

The Dynamic Beauty in Byron's Poem *She Walks in Beauty*

Xiuqin Huang

School of Foreign Languages, Guangzhou University of Software, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China

Abstract: *She Walks in Beauty* is Byron's early short lyric, famous for its uniqueness of the aesthetic experience of showing the dynamic beauty of a young lady, being a representative works written in English Romantic period. This paper explores the essential part of the eternal ideals of beauty: the dynamic beauty. As a representative poet of Romanticism, Byron returns to nature and the plain humanity to seek the truth of the beauty in the nature constructed by a divine imagination. By emphasizing the eternal ideals of beauty which appeal to the human heart, the paper analyzes this kind of beauty through its dynamic aspects from three layers: the dynamic use of the words, the dynamic application of the meter and the dynamic image, revealing the dynamic, multi-layer aesthetic experience to reflect the core idea and charm of the poem in emblematic language.

Keywords: the Dynamic Beauty; the Verbs; the Meter; Image; *She Walks in Beauty*

1. Introduction

Gorge Gordon Byron is regarded as one of the greatest English poets and his greatness is highly praised by the readers all around the world. The poet "Byron, widely read in his lifetime, has had a huge number of readers in many countries -probably more than any English poet apart from Shakespeare." *She Walks in Beauty*, one of his most transparent lyrics, is a the three-verse poem depicting the dynamic beauty of the lady as well as the universe in the poem [1]. As a famous English representative poet in the period of English Romanticism, Byron highly praises the female figure, symbol of nature, which is regarded as one of his famous and powerful works. This short lyric is "written after Byron had seen Mrs Anne Wilmot, wife of his cousin Robert John Wilmot, at a party given by Lady Sitwell in Seymour Place. The beautiful Mrs Wilmot, then in mourning, had appeared with dark spangles

on her dress." [2].

The poem consists of three stanzas spanning eighteen lines. Within this concise yet rich composition, the poet skillfully employs powerful verbs to show the movement and diverse rhythms to vividly portray the image of "beauty," creating a dynamic artistic effect.

The enduring appeal of the poem *She Walks in Beauty* has prompted a rich and diverse body of critical scholarship internationally for over a century. Critics not only explore the physical attractiveness but to dig the poem's subjects with profound philosophical and aesthetic dimensions. Beauty in the poem will be analyzed by scholars from three layers: the combination of inner and outer beauty, the dynamic quality of the beauty and the connection to the aesthetic concept of the sublime. Some scholars focus on the thematic explorations of beauty based on the integration of internal and external qualities, its dynamic nature, and its connection to the sublime like Howard Needler's article: 'She Walks in Beauty' and the Theory of the Sublime; some explore the formal and stylistic theme, including studies on prosody, musicality, and linguistic devices; others put an emphasis on the applications of modern literary theories, such as foregrounding, cognitive poetics, and multi-modal discourse analysis; still others concentrate on the comparative studies and translational studies of the poem's aesthetic and semantic integrity in Chinese, for example, Rosida Ana's paper: A Comparative Study of Poetry's structure: "Night" by Blake and 'She Walks in Beauty' by Byron. The academic research demonstrates that the poem's genius lies not only in its subject matter but in its perfect fusion of form and content with a holistic and dynamic vision of ideal beauty.

2. Dynamic Beauty

Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary defines dynamic as "a force that produces changes, action or effects". And according to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in his book *Laocoon: On the Limits of Painting and*

Poetry, he defines a pair of beauty when discussing the limits of painting as well as poetry: charm and beauty. Charm is regarded as beauty in motion or dynamic beauty while beauty actually is seen as static beauty. "Charm is beauty in motion, and is for this very reason less suitable to the painter than to the poet. The painter can only leave motion to conjecture, while in fact his figures are motionless. Consequently, with him charm becomes grimace. But in poetry it remains what it is, a transitory beauty which we would gladly see repeated. It comes and goes, and since we can generally recall to our minds a movement more easily and vividly than forms or colors, charm necessarily in the same circumstances produces a stronger effect than beauty." [3].

Dynamic aesthetics emphasizes the dynamic quality and variability of beauty, holding that beauty not only exists in static forms but more so in the transformation of forms and the process itself, producing changes, action or effects. It explores the dynamic changes in elements of beauty such as form, color, light,

and shadow, as well as how these changes resonate with the themes, emotions, and artistic conception of poetry. It also examines how the movement and variability of beauty in poetry enhance readers' aesthetic experiences and emotional resonance.

