

English literature - Poetry

Neutral Tones by Thomas Hardy

Structure:

"a" "b" "b" "a" rhyme pattern
 ↑ together
 ↓ apart

≈ Semantic field We stood by a pond that winter day,
of life + death And the sun ^{pathetic fallacy} was white, as though children of God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod; ^{oxymoron} ∵ empty love
- They had fallen from an ash, and were gray. ^{cold + colourless,}
^{remains of fine = fine = passion}
^{no passion}
Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove
Over tedious riddles of years ago; ^{disinterested}
And some words played between us to and fro
On which lost the more by our love.

The smile on your mouth is the deadliest ^{superlative}
^{fake smile} ^{contrast between life + death}
^{forced/evil smile} Alive enough to have strength + lie
grin of bitterness swept thereby
Like an ominous bird a-wing ... ^{foreshadowing} ^{= bad thing}
gives reader time to imagine what might have happened ∵ doesn't say what happened ∵ tension
Since then, keen lessons that love decries, ^{Shift in tone}
^{time has passed} And wrings with wrongs, have shaped to me ^{Short jumpy rhythm}
^{= anger/bitterness}
Cyclical structure [Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
brings reader back [And a pond edged with grayish leaves.
to the memory ∵ reminds them of the loss

- Hardy was a 19th century / early 20th century poet
- influenced by some Romantic poets (e.g. Wordsworth)
- Themes include disappointment in life + love
- Hardy + his wife barely spoke ∵ disappointment in life + love

- Neutral tones → neutral ∵ no emotion
 - » neutral ∵ no colour ∵ no passion