

Edexcel English Literature GCSE

Poetry Collection: Relationships

She Walks In Beauty - *Lord Byron*

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SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY

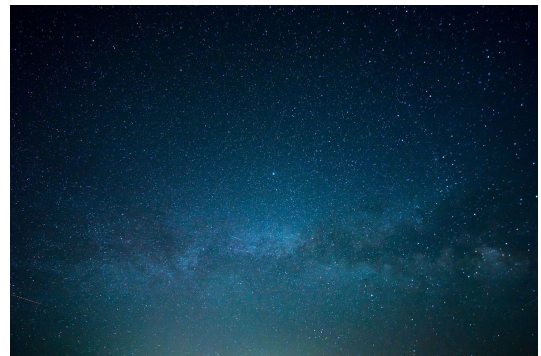
Lord Byron

Brief Summary

The speaker in “She Walks In Beauty” is describing both the intense inner and outer beauty of a woman he seems enchanted by. It celebrates the attractiveness of women and suggests that beauty is a combination of both appearance and personality.

Synopsis

- The speaker introduces an unnamed woman, whom he compares to dark, yet beautiful, imagery.
- Byron continues to use the light and dark contrast in reference to the unnamed woman.
- The speaker then comments that as well as her outward beauty, the woman also has a beautiful personality as well.



Context

Lord Byron (1788-1824)

Byron was a notorious Romantic poet who was frequently embroiled in public scandals: he is considered by many to be the first “celebrity”. After apparently having an illegitimate child with his half sister, Byron married Annabella Milbanke. They soon split up and after this Byron engaged in shameful activities such as affairs and getting into debt. He eventually moved to Lake Geneva in 1816 where he spent time with Mary Shelley, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Claire Clairmont (Mary Shelley’s half sister). He also fathered Clairmont’s child. Byron travelled further throughout Europe and eventually died of a fever in modern day Greece.

Romanticism Movement

Romanticism stemmed from the Enlightenment period. Writers within it wanted to reject the cold unemotional rationalism of enlightenment culture - which had a focus on objective science, logic and rationality - and instead use a more emotional and subjective view of the world, looking to the beauty of nature and past life. They used their art to protest against the industrial, changing face of the world.

The romantic writers would also follow enlightened values of protesting institutions and sources of power (church / monarch / army), and use their work to comment on society and how it should be reformed. They tended to use everyday language to make poems accessible to all,



and can be considered a reaction to the industrial revolution, as they'd express their dislike of urban life and embrace of nature. They'd also deal with loss primarily through writing poetry, and would often focus on larger, general themes of love, loss, and grief, rather than a specific focus on an individual.

The title "She Walks In Beauty"

The "She" is unnamed both in the title and in the poem - speculation caused by the choice to make her anonymous.

The verb "walk" connotes advancing both in time and space.

She Walks In Beauty

Echos Shakespeare's "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day", only comparing his subject to night rather than day.



She Walks In Beauty

The harsh consonant sounds refer to foreign countries, sibilance for sense of wonder in the Romantic style that compares femininity to nature. Question of limits of literature – what can/can't be expressed, and how nature required for both literature and life. Two sets of alliteration, harsh and soft, used to contrast.

Image of intimacy contrasts the third-person narrative perspective.

Syntactic parallels are used to extend the theme of comparison and contrast.

Theme of darkness vs light, also a relationship built on appearance. 'raven' usually associated with an omen, unconventional.

Cataloguing beauties in blazon technique typical of era.

Uses metonymy to represent the woman as a whole.

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!

This simile creates a sense of the sublime.

This is the extended simile of eyes like stars, written in a superlative sense and builds on antithesis. This antithesis could perhaps act as a mirror of confusion in his feelings for his cousin. Second line has a metrical inversion – trochee - where stress instead goes on 'meet'.

There are heavy consonant sounds used for contempt, connotations to the divine, alliteration, perhaps an extended criticism of other women who are superficial.

Imperfect equilibrium, but also lack of identity

Describing 'thoughts serenely' – connotations of virginity and the divine, patronising, misogynistic, mind as a metaphorical home for the thoughts

The cluster of three along with the intensifier "so" creates a claustrophobic and confusing sentence to reflect the complex relationship and love explored in the poem.

Implying that inner purity/ beauty reflects in the exterior.



Perspective

The poem is written from the perspective of a man who is in love with both the physical appearance of a woman and her personality. However, Byron doesn't use any **first-person pronouns** in the narrative of the poem. Instead it's written in the **third person** which could suggest that the speaker's love for the woman is **unrequited**.

