

A Light exists in Spring



POEM TEXT

- 1 A Light exists in Spring
- 2 Not present on the Year
- 3 At any other period—
- 4 When March is scarcely here
- 5 A Color stands abroad
- 6 On Solitary Fields
- 7 That Science cannot overtake
- 8 But Human Nature feels.
- 9 It waits upon the Lawn,
- 10 It shows the furthest Tree
- 11 Upon the furthest Slope you know
- 12 It almost speaks to you.
- 13 Then as Horizons step
- 14 Or Noons report away
- 15 Without the Formula of sound
- 16 It passes and we stay—
- 17 A quality of loss
- 18 Affecting our Content
- 19 As Trade had suddenly encroached
- 20 Upon a Sacrament.



THEMES



THE LIMITS OF HUMAN PERCEPTION

The speaker of "A Light exists in Spring" describes a beautiful light that appears fleetingly in the springtime. The speaker feels deeply moved by this light, as if it's about to reveal something profoundly important to them. That revelation never comes, however: the light always leaves, and the speaker can never quite hold onto what it seemed to want to tell them. In this way, the poem suggests that the world sometimes presents visions of beauty that feel mysteriously meaningful, but that ultimately elude human understanding; people can't grasp, explain, or unpack everything they experience.

A certain fleeting, beautiful spring light makes the speaker feel as if they're about to receive a message. The speaker says this light "waits upon the Lawn," as if it is hoping for the speaker to come out to meet it, and they feel as if it "almost speaks." This intense sense of expectation suggests that the speaker is ready to experience some sort of illumination or insight.

The speaker adds that the light "shows the furthest Tree / Upon the furthest Slope you know." In other words, the light seems to show people something right at the limits of what they can see. This image suggests that those who encounter this light feel as if they are about to understand something deeply important or meaningful, something right out on the boundaries of their understanding.

That apparently imminent revelation, however, remains ungraspable: the light always "passes" and people always "stay" where they are, unable to hear what the light seemed to want to tell them. Perhaps, the poem suggests, the most profound and lovely experiences *can't* be comprehended or explained; the deepest possible insight might be that the world is mysterious beyond human understanding.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Lines 9-16



SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION VS. LIVED EXPERIENCE

The speaker of "A Light exists in Spring" describes a springtime landscape lit up by a beautiful "Color" that eludes explanation or capture. The speaker themselves never doubts its existence, however, nor what this light makes them *feel*. In



SUMMARY

There's a certain kind of light in springtime that can't be seen at any other time of year. It appears early on in the season, when March has only just arrived.

A color lights up the lonely fields. This color can't be explained by science; rather, it's something that human beings innately sense.

It lingers on the grass, revealing even the most distant tree on the most distant hill you can think of. It practically talks to you.

But as the days go by, without so much as a sound, this light moves on while we're left behind.

The feeling of having lost something gnaws at our happiness, as if all of a sudden business had intruded upon some holy ceremony.

this way, the poem sets up a contrast between rigid scientific explanations and emotion or intuition. People can experience things, the poem suggests, that they can't always put into precise language.

The light resonates deeply with the speaker, suggesting that on some level, they naturally intuit its significance. The fact that this light illuminates the whole landscape, revealing even "the furthest Tree," implies that it grants the speaker a broad sense of perspective, a feeling that they're seeing *beyond* their normal limits. The light doesn't just make the landscape more beautiful; its "Color" is so intense that it "almost speaks to you."

Though the speaker senses the light's significance, they don't presume to *understand* it. They know they can't rationalize this phenomenon using rigid logic or reason; it doesn't stick to any "Formula," and "Science cannot overtake" (that is, reach or grasp) it. In short, the feeling the speaker is having isn't measurable or quantifiable. The speaker can only gesture toward it, rather than pin it down. In this way, the poem acknowledges the human capacity to feel and experience things that lie outside the scope of reason, logic, and quantifiable knowledge. There are aspects of reality that can only be lived—not explained.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 5-8

SPIRITUALITY VS. EVERYDAY LIFE

In "A Light exists in Spring," a spiritual experience is interrupted by the demands of modern life. The ethereal "Light" that the speaker gazes at seems to connect the speaker to some sort of divine presence that exists in nature. Yet the experience doesn't last: as time passes, the rhythms of ordinary life prevail, and the speaker is left feeling rather "discontent." The poem thus mourns the way that everyday life can intrude on the sacred connection between humanity and the natural world, carrying people away from moments of spiritual insight or illumination.

