# Unit-2 ❑ Elizabeth Barrett Browning: 'I Thought Once…'; Emily Brontë: 'No Coward Soul Is Mine'

**Structure:**

## 4.2.0 Introduction

In the previous Unit (4.1) you have dealt with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, one of the most remarkable novels by a Victorian woman novelist. In the present Unit

(4.2) and in the following one (4.3) you will be made acquainted with the poetry of three most remarkable women poets of the Victorian period. As you must have noted in the previous Unit, women writers were slowly becoming more visible on the literary scene throughout the Victorian Age, and here you are going to learn about two such poets whose poetic career charted very different courses from each other. Let us begin by learning a bit about their lives and times.

## 4.2.1 About Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The standard histories of English literature would not probably give the readers a very clear idea of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's contemporary reputation. Revered as the most accomplished "poetess" of the period, her fame at the time of her death was definitely greater than her husband Robert Browning. Elizabeth Barrett was born on March 6, 1806 at Coxhoe Hall. The first of twelve children born to Edward Moulton-Barrett and his wife Mary Graham Clarke, Elizabeth had a prosperous and protected childhood, mostly spent in Hope End, an estate in Herefordshire which her father bought in 1809. Elizabeth had a great desire to learn the Classical languages. Therefore, availing the services of her brother's tutor, she learnt Greek and Latin, and later went on to learn Hebrew. She was also extensively read in philosophy and history. The great range of her learning has left a mark on her poetry. Her first

**Elizabeth Barrett Browning**

volume of poetry— along with the poem titled "The Battle of Marathon" was published privately when she was only thirteen years old. Elizabeth's health however, began to fail from an early age though she continued to write poetry and her works were regularly published in the leading monthly magazines of the period. Around this time she developed a lung ailment that plagued her for the rest of her life. She was also diagnosed with a spinal weakness and started taking laudanum for the pain. Perhaps this led to addiction and her health weakened further. Her mother died when she was 22. Signs of this loss can be traced in *Aurora Leigh*.

Her health was further affected by the deaths, in quick succession, of two of her brothers in 1840. In 1844, *Poems, by Elizabeth Barrett* was published to popular and

critical acclaim. Robert Browning wrote to Elizabeth expressing his appreciation for her art. They met each other in her house in 1845 and this began one of the most famous courtships of the world. But their courtship had to be carried out secretly as her father would never approve of the match. Elizabeth was an invalid at the time and her mind, quite expectedly, was going through phases of emotional upheaval. *Sonnets from the Portuguese* records this turmoil during her period of courtship. They were secretly married in 1846. The couple left for Italy and Elizabeth spent the rest of her life writing and living abroad. In 1853 she began writing "Aurora Leigh", a long verse novel about a woman poet, a partly autobiographical Kunstlerroman which delineates, among other things, the role of a female poet in the society. "Aurora Leigh" was published in 1856 and till date is regarded as her most remarkable poetic achievement. Elizabeth's gradually failing health resulted in her death in 1861; her *Last Poems* was posthumously published in 1862.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry shows a remarkable range of learning coupled with an acute social consciousness. All the important socio-economic concerns of the period found expression in her poetry. Yet there are also expressions of intensely private emotions which deeply mark her poetry. It is this amalgamation of the private and the public, the social and the personal that make her one of the greatest poets of her age.

**4.2.2.a) About the Poem**

The poem that you are going to read shortly is the first sonnet from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnet sequence *Sonnets from the Portuguese. Sonnets from the Portuguse* is a series of 44 sonnets written during the secret courtship of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning (1845-46) and was published in 1850. This intensely personal record of passionate love was presented to the world in the guise of translation— apparently the poems were translated from Portuguese. The title of the sequence has another implication. Browning's nickname for EBB was "the little Portuguese". This sequence marks an important departure in the history of the English sonnet. The traditional English sonnet, from its very beginning in the sixteenth century had been a typically male preserve. Women did figure quite prominently in the sonnets, but mainly as the silent objects of male desire. The love sonnets of Wyatt and Surrey, Sidney and Spenser, Shakespeare, and much closer to EBB's time, John Keats, privileged the male voice and the male perspective. *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, on the other hand, records the tribulations and the emotional

upheavals of a female speaker. No longer the inert object of male adoration, the female speaker is at the centre of a vortex of emotion. It is her voice that the readers hear. It is her doubts and vacillations, her intense passion and desire that are expressed through the sonnets. Being the first poem of the sequence "I thought once" broaches many of the themes that would recur in the body of the sequence. In its frequent Classical allusions, depiction of an oscillation between doubt and hope and the use of a complicated structure with apparent ease this sonnet definitely paves the way for the rest of the sequence.

