

# ASM TUITION ACADEMY

## Sonnet 29 \_\_\_\_\_ I think of thee

**Sonnet 29: "I think of thee!"**

I think of thee!—my thoughts do twine and bud  
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,  
Put out broad leaves, and soon there's nought to see  
Except for 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 let these bands of greenery which in sphere 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.

### **Analysis of Sonnet 29 by Elizabeth Barrett Browning**

In *Sonnet 29*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning vividly expresses the speaker's deep love, desire, and need for physical proximity with her beloved. The poem is a celebration of romantic love, exploring the tension between thought and reality, imagination and presence, and the overwhelming joy that love brings when the beloved is near.

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### **Summary and Themes**

The speaker opens the sonnet by confessing how frequently she thinks of her beloved. Her thoughts are so numerous and intense that they resemble "wild vines" which wrap themselves around him, concealing the "tree" beneath. However, this imaginative connection is insufficient. She yearns for the actual presence of her beloved, believing that reality far surpasses the fantasies of the mind.

The theme of **romantic longing** is central to the poem. The speaker explores how her thoughts wrap around the beloved like vines, symbolizing the way in which her mind is consumed by love. However, she admits that thoughts alone are inadequate substitutes for real-life intimacy. This reveals a deeper theme of **physical vs. emotional connection**: she longs for the tangible presence of her lover, emphasizing the joy of togetherness.

Another crucial theme is the **power of love** to eclipse distance and abstraction. While the speaker acknowledges the consuming power of her imagination, she ultimately finds that true love transcends thought. The conclusion suggests that the beloved's presence overwhelms her so fully that there is no need to think about him anymore because he is near.

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## **Poetic Devices in the Sonnet**

Elizabeth Barrett Browning employs several poetic devices in *Sonnet 29* to enhance the emotional intensity and depth of the speaker's sentiments. Below is an analysis of the prominent devices used:

### **1. Metaphor:**

The entire sonnet revolves around an extended metaphor comparing the speaker's thoughts to wild vines that encircle her beloved, who is represented as a tree. This metaphor conveys how her thoughts envelop him obsessively:

- **"my thoughts do twine and bud / About thee, as wild vines, about a tree"**  
Here, the thoughts are depicted as uncontrollable, growing vines, wrapping around her beloved as a tree. This metaphor illustrates how her mind is overgrown with ideas and thoughts of him, almost obscuring his true form.
- **"O my palm-tree"**  
The beloved is addressed as a "palm-tree," a symbol of strength, stability, and growth. The image emphasizes the solidity and strength of the beloved, contrasting with the wild and unregulated growth of her thoughts.

### **2. Personification:**

The speaker personifies her thoughts as living, growing entities:

- **"my thoughts do twine and bud"**  
Her thoughts are not static but alive and constantly evolving, mimicking the natural processes of plants, which adds to the sense of uncontrollability and organic energy behind her emotions.

### **3. Alliteration:**

Alliteration is used to create a musical rhythm in the poem, emphasizing certain emotional points:

- **"twine and bud"**  
The repetition of the 't' sound adds a softness to the description, reflecting the tenderness of her emotions.
- **"Rustle thy boughs"**  
The 'r' sound here mimics the rustling of leaves, creating an auditory effect that aligns with the natural imagery in the sonnet.

### **4. Imagery:**

Rich, natural imagery fills the sonnet, particularly in the first half, which is dominated by the metaphor of the vine:

- **"broad leaves"**  
The leaves are a powerful image of nature's capacity to overgrow and obscure, symbolizing the way her thoughts might obscure her view of her beloved's true self.
- **"Let these bands of greenery... drop heavily down"**  
The image of the vines "dropping heavily down" suggests that her thoughts, while intense, are transient and inferior to the reality of her lover's presence.

### 5. Structure:

Like most Petrarchan sonnets, *Sonnet 29* consists of an **octave** (the first eight lines) and a **sestet** (the final six lines). The octave introduces the speaker's problem: her thoughts are overpowering and distracting her from the real person. In the sestet, there is a shift in tone as she calls for the actual presence of her beloved, recognizing that his presence is far more satisfying than her thoughts.

