

ASM TUITION ACADEMY

A COMPLAINT

A Complaint

By William Wordsworth

There is a change—and I am poor;
Your love hath been, nor long ago,
A fountain at my fond heart's door,
Whose only business was to flow;
And flow it did; not taking heed
Of its own bounty, or my need.

What happy moments did I count?
Blest was I then all bliss above!
Now, for that consecrated fount
Of murmuring, sparkling, living love,
What have I? Shall I dare to tell?
A comfortless and hidden well.

A well of love—it may be deep—
I trust it is,—and never dry:
What matter? If the water sleep
In silence and obscurity.
—Such change, and at the very door
Of my fond heart, hath made me poor.

Context:

William Wordsworth wrote "*A Complaint*" in 1807. It is believed to reflect his personal feelings regarding the cooling of a close relationship, possibly with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a fellow Romantic poet and friend. Wordsworth and Coleridge had a strong creative partnership that waned due to Coleridge's struggles with illness, addiction, and emotional distance. While the exact source of inspiration is debated, it is clear that the poem captures a deep sense of emotional loss and personal transformation in the speaker's life.

Theme:

The central theme of the poem is **emotional loss and change**, particularly in the context of a once joyful and fulfilling relationship that has now become strained or absent. Wordsworth explores how love or friendship, once abundant and vital like a flowing fountain, has been reduced to a stagnant, concealed well. The speaker reflects on the profound shift from a time of shared affection to one of isolation and emptiness, leaving him feeling spiritually impoverished.

Other sub-themes include:

- **The passage of time:** The shift from the past to the present, and the inevitability of change.
- **Nostalgia and longing:** The speaker reminisces about the happiness he once felt and laments its loss.
- **The fleeting nature of love:** Love, like water, can flow freely but also dry up or become concealed.

Poetic Devices:

1. **Metaphor:**

The key metaphor in the poem is comparing the speaker's past emotional state (love or friendship) to a **fountain** and his current state to a **well**. The "fountain" symbolizes the joy and abundance of love, constantly flowing and refreshing, while the "well" symbolizes a hidden, stagnant emotion, lacking vitality and movement.

- **Fountain:** Represents flowing, accessible love or emotional fulfillment.
- **Well:** Represents hidden, inaccessible, or reduced love, symbolizing the loss and emptiness the speaker feels.

2. **Imagery:**

Wordsworth uses vivid water imagery to evoke emotions. The **fountain** imagery suggests abundance, life, and joy, while the **well** connotes darkness, depth, and silence. This contrast between moving water and stillness helps illustrate the emotional shift in the speaker's life.

3. **Repetition:**

The word "**poor**" is repeated in the opening and closing lines of the poem, emphasizing the speaker's emotional poverty or sense of loss.

4. **Alliteration:**

Wordsworth employs soft alliteration to create a lyrical, flowing rhythm, as seen in phrases like "**blest was I then all bliss above**" and "**murmuring, sparkling, living love**". This gentle sound mirrors the earlier joyful emotions of the speaker.

5. **Rhyme scheme:**

The poem follows a consistent **ABABCC** rhyme scheme in each stanza, which lends a structured, harmonious quality to the poem, contrasting with the speaker's internal sense of disruption and emotional change.

6. **Symbolism:**

The fountain and well are symbolic representations of love's transformation. The fountain represents joy and life, while the well signifies depth, concealment, and emotional inaccessibility. These two water symbols illustrate how something that once brought life and happiness can change into something hidden and painful.

7. **Tone:**

The tone of the poem shifts from nostalgic and sorrowful in the beginning, as the speaker remembers the joy of the past, to reflective and resigned as he accepts the change. There is also a subdued tone of bitterness or regret as the speaker mourns the loss of what was once vital and sustaining.

COMPARISON WITH,

1-LOVE'S DOG

2-NATURAL TONES

To compare "A Complaint" by William Wordsworth with "Love's Dog" by Jen Hadfield and "Natural Tones" (which could refer to "Neutral Tones" by Thomas Hardy, a more common anthology poem), we can examine how each poet explores themes of love, loss, and emotional change. Here's a breakdown:

