



Tikrit University

Collage of Education for Women

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**“The Passionate Shepherd to His Love”**

**CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE**

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.

Though Christopher Marlowe likely wrote “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” in the early 1590s, it first appeared in print around 1600. This is a lyric poem that draws on the Classical tradition of pastoral poetry, which is a genre that takes place in a highly idealized country landscape. The principal inhabitants of this landscape are shepherds. In addition to idly tending their flocks, shepherds also sing songs and pursue amorous encounters. Though shepherds traditionally lust after nymphs, it isn’t clear who the poem’s “passionate shepherd” is addressing. Marlowe is known to have been queer, which has led some critics to speculate that the shepherd’s “love” could be male—though their gender ultimately remains ambiguous. Marlowe’s shepherd tries to convince his beloved to live with him in the country. He offers them a vision of rural life’s numerous pleasures, along with its promise of leisure. He also entices them with a taste of the pastoral landscape’s material abundance, the fruits of which he promises them in the form of luxurious gifts. The poem ends before the speaker’s beloved can respond, so we have no idea if they’ll agree to stay. This ambiguity has led to amusing poems of reply, such as Sir Walter Raleigh’s 1600 verse, “The Nymph’s Reply to the Shepherd.”

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.

### **Analysis of poem**

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.