true”.
- Then, the speaker considers her ancestry, and the gypsies that were part of her heritage. Gypsies, like Jews, were singled out for execution by the Nazis, and so the speaker identifies not only with Jews but also with gypsies.
- In fact, she seems to identify with anyone who has ever felt oppressed by the Germans.
- In the last line of this stanza, the speaker suggests that she is probably part Jewish, and part Gypsy.

I have always been scared of *you*,
With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.
And your neat mustache
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You——

- Here, the speaker finally finds the courage to address her father, now that he is dead. She admits that she has always been afraid of him.
- She implies that her father had something to do with the airforce, as that is how the word “Luftwaffe” translates to English. “Gobbledygoo” however, is simply gibberish.
- This implies that the speaker feels that her father and his language made no sense to her. In this instance, she felt afraid of him and feared everything about him.
- She never was able to understand him, and he was always someone to fear.
- She was afraid of his “neat mustache” and his “Aryan eye, bright blue”.
- This description of his eyes implies that he was one of those Germans whom the Nazis believed to be a superior race.
- He was Aryan, with blue eyes.
- He was something fierce and terrifying to the speaker, and she associates him closely with the Nazis.
- A “panzer-man” was a German tank driver, and so this continues the comparison between her father and a Nazi.

Not God but a swastika
So black no sky could squeak through.
Every woman adores a Fascist,
The boot in the face, the brute
Brute heart of a brute like you.

- In this stanza, the speaker compares her father to God.
- She clearly sees God as an ominous overbearing being who clouds her world.
- This is why she describes her father as a giant black swastika that covered the entire sky.
- The third line of this stanza begins a sarcastic description of women and men like her father.
- She mockingly says, “every woman adores a Fascist” and then begins to describe the violence of men like her father.
- She calls uses the word “brute” three times in the last two lines of this stanza.
- If these lines are were not written in jest, then she clearly believes that women, for some reason or another, tend to fall in love with violent brutes

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,
In the picture I have of you,
A cleft in your chin instead of your foot
But no less a devil for that, no not
Any less the black man who

- ❖ In the first line of this stanza, the speaker describes her father as a teacher standing at the blackboard.
- ❖ The author's father, was, in fact, a professor.
- ❖ This is how the speaker views her father.
- ❖ She can see the cleft in his chin as she imagines him standing there at the blackboard.
- ❖ Then she describes that the cleft that is in his chin, should really be in his foot.
- ❖ This simply means that she views her father as the devil himself.
- ❖ The devil is often characterized as an animal with cleft feet, and the speaker believes he wears his cleft in his chin rather than in his feet.
- ❖ Her description of her father as a "black man" does not refer to his skin color but rather to the darkness of his soul. This stanza ends with the word "who" because the author breaks the stanza mid-sentence.

Bit my pretty red heart in two.
I was ten when they buried you.
At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you.
I thought even the bones would do.

- With the first line of this stanza, the speaker finishes her sentence and reveals that her father has broken her heart. She says that he has “bit [her] pretty red heart in two”.
- The rest of this stanza reveals a deeper understanding of the speaker’s relationship with her father.
- Even though he was a cruel, overbearing brute, at one point in her life, she loved him dearly. It is possible that as a child, she was able to love him despite his cruelty.
- As an adult, however, she cannot see past his vices.
- This stanza reveals that the speaker was only ten years old when her father died, and that she mourned for him until she was twenty.
- She even tried to end her life in order to see him again.
- She thought that even if she was never to see him again in an after-life, to simply have her bones buried by his bones would be enough of a comfort to her.

But they pulled me out of the sack,
And they stuck me together with glue.
And then I knew what to do.
I made a model of you,
A man in black with a Meinkampf look

- ❖ In this stanza, the speaker reveals that she was not able to commit suicide, even though she tried.
- ❖ She reveals that she was found and “pulled...out of the sack” and stuck back together “with glue”.
- ❖ At this point, the speaker experienced a revelation. She realized that she must re-create her father.
- ❖ She decided to find and love a man who reminded her of her father.
- ❖ The speaker has already suggested that women love a brutal man, and perhaps she is now confessing that she was once such a woman.
- ❖ This is why the speaker says that she finds a “model” of her father who is “a man in black with a Meinkampf look”.
- ❖ While “Meinkampf” means “my struggle”, the last line of this stanza most likely means that the man she found to marry looked like her father and like Hitler.

And a love of the rack and the screw.

And I said I do, I do.

So daddy, I'm finally through.

The black telephone's off at the root,

The voices just can't worm through.

❖ In this stanza, the speaker reveals that the man she married enjoyed to torture.

❖ This is why she describes him as having “a love of the rack and the screw”.

❖ She confesses that she married him when she says, “And I said I do, I do.”

❖ Then she tells her father that she is through.

