

Farewell to false love analysis

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The reason behind Sir Walter Raleigh's "A Farewell to False Love" is evident in the title, the first few lines, and throughout the entire poem. It repeats over and over the theme of love being false and untrue. The poet portrays love as being a horrible thing, a liar and a deceiver. The poem is structured in the ababcc format, which was a common simple style of the time. The poem portrays love as being warm and fuzzy on the outside, but really just a "poisoned serpent covered all with flowers." This poem has a very depressing and angry feel to it, as if the speaker had a very bad experience with love and is now raging against it. In the last lines, despair and acceptance is evident in the lines, "Dead is the root whence all these fancies grew". This is basically the speaker saying, in layman's terms, 'My heart is dead.' The poem is filled with many different literary devices and a certain disliking, possibly hatred, for the idea of love. The opening line the poet uses is, "Farewell false love, the oracle of lies." An oracle is a prophecy, or a foretelling of what is to come. Knowing this, the line means that love is just a foretelling of lies about the future and false pretenses of good things to come. In reality, all love leaves is poison, pain, and despair. This metaphor is also seen in the poet's comparison of love to "a gilded hook that holds a poisoned bait." Love is shiny and it makes you want to take a bite, but in the end the bait you take is all poison. In fact, the entire poem is a metaphor to compare with this false love that he is saying goodbye to. Metaphors are the biggest and most obvious literary device that the poet keeps returning to in order to show his utter distaste with love. In line 2 and 3 the, "A mortal foe and enemy to rest,/ An envious boy, from whom all cares arise..." means that love is the enemy to everyone, not something to be sought after. Love is not

safe, love is going to hurt you. The poet suggests that one should flee from love as one would flee an enemy, instead of seeking after it. Line 5 suggests that the speaker is portraying love as betraying him when he says, " A way of error, a temple full of treason." Treason is a betrayal of trust or confidence, so the poet means that love is just a feeling full of betrayal. Also, the poet pits reason and love against one another through the line " in all effects contrary unto reason". He is saying that love is contrary to reason, that the two do not go together. Falling in/being in love is unreasonable and contrary to logic. During the time period this was written in, reason and enlightenment were the new, big ideas that were catching fire across England. Love as seen through religious eyes was under attack, but love as seen through worldly eyes was being scrutinized as well. Raleigh's idea of love in this poem is at direct odds with the true Biblical concept of love. Also, Raleigh has a style to his poems that shows contempt for the world, and this poem is certainly no different. Stanza two begins with him saying, " A poisoned serpent covered all with flowers,/ Mother of sighs, and murderer of repose." He describes love as being in disguise when he says that it is a poisonous serpent covered in flowers. Love is a dangerous thing dressed up to look nice so that the unwary will reach for it. To the speaker, love is deceptive and disguised as something good and beautiful. Mother of sighs and murderer of repose means that love is the biggest reason for sighs or bad feelings and the robber of peace and tranquility. A line combination I found particularly interesting was, " A substance like the shadow of the sun/ A goal of grief for which the wisest run". The poet portrays love as a shadow, which are without substance. Comparing love to a shadow is saying that love

has no substance, and it will fall out from underneath a person if they try to stand upon it. The second piece of this is, it causes immeasurable grief and, if a person is wise, they will stay far away. I found the poet's use of 'wise' interesting, as opposed to a word like 'smart' or 'intelligent'. Wise people aren't necessarily book-smart, but they learn from their prior experiences. The poet also says that love is a quenchless fire, and a nurse of trembling fear. Love, instead of easing fears, stokes them as one would stoke a fire. Instead of attempting to quiet the storm, all it does in reality is create a bigger one. Raleigh uses alliteration when he says, "A sea of sorrows whence are drawn such showers..." because the "s" sound is repeated. He also uses alliteration with the "s" sound and a simile when he says, "A substance like the shadow of the sun." In the last stanza, the poet turns from simply speaking about love to a more personal set of lines about what love did to him. He had faith in love, but it betrayed him and showed nothing but ingratitude for his faith. At the last, he says that he is bidding farewell to "false love, desire, and beauty frail" and that the root of these things within him is dead. This is truly a saddening thought, to know that a person has given up on love. Throughout this poem, the speaker sends the same message in each one of his lines: Love is betrayal. Love is deceiving and conniving. Love is dangerous and harmful. Love should be avoided because it is contrary to reason and logic.