There Will Come Soft Rains

POEM TEXT

(War Time)

There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pools singing at night,
And wild plum trees in tremulous white,

Robins will wear their feathery fire
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.

Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree
If mankind perished utterly;

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

SUMMARY

One day gentle rain will fall and bring with it the scent of damp earth. Swallows will fly in circles while letting out their brilliant call.

Frogs will sing out from their ponds in the night, and the white blossoms of wild plum trees will flutter.

Robins, in their fiery red coat of feathers, will sing out to their heart's content while perching on the wire of a low fence.

Not a single one of these animals will have any awareness of the war, nor will any of them care when it finally ends.

In fact, nothing in nature—neither the birds nor the blossoming trees—would care at all if human beings went completely extinct.

Even Spring herself would, upon waking up in the morning, hardly notice that human beings no longer existed.

THEMES

NATURE, HUMANITY, AND WAR

"There Will Come Soft Rains" contrasts the peaceful harmony of the natural world with humanity's capacity for violent destruction. Despite taking place against the backdrop of World War I, the poem turns away from the carnage of the battlefield and instead focuses on the beauty and serenity of nature—a place filled with "soft rains" and animals whose "singing" will endure well past the war's end. The poem frames humanity's squabbles as both an affront to nature and totally insignificant in the long run. While war and other forms of humanly destruction might *seem* devastating, "There Will Come Soft Rains" serves as a reminder that the natural world was here before us and will be here after us, too.

Though the poem is subtitled "War Time," it barely mentions war at all; most of its lines focus on the beauty and tranquility of nature, implying that human concerns aren't the end-all be-all of existence. The speaker spotlights this idea by imagining "swallows circling" through the air, frogs "singing at night," and "wild plum trees" blooming vibrantly. These gentle sights and sounds stand out against the implied brutality of war, especially since this kind of teeming beauty is usually associated with spring—a time of rebirth and new life that starkly juxtaposes the death and decay of war.

At the same time, some of this nature-related imagery subtly *acknowledges* the violent sights of war (like, for instance, the mention of the robins' "feathery fire"). This, however, only serves to make that contrast between human violence and natural beauty more noticeable, since it draws readers' attention to the fact that war is *nothing* like nature. The phrase "there will come" also hints at the fact that the war won't last forever; the songs of "circling" swallows, bellowing frogs, and "whistling" robins will outlast the gruesome cries of war.

In fact, the speaker even indicates that nature is *indifferent* to humanity and its many missteps. As robins sing their songs on a fence, the speaker says that they won't know or care about the war at all. This suggests that war (which seems so urgent and terrible to human beings) has no lasting impact on the natural world, which will continue to go along like it always does—regardless of petty human concerns, and regardless of whether human beings foolishly wipe themselves off the map entirely.

To that end, the speaker puts human worries into perspective by arguing that nature wouldn't even "mind" if "mankind perished utterly." Saying that humanity's complete disappearance would have no serious impact on the natural

world implies that human concerns—including those that lead to war—don't actually matter that much. War itself, then, seems completely foolish in the face of nature's lasting peace and harmony. The speaker thus critiques humanity's tendency to get wrapped up in its own destruction when, in reality, the world doesn't care about trivial human conflicts.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-12

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

The poem opens with imagery that illustrates the beauty and tranquility of nature. "There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground," the speaker says in line 1, setting forth a peaceful, soothing vision of the future. The sound of gently falling rain—along with the earthy smell that rises when this happens—creates a pleasant and calm atmosphere, allowing the speaker to emphasize the serene beauty of the natural world.

There is also an inherent sense of optimism in the phrase "there will come," which gestures toward the future. In this future, the speaker indicates, there will be little more than "soft rains" and the sight of swallows (a kind of bird) flying overhead. Using sound-related imagery, the speaker brings this atmosphere to life, noting the "shimmering sound" of the birds and, in doing so, hinting that there will be nothing to disrupt nature's bright, joyous music.

Of course, as the subtitle tells readers, this optimistic vision of the future sits against the backdrop of war. Given that the poem was published in 1918 (and reprinted in slightly different form in 1920), readers can gather that the specific war in question is World War I.

