

She Walks in Beauty by Lord Byron

The one with the beautiful woman

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 emphasise 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 longing.

Key Quotes:

- The title and opening line 'She walks in beauty' celebrates female beauty, a portrait of a woman through someone else's eyes.
- References to light suggests an inner radiance - 'starry skies' and 'tender light'.
- Sense of mystery surrounding her - she is compared to the darkness of night and 'raven tress' is associated with bad omens.
- Suggestion of a recent encounter as description is superficial - 'smiles that win, the tints that glow' suggests inner modesty and she is loved by all.
- Final words - 'A heart whose love is innocent!' is the first time love is mentioned and her beauty is described both internally and externally.

Context:

- Byron was a leading figure of the Romantic movement and liked to break conventions.
- Byron's private life was very public and he was known for his many relationships with different women.

Structure:

- At the beginning of the poem, Byron expresses his admiration for the woman and as the poem progresses he then speaks about her inner 'goodness'. He ends the poem with the idea of 'love.'

Possible Themes and Links:

- Relationships and love - Sonnet 43, Cozy Apologia and Valentine

The word 'she' could suggest an air of mystery around the woman because he doesn't know her. She could be anyone. The verb 'walks' could imply that everything about her is beautiful. It is not just her physical appearance that he admires but everything about her is beautiful even the way she moves.

Byron could use the simile 'like the night' to symbolise that this woman is different to all other women he has admired because he breaks the ordinary conventions of romantic poetry. For example, Shakespeare compares someone to 'a summer's day'.

The imagery used here is romantic and is mysterious just like the woman he is describing. Byron could be suggesting she is like the stars in the sky and is both lighting up the darkness and unobtainable.

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.

This could imply that her beauty is understated and natural. He admires how effortless her beauty is.

Byron uses a contrast of 'dark and bright' throughout the poem. This could suggest that both 'dark' and 'bright' come together in this woman to create perfection and balance.

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.

Byron is admiring her perfection.

Byron is admiring not only her physical appearances but her 'inner beauty'. Her 'sweet' thoughts match her external beauty.

By using the adjective 'raven' this could suggest an element of danger about the woman. Byron is also breaking conventions of the stereotypical sense of beauty.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,

By using the adjective 'eloquent' this could suggest that her beauty is clear and sophisticated.

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 admiring her innocence and her kindness.

In this stanza, Byron is zooming into specific details of her face. 'The smiles that win' could suggest that she has the best smile he has ever seen.

Lord Byron

Why does Byron only mention 'love' in the last line? There are many interpretations for this. It could suggest that he is just physically attracted to her so he doesn't 'love' her. However, it could suggest that by writing the poem in the order he does shows the process of falling in 'love' with someone and he realises at the end that he does 'love' her.