The Spring

POEM TEXT

Now that the winter's gone, the earth hath lost
Her snow-white robes, and now no more the frost
Candies the grass, or casts an icy cream
Upon the silver lake or crystal stream;
But the warm sun thaws the benumbed earth,
And makes it tender; gives a sacred birth
To the dead swallow; wakes in hollow tree
The drowsy cuckoo, and the humble-bee.
Now do a choir of chirping minstrels bring
In triumph to the world the youthful Spring.
The valleys, hills, and woods in rich array
Welcome the coming of the long'd-for May.
Now all things smile, only my love doth lour;
Nor hath the scalding noonday sun the power
To melt that marble ice, which still doth hold
Her heart congeal'd, and makes her pity cold.
The ox, which lately did for shelter fly
Into the stall, doth now securely lie
In open fields; and love no more is made
By the fireside, but in the cooler shade
Amyntas now doth with his Chloris sleep
Under a sycamore, and all things keep
Time with the season; only she doth carry
June in her eyes, in her heart January.

SUMMARY

Now that winter is over, the snow that covered the earth like a white robe has melted away, frost no longer coats the grass like crystalized sugar, and the silver lake and clear stream are no longer covered with a milky layer of ice. The sun's warmth melts the unfeeling earth, softening it, and revives the hibernating swallow; it wakes up the sleepy cuckoo bird and the little bee. Now a chorus of chirping birds sings to usher in spring's triumphant return. The landscape, adorned in a rich range of colors, welcomes the eagerly anticipated arrival of May. Now that everything is smiling, my love is the only one who frowns. Not even the burning heat of the midday sun can melt the rock-hard ice that grips her heart and makes it so she doesn't even feel bad for me. The ox, which only recently sought shelter from the winter in the barn, now lounges about in the open pasture. Couples no longer make love inside by the hearth; now the shepherd Amyntas and his lover Chloris nap in the crisp shade beneath the sycamore tree. Everything is in tune with the spring; it's only the woman I love who carries June in her eyes while in her heart it's still January.

THEMES

THE HOPELESSNESS OF UNREQUITED LOVE

"The Spring" juxtaposes the warmth and hope of spring with the chilly disinterest of the speaker's "love." The speaker spends the first half of the poem simply observing and admiring spring's effect on the natural world: everything is thawing, waking up, and coming alive. But even as the world around him softens and transforms, the woman the speaker longs for remains as frigid as "January" itself. Love isn't bound by the rhythms of the seasons, the poem implies, and not even the tender beauty of spring can melt an icy heart.

The speaker presents spring as a season filled with beauty, warmth, and delight. "Now that the winter's gone," the speaker says, the world is no longer dressed in "snow-white robes" and "frost" no longer "Candies" (or decorates) "the grass." Instead, "the warm sun thaws the benumbed earth." In other words, feeling is seeping back into the world. Things that were once sleeping come back to life: the sun's warmth "gives a sacred birth / To the dead swallow" and "wakes in a hollow tree / The drowsy cuckoo, and the humble-bee." "The valleys, hills, and woods" that surround the speaker are adorned in a "rich array" (or an opulent display) of fresh growth, and everyone is thrilled that "the long'd-for May" has finally arrived.

But while spring makes the world around the speaker more "tender," it does nothing to soften the woman he loves—nor to soothe his heartache. While everything else smiles with spring's delights, the speaker's beloved continues to "lour" (or frown). Even the hot "noonday sun" can't "melt" the "marble ice" that grips her heart, turning even her "pity cold." In other words, she has no sympathy for the speaker whatsoever; she is unmoved by his desire for her. The world may be transformed by spring, but for her, nothing has changed.

