She Walks in Beauty

POEM TEXT

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!

SUMMARY

The speaker compares a beautiful woman—who is walking—to a clear night sky full of bright stars. The finest light and darkness come together in harmony in this woman's appearance, particularly within her eyes. This gentle and delicate play of light is heavenly—indeed, heaven usually refuses to grant this supernatural light to the showy daytime.

A touch more shade or even one ray of light would have greatly diminished the woman's beauty. This beauty, which is hard to put into words, shows itself in every strand of the woman's hair, and gently falls on her face. Her sweet, angelic emotions play out on her face, revealing how pure and precious this woman is.

On the woman's cheek and forehead—softly and calmly, but noticeably—appear winning smiles and a glowing skin tone. These features reveal that the woman spends her days virtuously, that she possesses a peaceful mind, and that she has an innocent, loving heart.

THEMES

BEAUTY AND HARMONY

As its title might suggest, "She Walks in Beauty" is a poem that praises a woman's beauty. More specifically, it presents that beauty as a kind of harmony that is as perfect as it is rare. Indeed, that's the main point of the poem—that this *particular* woman's beauty is practically unparalleled *because* of the exquisite harmony and visual balance of her looks. Beauty, the poem thus suggests, is perfection achieved through harmony. And as the poem progresses, it makes clear that this harmony is delicate and fragile—potentially altered by even the smallest of changes.

The poem begins by establishing a sense of the speaker's wonder at the woman's majestic beauty. The speaker doesn't say that the woman walks beautifully—but that she walks *in* beauty. This unusual construction helps with the sense that the woman's beauty is truly remarkable, so vast and impressive that it seems to surround this woman like an aura or cloud. The poem quickly reveals what it believes to be the source of such beauty: the woman's physical appearance brings together "all that's best of dark and bright." This suggests that beauty is a harmony between distinct elements—darkness and light. Beauty takes the "best" of these elements and places them in a delicate balance.

The poem then expands on this marriage of light and dark in stanza 2. Here, beauty is presented as almost beyond language, a "nameless grace." The complex and intensely beautiful interplay between light ("ray[s]") and dark ("shade") is made possible only by the shape and contours of the woman's physical appearance. This reinforces the idea that beauty is a kind of perfection achieved through harmony.

Part of the power of beauty is in its rarity. As lines 5 and 6 make clear, the woman's harmonious beauty is not an everyday occurrence—this interplay of light and dark is the exclusive preserve of "heaven," not the "gaudy day[s]" of life on earth. Beauty, then, also has an air of the divine or supernatural that contributes to this sense of rarity—comparable to sighting a comet or eclipse, perhaps. Furthermore, beauty is all-the-rarer *because* the harmony required for it to exist is so fragile. In the second stanza, the speaker outlines how even one shade—or one ray—out of place in the interplay of light and dark on the woman's hair would upset her beauty; indeed, it would be "half impaired."

It's also worth noting that the common literary associations of darkness tend to be mystery and fear (in the works of Edgar Allan Poe, for example). Contrastingly, light is often linked to

purity, beauty, and love (e.g., Carol Ann Duffy's "Valentine" or Shakespeare's "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?") The beauty in "She Walks in Beauty" depends on *both* light and dark, bringing them together in harmony. Accordingly, the woman's beauty is all the more powerful and uncommon. "She Walks in Beauty," then, is a poem that cherishes physical beauty and perfection. In the figure of the woman that it addresses, it sees an unparalleled example of perfect beauty and seeks to explain it, even though it may prove impossible to characterize its "nameless grace," as a type of rare harmony that brings together light and dark.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-6
- Lines 7-10
- Lines 13-15

INNER BEAUTY VS. OUTER BEAUTY

While "She walks in Beauty" primarily focuses on physical beauty, it also explores the relationship between inner beauty and outer beauty. It portrays these concepts as closely interconnected. Indeed, the woman's outer appearance is read as a sign of her inner serenity, peacefulness, and innocence.

The poem develops a sense of physical beauty before introducing the idea that this type of beauty is linked to a person's interior state. Lines 1-10 help the reader grasp just how rare and powerful this woman's beauty is, which is further presented as a delicate—near impossible—balance between light and dark.

The poem then shifts, however, and begins to discuss the relationship between this outer loveliness and the woman's inner self. The woman's face is portrayed as the site on which her thoughts are "expressed." These thoughts, in turn, are characterized as "serenely sweet"; the poem maps the harmoniousness of the woman's beauty onto her presumed inner state (that is, since she is so lovely, her thoughts must also be lovely). Indeed, the expression of her thoughts on her face serves to reinforce the purity and "dearness" (preciousness) of their "dwelling-place." This could be interpreted as the thoughts reinforcing the woman's outer beauty, or perhaps they speak of a kind of beauty that incorporates both physical appearance and personality/character.

The third stanza picks up on the development of lines 11 and 12, focusing on the relationship between inner and outer beauty. The speaker lists the woman's fine features—her "cheek," "brow," "smiles," and "tints" (skin)—and suggests that they express an inner goodness. In other words, her good looks are the sign of good virtues: the speaker believes that woman spends her days in "goodness," has a peaceful mind, and a loving, innocent heart.

