The Passionate Shepherd to His Love

POEM TEXT

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove,
That Valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the Rocks,
Seeing the Shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow Rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing Madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of Roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of Myrtle;

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty Lambs we pull;
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold;

A belt of straw and Ivy buds,
With Coral clasps and Amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me, and be my love.

The Shepherds' Swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May-morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me, and be my love.

SUMMARY

Why don't you come live with me and be my lover? We will enjoy all the pleasures that can be found in valleys, groves, hills, fields, woods, and steep mountains. And we'll lounge on the rocks and watch the shepherds feed their sheep near shallow rivers—and we'll listen to birds sing sweet songs to the waterfalls of those rivers. And I will make you a bed made out of roses and thousands of sweet-smelling flowers. I will make you a cap of flowers, and a dress with myrtle leaves sewn through it. I will also make you a gown from the finest wool, which we will shear from our beautiful lambs. I will make slippers with linings to keep out the cold; their buckles will be made of pure gold. And I will make a belt made out of straw and ivy buds, its clasps made from coral and its studs made from amber. So if these pleasures sound good to you, why don't you come live with me and be my lover? The shepherd boys will dance and sing for you every morning in May. If these pleasures convince you, then come live with me and be my lover.

THEMES

LOVE AND PLEASURE

"The Passionate Shepherd" is a poem of seduction. In it, the speaker tries to convince his listener to come to the country and be his lover. The speaker makes his case on the basis of the luxuries they will enjoy together in the countryside, describing it as a place of pleasure that is at once sensual and innocent. He wants his "love" to simply sit on the rocks for a while and appreciate the scene, without worrying about their responsibilities. Although the joys the speaker describes may be fleeting, they are still rich and seductive. Listing them, the speaker makes a case for embracing the pure pleasure of love and rejects the idea that doing so might have negative consequences.

For the speaker, the countryside is a very sensual place. He is attentive to the materials and objects one finds in rural life: "straw," "ivy-buds," "beds of roses," and "fragrant posies." In his fantasy, he brings these objects into contact with the body of his "love"—making them into garments and beds. The fact that the speaker uses these objects in a suggestive fashion implies his underlying desire: he seems to want to take their place and caress his "love," to pay close and sensual attention to the lover's body.

As its title suggests, "The Passionate Shepherd" is thus a passionate poem, full of sexual tension. But, diverging from traditions that associate sexuality with sin and death, the poem portrays this sexuality as an innocent. There seem to be no costs associated with the pleasures the speaker describes in his seduction. Instead, the countryside is presented as a place of play and sheer joy, song, and dance. The speaker refuses to admit any problems, troubles, or downsides into the world he imagines occupying with his "love." Instead, he urges his love to just live in the moment, enjoying the sensual pleasures he lists for their own sake, without worrying about the consequences. Indeed, the speaker offers these delights as an escape from responsibilities and consequences.

Of course, this isn't necessarily a *realistic* depiction of love, and some readers may feel that the poem is too idealized. In that

vein, Sir Walter Ralegh, a contemporary of Marlowe, directly objects to the speaker of "The Passionate Shepherd" in his own poem "The Nymph's Reply." It's arguable that because the speaker of Marlowe's poem does not acknowledge any costs or problems associated with love, he fails to seduce the reader; this love is too perfect to be real or meaningful. Even so, the poem's speaker is steadfast in his argument: love, essentially, is pleasure, and is meant to be enjoyed without guilt.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-24

COUNTRY VS. CITY

It's important that the speaker locates the pleasures he describes in a specific landscape of "valleys, groves, hills and fields, woods or steepy mountain." Though this landscape is described in great detail and with considerable feeling, it is located at an implicit distance from the speaker's "love." The poem implies that this "love" lives in the city, with all its political entanglements, pollution, and grit. The poem thus draws an implicit contrast between the city and country, making the former dirty, busy, and unpleasant, and the latter peaceful, harmonious, and filled with pleasure.

The speaker begins the poem with an invitation: "Come live with me." The word "come" suggests that his love must cross some distance before being able to enjoy the pleasures the poem describes—which means that this "love" must live somewhere else. In keeping with the poem's general refusal to describe anything negative or unpleasant, the speaker doesn't name this other place. Yet the implication is clearly that the beloved lives in an urban environment that contrasts with the speaker's idealized depiction of rural life. This urban place must not be particularly pleasant; if it were, the speaker probably wouldn't be so adamant that he and this "love" go live elsewhere!

Indeed, given that the speaker lists specific things about life in the country in order to entice the lover to leave the city behind, readers can assume that the city doesn't share any of these positive attributes. For example, where the countryside is filled with "melodious birds," the city likely screeches with cacophonous noise. While in the country the lovers can sit idly and watch shepherds tending to their flocks, in the city they'd probably have to toil away at work. In the country the "love" could wear a gown of fine wool, gold-buckled slippers, and a belt woven from straw. None of these lovely, delicate clothes would hold up in the dirty city streets.

In the tradition that Marlowe was working in—called the pastoral—poets pose the innocence and pleasures of country life against city life, where they locate all the politics and problems that usually affect people. The speaker's presentation of the countryside here follows the ideals of the pastoral tradition: it is an innocent and pleasure-filled space that acts an implicit critique of the city. The poem thus argues for a return to a simpler, purer way of life embodied by the countryside.

Of course, rural life was certainly not as easy as the speaker makes it out to be, and the poem notably lacks any mention of, say, what happens when winter comes. In this sense, its depiction of rural life is as innocent and (perhaps purposefully) naïve as its vision of love.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-24

THE NOBILITY OF PASTORAL WORK

One of the rural pleasures that the speaker lists stands out from the rest: in the poem's second stanza he describes the pleasure of watching "the shepherds feed their flocks." Indeed, the title implies that the speaker himself is also a shepherd. This reference locates the poem within a long tradition of European poetry: the pastoral. Pastoral poems usually focus on shepherds, presenting their work as innocent and joyful—though, in reality, herding sheep is difficult and dirty work. Like the poets who came before him, then, the speaker suppresses much of the reality of rural life and agricultural labor. Instead, he presents an idealized, uncomplicated view of a complicated place. That he focuses specifically on shepherds suggests not only that the countryside is a more pleasant place to live than the city, but also that there is a unique nobility to the kind of work that brings people closer to nature.