This idea of a peaceful, harmonious future therefore contrasts with the brutal realities of one of the most gruesome wars in human history—brutal realities that the speaker never directly acknowledges. The speaker prefers to focus on nature's grandeur, which the poem implies exists separately from humanity's destructive tendencies.

The speaker's use of sibilance in these opening lines helps lull readers into the poem's relaxed and peaceful environment:

> There will come soft rains and the smell of the
> ground,
> And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

The hissing of the sibilant /s/ (as well as /z/ and /sh/) softens the speaker's language. In fact, many of the consonant sounds in these lines add to this pleasing effect, leading to a sense of euphony—the combination of the /m/, /l/, and /w/ sounds are particularly noticeable (in words like "smell," "swallows," and "shimmering"). The language thus reflects the same feeling of ease and wonder embodied by nature itself.

LINES 3-6

And frogs in the pools singing at night,
And wild plum trees in tremulous white,
Robins will wear their feathery fire
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

The speaker continues to describe an idyllic future in which nature is left to its own devices. In this peaceful atmosphere, frogs croak in their ponds at night, the blossoms of wild plum trees bloom a vibrant white, and robins "whistl[e]" while perched on fences. Humanity is totally absent here; there are no sounds of war to disrupt the frogs' chorus, domesticate plum trees, or shoo the birds away from that fence.

Yet while this all seems very scenic and harmonious, this vibrant imagery might also evoke war-related violence. The mention of robins and their "feathery fire," for example, could be the speaker's way of bringing to mind the horrifying sights of the battlefield and all the fiery explosions that take place on it. The low fence-wire is also probably an allusion to the barbed wire fences found on many WWI battlefields.

Part of what makes the poem so moving and poignant, however, is that it *avoids* focusing too much on human violence. The speaker concentrates on nature, not on war, suggesting that—despite war's harrowing impact on humanity—certain things are bigger than human conflict.

And while the presence of this fence serves as a reminder of human activity, there are no actual human beings in the poem—just the things they've left behind. This leads to the unsettling idea that human beings have wiped themselves off the face of the earth in the future the poem imagines, leaving the natural world to repurpose the things they've left behind.

This fence, then, is both a sign of humanity's impact on nature *and* a symbolic representation of the fact that the world go on like normal even if human beings destroy themselves. Those birds can sit calmly on those fences, with their brilliant red feathers replacing the explosions of war.

The speaker's use of repetition creates a feeling of excess, as if there's no end to nature's beauty. For example, the speaker uses polysyndeton by repeating the word "and" at the beginning of lines 3 and 4, emphasizing all of the peaceful things that will someday take place when nature is finally left to its own devices.

These lines are also very alliterative. The speaker repeats the /w/ sound in the words "wild" and "white" in line 4, repeats the

/f/ sound in "feathery fire" in line 5, and returns once again to the /w/ sound in "whistling," "whims," and "wire" in line 6. This just adds to the musicality of the language, making the poem sound as pleasant as the peaceful scene it describes.

LINES 7-10

And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.
Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree
If mankind perished utterly;

For the first time in the poem, the speaker explicitly acknowledges "the war," referring to World War I and its devastating toll on humanity. Instead of fixating on the horrors of war and how it has affected people, though, the speaker remains focused on nature, insisting that none of the animals mentioned earlier in the poem—the swallows, frogs, and robins—will ever even "know of the war."

By saying this, the speaker implies that there is a disconnect between the chaos of the human world and the peaceful harmony of the natural world. Although human beings are wrapped up in their own suffering, nature simply carries on—completely unbothered by petty human concerns.

The speaker uses anaphora, repeating the phrase "not one" in order to emphasize the extent to which the animals in nature can't be bothered by human drama:

> And not one will know of the war, not one
> Will care at last when it is done.
> Not one would mind [...]

This anaphora drives home the idea that there isn't a single nonhuman creature that "care[s]" about things like war. To *really* stress this idea, the speaker even suggests that "neither bird nor tree" would "mind" if humanity completely disappeared. At first, the speaker says that the animals don't even know that there's a war going on, then says that the animals won't care when it's over, and now insists that they wouldn't even "mind" if humans wiped each other off the face of the earth with unnecessary violence. In fact, it's not just the animals who won't care—the phrase "neither bird nor tree" implies that the natural world *as a whole* will be virtually uninfluenced by humanity's disappearance.

