



# When We Two Parted by Lord Byron KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

**Context** – *When We Two Parted* was written by Lord Byron, and was published in 1816.

**Lord Byron** – George Gordon Byron, 6<sup>th</sup> Baron Byron (1788-1824) was a leading poet in the romantic movement, in addition to being a politician, nobleman and peer. Byron is amongst the most popular and wide-read British poets. He is known as one of the most flamboyant and notorious of the major Romantic poets. Throughout his life, Byron travelled extensively, particularly throughout Italy. He was good friends with Percy Bysshe Shelley. In later life, Byron fought for the Ottoman Empire in the Greek War of Independence.



**Lady Frances Wedderburn Webster** – Lady Frances Caroline Wedderburn Webster (1793-1837) was a noblewoman who lived at the same time as Lord Byron. It is thought that Lady Frances and Lord Byron had at one point formed a relationship, even though Lady Frances was married! (although this perhaps never went beyond flirtation. It is rumoured that, upon hearing about Lady Frances' subsequent relationship with Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, Byron penned *When We Two Parted* in his moments of jealousy.



**Byron's Personal Life** – Byron was both celebrated and condemned in his life for his aristocratic excesses, which included numerous love affairs (with men and women), amassing huge debts, and being involved in scandalous rumours. It is not difficult to imagine that his many love interests influenced his poetry. He was described by one contemporary as 'mad, bad and dangerous to know.' In addition to a number of illegitimate children, Byron had one legitimate child: Ada Lovelace (pictured).



**Romanticism** – Romanticism was an artistic, literary, musical, cultural and intellectual movement that originated in Europe in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. In most areas it peaked in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Romanticism is characterised by its emphasis on emotions, as well as glorifying nature and past events – memories and settings are often colourfully described. It was partially in response to the scientific rationalisation of nature of the era. Aside from Lord Byron, amongst the most famous romantic poets were William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley.



## Language/Structural Devices

**Imagery** – As one would expect from a poem from the romantic tradition, *When We Two Parted* provides imagery of the natural setting in which the relationship ends. Byron discusses the weather and the atmosphere of the morning 'The dew of the morning/ sunk chill on my brow' hence foreshadowing the emotional coldness that the speaker would soon experience.

**Quote:** "The dew of the morning  
Sunk chill on my brow—"

**Alliteration and Assonance** – Byron uses alliteration and assonance in a number of places in the poem, in order to both emphasise ideas and feelings, and also to replicate particular sounds and patterns. For example, soft 'sh' sounds are repeated towards the end of the second stanza, to replicate the whispers of the woman's name and private life being spread throughout private circles.

**Quote:** "I hear thy name spoken,  
And share in its shame."

**Figurative Language** – Figurative language is used sparingly throughout the poem, however to powerful effect. For example, the speaker uses the term 'half-broken-hearted' to describe the pain of the separation. 'Half' broken-hearted takes a turn from the more common 'broken-hearted' metaphor, thus making the reader consider the true effect of the break up for both parties.

**Quote:** "And a grin of bitterness swept thereby  
Like an ominous bird a-wing..."

**Rhetorical Questions** – Byron employs rhetorical questions at a couple of points in the poem, to demonstrate how the events and emotions of the break-up still circulate in the mind of the speaker now, some time after the event. The speaker is still questioning their own thoughts and actions – demonstrating lingering feelings of regret and sorrow. The speaker also questions why they felt so strongly.

**Quote:** "A shudder comes o'er me--  
Why wert thou so dear?"

**Form** – The poem has four stanzas of eight lines each, with a rhyme scheme in each stanza of ABABCD. The lines are largely written in falling rhythm, with each line normally containing two 'feet' so that the poem could read as dactylic dimeter. However, the lines vary in both length and syllabic count, making the poem awkward and uncomfortable to read, effectively representing the subject matter!

**Quote:** "Pale grew thy cheek and cold,  
Colder thy kiss;"

**Structure** – Although the stanzas flow into one another fluidly, each stanza roughly separates distinct ideas. The first stanza introduces the despair of the break-up, the second stanza gives some details of the day on which the break-up took place, the third stanza deals with the pain associated with hearing the lover's name, and the fourth sums up the feelings of despair and regret.

**Quote:** "How should I greet thee?--  
With silence and tears."

**Themes** – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

**Sadness** – *When We Two Parted* is a love poem, but it focuses on the sadness of the end of a relationship rather than the joy of being in love. This is a poem about disappointed love, and is likely to be at least partially autobiographical, most-likely an attempt by Byron to address his lingering feelings for Lady Webster.



**Love** – Beneath the sorrow and (mild bitterness) that the speaker expresses about the woman of his affections, it is clear that there was (or perhaps still is) an enduring love between the two (or at least one way!) This is particularly clear in stanzas 3 and 4, in which the sheer thought of the lover can cause the speaker to 'shudder' and cry.



