The Love of Beauty

Love, time, beauty, what do they have in common? Perhaps it’s the theory they would not exist if it were not for humanity and the countless creations that come from being a part of it. Also they each construe a sort of magic behind the definitions, which entails one simply could not exist without the other. Many authors captured this magic and used it in their poetry. For example, W.H. Auden in his “As I Walked Out One Evening,” Lord Byron in his “She Walks in Beauty,” and John Keats in his famous “A Thing of Beauty” from Book I of *Endymion*. If it were not for the significance of beauty and the mysteries that lie behind it, some authors might not have anything to write about. Love, time, and beauty may be used in each of these author’s works; however, what is meant to be seen behind the word might be a story of its own.

In order to understand what Auden is saying about love, time, beauty, and humanity in “As I Walked Out One Evening,” one must first understand the overall message or theme. Ellis states, “An almost obsessive concentration on time-particularly its clash with the aspirations of young love-dominates the poem” (Ellis 2002). In other words, love is trying to coexist with humanity, but time being as short as it is, keeps running out. When Auden writes, “Life remains a blessing / Although you cannot bless” (Auden, lines 51-52). It is suggested love exists in the world, but when one gets caught up in their own affirmations, there is no inkling of its obstacles and contrarieties. Ellis also comments on the essence of the poem and when it was written. He says, “Auden composed the poem in 1937, when forces were gathering for world war, the second
of the poet’s lifetime. While no explicit references to the era mark this poem, its insistence on the ‘crookedness’ of humans in the face of cataclysmic disorders and vague horrors represents a challenge to the lovers beyond the ordinary power of time considered as an agent of the natural order” (Ellis 2002). For example, when Auden writes, “You shall love your crooked neighbor / With your crooked heart” (Auden, lines 55-56). He is describing the so called “crookedness” of the world. Ellis also states, “The final image of the river, which flows on as time does in the most tumultuous epochs, may signify time according to nature. If so, the last line of the poem affirms an order in which human love has a chance to prevail — an order that persists through the most disorderly of times” (Ellis 2002). When Auden writes his last stanza, “It was late, late in the evening, / The lovers they were gone; / The clocks had ceased their chiming / And the deep river ran on” (Auden, lines 57-60). Even though time has stopped, one is given the notion that there is a more powerful force at work here, and that the lovers can prevail if they stick together through the curveballs humanity may tend to throw at them.

Although love can be compared to time it can also be compared to the definition of beauty, such as in Lord Byron’s “She Walks in Beauty.” Most scholars agree, on the surface it is a fairly conventional description of a beautiful woman, whom Byron was acquainted with (Reisman 2002). However, was he in love with this woman, was it someone he wanted to be with but did not know how to? The question still remains a mystery as does beauty in itself. For example, when Byron writes, “She walks in beauty, like the night / Of cloudless climes and starry skies…” (Byron, lines 1-2). He is hiding behind his words leaving a mystery as to what type of beauty this woman has begotten upon him. Reisman states, “To him, she is beautiful in the same way that ‘night’ is beautiful, and, as he hastens to add, he means a particular kind of night, one of ‘cloudless climes and starry skies’ (Reisman 2002). Byron also declares his dark
beauty has the perfect combination of dark and bright when he writes, “And all that’s best of dark and bright / Meet in her aspect and her eyes…” (Byron, lines 3-4). In the second stanza Byron writes more of how her thoughts and personality is beautiful, rather than just her complexion. Byron writes, “Where thoughts serenely sweet express / How pure, how dear their dwelling-place” (Byron, lines 11-12). Also, Reisman suggests, “He does not seem to mean that she has a rosy complexion; instead, it is her “thoughts serenely sweet,” so evident in her facial expressions, that account for the impression she makes on all those who observe her” (Reisman 2002).

In Byron’s final stanza he explores the relationship between inner and outer beauty. When he writes, “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!” (lines 15-18). Byron surmises that this lady spends much of time doing good deeds and that she shows no disregard towards people. He also implies that when love enters her heart it is full of joy and innocence. Reisman declares, “Byron’s description of a dark-haired lady thus becomes much more: It is also his definition of the ideal woman” (Reisman 2002). Although some believe the ideal woman is needed for love, all one really needs is a beauty they can treasure through time and can fall in love with again and again.

While time and beauty is needed for love, the love of nature provides happiness as well. Where many things change and time can take its toll, nature will always remain a comfort and solitude for people to escape to. John Keats explains this love in “A Thing of Beauty,” which comes from Book 1 of *Endymion*. When Keats writes, “A thing of beauty is a joy for ever” (line 1), he entails that it does not matter what holds beauty, but no matter what it is it will give a joy that will last forever. Brewer states, “As the first book makes clear, one of the main themes of
Endymion is the nature of happiness” (Brewer 1992). Keats goes on to describe the beauty of the world of Endymion when he writes, “With the green world they live in; and clear rills / That for themselves a cooling covert make / ‘Gainst the hot season; the mid forest brake, / Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms: / And such too is the grandeur of the dooms” (lines 16-20). Keats also mentions that death can result without beauty. Keats writes, “Nor do we merely feel these essences / For one short hour; no, even as the trees / That whisper round a temple become soon / Dear as the temple’s self, so does the moon, / The passion poesy, glories infinite, / Haunt us till they become a cheering light / Unto our souls, and bound to us so fast, / That, whether there be shine, or gloom o’ercast, / They alway must be with us, or we die” (lines 25-33). Also, Brewer suggests, “In some ways Endymion is about the growth of a human mind through the imagination…that a life of contemplation and love is superior to a life of action, and that sorrow is an important element of both love and beauty” (Brewer 1992). Although a life of love may be superior to a life of action, sorrow is a main key to love and beauty in both cases because without we would not know the true meaning of each.

Each of these poems represents the definitions of love, beauty, and time. The world needs these three things to remain balanced, and yet one simply cannot exist without the other. Love needs time to grow and prosper such as in “As I Walked Out One Evening.” However, love begins with beauty, which attracts people toward their significant other; whether it is inner or outer beauty such as in “She Walks in Beauty.” Also, the beauty of nature is never changing and it gives solitude and comfort when life can be in a spiral, such can be described as a “love for nature,” which is specified in “A Thing of Beauty.” These poems indicate the cycle of love and how it will continue to prosper and grow till the end of time.
Love, time, and beauty makes one believe in fairytales. That just maybe there is a prince charming or a beautiful princess we can kiss and it will awake her. The truth of the matter is fairytales are as real as flying pigs; however, love is the most real and tangible emotion out there. Poets use it in their works, authors write millions of books based on love, and many television shows talk of love and the choices it brings. With love comes time, which many people spend hours or days wasting away. Time is what brings love without it how could one fall in love? Or get to know their significant other? Beauty also plays its own role. When something is described as beautiful it makes one curious to what the word really means. Is it nature, a diamond, love? What is beauty? The dictionary may describe it as: The quality of objects, sounds, ideas, etc., that pleases and gratifies, as by their harmony, pattern, excellence, or truth; A special grace or charm. However, beauty is more than just a definition; it is a reflection of life. Life is what ties these things together, no matter how boring or dull. Love, beauty, and time: the perfect recipe for a rich, satisfying life.
Works Cited


