



## English Poetry in 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> Century

### Lecture 7+8

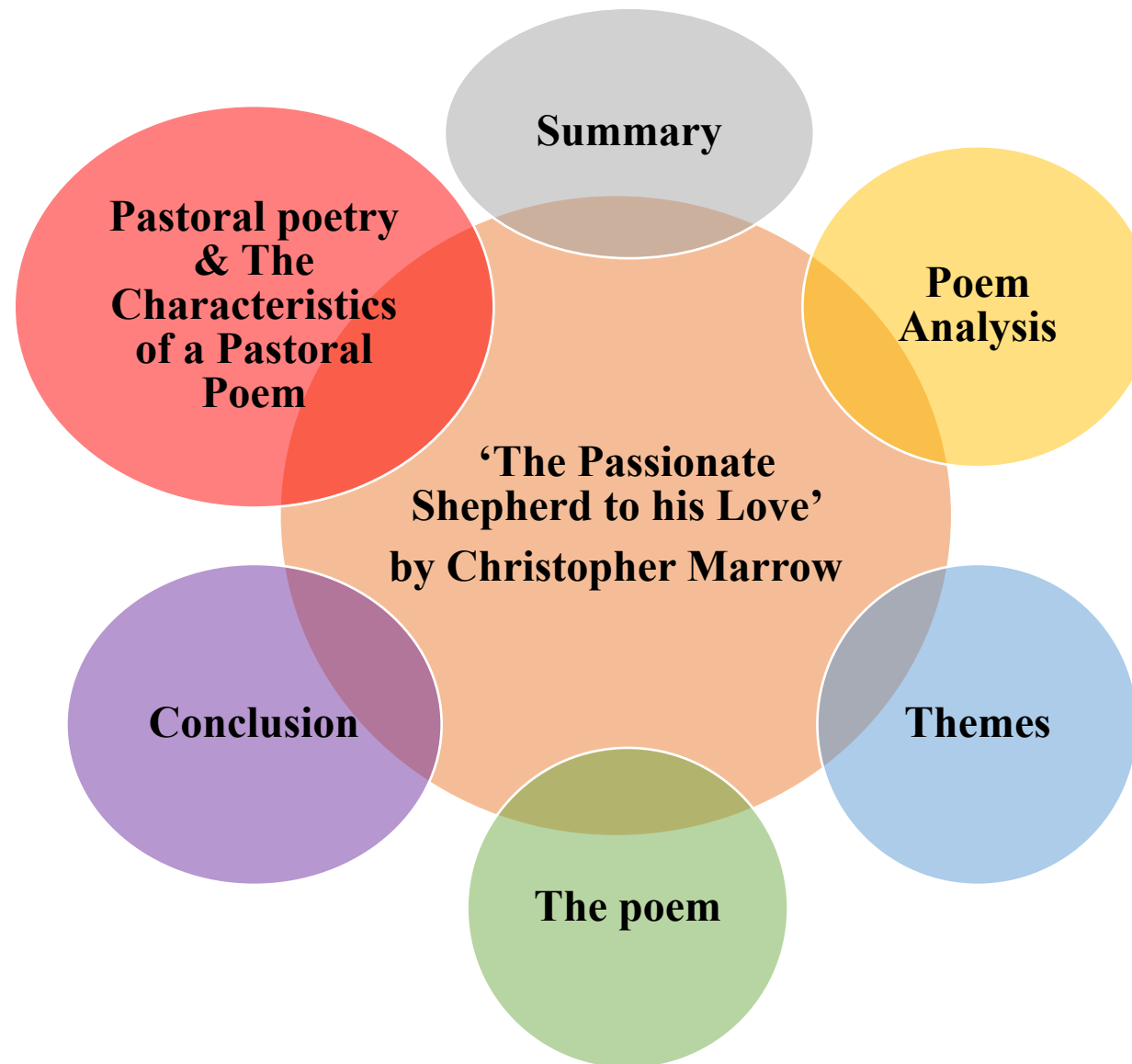
# Pastoral poetry: “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” By Christopher Marlowe

Prepared and presented by

Dr. Hassan Majid Ahmed

2<sup>nd</sup> stage Morning / Evening Studies

# Table of contents



## Pastoral poetry & The Characteristics of a Pastoral Poem

Pastoral poetry is a very ancient genre of poetry. It deals with the loves and lives of shepherds and shepherdesses, and other such country folk. They live far from towns, and spend their lives singing, sometimes mourning the loss of a sheep or a fellow shepherd or a love affair that has gone wrong.