❖ This means that having re-created her father by marrying a harsh German man, she no longer needed to mourn her father's death.

❖ She then describes her relationship with her father as a phone call.

❖ Now she has hung up, and the call is forever ended.

If I've killed one man, I've killed two——
The vampire who said he was you
And drank my blood for a year,
Seven years, if you want to know.
Daddy, you can lie back now.

- ❖ In this stanza of *Daddy*, the speaker reminds the readers that she has already claimed to have killed her father.
- ❖ She revealed that he actually died before she could get to him, but she still claims the responsibility for his death.
- ❖ Now she says that if she has killed one man, she's killed two.
- ❖ This is most likely in reference to her husband.
- ❖ She refers to her husband as a vampire, one who was supposed to be just like her father. As it turned out, he was not just like her father.
- ❖ In fact, he drained the life from her. This is why she refers to him as a vampire who drank her blood.
- ❖ It is not clear why she first says that he drank her blood for “a year”.
- ❖ However, the speaker then changes her mind and says, “seven years, if you want to know.” When the speaker says, “daddy, you can lie back now” she is telling him that the part of him that has lived on within her can die now, too.

There's a stake in your fat black heart
And the villagers never liked you.
They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always *knew* it was you.
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

- ❖ In this stanza, the speaker reveals that her father, though dead, has somehow lived on, like a vampire, to torture her.
- ❖ It is claimed that she must kill her father the way that a vampire must be killed, with a stake to the heart.
- ❖ She then goes on to explain to her father that “the villagers never liked you”.
- ❖ She explains that they dance and stomp on his grave.
- ❖ The speaker says that the villagers “always knew it was [him]”.
- ❖ This suggests that the people around them always suspected that there was something different and mysterious about her father.
- ❖ With the final line, the speaker tells her father that she is through with him.
- ❖ While he has been dead for years, it is clear that her memory of him has caused her great grief and struggle.
- ❖ The speaker was unable to move on without acknowledging that her father was, in fact, a brute.
- ❖ Once she was able to come to terms with what he truly was, she was able to let him stop torturing her from the grave.

- ❖ Sylvia Plath begins *Daddy* with her present understanding of her father and the kind of man that he was.
- ❖ She then offers readers some background explanation of her relationship with her father.
- ❖ As *Daddy* progresses, the readers begins to realize that the speaker has not always hated her father.
- ❖ She has not always seen him as a brute, although she makes it clear that he always has been oppressive.
- ❖ As a child, the speaker did not know anything apart from her father's mentality, and so she prays for his recovery and then mourns his death. She even wishes to join him in death.
- ❖ She then tries to re-create him by marrying a man like him.
- ❖ It isn't until years after her father's death that she becomes aware of the true brutal nature of her relationship.
- ❖ Though he has been dead in flesh for years, she finally decides to let go of his memory and free herself from his oppression forever.

Maya Angelou

4 April 1928 -28 May 2014



PHENOMENAL WOMAN

BIOGRAPHY

- ▣ Born on April 4th, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri, Dr. Angelou was raised in St. Louis and Stamps, Arkansas. In Stamps, Dr. Angelou experienced the brutality of racial discrimination, but she also absorbed the unshakable faith and values of traditional African-American family, community, and culture.

Life

- ▣ Maya Angelou is one of the most important African American authors and orators of the twentieth century. Her achievements span over seven decades and showcase a wealth of talents, beginning in the early 1940s when she became San Francisco's first female cable car conductor. Angelou then emerged as a singer and dancer in the 1950s and became an editor and writer in the 1960s. In the 1970s she began exploring her talents as an actress, director, poet and screenwriter.

Her Work

- ▣ Angelou's highly acclaimed 1970 autobiography "I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings" became an important example of African American literature as it chronicled the amazing journey of a young woman who overcame a childhood rape, made a pilgrimage to Africa, served as a civil rights activist and became a shining example of self-determination.

Her Work

- ▣ **AUTOBIOGRAPHIES**
- ▣ 2008 Letter to My Daughter
- 2004 - Hallelujah! The Welcome Table: A Lifetime of Memories with Recipes
- 2002 - A Song Flung Up to Heaven
- 1986 - All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes
- 1981 - Heart of a Woman
- 1976 - Singin' and Swingin and Getting Merry Like Christmas
- 1970 - I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
- 1974 - Gather Together in My Name

Success

- ▣ In 1993, Angelou read *On the Pulse of Morning* at Bill Clinton's Presidential inauguration, a poem written at his request. It was only the second time a poet had been asked to read at an inauguration.
- ▣ In 1995, She recites her poem "A Brave and Startling Truth" at the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in June and also gives a reading at the Million Man March in Washington D.C. in October

“PHENOMENAL WOMAN”

By: Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou published this poem in 1978 when it appeared in *And Still I Rise*, a collection of powerful poems that set many an oppressed woman free.

