

A Structuralist Study of Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" and its Pastiches

Nik Liyana binti Nik Ahmad Zahid*

Homam Altabaa**

Abstract

This research paper presents a structuralist analysis of Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (1599) and two of its pastiches. Marlowe's poem is a pastoral poem that focuses on the idyllic country life. The profound influence of the poem transcends literature where even artists and musicians drew inspiration from it. Numerous poets imitated or parodied the poem in their own styles including John Donne's "The Bait" (1633) and William Carlos Williams' "Raleigh was Right" (1962). Despite essentially paying homage to Marlowe's poem, these two pastiches are diverse in both their thematic and stylistic elements. This study compares these poems in the aspects of their themes and styles to examine the way they reflect their respective genres and times. The proposed framework is structuralist in essence as it allows the examination of the wider structures underlying the poems and the analysis of the interplay of the themes and stylistic elements. Essentially, this study analyses the conventions within the three poems and the pastiches' similarities or differences compared to Marlowe's poem. The study concluded that these poems convey different thematic elements through varying binaries which are influenced by their respective genres and eras. Compared to the original, the pastiches critique the traditional idea of love and gender roles by exploring varied aspects of the concepts, and incorporating, especially in the case of Williams, modernist and economic concerns.

Keywords: The Passionate Shepherd, Christopher Marlowe, John Donne, William Carlos Williams, structuralism, gender roles, traditional love

1.0 Introduction

This research paper presents a structuralist analysis of Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (1599) and its pastiches. Numerous poets imitated or parodied the poem in their own styles including John Donne's "The Bait" (1633) and William Carlos' "Raleigh was Right" (1962). Despite essentially paying homage to Marlowe's poem, these poems are diverse in both their thematic and stylistic elements. Thus, comparing how these poems convey their own themes, reflect their respective genres and times, and build on the tradition of the original poem can deepen our critical appreciation of these works as some of the most famous poems of literary pastiche in English literature. The proposed framework is structuralist in essence as it allows the examination of the wider structures underlying the poems and the

* Masters student at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC), International Islamic University Malaysia. Nikliyana01@gmail.com

** Assistant Professor at the Department of English Language & Literature, Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (AHAS IRKHS), International Islamic University Malaysia. drhomam@iiu.edu.my

analysis of the interplay of the themes and stylistic elements. Essentially, this study analyses the conventions within the three poems and the pastiches' similarities or differences compared to Marlowe's poem.

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To identify the central thematic elements conveyed through binaries in each poem.
2. To critically compare and contrast the poetic elements that mirror or subvert Marlowe's utilisation of the pastoral genre.

1.2 Significance of Study

Christopher Marlowe is still popular and his poem "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" continues to be imitated and parodied till today. "The Bait" (1633) by John Donne and "Raleigh was Right" (1962) by William Carlos are important responses to Marlowe by renowned poets in England and America. Understanding the interplay of these pastiches is important to critically appreciate their full thematic and stylistic significance.

1.3 Scope of Study

The study focuses on the comparative structural analysis of Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" and its pastiches across different genres particularly Donne's "The Bait" and Williams' "Raleigh was Right." This study analyses the main poetic elements in the poems, and how the pastiches mirror or contrast Marlowe's use of the pastoral genre. Through examining the past study of these works, it can be seen that there is a lack of comparative study on these poems. This paper covers the analysis of the four poems and comparing them structurally.

2.0 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Pastoral Genre and "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (1599)

Pastoral works often idealise country life with shepherds in an idyllic yet artificial setting, serving as a form of escapism from urban life.¹ Prominent characteristics include shepherds, praises of the beloved or pleasures of the country life, and elegies for the beloved's absence.^{2 3}

"The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," published in *The Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599, is one of the most famous pastoral poems from the English Renaissance.⁴ The speaker seduces his lover by illustrating an ideal life in the countryside that is full of pleasure. The figurative language employed creates a persuasive text by illustrating a peaceful and materialistic environment. The two prominent characteristics of this poem are: the invitation to love, and

¹ Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (2nd ed.), (London: Routledge, 2019): 1.