Outer beauty, then, becomes a symbol of inner beauty. Indeed, this inner beauty *enhances* the outer beauty because, if the outer beauty is linked to the woman's facial expressions, these expressions are the result of inner emotions. Her outer beauty and inner "goodness" are in a kind of feedback loop, each intensifying the other.

Of course, it's up to the reader to decide how much this idea convinces them. The poem spends most of its time focusing on physical beauty, and the reader learns little about the woman other than what the speaker tells them. Regardless, in the speaker's opinion at least, outer beauty is a reflection of inner beauty—and indeed, both are in harmony with one another.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Line 10
- Lines 11-12
- Lines 13-18

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

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

The poem opens with the same words that form the title: "She walks in beauty." These four simple words quickly create an atmosphere of admiration and mystery. The reader gathers that the poem is, most likely, going to praise a woman's beauty. But this isn't a beautiful woman taking a walk, nor a woman walking beautifully—beauty is something that she walks *inside* of.

The caesura break after "beauty" allows the reader to consider what it means to be *in* beauty, as opposed to merely beautiful. That said, the meaning here is fairly ambiguous. It could be that the woman "walks in beauty" because, as a prime example of beauty, she is in a way at its gravitational center. In other words, beauty is drawn to her and surrounds her. This is supported by the idea in lines 3 and 4 (that "dark and bright" light are drawn to the woman's appearance). It could also be that her own beauty somehow *makes* the world around her more beautiful—like an aura of beauty that surrounds her as she walks. The contrast between "night" and "starry skies" also sets up the poem's central idea: that beauty is a kind of perfection achieved through harmony. In this particular case, it's specifically through a delicate balance of "dark and bright."

An already complicated sentiment is complicated further by the simile that follows. Either the woman, the way she walks, or beauty itself is compared to "the night / of cloudless climes and starry skies." It's a fairly elusive simile because it's not clear exactly which elements of the sentence are being compared—though arguably this heightens the sense of

mystery around the woman's unparalleled physical beauty.

The poem also specifies a particular *kind* of night. These are nights when there isn't a cloud in the sky and the stars are shining bright. Here, then, the poem starts to develop its interplay of light and dark—an antithesis that is resolved in the beauty of the woman. The heavy alliteration (and sibilance) here is deliberately ornamental and decorative, and is meant to suggest physical beauty:

> Of cloudless climes and starry skies;

Also worth noting is the way in which the first two lines are paired together through enjambment—they are part of the same sentence. Line 2 is then end-stopped, further reinforcing the sense that the first two lines make a distinct pair. This is quite common in the poem and is suggestive of the idea of beauty as a kind of harmony or perfection—the two lines joining to make each other complete.

LINES 3-6

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.

In lines 3 to 6, the poem develops its key idea: that beauty is perfection achieved through harmony. What's more, the specific beauty of this woman is the result of the balance between darkness and light (which is, of course, facilitated by her physical appearance).

Lines 3 and 4 make clear that the woman's beauty represents a marriage of "dark and bright" that brings together the "best" of both. Picking up on the idea that the woman, by walking in beauty, is in a way at beauty's gravitational center, perhaps "the best of dark and bright" are irresistibly attracted to her for the very same reason. That is, her beauty is a kind of unstoppable force that pulls darkness and brightness towards it, before placing them in perfect balance (through the way they play on her face, for example). Line 4 represents the poem's first metrical variation, in which the first foot of the iambic tetrameter is substituted for a trochee (stressed-unstressed):

> Meet in | her as- | pect and | her eyes;

This makes the verb—"meet"—seem all-the-more urgent, as though there is something unstoppable about the woman's beauty. The consonance of /t/ sounds and sibilance also create a sense of cohesion throughout these two lines via repeated sound (note that "aspect" essentially means her features):

> And all that's best of dark and bright
> Meet in her aspect and her eyes;

As in the poem's first two lines, lines 3 and 4 *and* lines 5 and 6 are grouped into pairs by enjambment and end-stopping. If the poem is primarily about beauty as a type of harmony, then the pairing off of lines is the poem's way of hinting at its own delicate balance and harmoniousness. Indeed, the way that the lines are controlled here gives them a fragile quality, with lines 3 and 5 both adding a conjunction ("and" and "thus") that carries on the stanza's discussion of the woman's beauty.

With the woman's beauty now linked to the harmony of darkness and light, the poem emphasizes just how powerful and uncommon this resulting beauty actually is. In her beauty, "dark and bright" are "mellowed" (calmed or dimmed) to a light more suited to "heaven" than is the harsh daylight found on Earth. In other words, instead of stark brightness or total darkness, the two combine to create a soft, soothing light. "Mellowed" also alliterates with "Meet" and thus links cause and effect: the *meeting* of light and dark through the woman's physical beauty is what *mellows* them into something heavenly.

LINES 7-10

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;

The first four lines of the second stanza reveal the way in which this woman's beauty both depends upon and results in a delicate harmony of darkness and light.

This stanza develops the sense that this harmony is extremely fragile (and thus uncommon). In fact, this harmony is so delicate that "one shade the more" or "one ray the less"—in other words, a single passing cloud or ray of sunshine—could upset this harmony.

