

# Sonnet 43

## Overview:

In this poem, the persona explores the ways in which she loves the addressee, concluding that her love, already almost boundless, will become greater still after one or other or the pair dies.

## Context:

- Barrett-Browning was married very happily to Robert Browning (author of 'My Last Duchess'), and this poem may likely have been inspired by her love for him.
- This poem comes from a series of 44 sonnets entitled 'Sonnets from the Portuguese' (Browning called Elizabeth Barrett-Browning 'the Portuguese' as she had very dark hair).
- Barrett-Browning was an invalid for much of her life and died relatively young (at fifty five)
- When she was eight, one of Elizabeth's younger sisters died (aged three); in later life, when Elizabeth's doctor recommended her to move to Torquay, her favourite brother was drowned in a sailing accident. Barrett-Browning was grief-stricken and also felt guilty, since her brother had been visiting her at the time.
- Barrett-Browning was very religious. She described the intensity of her belief as "not the deep persuasion of the mild Christian, but the wild visions of an enthusiast."

## Structure:

- In terms of form, this is clearly a sonnet (Petrarchan), meaning it has fourteen lines in iambic pentameter. Sonnets as a form are typically associated with love.
- The first eight lines of the poem ('octet') use the same two rhyme sounds in the sequence ABBA. The last six lines ('sestet') have a CDCDCD rhyme-scheme.
- The poem begins with a question which the rest of the sonnet then answers (possibly an example of 'hypophora', where you ask a question and then answer it yourself).
- Repetition of 'I love thee' – utter conviction.

## Key Images:

- Religious imagery is central to this poem ("soul"; "Right"; "Grace"; "saints" etc) – her love is spiritual in its intensity and it pervades all areas of her life (past, present and future)
- Notice the intensely personal nature of the poem – the word 'I' is repeated ten times. The use of "thee" (an archaic – even in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century - intimate form of 'you) emphasises the closeness and devotion to the subject of the poem.

### Potential Comparisons

Devotion: 'i wanna be yours'



Exploring the idea of love: 'Valentine'

Effect of love: 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'