The "ox" that only recently had to hide in the barn to stay warm now sleeps happily in the sunlit, grassy fields, and "Amyntas" (a lovesick shepherd) lounges with "Chloris" (a Greek goddess of spring, flowers, and new growth) beneath a tree. But the speaker remains sad and alone. Love—or, at least this particular woman's love—doesn't keep "Time with the season," and her heart remains in "January." Spring's light and warmth ultimately cast the speaker's heartache in starker relief, as the fresh joy of

his surroundings only reminds him of the hopelessness of his longing.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-24

THE BEAUTY OF NATURE

Although "The Spring" ends with the speaker feeling as hopeless as ever about his unrequited love, it also simply celebrates the beauty and delights of the natural world. Nature, in this poem, is lovely and deeply connected, bound to predictable and comforting rhythms.

The speaker particularly savors the fresh warmth of spring, but he also recognizes that winter isn't without its charms. The image of winter as a woman in "snow-white robes" seems elegant and maybe even cozy. The speaker also says that the frost "Candies the grass," as though coating it in a layer of sweet, shiny sugar syrup. The image of a layer of "icy cream" atop the "silver lake" and "crystal stream" further conveys the unique loveliness of the season, presenting it as a time of delicate, glimmering sweetness and beauty.

Of course, winter also seems lonely and quiet, which is why it's a good thing that it gives way to spring: a time of new life, awakening, and "tender[ness]." Creatures celebrate the "long'd for May"; they can't wait for spring, which might even seem even *more* special coming on the heels of winter's cold. Indeed, the poem suggests that part of the beauty of the seasons is their predictability. The seasons happen in the same order every year, and there's comfort in knowing what to look forward to. While the speaker's love is hopeless, winter always contains within it the promise of spring.

The speaker presents this spring as a welcome antidote to the cold and stillness of winter, a season when the world comes alive. Creatures seem celebratory, happy, calm, and safe, emerging from their slumbers in "hollow tree[s]" to a world bright with colorful blooms and radiating warmth. Even the "valleys, hills, and woods" are resplendent with new life, and wandering musicians play their "triumphant" music to herald the arrival of the season. Nature is a peaceful, comforting place in the poem, and spring is a time of love and delight (for everyone but the speaker, of course).

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-12

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

Now that the winter's gone, the earth hath lost
Her snow-white robes, and now no more the frost
Candies the grass, or casts an icy cream
Upon the silver lake or crystal stream;

The speaker begins "The Spring" by announcing that winter is over. He describes the shifting seasons using vivid imagery that, perhaps surprisingly for a poem about the beauty of spring, presents winter as rather lovely in its own right.

The snow has melted, a process the speaker compares to the personified earth taking off her "snow-white robes." "The frost" no longer "Candies the grass"—another image that suggests both winter's frigidity and delicate beauty: that "frost" made the grass look like it was coated with hardened sugar syrup. It also cast "an icy cream / Upon the silver lake or crystal stream." Again, the imagery speaks to both winter's quiet cold and surreal beauty: until recently, the world was coated in a layer of creamy white, and the icy waters of the lake and stream sparkled. The world in winter seems pristine and elegant but also stiff and unfeeling—and spring's warmth loosens everything up.

The delicate sounds of these lines bring their imagery to life. Crisp alliteration ("Candies," "casts," "cream," "crystal") and consonance ("lake," "lost," "frost," "casts," "crystal stream") add to the feeling of a sharp, fragile world covered in glittering ice and snow. Sibilance evokes winter's stillness and quiet:

> Candies the grass, or casts an icy cream
> Upon the silver lake or crystal stream;

Lines 1-4 are also enjambed, each line flowing smoothly into the next and building momentum and anticipation. The poem pulls readers down the page, deeper into this quickly thawing world.

Finally, these lines establish the poem's form. "The Spring" is written in rhyming couplets of iambic pentameter: a meter consisting of five iambs (poetic feet with an unstressed-stressed pattern) per line. These are also called heroic couplets. Take lines 1-2:

> Now that | the wint- | er's gone, | the earth | hath lost
> Her snow- | white robes, | and now | no more | the frost

The meter here isn't always perfect (indeed, a totally perfect meter might make for a stiff, rigid-sounding poem!). For example, some might argue that line 1 actually begins with a trochee (stressed-unstressed; "Now that"), and the second line contains a spondee (stressed-stressed; "white robes"): Such

variations make can certain words stand out to readers. Still, the overall rhythm is recognizably iambic, marked by a steady, bouncy beat.

