

# The light and darkness in the poems of lord byron



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Abstract: The thesis is about the analysis of light and darkness in the poems of George Gordon Byron. The analysis is based on the two poems-She Walks in Beauty and Darkness. Key words: light, darkness, Byron, contrast, beauty, fight. As a leading figure of Romantic Movement, George Byron is widely regarded as the most flamboyant and notorious one of the major Romantics. He was the ideal of the Romantic poet, embracing the power of heart over the power of mind and fighting for the independence of Greece.

And he was once described by one contemporary as “ mad, bad and dangerous to know” for his scandalous private life including huge debts, numerous love affairs and rumors of incest with his half-sister. It seems that in his life light was interwoven with darkness. But here, the “ light” in the title is abstracted from She walks in Beauty—“ Thus mellow’d to that tender light/ Which heaven to gaudy day denies. ” And the “ darkness” is from his poem Darkness.

So the analysis of the light and darkness is based on the two poems. She Walks in Beauty - beauty in light and darkness By the contrasts between light and dark, the external beauty of the woman is vividly described and reflected in the first two stanzas. In the beginning, the light of star is contrasted with the shadow of night to emphasize the beauty of the woman. And “ all that’s best of dark and bright” meets in her face and eyes, suggesting that she walks in a dark beauty but she is herself a brighter beauty. Then as the “ tender light” is “ mellowed”, her beauty is contrasted to the “ gaudy” daylight. In the second stanza, Byron writes that “ One shade the more, one ray the less” would diminish the “ nameless grace” of the woman.

Her dark hair and eyes are in contrast with her fair skin while the grace of her “lightens” her face. Then he turns to her inner thoughts that make the woman a pure and dear beauty. In the final stanza, her cheek, brow and smiles that are as beautiful as night serves to convey her inner goodness, peaceful mind and innocent love, which make her an even brighter beauty. Her soft cheek and brow, smiles and glowing tints “tell of days in goodness spent”, a mind at peace and a heart with innocent love. And these wonderful features make her all the more beautiful and brighter.

In the poem, the contrast between light and dark is used to convey the soft beauty of the woman. The dark part of the contrast serves as a reality check to make the woman seem more worldly and real, and yet if she were to have even one bit more light or darkness she would only be “half-impaired”. But possessing a peaceful mind and innocent heart, she can bring forth her “nameless grace” out of darkness, which lightens and enhances her beauty in the speaker’s eyes. Darkness – fight between light and darkness Darkness is one of the bitterest poems of Byron.

It describes the end of world where people desperately struggle to survive by burning everything for light in order to fight against universal cold darkness. Here we can see the fight between light and darkness, between survival and death. In the beginning, the poem tells readers that the author had a dream but “was not at all a dream”. The light of sun was extinguished and the “icy earth” and “moonless air” cause that “men forgot their passions in the dread”. In order to drive off darkness and coldness, men burn everything they can for light and heat. The darkness turns all hearts into “a selfish prayer for light”.

As fires and light fades, men begin to weep or smile cynically or fall into madness. Then after running up of dead animals, men fight for “ a meal brought/With blood” in gloom, war and famine dominating the earth. Next, with men starving to death, those alive feed on the remains of the dead, even dogs attack their masters except one dog. The dog keeps faithful to his master and guards him until death in boundless gloom. Finally, two men remain alive and they are enemies. They set fire to a mass of holy things and as it grows lighter, they “ beheld/ Each other’s aspects–saw, and shriek’d, and died”.

At last, the darkness is the universe. In the poem, darkness is the absolutely dominant force, bringing nothing but famine, death, chaos and depression. And light stands for the feeble and desperate hope for survival. However it fades and disappears and the civilization of human is destroyed as well. The feeble light in contrast with powerful darkness conveys the final fate of the world- collapse and destruction and the gloomy and desperate view of the author who wrote the poem only months after the end of his marriage to Anne Milbanke. Both of the poems above contain light and darkness but their themes are different in any aspects.

The contrast between light and darkness in the two poems serves for conveying thoughts and emotions and enhancing the themes. But the meaning of light and darkness varies from one to another. In *She Walks in Beauty*, Byron repeats the contrast between light and darkness to reflect the external beauty of the woman and emphasize the grace and goodness of her that make her more beautiful. While in *Darkness*, the dominant darkness and

feeble light displays the destruction of civilization and world. We can see Byron is really skillful in employing such a contrast in his poems.

George Byron is often described as the most flamboyant British poet. His voluntary exile-travelling all over the Europe and fighting in the Greek War of Independence remains a legend around the world. While his poetry, along with his life-style, was considered as controversial in his time. Joan Murray, an American poet, once described Byron as “ Wild, audacious, rebellious... half mad by nature; a creature made to tempt and to be tempted, to seduce and to fall, about whom there was but one certainty, that he was irreclaimable”. In my opinion his life and works are even sharper than the contrast between light and darkness.