

# Criticism: She Walks in Beauty

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Although Byron is known as one of the major poet of the Romantic period, his work has been faulted by a number of famous writers. According to the poet W. H. Auden in his book *Dyer's Hand and Other Essays*, Byron's poems need to be "read very rapidly" because if one slows down the "poetry vanishes—the feeling seems superficial, the rhyme forced, the grammar all over the place." T. S. Eliot, the American expatriate poet, notes in his 1957 *On Poetry and Poets* that what some critics have considered as Byron's most ambitious works were "nothing but sonorous affirmations of the commonplace with no depth of significance." He even attacked Byron's ear for writing poetry, saying that he could "think of no other poet of his distinction who might so easily have been an accomplished foreigner writing in English." While nineteenth-century British poet Matthew Arnold considers Byron, along with Wordsworth, "first and pre-eminent in actual performance ... among the English poets of this century," he holds a similar opinion of Byron's technical merit. Writing in a preface to *Poetry of Byron*, Arnold states: "As a poet, he has no fine and exact sense for word and structure and rhythm; he has not the artist's nature and gifts."

Other critics have disagreed with such negative assessments of Byron's worth. In response to the first appearance of *Hebrew Melodies*, a British critic writes in a 1815 *Augustan Review* critique that "there are traits of exquisite feeling and beauty" in the collection; the poetry itself was considered by this nameless critic to be of "superior excellence." Other critics in this century have likewise praised *Hebrew Melodies* and specifically "She Walks in Beauty." L. C. Martin admires "the generous allowance of long vowels, the variety of vowels and consonants, and the likeness within the differences effected by internal rhymes or other devices" in the poem . He suggests that Byron should be taken "with some seriousness as a technician in verse ." Another critic, Frederick W. Shilstone, also applauds *Hebrew Melodies*, calling it "an important experiment in genre" that prepared the way for "more elaborate volumes like Robert Lowell's *Notebook* and John Berryman's *Dream Songs*."

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