Watching the mysterious light of early spring fall across the landscape, the speaker feels right on the cusp of connecting with something holy, or at least much bigger than the speaker themselves. The color this light creates "stands abroad / On Solitary Fields," like something "wait[ing]" for someone to come out and "speak" to it.

The speaker only says that the light "almost speaks" to them, however; they aren't *actually* able to receive its message, and soon enough the moment is gone. As the world continues to turn and "Noons report away" (or time goes by), the light "passes" without a "sound," leaving the speaker with a feeling of "loss."

The speaker then compares this sudden disconnection to the

intrusion of "Trade"—that is, ordinary business/work and the bustle of everyday life—on a "Sacrament," or religious ceremony. In doing so, the speaker suggests that the connection they experience in their moments with the light just can't last in the ordinary world; everyday life intrudes on the speaker's holy communion with nature.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20



LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

*A Light exists in Spring
Not present on the Year
At any other period—
When March is scarcely here*

The poem begins with an anonymous speaker describing a certain kind of "Light" that only appears in early spring. More precisely, this light shows up in the first days of March—when the month has "scarcely" begun.

Spring is the time when animals emerge from hibernation, the leaves return to the trees, and sprouts begin to shoot from the thawing ground. Coming on the heels of cold, dark winter, the season typically [symbolizes](#) rebirth and fresh starts. Light, meanwhile, is typically linked with truth, knowledge, understanding, and holiness.

Right away, then, the reader might sense that there's something uniquely invigorating or divine about this light. At the same time, the speaker makes it clear that this light won't stick around; it's present *only* in the very early days of the season. This suggests that whatever it is the light may represent to the speaker—insight, revelation, or even a connection to god—it can't last for very long.

The sounds of this opening stanza help to create a quiet and meditative as the speaker reflects on this special, ephemeral light. Listen, for example, to the gentle [sibilance](#) that fills these lines:

*A Light exists in Spring
Not present on the Year
At any other period—
When March is scarcely here*

This opening stanza also establishes the poem's form: its 20 lines are broken into five [quatrains](#), or four-line stanzas, that follow an ABCB [rhyme scheme](#) (lines 2 and 4 rhyme with each other, while lines 1 and 3 do not). The poem is also written primarily in [iambic](#) trimeter: lines of three iambs (poetic feet made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed

syllable: da-DUM). Every third line is written in *tetrameter*, however, meaning it contains an extra iamb. Here's the first stanza scanned:

A Light | exists | in Spring
 Not pres- | ent on | the Year
 At an- | y oth- | er per- | iod—
 When March | is scarce- | ly here

This quatrain thus looks a lot (though not exactly) like the [ballad](#) stanzas that Dickinson so often turns to in her work. Its rhythms sound easy and familiar.

LINES 5-8

*A Color stands abroad
 On Solitary Fields
 That Science cannot overtake
 But Human Nature feels.*

The speaker says that the fleeting light of early spring produces a "Color" that "stands abroad" (that is, far away) "On Solitary Fields." The speaker is subtly [personifying](#) both that color and those fields here, creating the sensation of a natural world that's vividly alive. Granting that color the ability to "stand" emphasizes that there's something extraordinary about this light—it signifies an almost solid *presence*.

Note the use of [parallelism](#) in these lines as well: "A Color stands" is grammatically identical to "A Light exists" in the opening stanza. This adds to the poem's steady rhythm while also emphasizing the relationship between the ephemeral light and the mysterious color of the fields. That is, these two things are one and the same; the light casts a color (perhaps a warm golden hue) across the landscape.

Science, the speaker continues, can't "overtake" this color/light. The implication is that this light defies scientific explanation. People may attempt to capture and explain this phenomenon, but it'll always be one step ahead of them, out of science's reach (note that the speaker personifies "Science" here too, treating it like a person running after this light and failing to ever catch up).

Science might not be able to get a grip on this light, but "Human Nature," the speaker says, simply "feels" it. Human beings, by their very nature, can sense that there's something powerful about this light, even if they can't exactly put that power into words.

The light does more than turn the fields a pretty color; it provokes a feeling in the speaker that reminds them that there is so much more to human experience than that which can be directly perceived or understood by cold, rational "Science." The [slant rhyme](#) between "Fields" and "feels" highlights the [juxtaposition](#) between what can actually be *seen* (the landscape) and what can only be felt or intuited.