LINES 5-8

But the warm sun thaws the benumbed earth,
And makes it tender; gives a sacred birth
To the dead swallow; wakes in hollow tree
The drowsy cuckoo, and the humble-bee.

The snow and frost have all disappeared, and "the warm sun" is thawing "the benumbed earth." The word "benumbed" suggests not just that the earth was frozen, but also unfeeling; the sun's warmth now "makes it tender"—literally softer and metaphorically sweeter, more sensitive and emotional. This tenderness will contrast with the icy lack of pity displayed by the speaker's beloved later in the poem.

The sun also "gives a sacred birth / To the dead swallow" (a kind of songbird). This is a *metaphorical* birth, building on an old (mistaken) belief that swallows hibernate for the winter (rather than migrate to warmer climates); this "birth" really refers to the bird waking up from hibernation. This a "sacred birth" because the sun is like God here in its ability to raise the bird from the "dead." Again, this image makes the speaker's beloved seem all the more cold and even inhuman later in the poem; not even this God-like sun can get her heart pounding.

The sun also "wakes" the sleepy "cuckoo" (another kind of bird) and "the humble-bee" (a pun on "bumblebee" that makes the bug seem sweet and meek). These images are sweet and delightful. In short, the whole world is becoming vibrant, refreshed, and renewed. Everything is starting to stir now that the weather is changing.

LINES 9-12

Now do a choir of chirping minstrels bring
In triumph to the world the youthful Spring.
The valleys, hills, and woods in rich array
Welcome the coming of the long'd-for May.

The speaker continues to paint a vivid picture of spring's arrival. The twittering birds are "a choir of chirping minstrels": a metaphor comparing the birds to a chorus of troubadours, or wandering musicians, whose cheerful songs "bring / In triumph to the world the youthful Spring." That is, the birds' song triumphantly ushers in the arrival of "youthful Spring." The sounds of lines 9-10 are bright and bouncy, the crisp and plosive consonants ("choir," "chirping," "triumph," "spring," etc.) evoking the birds' vibrant, entertaining music.

The birds aren't the only ones excited about the changing season, either: the landscape itself—with all its "valleys, hills, and woods"—is decked out in "rich array": cloaked in vibrant color as flowers blossom, leaves return to the trees, and the snows melt to reveal the greenery underneath. It's as though the earth has dressed up to "Welcome the coming of the long'd-for May." The speaker is again personifying the natural world, imbuing it with joy and delight. Everything appears to be in sync, happily and harmoniously enjoying the start of the season.

LINES 13-16

Now all things smile, only my love doth lour;
Nor hath the scalding noonday sun the power
To melt that marble ice, which still doth hold
Her heart congeal'd, and makes her pity cold.

Line 13 marks a turning point in the poem. The speaker has just spent 12 lines describing the delightful beauty of spring, which makes "all things smile"—all things, that is, except for the woman the speaker loves. While the rest of the world grows "tender" and joyful in the sun's warmth, this woman "doth lour": she scowls or frowns.

Not even spring's "scalding noonday sun"—the sun at its hottest, in the middle of the day—is enough "to melt that marble ice" that encompasses this woman's heart. Her heart is "congeal'd," or frozen solid, stuck in metaphorical winter while the rest of the world moves on. Whereas the "the warm sun thaws the benumbed earth, / And makes it tender," her icy heart "makes her pity cold." She won't "thaw" or grow soft and tender toward the speaker; she remains "benumbed," unmoved by his affection.

The frequent alliteration of these lines makes them more dramatic. The liquid /l/ sounds of "love doth lour" highlight the woman's disinterest, while the hissing sibilance of "scalding noonday sun" evokes the sizzle of that midday heat. The sounds of lines 15-16 are particularly intense:

> To melt that marble ice, which still doth hold
> Her heart congeal'd, and makes her pity cold.

