

What is the poem's setting?

- The poem recalls a **past love affair** from '**years**' ago. Byron doesn't specify time or place – some readers believe he was protecting the identity of a real-life past lover.
- Hearing others talk about his ex-lover has revived **bitter memories** for the speaker.

What is the poem about?

- The speaker describes his **mixed feelings** on hearing rumours about a past love.
- The speaker compares his **sorrow** at how his lover's feelings for him '**grew ... cold**' when they **separated**, to the way he feels now when '**they name thee before me**'.
- Nobody else knew about their affair – suggesting it was **secret**, perhaps even **illicit** – and so he now has to listen to comments about her all around him.
- It's partly this that makes him '**shudder**' now, but also the fact **she has moved on**.
- He feels **betrayed** by her current behaviour, just as he did years ago; he's ashamed he loved someone so **deceitful**.



Five key things about the language

1. Byron's use of pronouns shifts between '**we**', '**thee**' and '**I**', reflecting present separation, but also the way their secret past separates them from everyone else.
2. The mostly regular **dactylic** metre could reflect ideas about the inevitable death of love, only slipping in the final **stanza** where some beats are dropped in lines 1, 5 and 6.
3. The speaker describes his ex-lover using typically Romantic vocabulary associated with death – '**pale**', '**cold**', '**knell**' – to represent their love.
4. Most of Byron's rhymes are strong, emphasising endings, but weak rhymes in the second stanza – '**morning**'/'**warning**', '**broken**'/'**spoken**' – could suggest the speaker's feelings are not as clear as he states.
5. Repetition of words and rhymes e.g. '**tears**'/'**years**', hints at the inescapability of the speaker's feelings: he is doomed to grieve past love, even though he tries to escape his memories.

Five key quotations

1. Pain of separation: '**To sever for years**', l.4: 'severs' suggests that passion may end violently and suddenly.
2. Betrayal: '**Thy vows are all broken**', l.13: implies that the lover was not true to her word.
3. Painful memories: '**A knell in mine ear**', l.18: hearing a past love's name renews the agony of loss.
4. Power of emotion: '**Long, long shall I rue thee, Too deeply to tell**', l.23: the sorrow of separation is both lasting and impossible to describe.
5. Uncertainty: '**How should I greet thee?**', l.31: implies anxiety about how he will behave if they should meet again.

Note it!

Compare how Byron presents ideas about the end of relationships with Hardy's ideas in 'Neutral Tones'. Are their feelings equally 'dead'?

Exam focus

How can I write about how Byron uses imagery? AO2

You can explore how Byron uses imagery to present past love.

Byron's use of death imagery reflects the speaker's belief that the relationship is dead. His lover's cold kiss mirrors his chill brow, implying that their feelings have died, her name nothing but a knell when he hears it. However, his ongoing tears could suggest that he finds it hard to let go of his feelings, even though the relationship has been over for some years now.

Topic sentence makes clear point about the theme of endings

Precise references all support the point being made

Signals an alternative interpretation of developed idea

Link to wider context

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about betrayal. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Byron implies that the speaker's lover has betrayed him. He does this by

Five key things about how the poets explore family relationships

1. **Family relationships** is the central theme in poems such as 'Follower', 'Mother, any distance' and 'Before You Were Mine'.
2. Other poems explore family relationships in a **less direct way**, for instance in 'Eden Rock', where Causley uses **family to explore death and loss**, or 'Singh Song!', which presents **several relationships**.
3. Most of these poems present the **viewpoints of parents or children**, such as the father in 'Walking Away' or the son in 'Mother, any distance'.
4. Other poems explore **extended family relationships**, such as grandson and grandfather in Andrew Waterhouse's 'Climbing My Grandfather'.
5. Family relationships may be presented **positively**, as in 'Before You Were Mine', or **with ambivalence**, as in Heaney's 'Follower'.

How is the child's experience of family conveyed?

- Armitage uses metaphor to explore conflict between the need for parental support and the desire to break free.
- 'Follower' addresses the shift from cared-for to carer that children experience as their parents age.
- Causley uses a memory to explore the abandonment that even adults may feel on the death of parents.
- In 'Singh Song!', Nagra hints at parental pressure through the speaker's experience of family disagreements.



How is the parents' experience of family conveyed?

- In 'Walking Away', Day-Lewis tries to put into words the complex emotions of parents watching their children grow up.
- in 'Before You Were Mine', Duffy imagines how her birth might have affected her mother's experience of life.
- 'Follower' conveys a parent's patience with a child's learning, but through the child's eyes. In 'Mother, any distance', Armitage attempts to portray a mother's yearning to maintain a close mother-child bond.

What different attitudes to family relationships are conveyed?

- 'Climbing My Grandfather' uses mountain and climbing **imagery** to suggest the way that children often look up to and worship grandparents.
- Through an almost photographic image, Causley presents a sense of both love for and distance from his parents in 'Eden Rock'.
- In 'Follower', the speaker shows how early idealisation of a strong father changes as the adult child develops his own identity.

Three key quotations

1. Gratitude: **'You'd teach me the steps on the way home from Mass'** ('Before You Were Mine').
2. Anxiety, even guilt: **'I have had worse partings, but none that so / Gnaws at my mind still'** ('Walking Away').
3. Frustration: **'I reach towards a hatch that opens on an endless sky'** ('Mother, any distance').

Note it!

Notice that the poems focusing on family in the anthology are all more 'modern' poems, and nearly all about parents. Why might that be?

Exam focus

How can I write about relationships? AO1

You can write about a parent's feelings of loss.

Day Lewis makes it clear that **he has not been able to forget the memory of parting from his son at school**. He says that, while he's had 'worse partings', none of them **so gnaws at [his] mind still**, suggesting the lingering pain the memory causes him. **The word 'gnaws' describes a niggling pain, like hunger, implying emptiness or a feeling of incompleteness; perhaps it's also guilt he feels at 'walking away' from his small son when he was so young.**

Introduces the core idea

Apt quotation

Explains clearly

Language focus develops and interprets

Now you try!

Write your own paragraph about a different attitude to family in the cluster. Use one of the given quotations.