² Mohammad Quayum & Rosli Talif, *Dictionary of literary terms*, (Kuala Lumpur: Prentice Hall, 2000): 247.

³ Bryan Loughrey, "Introduction," in *The Pastoral mode*, (MacMillan, 1984), 8.

⁴ Stephen Greenblatt, *The Norton anthology of English literature: The sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century*, (New York City: W.W. Norton, 2018), 658.

the repertoire of pleasures.⁵ The impact of the poem is prominent in the pastiches, influencing them in terms of stylistic and thematic elements.⁶

In "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," the pastoral convention "invitation to love" is central. The first line of the poem establishes that the whole poem functions as an invitation, utilised to exaggerate the charms of rural life.⁷ The invitation establishes a link between love and pastoralism; their love improving their environment and life.^{8 9} The catalogue of pleasures often involves the lover's overreliance on sensual or material pleasures in seduction.¹⁰ However, the essence of the invitation shifts as it turns into a command; the last line suggests that if she is impressed, then she has no choice but to accept the shepherd's invitation.^{11 12} Consequently, the imperative invitational scenario places authority on the lover by silencing the voice of the female character.¹³

2.1.2 Metaphysical Poetry and "The Bait" (1633)

Metaphysical poetry refers to the works of 17th-century English poets who displayed complex intellect and personality in their works, characterised by conceit and wit. These poems often explore philosophical themes such as the nature of existence, the relationship between the spiritual and physical, and the complexities of human emotions.¹⁴

"The Bait" was published in the first collection of Donne's poems, *Songs and Sonnets*, in 1633. It imitates many aspects of Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," including poetic metre, rhyme and the opening line. Though often dismissed, the poem was praised as surpassing the original in terms of wit.¹⁵ The poem draws a parallel between the act of detailing sensuous pleasures to dangling a bait on a hook to ensnare the beloved.¹⁶ There is a twist where the conventional role of the man pursuing the woman is subverted as the woman is attributed to the act of pursuit.¹⁷ It explores the motives and seductive elements of an invitational poetry, that is the use of sensuous language as bait to catch the beloved.

"The Bait" illustrates the paradoxical nature of love as both devouring and being devoured. The poem explores the fear of being a victim of love;¹⁸ the beloved is likened to an angler catching fish lured to her beauty, implying seduction or rape.¹⁹ However, the speaker also likens the beloved to the bait, suggesting mutual desire and consumption between the lover

⁵ Forsythe R. S., "The Passionate Shepherd: And English poetry," *PMLA* 40, no. 3 (2020).

⁶ Ibid, 692.

⁷ Kimberly Huth, "Come Live With Me and Feed My Sheep: Invitation, Ownership, and Belonging in Early Modern Pastoral Literature," *Studies in Philology* 108, no. 1 (2011): 53.

⁸ Ibid, 54.

⁹ Louis H. Leiter, "Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love"," *College English* 27, no. 6 (1966): 445.

¹⁰ Douglas Bruster, "'Come to the Tent Again': The Passionate Shepherd," *Dramatic Rape and Lyric Time*, *Criticism* 33, no. 1 (1991): 51.

¹¹ Ibid, 51.

¹² Kimberly Huth, 56.

¹³ Douglas Bruster, 68.

¹⁴ Helen Gardner, *The Metaphysical poets*, (London: Penguins Classics, 1960): 17-18.

¹⁵ Lynn Hamilton, "Donne's the Bait," *The Explicator* 14, no. 3 (1988): 12.

¹⁶ Douglas Bruster, 53.

¹⁷ Robin Robbins, *The complete poems of John Donne*, (London: Routledge, 2010): 133.

¹⁸ Lynn Hamilton, 13.

¹⁹ Douglas Bruster, 54.

and the beloved.²⁰ This highlights the danger of love where "lines" and "hooks" are merely tools of entrapments.²¹ Both parties are affected or hurt by love, as they are depicted pursuing and being pursued.²² In the act of love, traditionally perceived as safe, they paradoxically consume each other.