This puts human conflict into perspective, making it seem extraordinarily petty. Although it's easy for people to obsess over their disputes with one another, the poem suggests that these disputes are insignificant in the grand scheme of things—so insignificant, it appears, that the natural world wouldn't even notice humanity's extinction.

This message might seem pessimistic, but it helps frame a devastating moment in human history—namely, World War I—as something that will eventually pass. The speaker's attitude is therefore oddly optimistic, since it invites readers to take comfort in the idea that even the most urgent and horrifying events in human history aren't powerful enough to fundamentally change the world at large.

LINES 11-12

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

In the poem's final couplet, the speaker personifies spring as a woman who would hardly notice if she woke up one morning and realized human beings were completely "gone." This builds on the previous suggestion that none of the animals in nature—nor nature itself—would "mind" if humanity destroyed itself entirely.

By personifying spring, the speaker imbues the natural world with its own sense of agency, making it easier to illustrate the world's "utter[]" indifference to human suffering. And because spring typically represents rebirth and new life, this use of personification also juxtaposes nature's vitality with humanity's violent, destructive ways.

What's more, the idea of spring waking up "at dawn" to discover that humanity has disappeared also subtly suggests that humankind is unnervingly close to sudden extinction, as if the entire fate of the human race could be determined in a single night.

This makes humanity seem expendable while also calling attention to the absurdity of war—after all, what could possibly inspire people to destroy their own kind? Given that the poem has already demonstrated the easy harmony and peacefulness that exists in the natural world, it seems especially ridiculous that human beings are willing to destroy *themselves*, since the rest of the world is able to simply coexist.

By suggesting that spring would "scarcely know" if humans perished, then, the speaker encourages readers to consider the fact that human beings aren't at the center of everything. Rather, humanity is just one small part of the world. The poem suggests that even the most dire situations in the human world aren't quite as significant as they seem—a comforting thought to return to during wartime, when the events of human history seem so important.

Throughout the poem, the speaker uses perfect end rhymes in each couplet. The final couplet is no exception, as the speaker rhymes "dawn" and "gone," leaving readers with a satisfyingly musical conclusion. These lines also feature the consonance of the /w/ and /n/ sounds, along with sibilance:

> And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn
> Would scarcley know that we were gone.

The speaker's language sounds rich and poetic in this moment. And by using such musical language, the speaker manages to

make the poem sound as soothing and tranquil as the world it describes—a world untouched by the mayhem of human conflict.

SYMBOLS

THE ROBINS WHISTLING ON THE FENCE

The robins in "There Will Come Soft Rains" are symbols of both nature's beauty and its indifference to humanity's destructive, violent ways—the latter of which are symbolized by the "low wire fence" on which the robins perch.

On the one hand, the birds fit into the poem's naturalistic imagery, since their feathers are beautiful and their "whistling" adds to the natural world's pleasant and peaceful soundscape. On the other hand, though, the phrase "feathery fire" hints at the image of fire on a battlefield. The fact that the robins perch on a "low fence-wire" also introduces battle-related imagery, since many trenches in World War I were protected by barbed-wire fences. In sitting on the fence, it's as though the birds have reclaimed part of the human world, their vivid feathers replacing the fires of war. If humanity destroys itself, this symbolism suggests, nature will step right into the world people leave behind.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-6:** "Robins will wear their feathery fire / Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;"

POETIC DEVICES

IMAGERY

The first half of "There Will Come Soft Rains" is full of imagery, as the speaker describes a peaceful world untouched by humanity's violent destruction. To emphasize this sense of serenity, the speaker draws on the human senses, focusing on how "soft[ly]" falling rain will bring out an earthy smell from the ground. This creates a feeling of tranquility, inviting readers to imagine the familiar scent of rainfall and the gentle sound of water dropping on the ground.

The speaker then concentrates on sound-related imagery, referencing the "shimmering sound" that swallows make as they fly in circles in the sky. Frogs join in this natural chorus, "singing at night" (that is, croaking). This makes it even easier for readers to imagine themselves in an environment in which the only activity comes from nature itself. By describing these sounds, the speaker makes it seem like the poem's setting is full of music.

