



WHEN WE TWO PARTED - LORD BYRON

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MAD FATHERS CROPS

The analyses in this document are based on the **MAD FATHERS CROPS** mnemonic in the [Sophicly Analysis Mastery Toolkit from the library](#).

MAD FATHERS CROPS stands for the following:

Metaphor

Alliteration

Direct address

Facts/foreshadowing

Assonance

Triadic structure

Hyperbole

Emotive language

Repetition

Simile

Contrast

Rhetorical question

Onomatopoeia

Personification

Sibilance

The goal here is to demonstrate that having a strong foundation of knowledge about the most common techniques should be the priority over trying to learn lots of different techniques: in other words, **quality over quantity**.

Of course, this does not mean that you should not learn more techniques, and, in fact, we will, but the point is that you should prioritise building a strong foundation of knowledge and then expand, rather than simply learning lots of techniques but not being able to write about or with them.

WHEN WE TWO PARTED: FULL POEM

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.

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.

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.

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.

CONTEXT: BIRTH AND DEATH

born in the year 1788 in London

- died in 1824 at the age of 36
-

CONTEXT: BYRON AND ROMANTICISM





was one of the big six romantic poets

- Wordsworth
- Keats
- Blake
- Coleridge
- and Shelley whom he was friends with
 - Romanticism was a cultural movement that originated in Europe in the late 18th century and lasted until the mid-19th century.
 - It was characterised by a focus on
 - emotion,
 - imagination,
 - and individualism,
 - as well as an interest in the natural world
 - and a celebration of the common people.
 - Romantic artists and writers sought to break free from classical norms and explore new forms of expression, leading to a flowering of
 - poetry,
 - literature,
 - music,
 - and visual art.

CONTEXT: ADDITIONAL FACTS ABOUT BYRON

- Byron was born with a deformed foot which he was incredibly self-conscious about throughout his life
- He travelled around the Mediterranean after racking up lots of debt in his early twenties, and he especially took to Greece
 - he returned to England after three years of travelling but would later move to Italy, where he met Percy Shelley
 - he'd eventually settle in Greece
- his turbulent personal life and elicit relationships are well documented
 - his wife even accused him of incest and all sorts of infidelities
- but all controversies aside, Byron was also well-known for being a champion of social causes
 - and was an outspoken member of the House of Lords
- he'd eventually be involved in the Greek war of independence
 - during which he died of fever at the age of 36.

CONTEXT: BYRON'S RELATIONSHIPS

Given Byron's wild romantic history, it's really hard not to read his love poetry in the light of his own relationships





- indeed scholars have suggested that Byron wrote *When We Two Parted* after he found out that one of his flings at the time, Lady Frances Webster, was having an affair with the Duke of Wellington
 - Byron, who was known for breaking hearts left right and center, was finally given a taste of his own medicine
 - so the poem *When We Two Parted* on the surface the poem seems to be about the disappointment and grief one feels about a failed romance which is something that most people can empathise with
 - however, there is more to it than meets the eye

TITLE: ANALYSIS

from the phrase *We Too* we feel a strong sense of division and this suggests two separate individuals, instead of one couple

- the past tense of parted emphasises that the relationship took place in the past and that whatever amorous feelings may remain, there's no longer a relationship to speak of now

OPENING STANZA: ANALYSIS

the syntax in the opening stanza gives us a first glimpse into the speaker's thoughts

- immediately after line four to 'sever for years', the word order of 'pale grew thy cheek and cold, / colder thy kiss' may sound strange because it reverses the normal subject-verb-object sentence construction
 - in which case it would read 'thy cheek grew pale and cold thy kiss colder'
 - this is an example of hyperbaton and this syntactical inversion could reflect the speaker's change in perspective and attitude towards his lover
 - note as well the pair of caesura that bookends line five coming after the words 'years' and 'cold'
 - this echoes the idea of severing and implies that the lover's coldness is the reason for the breakdown of this relationship

STRUCTURE: RHYME SCHEME

on the whole the poem follows an alternate rhyme scheme

- however, notice that when we get to stanza 3 there are two repeated rhyming pairs
 - 'me' and 'me' in lines 17 and 19
 - 'thee' and 'thee' in lines 21 and 23
 - interestingly, the 'me' and 'thee' rhyming pairs are chastically arranged with 'mine' in line 18 and another 'thee' in line 22





- we see once again this idea of a clear distinction between two individuals here
 - the 'me' of the speaker and 'the' of his lover are placed in clear parallel juxtaposition
 - parallel lines never cross each other and so perhaps the idea here is that the speaker and his lover are never to cross each other's paths ever again

LANGUAGE

the rhetorical question in line 20 'why wert thou so dear?' functions here as a sort of axis of symmetry between the group of 'mes' and 'thees'