This stanza, like the first, contains lots of [sibilance](#) ("stands," "Solitary Fields," "Science," etc.). These whispery sounds, plus the soft consonance of /f/ and /l/ sounds, add to the poem's quiet, reflective [tone](#).

LINES 9-12

*It waits upon the Lawn,
 It shows the furthest Tree
 Upon the furthest Slope you know
 It almost speaks to you.*

The speaker continues to [personify](#) the light/color in stanza 3. This light "waits upon the Lawn," though the speaker doesn't say who or what it's waiting for (perhaps it's waiting for the speaker themselves to come out and join it) and lights up faraway trees (in fact, it illuminates the "further Tree" located on the "furthest Slope" or hill).

[Anaphora](#) ("It waits," "It shows," "It stands") draws attention to the light's presence and agency. The light seems to have a will and agenda of its own as it falls across the world. The repetition of "the furthest" in lines 10 and 11 (an example of [diacope](#)) emphasizes the vast distances this light illuminates. It doesn't only light up a distant tree, but a distant tree on the most distant hill you know of.

Literally, these lines suggest that the speaker can see much "further" than usual thanks to the quality of this light during this special time of year. More figuratively, these lines suggest that the light *reveals* things about the world to the speaker.

The stanza ends with the speaker saying that the light "almost speaks to you." Note the ambiguity of the pronoun "you." This is the first pronoun to appear in the poem; the speaker hasn't referred to themselves as "I" once. This use of the second person might be the speaker addressing themselves, the reader of the poem, or just humanity in general. Regardless, the moment feels loaded with significance. Maybe the speaker feels they are about to understand something that had previously mystified them or that they are going to commune with the divine. Or, perhaps, they're simply spellbound by the beauty of the moment, as the fresh spring light falls across the quiet landscape.

Finally, note the lack of [end rhyme](#) between "Tree" and "you" in lines 10 and 12. This break from the [rhyme scheme](#) emphasizes the final line of the stanza, where the light "almost"—but doesn't actually—communicate with the speaker.

LINES 13-16

*Then as Horizons step
 Or Noons report away
 Without the Formula of sound
 It passes and we stay—*

The speaker says that the intensely beautiful spring light doesn't last. As time passes, the light disappears just as

mysteriously as it arrived.

Again, the speaker turns to [personification](#), treating both the "Horizons" and time itself as entities with wills of their own:

Then as Horizons step
Or Noons report away

Horizons "step" in the sense that they appear to move as the earth turns and the sun sets. "Noons report" in the sense that they appear day after day. The personification subtly reflects the limits of human perception; in this poem, light, horizons, color, and so on all have agency. People don't control, and can't entirely understand, everything that surrounds them.

As the world turns and the season marches forward, that special light "passes and we stay." The dash at the end of the stanza makes the speaker's words feel broken off, evoking the suddenness with which the beautiful spell of the moment has been shattered. Through the dash, one can almost feel the speaker reaching after that light, willing it to last a little longer.

Also notice the switch from the second person "you" in stanza 3 to this first person plural "we." The speaker is counting themselves among the people who are left behind by this ethereal light; the poem is talking about a more general human experience.

Hushed [sibilance](#) continues to imbue the poem with quiet reverence:

Without the Formula of sound
It passes and we stay—

The poem's consistent use of sibilance makes the whole thing feel whispered, as if the speaker is trying hard not to break the magic of this extraordinary moment in time.

LINES 17-20

*A quality of loss
Affecting our Content
As Trade had suddenly encroached
Upon a Sacrament.*

After the light passes, the speaker says, a "quality of loss" settles in, affecting people's "Content[ment]." In other words, people feel down and like something's missing when the special springtime light departs. Perhaps life seems a little flatter and duller in the wake of such an intense, meaningful experience.

The speaker uses a [simile](#) to compare the passage of this moment to "Trade" (or business) "suddenly encroach[ing]" (or intruding) "Upon a Sacrament." A sacrament is a religious ceremony or ritual, one that involves obtaining divine grace; the simile implies that the speaker's experience looking out on the landscape lit by this eerie spring light was a spiritual one (or at least deeply moving). While the light was there, the speaker felt

connected to nature and to deep, mysterious things people can feel but not explain.

Through the simile, the poem suggests that ordinary life ultimately drags people away from these moments of mystery, beauty, and connection, and that the effect is one of sadness and loss. The speaker is essentially grieving the fact that moments like these can't last. Such is the nature of life: time inevitably passes, and these moments of insight, revelation, or spiritual connection are fleeting in the grand scheme of things.