### 4.2.2.b) The text of 'I thought once'

> I thought once how Theocritus had sung
> Of the sweet years, the dear and wished for years,
> Who each one in a gracious hand appears
> To bear a gift for mortals, old or young:
> And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
> I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
> The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
> Those of my own life, who by turns had flung
> A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,
> So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
> Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair,
> And a voice said in mastery, while I strove, ...
> Guess now who holds thee?'—Death,' I said. But there,
> The silver answer rang ... Not Death, but Love.

### 4.2.2. c) Explanation of the poem:

i. Theocritus—Classical Greek poet credited with the development of bucolic poetry in the third century BC.

v. Antique tongue—ancient/classical Greek. Remember that Elizabeth Barrett Browning had learnt Greek from her brother's tutor.

viii-ix. Structurally this is a Petrarchan sonnet, But Barrett Browning uses the poetic device called "enjambment" or the run-on line. The sense of the eighth line is carried over into the ninth thereby forming a link between the octave and the sestet of the sonnet.

   ix. 'ware—Aware

x-xi. There seems to be a reference to *Iliad,* Book I, where Athena pulls Achilles back by the hair and stops him from engaging in the battle with Agamemnon. Note the reversal of gender roles in the poem. It is the mystic shape, presumably male, who pulls the female speaker back by the hair.

## 4.2.2. d) Critical Appreciation

"I thought once" captures a transitional moment between long-nurtured melancholy and a promise of future happiness to be arrived at through the help of love. The ancient Greek poet Theocritus had envisioned every passing year to offer new possibilities to every mortal being, irrespective of age and station of life. The speaker's reading of Theocritus leads her on to a contemplation of her own life, and what she sees through a vision clouded by tears is very different from what Theocritus had thought. The years which Theocritus had imagined were "sweet years, the dear and wished-for years", whereas the years of the speaker's own life had been, "sweet, sad years, the melancholy years". The weight of misery had cast a dark shadow on her life. Her illness and her state of isolation covered her days and years in a pall of gloom.

In this mood of despondence and melancholy, the speaker becomes aware of another "mystic shape" lurking behind her. It forcefully draws her back by the hair. Unable to see and comprehend the nature of the shape the speaker assumes that it is death which has her in his thrall. But she is mistaken in her belief— it is not Death but Love which proposes to establish mastery over her being. This sudden inversion of her apprehension into a sense of happy optimism is remarkable at the end of this poem. The abruptness with which the theme of love is introduced into an atmosphere so long charged with melancholy helps to establish its power and announce its promise for her future. So her years too have proved true to Theocritus' claim. They finally brought her a gift: the gift of love.

The "shadow" of the octave has turned into the "silver answer" of the sestet. Silver holds the promise of further brightness in future, to turn into gold in the full

maturity of triumphant and reciprocal love. It is interesting to note that Barrett Browning frequently uses colour imagery throughout the *Sonnets from the Portuguese.* You may take a look at Sonnet IV where the colour gold again takes on symbolic significance.

### 4.2.2. e)  Style and Technique

The rich complexity of the sonnet's connotations cannot be fully comprehended without reference to its structure. Structurally, it is a Petrarchan sonnet divided into an octave rhyming *abbaabba* and a sestet rhyming *cdcdcd.* Twice in the octave EBB has used "years" as a rhyming word— this repetition underscores the speaker's intense longing for the years which will bring gifts of happiness as Theocritus had promised. The sestet with its alternating rhyme scheme gives a rapid movement and urgency to the second half of the sonnet. The longish vowel sounds had given a slower movement to the octave ("years", "gracious", "appears", "melancholy"), the sestet on the other hand has a brisker movement.  Characteristically, the Petrarchan sonnet contains a "volta", or a turn of thought in the sestet. The volta is often marked by words like "yet", "still" or "but". Here, however EBB uses a different poetical device called "enjambment" or the run-on line. The sense is not completed at the end of the eighth line and is carried over into the ninth. The melancholy of the speaker had been so overpowering that it seeps into the second half of the sonnet which traditionally records a change in the mood/ thought of the speaker. The speaker, as it were, is saved from despair at the very last moment, and the poetic equivalent of this last moment's intervention is the brief dialogue between the "mystic shape" and the speaker which gives the last two lines of the sonnet something akin to the force of a Shakespearean couplet.

