

She walks in beauty 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!

There are plenty of 'explanatory' notes and analyses of this poem available – but how to get students involved with the poem instead of highlighting the alliteration and enjambement etc?

Most commentaries (aimed at students) avoid saying anything negative. I think it is OK not only for students to take against a poem but for teachers to share their own misgivings. Why not set up a for and against situation?

Divide the class into two (defence and prosecution) and sow some ideas taken from the suggestions below and of course encourage them to add their own.

The poem -

<p>Is a lovely expression of someone's appreciation of a woman's beauty. Is carefully crafted. Perfect scansion and rhyme pattern. Makes a thought-provoking point about inner goodness being represented by outer beauty. Also posits an interesting idea: beauty = harmony, where everything, e.g. light and dark, are in balance.</p>	<p>Is a superficial exercise in description of an anonymous woman. For all its grand language, it's impersonal. No sense of real feeling. Is an exercise in exaggeration. It's overblown and implausible, like a valentine verse, only worse. (What do the first two lines actually mean?) The idea that outer beauty is matched by inner goodness is highly unlikely.</p>
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Personally, I prefer Henry Beard's poem 'written by Lord Byron's cat', which begins:

She walks in booties, like a sprite
With pixie feet and fairy toes...