After its first stanza, the poem consists of a long list of rural pleasures. This list opens and closes with shepherds, the traditional central figures in pastoral poetry. In lines 5-6, the speaker notes that he and his love will watch "the shepherds feed their flocks." This is a strange way to seduce his "love," and one might wonder why watching other people work would be particularly enjoyable. The answer to this question, the speaker implies, is that shepherding is different from other kinds of work. It is not particularly painful or unpleasant; instead, it is enjoyable to do and watch. In lines 13-14, the speaker even suggests that he and his "love" own sheep themselves, since he refers to gathering wool from "our pretty Lambs." It seems, then, that this idyllic scene brings the speaker and his "love" directly into this noble, joyful work.

After listing the many rural pleasures that he and his beloved will enjoy, the speaker returns to the image of shepherds, now describing them as being in a happy, celebratory mood: they are singing and dancing. They seem in no way wearied or worn down by their work; instead, they participate with gusto in all the rural pleasures that the speaker describes. Pastoral work, then, seems to be something energizing and fulfilling. The

implication is that the shepherds aren't exhausted after their days because they find some sort of satisfaction and meaning in their labor—which, the poem implies, is largely absent from the ignoble toil of those living far from nature.

Even as the speaker celebrates the beauty and nobility of working in a natural setting, he overlooks the fact that that work is actually difficult and exhausting. To seduce this "love," the speaker keeps glossing over the truth—though whether the speaker does so purposefully is up for debate.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 5-6
- Lines 13-14
- Lines 21-22

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove,
That Valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

The first four lines of "The Passionate Shepherd" establish the poem's broad subject and its approach to this subject. The speaker begins by directly addressing someone, whom he refers to simply as his "love," without specifying the person's gender. The entire poem will be addressed to this "love." This is an instance of apostrophe. It makes the poem feel intimate and direct: the speaker is not addressing a broad, general audience. Rather, he is trying to convince someone of something specific: he is trying to seduce the person he addresses, to convince his "love" to follow him to the countryside. The speaker's language here subtly suggests some differences between himself and his "love." While the speaker is, as the poem's title suggests, a "shepherd," someone who works with sheep and lives in the country, his "love" is not. This person has to be convinced to "come" to the country—which implies that they do not live there already.

The poem's second line suggests how the speaker will try to seduce his "love." Once they are in the country together, they will try "all the pleasures"—every delight and joy offered in rural settings (the speaker goes on to list those many settings in lines 3-4). Right away, the speaker depicts the countryside as a pleasurable space: he does not mention the downsides of living in the country, or the difficulty of working on a farm or with livestock. It's clear from line 2 that his portrayal of life in the country will be idyllic and idealized—perhaps too much so.

As if to underline this focus on pleasure, the writing itself—here and throughout the poem—is unusually musical and rich in sound. The poem begins with a strong alliteration on the /l/ sound in the first line: "Come live with me and be my love." (This line will eventually become a kind of refrain for the poem, recurring in lines 20 and 24). This /l/ sound is carried through the next several lines, becoming consonance as it continues: "And we will all the pleasures prove…" Although these lines are wide-ranging in content (particularly lines 3-4), they are knitted together by this unifying sound.

These lines are further organized formally: each line is in an easy iambic tetrameter; the quatrain is divided into two rhyming couplets, with strong end-rhymes. Later in the poem a clear pattern of enjambment and end-stop will develop, alternating line by line between the two. But here that pattern has not yet developed; while lines 1 and 4 are end-stopped, lines 2 and 3 enjambed. There is thus a tension between the rhyming couplets, which serve as sonic units, and the grammar of the quatrain, which crosses the boundaries of those couplets. This gives the poem, right from the start, a sense of looseness: though it has underlying formal architecture, it is not fussy or overly precise. Instead, in its informality, it imitates the easy-going country life it describes.

LINES 5-12

And we will sit upon the Rocks,
Seeing the Shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow Rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing Madrigals.
And I will make thee beds of Roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of Myrtle;

In line 2, the speaker announces, "We will all the pleasures prove." This statement provides a clue to the speaker's plan for the rest of the poem: he will list, exhaustively, all the pleasures he and his "love" will "prove" in the countryside. In lines 5-12, he begins to list those pleasures. He imagines sitting on the rocks with his "love," watching shepherds feed their sheep by the river. And he imagines listening to the birds sing "madrigals" (a kind of song) to those rivers. Then he lists a series of things he will make and give to his "love"—"beds of roses," "a cap of flowers" "a kirtle." (The word "kirtle" is intriguing and ambiguous. It refers to several different garments, one of which is traditionally male and the other of which is traditionally female: it could be either a tunic or a dress. The speaker has yet to state the gender of his "love" and the word "kirtle" doesn't help. The word "gown" in line 13 was similarly ambiguous during Marlowe's lifetime.) He will spend much of the rest of the poem describing such gifts.

It is striking, then, that he doesn't *start* with the gifts he might give to his "love;" at first, he focuses instead on what they will see and hear together in the countryside. This has the effect of setting the scene, both geographically and culturally. Lines 5-8 situate the reader in the countryside, and they also situate the

reader in an important poetic genre: the pastoral, to which the speaker alludes here. Pastoral poems are often concerned with the lives of shepherds, which they present in a highly idealized way that focuses on their songs and dances, rather than the hard work of guarding and moving sheep. Invoking shepherds here—as the first pleasure of rural life—the speaker signals to his "love" that they should imagine occupying this idealized tradition together. That is, they are not going to a real place, but rather entering a poetic zone. The speaker strengthens this sense in line 12 by referring to "myrtle"—a plant that does not grow in England, where the poet who wrote "The Passionate Shepherd" lived, but is instead native to the Mediterranean countries (like Greece and Rome) where the pastoral originated. Myrtle is also a common symbol of romantic love, so mentioning it underscores the speaker's focus on seduction.

Further, in line 8, the speaker describes the birds singing "madrigals"—a song composed for unaccompanied voices. This personifies the birds, making it seem like they are singing human music—like they are part of a human world. Far from seeming threatening or alien, the natural world the speaker describes is sweet and almost human.

In lines 9-12, a formal pattern that will characterize the rest of the poem appears: the poem continues to be in iambic tetrameter rhyming couplets, two to a stanza. From line 9 on, it alternates enjambed and end-stopped lines, introducing a new gift in the first line of the couplet and wrapping up its description of it in the next. (Though the speaker gets a bit excited and introduces two gifts line 11, separated by a caesura).

In lines 5-8, though, he has not quite managed to achieve this balance and organization; the second stanza is a continuous sentence. (It might be tempting to think that line 6 is end-stopped because of the comma, but many editions do not print a comma there, or any punctuation at all, to emphasize the way that the stanza is a single, cascading grammatical unit). The speaker's excitement keeps him from achieving the careful organization that later characterizes his thoughts; instead, the stanza flows along at high velocity as he happily lists all the things he and his "love" will see and hear together in the country.