Structure

Iambic Tetrameter

IAMBIC TETRAMETER | Technique where the poet uses eight syllables in each line, with pairs of sounds going da-DA with the emphasis on the second syllable.

Most of the lines in the poem are written in **iambic tetrameter**. This **rhythm** adds momentum to the narrative which perhaps mimics the pursuit of the woman taking place.

**She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;**

This lyric form therefore builds the intensity of the speaker's love and fixation with the poem's subject.

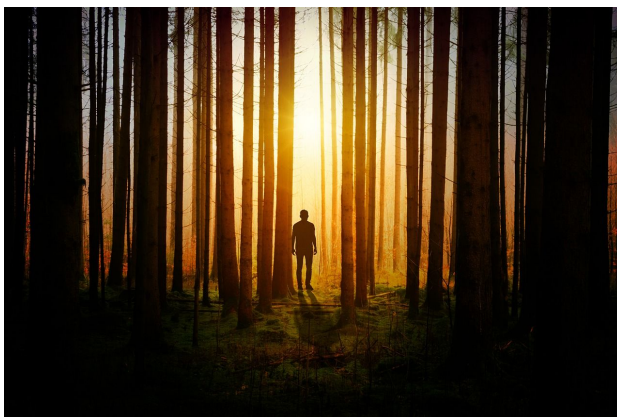
However, certain lines are not in **iambic tetrameter** and makes them stand out from the rest of the poem, this signifies to the reader that they are important. For example, the line:

Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

Does not fit in the meter. Here, Byron may be emphasising this line because it criticises superficial women which contrasts to the angelic figure he describes as the subject of the poem.

Regular Rhyme scheme

The **rhyme scheme** is a constant ABABAB. These controlled and **regular rhymes** contribute to the steady obsession and admiration the speaker appears to have with



the subject of the poem. The **enjambment** makes clear that he cannot pause to take a breath while describing her beauty.

Language

Semantic field of spirituality.

The examples of language used: ***“she walks in beauty like the night”, “gaudy day”, “nameless grace”, “a mind at peace with all below”*** - all **connote beauty on a spiritual level**. For example, the reader is reminded of walking in the light of God which provides a sense of biblical transcendence.

Blazon

BLAZON | Poetic device whereby the speaker uses metaphor, simile, hyperbole, and similar literary techniques to catalogue a woman’s physical features.

Byron catalogues the poem’s subject by describing her distinctive, angelic physical features, to emphasise her physical beauty and attractiveness. For example, the lines:

***“Meet in her aspect and her eyes;
Which waves in every raven tress,
And on that cheek, and o’er that brow,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,”***

These descriptions demonstrate how Byron’s speaker finds the woman irresistible and he is clearly devoted to his love towards her. By using such a traditional method of describing a woman in poetry (the techniques of **blazon** was popularised by Petrarch) the poet could be emphasising how deeply the speaker feels in love with the subject of the poem.

Metonymy

Byron uses the phrase ***“with all below”*** to suggest to the reader that the woman is positioned higher than others societally due to her beauty and grace. Additionally, ***“raven tress”*** refers to the subject’s hair, suggesting its majestic beauty.

METONYMY | A figure of speech used to refer to an object, concept or person.



Imagery

Byron uses a great amount of **imagery** which appeals to the reader's **sense of sight** in order to reflect the outer beauty of the poem's subject. It allows the reader to better visualise the subject's beauty, of which the poet is fixated on. For example, the setting is described through "**night**", "**starry sky**" and "**cloudless climes**".

Comparisons

She Walks In Beauty & Neutral Tones

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both revolve around a character who isn't named, from the perspective of a speaker connected to that person and who finds that the addressed character has a large impact on them. The speakers centre on a significant point in their lives. Used imagery to reflect the speaker's feelings.
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The two poets focus on different periods of a relationship - in SWIB, Byron focuses on a new relationship / attraction whereas in NT, Hardy is reflecting on an ended relationship. NT is centred on the past whereas SWIB is centred on the current. Byron's houses a more celebratory tone, whereas NT has a more regretful and somber tone.

She Walks In Beauty & Sonnet 43

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both poems use religious language - "if God chose" for Sonnet 43 & "tender light which Heaven to gaudy day denies". Both poets were writing during the romantic period - published during the nineteenth century - so share a similar contextual background. They both utilise a very similar theme of love and beauty and both are addressed to someone.
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The poets' use of structure is very different - whilst Browning uses a sonnet, Byron chooses to use iambic tetrameter. They also have differing rhyme schemes - whilst they both have a regular rhyme scheme, Sonnet 43 also uses some half rhyme.

