

Compare how poets present the theme of loss in 'When we two parted' and 'Winter Swans'. (30 marks)

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,
Colder thy kiss;
Truly that hour foretold
Sorrow to this.

The dew of the morning
Sank 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 in mine ear;
A shudder come 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.

LORD BYRON

Winter Swans

The clouds had given their
all -
two days of rain and then a
break
in which we walked,

the waterlogged earth
gulping for breath at our feet
as we skirted the lake, silent
and apart,

until the swans came and
stopped us
with a show of tipping in
unison.
As if rolling weights down
their bodies to their heads

they halved themselves in
the dark water,
icebergs of white feather,
paused before returning
again
like boats righting in rough
weather.

'They mate for life' you said
as they left,
porcelain over the stilling
water. I didn't reply
but as we moved on through
the afternoon light,

slow-stepping in the lake's
shingle and sand,
I noticed our hands, that
had, somehow,
swum the distance between
us

and folded, one over the
other,
like a pair of wings settling
after flight.

OWEN SHEERS