The visual imagery contributes to this sense of beauty. The speaker mentions "wild plum trees" that have bloomed a "tremulous white." The word "tremulous" suggests that the tree's white petals flutter gently in a soft breeze—a very calming, meditative image. To make the scene feel even more vibrant, the speaker notes the "feathery fire" of some nearby robins, adding a pop of color that illustrates nature's overwhelming beauty.

At the same time, it's also possible to interpret this imagery as an allusion to the horrific sights one might encounter on a battlefield. "There Will Come Soft Rains" was first published in 1918, shortly after the Sedition Act of 1918, which made it illegal to publish anti-war messages. It's possible, then, that the poem's imagery is Teasedale's subtle way of writing about the war without making overt references to it.

Under this interpretation, images like the robins' "feathery fire" seem like metaphorical representations of the explosions on a battlefield. Similarly, it's possible that the "tremulous white" of the plum trees is a reference to smoke hanging over the trenches after an explosion (or perhaps a reference to the flare of bright light one might see right as a grenade goes off). The potential double-meaning of the imagery thus hints at the juxtaposition between the natural world's calm beauty and humanity's destructive chaos.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground"
- **Line 2:** "And swallows circling with their shimmering sound"
- **Line 3:** "And frogs in the pools singing at night"
- **Line 4:** "And wild plum trees in tremulous white"
- **Line 5:** "Robins will wear their feathery fire"
- **Line 6:** "Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire"

PERSONIFICATION

At the end of the poem, the speaker personifies spring by referring to it as a woman who, upon waking up in the morning, hardly even notices that human beings have disappeared from the earth. By talking about spring as if it has personal agency, the speaker makes the natural world seem full of life—so much life, in fact, that the extinction of humanity wouldn't make a noticeable difference.

Personifying spring also vividly illustrates nature's total indifference to humanity. The idea of spring waking up in the morning suggests that even the most chaotic and destructive events in human history—like, for instance, World War I—aren't enough to rouse spring from its slumber; it isn't until *after* human beings disappear that spring finally wakes up. The implication, then, is that human concerns are unimportant in the world at large, despite the fact that war and other conflicts seem so dire and significant to human beings themselves.

The personification of spring also accentuates the speaker's use of juxtaposition, since springtime usually represents rebirth and new life. Bringing spring to life in the last two lines of the poem calls attention to the season, encouraging readers to more vividly consider all that spring represents. And this, in turn, subtly urges readers to compare spring's peacefulness and vibrancy to the follies of humankind.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 11-12:** "And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn, / Would scarcely know that we were gone"

JUXTAPOSITION

There is an implied juxtaposition at the heart of "There Will Come Soft Rains" between the peacefulness of nature and humanity's tendency toward violence and destruction. Such tendencies are never explicitly referenced in the poem, but the poem's subtitle, "War Time," makes it clear that all of this serenity and natural beauty plays out against a backdrop of chaos and violence.

This becomes especially apparent in the final three couplets, in which the speaker suggests that nothing in the surrounding natural world would "care" about the final outcome of the war. Having spent the first three couplets meditating on the idea of a conflict-free world in which the only sounds are those created by nature itself, the speaker finally acknowledges the impact of humanity on the world—or, rather, the *lack* of impact, since the poem suggests that the world would hardly change if human beings completely disappeared. Either way, the simple fact that the poem is technically about World War I encourages readers to juxtapose the calming natural environment with the unspoken horrors of war.

This juxtaposition is arguably embedded in the poem's imagery, too, some of which might allude to a battlefield. The flash of the robins' "feathery fire" in line 5, for instance, recalls the fiery explosions of war, and the "tremulous white" of the "wild plum trees" is reminiscent of smoke settling over the trenches. The bird singing on a "low fence-wire" is the most explicit allusion to the human world, and captures the contrast between nature's beauty and humanity (with the vibrant bird perched atop—essentially reclaiming—a remnant of human society). Juxtaposition helps the speaker imply that it's absurd to get hung up on petty human conflicts when, in reality, such conflicts aren't as significant as they seem.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-12

REPETITION

Repetition is essential to the poem's structure, as the speaker uses a combination of anaphora and polysyndeton to list off the many things that will take place in nature at some point in the future—that is, when World War I has ended and possibly even when human beings no longer exist. For example, the speaker catalogs all the things that "will come" in the future, using the word "and" at the beginning of each new line:

> There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
> **And** swallows circling with their shimmering sound;
> **And** frogs in the pools singing at night,
> **And** wild plum trees in tremulous white,

This repetition of "and" is an example of both anaphora and polysyndeton, and it adds a feeling of excess to the poem. As the speaker introduces image after image, it starts to feel like there's no end to what "will come" when the world is finally free of human drama.