She Walks in Beauty masterfully weaves together verbs and nouns to create a harmonious blend beauty of motion and stillness. As shown in table 1 and table 2, there are 13 verbs and 23 nouns. The verbs from the three stanzas that highlight the beauty of movement while the nouns emphasize the beauty of stillness. In the first stanza, 4 verbs with 9 nouns, create an wave of surprise mixed with eagerness to express the poet's rhythm of charm and beauty with every two steps of stillness with one step of motion; in the second stanza, 4 verbs with 5 nouns imply his calmness to face the charm and beauty; in the third stanza, 5 verbs with 9 nouns show the eternal existence of the charm and beauty upon the poet as well as the readers when the poet uses the verb "is" as a kind of "being".

Table 1. Verbs

word	Verb	Verb	Verb	Verb	Verb
Stanza 1	walks	meet	mellow'd	denies	
Stanza 2	(had)impaired	waves	lightens	express	
Stanza 3	win	glow	tell	spent	is

Table 2. Nouns

word	Noun	Noun	Noun	Noun	Noun	Noun	Noun	Noun	Noun
Stanza 1	beauty	night	climes	skies	aspect	eyes	light	heaven	day
Stanza 2	grace	tress	face	thoughts	dwelling-place				
Stanza 3	cheek	brow	smiles	tints	days	mind	peace	heart	love

3. The Dynamic Beauty in *She Walks in Beauty*

3.1 The Dynamic Use of the Words

The verbs collectively depict movement as graceful, meaningful, and alive while the nouns show the gentle motionless situation, blending smoothness, expression, struggle, and vitality to showcase its inherent beauty.

In the opening stanza, the verbs convey gentle, natural, and harmonious motion. "walks" suggests steady, smooth progress; the word "meet" literally means "to intertwine," vividly illustrating the harmonious unity between the lady's beauty and temperament. The original meaning of "meet" evokes a gradual unfolding of "the interplay of light and darkness," allowing readers to visualize the artistic contrast

firsthand, implying connection and interaction. Interestingly the noun "eyes" complements the concept of "meet," blending luminous and muted hues while maintaining dynamic balance. "mellow'd" evokes a soft, calming transformation. "denies" introduces subtle restraint, adding depth and nuance to the movement. Byron masterful use the three words "night," "light," and "bright" to create a unique aesthetic of paradox. Night, as the embodiment of darkness and stillness, forms a striking contrast with light and brightness, which accentuate the lady's captivating beauty by the juxtaposition of light and darkness. Showing the changes of the movement, Byron produces a distinctive chiaroscuro effect as well as the intensified emotional impact to amplify the lady's charm through the deliberate contrast of the interplay of light and shadow.

In the second stanza, the verbs reflect dynamic and expressive motion. "(had) impaired" contrasts by indicating disruption or struggle, making the beauty of fluid moments stand out more. "waves" evokes flowing, rhythmic movement like ocean tides, pulsating with vitality. "lightens" suggests gradual easing or brightening, symbolizing hope and illumination, as a soft beam gently bathes her face, enhancing her captivating beauty. This radiant light illuminates both the lady's allure and the poet's soul, leaving the poet utterly captivated. "express" highlights purposeful communication through movement. "And 'nameless grace'" signals more than an indefinable charm of her person. 'Nameless' is here as carefully chosen a word as is the 'name' of Augusta that Byron carefully chose to leave without a trace in the 'Stanzas for Music.'" [4]. The noun "trend" creates a radiant and elegant charm. It is a word indicates the beauty of the Greek sculptural style with minor details, featuring both meticulous brushwork like depictions and freehand brushwork style of the serene and clear radiance combining reality and virtuality.

In the third stanza, the verbs emphasize the impact and vitality of movement. "win" captures triumph and energy while "glow" suggests a steady, radiant presence. The nouns "cheek" and "smiles" reveal the action of the thoughts visibly shown the triumph is the situation of the lady's presence to the people who see her, following her movement of the steps silently. And "tell" implies movement that communicates story or emotion and "spent" hints at effort and dedication. The beauty of the lady's existence itself is a legend chasing because the verb "is" grounds the movement in existence and presence philosophically.