This is perhaps a testament to both the general beauty of the woman *and* that she looks especially beautiful in the light she "walks" in. Either way, the point that the poem is making is that this beauty is doubly powerful because it is the result of such delicate balance. The caesura in line 7 helps develop this sense of delicate balance, with the line being equally balanced either side of the comma (as though each side were level on a set of scales).

The poem here is specifically talking about the woman's hair ("every raven tress") and face. The use of "Had" in line 8 means "would have," rather than marking a sudden shift into the past tense. Again, it's all about making this beauty seem almost impossible. Indeed, the poem even admits that *describing* such beauty is practically impossible, characterizing it as "nameless grace" (though of course, the speaker makes an attempt regardless).

The poem uses heavy assonance here across four words: "nameless grace / Which waves in every raven tress." This, combined with the continued sibilance ("nameless grace /

Which waves in every raven tress") and the alliterative "Which waves" and "O'r/o'er," foregrounds the poem's attempts to put a "name" to the woman's "grace" (that is, to her beauty)—to try and capture a sense of beauty through words. The sound devices here are almost self-consciously poetic, showing the speaker's attempt to do justice to beauty through sonic ornamentation and prettiness.

LINES 11-12

Where thoughts serenely sweet express,
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

Lines 11 and 12 mark a significant shift in the poem, one which takes hold until the poem's end. Whereas lines 1 to 10 have dealt exclusively with the woman's physical beauty—trying to describe it, explain it, and show its rarity—here the poem begins to discuss *inner* beauty too.

The speaker is fixated on the woman's face still (set up in line 10), but the end-stop there creates a pause that allows for the discussion to move beyond surface attractiveness. The speaker now considers the woman's interior life, suggesting that her thoughts are expressed on her face—and the "serenely sweet" way in which they do so conveys purity and "dearness" (preciousness). From here on in, the speaker is solely concerned with the idea that outer beauty is a reflection of inner goodness and virtue. That is, the speaker equates good looks with good morals.

In an effort to bring this "sweetness" to linguistic life, line 11 is highly sibilant. In fact, five out its eight syllables contain sibilance:

Where thoughts serenely sweet express,

Line 12 uses diacope in the close repetition of "How" to pick up on this sense of intensity ("How pure, how dear"), the speaker reaching a new rhetorical height as observations of the woman's beauty continue to develop. Furthermore, the alliteration of "dear" and "dwelling-place," coupled with the consonant /r/ sounds of "pure," "dear," and "their," continues the poem's elaborate—almost "gaudy"—ornamentation. In other words, these poetic devices represent the poem's attempt to create its own beauty through sound—one which can match its subject.

LINES 13-18

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!

The final stanza develops the poem's discussion of inner and outer beauty. It begins by listing more of the woman's physical attributes—her "cheek," "brow," "smiles," and "tints" (skin)—before linking them to inner "goodness," a peaceful mind, and a loving, innocent heart. All this, the poem appears to claim, can be read in the woman's appearance.

Interestingly, the stanza begins with an "And" (a conjunction) even though the last line of the previous stanza was end-stopped with a full-stop. Essentially, then, this is a continuation of the sentiments of lines 11 and 12. Perhaps the speaker's thoughts have become deeper and more profound—as if within the pause of the stanza break the speaker has entered the next "layer" of contemplation. As with line 12, line 13 employs diacope, repeating "and" on either side of the caesura and following each with a similar /o/ sound (And on that cheek, and o'er that brow"). There is more diacope (plus sibilance) in the next line with "So soft, so calm," the repetition "so" emphasizing just how very soft and calm this woman is.

This all suggests that the speaker's gaze is intensifying, with the woman's appearance now observed with a heightened specificity. This sense that the poem is "zooming in" on more specific features of the woman's beauty is reflected in the increased use of caesura, making the speaker's clauses more compact as the observations become more focused. Looking closely at the woman's "cheek" and "brow," the speaker characterizes them as "soft" and "calm"—both of which can be read as descriptors of her outer *and* inner character. "Eloquent" is more specific to the woman's inner beauty because, essentially, her faces *speaks* of her "goodness."

Lines 13 and 15 use caesuras in much the same way, with similar-sounding phrases on either side of the comma. Again, this suggests balance and harmony, an equal amount of words on each side. It's also in line 15 that the poem reminds the reader of the importance of light and dark in the context of the woman's beauty, specifically with the phrase "the tints that glow." A tint is a shade of color, and this woman's "tints" glow because they reflect—or refract—her inner state. (Of course, it's up to the reader how much they buy into this idea of outer beauty reflecting someone's virtuous personality.)

Lines 16 to 18 conclude the poem by listing the inner characteristics that the speaker perceives in the woman's physical appearance. Her days, the speaker feels, are spent in "goodness." Presumably this is a reference to moral virtue. Her outer beauty—unvexed by worry or stress—also suggests a peaceful mind. The reference to "all below" does not relate to the rest the woman's body, but to her mind and spirit (feeling and emotions are often equated with a kind of *depth*).

