

## Weathers

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.

tumble – can mean dance, leap, spring, jump  
nestlings – baby birds  
bills - sings  
sprig – a little shoot or spray of flowers  
muslin – lightweight cotton fabric  
citizens – people who live in cities

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.

shuns – avoids  
dun – gray-brownish colour  
thresh and ply – (the trees' branches) beat to and fro in the wind  
hill-hid tides – little streams hidden underground  
rivulets – little rivers

\*hill-hid tides throb throe on throe – little streams hidden underground come pulsing violently out of the hillsides

This is a particularly cheerful poem, straightforward and immediate. Hardy paints two contrasting pictures, of spring and autumn. He writes as if he is speaking directly to the reader, showing the reader what he can see and hear: 'This is ... / And so do I.'

In the first stanza, Hardy pictures spring, perhaps the month of May, when the great white candles on horse chestnut trees are flowering, baby birds are leaving the nest and trying their wings, nightingales sing and everyone is heading outside. The rhythm is lively and cheerful; it skips and runs:

This is the weather the cuckoo likes  
And so do I;  
When showers betumble the chestnut spikes,  
And nestlings fly. (*baby birds*)

The buoyant rhythm bounces energetically between dactyls (first line and – if you cheat – third line) and iambs in the short lines. The impression of liveliness is increased by the change of rhythm half way through the longer lines: they start with a beat of three 'This is the weather the' and then change to two 'cuckoo likes'. Again in the third line: 'When showers betumble the' is a beat of three and 'chestnut spikes' is two. The effect is of a surplus of vitality, of enough energy to brake slightly and catapult us into the shorter line, 'And so do I' where the poet affirms (stressing 'so' and 'I') that he is absolutely one with nature in all this springtime vigour.

As if to add to the sense that we can almost hear the cuckoo, Hardy gives us plenty of cuckoo sounds in the first line, with the three repeated ck sounds there and another in 'spikes'. There is more birdsong when the nightingale 'bills (sings) his best' accentuated by the alliterated bs. There are lots of verbs – and therefore lots of activity, all of it outside – 'likes', 'betumble', 'bills', 'sit (outside)', 'come forth', 'dream' (this is when people who live in cities start to dream of their holidays in the south west, Cornwall, Devon and Dorset). The birds sing, the chestnut is in flower and there are lots of people about, sitting outside the pub, girls wearing Laura Ashley patterned cotton dresses, and people in cities. The excitement mounts in anticipating the approaching summer with 'And ...And ...And...And...And...And so do I'.

In total contrast, Hardy paints the colours and sounds of late autumn, 'the weather the shepherd shuns (avoids), / And so do I.' The determination of the shepherd to avoid the wretched weather is made obvious by the alliterated shs. Beech trees (of which there are many in Hardy's Dorset, as they like the chalky ground) 'drip in browns and duns (a brownish-grey) / And thresh, and ply.' Thresh and ply here mean the movement of the branches beating ('thresh') to and fro ('ply') in an autumn gale. Except for 'beeches', the words are heavy and monosyllabic; the repeated bs and ds add to the heavy, depressing sound, and 'thresh' is onomatopoeic as it mimics the sounds of the windswept branches. The colours 'browns and duns' are dreary.

Water is everywhere. Not only do the beeches drip but water courses are bursting out of the sodden hillsides, little rivers are forming as the rivulets overflow in the meadows and the gate-bars all have rows of rain-drops on them. The heavy sounds continue. 'And hill-hid tides throb, throe on throe' is almost completely made up of spondees (that is, each syllable stressed) which makes it feel slow, heavy and depressing. The ds and bs add to this and you find them again in 'drops' and 'bars', another monosyllabic line with a lot of stresses.

In contrast to the Spring verse, nobody is out of doors. There's nobody around at all. Even the flocks of rooks are flying home, and so – again at one with nature – does the poet. Here, the 'And .... And ... And...And so do I', instead of conveying mounting excitement, gives the impression that an unending list of dismal factors is adding to the gloom of Autumn. Nothing but water and wind, according to the verbs: 'drip', 'thresh and ply', 'throb' (gush), 'overflow', 'drops ... hang'. There is plenty of movement in these verbs, but all of an unpleasant kind. This time, instead of there being lots of things to go outside and do, there are lots of things to avoid.

Although this seems and perhaps is a simple, straightforward poem, Hardy is tapping into a long tradition of poetry welcoming the new spring. From the Middle Ages onwards, poets have greeted the spring, sometimes in poems known as reverdie (the re-greening of the world as the leaves burst forth in springtime). 'Sumer is icumen in / Lhude sing cuccu' is a famous medieval lyric written in the mid-thirteenth century. You can find the link to it on the British Library website

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/musicmanu/sumer/large17730.html>

There are many ballads and folk songs, such as 'The cuckoo is a pretty bird / She singeth as she flies ...' and Wordsworth's 'To the cuckoo': 'O blithe newcomer...' Hardy takes his spring greeting in a different direction here, however, as he contrasts the joyous picture of Spring with all its hopes and associations and the sodden picture of Autumn when all living creatures seek shelter.

## Literary terms

Very often writers highlight important words. They do this with:

Alliteration – several words starting with the same letter or sound, for example, ‘bleared and black and blind’.

Assonance – same vowel sound in different words, for example, ‘abode’, ‘sloped’.

Cesura – a break or pause in the middle of a line of poetry.

Consonance – same consonants in words that contain different vowel sounds, for example, ‘bode’, ‘boughed’.

Enjambement or run-on lines – when there is no punctuation at the end of a line of verse and it runs straight on to the next line.

Onomatopoeia – the effect when the sound of a word reflects its meaning, like ‘plash’.

Personification – when something that is not human is referred to as if it is a person, for example, the Titanic, ‘still couches she’.  
The effect is usually to exaggerate some aspect of the topic.

Repetition – repeated word or meaning.

Rhyme – very similar to assonance; same vowel sound and final consonant, for example, ‘say’, ‘decay’. Masculine rhyme – when the final syllable is stress, as in ‘say’ and ‘decay’. Feminine rhyme – when the final syllable is not stressed, as in ‘growing’, ‘showing’.

Rhythm – the musical beat of the line, with stressed and unstressed syllables (the stressed syllables will be the important ones). The different rhythms have different names. Trochee (trochaic): strong light, strong light; iamb (iambic): light strong, light strong; dactyl: strong light light, strong light light; anapaest: light light strong, light light strong. If puzzled, try Wikipedia which is very clear on the subject.

Then there are technical words for the number of lines in a verse or stanza.

Quatrain – four lines in a verse

Sestet – six line

Octave – eight lines