Weathers

POEM TEXT

This is the weather the cuckoo likes,
And so do I;
When showers betumble the chestnut spikes,
And nestlings fly;
And the little brown nightingale bills his best,
And they sit outside at "The Traveller's Rest,"
And maids come forth sprig-muslin drest,
And citizens dream of the south and west,
And so do I.

This is the weather the shepherd shuns,
And so do I;
When beeches drip in browns and duns,
And thresh and ply;
And hill-hid tides throb, throe on throe,
And meadow rivulets overflow,
And drops on gate bars hang in a row,
And rooks in families homeward go,
And so do I.

SUMMARY

This is the kind of weather that cuckoos like—and the kind I like, too. It's the time of year when rain showers make the chestnut blossoms dance and little baby birds take their first flights; when the nightingale sings sweetest, and people sit out in the pub garden, and girls walk around wearing flowered cotton dresses, and people start dreaming of traveling to the south or the west—and I do, too.

This is the kind of weather the shepherd avoids—and the kind I avoid, too. It's the time of year when beech trees drip rain from brown leaves and thrash in the wind; when underground springs overflow and pulse out of the earth; when the streams flood in the meadows; when raindrops hang from the bars of gates, and when families of rooks fly home—and I do, too.

THEMES

HUMANITY AND NATURE

Thomas Hardy's "Weathers" describes both the lively joy of spring and the dreary gloom of autumn. As it does so, the poem illustrates the deep connection between human beings and the natural world—especially in the countryside, where people follow the seasonal rhythms of the year particularly closely.

Whether gentle showers are making the flowers of the chestnut trees dance in spring or flooding "meadow rivulets" are soaking the fields in fall, the poem's speaker (and the people around them) responds in just the same way as the animals do. Over and over, the speaker shares a reaction to the weather with a bird or a fellow "citizen[]." "This is the weather the cuckoo likes, / And so do I," they declare at the start of the poem; "rooks in families homeward go, / And so do I," they conclude. This refrain persistently links the speaker's feelings about the seasons to those of other living creatures. When the sun comes out, the speaker shares in the cuckoo's delight and other people's "dream[s] of the south and west" with equal enthusiasm; when the autumn rains come, they make like the "rooks" and the "shepherd" and "homeward go" before they get soaked.

This kind of shared feeling, the poem suggests, is one of the powerful joys of a life lived close to nature. The speaker's familiarity with what happens in the countryside in the different seasons (which birds sing in spring, which streams flood in autumn) makes it clear that they've watched the seasons turn many, many times. Their friendly familiarity with the "weathers" of the year helps them to feel connected to nature and to the rural people around them. Even when autumn drives everyone to shelter, then, the speaker can still feel a warm camaraderie with the natural world and with their fellow countryfolk.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-18

THE REGULAR RHYTHM OF THE SEASONS

"Weathers" juxtaposes portraits of two seasons—spring and autumn—in the English countryside. The speaker's fond descriptions of spring (and less-fond descriptions of fall) suggest that, though the changing seasons feel very *different*, they're also intimately *connected*. The movements of the birds and the country people form a pulse and a pattern, a rhythm whose joys the poem celebrates.

The first stanza of the poem describes the delights of spring. "This is the weather the cuckoo likes, / And so do I," the speaker declares. In fact, every living thing comes out to celebrate the warmth and sunlight. The "little brown nightingale," the country "maids" (or young girls), the "citizens" of the speaker's town,

and the speaker all share in springy delight; the world feels bright and full of promise.

In autumn, by contrast, everyone heads for shelter from the gloomy rain. The "shepherd shuns" this weather, and the speaker and the "rooks" agree; everyone heads "homeward" and leaves the sodden trees and meadows to drip and flood on their own. Where "showers" playfully "betumble[d]" the trees in spring, storms now make the brown-leaved trees "thresh and ply" (thrash around) as if they were struggling to escape.

