

Today's poem was written by a Victorian poet called ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING, who was born in 1806 and died in 1861. She did well to live as long as she did because she was afflicted with ill health most of her life. The last 16 years of her life were the happiest because they were spent with the love of her life, ROBERT BROWNING - another poet. Elizabeth ended up marrying him, which is why her surname is 'Browning'. This poem is from a collection of love poems that Elizabeth wrote about Robert Browning. She published the collection under the name SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE because she didn't want anyone to know that the poems represented her personal feelings - she wanted everyone to think that she was just translating some poems that some Portuguese poets had written. Let's get straight into the poem and I will say some things about the poem afterwards. But before we start I will just say that 'thee' is simply an old-fashioned and affectionate way of saying 'you':



HOW DO I LOVE THEE?

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 everyday's
Most 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 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.

Elizabeth begins by saying she is going to count the ways that she loves Robert. She then goes on to list seven different ways in which she loves Robert, and suggest that if she is given the chance by God, after she dies, she will love him an eighth way - better than all the rest - after she dies.

The first way she loves Robert is that she loves him as much as is humanly possible - she gives him as much love as her soul is capable of giving even when it isn't inspired by nature ('the ends of Being') or God ('ideal Grace') to love Robert.

The second way she loves Robert is that she loves him enough to take care of all his everyday needs - both during the day ('by sun') and at night ('candlelight').

The third way she loves Robert is that she freely chooses to love him - her love isn't forced out of her, the way people whose rights aren't respected are forced to do things for other people.

The fourth way she loves Robert is that she doesn't expect anything in return for her love. She isn't looking to get anything back from him - just like someone who does something great

might not allow people to praise him for what he did, because he didn't do it so that other people would think that he's a great person.

The fifth way she loves Robert is that she loves him as passionately as she used to love herself (when she felt sorry for herself for the way her life was going) or as she used to love God ('my childhood's faith').

The sixth way she loves Robert is that she loves him like he's a saint - one of the holy people she used to be in awe of when she was young.

The seventh way she loves Robert is with everything that comes from her - every breath she takes, every smile she makes, every tear she sheds: it's all for him.

The eighth way she might love Robert in the future is better than all the other ways she currently loves him - but she doesn't know what that would involve. All she knows is there is a better way to love someone else, but she is going to need God's help to get to love Robert in that kind of way - because a mere human being cannot love someone more than she loves Robert in the seven ways she has just listed.