

When We Two Parted

Lord Byron

OVERALL SUMMARY

Throughout this poem, the speaker mourns the **tragic loss of a former love**, using a semantic field of death to induce a **sombre tone** as well as to signify their attitude towards the person of whom they write.

STANZA SUMMARY

- The first stanza establishes the fact that the speaker is solemnly reflecting upon the loss of a past loved one, describing the latter as **"cold"** and **"pale"** suggestive of a completely stale, dead relationship.
- The speaker goes on to compare the **"dew"** in the morning as a sort of **"warning"** that they were going to lose their love, like how the coldness of dewy mornings foreshadow the coming of autumn and winter. They then remark upon the **"vows"** that their love never fulfilled and the fact that they love this person too much to blame only them for the bad things they have done.
- The speaker comments on the difficulty they have hearing their ex-lover's name without being reminded of the death of their relationship. They then question their intense love for them, reflecting on their folly as they became too invested in the relationship, finally revealing that they now only **"rue"** them.
- In the final stanza, the speaker focuses on the secrecy and deception involved in their relationship with their past love and goes on to state that, if they were to ever meet again, they would feel for them the same as they did when they separated.

CONTEXT

- A year prior to the writing of this poem in 1817, Lord Byron had separated from his wife after his exile from England, so it is likely that she is the ex-lover that he speaks of. This, along with his **numerous romantic encounters**, renders his poems quite personal.
- There are suggestions that this poem could be one of **regret**, due to the supposed maltreatment of Lord Byron's ex-wife at his hand. He was known for his **promiscuous** nature, it being speculated that he may have engaged in relations with his half-sister, who he also left behind when leaving England. When taking this into consideration, it begs the question: does this poem refer to her at all?
- A leading figure of the **Romantic movement** (**Remember, they don't talk about love but about individualism, idolisation of nature and rejection of establishment**) in poetry, Byron, unsurprisingly, included a range of features of Romantic poetry in his work
- Byron's ex-lover is known to have had an affair, perhaps contributing to the tone of bitterness the speaker takes towards this figure in 'When We Two Parted'. This is made evident during stanza two of **"When We Two Parted"**, when he comments upon the supposed 'fame' of the ex-lover, that being that she was known to have an affair.

WHEN WE TWO PARTED

Lord Byron

WHEN we two parted
In silence and tears,
Half broken-hearted
To sever for years,
Pale grew thy cheek and cold,
Colder thy kiss;
Truly that hour foretold
Sorrow to this.

2

The dew of the morning
Sunk chill on my brow —
It felt like the warning
Of what I feel now.
Thy vows are all broken,
And light is thy fame:
I hear thy name spoken,
And share in its shame.

3

They name thee before me,
A knell to mine ear;
A shudder comes o'er me —
Why wert thou so dear?
They know not I knew thee,
Who knew thee too well: —
Long, long shall I rue thee,
Too deeply to tell.

4

In secret we met —
In silence I grieve,
That thy heart could forget,
Thy spirit deceive.
If I should meet thee
After long years,
How should I greet thee? —
With silence and tears.

Key Themes & Analysis

MEMORY

- **Reflecting upon a circumstance comparable to that displayed during Hardy's "Neutral Tones"**, Byron notes that the memory of his lost lover is a burden that he will forever have to carry.
- The description of how he feels is generally much more blatant and expressed via different means than it is in Hardy's poem, but during the first four lines, Byron notes that **"the dew of the morning" "...felt like the warning / of what I feel now."** In this way, he explicitly remarks upon the **pathetic fallacy** reflecting the speaker's **melancholic** (sad) recollection of their past relationship.
- The **"dew"** that appears in the early hours of the morning acts as a **'calm before the storm'**, foreshadowing a later downpour – the growing intensity of the speaker's despair.
- The **repetitive sibilance** during the first stanza, most notably within the lines **"In silence and tears"** and **"To sever for years"** enforces **the entrapment of the speaker by their memories** that will never cease to follow them.
- The repetition of the 's' consonant here not only reflects the frequent reliving of the speaker's experiences, but also **establishes an almost sinister and haunting tone**.
- This **sibilance also** represents an **underlying tone of bitterness** taken by the speaker towards their ex-lover.
- Like Thomas Hardy, Byron's speaker appears to be haunted by his memories, but the portrayal of this sensation is not primarily expressed through nature. **As a prevalent Romantic poet**, Byron takes advantage of other popular poetic elements of the period, namely the supernatural.
- The **constant alternation** between past and present, for example, **"the dew of the morning / sunk chill on my brow / ... what I feel now"** melds these two time frames, highlighting the constantly fresh wound that the speaker's past lover has left them with – one that refuses to heal.
- The memories of this person have almost left the speaker stuck, forced to **repeatedly relive a certain period of time**.