3.2 The Dynamic Application of the Meter

The poet employs an end rhyme scheme of "ABABAB, CDCDCD, EFEFEF," creating a cyclical rhythm that flows like the walking lady's graceful steps. The meter of the poem features a smooth, flowing movement. The application of meter shows the movement with visual auditory sense. The application of alliteration, repetition of an initial consonant sound, makes the steps of the walking lady with the beauty of rhythms gently. In "Cloudless climes and starry skies", /k/ and /s/ repeatedly imitates the stillness of the night and the motion and movement of the lights twinkling of the

shining stars while "So soft, so calm, yet eloquent" the repetition of /s/ is like the silk-like touch upon the heart, creating the echoing effect of the state of tranquility and gentleness. In "Days in goodness spent" the sound /d/ and /s/ forms the pattern of the internal rhythm, indicating the power of the virtue accumulated little by little as time gone by.

The poet who is good at poetic techniques, has applied the tetrameter rather than iambic pentameter to show his quickness to approach the walking beauty with a kind of agitation. "In the tetrameter lines there is a sense of quickness, sparseness, even a little agitation, which is not evoked in the five-foot lines (which are full, but not over-full, without obvious pressure in any direction)." [5]. The combination of the tetrameter instead of the traditional pentameter and the rhetorical device of enjambment of the first and the second line indicate the surprising eagerness to catch the movement of the beauty.

Each line mostly following a pattern of four pairs of syllables creates a steady, rhythmic walk and the rhythmic "walking" pace embodies calmness and elegance. The alternating unstressed/stressed syllables provide a natural, soothing flow, like gentle footsteps or soft waves, enhancing the sense of beauty and tenderness in the description. The use of feminine rhyme (rhymes on two syllables, with the final syllable unstressed) in the sixth line of the first stanza and the third line of the second stanza add softness and musicality, reinforcing the graceful, lingering movement of the lines. The meter allows for slight variations like light pauses and enjambment, which prevent rigidity and contribute to a seamless, expressive motion, much like the subtle "waves" and "lightens" described, transforming the abstract beauty into the specific and concrete detailed image, meaning the beauty can move by itself flowing among the raven tress while the face is shining with beauty.

Additionally, the language in poem is dominated by a variety of sounds that blend together seamlessly. As shown in Table 3 and 4, there are 106 vowels and 35 diphthongs in this poem, showing the movement with gentleness and passion concerning the patterns of the sounds. The occurrences of vowels and diphthongs that forms the poem's vowel and diphthong patterns shown in the tables are not arranged arbitrarily, rather they serve to underscore the poet's thoughts and the poem's themes. The [3:] sound

with 30 occurrences adds a slightly nasal, rolling quality to the poem's speech, contributing to the melodic flow of the beauty. And the [i:] sound conveys a sense of clarity and purity, implying the charm of the lady's physical as well as spiritual beauty while the [i]

sound with sustained, reveals that the purity of her outer beauty complements the peace of the inner world, emphasizing the positive qualities of the lady's character and the brightness of her demeanor.

Table 3. Vowels

vowel	[i:]	[i]	[e]	[æ]	[ɑ:]	[ɔ]	[ɔ:]	[u]	[u:]	[ʌ]	[ɜ:]	total
Stanza 1	2	8	5	3	2	/	3	2	1	1	10	37
Stanza 2	2	10	5	/	1	1	2	1	/	2	7	31
Stanza 3	2	8	4	4	2	2	1	/	1	1	13	38
total	6	26	14	7	5	3	6	3	2	4	30	106

Table 4. Diphthong

diphthong	[ei]	[ɜu]	[ai]	[au]	[eə]	[uɜ]	total
Stanza 1	1	1	8	1	/	/	11
Stanza 2	8	2	1	2	3	1	17
Stanza 3	1	3	2	1	/	/	7
total	10	6	11	4	3	1	35

The front vowels and the back vowels are in roughly equal measure, contributing to a sense of balance and the maintenance of the harmony, preventing the musical texture from too one-sided. The sound of being harmonious and well-proportioned is the movement of elegance and beauty. This creates a sense of clarity and purity, reinforcing the theme of a heart that is free from worldly corruption. The combination of [i:], [əʊ] and [e] shows the pace of the language in a hushed, meditative tone with the musical effect when describing the woman's serenity and peace, making the reader feel the same sense of calm and beauty that the lady embodies, reinforcing the lady's beauty that is matched by a deep inner peace, showing the flowing of the language mirrors the peacefulness of her mind and heart.

