She Walks in Beauty: A Poem by Lord 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!

ABOUT THE POEM:

meaning:
Of course it’s obvious that this poem is somewhat of a love poem, expressing how beautiful this woman is that Lord Byron is looking at. She combines opposites (or extremes) in perfect proportions in her looks and in her personality. Whether it is a true declaration of love or a statement of admiration (of her beauty) is left to the reader, since it’s known that this poem was about his cousin, Mrs. Wilmot, whom he met at a party in a mourning dress of spangled black.

imagery:
Lord Byron describes a night (associated with darkness) with bright stars (light) and compares this woman to that night. She brings together these opposites in her beauty and creates a "tender light." Not a light like the daytime, since he describes that as gaudy (showy in a vulgar way), but a light that "heaven" doesn't even honor the daytime with. Byron describes light and dark coming together in her appearance (or "aspect"), as in her dark hair ("tress") and the light complexion of her face. But her also says they meet in her eyes. The eyes are often associated with a person's soul, and reveal the heart. So he is suggesting that opposites meet in her soul as well. Note also, that Byron says that if this darkness and lightness wouldn't be in the right proportions ("One shade the more, one ray the less"), her beauty wouldn't be completely ruined as you might expect. He says that she would only be "half impaired," and thus still half magnificent.