Compare how difficult relationships are presented in ‘Winter Swans’ and one other poem from Love and Relationships

In ‘Winter Swans’ Sheers presents a difficult relationship between a couple that are on the verge of breaking up. Following “two days of rain,” a metaphor for the outpouring of emotion during arguments, the couple embark on a joint walk in a “break,” from the feud. The strenuous arguments have led to the couple feeling as though they are unable to proceed or connect with one another any longer. As they tread around the lake, the speaker notes the “waterlogged earth” that is “gulping for breath,” beneath their feet. Again, the use of metaphor here illustrates the difficulty the relationship is in as the world that they reside in is ruined by water, a symbol of the harsh words that they’ve exchanged during the “rain.” Like the ground, the couple are now left “gulping for breath” metaphorically, struggling to live with one another when so much has been said/revealed. Sheers shows the impact words have in relationships and that love is not plain sailing. Relationships are presented as being difficult yet there is a reluctance to walk away from one another, as the “walk,” together suggests, implying that some people find it difficult to leave a relationship, despite conflict that may exist.

Likewise, Byron shows relationships as being difficult in his poem ‘When We Two Parted.’ Unlike the couple in ‘Winter Swans,’ the speaker has already separated from his lover and the after effects of this relationship continue to cause him pain. This auto-biographical poem reveals the agony Byron faced after the end of his affair with Lady Frances Webberdurn, who left him for the Duke of Wellington. The speaker does not go through a prolonged period of arguments with his lover, as illustrated in ‘Winter Swans’. Instead, he finds the relationship gets into difficulty without warning. The speaker reveals how his lover is suddenly “cold,” towards him and that they “sever for years.” The reference to her lack of warmth is repeated throughout the poem as he notes “colder thy kiss” and the “chill,” that he feels from her. The use of alliteration here, emphasises the harsh, emotionless state that she presents him with. In addition, by describing the way that they split to “sever,” emphasises the swiftness of the break up and the way is which his lover metaphorically ‘cut’ him out of her life. Byron, like Sheers, illustrates the complexities of relationships and the ways in which loving couples can run into difficulties. Byron suggests that although some relationships can seem as though they are going well, they can alter swiftly and leave one feeling utterly heartbroken and betrayed, due to the lack of warning.

Communication is therefore shown to be a major contributor to difficulties in relationships in both poems. The couple in ‘Winter Swans’ have communicated too much, revealing their true feelings about one another which causes them to be “silent and apart,” as they walk around the lake. However, it is implied that there is hope for the relationship despite the difficulty it faces. As the couple see the “swans,” that are “tipping in unison,” and “mate for life,” the couple realise that anything worth having takes effort. The swans are used as an extended metaphor for this as beneath the surface, they paddle furiously, creating the smooth graceful gliding that is seen from above. The couple watch the swans and are motivated by them, causing their “hands,” to swim the “distance” between them “like a pair of wings settling after flight.” The use of simile here emphasises the similarity of the couple to the swans; despite the difficulties, they are dedicated to one another and will overcome their problems. Sheers suggests that although relationships can be complex, there is hope for some. This is echoed through the use of structure in the poem. The poem is written in free verse, perhaps reflecting the difficulties that the relationship has been experiencing. However, the last two lined verse, contrasts to the previous six, all made up of three lines, perhaps implying that the couple will stay together whilst acknowledging that it will not necessarily be easy, through the lack of rhyme.

Similarly, the lack of communication between the lovers in ‘When We Two Parted’ is a cause of the difficulty the speaker faces. The speaker is left unable to communicate his emotions, much like the couple in ‘Winter Swans,’ as he wanders in “silence and tears.” As a result of the nature of the relationship, the speaker feels “shame,” on hearing his ex-lover’s name, implying that part of the difficulty linked to the relationship was that they were unmarried, which was considered sinful. The speaker commences the poem in “silence and tears,” and concludes that if he sees his ex-lover in the future he will “greet,” her “with silence and tears.” Like ‘Winter Swans’, structure is used to show the difficulty of the relationship. The cyclical structure implies that when love is lost, it can be incredibly difficult to recover from and that for some, like the speaker, they feel they will never heal.