But paradoxically, the contrast between these two times of year suggests they're part of one big pattern. In spring, everything emerges into the sun, and in autumn, everything retreats to shelter. But then, you have to retreat in order to come out again! The opposite seasons here are depicted as part of the same rhythm, like the pulse of a heartbeat. The poem's form helps to make that point: the two stanzas use exactly the same structure and much of the same language, suggesting that these two different seasons are all part of the continuous music of nature.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-18

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

This is the weather the cuckoo likes,
And so do I;
When showers betumble the chestnut spikes,
And nestlings fly;

"Weathers" begins with a statement of shared springtime joy. "This is the weather the cuckoo likes, / And so do I," the speaker declares. Like the robin, the cuckoo is one of the classic harbingers of spring, its distinctive call a signal that the season has arrived. Here, though, the cuckoo isn't just the bearer of good news: it's also the speaker's comrade in happiness. It "likes" the warm weather just as much as the speaker does.

This simple statement of shared satisfaction sets the tone for a poem about the changing seasons in the English countryside. In "Weathers," the poem's speaker will soak up the pleasures of a rural English spring—and try to avoid soaking up too much of the wet of a rural English autumn. Their familiarity with the signs and sights of these seasons will suggest that one of the pleasures of a life lived close to nature is a fellow-feeling with every other creature experiencing the world's "weathers," animal and human alike.

The speaker begins by looking around at the springtime world. This is the time of year, they say, when "showers betumble the chestnut spikes"—that is, when rain makes the conical spikes of white and pink flowers that grow on chestnut trees shake and dance. The playful word "betumble" captures the boisterous, lively energy of these rain showers; there's something childlike and bouncy in the imagery here.

Amid these showers, new life grows. This is also the time of the year when "nestlings fly," when young birds make their first forays beyond the nest. Everything here feels young and fresh. That sense of new things emerging into the world will thread this first stanza together.

These first four lines might seem to set up a rhythmic pattern. Using flexible accentual meter (that is, lines that use a certain number of beats, but don't stick to any one type of metrical foot), Hardy alternates between lines of four beats (as in "This is the weather the cuckoo likes") and lines of two (as in "And so do I"). Readers might expect this pattern to continue, but the rest of this energetic stanza will head in a different direction.

LINES 5-9

And the little brown nightingale bills his best,
And they sit outside at "The Traveller's Rest,"
And maids come forth sprig-muslin drest,
And citizens dream of the south and west,
And so do I.

The speaker launches into a list of spring-time sights. The exuberant anaphora of the word "and" captures the feeling that everywhere the speaker's eye falls, they see some new thing to like about the spring:

And the little brown nightingale bills his best,
And they sit outside at "The Traveller's Rest,"
And maids come forth sprig-muslin drest,
And citizens dream of the south and west,
And so do I.

Lines 5-8 feel even more lively because they keep on returning to the same /est/ rhyme: *best / Rest / drest / west*. The spring brings out the same joy in the cuckoo, the nightingale, the folks at the Traveller's Rest (a pub), the young girls in their flowery dresses, the "citizens" of the countryside, and the speaker alike. The string of rhymes mirrors that sense of shared joy in sound.

The consistent four-beat meter in those lines similarly creates a feeling of exuberant energy and momentum—one that ends only in the speaker's return to their two-beat refrain, "And so do I."

The sights and sounds the speaker describes capture an idyllic rural scene—one that the speaker knows well. Some of the details here, like the song of the "little brown nightingale," might turn up anywhere in the southern English countryside. But the specificity of the name "'The Traveller's Rest'" suggests this pub might be one where the speaker has enjoyed a lazy afternoon beverage or two in their time. So does the speaker's choice to refer to the clientele of this pub only as "they"—you know, the

same *they* who are always there on a sunny spring day, relaxing at a picnic table out back.

The speaker describes this familiar crowd in the same breath as the "cuckoo" and the "little brown nightingale." The girls coming out "sprig-muslin drest" (that is, wearing light floral-print cotton dresses) are as much a sign of the spring as the nightingale's song or the fledgling's first flights. This image implies that the *humans* of the countryside follow a seasonal rhythm, just as the birds do. Perhaps even the "citizens" who "dream of the south and west," longing for a sun-soaked holiday in warm climes, are reacting to the spring as birds do: like the cuckoo, they're migratory (or would like to be, anyway).

