

Love's Dog

Overview: Jen Hadfield's *Love's Dog* is a poem designed to really make the reader think. The style it employs invites the reader to contemplate the abstract nature of the topic. The poem itself doesn't discuss dogs very much, but it does attempt to break down the idea of "love," doing so by utilizing a wide variety of metaphors and parallels, and explaining abstract ideas through concrete realities. It is not long, nor does it use very complicated language, but it is challenging because of its ambiguity.

Context:

Hadfield wrote this poem in response to the following line from a poem called 'A View of Things' by Edwin Morgan: 'What I hate about love is its dog'. The recurring refrain of 'Love's Dog' is worded in a similar way to Morgan's poem, which also used anaphora to make comparisons between love and hate. When asked about her obsession with this line by Morgan (it also forms the epigraph to another of her poems), Hadfield said: '*That phrase of Edwin Morgan's ... stayed with me for a long time; it speaks to me of the effort and deliberation of love.*'

Structure: This poem uses parallels throughout to enhance the various points being made. Parallelism is repetition of grammatical conventions and words in a piece of writing, and its presence here is very obvious. Each line begins with the words "What I," followed by either "hate" or "love," and "about love is its," which creates a pattern. Parallelism is especially effective when it is intentionally broken — the strong language in the first line of the second-to-last verse begins with "What I loathe" rather than what I love or hate. Whilst "loathe" in itself is already a stronger evocation of emotion, it is made especially poignant by the jarring feeling of breaking the established pattern.

Key Images: Even the title is thought-provoking, if for no other reason than its complete lack of sense. Does love have a dog? What do you think Morgan originally meant when he wrote, 'What I hate about love is its dog'. How can the positive qualities we associate with dogs (loyalty, affection etc.) be hated?

Each line uses metaphor to compare or contrast two ideas about some representation of love. E.g. being *diagnosed* with something means learning that you have it; having a *prognosis*, on the other hand, means learning what that something's course will be. In a similar way, realizing that you are in love is exciting and wonderful. By contrast, considering the idea of "for the rest of your life" can be terrifying. The speaker here is saying they love the present of being in love, but are frightened by the future. *Work through the poem, choosing the metaphors that say something to you.*

Potential Comparisons

Mixed emotions regarding love and its effects: Valentine, La Belle Dame sans Merci, My Father Would no Show Us



Metaphor: i wanna be yours, Valentine, Nettles

Structure - Lists: i wanna be yours, Sonnet 43