LINES 13-20

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty Lambs we pull;
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold;
A belt of straw and Ivy buds,
With Coral clasps and Amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me, and be my love.

In lines 13-20, the speaker continues to list the gifts he will give to his "love." As in the previous quatrain (lines 9-12), the speaker has found an easy, steady formal pattern here: each quatrain divides into two rhyming iambic tetrameter couplets; the first line of each couplet is enjambed, the second end-stopped. The first line of each couplet introduces a new gift, and by the end of the couplet's second line, the speaker has finished describing it. After the poem's opening, with its variable patterns of enjambment and end-stop, these lines have found a stable formal architecture. This is somewhat ironic, because just as the poem finds this formal structure, it loses narrative and logical structure. Indeed, the three stanzas in the middle of the poem (lines 9-12, 13-16, and 17-20) have no necessary order; many of the couplets could be moved between stanzas without seriously changing the meaning of the poem. The speaker meanders through these stanzas, seemingly lost in the dream of everything he'll create for his love.

In addition to solidifying the poem's underlying formal architecture, these lines also use a strong pattern of assonance, as in the strong /a/ sound in lines 17-18. These plays of sound are seductive and rich. They also help the reader make sense of the poem. That is, it might be hard to imagine how all the different objects the speaker lists in lines 17-18 actually come together to form a belt, but the repeated /a/ sound provides a subtle sonic reassurance that they do.

This problem recurs at a larger scale as the reader reflects on all the gifts the speaker pledges to give his "love." Though none of them is outrageous on its own, the sheer number of them begins to seem a bit unbelievable by the end of line 18. The mention of "Lambs" in line 14 also suggests that the speaker might even view life in the country as literally divine, since lambs are commonly a symbol for Jesus Christ and his purity and innocence. As the speaker lapses into these various kinds of hyperbole, it becomes harder to believe the idyllic vision he presents of life in the country, even as he insists upon it more forcefully than ever.

These lines end by repeating, with some slight differences, the first two lines of the poem. (For instance, the order of the lines has been reversed, and a new rhyme word is introduced). Line 20 thus serves as a kind of refrain. Coming a full 20 lines after the first instance of the refrain, line 20 feels conclusive, as though the poem is wrapping up by returning to its opening invitation. The poem even subtly hints at a marriage proposal in line 17 with the mention of "Ivy"—ivy was a symbol of marriage that would have been familiar to Marlowe's early readers. However, the poem continues for another four lines after this seeming conclusion. The speaker evidently feels that he has not yet done enough to convince his "love" of the pleasures of country life—he must give more reasons to live with him and be his love.

LINES 21-24

The Shepherds' Swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May-morning:

If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me, and be my love.

After the poem's false ending line 20, the speaker makes one final attempt to convince his "love" to join him in the country. He returns to the first "pleasure" of country life, the thing that began his long list: the lives and activities of shepherds. In lines 5-6, he describes watching them feed their flocks; here he promises that they will dance and sing every morning in May for his "love." The speaker evidently regards this as a kind of trump card: though he has supplied a long list of rural "delights," he returns to the activities of shepherds to seal the deal. This signals the poem's continuing allegiance to the pastoral as a genre, with its idealized depictions of the lives of shepherds. More than any gift or object, the speaker offers the pastoral to his love as an inherently seductive and pleasurable way of life.

He then repeats his refrain once more, in line 24. As in line 20, it serves to wrap up the poem, reiterating its original invitation. But its effect here is different than in line 20. The use of the refrain in line 20 is very distant from its original use; there is something satisfying about returning to it after so much time away. In line 24, it feels repetitive: some readers may feel that the stanza itself is unnecessary, awkward.

Certainly, there is some evidence that the speaker's confidence has failed him here. The poem maintains a steady formal structure from line 9 forward, offering iambic tetrameter quatrains, with two rhyming couplets to each stanza, and alternating enjambed and end-stopped lines. However, there is a major formal variation in lines 21-22. The lines rhyme a masculine and a feminine ending, which sounds awkward and strained. (There is another example of rhyme like this—called apocopated rhyme—in lines 9-10). At the beginning and end of this long stretch of formal regularity, the speaker seems to lose control briefly, admitting a moment of dissonance into an otherwise melodious poem. This brief lapse might hint that the country setting itself is also less harmonious than it seems on the surface.

SYMBOLS

SHEPHERDS

Shepherds are, literally speaking, people who tend sheep, monitoring the flocks as they graze. They are charged with protecting the sheep from wolves and bringing them in from the pasture at night. In the pastoral, a genre of poetry that stretches back to ancient Greece, shepherds are often invoked as key figures. Pastoral poems describe the lives of shepherds and their work, and they are (like this poem) often written in shepherds' voices.

These poems generally treat shepherds as symbols. The shepherds often stand in as symbols for all kinds of work: most broadly, they represent labor itself, the work that human beings to do feed and clothe themselves. Additionally, because of their close connection to animals and nature, shepherds also symbolize the natural world and humans' connection to it.

Finally, because the shepherds in pastoral poems often engage in song and dance, they also serve as symbols for poets themselves. (Indeed, in many pastoral poems, the shepherds seem to do far more singing and dancing than they do sheep-herding). In this sense, the shepherds present a kind of convenient screen: the poets can articulate their desires and their political complaints in someone else's mouth, someone distant from the political complications of city life.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "Shepherds"
- **Line 21:** "Shepherds'"

MYRTLE

Myrtle is a flowering plant. It is native to the Mediterranean, where the pastoral genre of poetry originated. It does not naturally grow in England, the country where Marlowe wrote "The Passionate Shepherd." Invoking it in this poem thus signals the speaker's allegiances: he wants his "love" to imagine Greek and Roman—not English— landscapes, and moreover, he makes it clear that he intends those landscapes to be the idealized ones of pastoral poetry.

Indeed, myrtle is often invoked in Greek and Roman poetry and ritual. In Greek mythology, for instance, the plant is sacred to Aphrodite, the goddess of desire and love. The plant thus serves as a double symbol in "The Passionate Shepherd." On the one hand, it symbolizes desire and love itself, serving as a subtle reminder that this is a poem of seduction. On the other, it captures in a symbol the poem's cultural and poetic allegiances: this is a poem which owes a lot to Greek and Roman poetry and, with its invocation of myrtle, acknowledges those debts.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 12:** "Myrtle"

LAMBS

Lambs are young sheep. In western literature, lambs often serve as symbols for innocence and purity. For instance, Jesus Christ is often referred to in the Bible as the "Lamb of God:" he is not only God's child, he is also innocent and pure. After his resurrection, Christ becomes the "Good Shepherd," with the Christian Church as his flock. In this way, the congregation takes on—if only aspirationally—Christ's innocence and purity. The lambs likely function in a similar way

here: the speaker invokes them in part as a way to emphasize the innocence and purity of rural life. (Indeed, one would generally shear wool from a full-grown sheep, not a lamb, which makes the speakers mention of lambs all the more significant.)