### 6. Enjambment:

Barrett Browning uses **enjambment** to reflect the fluidity of the speaker's thoughts, as they cascade from one idea to another without pause:

- **"I think of thee!—my thoughts do twine and bud / About thee, as wild vines, about a tree"**  
The lack of a full stop between lines suggests an overwhelming rush of emotion, mirroring the uncontrollable nature of the speaker's thoughts.

### 7. Volta (Turn):

The **volta**, or thematic shift, occurs in the sestet of the sonnet. Here, the speaker turns from her focus on thought to her desire for the beloved's presence:

- **"Yet, O my palm tree, be it understood / I will not have my thoughts instead of thee."**  
The speaker now dismisses the value of mere thoughts and imaginations, preferring the real, physical presence of her lover, which is superior to anything her mind can create.

### 8. Contrast:

The poem contrasts the intangible (thoughts) with the tangible (the lover's presence). The speaker moves from the world of imagination, where her thoughts are "wild vines," to the real world, where the beloved's presence is "strong" and steady.

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## Conclusion

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnet 29* is a powerful exploration of love's ability to overwhelm the mind and body, yet ultimately, the speaker desires the presence of her beloved over the indulgence of her thoughts. The poem beautifully captures the tension between

imagination and reality, with the conclusion affirming the superiority of real, lived experience over abstract thought.

## **COMPARISON WITH LOVES**

### **PHILOSOPHY**

When comparing Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnet 29* ("I think of thee") with **Percy Bysshe Shelley's** poem "*Love's Philosophy*," both works revolve around themes of romantic love, longing, and desire, but they approach these themes in very distinct ways, both in tone and poetic technique. Below is a detailed comparison of the two poems in terms of **themes, structure, poetic devices, and overall tone.**

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#### **Themes**

##### **1. Romantic Longing and Desire**

Both poems express a deep desire for unity and connection in love, but they differ in how they depict that longing:

- **Sonnet 29** focuses on the internal, emotional experience of love. The speaker expresses a consuming mental preoccupation with her beloved. Her thoughts, represented as vines, wrap around the figure of her lover, but she ultimately longs for his real, physical presence, which she believes surpasses any thoughts or imaginings of him.
- **Love's Philosophy**, on the other hand, makes a broader, more philosophical argument about the natural world's interconnectedness, using it as a metaphor to justify why the speaker and the person he loves should be together. Shelley's speaker looks outward, pointing to nature—rivers, oceans, mountains, and the mingling of elements—as evidence that human beings are meant to unite in love. The longing in this poem is more persuasive and intellectual, rooted in a desire to convince the beloved of the natural necessity of their union.

##### **2. Physical vs. Emotional Connection**

- In **Sonnet 29**, the speaker's longing for physical presence is more personal and emotional. While her thoughts are compared to vines, she admits that they are no substitute for the tangible joy of being with her beloved. The theme reflects the need for physical closeness to transcend the mental or emotional aspects of love.
- In **Love's Philosophy**, the speaker also desires physical closeness, but he uses the natural world as evidence that physical union is the natural culmination of love. The entire poem builds toward the rhetorical question at the end, highlighting the speaker's frustration that, unlike the elements of nature, he is separated from his beloved.

##### **3. Nature as a Metaphor for Love**

Nature plays an essential role in both poems, but it is used differently:

- **In Sonnet 29**, nature serves as a metaphor for the speaker's thoughts. The metaphor of her thoughts as "wild vines" clinging to a "tree" (the beloved) reflects the uncontrollable, organic growth of her emotions. Nature here mirrors the speaker's internal emotional state, suggesting how love can become all-encompassing.
- **In Love's Philosophy**, Shelley uses nature not just as a metaphor but as proof of his argument. He presents natural phenomena—streams mingling, winds kissing, mountains touching the sky—as examples of how all things in the universe seek unity. His speaker suggests that love, like these natural connections, should follow the same harmonious pattern.