This is also the case in lines 7 through 10, when the speaker uses an anaphora to repeat variations of the phrase "not one will":

> And **not one will** know of the war, **not one**
> **Will** care at last when it is done.
> **Not one would mind**, neither bird nor tree
> If mankind perished utterly;

This emphasizes the idea that nothing in the natural world, "neither bird nor tree," will care if human beings destroy one another. It also adds a pleasing and consistent rhythm to the speaker's language, making the poem sound musical and satisfying even as the speaker contemplates the end of human existence.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "And"
- **Line 3:** "And"
- **Line 4:** "And"
- **Line 7:** "And," "not one will"
- **Lines 7-8:** "not one / Will"
- **Line 9:** "Not one would"
- **Line 11:** "And"

SIBILANCE

"There Will Come Soft Rains" is a very sibilant poem. This is especially clear in the opening four lines, which are filled with /s/ and /sh/ sounds:

> There will come **s**oft rains and the **s**mell of the ground,
> And **s**wallows **c**ircling with their **sh**immering **s**ound;

And frogs in the pools singing at night
And wild plum trees in tremulous white,

This sibilance gives these opening lines a gentle lisping effect that helps the speaker recreate the soothing sound of a world undisturbed by human conflict. Other soft forms of consonance—like the /z/, /th/, and /f/—add to this effect. Note how the sounds of words like "soft," "rains," "swallows," and "their" imbue the line with gentleness.

The final two lines also feature sibilance:

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

Once again, this leads to a pleasing sound, one that could almost lull readers to sleep. In this way, the speaker's language is as peaceful and serene as the natural environment it describes—an environment completely untouched by humanity's chaos and destruction.

Where Sibilance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "soft," "smell"
- **Line 2:** "swallows circling," "shimmering," "sound"
- **Line 3:** "singing"
- **Line 4:** "tremulous"
- **Line 6:** "Whistling," "fence"
- **Line 11:** "Spring herself," "she"
- **Line 12:** "scarcely"

ALLITERATION

Alliteration is sprinkled throughout "There Will Come Soft Rains," adding gentle music and rhythm to its lines that evokes the loveliness and tranquility of the natural world. Consider, for example, lines 4 through 6, in which the speaker alliterates the breathy /w/ sound alongside the light /t/ and muffled /f/ sounds:

And wild plum trees in tremulous white,
Robins will wear their feathery fire
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

As with the speaker's use of sibilance, all this alliteration simply makes the language of the poem itself more musical and pleasant to the ear. And by giving certain words a slight rhythmic bump, the speaker invites readers to luxuriate in the language in the same way one might luxuriate in nature's tranquility.

Alliteration can also add emphasis to certain words and phrase, as is the case with "feathery fire" and "swallows circling." The shared sounds make these images stand out all the more clearly for readers.

Finally, alliteration helps the speaker emphasize the idea that nature is indifferent to human struggles. Note how the alliteration of /n/ and /w/ sounds in lines 7-8, for example, create a sense of insistence:

And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.

Hammering these sounds hammers home the idea that "not one" element of nature will miss humanity's violence.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "soft," "smell"
- **Line 2:** "swallows circling," "sound"
- **Line 4:** "wild," "trees," "tremulous," "white"
- **Line 5:** "will wear," "feathery fire"
- **Line 6:** "Whistling," "whims," "wire"
- **Line 7:** "one will," "war"
- **Lines 7-8:** "one / Will"
- **Line 8:** "when"
- **Line 9:** "Not one would," "neither," "nor"
- **Line 11:** "when," "woke"
- **Line 12:** "Would," "we were"

CONSONANCE

Like sibilance and alliteration, consonance fills "There Will Come Soft Rains" with gentle, pleasant music that evokes the gentle beauty of thre natural world. For instance, the first two lines blend the /w/, /l/, /s/, /m/, and /r/ sounds t create a richly textured, lyrical opening:

There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

The combination of these sounds—all of which are rather gentle—leads to a sense of euphony, as the different forms of consonance flow into each other in satisfying ways that are particularly melodic. This extra musicality draws readers through the poem and makes the language sound as pleasant as its naturalistic imagery.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Line 2
- Line 3
- Line 4
- Line 5
- Line 6
- Line 7
- Line 8

- Line 9
- Line 10
- Line 11
- Line 12

VOCABULARY

Swallows (Line 2) - Songbirds with large wings.