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 14:** "Lambs"

IVY

In the Renaissance, many poets used ivy as a symbol for marriage between a man and a woman. In this symbol, the ivy symbolizes the female partner in the marriage; she is paired with an oak tree, which represents the male partner. The ivy grows up the trunk of the oak tree; the oak tree provides support for it. The traditional symbol thus makes certain assumptions about the gender roles of each partner in the marriage: the male partner provides a sturdy support; the female partner depends on that support. (Indeed, the ivy would die without the oak tree.)

"The Passionate Shepherd" does not make explicit reference to this tradition, but its early readers would've likely heard its echoes: the ivy and the oak were almost proverbial in Marlowe's culture. The speaker invokes that tradition in a potentially subversive way. If his "love" is a woman—as many readers assume—then she has taken on the traditionally male role of the oak tree, supporting the "ivy buds" by wearing them on her body. If, on the other hand, his "love" is a man, then the speaker and his love are mimicking the symbols of heterosexual love and infusing them with homoerotic energy.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 17:** "Ivy"

POETIC DEVICES

HYPERBOLE

Over the course of "The Passionate Shepherd," the speaker lists an astonishing number of gifts he plans to "make" for his love: caps, kirtles, gowns, slippers, etc. In isolation, none of these gifts are particularly extraordinary; the speaker seems sincere in his desire to give them to his "love." But as the gifts gradually accumulate (and as the poem dissolves into a loose, disorganized list of such gifts), the speaker's promises become hyperbolic; they seem to go beyond what anyone could reasonably give to another person.

In fact, the speaker is so eager to please and seduce that he ends up undercutting his own argument: the reader may feel that he is less than sincere because his extravagant generosity exceeds the boundaries of credibility. Similarly, the use of hyperbole may undermine his account of the natural world. As his list of gifts builds, some readers may find themselves wondering if there isn't something—anything—unpleasant about the world where he wants to live with his "love." The use of hyperbole thus complicates the speaker's presentation of rural life and pleasure: the speaker is so idealizing that he calls attention to the fact that he is not being entirely honest; it becomes clear that important (and unpleasant) aspects of rural life have likely been left out of his account.

Where Hyperbole appears in the poem:

- **Lines 9-20:** "And I will make thee beds of Roses / And a thousand fragrant posies, / A cap of flowers, and a kirtle / Embroidered all with leaves of Myrtle; / A gown made of the finest wool / Which from our pretty Lambs we pull; / Fair lined slippers for the cold, / With buckles of the purest gold; / A belt of straw and Ivy buds, / With Coral clasps and Amber studs: / And if these pleasures may thee move, / Come live with me, and be my love."

END-STOPPED LINE

"The Passionate Shepherd" is, generally speaking, a loosely organized poem. Once the speaker starts to list all the things he'll give to his "love," the poem loses any semblance of logical or narrative structure. For most of the middle portion, it is simply a list; it might be lengthened, shortened, or rearranged, all without significantly effecting the poem's over-all argument.

But the poem does have some structural elements, which the speaker carefully observes. It is in quatrains, and each quatrain is divided into two rhyming couplets. This division of the poem into four- and two-line units affects the way the poem uses enjambment and end-stop: for instance, the last line of every stanza is end-stopped. The second line of each stanza is also usually end-stopped. The speaker tends to treat each couplet as a unit of thought; he calibrates his thinking to that unit, so that grammatical and conceptual units start and end every two lines.

At times, the poem's use of end-stop does vary. The speaker sometimes takes a whole stanza to develop his thought, as in stanza 2; at other times, he shrinks it to a single line, as in line 1. However, in general, the use of end-stop suggests an underlying organization beneath the poem's loose structure. Though the parts of the poem don't always fall into a logical order, its stanzas and couplets are highly structured. This relatively steady form gives the poem order and reins in the speaker's meandering way of expressing himself.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "love,"
- **Line 4:** "yields."
- **Line 8:** "Madrigals."

- **Line 10:** "posies,"
- **Line 12:** "Myrtle;"
- **Line 14:** "pull;"
- **Line 16:** "gold;"
- **Line 18:** "studs:"
- **Line 20:** "love."
- **Line 22:** "May-morning:"
- **Line 24:** "love."

ENJAMBMENT

Though "The Passionate Shepherd" is a free-flowing poem, it has an underlying architecture that contains and frames its otherwise unstructured thoughts. The poem is divided into quatrains, and each of those quatrains contains two rhyming couplets. Throughout, these couplets and quatrains largely determine the pattern of end-stop and enjambment: the second and fourth lines of each stanza tend to be end-stopped, and the first and third lines are usually enjambed.

As the speaker lists all things he'll make and give to his "love," he organizes his gifts into two-line units, usually introducing a new object every other line. A good example of this formal pattern comes in lines 13-16. In the first two lines, the speaker describes a "gown" he plans to give his "love." Line 13 is enjambed, line 14 end-stopped. Then, in lines 15 and 16, he moves on to a new object, "slippers," which he describes in detail. Line 15 is enjambed and line 16 is end-stopped. (The comma at the end of line 15 doesn't negate this sense of the meaning of the line spilling over; in fact, it doesn't even appear in many editions of the poem, so it shouldn't be taken as an end-stop).

The poem doesn't always follow this rule: for instance, the poem's first line is end-stopped, and the following line is enjambed. And lines 5-8 have only one end-stop, in line 8. Where one expects an end-stop, at the end of line 6, the sentence and the speaker's thought spill over the line break. (For that reason, many editions print line six without a final comma, emphasizing the grammatical and conceptual continuity of the stanza). These moments of variation help to maintain the casual, loose feel of the poem: if it were consistently divided into two-line units, the poem might begin to feel predictable, rote. Instead, it manages to maintain a strong internal structure while also feeling light and playful.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "prove, / That"
- **Lines 3-4:** "fields, / Woods"
- **Lines 5-6:** "Rocks, / Seeing"
- **Lines 6-7:** "flocks, / By"
- **Lines 7-8:** "falls / Melodious"
- **Lines 9-10:** "Roses / And"
- **Lines 11-12:** "kirtle / Embroidered"
- **Lines 13-14:** "wool / Which"
- **Lines 15-16:** "cold, / With"
- **Lines 17-18:** "buds, / With"
- **Lines 19-20:** "move, / Come"
- **Lines 21-22:** "sing / For"
- **Lines 23-24:** "move, / Then"

REFRAIN

The first line of the poem, "Come live with me and be my love," repeats twice over the course of the poem, in lines 20 and 24. The line thus comes to serve as a refrain—though it is a strange and irregular usage. When they use refrains, poets often repeat them at regular intervals, using the refrain to give the poem an internal structure. But "The Passionate Shepherd" is loosely organized and unfussy: it does not have a strong internal structure. It is thus not entirely surprising that the refrain, when it appears, does so in unpredictable places. Twenty lines separate its first appearance, in the poem's opening lines, from its second in line 20. Then it appears again suddenly, just four lines later.