The poem can be read as a rejection of the pastoral genre and Petrarchism's idealised love. Donne uses the piscatorial metaphor to challenge conventional Renaissance love poetry by reversing the roles of pursuer and pursued, questioning the male-dominated perspective of traditional Renaissance love that reflects the patriarchal society.²³ In the last stanza, the speaker moves away from Renaissance love, its deceit and his assumption of male dominance.²⁴ Thus, the poem rejects the idealised pastoral love through the subversion of traditional gender roles and proclaiming mutual love.

2.1.3 Modernist Poetry and "Raleigh was Right" (1940)

Modernist poetry is a literary movement that grew from the late 19th to the mid-20th century, born of the citizens' distrust in optimism, conventions, and scientific progress. The crumbling economy and culture led to a period of experimentation in literature to find innovative "forms of expressions" and break away from the past, portraying "a sense of disillusionment and fragmentation" in the era.²⁵ Structure and organisation collapsed in literature, reflecting a nihilistic view of history and a cultural crisis.²⁶

"Raleigh was Right" by William Carlos Williams is a poem that reflects the cultural crisis of its historical period. Despite being a pastiche of Marlowe's poem, it does not imitate the original poem.²⁷ It does respond to Sir Raleigh's poem "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd," whose speaker — the nymph — rejects the shepherd's invitation, believing that all the materialistic pleasures will disappear over time. The speaker of Williams' poem agrees with the nymph, claiming that the country is no longer able to offer relief from the modern world as life in the countryside became untenable due to economic pressures. The poem is a social commentary on the altered relationship between nature and humans, contrasting life in pastoral poems during the Renaissance and life in the modern world.

"Raleigh was Right" can be considered as a poem that dismisses the idealised pastoral life. The poem rejects the pastoral convention where the country is a place of retreat and pleasure.²⁸ The speaker exhibits obvious longing for the past, yet there is no complicity nor involvement with it, revealing a sense of detachment from the past.²⁹ As a Modernist speaker,

²⁰ Lynn Hamilton, 12.

²¹ Ibid, 13.

²² Ibid, 13.

²³ Eugene R. Cunnar, "Donne's Witty Theory of Atonement in" The Baite", " *Studies in English literature, 1500-1900* 29, no. 1 (1989): 78–79.

²⁴ Ibid, 91.

²⁵ Kathleen Kuiper, "Modernism," Encyclopædia Britannica, last modified May 17, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Modernism-art>

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Jeff Dolven, "Poetry, Critique, Imitation," *Poetic Critique* (2021): 52.

²⁸ Kenneth E. Gadowski, "Williams' Raleigh was Right," *The Explicator* 43, no. 3 (1985): 31.

²⁹ Jeff Dolven, 52.

she does not blindly follow the poetic tradition and is aware of the changing reality.³⁰ In fact, turning away from tradition is a Modernist value.

The poem laments the state of country life in the modern world. The speaker asserts that country life is no longer a place of retreat often portrayed in pastoral Renaissance poetry. Yet, she remains attentive towards nature, showing her longing and appreciation towards it. In the second stanza, nature assumes the role of the speaker, allowing it to reveal its perspectives; this places nature in a more sympathetic light. Both the woman and nature, traditionally positioned as subordinates, are given a voice and a sense of agency.³¹ Despite this, both lovers are no longer able to retreat and live an idealised life. The country, once regarded as a place of peace and tranquillity, is not exempt from pervasive modern hardships.

2.1.5 Research Gap

While there are various studies on Marlowe and Donne's poems, there are only several discussions on Williams' poems. Yet, research on the comparison between Marlowe and Donne's bait is scarce and there is a lack of research on the comparison between the original poem and Williams' poems.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Structuralism

Ferdinand de Saussure believed that the human mind is structured, and thus every thought and action is an embodiment of underlying framework.³² Structuralism focuses on analysing the underlying structures and systems that govern the meaning and interpretation of texts.³³ This is carried out based on the assumption of unity in a text. A key idea in Structuralism is 'unity,' delving into how various elements within the poem come together to articulate a cohesive thematic whole, within the systems or structures that form the contexts of a poem. For structuralists, "the characteristic feature of the poem is its unity"³⁴ and "reading a poem is a quest for unity".³⁵ Riffaterre expands on the idea, putting forward the notion of 'semiotic unity' where every word is a variant of a word that forms the crux of the poem.³⁶

Saussure claimed that "the meanings of words are relational" where the definition of a word depends on its neighbouring words.³⁷ Saussure explained that "all words, thus, exist in 'differencing networks'" where their relationships are constructed with fluidity.³⁸ Claude Levi-Strauss introduced binary opposition, referring to "any pair of terms which appear diametrically opposed".³⁹ One of the binary oppositions is always culturally significant compared to its

³⁰ Kenneth E. Gadomski, 31–32.