The huffing /h/ sounds of "hold / Her heart" help to convey the speaker's exasperation, while the sharpness of "congeal'd" and "pity cold" emphasizes this woman's complete lack of softness toward the speaker.

LINES 17-22

The ox, which lately did for shelter fly
Into the stall, doth now securely lie
In open fields; and love no more is made
By the fireside, but in the cooler shade
Amyntas now doth with his Chloris sleep
Under a sycamore,

The speaker describes another happy springtime scene to highlight just how out of sync his beloved is with the rest of the world. Only recently, the "ox" had to hide out inside a barn to stay warm; now that spring has arrived, however, it sleeps soundly in the "open fields." Whereas everything is focused on simply *surviving* the colder months, spring is a time for

happiness and ease.

Likewise, while lovers snuggled up "By the fireside" all winter, they now lounge in "the cooler shade" outdoors. The speaker has specific lovers in mind here: "Amyntas" and "Chloris," who now rest "Under a sycamore" tree. Chloris was the Greek goddess of spring, flowers, and new growth. The name "Amyntas" was used for various lovesick shepherds in 17th-century pastoral literature. It might allude specifically to a play called *The Queene's Arcadia* by the English poet and playwright Samuel Daniel; the poem features a character named Amyntas who was hopelessly in love with Chloris. The allusion emphasizes the speaker's bad luck: even Amyntas has acquired his heart's content with Chloris, yet the speaker has not managed to woo the woman he loves.

Note that from line 17 until the poem's end, every line is enjambed:

> The ox, which lately did for shelter fly
> Into the stall, doth now securely lie
> In open fields; and love no more is made
> By the fireside, but in the cooler shade
> Amyntas now doth with his Chloris sleep
> Under a sycamore, [...]

And so on. This steady enjambment propels the reader through the poem. The forward pull of the lines mirrors the pull of spring, which urges creatures outside, into the sunlight. The only one to resist spring's call is the speaker's beloved.

LINES 22-24

> *and all things keep*
> *Time with the season; only she doth carry*
> *June in her eyes, in her heart January.*

The poem's final lines hammer home the contrast between the speaker's beloved and the rest of the world. The speaker says that "all things keep / Time with the season"—that is, everything exists in harmony with the changing season; the world takes its cues from spring's brightness and warmth, growing "tender" and loving in return.

And yet, the speaker's beloved remains cold towards him. She's the "only" thing who holds "January" in her heart, even as she has "June in her eyes." Despite watching the spring unfold all around her, this woman's heart won't thaw. The alliteration of "June" and "January" emphasizes the juxtaposition between what this woman sees (what she "carries in her eyes") and what season it is within her own heart. The speaker might also be nodding towards the woman's beauty; her eyes carry "June" in the sense that they appear young and vibrant. Her heart, meanwhile, is icy cold.

In the end, then, the poem suggests that not even the loveliness of spring can't cheer the speaker up. The weather might be nice and the flowers might be blooming, but this just reminds the speaker that his love is unrequited. As if to evoke the speaker's hopelessness, the poem ends with a metrically irregular line:

> June in | her eyes, | in her heart | Janu- | ary.

It's as though the speaker has given up trying to make his words fit into iambic pentameter. Ending the poem with two trochees in a row creates a falling rhythm that contrasts with the rising rhythm present throughout the rest of the poem. The poem peters out, making it sound like the speaker is giving up.

SYMBOLS

JANUARY/WINTER

The poem leans on traditional nature symbolism throughout. Spring, here, represents freshness, vitality, and rebirth, while winter represents stagnancy, frigidity, and sorrow. While the spring is filled with stirring swallows and buzzing bees, the winter landscape seems cast in ice: lovey, perhaps, but also still, quiet, and "benumbed"—totally unfeeling. When the speaker says in the poem's final line that his beloved's heart is filled with "January," this symbolizes her *emotional* coldness towards the speaker. While the rest of the world is warming up, her heart remains frozen solid, as "benumbed" as the earth in winter and as still as the frozen "lake."