Finally, the poem throws out its sole exclamation mark, ending the poem on a high and climactic note. The speaker believes that the beauty of the woman indicates that her heart is loving, and that this love is "innocent." Perhaps this is because she hasn't had to face too much trouble in life or love, but there isn't enough information about who the woman actually is for

the reader to tell.

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

"She Walks in Beauty" makes frequent use of alliteration. For the most part, the alliteration is meant to reflect beauty on a linguistic level. In other words, the alliteration helps the poem itself *sound* beautiful to match the fact that it is talking about beauty. Indeed, it's quite ornate, even showy at times. It draws the reader's attention to the fact that this is capital-P *Poetry*.

The first example of alliteration is in line 2: "cloudless climes and starry skies." The alliteration here is not subtle, and forms two obvious pairs—the hard /c/ sound and the /s/ sound (which is specifically an example of sibilance). As the poem intends to establish beauty as a kind of perfection achieved through harmony (in this case, between light and dark), the pairing-off of sounds creates a sense of harmoniousness; in other words, the sounds—two /c/ sounds in a row followed by two /s/ sounds in a row—create a sense of balance and symmetry.

The next key example is between lines 4 and 5, with "Meet" and "mellowed." "Meet" is a stressed syllable, which opens the line with a trochee and upsets the poem's iambic tetrameter:

> Meet in her aspect and her eyes

This stress makes the word "Meet" sound particularly prominent, allowing for the alliteration between this and "mellowed" to ring out despite the relatively wide distance between these two words. "Mellowed" in turn shows the reader what happens when the "best of dark and bright / Meet" in the appearance of the woman. As such, cause is linked with effect through sound.

Line 9 has alliteration through the phrase "Which waves," which is part of the stanza's broader heavy use of consonance, assonance, and sibilance. All of these techniques function as ornamentation, intended to make the stanza sound "prettier" in order to reflect the woman's beauty.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "c," "c," "s," "s"
- **Line 3:** "A," "a," "b," "b"
- **Line 4:** "M," "a," "a"
- **Line 5:** "m," "t," "t"
- **Line 6:** "d," "d"
- **Line 8:** "H," "h"
- **Line 9:** "W," "w"
- **Line 11:** "s," "s"
- **Line 12:** "d," "d"
- **Line 14:** "S," "s," "s"

ANTITHESIS

One of the poem's key ideas is that beauty is achieved through the harmony or balance of different elements. The particular focus of this idea is on light and dark and how the "best" of them is brought together by the woman's beauty. In various lines, this is presented directly using antithesis—for instance, the phrase "dark and bright" in line 3. Other times, the poem puts these two qualities in more general juxtaposition.

Light vs. darkness is perhaps humankind's original antithesis, built into existence from the very beginning as day moves into night and vice versa. Light has also often been associated with goodness, purity, and warmth, while darkness carries connotations of mystery and possible danger (how much these associations stand up to scrutiny is, of course, debatable).

While there are many poems that equate beauty with light, Byron's is fairly unique in its attempt to depict beauty specifically as the *synthesis* of light and dark. The woman's remarkable beauty takes these two opposite elements and brings them together in unique harmony. The poem starts developing this idea from line 2 onwards, with the contrast between the dark of night and the light of the stars. The woman then brings "the best of dark and bright" together by acting as a kind of gravitational center for beauty, attracting light in its best forms and combinations. It's a delicate balance, too, as suggested by line 7, which argues that even the slightest difference in this harmony of light would greatly diminish the woman's beauty.

Where Antithesis appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "starry skies"
- **Line 3:** "dark and bright "
- **Lines 5-6:** "Thus mellowed to that tender light / Which heaven to gaudy day denies. "
- **Line 7:** "One shade the more, one ray the less,"

ASSONANCE

Assonance is used fairly often in "She Walks in Beauty." Across the first two lines, for example, long /i/ sounds repeat in "like," "night," "climes," and "skies." This activates the poem's main simile, joining together the word that signals the simile—"like"—with the object of comparison: the starry night sky.

Assonance is most prominent in the second stanza, which is when the "volume" of the poem's assonance, consonance, and sibilance is loudest. Generally speaking, all of this carefully-crafted sound is meant to create a sense of ornate decoration, the "prettiness" of the echoing sounds representing the beauty of the woman. The assonance of /a/ sounds contributes to this significantly in lines 7-9:

> One shade the more, one ray the less,

Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,

Later, in line 11, the long /e/ sounds in "serenely sweet" combine with sibilance to create a sense of delicate sweetness that is meant to reflect the woman's inner goodness. Lines 13 to 15 then use assonance to build a sense of harmoniousness, with the careful placement of the sounds intended to show the way in which "dark and bright" are brought into delicate balance by the woman's physical appearance:

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,

The repeated /o/ sounds are long, open vowels, filling the lines with a sense of calm and luxuriousness that reflects the serene beauty being described.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "i," "i"
- **Line 2:** "i," "i"
- **Line 7:** "a," "a"
- **Line 8:** "a," "a," "a," "a"
- **Line 9:** "a," "a"
- **Line 10:** "O," "o," "o"
- **Line 11:** "e," "ee"
- **Line 13:** "o"
- **Line 14:** "o," "o," "o"
- **Line 15:** "i," "i," "o"

CAESURA

There are seven caesurae in "She Walks in Beauty." The first of these is after the repeat of the title in line 1. The comma after "beauty" creates a natural pause, allowing space for the complexity of the idea—that the woman walks *in* beauty, as opposed to merely walking beautifully.