³¹ Angelica Duran, "Walter Raleigh, through John Milton, according to William Carlos Williams," *William Carlos Williams Review* 31, no. 1 (2014): 23–24.

³² Mohammad Quayum & Rosli Talif, 308.

³³ Mary Klages, *Literary theory: A guide for the perplexed*, (London: A&C Black, 2006): 31.

³⁴ Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of poetry*, (Indiana: Indiana University, 1978): 2.

³⁵ Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics*, (London: Routledge, 1981): 89

³⁶ Jonathan Culler, 90–91.

³⁷ Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester University Press, 1995): 43.

³⁸ Ibid, 43.

³⁹ Julian Wolfreys, *Key Concepts in Literary Theory*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013): 17.

counterpart.⁴⁰ Structuralism explores the dynamic of two contrasting elements which ultimately lead to the theme as a whole, indicating its unity.

The theory identifies systems that govern the texts through recurring patterns and repetitions and classifying them into categories.⁴¹ Thus, a work is an example of a particular genre, influenced by its conventions and rules.⁴² Structuralists examine literary texts in their interaction with the genre.⁴³ A genre must reveal a consistent fundamental aspect across all works within it.⁴⁴ It analyses how a particular work utilises the conventions of a genre, adapts to it or innovates within the constraints.

Thus, this study analyses the thematic and stylistic elements of the four poems to understand how the use of the poetic elements mirrors or subverts Marlowe's utilisation of the pastoral genre.

3.1 The Representation of Key Elements in the Poems

3.1.1 "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love"

The poem "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" by Christopher Marlowe is a seduction poem or an invitation to love where the speaker, a passionate shepherd, addresses and entices an anonymous girl through the promise of sensual pleasures in the countryside. The main theme of invitation to love in a pastoral setting relies on its expression on a number of binaries that operate throughout the poem. Some of these multifaceted binaries dominate the whole poem such as the binary of male/female, lover/loved, and speaker/listener, while others serve the main theme in a more minute manner or through a less prominent role. These binaries include mountain/valley, shepherd/flock, and May-morning/cold. The use of these binary elements seemingly conveys contrasting views or concepts that converge towards underscoring the main theme of invitation to love. In other words, the key binary of speaker/addressee, can be labelled in numerous ways that influence the understanding of the poem. One of the labels to categorise the binary is by gender as male and female, or by the roles they assume as active and passive. Taking these labels of this key binary into consideration, it can be said that the male speaker has the agency in the poem and dictates the terms of the relationship in contrast to the silent female addressee. The poem portrays a shepherd who fervently expresses his adoration to his love, inviting and seducing her to his world. His expression of desire is active, while her silence is passive. To underscore the main theme of invitation to love, other binaries such as shepherd/flock indicate that the speaker has caring and nurturing qualities that he can shower on his beloved. Binaries such as mountain/valley and May-morning/cold highlight that despite the difficulties in their relationship, the speaker will stand by and protect the girl throughout these hardships with their prosperity as the end goal. This dedication transcends any circumstances, with the belief that love conquers all. Love and sensual pleasures are intertwined in their relationship, where physical intimacy and shared experiences contribute to

⁴⁰ Mary Klages, 54.

⁴¹ Ann B. Dobie, *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2012): 152.

⁴² Peter Barry, 38.

⁴³ Charles E. Bressler. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. 3rd ed. (Harlow, UK: Pearson, 2003): 99.