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-6:** "Now that the winter's gone, the earth hath lost / Her snow-white robes, and now no more the frost / Candies the grass, or casts an icy cream / Upon the silver lake or crystal stream; / But the warm sun thaws the benumbed earth, / And makes it tender"
- **Line 24:** "June in her eyes, in her heart January."

POETIC DEVICES

METAPHOR

The speaker of "The Spring" describes the changing seasons using rich, evocative metaphors. For example, in lines 1-2, the speaker describes the melting snow as "the earth" taking off "Her snow-white robes." This is also an example of personification. The image conveys the elegant beauty of winter and is also a bit suggestive—perhaps hinting at the speaker's unfulfilled longing (maybe he wishes his actual beloved would loosen *her* robes!).

This personification continues when the speaker says that the sun "thaws the benumbed earth." Calling the earth "benumbed" suggests not just that it's frozen solid but also that it's *unfeeling*

(until the sun comes and warms it up, that is). The sun also "gives sacred birth / To the dead swallow." This is a metaphorical birth: the sun's warmth nudges creatures out of hibernation. (Carew is building on an old mistaken belief that swallows hibernate for the winter.) The sun also "wakes" sleepy birds and bumblebees. Birds (and perhaps insects) become a metaphorical "choir of chirping minstrels"—a chorus of singing musicians whose song ushers in the season.

All these vibrant metaphors emphasize the power and beauty of spring. They make the world feel vividly alive—in turn emphasizing the stark juxtaposition between the vibrant, joyful season and the icy demeanor of the speaker's beloved. Not even "the scalding noonday sun" can "melt that marble ice" that grips his beloved's heart. Her heart is stiff and unyielding as stone. Even as the world around her softens, the woman's heart is stuck in "January." She remains cold and untouchable, unmoved by the changing seasons.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "the earth hath lost / Her snow-white robes"
- **Lines 2-3:** "now no more the frost / Candies the grass"
- **Line 5:** "the benumbed earth"
- **Lines 6-7:** "gives a sacred birth / To the dead swallow"
- **Line 9:** "a choir of chirping minstrels"
- **Lines 14-16:** "Nor hath the scalding noonday sun the power / To melt that marble ice, which still doth hold / Her heart congeal'd, and makes her pity cold."
- **Lines 23-24:** "only she doth carry / June in her eyes, in her heart January."

PERSONIFICATION

The speaker personifies nature throughout the poem. In making nature seem more *human*, the speaker emphasizes just how out of step his beloved is with the rest of the world.

The speaker says that the earth sheds her "snow-white robes" in spring, for example, comparing the snow-covered earth to a woman dressed in pure white clothing. The earth was "benumbed," or hard and unfeeling, throughout the winter, but the "warm sun" of spring makes her "tender." The sun becomes a female figure here as well, able to give "sacred birth / To the dead swallow" (that is, the sun wakes the bird from hibernation). All these references to female figures reflect the fact that unrequited love is on the speaker's mind: the speaker wishes the woman that he loves would behave more like the earth and let the sun thaw her icy heart.

The speaker also calls singing birds "a choir of chirping minstrels," or musicians, and declares that the "valleys, hills, and woods" all "Welcome the coming of the long'd for May." The landscape and all its creatures are emotional beings in the poem; they eagerly await the end of winter and "smile" upon spring's arrival. In personifying nature, the speaker is able to create antithesis: nature smiles but his "love doth lour," or frown.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "the earth hath lost / Her snow-white robes"
- **Lines 5-7:** "But the warm sun thaws the benumbed earth, / And makes it tender; gives a sacred birth / To the dead swallow"
- **Lines 9-13:** "Now do a choir of chirping minstrels bring / In triumph to the world the youthful Spring. / The valleys, hills, and woods in rich array / Welcome the coming of the long'd-for May. / Now all things smile"

IMAGERY

Imagery plays an important role in "The Spring." The speaker's vivid, vibrant depictions of the warming world highlight the loveliness and harmony of spring—in turn, making the speaker's heartache seem all the more illogical and isolating.