Line 7's caesura is perhaps the most beautiful of the set. Here, the poem is developing its antithesis between light and dark ("dark and bright") in its effort to show beauty as a kind of harmony. The use of comma divides the line exactly in half, with dark ("shade") on one side and light ("ray") on the other. This suggests symmetry and balance—precisely the qualities that contribute to the woman's beauty. This specific use of caesura is echoed by the comma in line 13, which also divides the line neatly in half.

In line 12, the caesura helps to intensify the speaker's sense of admiration, facilitating the diacope (the quick repeat of "how") as the poem builds up in intensity. The caesurae in line 14 also help establish diacope ("so"). The presence of not one but two caesurae helps with the sense that the poem is "zooming-in" on the woman's beauty (and the way it perceives beauty more generally), the smaller clauses reflecting a kind of microscopic, forensic attention to detail. The caesura in line 15 supports this idea and also creates another echo of the use of caesura to suggest symmetry and harmony.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** ","
- **Line 7:** ","
- **Line 12:** ","
- **Line 13:** ","
- **Line 14:** "," "," ","
- **Line 15:** ","

CONSONANCE

Consonance is used frequently in "She Walks in Beauty." Its main purpose is to suggest beauty through ornamentation, the "prettiness" of the language representing the woman's physical attractiveness. It also creates a sense of delicateness and fragility—which are the same qualities attributed to the woman's beauty. In the first stanza, this plays out through the repeated, quick and sharp /t/ sounds:

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.

With the first use of the /t/ coming in the word "beauty"—the concept that the poem is trying to define—each subsequent /t/ is a gentle reminder of the poem's subject. It's a delicate sound that brings the tongue to the ridge of the teeth.

As shown above, there are also gentle /n/ and /d/ sounds at play throughout lines 5 and 6 ("Thus mellowed to that tender light / Which heaven to gaudy day denies"). This links these various words, suggesting a comforting "mellowed tenderness" running beneath these lines. Note also the repeated /v/ sounds in line 9 with "Which waves in every raven tress," the soothing voiced consonant adding a sense of melody to this description of the woman's lovely flowing locks.

In the final stanza, the poem employs a number of /l/ sounds. These link the words "eloquent," "smiles," "glow," "love," and arguably "calm" together conceptually. This reinforces the idea that these are all aspects of the woman's inner and/or outer beauty, the common sound suggesting the precise—and rare—nature of this beauty.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “k,” “t,” “k,” “t”
- **Line 2:** “c,” “l,” “l,” “ss,” “c,” “l,” “s,” “s,” “t,” “sk,” “s”
- **Line 3:** “t,” “s,” “b,” “st,” “b,” “t”
- **Line 4:** “M,” “t”
- **Line 5:** “m,” “d,” “t,” “t,” “t,” “n,” “d,” “t ”
- **Line 6:** “n,” “d,” “d,” “d,” “n”
- **Line 8:** “H,” “h,” “ss,” “c”
- **Line 9:** “W,” “w,” “v,” “s,” “v,” “v,” “ss”
- **Line 10:** “s,” “f,” “l,” “l,” “s,” “f,” “c”
- **Line 11:** “s,” “s,” “s,” “x,” “ss”
- **Line 12:** “H,” “w,” “r,” “h,” “w,” “d,” “r,” “d,” “c”
- **Line 14:** “S,” “s,” “s,” “l,” “l,” “t”
- **Line 15:** “l,” “t,” “t,” “l”
- **Line 16:** “t,” “t,” “d,” “s,” “d,” “ss,” “s,” “t”
- **Line 17:** “c,” “ll,” “l”
- **Line 18:** “t,” “l,” “t”

DIACOPE

Diacope is used a few times in "She Walk in Beauty," each time imbuing the line in which it appears with a sensation of emphasis and intensity. The first example is in line 4, with the repetition of "her." This stresses the presence of the woman herself in this line—the fusion of "dark and bright" is only possible because of this woman; it could not happen without "her" features and "her" eyes.

Another example comes in line 12, with the quick repeat of "How." Having established the physical beauty of the woman, the poem is moving on to its discussion of inner beauty. The diacope here represents an intensification of the speaker's passion as they marvel at what they perceive to be the woman's purity and "dearness" (preciousness). In line 14, the repeated "so" serves a similar function. "So" is much like "how" in that it suggests emphasis; the woman is not just "soft" or "calm," she is so soft, and so calm.

In this stanza, too, the speaker's attention is zooming in on the woman's individual features (her "cheek, "brow, "smiles," and skin). The diacope combines with the caesurae to create a sense that the lines, too, are being divided into smaller units—representing the speaker's increasingly microscopic attention to detail, and efforts to render the woman's beauty in precise language.

Where Diacope appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** “her,” “her”
- **Line 12:** “How,” “how”
- **Line 14:** “S,” “so”

ENJAMBMENT

Enjambment is used frequently in the first stanza, twice in the second, and not at all in the last. This is likely not random, and instead seems to reflect certain thematic elements of the poem.