And the speaker is aligned with them all. Their refrain, "And so do I," suggests that a big part of their countryside life is a feeling of camaraderie with their fellow "citizens" and the wildlife alike. Everyone relishes and responds to the weather together.

LINES 10-13

This is the weather the shepherd shuns,
And so do I;
When beeches drip in browns and duns,
And thresh and ply;

The beginning of the second stanza sounds, in many ways, much like the first. Pronounced repetitions and an identical four-beat/two-beat rhythm shape lines 10-13 to match lines 1-4:

This is the weather the shepherd shuns,
And so do I;
When beeches drip in browns and duns,
And thresh and ply;

In all other ways, though, the vision presented in these lines is very different from that presented at the poem's start. The speaker describes the autumn—and where they shared the cuckoo's "lik[ing]" for spring weather before, they share the shepherd's distaste for gloom and rain now. (The pronounced /sh/ alliteration of "shepherd shuns" emphasizes that distaste!)

The speaker marks the difference between spring and autumn by revisiting an image. Where rain and wind shook the chestnut blossoms in lines 3-4, they shake the beech leaves here—leaves that have dried to muddy "browns and duns," dull dead colors. The chestnut blossoms were jauntily "betumble[d]" by spring showers; the faded beeches, by contrast, "thresh and ply," thrashing around as if they were in pain.

This juxtaposition suggests an autumn world that feels very different from the spring one. This season's weather is drab, uncomfortable, and drives people to "shun[]" it rather than calling them outside. But the parallel imagery and echoing language also suggest that autumn is the other side of spring's coin. In both of these seasons, readers see a vision of a tree tousled by rain, and in both of these seasons, the speaker shares in the whole world's reaction to the weather: that old refrain, "And so do I," shows that they're connected to the rain-shunning shepherd even as the two of them hurry off to their separate homes.

LINES 14-18

And hill-hid tides throb, throe on throe,
And meadow rivulets overflow,
And drops on gate bars hang in a row,
And rooks in families homeward go,
And so do I.

The rest of this autumn stanza parallels the form of the spring stanza. Again, there's a string of four-beat lines connected by anaphora on the word "And":

And hill-hid tides throb, throe on throe,
And meadow rivulets overflow,
And drops on gate bars hang in a row,

...and so on. Also once again, there's a repeated rhyme sound. This time it's the /oh/ sound: *throe / overflow / row / go*. And, finally, the poem once more returns to the speaker's refrain: "And so do I."

This time, though, the sorts of things the speaker notices feel pretty different. The first stanza described bird life emerging and people getting out and about, putting on their spring dresses and reveling in the warm sun. Here, the speaker mostly notices how darn *wet* everything is:

- The "hill-hid tides"—underground springs—"throb," pulsing out of the ground "throe on throe" (that is, spasm after spasm), a moment of imagery that feels at once lively and painful. (The word "throe" is often used to describe an agonized convulsion, as in the "throes of childbirth.")
- The "meadow rivulets overflow": the little streams spill out and flood the meadows.
- And every "gate bar[]" wears a string of dangling "drops" like a necklace.

In the midst of all this stormy wetness, the only life the speaker observes besides that rain-shunning shepherd is a family of "rooks" making its way "homeward"—an example that the speaker chooses to follow, as they reveal with their final "And so do I." Where spring brings life *out*, then, autumn sends it hurrying *in*. While this juxtaposition doesn't seem particularly favorable to autumn, the poem's mirrored shape suggests that these two different "weathers" are just two sides of the same coin. Nature pulses between joyous spring and gloomy autumn; throughout it all, the speaker feels connected to the rest of the living landscape by shared responses. The changing seasons bring their own natural pleasures and pains to every person and every bird—and the speaker's capacity to say "And so do I"

seems like a pleasure that transcends gloom and wet. The change of the "weathers," this poem suggests, can unite those living things that are sensitive to them.

