

Module 6: Examining the World to Discover Truth

Topic 2 Content: The Use of Contrast in "She Walks in Beauty"

Introduction

The Use of Contrast in "She Walks in Beauty"


Light and Dark

Conventional and Avant-Garde

Inner and Outer Beauty

Introduction

Lord Byron's poem "She Walks in Beauty" treats the Romantic theme of beauty in a very nontraditional way. By employing a series of contrasts throughout the poem, Byron shows how opposing concepts can create harmony in beauty. Click each of the tabs to examine the use of contrast in the poem "She Walks in Beauty."



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The most notable contrast that Byron employs is the contrast between light and dark. In the first two lines of the poem, Byron contrasts the night, which is inherently dark, with "starry skies," conveying brightness. Byron's speaker then goes on to describe the beauty of the woman as the "best of dark and bright."

The harmony of light and dark continues through the remainder of the poem in the speaker's descriptions of the lady. For example, in the second stanza, Byron describes the woman's grace as a perfect harmony that would be destroyed by "one shade" more and "one ray" less. Just as "shade" and "ray" are opposites, the juxtaposition of "more" and "less" helps to highlight contrasting concepts that tie everything together in perfect harmony.

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Conventional and Avant-Garde

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Light and Dark	<h4>Conventional and Avant-Garde</h4> <p>After Byron portrays the woman as so enchanting that she "walks in beauty," the serenity and charm of the phrase are soon upended by the following idea: Byron chooses to compare a beautiful woman to the night. This word choice was very avant-garde, or revolutionary, in Byron's time when people still revered the work of William Shakespeare. In Shakespeare's famous Sonnet 18, the speaker opens the poem by saying to his love, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" However, the speaker of Byron's poem dares to compare the woman's beauty to the night, an unexpected contrast to conventional poetic motifs.</p> <p>In the second stanza, Byron goes on to describe the woman's dark hair, saying that her beauty "waves in every raven tress." British society of the early 1800s defined feminine beauty as fair-skinned with blond hair. In painting the poem's figure with dark, raven hair, Byron contrasts ideas of conventional beauty with Romantic aspirations for harmony in natural beauty.</p>
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Light and Dark	<h4>Inner and Outer Beauty</h4> <p>Byron chooses to focus not only on the woman's outer beauty but on her inner beauty as well. About halfway through the poem, Byron's speaker observes that the woman openly shows her feelings and thoughts through her face. Her serene thoughts express that the "dwelling place" of her mind is pure and dear.</p>
Conventional and Avant-Garde	<p>The last stanza also touches on the woman's thoughts and character. Her "smiles that win" and the "tints that glow" on her face reveal her "goodness" and "[a] mind at peace." Finally, Byron elects to characterize her heart and soul as innocent.</p>
Inner and Outer Beauty	<p>Overall, the poet conveys to the reader that this alluring woman is beautiful on the outside precisely because she is beautiful on the inside. It is the harmony between one's inner and outer being that makes the poem's subject a figure to be greatly admired.</p>

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