### The Characteristics of a Pastoral Poem

- A pastoral poem is about pastures i.e., the countryside where shepherds tend their sheep on pasture land.
- A pastoral poem promotes the characteristics of the countryside over those of the town or city, presenting an idealized image of country life that may have been quite at odds with the reality of a hard life in harsh conditions.
- Shepherds are presented as living an idyllic and innocent life in a delightful environment.
- In fact, imminent starvation during harsh winter conditions or when the harvest had failed was a reality of everyday life in past centuries.
- Nevertheless, the vivid imagery in *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* has ensured that it has remained one of the most-loved poems in the English language.



# ‘The Passionate Shepherd to his Love’ (1599)

## ‘The Passionate Shepherd to his Love’ (1599)

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.

1599 الراعي العاطفي لحبيبته  
تعال عش معي وكن حبي  
، وسنثبت كل الملذات  
، تلك الوديان والبساتين والتلال والحقول  
الغابة ، أو غلة الجبال شديدة الانحدار  
ونجلس على الصخور  
، ولما رأيت الرعاة يرعون قطعانهم  
من الأنهار الضحلة التي تقع  
تغني الطيور الشنيعة مادريجال

وسأبني لك أسرة من الورود  
، وألف وضعية عطرة  
kirtle قبعة من الزهور و  
مطرزة بأوراق نبات الآس

عباءة من أجود أنواع الصوف  
التي من الحملان الجميلة لدينا نخرج ؛  
، نعال مبطنة عادلة للبرودة  
بأبازيم من الذهب الخالص

، حزام من القش وبراعم اللبلاب  
مع المشابك المرجانية ودبابيس العنبر  
، وإذا انتقلت هذه الملذات  
تعال وعش معي وكن حبي

يرقص الرعاة ويغنون  
لإسعادك كل صباح في مايو  
، إذا كانت هذه المسرات قد تحرك عقلك  
ثم عش معي وكن حبي



## A brief summary of 'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love' (1599)

"The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" is a pastoral lyric, a poetic form that is used to create an idealized vision of rural life within the context of personal emotion.

The speaker in The Passionate Shepherd to His Love is urging his beloved, who presumably dwells in an urban environment, to join him in a life in the countryside. He attempts to seduce her by presenting an enticing image of delightful and varied vistas with a background of sweet birdsong.

# Themes in 'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love'

## 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.



# Themes in 'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love'

## COUNTRY VS. CITY

- 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 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.





## Themes in 'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love'



### THE NOBILITY OF PASTORAL WORK

- The speaker 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.
- Shepherding is different from other kinds of work. It is not particularly painful or unpleasant; instead, it is enjoyable to do and watch.





# **The Passionate Shepherd to His Love**

Poem  
**Analysis**

CHRISTOPHER  
MARLOWE



# Analysis of 'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love' (1599)

**In the first stanza**, the Shepherd invites his love to come with him and "pleasures prove" (line 2.)

This immediate reference to pleasure gives a mildly sexual tone to this poem, but it is of the totally innocent, almost naïve kind.

The Shepherd makes no innuendo of a sordid type, but rather gently and directly calls to his love. He implies that the entire geography of the countryside of England "Valleys, groves, hills and fields/Woods or steepy mountains" will prove to contain pleasure of all kinds for the lovers.

The idealization of rural life is essentially what separates pastoral poetry from simple rustic verse.



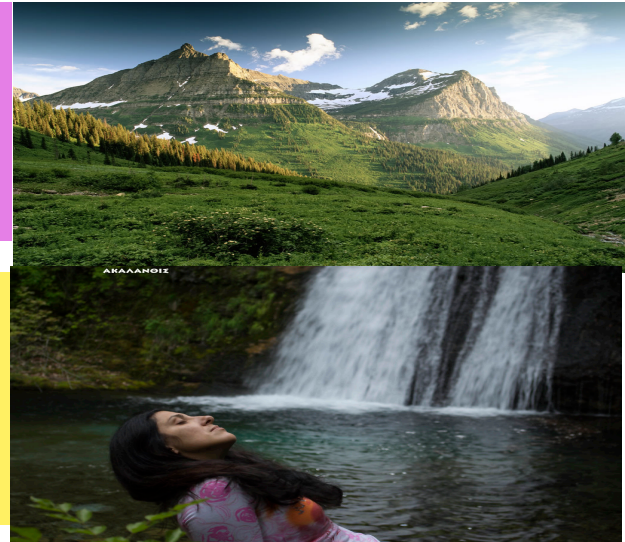
## Analysis of 'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love' (1599) cont.

