

CLUSTER 1

Love and relationships
1 When We Two Parted

GETTING STARTED - THE POEM AND YOU

This poem concerns the ending of a relationship and the response of someone who feels that they have been badly treated.

If you had been badly let down by someone, what would you do? For example would you be tempted to make your feelings public on social media? Would there be an element of revenge?

GETTING CLOSER - FOCUS ON DETAILS

First impressions

- 1 Now read the poem. It raises some questions: Who is he talking about? What has happened? How much do we know or can we deduce at this stage?

Create a table to help you tease out what you know. For example:

What you know or deduce	How you know it
A relationship has ended	
It took place a long time ago	'To sever for years'
	'Thy vows are all broken'
Their relationship was a secret	
The writer is bitter	

- 2 If you could give the poem another title, what would it be?
- 3 **Annotate** a copy of the poem in order to begin organising your thoughts about it. For example:

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.

Images of grief and death

Only one of them was broken-hearted?

A 'cold kiss' worse than none at all?

Long-lasting

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Contexts

Lord Byron (1788-1824) was an English poet and one of the most famous members of the Romantic movement. This poem is said to be about his love affair with Lady Frances Webster. Not only was she a married woman, but she was also the wife of one of his friends. Later, after their affair ended, Byron learned of Lady Frances' new affair with the Duke of Wellington. There are plenty of books and websites that will give you more information on the life and loves of Byron, about whom it was famously said that he was 'Mad, bad and dangerous to know'!

WHEN WE TWO PARTED

When we two parted
In silence and tears,
Half broken-hearted,
To sever for years,
Pale grew thy cheek and cold, 5
Colder thy kiss –
Truly that hour foretold
Sorrow to this.


The dew of the morning
Sunk chill on my brow – 10
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, 15
And share in its shame.

They name thee before me –
A knell to mine ear;
A shudder comes o’er me –
Why wert thou so dear? 20
They know not I knew thee,
Who knew thee too well;
Long, long shall I rue thee,
Too deeply to tell.

In secret we met, 25
In silence I grieve
That thy heart could forget,
Thy spirit deceive.
If I should meet thee
After long years, 30
How should I greet thee?
With silence and tears.

Lord Byron

fame (14): reputation
knell (18): the sound of a bell, especially when rung for a death or funeral
rue (23): regret bitterly

 Listen to the poem on Cambridge Elevate

GCSE English Literature for AQA: Poetry

PUTTING DETAILS TO USE

Interpreting themes, ideas, attitudes and feelings

1 In pairs or small groups, look at the following table. The left-hand column contains certain lines from the poem and the right-hand column shows different ways to **interpret** these lines. Discuss which interpretations you think are the most appropriate. There is not necessarily a right and wrong answer – but you do have to agree on a choice.

<p>‘The dew of the morning Sunk chill on my brow – It felt like the warning Of what I feel now.’</p>	<p>The morning dew was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">like a cold sweat, an omen of the suffering to followcold, like your feelings and a sign of the chill that was to follow in my lifelike a premonition of death.
<p>‘Thy vows are all broken, And light is thy fame;’</p>	<p>You’ve broken promises and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">your reputation is in tattersyour behaviour is well knownyou are talked about everywhere.
<p>‘I hear thy name spoken, And share in its shame.’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">I can’t bear to hear you talked about.I feel ashamed of my association with you.I’m embarrassed when people speak about what you’re up to.
<p>‘They name thee before me – A knell to mine ear;’</p>	<p>I overhear people talking about you and to me it is like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a funeral bellthe sound of deatha foretaste of death.
<p>‘A shudder comes o’er me –’</p>	<p>It makes me:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">shiver in horrorshake with sadnessconvulse with despair.
<p>‘They know not I knew thee, Who knew thee too well;’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">I knew you far better than they think.I wish I had not known you so well.They are ignorant of your true nature.
<p>‘Long, long shall I rue thee, Too deeply to tell.’</p>	<p>I regret:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">ever knowing youthat we partedthat you broke your promises.

2 Share your decisions with the rest of the class. Do other groups disagree with some of your interpretations? If so, try to examine why.



They name thee before me –
 A knell to mine ear;
 A shudder comes o'er me –
 Why wert thou so dear?



Learning checkpoint

Choose three extracts from the poem and give your response to them, each time beginning your response with 'Reading between the lines ...' For example:

In the *second verse* he says that he will regret ever knowing her for a very long time and these feelings of hurt are too deep to speak of. Reading between the lines and knowing something of his character, I feel that he is exaggerating how long it will take to get over her. Also, he is expressing his feelings in the poem so they are not too deep 'to tell' after all.

Show your skills

Although the **rhythm** of the first verse is slightly irregular, the poem then settles down to a very clear beat. Read verses two and three aloud with a partner in a way that emphasises the regular beat:

The **dew** of the **morning** / Sank **chill** on my **brow**

Such a reading begins to sound very monotonous. Now experiment with reading those verses in a very different way. It may help to mark the lines with places where you intend to pause or to raise or lower the volume. You can decide your own abbreviations; this example uses the following: *italics* = quieter; // = pause (/// = longer pause); **bold** = louder; underline = slowing down.

The dew of the morning sank *chill on my brow*. // It felt like the **warning** /// of what I feel now.

Reading the poem in your own way will show that you have understood the importance of different words and phrases and are able to interpret them (and explain your choices). If possible, record your reading.

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GETTING IT INTO WRITING

From the work you have done already, you should now be able to tackle a longer piece of writing about the poem. Answer the following question:
What are Byron’s feelings about the parting and how well do you think he expresses them?

Here are some of the aspects you should consider:

- Byron’s vocabulary – which words establish a particular feeling or **tone**?
- The **structure** of the poem – does the verse **form** and rhythm influence the way the poem makes you feel?
- The argument – how he builds up a case against the woman.
- The overall impact – do his words convince you? Do you think his reaction is typical?

Comparing poems

As you read the other poems in this collection, look out for similarities and differences between them. Sometimes their form (the way they are constructed, perhaps with formal verse patterns) will be very different, but their themes and points of view may be similar.

GETTING CREATIVE

Here is the first verse, expanded with the addition of some extra words and phrases to create a version from the woman’s point of view. Choose another verse to adapt in a similar way. Here and there you may wish to change the word order, but try to stick to the original order as far as possible.

When we two parted, it was in silence and there were tears, of course. I was only half in love with you and could not pretend to be broken-hearted. It was not so hard to sever the ties. I had known you for years and knew your faults. Your cheek grew pale and cold, colder than the touch of your hand. Your parting kiss was truly the end, for it tasted of bitterness. I knew that hour that I had done the right thing. Our relationship only foretold sorrow. ‘Yes, it’s come to this,’ I said.

Your response

How would you feel if you received a message such as ‘When We Two Parted?’ Would you feel angry/resentful/remorseful/amused/irritated? How do you think the woman about whom the poem was written felt when she read it? You could write her reply!