

Before he was known as Lord Byron, the still-famous poet was called George Gordon. Before he inherited a title - and became a Peer of the Realm - he was a writer whose poetry still resonates.

Believing that Greece was a major contributor to Western Culture, Lord Byron decided it would be wise to help Greece fight for its independence in the early nineteenth century.

On the 9th of April, 1824, he was drenched during a heavy rainfall while riding his horse in Greece. Within a few days, he was seriously ill.

Following the medical custom of the time - which would be resoundingly rejected today - Lord Byron's doctors "bled him." Instead of helping, that procedure further weakened him.

On the 19th of April, 1824 - while a violent electrical storm was raging outside his room - Lord Byron died. He was hailed - then, and later - as a national hero of Greece. A painting of him on his death bed - by Joseph Denis Odevaere - discreetly covers his right foot (which was misshapen).

When the lover of Greek culture died, his death helped to unite disparate forces - including Britain, France and Russia - who were able to assure Greek independence by 1829. Byron - had he lived - would have been proud.

Byron's poems - especially "She Walks in Beauty" - remain popular. In this audio clip, it is read by Carole Bos (creator of AwesomeStories).

She Walks in Beauty

By George Gordon (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!***

Byron seems to write about someone he has seen. Does he know her?

He can tell ...she's beautiful on the inside as well as the outside. If he doesn't know her, would he be able to quickly judge the "content of her character" (to borrow a phrase from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)?

So ... let's determine whether there's a story behind the poem.

What motivated the poet to write these words: "She walks in beauty?" Who is "She?" Is it someone he's seeing in his mind - or - someone he's seeing with his eyes? Is he seeing her now, or is he remembering her from an earlier time?

In other words ... is "She" a real person or a made-up person? Is "She" one person or a compilation of several people?

Upon investigation, we learn a few facts about Byron and "She."

It's the early part of the 19th century - the 11th of June, 1814, to be exact. Lord Byron is attending a party in London. He's with a friend, James Wedderburn Webster, and he's at the home of Lady Sarah Caroline Sitwell.

Among the guests is Anne Beatrix Wilmot. She's the wife of Byron's cousin, Sir Robert Wilmot. By all accounts, she is dazzlingly beautiful.

Years later, in the 1890s, Walker & Boutall will create a photogravure of the woman Byron calls "She." Based on a lithograph, the image depicts Anne Wilmot-Horton. The change-in-name takes place circa 1823 after

Anne's husband (Robert) inherits the estate of Anne's father (Eusebius Horton) and adds another surname (Horton) to his own (Wilmot).

Here's a final question to consider:

Does knowing the story behind the poem help or hinder its meaning to the reader?

For Classics at AwesomeStories

Credits:

"She Walks in Beauty," by Lord Byron. Read by Carole Bos (creator of Awesome Stories).

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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Anne Beatrix Wilmot-Horton

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