Note that in addition to continued [sibilance](#), there is also thick /ck/ [consonance](#) throughout the last stanza ("quality," "Affecting our Content," etc.) These back-of-the-throat sounds evoke the speaker's grief. The loss of these moments may be inevitable, but it still hurts.



SYMBOLS



THE SPRING LIGHT

Light traditionally [symbolizes](#) truth, understanding, knowledge, and holiness (think about phrases like "seeing the light" or "a divine light"). The light that the speaker describes seems, on one level, to encompass all of these things. Human beings, by their very "Nature," can *feel* this light, which at times "almost speaks to you." This suggests that, in witnessing this light, the speaker feels on the brink of learning some deep truth or insight about the world or even connecting with god.

And yet, the light doesn't *actually* speak—it "almost" does. Ultimately, then, the light that the speaker describes thus seems to represent things that lie *beyond* the realm of ordinary human perception or scientific explanation. This light makes the world feel more meaningful, more full of mystery and wonder, and the world seems emptier when the light eventually "passes."

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-12
- Line 16



POETIC DEVICES

PERSONIFICATION

The speaker [personifies](#) elements of the natural world throughout the poem, including the special springtime "Light"/"Color" itself. In addition to simply enhancing the poem's [imagery](#), this personification emphasizes the significance of the light the speaker is describing. It also makes the entire *world* seem vividly alive—in turn subtly highlighting

that there is much more to this world than that which human beings can perceive.

In lines 5-6, the speaker describes the color created by this spring light:

A Color stands abroad
On Solitary Fields

That the color "stands" makes it feel as if it is a physical *presence* in this scene. Calling those fields solitary can also be read as subtle personification: the fields seem lonely or isolated.

The speaker continues to personify the light/color in the next stanza, saying that it "waits," "shows," and "almost speaks." The light seems both patient and eager to show the speaker more of the world. These lines also imply a relationship between the speaker and this mysterious light. The light "waits" for the speaker (or anyone who sees it)—perhaps to come outside and join it or simply to take notice of it. It "shows" distant trees, spotlighting things that onlookers perhaps haven't seen before.

The light feels so loaded with significance that it "almost speaks." The speaker feels as if they are in communion with this light—that it has something important to say to them. In this way, personification conveys that this light feels like more than just light; it's a connection to a world that exists beyond the bounds of everyday perception and experience.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-14:** "A Color stands abroad / On Solitary Fields / That Science cannot overtake / But Human Nature feels. / It waits upon the Lawn, / It shows the furthest Tree / Upon the furthest Slope you know / It almost speaks to you. / Then as Horizons step / Or Noons report away"

SIBILANCE

The poem contains lots of [sibilance](#) throughout, reflecting the speaker's sense of awe and, ultimately, disappointment. Take the opening line, for instance:

A Light exists in Spring

Sibilance immediately helps set up the speaker's quiet, thoughtful tone. They aren't describing loud, boisterous events after all, but meditating on a surreal natural phenomenon. The gentle sounds here and throughout the poem also convey a sense of reverence and respect for this light. It sounds as though the speaker is talking quietly so as not to disturb it.

Sibilance continues in the next stanza:

A Color stands abroad
On Solitary Fields
That Science cannot overtake

But Human Nature feels

The [imagery](#) of this light standing on lonely, empty "fields" is all the more effective because of the way the speaker almost whispers this description, as if they don't want to break the spell of the moment.

In the stanzas following the light's departure, sibilance has a slightly different effect. Take lines 15-17:

Without the Formula of sound
It passes and we stay—
A quality of loss

Whispy sibilance helps to convey just how quickly and imperceptibly these intensely beautiful moments disappear, leaving people feeling bereft.

Where Sibilance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "exists," "Spring"
- **Line 2:** "present"
- **Line 4:** "scarcely"
- **Line 5:** "stands"
- **Line 6:** "Solitary," "Fields"
- **Line 7:** "Science"
- **Line 8:** "feels"
- **Line 9:** "waits"
- **Line 10:** "shows," "furthest"
- **Line 11:** "furthest," "Slope"
- **Line 12:** "almost," "speaks"
- **Line 13:** "Horizons," "step"
- **Line 14:** "Noons"
- **Line 15:** "sound"
- **Line 16:** "passes," "stay"
- **Line 17:** "loss"
- **Line 19:** "suddenly"
- **Line 20:** "Sacrament"

PARALLELISM

Parallelism lends the poem a steady rhythm and sense of momentum. For instance, lines 1 ("A Light exists") and 5 ("A Color stands") follow the same grammatical structure, emphasizing the *connection* between the things they describe (the "Light" and "Color"). The speaker is describing the same phenomenon using different words—whatever it is they are experiencing isn't *just* a light or *just* a color, but these are the closest words they can get to capture whatever it is they are seeing/feeling.