POETIC DEVICES

ANAPHORA

"Weathers" is filled with anaphora, a device that gives this poem its shape and helps to reveal its themes. Both of the nine-line stanzas here use the same patterns of language, and this parallelism echoes the thematic idea that spring and autumn—however different their weather may be—are both part of the steady rhythm of nature.

To start, there's the anaphora that matches lines 1 to line 10:

> This is the weather the cuckoo likes,
> [...]
> This is the weather the shepherd shuns,

These lines introduce the seasons each stanza will deal with. At the same time as the poem points out the difference in the world's *feelings* toward spring and autumn—the one "like[d]," the other "shun[ned]"—the echoing language quietly reminds readers that both of these seasons are just different movements in the same symphony, as it were.

The anaphora that links lines 3-4 to lines 12-13 creates a similar effect:

> When showers betumble the chestnut spikes,
> And nestlings fly;
> [...]
> When beeches drip in browns and duns,
> And thresh and ply;

Here, a parallel sentence structure draws attention to the parallels between the scenes the speaker describes. In both of these images, trees are tossing their leaves in the rain. In the spring, though, it's just playful "showers betumbl[ing]" chestnut flowers. In the autumn, by contrast, beech trees with dying "brown[] and dun[]" leaves "drip" gloomily and "thresh and ply" (thrash around) as if they're in pain.

Perhaps the poem's most dramatic moments of anaphora come in lines 4-9 and 13-18. Every single line in each of these passages starts with the word "and." This choice creates an exuberant pile-up of impressions:

> And nestlings fly;
> And the little brown nightingale bills his best,
> And they sit outside at "The Traveller's Rest,"
> And maids come forth sprig-muslin drest,
> And citizens dream of the south and west,
> And so do I.

It's as if the speaker's eye is roving over the landscape, taking in sight after sight. There's a sense of abundance in this picture—a sense that even carries over to the speaker's gloomier picture of autumn, in which "hill-hid tides," "meadow rivulets," and "drops on gate bars" all add up to a mood of general muddy greyness.

The anaphora on "and" also links these passages of description with the speaker's refrain: "And so do I." That connection helps to stress the speaker's connection to the landscape. The words "and so do I" themselves get tied into the scenery through the speaker's repeated language.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "This is the weather"
- **Line 2:** "And"
- **Line 3:** "When showers"
- **Line 4:** "And"
- **Line 5:** "And"
- **Line 6:** "And"
- **Line 7:** "And"
- **Line 8:** "And"
- **Line 9:** "And"
- **Line 10:** "This is the weather"
- **Line 11:** "And"
- **Line 12:** "When beeches"
- **Line 13:** "And"
- **Line 14:** "And"
- **Line 15:** "And"
- **Line 16:** "And"
- **Line 17:** "And"
- **Line 18:** "And"

REFRAIN

The speaker's loving engagement with the changing "Weathers" of the year sings through in a refrain. The words "And so do I" thread the poem together, reminding readers that the speaker is as moved by the seasons as the birds are. This refrain appears in the same position in both stanzas: the second and ninth lines. The same words thus introduce and close the speaker's descriptions of spring and autumn. To start, compare the refrain's appearances in lines 2 and 11:

> This is the weather the cuckoo likes,
> And so do I;
> [...]
> This is the weather the shepherd shuns,
> And so do I;

These repetitions open each stanza with a statement of the

speaker's connection to what they see around them. They "like[]" the spring weather alongside the cuckoo, they "shun[]" the autumn weather alongside the shepherd: in both cases, they feel camaraderie with their fellow country-dwellers.

The refrain's later appearances (in lines 9 and 18) come after sweeping, attentive descriptions of the sights and sounds of each season:

> And citizens dream of the south and west,
> And so do I.
> [...]
> And rooks in families homeward go,
> And so do I.

