



SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY

LORD BYRON (GEORGE GORDON)


LORD BYRON (1788-1824)

- ▶ George Gordon Noel Byron, 6th Baron Byron, was born 22 January 1788 in London and died 19 April 1824 in Missolonghi, Greece.
- ▶ He was among the most famous of the English 'Romantic' poets; his contemporaries included Percy Shelley and John Keats.
- ▶ He was also a satirist whose poetry and personality captured the imagination of Europe.
- ▶ His major works include "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" (1812-18) and "Don Juan" (1819-24).
- ▶ He died of fever and exposure while engaged in the Greek struggle for independence.
- ▶ As a leading figure of the Romantic movement – an attempt by writers and artists to dispel the effects of the scientific, rational movement, and bring back magic and wonder to a humanistic world – Byron is regarded one of the greatest British poets, and one of the most influential.
- ▶ Most of his works are inspired, in fact, by his travels: his Grand Tour of Europe, which led him to spend seven years in Italy, partially inspired Don Juan.
- ▶ He also fought in the Greek War of Independence, where he was considered a national hero by the Greeks.

SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY

She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes;
Thus mellowed to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.


One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express



And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent!


SUMMARY


- ▶ She Walks in Beauty is a short eighteen line poem celebrating female beauty.
- ▶ The beauty of the woman the speaker describes is in both her external appearance and her inner goodness.
- ▶ Although it might generally be classified as a love poem the poet never actually declares that love.
- ▶ He concentrates on the subject's captivating attractiveness and purity.
- ▶ The speaker is a highly biased observer and he seems entirely fascinated by the woman's beauty.
- ▶ He is telling himself what he finds most captivating about this woman but at the same time communicating his feelings to a wider audience – the reader.
- ▶ We are therefore given a portrait of this woman, as seen through someone else's eyes.
- ▶ The speaker is keen to emphasize that it is not all about outward appearances.
- ▶ The early description of her physical beauty is matched by the description of her inner beauty or 'goodness' towards the end of the poem.
- ▶ She almost seems to be unobtainable and, to some extent, we may sympathise with the poet's sense of



STANZA 1: She walks in beauty, like the night.
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
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Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

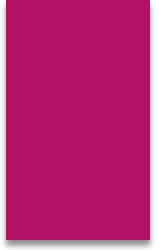
- Describing her as walking "in beauty" makes her beauty less personal and more ethereal.
- "Walk[ing] in beauty" makes her beauty seem more dynamic – as though it's partly her movement and the spring in her step that make her beautiful. She's not just a pretty face in a portrait; it's the whole living, breathing, "walk[ing]" woman that's beautiful.
- Since she is compared to something as cosmic as "night of cloudless climes and starry skies" -- that is, a clear night lit brightly by stars -- the suggestion is not just of personal beauty, but of a celestial, almost spiritual quality.
- her conscience might be as clear as a "cloudless" sky.
- It is not simply that she is dark-haired, with bright eyes (like the dark sky of night, and bright stars,) but "all that's best of dark and bright" are joined in her aspect (looks) and her eyes.
- Everything that is great about both "dark" and "bright" come together in this woman. Essentially, she's got the best of both.

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- Her "aspect" can mean both her facial expression and her overall appearance.
 - So her whole appearance and especially her "eyes" create some kind of harmony between "dark" and "bright."
 - Byron's setting up a binary, or opposition, between "bright" and "dark," but it's important to realize that neither is considered better or worse than the other. Both have aspects that are "best."
 - The picture, created in just these first six lines, is of a woman who is not only blessed with physical beauty, but has a certain quality of harmonious nature about her which increases her attractiveness.
 - A phrase so general as "all that's best of dark and bright" brings to mind the beauty of all things dark and things shining.
 - Everything that's great about both "dark and bright" (line 3) is "mellow'd," or toned down to something that's more "tender" and less intense than the light you get during the day.
 - He has been talking about the starlight or moonlight that would be a "tender light" that is less "gaudy," or bright and blinding, than the light you get during the day.
 - To be possessed of the best qualities of beauty of such a large class of things is substantial indeed.




STANZA 2: One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
How pure, how dear, their dwelling-place.

- In this stanza, Byron talks about how not only is the subject of the poem beautiful, but she has a perfect balance to her beauty.
- "One shade the more, one ray the less" refers back to the first stanza's mention of dark and bright.
- The balance between "shade" and light in the lady's beauty is so perfect that if you added one more "shade," or took away a single "ray" of light, you'd mess everything up.
- She has the right amount of "shade" (darkness) and "rays" (brightness) balanced in the look of her face.
- But for the first time Byron now discusses her thoughts illuminating her beauty.
- Her beauty and "grace" are so hard to define that they're "nameless."
- This "nameless grace" is visible in every lock of her black hair ("every raven tress") and it "lightens" her face.