### 4.2.2. f) Summing Up

➢ "I thought once" is the first poem in the sequence of 44 sonnets titled *Sonnets from the Portuguese* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning; the sequence is a poetic record of the courtship between EBB and her future husband Robert Browning

➢ It is a Petrarchan sonnet with an octave rhyming *abbbabba* and a sestet rhyming *cdcdcd* ; EBB uses the poetical device called 'enjambment', whereby the octave flows into sestet without a break in the sense

➢ The poem depicts a moment of transition from despondence and despair to

a future promise of hope; the speaker looks back at her life as a series of gloomy years without enlightenment and joy. A passing shape falls between the speaker and her despair; it is mistaken as the shadow of Death, but in reality, it is the shape of love; come to relieve the speaker from that brooding, overpowering sense of melancholy.

➢ Though it is Petrarchan sonnet, the brief dialogue between Love and the speaker at the end of the poem gives the last lines the force of a couplet in a Shakespearean sonnet.

### 4.2.2. g) Comprehension Exercises

● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem with special reference to the Classical allusions used in the poem.

2. Would you agree with the view that this sonnet records a moment of transition in the speaker's life and thoughts? Give reasons for your answer.

● **Medium length answer type—12 marks**

1. Briefly comment on the structure of the poem.

2. How does the speaker describe her life in the octave of the sonnet?

● **Short Answer Type—6 marks**

1. Who was Theocritus? Mention another Classical reference used in the poem.

2. What is enjambment? Show how enjambment is used in this sonnet.
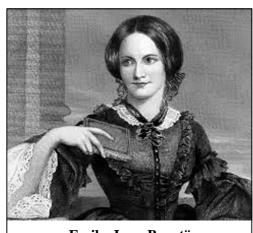
3. Comment on the use of colour imagery in this poem.

## 4.2.3. About Emily Brontë

**A Literary Biography**

Emily Jane Brontë, the fifth of the six children of Patrick Brontë and Maria Branwell Brontë, was born on July 30, 1818. In 1820 Patrick Brontë moved with his family to the Yorkshire village of Haworth where he held a curacy for life. With the exception of brief intervals when she was either studying, or was in employment as a governess, Emily spent most of her brief life in the Haworth Parsonage, in the company of her family members. The Brontë children lost their mother in 1821 and were looked after by their aunt Elizabeth Branwell. In 1824 Maria and Elizabeth

Brontë, the two elder sisters of Charlotte, Branwell ,Emily and Anne Brontë, were sent to the Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan Bridge. Charlotte and Emily were sent to the same school soon afterwards. The harsh living conditions at the school are memorably presented by Charlotte in *Jane Eyre* in the form of the Lowood School. The two elder sisters caught tuberculosis, and were brought home by Patrick only to die within a month of each other. Charlotte and Emily were also brought home and they remained in Haworth with their brother Branwell and younger sister Anne for the next five years. The four children shared a richly imaginative inner life. Fortunately neither Patrick, nor their aunt Elizabeth



**Emily Jane Brontë**

discouraged the children from reading, and what the children read, saw, and thought were transformed into their early collaborative narratives about the two imaginary worlds that they created. Charlotte and Branwell collaborated in creating "Angria" and Emily and Anne in "Gondal" – two imaginary nations around which the children weaved stories, plays and poems. Many of Emily's poems, in fact, deal with characters and events from the imaginary "Gondal" sagas. In 1835 Emily was sent to Roe Head School in Mirfield where Charlotte was already working as a teacher after a stint as a pupil. Emily was once again as desperately homesick and unhappy as she had been at Cowan Bridge and was finally sent home within a few weeks. After being at home for three years, Emily finally took up a position as a Governess at Law Hill near Halifax. Like the schools that Emily had been to, this job as a governess also proved uncongenial to her health and temperament and she returned to Haworth within six months. A few months' stay in Brussels with Charlotte in 1842 to learn languages was Emily's last long sojourn away from home. Unlike Charlotte, she never married; neither did she enjoy the life of a celebrated author in London. Reclusive by temperament, Emily preferred to stay at home. Meanwhile she continued to write poetry, often concealing the fact form her siblings. It was Charlotte who took the initiative and persuaded a reluctant Emily to publish some of her poems along with those of Charlotte and Anne under a pseudonym. It was thus *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* was published in 1846. The volume with twenty one poems by Emily, some depicting characters and events from Gondal, was reviewed well, but

unfortunately sold only two copies. Undaunted by the poor sale and buoyed up by the critical acclaim, Charlotte attempted to have three novels by each of the sisters published. Ironically enough, it was Charlotte's *The Professor* which was rejected by the publisher and Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *Agnes Grey* were accepted for publication. Charlotte replaced *The Professor* with *Jane Eyre* which was published in October 1847, while the novels by Emily and Anne followed suit in December, and received mixed responses. Emily died of tuberculosis at Haworth in 1848.