## Line-by-Line Analysis

STANZA	LINE	POEM	ANALYSIS
1	1	When we two parted	The poem begins at an <u>unexplained moment in time</u> , in which the speaker of the poem and their (former) lover 'parted' ways. 'Half broken-hearted' demonstrates the use of a <u>metaphor</u> (heart not literally broken but in fact desperately sad), however 'half' may be relevant in the sense that perhaps one of them did not care as much, or alternatively neither were totally distraught. The <u>varied verb</u> 'sever' suggests that the separation is permanent – cannot be mended. The use of the <u>adjectives</u> 'pale' and 'cold' offer connotations of lifelessness – the relationship has died, as have their emotions and their 'kiss' towards one another.
	2	In silence and tears,	
	3	Half broken-hearted	
	4	To sever for years,	
	5	Pale grew thy cheek and cold,	
	6	Colder thy kiss;	
	7	Truly that hour foretold	
	8	Sorrow to this.	
2	9	The dew of the morning	The <u>second stanza</u> offers more details of the cold conditions on the morning – this 'coldness' <u>foreshadows</u> how the speaker feels now that the relationship has ended; the chilly dew on the morning gave the speaker a ' <u>warning</u> ' of the emotional coldness and hardship that they would soon experience. Midway through the stanza the speaker shifts to the <u>present tense</u> – offering some insight into the effects of the breakup. The 'vows' refer to the promises made (and 'broken') between the two lovers. ' <u>Light is thy fame</u> ' most likely refers to the fact that the partner is known for being light and flighty, running circles around men – the speaker is now too associated with the 'shame' of this person.
	10	Sunk chill on my brow--	
	11	It felt like the warning	
	12	Of what I feel now.	
	13	Thy vows are all broken,	
	14	And light is thy fame;	
	15	I hear thy name spoken,	
	16	And share in its shame.	
3	17	They name thee before me,	The moderate fame of the former lover is again discussed in the opening to the <u>third stanza</u> – 'they' (presumably meant to be those in aristocratic circles) discuss the lover before the speaker. The speaker describes this as a ' <u>knell to mine ear</u> .' A knell usually refers to a sombre, slow bell used to announce death – therefore it is a <u>metaphor</u> to show that even the mention of the woman's name in front of the speaker causes pain. The use of the <u>varied verb</u> 'shudder' portrays the speaker as visibly startling whilst wondering ( <u>through a rhetorical question</u> ) why they held the subject of this gossip 'so dear.' Knowing this person 'too well/ too deeply to tell' suggests that the speaker had a sexual relationship with them.
	18	A knell to mine ear;	
	19	A shudder comes o'er me--	
	20	Why wert thou so dear?	
	21	They know not I knew thee,	
	22	Who knew thee too well--	
	23	Long, long shall I rue thee,	
	24	Too deeply to tell.	
4	25	In secret we met--	Byron uses <u>anaphora</u> at the opening of stanza 3, to <u>emphasise</u> the fact that this was a <u>secret affair</u> – not a known or wed-locked relationship. This means that the speaker must now ' <u>grieve</u> ' for the loss in silence – he cannot share his feelings with others. <u>Lines 27 and 28</u> show that the speaker is irked by how quickly the <u>lover has moved on</u> – 'forgetting' what they had and 'deceiving' themselves that there is better elsewhere. The speaker ends by using another <u>rhetorical question</u> (showing that thoughts of the lover still plague his mind) to consider how to act if they should meet again. <u>The final line shows the speaker is not over the lover.</u>
	26	In silence I grieve,	
	27	That thy heart could forget,	
	28	Thy spirit deceive.	
	29	If I should meet thee	
	30	After long years,	
	31	How should I greet thee?--	
	32	With silence and tears.	

## Poems for Comparison

Neutral Tones	Mother, Any Distance...	The Poet's Influences
<i>When We Two Parted</i> can be compared and contrasted with this poem as both detail <u>sadness at the end of a relationship.</u>	<i>When We Two Parted</i> can be compared and contrasted with this poem in the approach to the theme of <u>growing apart.</u>	"In a letter from 1823, Byron refers to this poem and its relation to his 1813 flirtation with Lady Frances Wedderburn Webster. In 1816, when many scholars believe the poem was written, Lady Frances was scandalously linked with the Duke of Wellington. Byron had written earlier sentimental sonnets to Lady Frances and in "When We Two Parted" he appears pained to hear of her entanglement with the Duke. When he speaks of the vows she has broken it is possible that he is referring either to her wedding vows...or alternatively, promises she may have made to Lord Byron. He discusses as well the shame he feels." <a href="http://www.encyclopedia.com">www.encyclopedia.com</a>