The word Phenomenal means *remarkable or exceptional, especially exceptionally good*. Thus *phenomenal woman* means an extraordinary or stunning woman. Traditionally a woman is considered *phenomenal* only when she has fair skin and attractive figure.

The poem has been divided into four stanzas. *Phenomenal Woman* is a free verse poem (has no rhyme scheme). In the poem, the poet challenges the traditional concept of beauty and tells the readers how beautiful she is and she is quite proud of it.

Phenomenal Woman

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size
But when I start to tell them,
They think I'm telling lies.
I say,
It's in the reach of my arms,
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

- In the first stanza, the poet says *Pretty women wonder*.
- The **pretty woman** refers to the woman of fair skin (probably the Whites).
- According to the poet, the beautiful women keep wondering how the poet in spite of being *not cute or build to suit a fashion model's size*, is attractive and appreciated by the people.
- When she reveals her secret, they (pretty women) do not believe her because for them fairer skin is the only thing that makes a woman beautiful.
- For them, the reason for her beauty is quite different
- The poet tells them that the secret of her beauty is her womanhood.
- Her way of stretching her arms, walking with long and decisive steps, stretched hips and curved lips i.e. her way of smiling are the secrets that tend to make her beautiful and attractive.
- This is why is she a *phenomenally, phenomenal woman* i.e. quite beautiful and extraordinary woman.

I walk into a room
Just as cool as you please,
And to a man,
The fellows stand or
Fall down on their knees.
Then they swarm around me,
A hive of honey bees.
I say,
It's the fire in my eyes,
And the flash of my teeth,
The swing in my waist,
And the joy in my feet.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

In stanza 2, the poet says that whenever she walks into the room (in the way described above) though in an ordinary way, the men around either stand up or bend down to their knees and start staring at her. They flock around her like *a hive of honey bees* (that surround the queen bee) and she becomes the cynosure of their eyes.

According to the poet, it is the *fire* i.e. passion in her eyes, her beautiful smiling teeth (*flash of my teeth*), her swinging (moving to and fro) waist and the joy in her feet (probably the way she dances) that make her attractive and thus a *phenomenally, phenomenal woman*.

Men themselves have wondered
What they see in me.
They try so much
But they can't touch
My inner mystery.
When I try to show them,
They say they still can't see.
I say,
It's in the arch of my back,
The sun of my smile,
The ride of my breasts,
The grace of my style.
I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

➤ In the 3rd stanza, the poet says that the men, like the *pretty women*, too wonder what is so beautiful in her and make her charming which they cannot see.

➤ They try a lot to find that *secret* but fail to do so as they *cannot touch* her *inner mystery*. Here the inner mystery is something which for the poet is the secret of her beauty.

➤ *Inner mystery* probably refers to the inner beauty which is common to all the women and it makes any woman beautiful and charming irrespective of the color of her skin.

➤ When the men become more curious to know the secret of her beauty, the poet tells them that it is her curved back, her shining and glorious smile, the rhyming motion (*ride*) of her breasts and the elegance of her style which make her *phenomenally, phenomenal woman*.

Now you understand
Just why my head's not bowed.
I don't shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.
When you see me passing,
It ought to make you proud.
I say,
It's in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
the palm of my hand,
The need for my care.
'Cause I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.

In the final stanza, the poet concludes that now the *pretty women* would have understood why her *head's not bowed* i.e. she walks with full confidence. She doesn't need to make noise or jump around or talk loud in order to make her presence felt before the men.

Whenever she would pass the *pretty women*, it will really make them feel proud of her because of the sound of her heels, the style of her hair, the palm of her hand and their desire to care for her (a man desires to be caring for a woman).

About the Poet – SITA by Toru Dutt

- Toru Dutt was a pioneer in the history of Indian literature.
- She came from a family known for its aristocracy, progressive Western outlook and literary leanings.
- On the death of her brother at the age of 14, the family left to settle in Europe where they spent four years, before the failing health of Toru and her sister Aru, compelled the Dutts to return to Calcutta.
- Perhaps a premonition of her approaching end, made Toru take up a lot of intense literary activities, writing in both English and French.
- She died, at the age of 21, in 1877, after suffering from tuberculosis.
- One of the poems is Sita by Toru Dutt

Three happy children in a darkened room!
What do they gaze on with wide-open eyes?
A dense, dense forest, where no sunbeam pries,
And in its centre a cleared spot.—There bloom
Gigantic flowers on creepers that embrace
Tall trees: there, in a quiet lucid lake
The while swans glide; there, "whirring from the brake,"
The peacock springs; there, herds of wild deer race;
There, patches gleam with yellow waving grain;
There, blue smoke from strange altars rises light.
There, dwells in peace, the poet-anchorite.
But who is this fair lady? Not in vain
She weeps,—for lo! at every tear she sheds
Tears from three pairs of young eyes fall amain,
And bowed in sorrow are the three young heads.
It is an old, old story, and the lay
Which has evoked sad Sîta from the past
Is by a mother sung.... 'Tis hushed at last
And melts the picture from their sight away,
Yet shall they dream of it until the day!
When shall those children by their mother's side
Gather, ah me! as erst at eventide?