Here, the pattern of whom the speaker relates to gets reversed: birds to humans and back again. The first stanza starts with a connection to a cuckoo and ends with a connection to the speaker's fellow "citizens"; the second stanza starts with a shepherd and ends with "rooks in families" making their way "homeward."

Beyond merely echoing, then, these refrains also fit in with the poem's overall mirrored structure, helping to reveal sunny spring and rainy autumn as two sides of the same seasonal coin.

Where Refrain appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "And so do I;"
- **Line 9:** "And so do I."
- **Line 11:** "And so do I;"
- **Line 18:** "And so do I."

JUXTAPOSITION

"Weathers" juxtaposes spring, which is described in the first stanza, and autumn, which is described in the second. Spring, here, is a season of joy and liveliness, while autumn is dreary. Spring features happily singing birds; people hang outside pubs or dream of traveling. The world comes alive, and animals and people alike are out and about. Autumn, by contrast, is wet and brown. Birds fly away, and people like the speaker head indoors.

While the poem's imagery presents these seasons as being very different, however, the poem's *structure* makes it clear that they're also part of the same rhythm or cycle. The poem's parallelism and repetitions give the two stanzas the same shape, and the mirrored patterns in what the speaker describes reveal connections between the lively spring and the gloomy fall. For instance, the speaker watches the movements of the trees in lines 3-4 and 12-13:

> When showers betumble the chestnut spikes,
> And nestlings fly;
> [...]
> When beeches drip in browns and duns,
> And thresh and ply;

There's a similar movement going on in both of these moments: rain and wind are throwing the trees around. But where the weather playfully "betumble[s]" flowering chestnut trees in the first stanza, it makes brown-leaved beech trees "thresh and ply" (or thrash violently) in the second. The *mood* of these passages is very different, but the *action* is essentially the same.

The speaker also pays careful attention to bird life in both the spring and the autumn stanzas. In the first stanza, they observe the cheerful "cuckoo" (who "likes" this weather as much as the speaker does) and the "little brown nightingale" singing its heart out; in the second, they watch as "rooks in families homeward go," hurrying to get out of the rain just as the speaker does. The movements of the birds seems to *pulse* here: the cuckoo and nightingale come in spring, the rooks go in autumn. The birdy welcome-back of spring, these juxtapositions hint, requires the birdy departures of fall.

One further juxtaposition has more to do with what's *not* there than what is. Plenty of "citizens" are out and about in the spring stanza, from "maids" in flowery dresses to people "sit[ting] outside" at the local pub. In the second stanza, readers get only one glimpse of another person, and it's a "shepherd" who might not even be there: he "shuns" the bad weather, so he might well be indoors by the fire, not out in the muddy fields. The birds have their seasonal rhythms, and humanity does, too.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-9
- Lines 10-18

IMAGERY

The poem's imagery helps to distinguish spring and autumn from each other: the flavor of the imagery in the spring stanza is quite different from that of the fall stanza. In spring, for instance, the speaker observes "showers betumbl[ing] the chestnut spikes"—in other words, rain making the conical flowers of the chestnut trees bounce and dance (and perhaps sometimes "tumble" to the ground). The lively word *betumble* suggests a boisterous, playful kind of motion. Nearby, meanwhile, the "little brown nightingale bills his best." The imagery here captures the speaker's fondness for the unassuming "little brown" bird with the incongruously ravishing song. Both these moments of imagery call up something sweet and childlike in the spring: playfulness, bounciness, smallness.

The speaker's images of the autumn, by contrast, are stormy and even a little ominous. Unlike the playful rains that "betumble" the chestnut flowers, autumnal winds shake beech trees whose leaves have faded to "browns and duns," making them "thresh and ply"—that is, thrash around, as if they were in pain. The "hill-hid tides" of underground springs also sound like

they're suffering: they "throb, throe on throe," as if convulsing.