- "Where thoughts serenely sweet express" means that the thoughts of her mind are so sweet that they make her countenance so.
- The expression on the woman's face shows how "serenely sweet" her "thoughts" are.
- The thoughts, he is saying, express that their "dwelling place" i.e. -- her head, is pure and dear.
- The "sweet[ness]" of this lady's expression suggests that her mind is "pure" and innocent.
- "Dear," in this context (and in British English generally), means both precious and valuable.
- This is a markedly different kind of personification, in which a person's thoughts are being said to have an expression about the body they inhabit.



STANZA 3: And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, so eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent!

- Byron is still talking about her looks, but in this stanza he is focusing on what her looks say about her soul.
- The woman's smiles and her healthy blushes ("tints") that "glow" on her "cheek" and "brow" are serene and "calm." ("Brow" is just a poetic way of saying forehead.)
- The first four lines are telling about her face, which has "smiles that win, the tints that glow" but everything is meant to show that her days are "in goodness spent".
- What has started out as a poem about how a woman looks has come to be about how her looks illuminate what kind of person she is.
- The fact that she looks a certain way means, to Byron, that she is good and kind and has a "heart whose love is innocent".
- She's certainly not just a pretty face – she's also kind and good, which is why she's able to look so "calm" and serene: her conscience is at rest.
- The woman's serenity and "smiles" also reflect the calmness of her mind. Because she's a good person, her "mind" is at "peace with all below" (everyone on earth).
- Byron feels so strongly about this last line that he adds an exclamation point.
- The effect is that while the poem may have seemed to be one about superficial beauty, what the poet really

THEME


- The theme of the poem is the woman's exceptional beauty, internal as well as external.
- The first stanza praises her physical beauty.
- The second and third stanzas praise both her physical and spiritual, or intellectual, beauty.
- The rhyme scheme of the first stanza is ababab; the second stanza, cdcdcd; and the third stanza, efefef.
- Appearances
- Women and Femininity
- Awe and Amazement

POETIC DEVICES

- Lines 1, 2: Simile comparing the movement of the beautiful woman to the movement of the skies.
- Line 6: Metonymy, [the substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing meant, for example suit for business executive, or the turf for horse racing] in which heaven is substituted for God or for the upper atmosphere.
- Lines 8-10: Metaphor comparing grace, a quality, to a perceivable phenomenon
- Lines 11-12: Metaphor and personification comparing thoughts to people; metaphor and personification comparing the mind to a home (dwelling-place)
- Lines 13-16: Metaphor and personification comparing the woman's cheek and brow to persons who tell of days in goodness spent.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

- ▶ Scholars believe that ‘She Walks in Beauty’ was written when Byron met his cousin Mrs. John Wilmont.
- ▶ She wore a spangled black dress, for she was in mourning, and the story goes that Byron was so struck by her beauty that he went home and wrote this poem about her.
- ▶ It is written in iambic tetrameter, three stanzas of six lines each, which is a poetic form mostly used for hymns, [A hymn is a type of song, usually religious, specifically written for the purpose of adoration or prayer, and typically addressed to a deity or deities, or to a prominent figure or personification.] and thus associated both with simplicity, and with chasteness.(pure & virtuous)
- ▶ In fact the poem itself, although a type of love poem, does not really refer to passionate love.
- ▶ The speaker’s awe at the woman’s beauty comes across as just that: the awe that one would feel for a lovely painting, or a picture of nature.
- ▶ It is an especially unusual choice coming from Byron, given that he was mostly known for his lascivious affairs.

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- ▶ The speaker of "She Walks in Beauty" admires the effortless harmony of a woman's beauty, and tells us that it's all about the perfect balance of light and dark in her whole face and figure.
 - ▶ He never says he's in love with her, but the reader can guess that he's attracted to her – after all, he can't stop talking about her hair, her eyes, her cheeks... the list goes on.
 - ▶ He starts telling us that her good looks are really a reflection of her inner goodness.
 - ▶ And purity! She's so innocent! Her "mind is at peace"! There's nothing going on between them, honest! At least... not on her side.
 - ▶ By the end of the poem, it seems like the speaker is protesting a little too much.
 - ▶ By insisting repeatedly that the lady is pure and that her "love is innocent," it's hard not to suspect that he perhaps wishes that weren't the case.