The repetition of the line at the end of stanzas 5 and 6 gives the poem a kind of false ending. Because the reader has not heard the line for so long, its appearance at the end of stanza 5 feels like a way of tying up the poem, making for a neat ending. But then the poem continues for another four lines before finally ending with another variation on lines 1 and 20. The reader's hunch—that the poem would end with the refrain—is confirmed, but only after three extra lines intervene. Far from organizing and ordering the poem's material, the refrain highlights just how loosely organized the poem is—and how eager the speaker is to succeed in his seduction. That is, he is not content to issue his invitation to his love once, but must do so three times, awkwardly extending his poem as a result.

Where Refrain appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Come live with me and be my love,"
- **Line 20:** "Come live with me, and be my love."
- **Line 24:** "Then live with me, and be my love."

ALLITERATION

"The Passionate Shepherd" is a highly alliterative poem. This is fitting because it is a poem about pleasure; its speaker aims to make sure the poem itself is as pleasurable as possible. Some poets shy away from alliteration, for fear that it is too literary—it seems almost like showing off. But "The Passionate Shepherd" is unembarrassed and unafraid of seeming pretentious; its goal is to make a point to the speaker's "love," and it will use any tool in order to do so. Thus the poem contains a number of loud, flashy alliterations, like the /l/ sound

in its first line: "Come live with me and be my love." (This /l/ sound is carried into the next two lines, though it slides inside the following words, transposed from alliteration to consonance).

Similarly, in lines 6 and 21, there is a strong alliteration on an /s/ sound: "Seeing the Shepherds;" "The Shepherds' Swains shall dance and sing." These are particularly interesting places to discover such prominent alliterations. The shepherds are, ostensibly, humble people, who work and live their lives far from the centers of learning and urban sophistication. Yet the speaker uses sophisticated plays of sound in describing them, making alliteration yet another way in which the speaker idealizes shepherds and country life, conveniently glossing over any imperfections. Overall, alliteration supports the poem's broader project: it makes the poem itself as seductive as the things it describes.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "l," "m," "m," "l"
- **Line 2:** "A," "w," "w," "a," "p," "p"
- **Line 5:** "w," "w," "s"
- **Line 6:** "S," "S," "f," "f"
- **Line 7:** "f"
- **Line 8:** "M," "M"
- **Line 9:** "th"
- **Line 10:** "th," "f"
- **Line 11:** "c," "f," "k"
- **Line 13:** "w"
- **Line 14:** "W," "L," "w"
- **Line 15:** "l"
- **Line 17:** "b," "b"
- **Line 18:** "C," "c"
- **Line 19:** "m," "m"
- **Line 20:** "l," "m," "m," "l"
- **Line 21:** "S," "S," "s," "s"
- **Line 22:** "M," "m"
- **Line 23:** "m," "m," "m"
- **Line 24:** "l," "m," "m," "l"

ASSONANCE

"The Passionate Shepherd" is a poem about pleasure. The speaker tries to seduce his "love" by describing a series of pleasurable gifts and scenes: dancing shepherds, golden slippers, beds made of flowers. Throughout the poem, he subtly underlines the richness and delight of the things he describes by using sweet, melodious language. This poem is a joy to listen to and a joy to read: it is dense with patterns of assonance as well as alliteration and consonance. For instance, lines 17-18 contain a series of /a/ sounds:

> A belt of straw and Ivy buds,
> With Coral clasps and Amber studs:

The speaker lists a lot of objects and materials in these lines: straw, ivy, coral, and amber. And he asks the reader to imagine all of these exquisite objects somehow coming together to form a belt. One might be forgiven for having trouble envisioning this elaborate belt. But though the sound of the poem doesn't help the reader envision how everything comes together, it does nonetheless insist subtly that it *does* all somehow fit. The repeated /a/ sound links almost all of the various materials that form the belt, binding them into one coherent substance. The sound of the poem thus contributes to the poem's seductive power: it amplifies the pleasure of the things the speaker describes and it helps the reader make sense of the dazzling array of objects he lays out over the course of the poem.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "o," "i," "i," "e," "e," "o"
- **Line 2:** "e," "i," "o"
- **Line 3:** "i," "ie"
- **Line 4:** "ee," "ie"
- **Line 5:** "i," "i," "o," "o"
- **Line 6:** "ee," "e," "e," "ee," "o"
- **Line 7:** "a"
- **Line 8:** "a"
- **Line 9:** "A," "a," "o"
- **Line 10:** "A," "a," "a," "a," "a," "o"
- **Line 11:** "A," "a," "a," "a," "i"
- **Line 12:** "a," "y"
- **Line 13:** "A," "a," "oo"
- **Line 14:** "u"
- **Line 15:** "o," "o"
- **Line 16:** "o"
- **Line 17:** "A," "a," "a," "u"
- **Line 18:** "a," "a," "a," "A," "u"
- **Line 19:** "A," "a," "o"
- **Line 20:** "o," "e," "e," "o"
- **Line 21:** "e," "e," "i"
- **Line 22:** "y," "i," "a," "o," "i"
- **Line 23:** "e," "e," "i," "y," "a," "o"
- **Line 24:** "e," "e," "o"

CONSONANCE

"The Passionate Shepherd" is a poem full of rich sounds. It contains dense arrays of alliteration, assonance, and consonance. All that sound makes the poem itself very pleasurable: it is an unusually fun poem to read aloud because of the way it trips off the tongue.