The speaker describes winter as a time of stark beauty: the grass is covered with frost crystals, making it look "candied" with sugar; clear, sparkling lakes and streams are topped by a layer of "icy cream"; and the earth is wrapped in "snow-white robes." The sun melts all this away, thawing the solid earth until it grows soft and "tender." Readers can easily picture the lovely yet cold landscapes of winter giving way to the lush greenery of spring, when the air is filled with the sounds of chirping birds and buzzing bees and the "valleys, hills, and woods" don a "rich array" of colors and growth.

The sun at its height is "scalding," beating down on the blooming earth below. And yet, not even this intense heat, which seems to bounce off the page, can "melt that marble ice" of the speaker's beloved's heart—which has "congeal'd," or frozen solid. The juxtaposition between the images of warmth and softness with icy firmness highlights the fact that this woman's feelings are out of step with "the season," in the speaker's estimation at least.

Animals like the "ox" lounge in "open fields," and lovers "Amyntas" and "Chloris" relax in the refreshing shade of a sycamore tree. All this imagery evokes the lush, welcoming beauty of spring—something that casts the speaker's broken heart in harsher light.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-6
- Lines 9-11
- Lines 14-16
- Lines 17-22

ALLITERATION

"The Spring" uses alliteration to make its language and imagery

more dramatic and intense. Listen to the mixture of crisp /c/ and soft /s/ sounds in lines 3-4, for example, which conveys the sharp, brittle, quiet beauty of the world in winter:

> Candies the grass, or casts an icy cream
> Upon the silver lake or crystal stream;

Consonance adds to the effect ("grass," "casts," "icy," "lake," "crystal," "stream"). Overall, the lines simply sound like winter!

Alliteration also calls attention to important ideas in the poem, as with the shared sounds of "love" and "lour" in line 13. This alliteration highlights the fact that the speaker's beloved continues to scowl even as the rest of the world lights up in response to the changing season.

Alliteration appears in the next few lines as well:

> Nor hath the scalding noonday sun the power
> To melt that marble ice, which still doth hold
> Her heart congeal'd, and makes her pity cold.

The hissing sibilance of "scalding"/"sun" suggests the sizzle of the midday heat, those huffing /h/ sounds evoke the speaker's exasperation. The poem's language is heightened and dramatic here, which helps to convey the speaker's immense anguish.

Finally, the alliteration of "June" and "January" hammers home the juxtaposition between the world this woman sees and what she feels inside. It might be warming up all around her, but her heart remains trapped in ice.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "Candies," "casts," "cream"
- **Line 4:** "silver," "crystal," "stream"
- **Line 6:** "sacred"
- **Line 7:** "dead," "swallow," "hollow"
- **Line 8:** "drowsy," "humble"
- **Line 13:** "love," "lour"
- **Line 14:** "scalding," "sun"
- **Line 15:** "melt," "marble," "hold"
- **Line 16:** "Her," "heart," "congeal'd," "cold"
- **Line 18:** "stall," "securely"
- **Line 19:** "more," "made"
- **Line 20:** "cooler"
- **Line 21:** "Chloris"
- **Line 24:** "June," "January"

VOCABULARY

Hath (Line 1, Line 14) - Old-fashioned form of "has."

Candies (Line 3) - The speaker is saying that the frost coats the grass in a way that makes it look covered in sugar syrup.

Casts (Line 3) - Sends out.

Icy cream (Line 3) - The speaker is describing the color of the frost over lake.

Benumbed (Line 5) - That is, numbed; rendered unable to feel. Here, the speaker uses the word metaphorically, to describe the earth in its frozen state.

Swallow (Line 7) - A kind of songbird.

Drowsy cuckoo (Line 8) - Sleepy songbird.

Humble-bee (Line 8) - Bumblebee.

Chirping minstrels (Line 9) - The speaker is metaphorically comparing the "chirping" birds (and, perhaps, insects) to traveling musicians.