DEATH / SUPERNATURAL

- A **gothic element permeates this poem**, first made evident by the description of a ***"shudder"*** that ***"comes o'er me."*** Although not describing the literal passing of a ghost as such, this sensation often connotes to the chill one supposedly experiences in the presence of a supernatural figure.
- This, along with the referral to the past love as ***"spirit"*** at line 4 of stanza 4 implies that the speaker feels as though they are being **followed by the ghost of their past love**.
- This motif first appears at lines 5 and 6 of stanza 1, when Byron writes ***"Pale grey thy cheek and cold; / Colder thy kiss."*** The **caesura** at the end of the first of these lines **denotes a rift in the relationship**, whilst the repetition of the adjective ***"cold"*** along with adjectives ***"pale"*** and ***"grey"*** not only allude to an emotionless and distant partner prior to its ending, but are also **blunt, dehumanising descriptors of a typical corpse**, or perhaps a ghost.
- The poem's supernatural element allows Byron to develop the **semantic field of death** throughout.
- This is most explicitly achieved by the mention of the ***"knell"***. Simile is used compare the ***'knell'*** of a funeral bell with the sound of the speaker's lover's name, immediately implying that this lover is dead to them, or perhaps that the **intensity of their emotions equates to the death of their happier self**.
- This theme of ghostly figures develops that of **deception** throughout the poem, particularly during the final stanza. **Anaphora** is made use of here, the first two lines of the stanza beginning with the word ***"In"*** suggestive of something concealed, and the sibilance created by the nouns ***"secret"*** and ***"silence"*** indicative of a duplicitous nature. This is then continued by the line "Thy spirit deceive".
- This **theme of deception** is also present elsewhere, notably in stanza 2, when the speaker **alludes** to the rumours regarding the adultery of their lover; ***"I hear thy name spoken...and share in its shame"***.

Form

REGULAR RHYME

- The rhyme scheme of the poem is regular, (ABABCD CD) indicating that, despite the sorrow felt and expressed by the poem's speaker, life continues regardless.

RHYTHM

- The rhythm is **accentual-syllabic**, two syllables being emphasised per line. Generally, it repeats the alternation between 6 and 5 syllables per line regularly throughout, but the first four lines are all 5 syllables long.
- The last syllable in the fifth line that breaks the regular accentual rhythm lands on the adjective "cold", placing a lot of emphasis on this word and the feelings it connotes to, such as those of **bitterness, melancholy, and emptiness**.

CYCLICAL STRUCTURE

- The **cyclical structure** of this poem, beginning and ending with the line, "In silence and tears", develops this idea even further.
- This in itself displays an inability to progress, **mirroring the repetitive thoughts** of the speaker, stuck in a state of mourning the loss of their love and underlining the notion of their entrapment in a moment of time.

Structure

ENJAMBMENT

- The enjambment following the first line *"When we two parted"* begins the poem on **a glum and despairing tone**. The continuation of the line instantly mirroring the **continual dismay and burden** he carries from the loss of his lover.
- The enjambment is less frequent than the use of **end stopping**, perhaps the end-stop mimicking how their love has been quickly **curtailed and has abruptly ended**. The enjambment in this instance signifying the continuation of their love, yet the contrast with the end-stopping, shows their love was not sempiternal.