**The second stanza** suggests that the lovers will take their entertainment not in a theatre or at a banquet, but sitting upon rocks or by rivers.

**They will watch shepherds (of which the titular speaker is ostensibly one, except here it is implied that he will have ample leisure) feeding their flocks, or listening to waterfalls and the songs of birds.**

**These are entirely bucolic, traditional entertainments; the idea of Marlowe, the young man about town who chose to live in London, actually enjoying these rustic pleasures exclusively and leaving the city behind is laughable.**

Again, these invitations are not to be taken literally. Marlowe may well have admired pastoral verse, and the ideals of it (such as Ovid's ideals of aggressive, adulterous heterosexual love) were not necessarily those he would espouse for himself





## Analysis of 'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love' (1599) cont.

**The third, fourth, and fifth stanzas** are a kind of list of the "delights", mostly sartorial, that the Shepherd will make for his lady love.

The list of the things he will make for his lady: "beds of roses" "thousand fragrant posies," "cap of flowers," "kirtle embroidered with leaves of myrtle," "gown made of the finest wool/Which from our pretty lambs we pull," "fair-lined slippers," "buckles of the purest gold," "belt of straw and ivy buds," "coral clasps," and "amber studs") reveal a great deal about the situation of the "Shepherd" and what he can offer his love.

While certainly many of the adornments Marlowe lists would be within the power of a real shepherd to procure or make (the slippers, the belt, possibly the bed of roses (in season), the cap of flowers, and the many posies, and possibly even the kirtle embroidered with myrtle and the lambs wool gown,)

But the gold buckles, the coral clasps, and the amber studs would not be easily available to the smallholder or tenant shepherds who actually did the work of shepherding. This increasingly fanciful list of gifts could only come from a member of the gentry, or a merchant in a town.



## Analysis of 'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love' (1599)

- While the delights of the countryside and the rural life of manual labour are celebrated, the poet (and the reader) is assumed to be noble, or at least above manual labor.
- The fantasy of bucolic paradise is entirely idealized; Marlowe's Shepherd is not a real person, but merely a poetic device to celebrate an old poetic ideal in verse.
- Incidentally, the plants mentioned (roses, flowers, and myrtle) are conventional horticultural expressions of romance.
- The rose, especially, was sacred to the goddess Venus (and it is how roses have come to symbolize romantic love in some modern Western cultures.) The myrtle was associated with Venus, too, and especially with marriage rituals in Ancient Rome.
- This connotation would have been known to Marlowe's readers. The attribute of virginity should not necessarily be assumed here; it was not for a few more centuries that myrtle would come to symbolize sexual purity.
- Therefore, the kirtle embroidered with myrtle is not just a pretty rhyme and a word-picture of a desirable garment. It was meant to symbolize that this was a **nuptial invitation**, and that **the Shepherd's lady was not strictly defined** (though she may well have been meant to be) **a virgin bride**. Myrtle was an appropriate nature symbol from the Greek and Roman mythologies (from which the first pastoral poems come) to insert into a love-poem.

## Analysis of 'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love' (1599) cont.

The image of the Shepherd as a member of the gentry becomes complete when, **in the last stanza**, it is said "The shepherd swains shall dance and sing/For thy delight each May-morning."

The picture here is of other shepherds doing the speaker's bidding. A rustic form of performance – in the open air and not on a stage – is again in marked contrast to the kind of formal performance of plays on the Renaissance stage, which would make Marlowe famous at a very young age.

The poem ends with an "if" statement, and contains a slightly somber note. There is no guarantee that the lady will find these country enticements enough to follow the Shepherd, and since the construction of them is preposterous and fantastical to begin with, the reader is left with the very real possibility that the Shepherd will be disappointed.



## Conclusion

The poem can be read as containing irony (as written by an urbane man who longed for the city rather than the country, and thus constructed impossible rustic scenarios), serious and heartfelt emotion, a slight political commentary, a gentle sadness, and a transcendent love of nature.

Good poetry is often many things to different readers, and Marlowe was able to create, within a codified (and one might say ossified) form of poetry a piece of clever and flexible Elizabethan verse.

The Shepherd may not have been real, but the emotions and effects created by this poem have their own reality.