Rich array (Line 11) - A lavish display; a variety of colors.

Long'd-for (Line 12) - A contraction of "longed for." Carew is using a contraction here so that readers know to pronounce the phrase with two syllables rather than three (long-ed-for).

Doth (Line 13, Line 15, Line 18, Line 21, Line 23) - An old-fashioned form of "does."

Lour (Line 13) - Frown or scowl.

Congeal'd (Line 16) - This is a contraction of "congealed," which means solidified or frozen.

Amyntas (Line 21) - The name of a lovesick shepherd who often appears in pastoral poetry in Carew's day.

Chloris (Line 21) - The name of Amyntas's lover, who often appears in pastoral poetry. Also the Greek goddess of spring, flowers, and fresh growth.

Sycamore (Line 22) - A kind of deciduous tree.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"The Spring" consists of a single stanza that can be broken up into 12 heroic couplets: rhyming pairs of iambic pentameter (lines with five iambs, poetic feet with a da-DUM rhythm). The steady heartbeat of iambic pentameter and the quick one-two punch of those couplets drives the poem forward.

Note, too, that the poem can be divided in half thematically: lines 1-12 focus on the beauty of spring, while lines 13-24 focus on the comparative coldness of the speaker's beloved.

METER

The poem is written in iambic pentameter: lines of five iambs, poetic feet that follow an unstressed-stressed rhythm (da-DUM). Those pounding iambs echo a beating heart, evoking the way life surges forth in the spring. Here is line 1 as an example:

Now that | the win- | ter's gone, | the earth | hath lost

It's possible to scan that first foot as a trochee ("Now that"), placing emphasis on the word "Now" and situating the poem firmly in the spring—and, the speaker thinks, firmly at a time when his beloved's heart should be softening toward him. Many lines here start with trochees, in fact, such as line 3:

Candies | the grass, | or casts | an i- | cy cream

Or line 12:

Welcome | the com- | ing of | the long'd- | for May.

These variations are minor, but in opening lines with a stressed beat, they add some urgency and sonic interest to the poem, preventing it from feeling too rigid or tightly wound.

Readers can hear the speaker's desperation in the final two lines of the poem, which play with the meter quite a bit:

Time with | the sea- | son; on- | ly she | doth carry
June in | her eyes, | in her heart | Janu- | ary.

The trochee at the top of line 23 calls attention to the importance of time—the force that seems to guide "all things" except for the heart of the speaker's beloved. There's also an extra, dangling unstressed beat at the end of the line (something called a "feminine ending"). The poem's final line is then very metrically irregular, containing an anapest in its third foot ("in her heart") followed by two trochees in a row. As a result, the poem concludes with a falling rather than rising rhythm; the poem seems to peter away, evoking the speaker's hopelessness. (Some may scan the final word as "January," without a stress on that "a," making the effect even more pronounced.)

RHYME SCHEME

"The Spring" is arranged into 12 heroic couplets. As such, it also follows a very simple rhyme scheme: AABBCCDD... and so on.

This tightly wound rhyme scheme fills the poem with quick, steady music. It also subtly hints at the speaker's solitude: these are all rhymed pairs, meaning each sound has a partner. The speaker, by contrast, does not; his beloved continues to reject him.

SPEAKER

The lovesick speaker of "The Spring" is pining away for a woman who clearly has no interest in him (or, perhaps, her; the poem never actually genders the speaker, and we've used male pronouns in this guide simply to reflect the vantage point of the poem's 17th-century author). He notices the beauty and warmth of spring blooming all around him, and he describes the world in tender detail. This is clearly someone who appreciates nature's splendor, yet all this vibrancy and joy ultimately throws his sorrow into starker relief. He seems to wish he could feel as happy and carefree as lovers resting in the shade of a "sycamore" tree. Instead, he's stuck lamenting that his beloved's heart remains frozen solid, stuck in a metaphorical "January."