**Emily Brontë as a Poet**

The later critical fate of *Wuthering Heights* has somehow eclipsed the considerable achievements of Emily as a poet, so much so, that only thirty-eight of her poems were published and known to the reading public in the nineteenth century. After Emily's death in 1848, Charlotte prepared a posthumous edition of her sister's poems which included only eighteen more poems. The fact that Emily's output was far more extensive (more than two hundred poems have survived, including fragmentary ones) was established only in the early twentieth century. Like Emily's only novel *Wuthering Heights,* her poetry also records the mark of a powerful imagination, combined with a keen eye for nature and a controlled use of images and expressions. Unlike the celebrated male poets of the Victorian period, Emily was never a part of the public literary scene. Some of her contemporary, or near contemporary, women poets—especially Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti— also enjoyed literary repute and a fair degree of popularity, but Emily remained an elusive figure. She wrote her poems in a time of great change and intellectual upheaval, but her poems barely contain any direct reference to the great public debates of her time, in fact the one overwhelming characteristic of her poetry is its introspective and private nature. Let us now read the poem in detail and we shall see how we can relate Emily's poetry to her times.

**4.2.4.a)  The Text of the Poem**

> No coward soul is mine
> No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere
> I see Heaven's glories shine
> And Faith shines equal arming me from Fear
> v. O God within my breast
> Almighty ever-present Deity

> Life, that in me hast rest,
> As I Undying Life, have power in Thee
> Vain are the thousand creeds
> x. That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,
> Worthless as withered weeds
> Or idlest froth amid the boundless main
>
> To waken doubt in one
> Holding so fast by thy infinity,
> xv. So surely anchored on
> The steadfast rock of Immortality
> With wide-embracing love
> Thy spirit animates eternal years
> Pervades and broods above,
> xx. Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears
> Though earth and moon were gone
> And suns and universes ceased to be
> And Thou wert left alone
> Every Existence would exist in thee
> xxv. There is not room for Death
> Nor atom that his might could render void
> Since thou art Being and Breath
> And what thou art may never be destroyed.

### 4.2.4. b) Analysis/Explanation of the Poem

i. The poem begins with an instance of litotes, a figure of speech in which a rhetorical understatement stating something in the negative is used to mean a positive statement. Thus, by stating 'No Coward Soul is Mine' the speaker attempts to bring into focus the courage of the soul. Another rhetorical device used in the line is hyperbaton—an inversion of the normal syntactical structure of a sentence for poetical effect. Lines i. and ii. also use anaphora, the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of a sentence.

ii. Heaven's glories—stars which symbolize the glory of heaven

iv-viii. Look carefully at the use of capital letters in these lines. What do you think they signify?

ix. Creeds—systems of belief or faith

x. This line uses alliteration. Could you identify another use of the same figure of speech in the poem?

xi. Boundless-limitless; main- ocean

xviii-xx.The spirit of God is omnipresent; it is beyond the reach of time and; it is this spirit which creates, mutates and nurtures lives

xxi. These lines were revised by Charlotte in her edition to read "Though Earth and man were gone". Lines xxi-xxiii envision the destruction of the universe even after which the Divine presence would continue to exist as it is immortal

xxvi. Might- power

**About the Poem**

'No Coward Soul is Mine' was first published posthumously in 1850. The phrase "Coward Soul" was adopted by Brontë from an Ode written by an eighteenth century conduct book writer Hester Chapone. While editing the poem for publication, Charlotte made quite a number of changes to some of the phrases of the poem and capitalized certain letters for emphasis. The version that you are reading here is what Emily actually wrote.

**4.2.4. c) Critical Appreciation**

In the 1850 edition of Emily Brontë's poems in which 'No Coward Soul is Mine' was first published, Charlotte had identified the poem as the last composition by her ailing sister. Though later critics and biographers have contended that Emily wrote at least two other poems after "No Coward Soul", the centrality of this lyric in her poetic oeuvre has been acknowledged by most. The lyric is a triumphant assertion of the power of the human soul to survive beyond the mutable world and into eternity.