Much of the poem's parallelism is more specifically [anaphora](#), as with the repetition of "It" in stanza 3:

It waits upon the Lawn,

It shows the furthest Tree
[...]
It almost speaks

That repeated "It" makes the light seem all the more immediate and present, like a being with a will and agency of its own. There's a sense of building anticipation here as well as the speaker describes the various things this mysterious light does; readers may continue on to learn what, exactly, the light will do next.

Note, too, how line 12 subtly breaks up the parallelism of lines 9 and 10, inserting the word "almost" before the line's verb. This subtle tweak inserts some distance between the speaker and the light: the speaker feels right on the cusp of figuring out what the light is trying to say, but that revelation never actually comes. The light only "almost speaks," and its mysteries ultimately remain just that: mysteries. Eventually "It passes" altogether, the return to anaphora signaling that this is another inevitable step in the light's journey.

In lines 10-11, parallelism (and more specifically [diacope](#)) emphasizes just how far this light illuminates:

It shows the furthest Tree
Upon the furthest Slope you know

It's not just "the furthest tree," but the most distant tree on the most distant hill.

Finally, note the [antithesis](#) of line 16:

It passes and we stay—

The parallel phrasing here underscores the fact that the light leaves humanity behind when the seasons change. The light "passes," pulled away to somewhere human beings can't follow. Meanwhile, "we stay" in the world we know, where we can only wait for the light to one appear again.

Where Parallelism appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "A Light exists"
- **Line 5:** "A Color stands"
- **Line 9:** "It waits"
- **Line 10:** "It shows," "the furthest Tree"
- **Line 11:** "the furthest Slope"
- **Line 12:** "It almost speaks"
- **Line 13:** "Horizons step"
- **Line 14:** "Noons report away"
- **Line 16:** "It passes and we stay—"

SIMILE

The poem ends with a striking [simile](#) that conveys the immense grief that the speaker feels when this light departs. The passing

of the light leaves the speaker with a sharp sense of "loss" that affects their "Content" (that is, their contentment or happiness). Watching the light, the speaker felt as though they're communing with the landscape and maybe as if something is about to be revealed to them. Yet time passes, the seasons turn as they always do, and the light inevitably disappears. At these moments, the speaker says, it feels as though "Trade had suddenly encroached / Upon a Sacrament."

A "Sacrament" is a religious rite, while "Trade" brings to mind business, responsibility, and so on. In losing this light, it feels like the mundane concerns of everyday life have abruptly interrupted a holy ceremony. It's as though someone had burst through the church door in the middle of a baptism or marriage to declare that someone's car was about to be towed or that the water bill was due.

The word "encroached" suggests that such distraction is unwelcome and that being "suddenly" jerked back into the everyday world of chores and responsibilities is a drag. The simile suggests that the ordinary activities of everyday life tend to get in the way of moments of deep, even spiritual, insight.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 19-20:** "As Trade had suddenly encroached / Upon a Sacrament."



VOCABULARY

Scarcely (Line 4) - Barely.

Abroad (Line 5) - Far away.

Overtake (Line 7) - Catch up with or grasp.

Slope (Line 11) - Hill.

Report away (Line 14) - Keep on passing by.

Formula of sound (Line 15) - The speaker is saying that time passes without a sound. They're using scientific language ("Formula") to indicate that there's no way to measure this sudden disappearance.

Affecting (Line 18) - Acting on; impacting.

Content (Line 18) - A state of feeling happy or peaceful.

Encroach (Line 19) - Intruded.

Sacrament (Line 20) - A religious ceremony. In Christianity, sacraments are a means of obtaining grace from God.



FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"A Light exists in Spring" doesn't follow a conventional form (such as a [sonnet](#) or [villanelle](#)), though readers who are familiar

with Dickinson will find this poem's shape and hymn-like rhythms familiar.