SETTING

"The Spring" takes place, unsurprisingly, in the spring. It's May; the winter has officially "gone," and the world has cast off its coat of snow and frost. The "warm sun" beats down on the earth, softening the ground, melting away the ice, and beckoning creatures out of hibernation. Birds chirp like "minstrels," or wandering musicians, celebrating the season. Animals like the "ox" snooze in the "open fields" rather than in their stalls, and lovers lounge beneath a shady "sycamore" tree. This world is idyllic, lush, and serene.

Everything responds to the warmth and tenderness of the season—everything, that is, except for the speaker's beloved. While "all things smile," this woman just keeps scowling. She doesn't "keep / Time with the season," the delights of which simply make her metaphorical coldness all the more unbearable.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Thomas Carew has long been associated with the "Cavalier poets," a number of aristocratic, 17th-century English poets who supported King Charles I during what is now called the English Civil War. The purported aim of Cavalier poetry was to lionize the king and his reign. In reality, however, most Cavalier poetry only glancingly refers to politics or philosophy, instead focusing on beauty, sex, seizing the day, and personal valor—virtues and pleasures the Cavaliers associated with life under a rightful monarchy.

Carew didn't actually live to see the English Civil War (he died sometime around 1639-1640, and the war began in 1642). In fact, though he is generally lumped in with the Cavaliers, his work actually served as a kind of bridge between earlier figures of the English Renaissance, such as Ben Jonson and John Donne, and the younger generation of poets who would come to be known as the Cavaliers (including Richard Lovelace, Robert Herrick, and Sir John Suckling). Carew is a transitional figure whose combination of technical skill, wit, and lighter, more carefree subjects helped to usher in the era of Cavalier poetry.

With its idyllic depiction of the world in spring and mention of the figures "Amyntas" and "Chloris," "The Spring" can also be considered a pastoral: a poem that celebrates a heavily romanticized version of rural life. (The shepherd Amyntas and his beloved Chloris also appear often in pastoral literature.) Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," in which a shepherd urges his lover to escape with him to the countryside, is a classic example of the genre. The speaker of Marlowe's poem, like the speaker of "The Spring," believes that the alluring beauty of the countryside *should*, in theory, melt his beloved's heart.

Carew's poems weren't officially published until after he died, but his manuscripts were passed around and read by other members of the court. In his lifetime, he was perhaps best known for his erotic—and, at the time, deeply scandalous—poem "A Rapture," but he has since come to be known as one of the most complex and skilled poets of his time.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"The Spring" addresses timeless themes of unrequited love and the beauty of the natural world, and it doesn't refer directly to political or historical events. Nonetheless, it was written in the years leading up to the English Civil War, when Carew and his fellow Cavalier poets were united by their strong support for the English king—and, more broadly, for the monarchy itself. They thought that God himself authorized the king's authority. Most of them were also aristocrats: well-born men who served at high levels in the British government as ambassadors, courtiers, and royal advisors. Carew himself was the son of a lawyer, and his mother was the daughter of the Lord Mayor of London.

"The Spring" also draws on archetypes of courtly love common in 17th-century literature. Relationships of this kind weren't physical; in fact, the parties involved often had very little interaction with each other. Young noblemen would attempt to flatter and woo ladies who were quite often of higher standing than themselves. The Cavaliers, in particular, were also known for being promiscuous at a time when sex outside of marriage was considered scandalous.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Pastoral Poetry 101 — Learn more about the idyllic world of pastoral poetry, the influence of which appears in this poem's mentino of the shepherd Amyntas and his beloved Chloris. (https://www.masterclass.com/articles/poetry-101-what-is-a-pastoral-poem-learn-about-the-conventions-and-history-of-pastoral-poems-with-examples)
- Thomas Carew's Life and Work — A biography of the poet via the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/thomas-carew)
- A Reading of Carew's Poem — Listen to "The Spring" out loud. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjgNEDDYB24)
- Who Were the Cavalier Poets? — Read about the school of poets with whom Carew is usually associated. (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cavalier-poets)

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