Neutral Tones by Thomas Hardy

**Context**

Neutral Tones was written by Thomas Hardy in 1867. It formed part of his Wessex Poems in 1898.

**Line-by-Line Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STANZA</th>
<th>LINE</th>
<th>POEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>We stood by a pond that winter day.</td>
<td>1 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>And the sun was white, as though chidden of God.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Over tedious riddles of years;</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>And some words played between us to and fro</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>On which lost the more by our love.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Language/Structural Devices**

- Imagery
- Alliteration and Assonance
- Figurative Language
- Personal Pronouns
- Form/Structure
- Narrative Structure
- Theme

**The Poet's Influences**

- Victorian Realism
- Romanticism
- Language/Structural Devices

**Neutral Tone**

The poem opens by a pond in winter – the season that is the coldest and most lifeless of all (reflective of the relationship being dead). The colour of the sun suggests that it has lost its vitality, just like the relationship.

Personification of nature, such as the pond, as a living entity, adds to the sense of pessimism in the poem. The pond is personified as a rustic witness to the experience of loss. The relationship, just like the pond, has been drained of life.

The second stanza appears to focus more on the relationship between the speaker and recipient – the first line suggests that this was not a faithful relationship. The speaker is more explicit about the fact that the relationship has ended in loss. The last line gives another clear reference that love has been lost.

**Poems for Comparison**

- When We Parted
- Mother, Any Distance...

**Themes**

- A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

**Sadness**

Neutral Tones 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 auto-biographical, as Hardy struggled with several challenging relationships during his life.

**Neutrality**

The writer’s tone is neutral and unemotional, reflecting the lover’s tones as he/they held their discussion. The rhyme scheme that runs throughout the poem is ABBA throughout.

**Poetry Collection**

- Poetry collection until 18...

**Biographical Details**

- Born in Dorset, England (1891). Many of his works are set in his native south...

**The Mayor of Casterbridge**

- Published in 1867. It formed part of his Wessex Poems...

**Examples**

- “And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me...”
- “And a grin of bitterness swept thereby...”

**Quotes**

- “And your eyes on me were as eyes that rove...”
- “And some words played between us to and fro...”

Thomas Hardy

- Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was an English novelist and poet. He is known as one of the preeminent authors of Victorian realist works, and his novels and poetry were also clearly influenced by Romanticism. Hardy did not release his first poetry collection until 1898. Neutral Tones was in this collection, initially becoming famous from his novel such as The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886) and Tess of the d’Urbervilles (1891). Many of his works are set in his native south-west England or the semi-rural region of Wessex.

**Personal Pronouns**

- The use of personal pronouns is another important point to describe the relationship between the speaker and the former lover should be treated as separate entities.

**Form/Structure**

- Neutral Tones is written in quatrains. This straightforward grouping of sets of four lines is one of the simplest and most recognizable poetic forms. As the poem is written in iambics, there are a different pattern of stress used. The rhyme scheme that runs throughout the poem is ABBA throughout.

**Themes**

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**Glossary**

- Figurative Language: A device used to create a comparison or contrast between two things.
- Alliteration and Assonance: Repeated use of initial consonant sounds and vowel sounds, respectively.
- Imagery: The use of descriptive language to create a mental image.
- Personal Pronouns: The use of words such as I, me, you, and we in poetry to create a sense of immediacy.
- Narrative Structure: The sequence of events in a poem that tells a story.

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