

Revision Guide



*She Walks in
Beauty*

Lord Byron

Scrbply.

What

tender

light

She Walks in Beauty

Lord Byron

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,
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

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!

A still life painting depicting a table covered with a white, patterned cloth. On the table, there are several objects: a glass bottle, a small box, a container with a white substance, and a glass vase. A book is placed on a small, ornate wooden table in the foreground. The background is dark and atmospheric.

VOCABULARY

Climes - places that are known for good weather

Aspect - face / features

Mellowed - softened

Gaudy - extravagantly bright

Impaired - weakened, in this instance also 'hidden or obscured'

Grace - elegance, spiritual alignment and kindness

Raven tress - black hair, like a raven's dark black feathers

O'er - over

Serenely - peacefully

Dwelling-place - living place

Eloquent - well spoken, good at expressing and communicating



SUMMARY

She walks in beauty, like a night that is full of cloudless, warm weather and starred skies - all the best things about darkness and brightness are present in her face, and especially in her eyes. So, her beauty is softened in that tender evening light (moonlight), which has a kind of spiritual power that God never fully expresses in the strong light of garish daytime.

An extra shadow, or a little less light, would half-ruin the unnameable grace that waves through every dark curl of her hair, or softly lightens over her face, where thoughts that are calm and sweet express themselves - how dear, how pure the face is where they live.

And on her cheek, and over her forehead, so soft, so calm, yet so clear and communicative - I see her winning smiles, her glowing complexion, that show me she spends her days being a good person, she has a mind that's at peace with everything on earth, and a heart whose love is innocent!

SPEAKER + VOICE

The poem is written in a melodic way, as if it is a song. It expresses the speaker's idealisation of love for a woman whose inner and outer beauty are perfectly aligned, almost as if she is divinely blessed. It's almost as if the speaker has a crush on the addressee and can't stop thinking about her - for him, she is almost otherworldly or saintly, representing the divine beauty of the universe in corporeal form, as she fully embodies both darkness and brightness within her, yet remaining graceful and good at all times in her soul.

LANGUAGE

Alliteration - 'cloudless climes and starry skies' - the opening imagery of the poem creates a perfect, beautiful setting for the lady, the idealised subject of Byron's poem. On the surface the poem seems idealistic, however the **adjective** 'starry' perhaps implies that there is something fated or tragic about the relationship - as traditionally in literature references to the stars convey the idea that fate watches over and predetermines people's lives on earth - Shakespeare, for instance, calls Romeo and Juliet 'star-crossed lovers'; we could intimate that there is something similarly ill-fated about the lovers in this poem.

Sibilance - 'So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,' - the soft **sibilant** 's' and **fricative** 'l' sounds in this line convey the gentleness and gracefulness of the lady's beauty. This is echoed in later lines, such as 'Where thoughts serenely sweet express'; the poem then begins to pick up other alliterative sounds such as the 'w' in the phrase 'Which waves in every raven tress'.

Semantic field - The **adjective** 'raven' suggests perhaps a touch of ambiguity about the woman, as ravens typically convey a gothic atmosphere of darkness (further conveyed by the semantic field of darkness: 'dark', 'raven', 'night', 'shade') - something which initially may seem counter to the lady's heavenly and ethereal beauty, but, the speaker asserts, her darkness in fact only enhances her appeal as she embodies the 'best of dark and bright' equally.

Antitheses - 'dark and bright' / 'One shade the more, one ray the less' - these antithetical oppositions are perhaps evocative of good and evil, as darkness and light are often used in literature to symbolise this dichotomy. This creates an unsettling undertone to the poem - suggesting that the woman's grace and calmness, her beauty and divine qualities are offset against something darker, which is equally alluring. Nevertheless, **the end of the poem** seems to resolve this complexity by offering a final comment on the lady: 'days in goodness spent, / A mind at peace with all below, / A heart whose love is innocent!' - the speaker seems to affirm several times that the lady is ultimately good, pure, innocent and peaceful.

STRUCTURE + FORM

Title - the title and opening line of the poem convey the sense that the unnamed subject of the poem is surrounded by a magical force called 'beauty', which makes her appear stunning wherever she goes. As the speaker breaks down the different aspects which make the lady beautiful, we realise that her character is just as important as her external appearance.