In short, the sounds aligning the musical qualities of the lines with the content of the poem, poet not only reveals a visual delight but also a sonic one, contributing to the emotional impact of the poem. The poem's meter moves with a calm, elegant rhythm mirroring the beauty, harmony, and tender grace portrayed in the poem's imagery.

3.3 The Dynamic Image

"The image itself, as both the product of thought and the bearer of thought, becomes thought made made visible." [6]. When Byron portrays this dynamic image, he makes his thoughts visible "With concise language and profound emotion, Byron vividly portrays a lady's dazzling presence at a ball and the emotional

ripples she stirs in those around her." [7]. The beauty moves gently, like "the night of cloudless climes and starry skies," suggesting a calm, smooth, almost effortless presence. The poetic use of "waves" creates profound image, showing the lady's radiance undulates like ocean tides, pulsating with vitality. Additionally, the graceful "waves" in her hair and light that "softly lightens o'er her face" evoke a sense of gentle movement, like a breeze or flowing water, giving life and vibrancy to her beauty. This image not only highlights her luminous eyes but also subtly mirrors the ebb and flow of her emotions.

"In Byron's poems, the images are largely created through allusions". [8]. By allusions, it's justified to say that the image of the lady blends "dark and bright," showing dynamic balance and unity within her appearance of light and shadow meeting in perfect harmony. When the beauty is "mellow'd to that tender light," indicating a gentle, soothing glow rather than harsh brightness, adding warmth and subtlety to her image. Her face and expressions "serenely sweet" communicate inner purity and peace, showing that beauty is not just physical but emotionally alive and eloquent. The smiles that "win" and "tints that glow" reveal quiet confidence and warmth, while the mind "at peace" and "heart whose love is innocent" emphasize an enduring, tranquil inner beauty. The three words "heaven" "grace" "innocent" imply religiously the image of the Virgin Mary, echoing the image of beauty in this poem who is dynamic yet calm, flowing gently with harmonious contrasts, tender light, and soft motion, while expressing serene inner grace, peace, and warmth. It captures beauty as a living, radiant presence in harmonious flow and "presents a dynamic world picture". [9].

The image of "She" isn't a woman at all but

simply Byron's loving, figurative memory of the magical Levantine nights of 'cloudless climes and starry skies' that haunted him all his life, and where he learned to take a walk on a wild side that could take him even further back, to Never Never Land." [4].

4. Conclusion

In *She Walks in Beauty*, Byron successfully blends charm and beauty into three layers: the dynamic use of the words, the dynamic application of the meter and the dynamic image. The poem masterfully blends static and dynamic beauty through its soothing rhythm and natural emotional flow. This paper analyzes the poem from three perspectives: prosody, language, and semantics.

Through depicting the diversity and influence of feminine beauty, as well as the audience's reverence and admiration for beauty, Byron reveals the dynamic essence of beauty. This dynamic beauty lies not only in a woman's inherent elegance and charm, but also in her ability to touch hearts and transform those around her. The environment allows people to feel the power and value of beauty under her influence. This dynamic beauty not only makes poetry more vivid and three dimensional, but also gives readers more space for imagination and interpretation.

References

- [1] Beatty. Bernard. *Reading Byron*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2022: P11.
- [2] MacCarthy Fiona. *Byron Life and Legend*: John Murray (Publishers), 2002: P268.
- [3] Lessing Gotthold Ephraim. *Laocoon: On the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. University Press: John Wilson & Son, Cambridge. 1887: P138.
- [4] McGann, Jerome. *Byron and the Poetics of Adversity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2023: P190.
- [5] Oliver Mary. *A Poetry Handbook*: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1994: P39.
- [6] Vendler Helen. *Poets Thinking*: Harvard University Press, 2004: P9.
- [7] Liu Di, Sun Lingxiao, Gao Weihua. *Analysis of the Dynamic Features of "Beauty" in She Walks in Beauty: Appreciation of Yangtze River Novel*. 2024 (23).
- [8] Yang Yongqing. *An Appreciation of Three Poets of the Younger Generation of Romanticism*. *Philosophy Journal*. Volume 4, Issue 1. 2025.
- [9] Havard John Owen. *Late Romanticism and the End of Politics Byron, Mary Shelley, and the Last Men*: Cambridge University Press, 2023: P57.