In the first stanza, enjambment is part of a pattern in tandem with the use of end-stops. Every two lines come as a pair, with the first like being enjambed and the second end-stopped. This pairing-off of lines suggests that each one is a self-contained unit, a couple, which expresses a different aspect of the woman's beauty. That said, the poem also toys with this idea by marking each new unit (lines 3 and 5) with a conjunction ("and" and "thus"). This helps the poem create a sense that the woman's beauty is barely containable in poetic form—that it is a "nameless grace" that the speaker will nevertheless try to do justice to.

In the second stanza, the enjambment between lines 8 and 9 suggests an effortlessness of movement and appearance in keeping with the concept of "grace." That is, the woman's "grace" dictates that no punctuation mark gets in the way of the passage from one line to the next. The same can be said of lines 11 and 12 (which are indeed experienced as enjambed despite the comma separating them, because of the way in which the entire meaning of the sentence is only clear upon reading both lines). By the end of the poem, however, end-stops have taken over. This perhaps reflects the speaker's growing boldness, as each line becomes a concise declaration with no room for argument.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “night ”
- **Line 2:** “Of”
- **Line 3:** “bright ”
- **Line 4:** “Meet ”
- **Line 5:** “light ”
- **Line 6:** “Which”
- **Line 8:** “grace ”
- **Line 9:** “Which”
- **Lines 11-12:** “express, / How”

SIBILANCE

"She Walks in Beauty" is practically bursting at the seams with sibilance. This is in keeping with the poems use of consonance, alliteration, and assonance: frequent repeated sounds adds to the poem's overall beauty, which reflects the beauty of the poem's subject (the woman who walks in beauty).

Sibilance has even more specific resonance, however. The /s/ sound is hushed and soft, perhaps reflecting the gentle, peaceful beauty of this woman (which is not "gaudy," or showy, unlike the daylight of line 6). Notice how in line 11 the speaker associates the woman's unparalleled beauty with "thoughts" expressed in a way that is "serenely sweet," which in turn speak of the "purity" and "dearness" (preciousness) from whence they came (the woman's inner *and* outer beauty). The /s/ sound,

then, is intended to invoke this "sweetness" and "grace" throughout the poem, suggesting a kind of gliding quality that chimes with the image of the woman walking *in* beauty. In fact, there's only one line that contains a notable lack of sibilance! This is line 13, and even the /ch/ in "cheek" *could* be considered sibilant by some definitions.

In line 2, the sibilance is both consonantal (in "cloudless climes") and alliterative "starry skies"). The latter is part of two instances of alliteration in the line, and is used to suggest the idea of two distinct elements coming into harmony with one another.

Where Sibilance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "s"
- **Line 2:** "ss," "s," "s," "s," "s"
- **Line 3:** "s," "s"
- **Line 4:** "s," "s"
- **Line 5:** "s"
- **Line 6:** "s"
- **Line 7:** "s," "h," "ss"
- **Line 8:** "ss," "c"
- **Line 9:** "s," "ss"
- **Line 10:** "s," "s," "c"
- **Line 11:** "s," "s," "s," "x," "ss"
- **Line 12:** "c"
- **Line 14:** "S," "s," "s"
- **Line 15:** "s," "s," "s"
- **Line 16:** "s," "ss," "s"
- **Line 17:** "c"
- **Line 18:** "s," "s," "c"

SIMILE

The whole poem hinges on its famous (and only) simile:

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

In all honesty, the intended meaning of the simile is relatively ambiguous. The woman walks in beauty—but it could be either that she *herself* is "like the night"; or that the *way* she "walks in beauty" is what is "like the night"; or even that the *beauty* in which she walks is "like the night." Perhaps all three are meant to be true at once!

Regardless, the simile serves to set up the poem's main idea—that beauty is a kind of perfection achieved through harmony. Notice how subtly contained within the simile is the contrast of light and dark: "starry skies." The night sky, of course, is the presence of light surrounded by its absence. Indeed, this is precisely how the speaker characterizes the woman's beauty: as a near-impossible coming-together of the "best of dark and bright."

The simile also refers to a night "of cloudless climes." "Climes" essentially just means climates or weather, so here the poem is referring to place where the night sky is neither blocked by clouds nor diluted by light pollution (though that is a more 20th/21st century problem!). This is suggestive of purity, clarity, and serenity—all traits which the speaker comes to attribute to the woman's outer and/or inner beauty.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "She walks in beauty, / the night / Of cloudless climes and starry skies; "
- **Line 1:** "like"

END-STOPPED LINE

The frequency of end-stops in "She Walks in Beauty" increases as the poem unfolds. In the first stanza, they divide the lines into pairs in combination with the use of enjambment: an enjambed line is followed by an end-stopped one. This pairing-off suggests that every two lines represent a distinct unit. However, the poem plays with this idea by beginning each new unit with a conjunction ("and" and "thus")—making all of the lines part of the same long sentence. This suggests that the woman's beauty can barely be contained by the poetic form. Each stopping point is diminished by the speaker's need to keep hammering home the same point, rendering this beauty in increasingly precise ideas and poetic language.