- suggesting that while the speaker and his lover were once so alike in their love, they are now divided and broken up into two
 - the speaker's desire to dissociate himself from his lover makes sense because we know from lines 15 and 16 in stanza 2 that her name comes with shame, which is indicated by the internal rhyme

METRE/RHYTHM: DACTYLS & ANAPESTS

Rhythm is a significant part of this poem

- When We Two Parted is an example of accentual verse
 - this means each line contains the same number of stresses regardless of the number of syllables
 - much of English poetry is accentual verse, largely because English is a stress-timed language unlike Italian or French which are syllable timed
 - the first four lines alternate between dactylic and anapestic dimeter
 - but in the latter half of the stanza the rhythmic composition shifts to all dactyls
 - a dactylic foot refers to a stressed-unstressed-unstressed unit
 - for example, line one reads 'when we two parted', which is dactylic
 - an anapestic foot on the other hand refers to an unstressed-unstressed-stressed unit
 - for instance, line two reads 'in silence and tears' which fits the bill for an anapest
 - consequently, there is a to and fro between dactyls and anapests in the first half
 - while the latter half becomes entirely dactylic

METRE/RHYTHM: EFFECTS DACTYLS & ANAPESTS





we see that the speaker starts off by feeling a bit ambivalent, almost wistful in his lament to the loss of this relationship

- this uncertainty is reflected in the indecisiveness of the rhythm as it shifts between the stresses and unstresses at the beginning, right after his reference to 'sever for years'
 - though his words, as does the rhythm becomes more resolute in its decision to cut ties and so the rhythm becomes more trenchant with the dactylic momentum
 - as the speaker places the blame of this breakup on his lover
 - interestingly after the dactyls and stanza one, the rest of the poem's rhythm is largely anapestic
 - these anapests project a sense of predictability, almost as if the speaker is suggesting that he's seen it coming for a while
 - this echoes the foreboding reference to 'it felt like the warning' in line 11
 - therefore, after stanza 1, the speaker's lament seems less like a genuine emotional outpour of grief and more so a crafted testimony of one who is supposed to feel grief
 - you feel that merry-go-round sort of swing when there's too many anapests and after a while it gets a bit monotonous

METRE/RHYTHM: MASCULINE AND FEMININE LINE ENDINGS

note that while stanzas two and three alternate between feminine (unstressed) and masculine (stressed) endings stanza 4 only contains masculine line endings

- all of its lines end on a stress
 - this tells us that the speaker has progressed from being in two minds about letting this doomed relationship go
 - to finally deciding that he's going to cut everything off once and for

IMAGERY

there are two particularly interesting sets of imagery at play

- first that's the visual imagery of the droplet and dew of the morning and the tears in silence and tears
 - next there's the sonic imagery of a deafening silence
 - in the reference to a 'knell to mine ear'
 - and again in the thrice repeated word 'silence' which repeats twice in the phrase 'silence and tears', first seen in line two of the poem
 - while the mourning dew is a Biblical allusion symbolising truth and virtue, the heartbroken tears are a result of deceit and unvirtuous behavior





- and this could be said for both the lover and the speaker given the secretive nature of their affair
 - therefore, Byron also repurposes the dew from being a symbol of truth to an omen of betrayal as in line 10 'it sunk chill on my brow and verified' his suspicions
- the knell is a bell that one would find at a funeral and is a symbol of death
 - as an object one would find in a sacred space like the church, the knell gives this illicit relationship of veneer of holiness and so to an extent seems to justify it from the speaker's perspective
- the alliteration of sibilance in the final stanza reinforces the idea of silence
 - but when we read the words
 - secret
 - silence
 - spirit
 - deceive
 - and should in close succession, the overall result actually isn't all that quiet
 - so ironically then we're led to consider if the speaker really is grieving in silence because if he were then there probably wouldn't even be this poem and it's many words to begin with

VERB TENSES

my final point is about verb tenses notice that there's a couple of tense shifts throughout the poem including

- 'felt' to feel in stanza 2
- 'know to knew' in stanza 3
- and 'met to meet' and stanza 4
 - this is an example of polyptoton which means the repetition of the same root but in different forms of the word
 - by differentiating what is passed from what is present byron highlights the speaker's wish to dissociate himself from a shameful underground relationship
 - for instance why does the speaker say 'knew thee' instead of 'know apart from the possible word play on new as a Biblical word for intimate relationships, the fact that this verb comes in simple past tense suggests that the lover he once knew is different from the betrayer he now knows
 - this is similar to the rhetorical question in line 20, 'why wert thou so dear'
 - the word 'wert' is the archaic form of were which is the past tense of 'are'
 - this implies that the lover was once dear to the speaker but not anymore
 - in the penultimate line. the modal auxiliary 'should' in 'how should I greet thee' conveys a sense of grudging obligation
 - as if suggesting that any future encounter between the speaker and the lover will only be a matter of courtesy and good will, rather than one of intimacy or affection



