

"the nymph's reply to the shepherd" essay



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"The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" By Sir Walter Raleigh Summary: "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" is Sir Walter Raleigh's response to a poem written by Christopher Marlowe, "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love." In the Marlowe poem, the shepherd proposes to his beloved by portraying their ideal future together: a life filled with earthly pleasures in a world of eternal spring. Raleigh's reply, however, debunks the shepherd's fanciful vision.

While Marlowe's speaker promises nature's beauty and a litany of gifts, Raleigh's nymph responds that such promises could only remain valid "if all the world and love were young." Thus, she introduces the concepts of time and change. In her world, the seasons cause the shepherd's "shallow rivers" to "rage," rocks to "grow cold" and roses to "fade." The shepherd's gifts might be desirable, but they too are transient: they "soon break, soon wither" and are "soon forgotten." In the end, the nymph acknowledges that she would accept the shepherd's offer "could youth last" and "had joys no date. Like the shepherd, she longs for such things to be true, but like Raleigh, she is a skeptic, retaining faith only in reason's power to discount the "folly" of "fancy's spring." Source: <http://www.enotes.com/nymphs-reply> Analysis: Raleigh's poem "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" is a witty and well-written reply to Marlowe's more innocent "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love". Using similar images and metrics, Raleigh cleverly presents the nymph's world-weary response to the shepherd's new and childlike view of love. In Marlowe's poem, the shepherd reaches out to his love with a pastoral ballad.

The piece is very beautiful, painting an idyllic scene wherein the shepherd and his love can roam at their will. The shepherd tells his love that he will

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give all for her if she would just live with him; together they will "all the pleasures prove" (2) and he would show her to a world where birds sing, the sun shines, and everything is serene and perfect. Even Marlowe's use of language contributes to his scene of happiness with which he tries to lure his love; the poem is written in iambic tetrameter couplets, giving it a lilting and song-like feel.

He also employs alliteration quite often and to great effect; soft, rolling sounds like "we will" (2), "mind may move" (27), and "live with me and be my Love" (28) achieve a verbal approximation of the valleys and hills that he speaks of contextually. Raleigh, however, will have none of Marlowe's idealism and naiveté. In his poem, the shepherd has sung his song to the lover, and Raleigh's poem is her reply. Interestingly enough, Raleigh uses the word "nymph" instead of a more neutral word like "girl" or a direct counter like "love".

Although the word nymph did mean "girl" in Raleigh's time, it also had the mythological connotation of a female spirit who would have been adept at warding off satyrs and would-be suitors. Raleigh's nymph breaks down the shepherd's love-struck ballad quickly and efficiently; in fact, Raleigh's poem has a counter for each of Marlowe's ideas. It begins by having the nymph doubt the shepherd's ability to make true his promises; she questions the "truth in every shepherd's tongue" (2).

The shepherd and the nymph see the world in two very different lights: while the shepherd entreats the nymph to come with him, the nymph's response is one of sobering mortality. For all his romantic ideas of fields and flowers, the

nymph knows that it does not matter because eventually " Time drives the flocks from fields to fold" (5) and " flowers fade" (6). Where the shepherd's " birds sing madrigals" (8), the nymph replies that " Philomel becometh dumb" (7), invoking the mythological story of Philomela, a Greek girl who was transformed into a nightingale.

The poem continues in this tone until the last stanza; there, Raleigh's nymph concedes that if they were both immortal she might consider joining him, a last bit of hope for Marlowe's poor shepherd. The language of Raleigh's poem contributes greatly to the nymph's demolition of the shepherd's naive and heartfelt plea for love. Raleigh reiterates many of Marlowe's images and ideas, but distorts them through the lens of time. The same alliteration is also used in both; there is, however, a marked difference in their sounds.

Marlowe alliterates softer " m" and " l" sounds, giving his poem the aforementioned rolling aspect. Raleigh imitates Marlowe extremely well, but there is a telling difference that can be noted in some places; Raleigh uses a rougher alliteration of sounds like hard " c" and " t" to give his poem a more mocking, satirical bent. This is especially prominent in the second stanza of Raleigh's poem; while Marlowe's second stanza has the softer alliterative sounds, Raleigh's stanza moves stiffly with the " c" sounds in " complains of cares to come "(8).

The metrics of Raleigh's poem are also in and of themselves a direct reply to Marlowe's. Raleigh uses the same iambic tetrameter that Marlowe uses, organizing the poem into four line stanzas composed of two rhyming couplets each. He achieves an oddly mocking tone with the meter because

of the words involved. Although the words still flow because of the regular meter, they are decidedly less romantic and are juxtaposed with the meter. Examples of this are the harsh alliteration in "complains of cares to come" (8) or the rolling, soft sound that "wayward winter's reckoning yields" (10).