This sense of precision increases as the poem continues, as the speaker tries to capture the woman's beauty—and understand it—in language that does it justice (even if, ultimately, her beauty might be a "nameless grace"—a beauty that can't truly be portrayed by language). Indeed, every line in the final stanza is end-stopped. This suggests a sense of emphatic sureness—that the speaker is making bold declarations and will entertain no counterarguments when it comes to this woman's beauty. This, in turn, helps the poem build a sense of the speaker's increasing passion and admiration for the woman's beauty, which culminates in the poem's single use of an exclamation mark in its final line.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** ";"
- **Line 4:** ";"
- **Line 7:** ""
- **Line 9:** ", "
- **Line 10:** "; "
- **Line 11:** ", "
- **Line 12:** ". "
- **Line 13:** ", "
- **Line 14:** ""
- **Line 15:** ""
- **Line 16:** ", "

- **Line 17:** “,”
- **Line 18:** “!”

PARALLELISM

The poem's use of asyndeton is closely linked to its use of antithesis. It keeps the poem moving at a rhythmic clip as it discusses the various facets of this woman's beauty, subtly underscoring how delicate and rare is this combination of light and dark that she exemplifies.

The lack of conjunctions between the phrases in line 7, which are further separated by a caesura, creates a sense of inevitability. Just a little bit more shade, or just a little less sunshine, and the beautiful harmony would be thrown off balance. The asyndeton juxtaposes these two conditions—which additionally have parallel grammatical structures—on either side of the comma as if it were a see-saw, creating a sensation of balance within the language of the line itself.

The asyndeton in line 15 is a bit different, and primarily serves to amp up the pace of the line. Note how the lack of conjunction here contrasts with the *two* "ands" of line 13. As the final stanza builds up in intensity, the speaker does away with conjunctions that would slow things down, relying on the reader instead to fill in any blanks. This allows these final few lines to feel all the more urgent.

Where Parallelism appears in the poem:

- **Line 7:** “One shade the more, one ray the less, ”
- **Line 15:** “The smiles that win, the tints that glow, ”

VOCABULARY

Climes (Line 2) - A reference to a geographical region specifically related to its weather; climates. Greece, for example, has sunnier climes than Norway.

Aspect (Line 4) - Aspect here refers both to the woman's face and her general physical appearance.

Thus (Line 5) - A formal term meaning "therefore."

Mellowed (Line 5) - This usage means something along the lines of "softened," and helps establish the sense of gentle and beautiful light.

Gaudy (Line 6) - Gaudy means "showy" or "tastelessly extravagant."

Had (Line 8) - This is an old-fashioned way of saying "would have."

Impaired (Line 8) - Damaged or weakened.

Raven Tress (Line 9) - This is a reference to the woman's hair. A tress is a long lock of hair, and a raven is a dark bird; the speaker is comparing the woman's hair color to that of the bird's feathers.

O'er (Line 10) - A contraction of "over."

Serenely (Line 11) - Calmly and peacefully.

Dwelling-Place (Line 12) - A reference to the woman's physical body and face.

Eloquent (Line 14) - Expressing something in a clear and persuasive way.

Tints (Line 15) - Shades of color.

But (Line 16) - The speaker is using this to essentially mean "and" rather than as a conjunction to introduce any sense of disagreement or change in the speaker's direction.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"She Walks in Beauty" has a simple and regular form. It is comprised of three six-line stanzas, a.k.a. sestets, all of which are iambic tetrameter.

Each sestet serves a slightly different purpose in developing the poem's discussion of beauty. The first is simply to establish the beauty of the poem's subject: a woman seen by the speaker. The speaker develops the idea that beauty is a form of perfection achieved through harmony, particularly in this case through the "meeting" of darkness and light. The rarity of this harmony is also established through the mention of heaven—this is not an everyday, "gaudy" beauty.

The second stanza portrays this beauty as delicate and fragile. Even a slight change to the light—one shade more or one ray less—would greatly diminish this beauty. Line 11 marks a shift in the poem in which the discussion moves beyond physical appearance and starts to consider inner beauty too.

The third stanza picks up on this idea, honing on the individual features of the woman's face and building a composite picture that speaks of inner goodness, peace, and love. In other words, the woman's physical attractiveness is read by the speaker as signal of an equally beautiful interior state. The poem builds to its rhetorical height, denoted by the final—and only—exclamation mark.

METER

"She Walks in Beauty" has a regular metrical scheme throughout: iambic tetrameter. This means there are four poetic feet per line, each consisting of a da DUM syllable pattern.