The poem's 20 lines of [iambic](#) trimeter and tetrameter (more on those under the Meter section of this guide) are arranged into five [quatrains](#), or four-line stanzas, with an ABCB [rhyme scheme](#). The stanzas look a lot (though not exactly) like the [ballad](#) stanzas that Dickinson turns to so often in her poetry, and which form the basis of many religious hymns. Here, Dickinson uses this musical form as a deceptively simple container for the poem's nuanced philosophical explorations.

METER

The poem is written mostly in [iambic](#) trimeter, meaning that lines contain three iambs: poetic feet made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a **stressed** syllable (da-DUM). Here are the first two lines, for example:

A Light | exists | in Spring
Not pres- | ent on | the Year

The third line of each stanza, however, is written in iambic *tetrameter*—meaning those lines contain *four* feet instead of three. Here's line 3:

At an- | y oth- | er per- | iod—

These longer lines vary the poem's rhythm, keeping it dynamic and interesting. Note that the poem's meter is very close to [common meter](#), the meter of church hymns, which Dickinson frequently used in her poetry. (The only difference is that with common meter, the first lines of every stanza would also be written in tetrameter).

RHYME SCHEME

The poem follows an ABCB [rhyme scheme](#) (with new rhyme sounds introduced in each stanza). This is the pattern of ballads and many church hymns, and it thus lends the poem some familiar music.

Several of these rhymes are perfect ("Year" and "here," "away" and "stay"), while others are [slant](#) ("Fields" and "feels"). Dickinson often uses slant rhyme in her poetry, which can make things sound a little strange or off. Here, the mixture of perfect and imperfect rhyme sounds keeps readers on their toes. It also subtly gestures towards the idea that people can't fully understand or explain the "light" the speaker describes. The light can't be pinned down, so it makes sense that the poem's rhyme sounds aren't overly neat and tidy.

Note, too, that the third stanza contains no end rhyme at all! The lack of rhyme between "Tree" at the end of line 10 and "you" at the end of line 12 disrupts the rhythm of the poem, adding emphasis to this moment where the speaker feels the light/color is "almost speak[ing]" to them. The lack of rhyme

subtly underscores the fact that the speaker's expectations are not actually met; the moment feels loaded with possibility, but it passes before anything grand is revealed.



SPEAKER

The speaker is someone who senses something special in the mysterious light of early spring. Their feelings about the wonder and potential divinity of nature line up with Dickinson's own, but readers don't have to take the speaker as being Dickinson herself. Really, the speaker is anonymous. They don't reveal any information about themselves and seem to be speaking on behalf of human beings in general.

The speaker never uses the word "I," and no pronoun appears until the third stanza, when the speaker says:

It shows the furthest Tree
Upon the furthest Slope you know
It almost speaks to you.

This "you" could be read as the speaker addressing themselves, the reader, or humanity itself. What's clear is that the speaker knows they aren't the only person who has experienced this springtime light. They're describing something that anyone who has gazed upon "Solitary Fields" in early March might relate to.

Indeed, in the fourth and fifth stanzas, the speaker goes from using the second person to using the first person plural:

It passes and **we** stay—
A quality of loss
Affecting **our** Content

The "we" and "our" gesture toward a common human experience.



SETTING

The poem describes a fleeting scene in early "Spring," specifically at the very beginning of "March," when a particular "Light" appears. This light falls across "Solitary," or lonely/ isolated, "Fields" and lingers on the grass, lighting up even the most distant tree on the most distant hill.

The speaker says that science can't fully explain or identify the "Color" of this light, even as human beings intuitively sense its presence. This suggests that the speaker isn't necessarily describing a *literal* color (the land isn't suddenly glowing blue), but rather that they sense some quality or intensity in the landscape that is absent the rest of the year. Indeed, this light doesn't last; as the earth turns and days pass the speaker by, the light disappears.



CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) published almost nothing during her lifetime, and after 1865 she rarely even left her family home in Amherst, Massachusetts. But from within her circumscribed world, she explored the heights and depths of human experience through her groundbreaking poetry.

No one else sounds quite like Dickinson. Her poems use simple, folksy forms—[ballad](#) stanzas, for instance—to explore [profound philosophical questions](#), [passionate loves](#), and the [mysteries of nature](#). This poem also isn't the only one in which Dickinson focuses on a strange and perhaps divine light; "[There's a certain Slant of light](#)," which describes the appearance of a cold light in winter, makes for an interesting comparison.

