

APPENDIX I
BIOGRAPHY



ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's most famous work is the sonnet, "How Do I Love Thee?". Browning was born on March 6, 1806 at Coxhoe Hall in County Durham, England, the oldest of twelve children to Mary Graham Clarke Moulton-Barrett and Edward Barrett Moulton (whose name later changed to Edward Moulton Barrett). Edward had made his fortune from Jamaican sugar plantations. He was domineering and controlling, but the children enjoyed pony rides through the country side and other pleasures that made them happy.

In 1806 the family moved into Hope End, a country estate in Herefordshire. When she was only 12 she wrote a poem called, The Battle of Marathon. Her father had it printed two years later. Despite his manner, he often supported her work in this way.

When she was 13 Elizabeth Barrett determined that she was of "natural ill health". Nevertheless, her real problems with her health did not appear to begin in earnest until two years later in 1821. Then she may have suffered a spine injury for which she was given a prescription for opium, but the injury was not documented. Injury or none, she developed a life long opium addiction. She also suffered from lung problems, anorexia nervosa, and a number of other illnesses, and spent a great deal of time seeking cures.

In spite of her ill health and addiction, she was a brilliant self-taught student, who could read complicated texts in their original languages when she was as young as ten. She read the entire Old Testament in Hebrew, as well as Dante's *Inferno*, and passages from *Paradise Lost* and other historic works. She maintained a life long interest in metaphysics and religion.

In 1828, Elizabeth Barrett's mother died. When she was 26, in 1832, she moved with her family to Sidmouth, Devon, and in 1836 they moved again to London. While living there she wrote for several magazines. In 1825 her first published work, "The Rose and Zephyr," was published in *Literary Gazette*. In 1826 her first collection of poems, "An Essay on Mind", was published anonymously but received no critical attention. Her translation of a Greek work entitled "Prometheus Bound" was unsuccessful.

In 1837, Elizabeth Browning suffered a burst blood vessel and this affected her lungs. It proved to be a very serious illness. Her first collection of poems in her name, called "The Seraphim and Other Poems" was published in 1838 and was well received. For three years following the publication of her collection,

Elizabeth Barrett recuperated in Torquay, Devon with her favorite brother, Edward, whom she affectionately called "Bro".

While they lived there, Bro drowned in Babbacombe Bay. Thereafter, Elizabeth stayed inside her bedroom for five years. She felt responsible for his death because it was she who wanted him to be there with her. For the rest of her life she avoided all but her very closest friends and relatives. During her recovery she wrote poetry, including "The Cry of the Children," which was a condemnation of child labor published in 1842. It helped bring about child labor reforms.

In 1844, a second collection entitled "Poems" by Elizabeth Barrett received good reviews. The American version contained an introduction by Edgar Allen Poe. A year later she got a telegram from an admirer named Robert Browning. He wrote, "I love your verses with all my heart, dear Miss Barrett. I do, as I say, love these books with all my heart--and I love you too." The two met that summer. This was the beginning of a secret courtship, held forth primarily in frequent letters back and forth, that were kept from the overbearing Edward Barrett, who did not approve of the marriages of any of his children. "Sonnets From the Portuguese" was published in 1850, and expressed her love for Robert, as well as a certain reticence about marriage to this man six years her junior. (Robert's pet name for Elizabeth was "The Portuguese".)

They did marry, however, on Sept. 12, 1846, but Elizabeth Barrett Browning continued to live at home for another week, unable to break the news to her father. As soon as he learned, the elder Barrett promptly disinherited her, and never forgave her. He died a decade after their marriage in 1856.

The marriage was happy and Robert Browning fawned over his wife, encouraging her work and taking care of her. After their marriage the Barretts moved to Pisa, Italy, and it was there that Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote, "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point", in protest of slavery in the United States. They moved to Florence, Italy in 1849 and their only child, Robert Wiedemann Barrett, was born there that year. His nick name was "Pen". In 1857 Browning finished her epic love poem, Aurora Leigh while visiting London. It was a huge popular success, but was not appreciated by critics.

Toward the end of her life, Browning became interested in the occult and spiritualism. She also developed an obsession with Italian politics and took a romanticized approach to it. She wrote a book entitled "Casa Guidi Windows" about that subject. Her last work was a collection published in 1860 called "Poems Before Congress". It contained a poem entitled, "A Curse For A Nation". It was misinterpreted as an attack on England, but it was in fact an attack on the United States system of slavery.

On June 29, 1861, Elizabeth Barrett Browning suffered "a chill" and died at the age of 55 in the arms of her husband.¹

¹ http://www.essortment.com/all/elizabethbarret_rysn.htm

APPENDIX II
POETRY UNDER ANALYSIS

I. HOW DO I LOVE THEE? LET ME COUNT THE WAYS...

“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways...”

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 my 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 candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with a 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 breadth,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!---and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

II. I THINK OF THEE!MY THOUGHTS DO TWINE AND BUD...

“I think of thee!My thoughts do twine and bud...”

I think of thee!---my thought do twine and bud
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,
Put out broad leaves, and soon there's nought to see
Except the straggling green which hides the wood.
Yet, O my palm tree, be it understood
I will not have my thoughts instead of thee
Who art dearer, better! Rather, instantly
Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should,
Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,
And lets these bands of greenery which insphere thee
Drop heavily down,---burst, shattered, everywhere!
Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee
And breathe within thy shadow a new air,
I do not think of thee---I am too near thee.

III.MY OWN BELOVED, WHO HAST LIFTED ME...

“My own Beloved, who hast lifted me...”

My own Beloved, who hast lifted me
From this drear flat of earth where I was thrown,

And, in betwixt the languid ringlets, blown
A life-breath, till the forehead hopefully
Shines out again, as all the angels see,
Before thy saving kiss! My own , my own,
Who camest to me when the world was gone,
And I who looked for only God, found thee!
I find thee; I am safe, and strong, and glad.
As one who stands in the dewless asphodel,
Looks backward on the tedious time he had
In the upper life,---so I, with bosom-swell,
Make witness, here, between the good and bad,
That love, as strong as Death, retrieves as well.