

3

For *me*, degenerate modern wretch,
 Though in the genial month of May,
 10 My dripping limbs I faintly stretch,
 And think I've done a feat to-day.

4

But since he cross'd the rapid tide,
 According to the doubtful story,
 15 To woo,—and—Lord knows what beside,
 And swam for Love, as I for Glory;

5

'Twere hard to say who fared the best:
 Sad mortals! thus the Gods still plague you!
 He lost his labour, I my jest:
 20 For he was drown'd, and I've the ague.

1810

1812

She Walks in Beauty¹

1

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:
 5 Thus mellow'd to that tender light
 Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

2

One shade the more, one ray the less,
 Had half impair'd the nameless grace
 Which waves in every raven tress,
 10 Or softly lightens o'er her face;
 Where thoughts serenely sweet express
 How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

1. From *Hebrew Melodies* (1815), a collection of lyrics on Old Testament themes that Byron composed to accompany the musician Isaac Nathan's settings of traditional synagogue chants. Byron wrote these lines about his beautiful cousin by marriage, Anne Wilmot, who at the ball where

they first met wore a black mourning gown brightened with spangles. In their context as the opening poem of *Hebrew Melodies*, the lines praise any one of a number of Old Testament heroines.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
 So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
 15 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!

June 1814

Darkness¹

I had a dream, which was not all a dream.
 The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars
 Did wander darkling^o in the eternal space,
 Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth
 5 Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air;
 Morn came and went—and came, and brought no day,
 And men forgot their passions in the dread
 Of this their desolation; and all hearts
 Were chill'd into a selfish prayer for light:
 10 And they did live by watchfires—and the thrones,
 The palaces of crowned kings—the huts,
 The habitations of all things which dwell,
 Were burnt for beacons; cities were consumed,
 And men were gather'd round their blazing homes
 15 To look once more into each other's face;
 Happy were those who dwelt within the eye
 Of the volcanos, and their mountain-torch:
 A fearful hope was all the world contain'd;
 Forests were set on fire—but hour by hour
 20 They fell and faded—and the crackling trunks
 Extinguish'd with a crash—and all was black.
 The brows of men by the despairing light
 Wore an unearthly aspect, as by fits
 The flashes fell upon them; some lay down
 And hid their eyes and wept; and some did rest
 25 Their chins upon their clenched hands, and smiled;
 And others hurried to and fro, and fed
 Their funeral piles with fuel, and look'd up
 With mad disquietude on the dull sky,
 The pall of a past world; and then again
 30 With curses cast them down upon the dust,
 And gnash'd their teeth and howl'd: the wild birds shriek'd,
 And, terrified, did flutter on the ground,
 And flap their useless wings; the wildest brutes

1. A powerful blank-verse description of the end of life on earth. New geological sciences and an accompanying interest in what the fossil record indicated about the extinction of species made

such speculations hardly less common in Byron's time than in ours. Mary Shelley would later take up the theme in her novel *The Last Man* (1826).