Exclamatory sentence - 'A heart whose love is innocent!' - the exclamation at the **end of the poem** implies that the speaker cannot contain his feelings, he is so emotional and overwhelmed in a positive way by his reverence and love for the lady.

iambic tetrameter - the poem follows a **regular structure** of three **sestets (six line stanzas)**, which combine **iambic tetrameter** with an **ABAB rhyme scheme** to create a musical, hymn-like quality to the lines that propels the momentum of the poem forwards. There is a simultaneous sense of harmony and variety achieved through the alternate rhyming lines.



CONTEXT

The poem was written in 1814, after Byron attended a party at the home of Lady Sarah Caroline Sitwell in June of that year and met a woman whose beauty took his breath away. The identity of the woman is debated, but many scholars think that it was Mrs. Anne Beatrix Wilmot, the wife of Byron's first cousin, Sir Robert Wilmot (!).



Drawing of Mrs. Anne Beatrix Wilmot

TASK 1

Lord Byron was famously called 'mad, bad and dangerous to know' by one of his ex-lovers - Lady Caroline Lamb. How far do you think the poem above confirms or denies this perspective on him?

Romanticism - Byron was one of the leading 'Romantic' poets - the Romantics were a group of writers, artists and musicians who lived in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Their work formed an opposition to the normal trend of the time, the 'Age of Reason' which favoured logic and intellect over emotion - Romantic literature, therefore, seeks to celebrate and embrace all of life's emotions, it relies on intuitions and feelings as potent spiritual experiences. It also encourages readers to accept the bad experiences along with the good as valid and important aspects of living a full, honest life. Romanticism also foregrounds the beauty and power of Nature (which they typically viewed as a manifestation of God's power on earth) - many Romantic poets sought to capture the feeling of 'the sublime' in their work. The sublime is a curious human experience, where a person is struck by feelings of awe, fear and respect when in the presence of a powerful, beautiful and dangerous natural phenomenon - sometimes this may be an aspect of nature, such as a mountain or volcano, but it is also often conflated with feelings of love, when the speaker in a poem is chasing his or her ideal partner, or meets a person who feels powerfully superior to them.

TASK 2

Read **Wordsworth's** 'She was a Phantom of Delight', and **Keats's** 'Bright Star'. How do these poems echo similar Romantic sentiments to Byron's 'She Walks in Beauty'? Which is your favourite, and why?



ATTITUDES

Beauty isn't just about appearances - while the lady is physically attractive, the speaker conveys that this isn't the only thing that makes her appear beautiful - in fact, the harmony of the woman's inner and outer beauty creates a sense of perfection. She is in alignment with the universe and divinity, reminding him of 'cloudless climes and starry skies'. The effect of the light at this particular moment in the evening creates a sense of 'nameless grace' within her.

Ideal love can seem perfect - the speaker objectifies the woman, he does not seem to have a personal connection with her; he merely admires her from afar. A skeptical reading of this poem would posit that her perfect beauty is in some ways false or appealing purely because she represents an idealistic and hypothetical type of love, rather than the more complex reality.

Darkness is not always negative - the mixture of 'dark and bright' creates a powerful, enigmatic portrayal of the woman - there is a suggestion that her dark hair, her appearance at nighttime as well as her alluringly dark eyes all add to her attractiveness. These aspects are balanced by the 'sweet'ness of her demeanour and her pleasant expressions, which culminate in the speaker's conclusion that she carries 'a heart whose love is innocent!'

THEMES

Love

Beauty

Appearance vs Reality

The Sublime

Spirituality

Idealism

Romance and Courtship

Emotions

TASK 3

Pick two of these themes, make a mind map and add four separate quotations from the story that relate to it. Make short notes of analysis, explaining how and why each one relates to your theme. What, in your opinion, is the author's final message or statement about each theme that you chose?

A painting of a woman lying down, wearing a white dress, with a dog lying next to her. The dog is looking up at the woman. The background is dark and indistinct.

EXERCISES

1. What, in your opinion, is beauty? Write notes on your own perceptions and beliefs around the idea of 'beauty', trying to define it on your own terms.
2. Would you agree with Byron's portrayal of a beautiful woman? Why / why not? Use evidence from the poem in your answer.
3. Find three references to the divine and the spiritual in the poem. For each reference, explain how it enhances our understanding of the woman's character.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. In what ways and with what effects does Byron use images of natural beauty in the poems in your selection? You may refer to two or three poems in your answer, or range more widely.
2. "The woman in 'She Walks in Beauty' represents a perfect embodiment of love." To what extent do you agree with this statement?
3. Discuss Byron's treatment of The Sublime in relation to the poem.

Find more English Literature and Language resources at www.scrbbly.com