Although the metrics are regular and fall soft on the ear, the subject matter is darker and uses the meter to make fun of Marlowe's pastoral love poem. Raleigh also uses metric substitution, like his alliteration, to make his poem rougher and less pleasing to the ear than Marlowe's. The first example of metric substitution comes in the second stanza. The two stressed feet in "Time drives" (5) are an abrupt break from the pleasing, flowing metrics that Marlowe established and Raleigh's first stanza adhered to.

The spondee substitution has a forced sound that gives the reader the impression that time never ceases, relentlessly pressing on against the pleasures of which Marlowe's shepherd thinks so highly. It is also found in the second line where "rocks grow cold" (6). The substitution here is ironic verb "grow" is usually associated with natural things like trees and flowers, objects with which the shepherd tries to entice the nymph. The nymph, however, returns with an object that is rough and does not truly grow; she instead uses the word to mean "to turn", and the stresses indicate the harsh reality of the line.

The second example of metrics is found in the fourth stanza, and it is an interesting thing indeed. Each line in the fourth stanza has nine syllables as opposed to eight, thus giving each line a feminine ending. This is interesting in that feminine endings are generally a weaker ending; however, it is clear

in this stanza that the lines are powerful and reject the gifts the shepherd has offered. The third line of the stanza thunders into being, with four stressed syllables at the beginning and the bilabial plosive in break" gives the line a very angry tone; Raleigh uses the metrics, then, to give his nymph an anger and irritation to the shepherd's foolhardy thoughts of love and paradise, knowing that time will come and destroy it all one day. The nymph's reply, however, becomes softer and softer as she begins to feel pity or compassion towards the shepherd. The last two stanzas are in regular iambic tetrameter with the exception of the first line of the last stanza; the nymph tells the shepherd that " could youth last" (25) they would be together.

The three stresses on " could youth last" contribute to a sense of length; the reader expects the unstressed syllable to come naturally but it does not, instead waiting two syllables to appear. Both Marlowe and Raleigh were excellent poets and show it in both " The Passionate Shepherd" and " The Nymph's Reply". Raleigh's reply, however, cleverly bends Marlowe's images, ideas, and metrics into a more sober and mature outlook than the shepherd's dreamy infatuation. Source: [http://www. helium.](http://www.helium.com/items/879551-poetry-analysis-the-nymphs-reply-to-the-shepherd-by-william-raleigh)

[om/items/879551-poetry-analysis-the-nymphs-reply-to-the-shepherd-by-william-raleigh](http://www.helium.com/items/879551-poetry-analysis-the-nymphs-reply-to-the-shepherd-by-william-raleigh) Extra: I also found these steps which I found very interesting (although the source is not very reliable) 10 Step Poetry Explication Process

1) Title A nymph's reply to a statement made by a shepherd. 2) Dramatic Situation Speaker is the nymph (the young girl) The addressee is the shepherd 3) Subject The nymph is responding to the proposal made by the

shepherd. She contrasts the hypothetical world presented by the shepherd with reality.

The nymph says that what makes the shepherd's vision false is time and attacks his assumption that love and lovers will remain young. 4) Images, Figures of Speech, Literary Devices Raleigh uses the poetic devices that give Marlowe's poem its musicality. (as mockery) *alliteration- ex: "flocks from field to fold" *repetition of initial consonant sounds- ex: "flowers" and "fade", "wayward" and "winter", "spring" and "sorrow", "fancy" and "fall" 5) Tone Realistic In Stanza 6 the tone changes to wishful with the word "but".

The nymph wished the world could be immortal. 6) Structural Divisions

Six four line stanza containing two rhymed couplets Predominant meter is iambic tetrameter ex: If all/ the world/ and love/ were young... The speaker contrasts the shepherd's vision with realities introduced by the word "but" -

Point by point shows how everything withers and dies. ****Parody-parallels

The Passionate Shepherd to His Love in both form and content Rejects

shepherd by stanza 5- "All these in me no means can move" In Stanza 6 a

twist occurs. She says if the world were as the shepherd has promised. 7)

Rhyme Scheme aabb ccdd eeff gghh iibb jjbb 8) Title The nymph's reply to

the promises made by the shepherd) Theme The poem is centrally

concerned with responding to the invitation by the Shepherd in The

Passionate Shepherd to His Love. The poet wishes to addressee to know that his promises are not possible because time changes them. 10) Diction

Formal- ex: "thee", "thy" Connotative- The images are real, but are taken

from the Passionate Shepherd to His love, and go beyond their meaning. The effect of time on these objects is representative of all change. Concrete- The

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words are specific and give a mental picture ex: " coral claps", " rivers rage"

Cacophonous-ex: " rage", " gall", " sorrow",