CAESURA

- Caesura describes the abrupt pauses created in the middle of lines of poetry by punctuation such as a full-stop or semi-colon, for example.
- There is a lot of enjambement throughout this poem, **littered with infrequent** but significant caesura – the caesura often being used to **emphasise the features of the lost love** that Byron wants to draw attention to.

Comparisons

Neutral Tone	THEME	FORM	STRUCTURE	CONTEXT
Similar	<p>Loss of Love</p> <p>Both poets reflect solemnly upon a past love interest</p> <p>Memory</p> <p>A key feature of both poems is the power that the speakers' memories have over their present lives, both reflecting upon</p>	<p>Regular rhyme scheme</p> <p>In 'Neutral Tones', the continuous ABBA rhyme scheme signifies the consistent movement of nature, such as the passing of the four seasons, whilst the regular rhyme scheme in 'When We Two Parted', the regular ABABCD CD rhyme scheme also gives the impression of life moving forwards, despite the sorrow of the speakers</p>	<p>Cyclical</p> <p>The cyclical structure of both poems emphasises the never-ending burden of the memories of a past love.</p> <p>Melding of past and present</p> <p>In both poems, there is slight ambiguity regarding the separation between the past and the present, both poets using this as a means of emphasising the long-lasting effects of the despair of the speakers.</p>	<p>Both poems are littered with elements of romanticism to enhance the expression of emotion displayed by each poem's speaker.</p>
Different	<p>'Neutral Tones' focuses on the power that the speaker's memories have on how they view the world through nature, whereas Byron places a lot more emphasis on the constant presence of the speaker's lost love as a supernatural, ghostly figure.</p>	<p>The rhythmic choices of each poet vary, Byron choosing to use accentual-syllabic rhythm which does not occur in 'Neutral Tones', reflecting the monochromatic, lifeless scenery surrounding the speaker.</p>		<p>Hardy, although influenced by Romanticism in this instance, was prone to focusing on realism, highlighting the harsh realities of life. Byron, however, was writing during the peak of the romantic era (as opposed to Hardy writing not long after it) so he was heavily influenced by its features.</p>

Winter Swans	THEME	FORM	STRUCTURE	CONTEXT
Similar	<p>Loss of Love</p> <p>Both poets explore the difficulties that are faced in relationships</p> <p>Nature</p> <p>Both poets use nature, specifically weather, at the start of their poems to depict their state of mind. In both cases, this entails a somewhat dreary, wet setting during a cold time of year. There is a relatively pessimistic attitude taken towards relationships in both poems.</p>	Not the same	Not the same	Contextually, there is a lot of difference between these two poems, but both writers set out with the intention of using natural surroundings to enhance the portrayal of emotion in their poetry.
Different	<p>Whilst the speaker in 'When We Two Parted' presents a bitter attitude towards their lost love and is seemingly inconsolable, Sheers suggests that these issues can be overcome. Additionally, whilst Sheers focuses greatly on nature, Byron leans more towards a focus on the blatant retelling of emotion, using a semantic field of death to reflect the death of the relationship and the way it haunts him.</p>	<p>Winter Swans has no rhyme scheme and no regular rhythm, completely contrasting Byron's use of an ABABCD CD rhyme scheme along with alternation between 5 and 4 syllables during the first half of the first stanza and between 5 and 6 throughout the rest of the poem.</p>	<p>Winter Swans is full of enjambement and completely lacks any end-stops, contrary to the frequent end-stops present throughout 'When We Two Parted'.</p>	<p>Whilst Byron's poem is very personal, referring to a real love of his, Sheers writes of a fictional relationship. The difference in time periods during which each writer wrote their poems demonstrates a difference in their influences. Byron was incredibly heavily influenced by Romantic poetry as he was alive during the peak of the Romantic era, whilst Sheers, despite his focus on nature which is typical of Romantic poetry, was inspired by particular natural processes and landmarks that he personally found symbolic.</p>