While Dickinson didn't get too involved in the literary world of her time, she was still part of a swell of 19th-century American innovation. Her contemporary [Walt Whitman](#) (who became as famous as Dickinson was obscure) was similarly developing an unprecedented and unique poetic voice, and the Transcendentalists (like [Emerson](#) and [Thoreau](#)) shared her deep belief in the spiritual power of nature. The speaker's communion with a mysterious light in this poem, along with the prioritization of human emotion over science, also echoes the work of earlier English Romantics like [William Wordsworth](#).

Unknown during her lifetime, Dickinson led a very private life but became one of the world's most famous and beloved poets after her death, when her sister discovered and published a secret stash of her poems. Later artists of all stripes claim Dickinson as an influence, and not just writers: artists from the composer [Samuel Barber](#) to the director [Jane Campion](#) have responded to Dickinson's poetry in their work.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The poem's attention to a quiet but significant moment in nature can be seen as a reaction to the growing dominance of reason, science, and materialism during the 19th century's Industrial Revolution. In this period of rapid technological advancement, wonderful discoveries in medicine and biology came alongside destructive mining and logging, merciless working conditions in newly-built factories, and choking pollution.

Many artists of this era worried that humanity was beginning to see the world as something to be mastered and exploited. They feared that both the beauty and the spiritual power of nature might be lost to the "encroach[ment]" of soulless "Trade."



MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [The Poem Out Loud](#) — A dramatic recital of "A Light exists in Spring." (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9GJiUxH9w8>)
- [Dickinson's Spiritual Life](#) — Read an essay exploring Dickinson's relationship to religion and spirituality. (<https://www.sumangali.org/the-spirituality-of-emily-dickinson/>)
- [The Poem Set to Music](#) — Listen to a duet that captures the poem's intense, eerie atmosphere. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cleeJVm3-QA>)
- [Dickinson's Biography](#) — Head over to the Poetry Foundation to learn more about Dickinson's life and work. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/emily-dickinson>)
- "How Emily Dickinson Grew Her Genius in Her Family's Backyard" — This Slate article discusses the ways Dickinson's fascination with nature fueled her poetry. (http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/books/2016/05/every_single_living_creature_in_emily_dickinson_s_complete_w)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER EMILY DICKINSON POEMS

- [A Bird, came down the Walk](#)
- [After great pain, a formal feeling comes -](#)
- [A Murmur in the Trees—to note—](#)
- [A narrow Fellow in the Grass](#)
- [An awful Tempest mashed the air—](#)
- [As imperceptibly as grief](#)
- [Because I could not stop for Death —](#)
- [Before I got my eye put out](#)
- [Fame is a fickle food](#)
- [Hope is the thing with feathers](#)
- [I cannot live with You -](#)
- [I cautious, scanned my little life](#)
- [I died for Beauty—but was scarce](#)
- [I dwell in Possibility -](#)
- [I felt a Funeral, in my Brain](#)
- [If I can stop one heart from breaking](#)
- [I had been hungry, all the Years](#)
- [I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -](#)
- [I like a look of Agony](#)
- [I like to see it lap the Miles](#)
- [I measure every Grief I meet](#)
- [I'm Nobody! Who are you?](#)
- [I started Early — Took my Dog —](#)
- [I taste a liquor never brewed](#)
- [It was not Death, for I stood up](#)
- [I—Years—had been—from Home—](#)
- [Much Madness is divinest Sense -](#)

- [My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun](#)
- [Nature is what we see](#)
- [One need not be a Chamber — to be Haunted](#)
- [Publication — is the Auction](#)
- [Safe in their Alabaster Chambers](#)
- [Success is counted sweetest](#)
- [Tell all the truth but tell it slant —](#)
- [The Brain—is wider than the Sky—](#)
- [The Bustle in a House](#)
- [The Mushroom is the Elf of Plants](#)
- [There came a Wind like a Bugle](#)
- [There is no Frigate like a Book](#)
- [There's a certain Slant of light](#)
- [There's been a Death, in the Opposite House](#)
- [The saddest noise, the sweetest noise](#)
- [The Sky is low — the Clouds are mean](#)
- [The Soul has bandaged moments](#)
- [The Soul selects her own Society](#)
- [The Wind – tapped like a tired Man –](#)

- [They shut me up in Prose –](#)
- [This is my letter to the world](#)
- [We grow accustomed to the Dark](#)
- [Wild nights - Wild nights!](#)



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