The sonic pleasure of the poem supports its goal: the poem doesn't simply describe seductive things—thanks to its sonic richness, it is itself seductive. The key to this seductive power is the way the poem's various sonic tools work together. Consonance often appears here in close connection with alliteration, supporting and extending alliterative plays of

sound. The first line of the poem, for instance, contains a strong alliteration on an /l/ sound. This /l/ sound is picked up and extended throughout the first stanza as it slowly becomes consonance:

> Come live with me and be my love,
> And we will all the pleasures prove,
> That Valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
> Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

The speaker's initial invitation—"Come live with me and be my love"—echoes through the stanza, long after the speaker has moved on to other things, through the repeated /l/ sounds. This sound helps guide the reader through the stanza. The /l/ sound reminds the reader that the speaker is not simply listing these things for the sake of it; rather, the list of beautiful locations is part of his attempt to seduce his "love." Here and in many other instances throughout, consonance not only contributes to the poem's seductive sonic pleasure; it also helps guide the reader, supplying an underlying organization to a loose and playful poem.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "l," "m," "m," "l," "v"
- **Line 2:** "w," "w," "ll," "ll," "p," "l," "s," "r," "s," "p," "r," "v"
- **Line 3:** "V," "ll," "s," "v," "s," "ll," "s," "l," "d," "s"
- **Line 4:** "ds," "s," "l," "d," "s"
- **Line 5:** "w," "w," "ll," "s," "ck," "s"
- **Line 6:** "S," "d," "s," "f," "d," "f," "l," "ck," "s"
- **Line 7:** "ll," "R," "r," "f," "ll"
- **Line 8:** "M," "l," "d," "s," "r," "d," "s," "s," "M," "d," "r," "l," "s"
- **Line 9:** "d," "s," "R," "s," "s"
- **Line 10:** "d," "r," "r," "s," "s"
- **Line 11:** "c," "r," "k," "r," "tl"
- **Line 12:** "m," "r," "r," "ll," "l," "M," "r," "tl"
- **Line 13:** "m," "w," "l"
- **Line 14:** "W," "r," "L," "m," "w," "ll"
- **Line 15:** "r," "l," "l," "r," "r," "ld"
- **Line 16:** "l," "r," "ld"
- **Line 17:** "b," "l," "t," "t," "r," "b," "ds"
- **Line 18:** "C," "l," "c," "l," "r," "ds"
- **Line 19:** "l," "s," "r," "s," "m," "m," "v"
- **Line 20:** "m," "v," "m," "m," "v"
- **Line 21:** "r," "s," "S," "n," "s," "ll," "n," "c," "nd," "s," "n," "g"
- **Line 22:** "l," "M," "m," "r," "n," "ng"
- **Line 23:** "m," "m," "m," "v"
- **Line 24:** "v," "m," "m," "v"

CAESURA

"The Passionate Shepherd" contains relatively few instances of caesura. And its caesurae tend not to be particularly strong or important to the lines in question. For instance, there are a number of brief pauses in lines 3 and 4, as the speaker lists the places where he and his "love" might encounter rural pleasures: "Valleys, groves, hills, and fields, / woods, or steepy mountain yields." Because these caesurae are part of a list—a list which includes a large number of items—it's easy to speed past them, pulled through the sentence by the weight of the list. There are also caesurae in lines 20 and 24, though not the first line of poem (in this printing—other editions print a comma there). These caesurae are again relatively inconsequential: the energy of the lines, particularly in that they feature the poem's refrain, draws the reader's eye quickly across them.

The poem's other caesura occurs in line 11: "A cap of flowers, and a kirtle." This caesura is slightly more revealing. Though the speaker lists many pleasures and gifts, and though the poem is loosely organized, he usually manages to respect the limits of the line as a unit of thought. He does not introduce a new idea or object in the middle of a line—except in line 9. In line 9, it seems as though the speaker's enthusiasm has gotten the better of him. He can't contain himself; even the rather loose formal structure of the poem is too constraining and he breaks the rules he otherwise observes, using a caesura to mark this lapse.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** ", " ", " ", "
- **Line 4:** ", "
- **Line 11:** ", "
- **Line 20:** ", "
- **Line 24:** ", "

APOSTROPHE

As its full title suggests, "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" is addressed *to* someone. The poem's speaker isn't simply listing all these rural pleasures for his own benefit; rather, he is talking to his "love," trying to convince his "love" to join him in the country and indulge in the many delights of country life. The person the speaker addresses is thus at the center of the poem and is the reason for its existence: if the "love" didn't need to be convinced, there would be no poem. The whole poem is thus an instance of apostrophe. But despite the centrality of this device, the speaker tells the reader very little about his "love;" the speaker doesn't even reveal the gender of this "love."

Instead, the reader must make inferences about the speaker's "love" based on the argument the speaker makes to convince this person to join him in the country. For instance, the fact that the speaker needs to list all the pleasures of rural life suggests that his "love" doesn't know much about life in the countryside—or has a negative opinion of it. Similarly, in lines 1, 20, and 24, the speaker *invites* his love to join him in the country: "Come" he says, repeatedly. This suggests that his "love" does not live in the country, but somewhere else, perhaps

somewhere more urban. The reader must make do with these hints because, although the speaker addresses his "love" directly throughout the poem, he says almost nothing about this person.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-24

ALLUSION

"The Passionate Shepherd" is a pastoral poem. The pastoral is an important genre of European poetry, which originates in ancient Greece. Pastoral poems tend to focus on the lives of shepherds, but they describe those lives in highly idealized terms. Instead of discussing the difficulties of working with sheep or living in the country, the shepherds in pastoral poetry tend to spend their time singing and dancing, composing elaborate poems that articulate sophisticated complaints about love or politics.

"The Passionate Shepherd" alludes to this tradition in a number of ways. First, shepherds appear throughout the poem. According to the title, the speaker is himself a shepherd. He invites his "love" to watch the shepherds feed their flocks; he promises that "The Shepherds' Swains shall dance and sing / For thy delight each May-morning." Like many pastoral poems, "The Passionate Shepherd" focuses on the lives of shepherds—and treats those lives in ideal terms.

Second, the poem alludes to one of the central activities depicted in pastoral poems: gift-giving. In pastoral poetry, shepherds seem to have a limitless supply of finely made objects that they trade, wager, and give each other and their loves. The central section of the poem, with its long list of gifts, plays on this tradition, and stretches it to a hyperbolic extreme.

Finally, the speaker references a plant, myrtle, that is native to the Mediterranean (where the pastoral was born) and not England (where the poet, Christopher Marlowe, lived). This reference locates the poem in a cultural rather than national space: the poet is less concerned with inviting his "love" into a specific place in the English countryside and more concerned with bringing his "love" into the idealized pastoral itself, with all of its pleasures and promises.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- Line 6
- Lines 9-20
- Lines 21-22

PERSONIFICATION

In line 8, the speaker promises his "love" that in the countryside, they will hear "Melodious birds sing Madrigals." A madrigal is a type of song, usually written for unaccompanied voices. Suggesting that the birds will sing such a song, the speaker personifies them: he makes it seem as though they have human voices and make human music. This use of personification supports the poem's broader project: this is, after all, a poem that wants to seduce, and that tries to do so by presenting nature as a location of play and pleasure.