The more homely, humble detail of "drops on gate bars hang[ing] in a row" grounds these images at the last minute. But there's still a very different mood in the autumn and spring imagery here, a contrast that cuts across the mirrored shape of the stanzas. Joy and gloom, this contrast might suggest, both take their place in the turn of the seasons.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "When showers betumble the chestnut spikes,"
- **Line 5:** "the little brown nightingale bills his best,"
- **Lines 12-13:** "beeches drip in browns and duns, / And thresh and ply;"
- **Line 14:** "And hill-hid tides throb, throe on throe,"
- **Line 16:** "And drops on gate bars hang in a row,"

ALLITERATION

"Weathers" features many moments of alliteration. This device heightens the poem's language, adding a touch of music or drama. For instance, take line 5, where the "little brown nightingale bills his best." That bold, jaunty /b/ sound captures something bubbly and lively in the bird's song. That same sound (alongside a hard /d/ sound) works to a different effect in the second stanza:

> When beeches drip in browns and duns,

Here, the /b/ sound, alternating with that /d/ sound, feels heavier, rounder, and blunter, perhaps suggesting the drip-drop of those rain-soaked beech trees. No wonder that the "shepherd shuns" such weather—a shunning the speaker stresses with that emphatic /sh/ alliteration, too! Perhaps that /sh/ sound also suggests the rush of rain and whoosh of wind.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "brown," "bills," "best"
- **Line 8:** "citizens," "south"
- **Line 10:** "shepherd shuns"
- **Line 12:** "beeches," "drip," "browns," "duns"
- **Line 14:** "hill-hid," "throb," "throe," "throe"

VOCABULARY

Betumble (Line 3) - Jostle, ruffle, make dance.

Chestnut spikes (Line 3) - The conical clusters of white flowers that chestnut trees grow in spring.

Nestlings (Line 4) - Baby birds.

Bills (Line 5) - Here, Hardy uses the word "bills" to mean "sings": the nightingale, in other words, opens its bill (or beak) and sings beautifully.

The Traveller's Rest (Line 6) - The name of a pub.

Sprig-muslin drest (Line 7) - That is, dressed in gowns of muslin (a light cotton) patterned with flowers (or "sprigged").

Shuns (Line 10) - Avoids, dislikes.

Duns (Line 12) - Muddy greyish-browns.

Thresh and ply (Line 13) - Thrash around in the wind.

Throe on throe (Line 14) - Convulsion after convulsion.

Rivulets (Line 15) - Streams.

Rooks (Line 17) - Black birds related to crows and ravens.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Weathers" contains two nine-line stanzas. The first stanza describes the spring and the second the fall. These seasons are quite different, but the stanzas use extremely similar language to describe them:

- The first word of every line in stanza 1 is mirrored by the first word of every line in stanza 2 ("This ... And ... When ... And ..." and so on).
- Both stanzas start with the words "This is the weather" and then introduce their seasons with a description of the way nature *responds* to them. The "weather the cuckoo likes" in the first stanza gets juxtaposed with the "weather the shepherd shuns" in the second.
- The second and ninth lines of each stanza repeat exactly, as the speaker connects to the natural world with the words "And so do I" (meaning that the speaker responds to the seasons just as the cuckoo and the rooks do).

This neat, parallel form suits the poem's subject matter: the rhythm of the seasons. Describing the spring and autumn English countryside in stanzas with the same shape, Hardy hints at the steady, lovely *order* of the "Weathers" the poem celebrates. Every year, the cuckoo, the nestlings, the speaker, and their fellow citizens all behave the same way in these two different seasons—and while the speaker might "like[]" the weather of spring and "shun[]" the weather of autumn, the harmonious form suggests both seasons take their place in the balance of the world.

The poem's rhythms feel fittingly organic, too. The poem uses accentual meter, meaning the lines are measured by a certain number of beats but don't stick to a regular metrical foot (like the iamb or the trochee). That choice gives the speaker's voice a natural feeling. The lines swing freely back and forth between four beats ("This is the weather the cuckoo likes") and two

("And so do I") like a branch swaying in a fresh breeze.

