

She Walks in Beauty

Overview:

In this poised, serene poem, Byron admires the physical beauty and moral goodness of a young woman and famously compares her to a starry night sky.

Context:

- Lord Byron, one of the second wave of Romantic poets (who prioritised feeling/ emotion over rationality), was famously described as ‘mad, bad and dangerous to know’. He was flamboyant and known for having numerous lovers of both sexes.
- This poem was reputedly written about the wife of Byron’s cousin. He was said to have composed it after seeing her wearing mourning clothes (black) at a party.
- This is a ‘lyric poem’, which was intended to be set to music.

Structure:

- This poem is written in iambic tetrameter (four iambic feet) with a regular rhyme-scheme of ABABAB, which perhaps reflects the gracefulness and delicate balance of the subject (remember, too, that the poem was to be set to music).
- The poet/ voice moves from admiring the general effect of the woman’s beauty, to looking in detail at her hair and face, and then finally exclaims over her goodness and innocence, making this seem to be her crowning glory.

Key Images:

- Dark and light – and the perfect mixture of the two represented by the woman (note how very delicate the balance is – “one shade the more, one ray the less” would “half [impair]” her perfection)
- Delicate verbs and numerous positive adjectives throughout are used to express the speaker’s admiration of his subject.

Potential Comparisons:

Physical description of a person: ‘The Manhunt’



Admiration in a relationship: ‘First Date’/ ‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’

Presentation of a woman: ‘My Last Duchess’