As you have already learnt, the poem begins with a hyperbaton and a litotes. The negative with which it begins is repeated in the second line to underline the sense of the soul's courage and steadfastness. The first stanza employs the submerged metaphor of the soul as a lonely traveller/ vessel in the "world's storm-troubled sphere", where the steadily shining glory of heaven, undimmed by the storm, arms the soul to strive against fear.

The second stanza locates the source of the soul's strength in the presence of God within the human breast. The poet-speaker imagines the human soul— and human life by extension—as a part of and continuous with the Divine presence. Human life, enclosed within the human form, draws sustenance from God and hence, becomes "Undying Life". The bond between the human and the Divine is reciprocal.

This belief in the immersion of the human soul in the soul Divine helps the poet to reject the doctrines and orthodoxies of established religion. The creeds taught by preachers and believed in by many, appear to the poet to be as insubstantial and hollow as the 'idlest froth' or 'withered weeds' floating on the measureless ocean.

The sense of the third stanza is carried over into the fourth (this rhetorical device is known as 'enjambment' where the sense of a line of verse or a stanza is carried over into the next without any syntactical break) where the speaker asserts the futility of any effort to plant the seeds of doubt in the mind of the staunch believer in the Immortality of the Soul. Taken together, the two stanzas focus on the powerlessness of the thousands of vain creeds to sway the mind of the believer who has complete and personal faith in the Divine.

The fifth stanza shifts the focus of the poem from the human spirit to the spirit Divine. In words which remind the readers of Coleridge's definition of the Secondary Imagination (Coleridge had defined the Secondary Imagination in *Biographia Literaria* as a power which "… dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create"), the poet characterizes the Divine spirit as a presence that embraces, pervades and broods over all things and is the ultimate arbiter of all the changes and mutations that the things undergo.

This all-encompassing quality of the Divine is eternal, thus even if/ when, the "Earth and the Moon" along with the entire cosmic order is annihilated, all existence will paradoxically continue to exist in the Divine being. This stanza presents a poetic approximation of the Apocalypse, the end of the world order. This end would also signify the end of Time, but the Divine is beyond and above time and therefore would contain the universe in its very Being.

The last stanza of the poem confidently asserts the powerlessness of death over the eternal. Death does not even have the power to undo or destroy the tiniest of atoms as the atom is also a part of God. Since God is the source of all Being and all Life, and since the Divine is Eternal, immutable and indestructible, it 'may never be destroyed".

## 4.2.4. d) Style and Structure

'No Coward Soul is Mine' uses simple and lucid poetic diction with a controlled use of rhetorical devices which reinforce the sense of the expressions. Brontë adopts an uncomplicated yet flexible quatrain stanza which she had earlier used in many of her other poems. The rhyme scheme is *a b a b* and the lines are alternate iambic trimetre and pentametre which provide the poem with a pace suitable to its theme. Some of the most important images of the poem have been contrasted with antithetical ones. For instance—the image of the 'idle froth' has to be juxtaposed to that of the boundless sea to underscore the insubstantiality of the former. In contrast to the 'storm-troubled sphere' of the world we have the 'equal' i.e. steady shining of Faith and the "Steadfast rock of Immortality". Repetition of certain words is another technique that Brontë uses to remarkable effect. The repetition of the "No" in the first two lines strengthen the positive image of the dauntless soul, whereas "Life", repeated in consecutive lines in the second stanza establishes a metaphorical and poetic continuity between the life human and the life Divine. The adjective 'Vain', repeated in the consecutive lines of the third stanza means to highlight the hollowness of religious orthodoxies. Alliteration is used to a similar effect—the heavily accented first syllables of "Worthless as withered weeds" seem to pronounce the insignificance of the weeds with all the more conviction.

## 4.2.4. e) Themes of the Poem

As you have already understood from your reading of the poem, the **central theme is faith** which can triumph over various challenges. Let us discuss why this particular theme seems to be a recurrent one in the context of Victorian poetry in general and Emily Brontë's poetry in particular. The Victorian age faced an unprecedented crisis of faith—a crisis in which traditional religious beliefs were radically questioned by the findings of science. Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), proposed a theory of evolution which challenged the Biblical narrative of Genesis or the creation of the world. The belief in the primacy of rational discourses which has been a marked characteristic of English thought since the eighteenth century made it impossible for rationalists to doubt the scientific evidence presented by Darwin after decades of painstaking research. Equally difficult was it to entirely discard the teachings of the Bible. Though it was Darwin whose findings shook the foundations of traditional beliefs most radically, he was not the only one to have affected public opinion in the Victorian age. Charles Lyell's *The Principles*