Brief Summary of the poem

- ❖ In this poem Sita By Toru Dutt Summary, Toru Dutt narrates the story of Sita from Indian mythology.
- ❖ The poem is set amid a beautiful and serene dense forest. A mother tells her children the story of Sita, as she
- ❖ puts them to bed.
- ❖ Sita has been abandoned by her husband and takes shelter in Valmiki's hermitage.
- ❖ She is in deep anguish and as the children listen to the story, they are so moved by her sorrow that they weep at her troubles.
- ❖ After finishing the tale, the mother hugs her children and pacifies them.

Three happy children in a darkened room!
What do they gaze on with wide-open eyes?

The poem begins with the image of three children in a darkened room. It's bedtime and the children are being told a story by their mother. The story comes alive with the mother's narration and the children are all attention. 'Wide open eyes' means they are awake. The poet wonders what is it that they listening to with much interest and involvement.

A dense, dense forest, where no sunbeam pries,
And in its centre a cleared spot.—There bloom

There is a dense forest, so filled with trees that no sunbeams can penetrate the thick canopy of vegetation and enter the forest. The word 'dense' is used twice to emphasize the density of the forest. In the centre of the forest, there is a cleared area. Here there are blooms. This line implies that a certain area in the centre of the forest has been cleared.

Gigantic flowers on creepers that embrace
Tall trees: there, in a quiet lucid lake
The while swans glide; there, "whirring from the brake,"
The peacock springs; there, herds of wild deer race;

There are blooming flowers on creepers twining around tall trees. There is also a lake, the waters of which are clear. A beautiful picture of nature has been painted in these lines.

Swans glide in the waters of the lake. "whirring from the brake" is a reference from Alexander Pope's poem 'Windsor Forest'. There are springing peacocks and racing deer. We find life and activity depicted on the lines.

There, patches gleam with yellow waving grain;
There, blue smoke from strange altars rises light.
There, dwells in peace, the poet-anchorite.
But who is this fair lady? Not in vain

Crops have been grown on patches of land, indicating a settlement.
Smoke and altars is a reference to the hermitage of Valmiki where Sita sought shelter after being abandoned by her husband Ram.

The forest is a pleasant and peaceful place to live and the poet feels it is like a haven for poets, to spend time in tranquillity.
After dwelling on the forest, the poem moves on to describe a beautiful lady. The poet wonders who “is this fair lady “.

She weeps,—for lo! at every tear she sheds
Tears from three pairs of young eyes fall amain,
And bowed in sorrow are the three young heads.
It is an old, old story, and the lay

The lady is in pain and weeping. The three children listening to the tale, also weep at the sorrow of Sita, the lady in the story. They are troubled by her troubles and their tender hearts ache at her suffering. The anguish of Sita is juxtaposed against the serenity of the atmosphere.

The young children bow their heads in sorrow at the sad plight of Sita. The story is an old one, handed down from generation to generation

Which has evoked sad Sîta from the past
Is by a mother sung.... 'Tis hushed at last
And melts the picture from their sight away,
Yet shall they dream of it until the day!

This legendary story of Sita has been told by a mother to her three children. There is a long pause between the two lines. The narration of the story gets over.

The picture of a sorrowful and grieving Sita fades from their sight. Yet, during the night the children dream of Sita. The story has made a lasting impact on them and will stay with them.

When shall those children by their mother's side
Gather, ah me! as erst at eventide?

The mother draws her children near and hugs them. Having lost both her beloved siblings at a young age, the lines express Toru's deep wish of possible reunion with them.

In 'Sita', a poem of 22 lines, a mother while putting her children to bed and relates the story of Sita to them.

2. The children are so absorbed by the story that they weep at Sita's troubles.
3. The beauty of the forest is described in the initial lines.
4. Sita was abandoned by her husband and she sought refuge in the forest in Valmiki's hermitage.
5. The mother pacifies her children on conclusion of the narration.
6. The story has made a deep impact on the children and would continue to remain with them.
7. There is some resemblance between the poem and the poet's life. Toru adored Sita and thought of her as a touching and lovable heroine. The three children in the poem could be Toru, her brother Abju and sister Aru. She derived her interest in Indian mythology from her mother.
8. Sita's inner turmoil is juxtaposed against the serenity of nature.
9. In the beginning of the poem, the children are happy. In the end, we see three sorrowful children.