Shimmering (Line 2) - The word "shimmer" usually describes something that shines in a trembling way. Here, though, the speaker applies the word to the sound of swallows singing out in the sky, suggesting that their calls have an urgent but fluctuating sound.

Tremulous (Line 4) - Shaking or gently quivering.

Feathery Fire (Line 5) - A phrase used to describe the bright red of a robin's feathers.

Whims (Line 6) - The speaker's suggestion that the robins "whistl[e] their whims" means that they sing to their heart's content.

Perished (Line 10) - To "perish" is to suffer to the point of complete destruction and even extinction.

Utterly (Line 10) - Completely.

Scarcely (Line 12) - Hardly at all.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"There Will Come Soft Rains" is a 12-line poem divided into six couplets. This is a very straightforward form that adds a sense of structure and simplicity to the poem—a sense of simplicity that reflects nature's peaceful harmony. Because couplets only contain two lines, there's nothing daunting or visually overwhelming about this poem. Rather, it feels neat and manageable, enabling readers to focus on its imagery instead of getting distracted by a messy or complicated form. By using this well-ordered and simple structure, the speaker invites readers to bask in the feeling of ease and tranquility embodied by nature itself.

METER

The poem doesn't follow a strict meter, though most lines have four stressed beats. Where those beats fall in the line varies, as do the number of unstressed beats. Since most the feet are iambs (da-DUM) or anapests (da-da-DUM), poem might be considered a very loose mixture of iambic and anapestic tetrameter.

Line 8, for example, is perfect iambic tetrameter:

> Will care | at last | when it | is done.

The way the stresses fall in this moment give the line a clear iambic bounce. Another example of perfect iambic tetrameter comes in line 12:

> Would scarce- |ly know | that we | were gone.

Other lines in the poem don't always stick to this pattern. The first line is a good example of this, since it can be scanned in multiple ways. Here's one way to read it:

> There will come | soft rains | and the smell | of the ground,

This is again tetrameter, meaning there are four feet in the line—but here, the speaker tosses some anapests (again, da-da-DUMs) in with those iambs. Line 4 again has four stressed beats, this time a mixture of iambs, an anapest, and a trochee (DUM-da):

> And frogs | in the pools | singing | at night,

Some lines do have more than four stresses, but most keep this general pattern going. The result is a poem that feels rhythmic and musical yet not overly strict or rigid in its form. By varying the rhythm throughout, the speaker lets the language fluctuate naturally, giving the words a casual, unbothered sound that reflects the ease of nature and all its serene beauty.

RHYME SCHEME

"There Will Come Soft Rains" follows a very simple, clear rhyme scheme made up of couplets:

AA BB CC DD EE FF

This neat pattern makes the poem feel steady and predictable—perhaps as steady and predictable as nature's indifference to humanity's struggles! The poem's clean, calm rhyme scheme subtly reflects the idea that none of the human world's violence and chaos disturbs nature, which continues on normally regardless of the war raging in the background.

SPEAKER

There is no identifying information about the speaker of "There Will Come Soft Rains"—apart from the fact that they're a human being (they consider themselves part of the "we" in the final line). This makes sense; one of the speaker's main points is that nothing in the natural world "would mind" if "mankind perished utterly." The fact that the speaker acts as nothing more than a narrating voice is appropriate, then, since the absence of an identifiable person in the poem aligns with the vision of a world completely uninfluenced by human beings.