Looked at broadly, perhaps it is fitting that the poem is so regular in terms of meter, stanza shape, and rhyme—together, these traits denote a sense of order, harmony, and symmetry

befitting the type of rare beauty the poem attempts to describe. On another general point, it's worth remembering that iambs are often associated with walking. Their steady groups of two syllables mimic the alternating combination of left foot and right foot—indeed, extending the analogy further, people themselves have one stronger and one weaker foot (just as the iamb has a stronger and weaker syllable). The way this steady rhythm evokes the woman's walk is evident from the beginning:

> She walks in beau-ty, like the night
> Of cloud-less climes and star-ry skies;

In fact, there is only one deviation from this metrical regularity throughout the whole poem. This happens in line 4, when the line uses a trochee (stressed-unstressed, basically the opposite of an iamb) in the first foot. This places sudden and dramatic stress on the verb "Meet," which helps creates the sense of "dark and bright" being forced together:

> Meet in her as-pect and her eyes;

RHYME SCHEME

The rhyme scheme in "She Walks in Beauty" is highly regular, with each six-line stanza following a pattern of:

> ABABAB

Apart from the slight slant rhyme of "brow," "glow," and "below," in the third stanza, these are all strong, perfect rhymes.

Generally speaking, the neatness of the rhyme scheme is intended to create a sense of harmony and symmetry. Given that one of the poem's main ideas is that beauty is a kind of perfection achieved through harmony, it makes sense that the rhymes would ring out so clearly and cleanly.

Furthermore, the fact that each stanza uses only two different rhyme sounds helps to mirror the poem's central antithesis between light and dark. Each stanza is a kind of fusion between these two different rhyme sounds, just as the woman's beauty brings together the "best of dark and bright."

SPEAKER

The speaker in "She Walks in Beauty" is not specified—given no name, age, occupation, nor gender. This adds to the universality of the poem and suggests that anyone would be able to appreciate this woman's beauty. That said, it's also worth noting that the Lord Byron himself is often equated with the poem's speaker. So the story goes, the poem was written after a party Byron attended at which he saw a particularly beautiful woman (who was the wife of his cousin).

In any case, the speaker is a person preoccupied by a contemplation of beauty, physical or otherwise—though perhaps mostly physical; it's not until past the poem's midway point that the speaker starts to discuss the woman's inner beauty.

SETTING

"She Walks in Beauty" doesn't really have a particular sense of location or place. Primarily, it takes place in the mind of the speaker, who is trying to understand the astonishing beauty of a particular woman. The poem does *evoke* a kind of setting, mentioning a clear and starry night in the opening lines and "tender light" later in the stanza. There is a certain atmosphere, then, one which is constructed on a kind of gentle and delicate light—but it's not really wedded to a particular location. The poem also casts a kind of microscopic gaze on the woman's outer appearance, making this is a part of the setting too.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Lord Byron—George Gordon Byron, 6th Baron Byron to be precise—is one of English literature's most infamous figures. He was part of the British Romantic poets, in particular the second generation (along with Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats). This particular poem was published in his collection *Hebrew Melodies* (1815), which was originally intended to be set to music (which perhaps is reflected in the simplicity of the poem's meter).

Though Byron is now considered one of the English language's foremost poets, his early forays into the literary world were not very successful. Indeed, his first volume of poetry was slammed by the critics. Byron got his own back on the literary establishment by publishing his satire, "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" (1809), which took aim at contemporaries like William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge (a move that he re-evaluated later in life).

Byron does have a number of aspects in common with the usual associations of Romanticism. These include political engagement, extensive travel, and a taste for freedom. That said, he occupies in a place in Romanticism like no other. After publishing his long poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron became a celebrity on a scale that was practically unknown at the time. That poem saw the genesis of the "Byronic hero," a well-educated, cunning, and charming man who has a disdain for authority. Many readers saw Byron himself as the archetype for this hero.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Byron lived during an age of considerable upheaval. For one thing, he was born on the cusp of the French Revolution, when

French citizens overthrew the country's absolute monarchy and showed the rest of Europe how formidable the people, when banded together, could be. The French Revolution, initially at least, was well-received in some quarters in Britain; William Wordsworth, another Romantic poet, praised it in his *Prelude*: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive." Not long before the French Revolution, America had also rebelled against its colonial British rulers. Finally, the late 18th and early 19th century also marked the First Industrial Revolution in England, a time of widespread societal change spurred by new technologies and manufacturing processes.

Byron also strongly admired Greek culture and Byron supported the Greeks in their attempts to win independence from the Ottoman Empire. He spent much of his personal fortune on improving the conditions of Greek ships and soldiers. The Greek side had a number of internal conflicts, with Byron sometimes acting as mediator. It was in Greece that he died in 1824 at the age of 36 from fever.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- A Reading of the Poem — The poem read by Tom O'Bedlam. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PLaNdjAjGU)
- Byron's Scandals — A documentary about Lord Byron's more salacious side. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CR-R0XFHtng)
- Lord Byron's Revenge — Byron launches an attack on the literary establishment—one which helped him make his name. (https://archive.org/stream/bardsscotenglish00byrorich?ref=ol#page/n4/mode/2up)
- Byron's Life and More Poems — A good resource from the Poetry Foundation with biographical details on Byron, plus more of his poems. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/lord-byron)
- A Scathing Review — A review of Byron's first collection of poems, which isn't exactly full of praise! (https://ir.vanderbilt.edu/bitstream/handle/1803/2465/Edinburgh%20Review%20-%20Vol%20XI%20-%20Review%2

LITCHARTS ON OTHER LORD BYRON POEMS

- Prometheus
- The Destruction of Sennacherib
- When We Two Parted

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