METER

"Weathers" uses an energetic accentual meter. In accentual verse, lines stick to a certain number of stressed beats but not to a regular metrical foot (like the iamb or the dactyl). In this case, Hardy moves back and forth between lines with four stressed beats and lines with two, as in lines 1-2:

> This is the weather the cuckoo likes,
> And so do I;

Both stanzas use the same rhythmic patterns: their second, fourth, and ninth lines all use two beats, while the rest of the lines use four.

Depending on how many unstressed syllables the lines use, the speaker's voice can patter like raindrops or sigh like a breeze. For instance, compare the rhythm of line 5 to the rhythm of line 7:

> And the little brown nightingale bills his best,
> [...]
> And maids come forth sprig-muslin drest,

The line describing the "little brown nightingale" is full of quick unstressed syllables, fitting for a description of a nightingale's light, complex song. The line describing the young women in their flowery spring dresses, meanwhile, takes on a steady swing; in fact, it even falls into a regular iambic pulse for a moment, with four steady da-DUMs in a row evoking the girls' graceful movements.

All of the poem's two-beat lines also fall into iambs—"And so | do I," "And nest- | lings fly," "And thresh | and ply." These dips into regularity give the poem a kind of metrical backbone, especially because they all fall on those distinctive short lines.

Taken all together, these choices suit the speaker's subject. The freedom and ease of accentual meter, the gentle returns to iambic regularity, and the constancy of the poem's overall rhythmic pattern match the combined surprise and predictability of the seasonal "Weathers" the poem honors.

RHYME SCHEME

"Weathers" uses the following rhyme scheme:

ABABCCCCB DBDBEEEEB

Fittingly for a poem about the seasons, this rhyme scheme combines continuity and change, predictability and novelty:

- Both stanzas start out with an alternating rhyme pattern (as in *likes / I / spikes / fly*) and move into a run of four of the same rhymes in a row (as in *best / Rest / drest / west*), then close with one last B rhyme.
- That B rhyme stays the same all through the poem: it's always either the word "I" or a word that rhymes with "I" (*fly, ply*).

This choice suggests a continuity running through the changes in the "Weathers" the speaker describes. The "weather the cuckoo likes" and the "weather the shepherd shuns," so different in outward character, are nevertheless *linked*, part of the same pattern. The echoes in the rhyme scheme help to support that idea through sound. The poem's return to its B rhyme also stresses the speaker's connection with the weather and the seasons. The words "And so do I" become the poem's refrain, suggesting the speaker's joyous embrace of their place in nature.

SPEAKER

The reader learns about the speaker of "Weathers" through their descriptions of the world around them. This person is lovingly alert to the changes in the weather and the wildlife as the seasons turn: they know to expect the "cuckoo" and the "nightingale" in spring and to make like a "rook[]" and "homeward go" when the rains of autumn come.

They're also attuned to rural rhythms and traditions. The time when the cuckoo comes out is also the time when girls come out dressed in "sprig-muslin" (flowered cotton) and people "sit outside at 'The Traveller's Rest'" to soak up some sun; the time when the rooks fly home is also the time when the "shepherd shuns" bad weather. The speaker's affectionate familiarity with the countryside and its life (both avian and human) suggests that they're a rural person from way back: they've seen the rhythms of the spring and the autumn playing out year after year, and they greet the signs of the seasons as friends. Though they clearly prefer bright spring to wet autumn, they're equally attuned to the harbingers of both seasons. They *participate* in the seasons, too. Their repeated refrain—"And so do I"—suggests that they're as much a part of the natural world as any cuckoo or rook.

Readers familiar with Hardy and his work might see more than a little of the poet himself in this speaker. Hardy grew up in Dorset, a rural region in the southwest of England, and much of his writing is set in a landscape like the one he knew and loved as a child.

SETTING

"Weathers" is set in the English countryside across two seasons, spring and autumn:

- In the first stanza, the speaker greets the arrival of spring birds like the nightingale and the cuckoo (as well as cheerful spring sights like girls in flower-

print dresses and people sunning themselves in a pub garden).
- In the second, they look with a rather gloomier eye on an autumnal landscape of windblown beech trees, sodden meadows, and birds and shepherds alike hightailing it home out of the rain.