#### 4. The Power of Love

- In **Sonnet 29**, love has the power to eclipse thought. The speaker implies that when her beloved is present, her thoughts become irrelevant: *"I do not think of thee—I am too near thee."* Love transcends even the mental space, overwhelming the need for thought and imagination.
- In **Love's Philosophy**, love is a force that binds all things in the universe together, and the speaker's frustration comes from his inability to complete this natural cycle of union with his beloved. Love is seen as a unifying, inevitable force.

### Poetic Devices

#### 1. Metaphor

Both poets use metaphor to illustrate the nature of love:

- **In Sonnet 29**, the speaker uses an extended metaphor comparing her thoughts to "wild vines" encircling a "tree" (her beloved). This metaphor illustrates the overwhelming nature of her emotions, which wrap around him and obscure his true form, indicating the intensity of her longing for his presence.
- **In Love's Philosophy**, Shelley uses the natural world as metaphorical evidence of love's necessity. The rivers, oceans, and other elements "mingle" and "kiss" to show how love is a force of nature. He metaphorically aligns natural connections with human romantic relationships, suggesting that physical love is as natural and inevitable as the mingling of rivers and the unity of the earth and sky.

#### 2. Repetition and Parallelism

- In **Sonnet 29**, Elizabeth Barrett Browning uses repetition of ideas rather than exact words. The metaphor of thoughts as vines returns in various forms throughout the poem, culminating in the wish for the physical presence of the beloved.
- In **Love's Philosophy**, Shelley uses repetition and parallelism to emphasize his argument. The poem's structure is built on paired images (rivers, oceans, winds, mountains), creating a sense of inevitability. The repetition of "mingle" and "kiss" reinforces the idea that all elements of nature join together, making his case for physical love between humans more convincing.

#### 3. Rhetorical Questions

Shelley's use of rhetorical questions at the end of each stanza in **Love's Philosophy** adds a persuasive tone:

- **"Why not I with thine?"**
  - The question is both a plea and a challenge. It highlights the speaker's frustration and disbelief that, despite all the natural evidence he presents, he and his beloved remain apart.

Browning, in **Sonnet 29**, avoids rhetorical questions, focusing instead on direct expressions of her emotional journey, from imagining her lover to desiring his actual presence.

#### 4. Enjambment

Both poems use **enjambment** to create fluidity and continuity:

- **In Sonnet 29**, Browning uses enjambment to show the flowing, overwhelming nature of the speaker's thoughts, which run from one line to the next, reflecting the entangling growth of the "wild vines."
  - **In Love's Philosophy**, Shelley uses enjambment to reflect the natural flow of elements he describes. The idea that all parts of nature mingle smoothly together is reflected in the way his lines flow from one to the next without pause.
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#### Tone and Mood

- **Sonnet 29** has a more introspective and emotionally intense tone. It expresses the speaker's inner conflict between the world of thoughts and the tangible reality of love. The mood is one of anticipation and yearning, with a resolution that emphasizes the joy of real presence over imagined connection.
  - **Love's Philosophy** has a more persuasive, philosophical tone. The speaker uses nature as evidence to convince his beloved that they should be united. The mood is light yet earnest, as the speaker tries to convince his love of the naturalness of their union. There's also a hint of frustration at the poem's end, as the speaker questions why this natural connection has not yet occurred.
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#### Conclusion

While both *Sonnet 29* and *Love's Philosophy* explore the theme of romantic longing, they approach it from different angles. **Browning** focuses on the emotional and psychological experience of love, emphasizing the need for physical closeness and the power of love to transcend thought. **Shelley**, by contrast, offers a more outward-looking, philosophical argument, using nature as a metaphor for love's inevitability and expressing frustration over unfulfilled desire. The former poem is deeply personal and introspective, while the latter is a persuasive argument aimed at convincing the beloved of the necessity of love.

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