*of Geology* (1830-33) had already contested the Bible's claim about the age of the earth on the basis of geological evidences. The works of Herbert Spencer and Robert Chambers had also proposed an "evolutionary" theory of life forms as opposed to the "Creationist" ones favoured by theologists. Victorian thinkers, therefore, were faced with the tremendous difficulty of reconciling the teachings of religion to the evidence of science. This crisis has been poetically addressed most notably in poems like Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850*)*, Matthew Arnold's "Scholar Gypsy" and "Dover Beach".  Emily Brontë's poem, written just over a decade before the publication of *The Origin of Species* and some fifteen years after the publication of *The Principles of Geology,* can hardly be untouched by this crisis. The importance of this poem in the context of this debate over faith lies in its confident assertion of the power of personal faith to face "the world's storm-troubled sphere". Very significantly, the poet-speaker firmly rejects the established creeds in favour of a private world of faith.   Being a country Clergyman's daughter, Emily Brontë succeeds in offering a personal and surer way of salvation for the believer than the ones established church doctrines could offer.

---

**Activity for the Learner**

**You have probably noted that Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' is another poem in your syllabus which deals with the "crisis of faith". How do the two poems differ in their treatment of the theme? Also note the image of the sea in both poems. What do you think the image stands for?**

---

Another important theme brought up by the poem is that of **death and immortality**. Death is a theme that Emily had dealt with in many of her other poems as well (notably in poems like—"Faith and Despondency", "The Philosopher", "Remembrance" "A Death Scene"), but here we see a calm assurance in the power of the soul expressed in a poetic structure handled with maturity and consummate artistry. Moreover, the powerful claims of Immortality made for the Human Soul and the ultimate powerlessness of death may remind the readers of John Donne's "Death Be not Proud" which concluded with the proclamation:

> "One short sleep past, we wake eternally
> And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die."

This poem seems to assert that death is a function of time which would stand defeated as God, who is the source of all life and all being is immortal. Every living being thus would continue to have existence in God and would live eternally.

### 4.2.4. f) Summing Up

➢ Now let us look back at some of the main points that we have discussed so far.

➢ "No Coward Soul is Mine" is a posthumously published poem in which Emily Brontë deals with the themes of faith and immortality.

➢ The poem uses a simple stanzaic pattern consisting of alternate iambic trimeter and penatmeter lines arranged in quatrains.

➢ The poem may be read in the context of Victorian crisis of faith and Emily seems to offer a personal faith as a solution to the crisis.

➢ Death and faith are two themes that the poet has dealt with in other poems as well, but here we have a supreme confidence in terms of expression as well as thought.

➢ Of all her poems, this one has been the most widely anthologized and commented upon and is generally thought of as representing her greatest poetic achievement.

### 4.2.4. g) Comprehension Exercises

● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. How does the poet treat the theme of immortality in the poem?

2. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem.

3. Would you agree with the view that 'No Coward Soul is Mine' presents a personal solution to the problem of faith?

● **Medium Length Questions-12 marks**

1. Comment on the use of imagery and rhetorical devices in the poem

2. What does the poet mean by the line "Every Existence would exist in thee"

3. How does the poet envision the end of the cosmic order in the poem?

● **Short Questions– 6 marks**

1. Why does the poet consider "thousand creeds" as vain?

2. Explain the lines with reference to the context —

   "Since thou art Being and Breath
   And what thou art may never be destroyed."

3. How does the poet represent divine omnipresence in the poem?

## 4.2.5. Comprehensive Reading List

Brontë, Emily. *The Night is Darkening Round Me*. Penguin Classics: London, 2015. Print.

Gezari,Janet. *Last Things:Emily Brontë's Poems*. Oxford UP:London,2007. Print.

Ingham, Patricia. *Authors in Context: The Brontës.* Oxford UP:London, 2006. Print.

Starzyk, Lawrence J. "The Faith of Emily Brontë's Immortality Creed". *Victorian Poetry* 11.4. 295-305. *JSTOR.*Web.

Avery, Simon and Rebecca Stott. *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* .Routledge : Oxon, 2014.

Bristow, Joseph, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry.* CUP: Cambridge,2000.

Mermin, Dorothy. *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry.* University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1989.

Stone, Marjoroie. "Elizabeth Barrett Browning". *Victorian Poetry.* Vol-39: 3 ( 2001) 436-447.