The landscape here feels particular and lived-in. Alongside their friendly familiarity with the specific bird life of each season, the speaker refers, not to any old generic pub, but to "'The Traveller's Rest'"—a name specific enough that the reader might imagine the speaker has spent more than a few sunny afternoons at just that fine drinking establishment. The speaker's description of the setting thus paints a self-portrait as much as a landscape. The speaker knows this stretch of the countryside well, and they have a strong sense that its rural customs are an integral part of the natural world. Readers might guess that they're catching a glimpse of Hardy's native Dorset here, a county that he'd fictionalize as "Wessex" in many of his writings.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was an English poet and a novelist, known for his passionate opposition to the cruelty and hypocrisy of the buttoned-up Victorian world he was born into. Though Hardy is now most famous for novels like *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, those frank and shocking books weren't especially well-received during his lifetime, and Hardy made his reputation through his poetry.

Hardy was deeply influenced by his rural upbringing in Dorset, a county in the southwest of England. (The speaker of "Weathers" has a loving familiarity with the seasonal rhythms of the English countryside that reflects Hardy's own feelings.) Many of Hardy's books and poems are set in a fictionalized version of his home county, which he renamed "Wessex" and elaborated as thoroughly as Tolkien elaborated his Middle-earth.

Hardy's friend William Barnes, who was similarly interested in rural identity and dialect, was a big influence on him. In his passionate denunciation of sexual hypocrisy and misogyny, Hardy also followed in the footsteps of thinkers like John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Hardy was well-known during his own lifetime, a public figure as well as a literary man. His political outrage and naturalistic ear for voice influenced any number of later writers, from Yeats to Woolf to Sassoon.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Hardy published "Weathers" in 1922, just four years after World War I ended. World War I was known, at the time it was fought, as "the war to end all wars" (a phrase that would prove tragically inaccurate when World War II broke out a generation later). It began when assassin Gavrilo Princip shot Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (which ruled a large section of Central and Eastern Europe at the time). Austria-Hungary accused their enemy Serbia of masterminding this assassination; Germany supported Austria-Hungary; Russia supported Serbia. Soon, chains of pre-existing alliances had dragged nearly all of Europe (and countries beyond) into bloody trench warfare, a snowballing catastrophe that would claim millions of lives.

The trauma of this war left a deep mark on the English imagination. While Hardy's sweet, simple poem of the seasons might not seem to have much to do with war, it takes its place among a lot of English art from the pre- and post-war period that responds longingly, lovingly, or wistfully to the beauty of the English countryside. Readers might, for instance, read this poem in tandem with Edward Thomas's "Adlestrop," Eleanor Farjeon's "Easter Monday," Ralph Vaughan Williams's "The Lark Ascending," Gustav Holst's "Thaxted" theme (named for the Essex village where the composer lived)—or Hardy's own half-mournful, half-hopeful "The Oxen." In all of these works, the countryside offers an artist a poignant vision of a lost world, a dream of a better one, or something between the two.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- A Short Biography — Learn more about Hardy's life and work via the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/thomas-hardy)
- The Thomas Hardy Society — Learn more about Hardy through the Thomas Hardy Society, a group dedicated to studying Hardy's work and preserving his legacy. (https://www.hardysociety.org/)
- Portraits of Hardy — Admire some portraits of Hardy via London's National Portrait Gallery. (https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp02044/thomas-hardy)
- A Performance of the Poem — Listen to the actor Richard Burton reading "Weathers" aloud. (https://youtu.be/w0arxPvIwkQ?si=GCToqYa2nBZK3r6F)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER THOMAS HARDY POEMS

- A Broken Appointment
- Afterwards
- At an Inn
- At Castle Boterel
- A Wife in London
- Channel Firing

- Drummer Hodge
- Hap
- He Never Expected Much
- Neutral Tones
- The Convergence of the Twain
- The Darkling Thrush
- The Man He Killed
- The Oxen
- The Ruined Maid
- The Voice
- Where the Picnic Was

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