

Themes

Love – fulfilment and joy

The tone of the poem is joyous and excited by love. The narrator's thoughts 'twine' about her lover as they develop and 'bud'. This is love that is fulfilled and given back to her by the lover who enables her to 'breathe new air'.

Compare with
'Singh Song!': the joy of love within marriage is explored.

Love – distance

The lover is absent and so at first she can only think of him. She longs for the lover and demands that he comes to her. The narrator wants her lover rather than any idealised version that is created by her thoughts as he is 'dearer, better!'

Compare with
'When We Two Parted': the distance between the lovers is viewed with bitterness.

Nature and the natural world

Thoughts about the lover are expressed in natural images. An extended metaphor of a tree (the lover) and a vine (the narrator) is used to show the relationship. The lover is strong and magnificent. Her love, extensive like the vine leaves, surrounds him.

Compare with
'Love's Philosophy': the natural world is used as a model of how the lovers should behave.

Language

The sonnet uses images from nature to describe the fulfilment of the narrator's love. Her thoughts 'twine' and 'bud' before they 'drop heavily, down' and 'burst'. These are natural, ripe and luscious images. The central extended metaphor shows the lover as a strong and stable tree that she, shown as a vine, surrounds and embraces. This vine can 'put out broad leaves' (her thoughts) until there is 'nought' to see of him, but she understands that it is him she wants rather than any idealised version. The lover is referred to as a 'palm-tree', a tree seen as exotic by the Victorians. It also has religious **connotations** as Christ's followers threw palm leaves at his feet as a sign of their devotion and worship as he entered Jerusalem triumphantly.

The mirroring of 'I think of thee' and 'I do not think of thee' brings the sonnet full circle showing the all-consuming presence of the lover in her thoughts. The echo of 'thee', the intimate form of 'you' which would have been old-fashioned when the poem was written, reinforces this focus.

DO IT!
What do you understand by the lines, 'Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should,/Rustle thy boughs'?