SETTING

The subtitle of "There Will Come Soft Rains" clarifies that the poem takes place during "War Time." Given that the poem was published in 1918, it's reasonable to conclude that the war referred to here is World War I. Of course, the poem doesn't take place on the battlefield or even in human society at all. Instead, it is set in a peaceful, rural environment filled with birds, frogs, and "wild plum trees" that are in full bloom because it's springtime. The only evidence of humanity's existence at all is the "low fence-wire" on which robins perch. This image symbolizes nature's indifference to human struggles, illustrating the way that the natural world moves along as normal on regardless of humanity's fighting; the birds will chirp regardless of whether humanity disappears.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Sara Teasdale published the first version of "There Will Come Soft Rains" in *Harper's Magazine* in 1918. This version didn't include the subtitle, "War Time," which Teasdale added when she included the poem in her 1920 book *Flame and Shadow*, which deals more explicitly with World War I; "There Will Come Soft Rains" is actually the first poem in an entire section of the book that focuses on wartime losses.

"There Will Come Soft Rains" is a bit more subtle than many of the most famous poems to have come out of World War I. Poems like Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est" or Siegfried Sassoon's "Suicide in the Trenches," for example, are much more upfront about the horrors of war, describing death and violence in vivid, visceral terms. "There Will Come Soft Rains," on the other hand, doesn't take place on the battlefield. Instead, the speaker focuses on nature's beauty and doesn't even mention the war until halfway through the poem.

This is likely due, at least in part, to the Sedition Act of 1918, which made it illegal to publish any kind of criticism of the U.S. government's involvement in World War I. War poets like Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon were British, so they didn't have to deal with this attempt to squash poetic anti-war messages. For this reason, Teasdale's subtle criticism of the folly of war was unique in the landscape of American poetry, since it wasn't until after the war that many of her fellow American poets began to write openly about the conflict.

When Teasdale published "There Will Come Soft Rains" in 1918, then, there hadn't yet been very many dissenting voices when it came to war poetry. In fact, one of the most famous poems to come from an American poet during that time is Alan Seeger's "I Have a Rendezvous with Death," in which the speaker—and, in turn, the poet himself—declares a total willingness to die in battle. This gung-ho, jingoistic attitude was typical of poetry published during World War I, making Teasdale's nuanced critique of the war even more remarkable.

In 1950, the science fiction author Ray Bradbury titled a famous short story after Teasdale's poem; the story takes place in a house filled with devices going through their automated functions after much of humanity has destroyed itself in a nuclear war.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As previously mentioned, "There Will Come Soft Rains" was first published shortly after the Sedition Act of 1918 limited what writers were allowed to say about World War I. The poem's publication also occurred alongside the German Spring Offensive, in which Germany made an effort to expand through Europe before the United States had the chance to fully put their resources to work (the U.S. hadn't officially joined World War I until April 1917, less than a year before the Spring Offensive).

The end of the Spring Offensive in July 1918 actually coincided with the appearance of "There Will Come Soft Rains" in that month's issue of *Harper's Magazine*, meaning that the poem reached the public at a very volatile time in the war. The Germans had technically gained ground in Europe, but August marked the beginning of the Hundred Days Offensive, in which the U.S. and other Allied forces mounted a series of attacks that led to Germany's defeat and the end of the war.

But when "There Will Come Soft Rains" was published, it was entirely unknown what might happen, and the end of the war most likely felt a long way off. To add to this, there was a devastating flu pandemic in 1918 that ravaged the United States. The poem therefore emerged in an atmosphere of tense uncertainty.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- The Poem Out Loud — Listen to a reading of "There Will Come Soft Rains." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XB3vXrPjNWM)
- Ray Bradbury's Short Story — The science fiction writer Ray Bradbury wrote a story called "There Will Come Soft Rains," borrowing the title from Teasdale's poem. (https://www.btboces.org/Downloads/7_There%20Will%20Come%20Soft%20Rains%20by%20Ray%
- The Sedition Act of 1918 — Learn more about the Sedition Act of 1918, which is possibly one of the reasons that the references to World War I in "There Will Come Soft Rains" are indirect and subtle. (https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/u-s-congress-passes-sedition-act)
- Sara Teasdale's Biography — For more information about

Sara Teasdale, take a look at this brief overview of her life and work. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/sara-teasdale)

- The Poem in Popular Culture — A robot in the post-apocalyptic video game Fallout 3 recites "There Will Come Soft Rains." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnXvVdy5sxs)

HOW TO CITE

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