In order for the poem to accomplish this goal, the speaker has to guard against another, darker vision of nature: nature can be (or seem to be) threatening and violent, a place hostile to human life. By personifying the birds, the speaker seeks to exclude this darker vision. Giving them human voices, he diminishes their strangeness and difference; they seem already to be part of a comfortable and pleasurable human world. In this way, the speaker subtly reassures his "love" that they need not be afraid of joining him in nature; he shows that nature really is as pleasurable and congenial as he insists.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 7-8:** "to whose falls / Melodious birds sing Madrigals."

VOCABULARY

Prove (Line 2) - To test or try.

Steepy (Line 4) - A steep or sheer surface. In this case, a rugged, steep mountain. The word suggests a wild environment, unsuited for farming—but good for grazing sheep.

Madrigals (Line 8) - Madrigals are a kind of music or song first developed in Italy during the Renaissance. Usually madrigals are written just for voice; they don't feature any accompanying instruments. The madrigal later became a poetic form whose boundaries and components are loosely defined. However, Marlowe is likely referring to the musical sense here.

Kirtle (Line 11) - A garment. It is hard to know exactly what kind of garment the speaker has in mind. A "kirtle" can be a kind of gown or dress (which would suggest that the speaker's love is a woman); it can also be a tunic or long shirt, a garment traditionally worn by men (which would suggest the opposite).

Pull (Line 14) - In this case, to shear or cut the wool from a sheep.

Coral (Line 18) - The speaker is probably referring to a specific kind of coral, which was found in the Mediterranean and famous for its vibrant red color. It was often invoked in Renaissance poetry as a symbol of ideal beauty; see, for example, Shakespeare's reference to the same kind of coral in "Sonnet 130."

Amber (Line 18) - A honey-colored, semi-translucent substance, found in nature and generally made of fossilized

tree-resin.

Studs (Line 18) - Instead of holes, some Renaissance belts had studs, bumps onto which the clasp fastened to hold the belt up.

Swains (Line 21) - Boys. A word almost exclusively used to describe rural children, particularly shepherds. It has an archaic, slangy feel to it; it marks the speaker of the poem as someone a bit out of fashion, close to the language that common people use.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"The Passionate Shepherd" is not in a specific form, though it does employ meter and rhyme in a consistent fashion. The poem consists of six quatrain stanzas, and each quatrain contains two rhyming couplets. The poem does not use rhyme in a highly structured way: with the exception of the poem's refrain—which repeats in lines 1, 20, and 24—each couplet introduces a new rhyme. Finally, each line of the poem is in iambic tetrameter, a consistent but light and playful meter.

The poem thus has an underlying formal architecture. But this formal architecture is not imposing or overwhelming; it does not dominate the reader's experience of the poem. Instead, readers will likely find the poem to be loose and light, almost unstructured. After the poem's initial stanza, where the speaker issues an invitation to his "love," each of the next five stanzas lists the pleasures they will find in the countryside. These stanzas do not have a narrative or logical order; they could easily be reversed or reorganized without changing the content or the argument of the poem. As a result the poem feels less like an elegant and seductive argument (like some other poems of seduction, such as Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress") and more like an overflow of passion and enthusiasm. The poem's loose form contributes to this sense of energy and disorganization: since it does not place strenuous structural demands on the speaker, he can let his passion run free in a way that reflects the easygoing country life he describes.

METER

"The Passionate Shepherd" is written in iambic tetrameter—a relatively relaxed, playful meter. In this way, it's different from its close cousin, iambic pentameter, which is usually used for stately, heroic, and serious topics. (Indeed, Christopher Marlowe is one of the poets who pioneered the use of iambic pentameter in his tragedies, paving the way for poets like Shakespeare and Milton to take it up as the form for their grand meditations). Marlowe's decision to use iambic tetrameter instead of pentameter thus shows what he thinks of the subject matter of "The Passionate Shepherd:" it does not quite deserve a grand, dignified treatment. Instead, this poem and its subject deserve a more relaxed and humble meter.

In keeping with the poem's playful tone and relaxed meter, "The Passionate Shepherd" contains a number of metrical substitutions. These metrical substitutions are rarely thematically significant, but they do suggest that the speaker feels relaxed and informal as he makes his invitation to his "love." For instance, there are a number of lines that include first foot trochees, like line 6:

> See|ing | the Shep- | -herds feed | their flocks,

This is a relatively common metrical substitution in iambic verse. Similarly, the poem often uses feminine endings; the third stanza contains three such endings in lines 9, 11, and 12:

> And I | will make | thee beds | of Roses
> And a | thousand | fragrant | posies,
> A cap | of flow- | -ers, and | a kirtle
> Embroi- | -dered all | with leaves | of Myrtle;

Notice also that line 10 in that same stanza is actually trochaic tetrameter rather than iambic tetrameter.

These substitutions do not substantially upset the rhythm of the lines, but they do suggest that the speaker is not particularly concerned with metrical precision; he feels no need to show off his poetic skill. Indeed, doing so might undermine his image as a "shepherd," a country person impatient with the polished sophistication of the city.

RHYME SCHEME

"The Passionate Shepherd" is written in rhyming couplets, with two couplets to a stanza. Its rhymes are serial. In general, each couplet introduces a new rhyme, so the poem is rhymed:

> AABBCCDD

... and so on.

There is one exception to this general rule: because the poem has a refrain—which repeats inlines 1, 20, and 24—the poem repeatedly uses rhymes with the word "love." In each case, these rhymes sound like slant rhymes to modern ears. However, to Marlowe and his early readers, they would've been perfect rhymes: there has been a shift in English pronunciation in the intervening centuries, which has changed the way the "o" in words like "love" is pronounced. The poem's rhymes are thus strong, direct, and unforced, and in only three cases does the speaker use a two-syllable word in the rhymes. The rhymes thus reflect the speaker's confidence and his unpretentious approach; he does not bother with fancy rhymes.

However, there are some places in the poem where the speaker's unfussy approach to meter and rhyme cause some complications. For example, line 21 is a strong line of iambic tetrameter, and it ends with a single-syllable rhyme word, "sing."

That rhyme word bears the stress in the line's final foot. But the next line, line 22, has a feminine ending. Here the rhyme sound falls in the unstressed final syllable of the line:

> The Shepherds' Swains shall dance and sing
> For thy delight each May-morning

This is called an apocopated rhyme. It is a very rare kind of rhyme; normally, poets rhyme stressed syllables with stressed syllables, and one can see why. The result is awkward and strange: rhyming a stressed syllable with an unstressed one creates an unexpected and perhaps unwanted feeling of interruption in an otherwise smooth poem. Here, the speaker seems to lose control of the poem momentarily, its polish coming off in a moment of passion.

