

*From you have I been absent in the spring,
 When proud pied April (dressed in all his trim)
 Hath put a spirit of youth in everything,
 That heavy Saturn laughed and leapt with him.
 Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
 Of different flow'rs in odor and in hue,
 Could make me any summer's story tell,
 Or from their proud lap pluck them where they grew.
 Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
 Nor praise the deep vermillion in the rose;
 They were but sweet, but figures of delight
 Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.
 Yet seemed it winter still, and you away,
 As with your shadow I with these did play.*

The disparity between the speaker's inner seasons and the outward reality continues. The overall coloration of this sonnet is much more cheerful than the preceding poem's grim, wintry broodings. Though the speaker has been absent in the spring, his depiction of "proud-pied April" dressed in all his finery gives a buoyancy to the tone that spreads out to both the speaker and the reader. The lighthearted spirit of youth pervades the poem for the moment. Even "heavy Saturn" (l. 4) laughs and leaps. And since Saturn is associated with sad old age, one can see a parallel between his pairing with April and the speaker's pairing with his younger friend.

But the happy miniature allegory ends with the first quatrain. Now the sweet things of spring do not inspire the speaker to tell a "summer's story" (l. 6). The phrase is arresting because of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, a play in which an unfortunate child declares that "a sad tale's best for winter." Like the sonnets, *The Winter's Tale* focuses on betrayal, specifically the supposed betrayal of one man by another, resulting in a serious tragedy.

The second quatrain shifts from the colorful and dramatic personifications of April and Saturn to a pleasant but rather abstract description of the birds and flowers. The uninspired speaker is not yet moved to tell a romantic tale, nor, more significantly, is he spurred to

pluck the flowers from the “proud lap . . . where they grew” (l. 8). Inevitably this has sexual overtones, and Shakespeare has tactically placed it at the end of the octave.

In the last quatrain, the color returns; the lily is white, the rose a deep vermilion. These, however sweet, were but the “figures” — that is, the images — of delight, which are drawn after the pattern of the speaker’s friend. (l. 12)

In the couplet, we learn that winter still rules the speaker’s mood and his friend is still absent. It is the final line that reveals the emotions he feels. The speaker has played with the flowers as he has played with the friend’s shadow. This shadow is a mental picture, but it can also refer to a portrait, and the suggestion of masturbation cannot be wished away.