

Erotic Love Reflected in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "HOW DO I LOVE

THEE?"

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Abstract

The poem entitled "*How Do I love Thee?*" was written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. This poem tells about how Elizabeth Barrett Browning loves her sweetheart. Her love to her sweetheart is very wonderful and strong. The purpose of this study is to describe the category of love in the poem by using Erich Fromm's theory of love as the method of approach. In addition, this study also explains the characteristic of that category of love in the poem. The writer uses library research in his study for collecting the data. The result of this study shows that love desire that is felt by Elizabeth Barrett Browning is not a sexual contact but it is a wish to be a couple of lover. It can be categorized into erotic love. It has been proven by several characteristics of erotic love reflected in the poem. That characteristics are like it is not universal or it is only specific to one person for craving complete union, it is very exclusive from its own nature and strong commitment of Elizabeth Barrett Browning that makes her love is endless love.

Keyword: erotic love, love desire, exclusive, strong commitment

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) was one of the most famous English poets of the Victorian Era. She succeeded to create wonderful poetry during her lifetime. "*How Do I Love Thee?*" that was written in 1850 became a well-known poem because of its famous lines. Elizabeth Barrett Browning was genius to choose and to arrange the words into her poem. The writer believes that "*How Do I Love Thee?*" contains aspects of love especially erotic love in it.

Erotic love is a concept of love developed by Erich Fromm. Erotic love is categorized into the objects of love. Characteristic of erotic love is by nature exclusive and it is not universal. The study of this extended essay develops from a recent study on Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "*How Do I Love Thee?*." The previous study is discussed by a student of Tartu University Narva College as a bachelor thesis. However, her study only focuses on the concept of love in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poems, especially *Sonnets from Portugal*. She does not specifically discuss "*How Do I Love Thee?*" and makes the writer decide to analyze the concept of love in the poem. The description of erotic love is explained in this extended essay.

1.2. Research Problems

1. How the concept of erotic love is figured out through the narration in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "*How Do I Love Thee?*" ?
2. How is Elizabeth Barrett Browning's love desire reflected in "*How Do I Love Thee?*"

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1. To figure out the concept of erotic love through the narration in "*How Do I Love Thee?*".
2. To figure out Elizabeth Barrett Browning's love desire in "*How Do I Love Thee?*".

2. Research Method

The writer applies the library research as the method of his research for collecting data. He collected some books, journals, essays, and articles for collecting data and reference to strengthen the analysis of the poem. According to George (2008), library research is "that the elements of library research involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal and expert opinion on a research question; necessary component of every other research methods at some point." Based on that description about library research, the writer will identify and locate the references to answer the research problems. The writer's

identification and collection of the sources will be necessary for the analysis in his extended essay.

Psychological approach is also used in this study to help the writer in analyzing the representation of love in the poem. According to M.H. Abrams in his book *A Glossary of Literary Term*

The psychological approach deals with a work of literature primarily as an expression, in fictional form of the state of mind and the structure of personality of the individual author. This approach emerged in the early decades of nineteenth century, as part of the romantic replacement of earlier mimetic and pragmatic view of the nature of the literature (1999: 247).

In relation to the approach method to analyze Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem of this extended essay, the writer decided to adopt a theory of love by Erich Fromm. The writer infers the theory of love approach from Erich Fromm to figure out Elizabeth Barrett Browning's love in the poem. To analyze Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "*How do I Love Thee?*" The writer uses the concept of erotic love.

3.1. The concept of erotic love through the narration in "*How Do I Love Thee?*"

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "*How Do I Love Thee?*" is a love poem. The writer believes that it has type of erotic love as mentioned by Erich Fromm. The writer is convinced that the type of love in this poem is erotic love. There are several characteristics of erotic love which are reflected in the poem.

First, "*How Do I Love Thee?*" tells about the exclusiveness between the Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning. It is proven in line 2-4.