SPEAKER

As its title specifies, the speaker of "The Passionate Shepherd" is a shepherd: someone who works with sheep, supervising them as they graze. There is a whole genre of poetry written in the voices of shepherds—a genre called the pastoral.

The poets who work in this genre are rarely much interested in the work that shepherds actually do or the reality of their lives; instead, they use the shepherd as a cipher or a mask, behind which they can express their desires or their political complaints. "The Passionate Shepherd" follows in that tradition. The shepherd of its title does not say much about his life or work; instead, he spends much of the poem articulating erotic desire, using euphemism and metaphor to disguise it. The speaker of the poem is thus only ostensibly a shepherd: more likely, the speaker is a lover who takes on a shepherd's disguise to create some distance between himself and his desire.

SETTING

"The Passionate Shepherd" has two settings, one explicit and one implicit. The speaker spends much of the poem describing life in the countryside, focusing on its simple pleasures and humble luxuries. Since the speaker of the poem is, according to the poem's title, a "shepherd," it seems reasonable to assume that he lives in the countryside, and that the world he describes is the setting of the poem.

But the speaker's "love" does not live in the countryside—he or she lives somewhere else. This person does not know much about the country and thus needs the speaker to describe it at length. Most likely, the speaker's "love" is a city person. The city is thus an implicit second setting for the poem; it's almost as if the speaker is talking about the country from somewhere far away. Indeed, one might imagine that the speaker has traveled to the city to beg his "love" to return to the countryside.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"The Passionate Shepherd" is a pastoral poem. The pastoral is one of the oldest and most prestigious genres of western poetry—ironically enough, since it usually describes humble and unpretentious scenes. Most pastoral poems take place in rural settings and their speakers are shepherds, people who work with sheep. The shepherds reflect on political conflict, express sexual desire, and meditate on the nature of work—all at a safe distance from urban life, with its complicated political demands and its powerful figures, who might take offense at a more direct poem.

The first pastoral poems were written by Greek poets like Theocritus in the third century B.C.E. Theocritus and his peers often seem self-conscious of their place in the history of Greek literature: they know that they will not equal the achievement of poets like Homer or playwrights like Sophocles, so they do not dare take on the epic and mythological themes that occupied those writers. Instead, they present their work as humble reworkings of the themes and tropes of their predecessors' writings. For example, where Homer dedicates a long passage of the *Iliad* to describing the hero Achilles's shield—made by the god Hephaestus and inscribed with elaborate scenes representing human life—Theocritus in his first Idyll spends a long time describing the engravings on a wooden cup. In the pastoral form, there is a palpable sense of having fallen from an epic grandeur to something much less impressive.

Pastoral poems were widely written in the ancient world, with poets like Virgil taking up the genre. However, after about 300 C.E. they fell out of style. Until the Italian poet Sannazaro revived the genre nearly a thousand years later, almost no one wrote pastorals. The revival of interest in pastoral poetry emerged from a broader interest, during the European Renaissance, in reviving classical language, texts, and modes of thinking.

In English poetry, the pastoral became one of the most important modes, with key figures like Spenser and Sidney writing and publishing pastoral poems in the 1580s and early 1590s—just as "The Passionate Shepherd" was being written. The poem thus participates in a broader set of experiments designed to revive a classical genre and make it clear that poetry written in English could equal classical poetry.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"The Passionate Shepherd" was likely written in the early 1590s, toward the end of Christopher Marlowe's life. Marlowe was a playwright and poet—perhaps the most famous playwright of his day. (He was murdered in a bar-room brawl in 1593, just as Shakespeare was beginning to surpass him in

popularity).

Marlowe's life was marked by considerable political turmoil. Though Elizabeth I was Queen of England, she was beset by foreign adversaries—she barely escaped being swept off the throne when the Spanish Armada attacked in 1589—and she had no heir to take her throne when she died. (She died some ten years after Marlowe, in 1603).

Though the 1590s were a period of relative peace and prosperity in English life, they were nonetheless bracketed on both ends by political uncertainty—uncertainty that the English state tried to control by closely monitoring its citizens. Marlowe himself was the object of persistent surveillance and was tried at one point for blasphemy. (He was accused of being an atheist, in part because of his play *Doctor Faustus*. This was a serious crime in Elizabethan England). There are even rumors—unsubstantiated ones—that Marlowe's murder was not an accident, but rather an assassination, ordered by Elizabeth I or one of her lieutenants. Given all of this political controversy and uncertainty, it is easy to imagine why Marlowe might imagine escaping from London to a pure and uncomplicated life of rural pleasure.

Marlowe was also one of the most openly homoerotic writers of the Elizabethan period. His play *Edward II* describes in loving and often erotic detail the relationship between Edward and his liegeman Piers Gaveston; his poem *Hero and Leander* also contains long homoerotic passages. This undercurrent of homoerotic desire may also be present in "The Passionate Shepherd." Some of Marlowe's readers assume that the shepherd's "love" is female. Sir Walter Ralegh, for example, wrote a poem in response to Marlowe's called "The Nymph's Reply," which assumes that the shepherd is speaking to a nymph, a female deity. But Marlowe's poem does not provide any information about the gender of the speaker's "love." Though the poem is not openly homoerotic, it allows, even invites, the possibility that the male speaker might be writing to another man.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Another of the Same Nature, Made Since — Another response to Marlowe's poem, this one anonymous. (http://www.arctracer.com/poems/Another.html)
- A Reading of "The Passionate Shepherd" — A reading of "The Passionate Shepherd." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znx10eXkrYQ)
- The Mysterious Passionate Pilgrim — A blog entry with information about the book The Passionate Pilgrim, in which "The Passionate Shepherd" was first printed, alongside several of Shakespeare's Sonnets. (http://theshakespeareblog.com/2011/11/the-mysterious-passionate-pilgrim-and-shakespeare/)
- Early Printings of "The Passionate Shepherd" — This page contains information about and images of the first printed versions of Marlowe's poem. (https://comelivewithmeballad.com/about-the-poem/)
- The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd — Sir Walter Ralegh's response to Marlowe's poem. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44939/the-nymphs-reply-to-the-shepherd)
- Pastoral — A guide to the pastoral genre, from the Encyclopedia Britannica. (https://www.britannica.com/art/pastoral-literature)

HOW TO CITE

MLA

Altman, Toby. "*The Passionate Shepherd to His Love.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 8 May 2019. Web. 22 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Altman, Toby. "*The Passionate Shepherd to His Love.*" LitCharts LLC, May 8, 2019. Retrieved April 22, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/christopher-marlowe/the-passionate-shepherd-to-his-love.