1. Themes:

- **"A Complaint" (William Wordsworth):**
 - **Love as loss:** Wordsworth focuses on the theme of lost love or friendship, reflecting on how something once vibrant and joyful has become distant and emotionally impoverished. The speaker mourns a deep emotional change, comparing it to a shift from a flowing fountain to a hidden, stagnant well. This loss is melancholic and focuses on a personal sense of spiritual poverty.
 - **"Love's Dog" (Jen Hadfield):**
 - **Love as paradox:** Hadfield's poem contrasts the highs and lows of love through a series of contradictions. The poem explores the mixed emotions that come with loving someone, balancing affection and frustration, joy and pain. The speaker lists what they love and hate about love in equal measure, presenting it as something simultaneously wonderful and unbearable.
 - **Playfulness vs seriousness:** Unlike Wordsworth's lamentation of lost love, Hadfield's tone is more playful and reflective of the duality of human relationships, capturing love as a complex mix of emotions.
 - **"Neutral Tones" (Thomas Hardy):**
 - **Love as disillusionment:** Hardy's poem is about the end of a relationship and the emotional numbness that follows. The speaker reflects on a past love that has faded, leaving behind a sense of coldness and distance. The natural imagery of the poem (the sun being "white," the "deadest" leaves, the "grey" landscape) mirrors the emotional desolation. Similar to Wordsworth's theme, Hardy explores the transition from love to emptiness, but his tone is more resigned and bleak.
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2. Tone:

- **"A Complaint":**
 - The tone is **mournful and reflective**, with a deep sense of loss and regret. Wordsworth's language is lyrical and introspective, focusing on how the speaker has been emotionally impoverished by the change in the relationship.
- **"Love's Dog":**
 - The tone is **playful and paradoxical**. Hadfield presents love in a way that acknowledges both the joys and the frustrations it brings. The contrast between the "I love" and "I hate" statements adds complexity, giving the poem a light-hearted yet sincere exploration of human emotion.
- **"Neutral Tones":**

- The tone is **bleak and resigned**. Hardy uses stark, cold imagery to convey the lifelessness of a relationship that has ended. His portrayal of nature mirrors the emotional sterility, making the poem feel emotionally detached and pessimistic.
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3. Poetic Devices:

- **"A Complaint"**:
 - **Metaphor of water**: Wordsworth uses the metaphor of a fountain to represent abundant love, which turns into a hidden well, symbolizing emotional emptiness. The metaphor emphasizes the sense of loss and change.
 - **Imagery**: Vivid imagery of the fountain and well brings the emotional state of the speaker to life, contrasting past joy with present isolation.
 - **"Love's Dog"**:
 - **Contradiction and paradox**: The poem relies on oppositional pairings such as "I love" and "I hate" to express the duality of love. Each contradiction highlights the emotional complexity of relationships.
 - **Repetition**: The repetition of "I love" and "I hate" creates a rhythm that reinforces the back-and-forth nature of the speaker's feelings.
 - **"Neutral Tones"**:
 - **Natural imagery**: Hardy uses imagery from nature (sun, leaves, pond) to symbolize the emotional desolation of a dying relationship. The "white" sun, "grey" leaves, and a "starving sod" all reinforce the cold, lifeless tone of the poem.
 - **Metaphor of the pond**: The "pond" in Hardy's poem can be seen as a metaphor for emotional stagnation, much like Wordsworth's well. Both represent love that has become stagnant and cold.
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4. Love as Emotion:

- **"A Complaint"**:
 - **Love is transformative**: In Wordsworth's view, love transforms, and the change is often for the worse. What was once life-giving has now become a source of sorrow and emotional poverty.
 - **"Love's Dog"**:
 - **Love is contradictory**: Hadfield views love as both wonderful and frustrating, capturing the duality of relationships. The speaker's simultaneous love and hate for aspects of love highlights how relationships are often a complex mixture of emotions.
 - **"Neutral Tones"**:
 - **Love is bleak**: Hardy presents love as something that fades into disappointment. The speaker has moved from warmth and affection to coldness and distance, reflecting the way emotions can gradually become neutral and detached.
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5. Structure and Form:

- **"A Complaint":**
 - The poem follows a structured **ABABCC rhyme scheme**, creating a harmonious and lyrical quality. Despite the sorrowful tone, the structured rhyme mirrors the speaker's controlled reflection on emotional loss.
 - **"Love's Dog":**
 - The poem is free verse with an **unconventional structure**, which mirrors the unpredictable nature of love. The lack of rhyme or consistent form emphasises the chaotic and varied experiences of love.
 - **"Neutral Tones":**
 - Hardy's poem uses a **quatrain structure** with an ABBA rhyme scheme, giving it a cyclical, repetitive feeling that echoes the speaker's reflection on love's decline. The rigid structure contrasts with the emotional desolation described within.
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Conclusion:

- **"A Complaint"** mourns the transformation of love into emotional poverty, using metaphors of water to depict this change.
- **"Love's Dog"** plays with the contradictions of love, capturing both its joys and frustrations with a more playful tone.
- **"Neutral Tones"** focuses on the disillusionment and emotional desolation following the end of a relationship, using cold natural imagery to reflect the speaker's inner state.

All three poems explore love's complexity, but where Wordsworth laments its loss, Hadfield accepts its contradictions, and Hardy reflects on its disillusionment. Each poet employs different tones, metaphors, and structures to communicate the varied emotional experiences of love.