*I love thee to the depth and breadth and height₂
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.*

The lines above show that how deep Elizabeth Barrett Browning's love is for her sweetheart. She expresses the extent of her love using measurements of places where her soul can reach. It makes a point that her love cannot be measured. Even if the world ends, she will always still love him. Her love for him will never change.

In lines 5 and 6, Barrett Browning describes that her love is like the basic need to survive.

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

These lines present us that Elizabeth Barrett Browning's love always increases every day. In addition, it is Elizabeth Barrett Browning's necessity to love her sweetheart. She needs her sweetheart every day and every night.

The huge form of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's love is also reflected in lines 7 and 8.

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

These lines show that Barrett Browning's love is wonderful. Everything she will stand for the sake of her love with her sweetheart. She is willing to sacrifice and fight as a male fighter for her right. She also tells that her love is pure, as it turns out her praise for the pure love itself. In other word, her love is unconditional love.

The reason for Barrett Browning fights for her love is described on line 10-12.

*In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.¹⁰
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints,¹²*

From line 10 "In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith." It figures out that there is a past experiences of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. It is proven by the word 'my childhood's faith'. It means that when she was child she felt something that she will tell in the next line. The next line

is 'I love thee with a love I seemed to lose', it imagines that she loves someone but there is an obstacle in her love that makes her love become a little bit faded or lost. Then, Elizabeth Barrett Browning wants to tell through her line that her love seems to lose her out as she lost her saints. 'Saints' here can be interpreted as spirit, soul or holy wish of Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Strong commitment and individual attraction become characteristics of erotic love. They are reflected in this poem in line 12-14.

*I love thee with the breath,¹²
Smiles, tears, of all my life! -- and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.* 14

The lines above express that Elizabeth Barrett Browning's love is powerful. She loves him with the life is in her well being, every happiness, sadness, and her whole life. She believes that she has a feeling of wonderful attraction that makes her really love him. She loves him even if after death. Beyond the grave, she wishes God's permission that she will always love him eternally. It is an evidence that Elizabeth Barrett Browning's commitment can be undoubted anymore. Although, she will be separated by the death, she still wants to be with her love.

3.2. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's love desire in "How Do I Love Thee?"

As mentioned in the Oxford Dictionary in the previous part of this extended essay, erotic love defined as 'used or intended to cause sexual desire. It is appropriate with Fromm's statement in his book that sexual desire aims at the fusion. It means that fusion between two people who are falling in love will create a sexual desire. Sexual desire is not only explained as sexual contact but also it can be defined as a wish to be one or unity with the other person.

There is one illustration in the poem that shows Elizabeth Barrett Browning's love desire. It is reflected in line 9.

I love thee with the passion to use

This line figures out that Elizabeth Barrett Browning love with her sweetheart passionately. This passionate feeling exist when she is looking at him at the first sight. Elizabeth Barrett Browning falls in love with her sweetheart with a desire to be one couple of lover or she wants to own him in her side.

It is similar to the contain of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "*How Do I Love Thee?*". This poem tells that as a poetess Elizabeth Barrett Browning wants to be one or unity with someone who she loves. She wants to be a couple of sweetheart.

4. Conclusion

Based on the type of love in *The Art of Loving*, love Barrett Browning feeling's can be categorized as erotic love. The characteristics of erotic love are found by the writer in the lines of "*How Do I Love Thee?*". Love desire in this poem is not about sexual contact but a wish to be one unity between the author and someone who she loves. Even though not all characteristics of erotic love are reflected in the poem, there are still several characteristics which appear in the poem. That characteristics of erotic love are strong exclusiveness between a couple of lovers, each of them has strong commitment for loving the other and individual attraction between them. According to the characteristics of erotic love in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "*How Do I Love Thee?*", The writer concludes that her love is pure and powerful. The poem tells that Barrett Browning's love to her sweetheart is endless love.

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APPENDIX

How Do I Love Thee?

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 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 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.