⁴⁴ Wesley Morris, "History, Presence, and the Limits of Genre Criticism," *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 6, no. 2 (1973): 48.

the depth and richness of the emotional connection between the speaker and the beloved. In a nutshell, the binary elements organically serve the theme of invitation to love. It can be seen that these binaries favour one side which is the side of the male speaker who is active and giving, compared to the female addressee who only receives his love, gifts and protection.

3.1.2 "The Bait"

"The Bait" by John Donne is a seduction poem where the speaker attempts to seduce a woman by promising material luxuries and praising her. Using piscatorial imagery, the woman is depicted as a fish coveted by the male speaker, described as one of the anglers. Eventually, the speaker reveals himself to be ensnared by the woman's beauty, falling in love with her. The main theme of complexity of love is conveyed through several binaries. The dominant binary in the poem is male/female, while other binaries such as light/dark, sun/moon, sleeve-silk/coarse, and warm/freeze serve to highlight the main theme. In the beginning, the privileged side of the male/female binary seems to be the male, seen through the male speaker's active invitation and seduction. His proactive pursuit of love is depicted again in stanza three where the many fish race to capture her. The male speaker has a privilege in this relationship as he has power over her happiness and consequently over her decision. This conventional depiction of the male/female binary lulls the readers into a sense of familiarity expected of such genre. However, by the end of the poem, the privileged side seems to shift from the conventional male/female binary to the novel female/male binary. The woman becomes the pursuer in the relationship, replacing the male speaker's active role. This is highlighted in stanza 3, line 9 where the woman willingly dipped herself in the water; she has made the decision to swim in the water despite the predatory fish. Thus, she is taking an active role where she uses her appeal to attract the fish. The male speaker is under the impression that he is the one holding the power while the woman is passive; in reality, the woman is the one who is furtively seducing the male speaker without his awareness. The speaker loses his power over the woman as his agency is threatened by his infatuation with the woman, as he becomes captivated by her beauty. Meanwhile, the woman resists the male's oppression, where she defies societal expectations to be passive and instead takes the lead in the relationship, reversing the traditional power dynamics.

The additional binaries fish/bait and angler/fish expand on the male/female binary. The fish/bait binary mirrors the male/female binary, as the fish swims to take the bait, highlighting the active role of the fish as it consumes the bait. Halfway through the poem, the fish/bait binary is reversed into angler/fish binary, mirroring the shifting dynamic between the characters to the unconventional female/male binary. The female is portrayed as a passive bait consumed by the fish, but her active role in seducing and luring the fish transforms her to be the angler who catches the fish. As the angler, the woman holds the power in the relationship, ensnaring the fish. The supporting binaries that underscores the main theme include sun/moon, light/dark, silk/coarse, and warm/freeze. The sun/moon and light/dark binaries can be understood as the woman's ulterior motives secluded from his awareness. Silk/coarse and warm/freeze binaries show the distance between the two, highlighting their differences. It can be seen that the binary male/female shifts against the conventional idea as the male speaker turns from the wooer to the wooed, and the female character transforms from the passive bait to the active angler fishing

for men, highlighting the complexity of love where it is not as straightforward as it seems to be.

John Donne offers a different perspective on Renaissance love. The metaphysical elements in his poem creates a unique poem that subverts conventions of Renaissance love poetry. He repeats the first two lines from the original poem but with slight modification where "all pleasures" become "some new pleasures."

The speaker wishes to add onto Marlowe's or Renaissance love list of pleasures with new unique delights, hinting at a more realistic view of love, which sets him apart from other poets of Renaissance.

Consequently, new elements are utilised to convey the theme of complexity of love, such as conceit. The speaker tries to tempt a lover into a relationship but the readers find that it is not as straightforward as in Marlowe's poem. The setting of the poem which shifts from the countryside to the piscatory environment while still classified as a pastoral poetry⁴⁵ alludes to the shift of male dominance to female dominance while still maintaining the theme exploration of love. In the piscatorial setting, Donne employs a conceit that is both original and bold where he connects love pursuits with fishermen; lovers are fishermen who try to catch beautiful women. Men employ tricks and deceit to catch fish or women as seen in stanza 5 and 6. However, the woman whom the speaker seeks to catch is portrayed as truthful and genuine, yet she outsmarts the man, paralleling how fish evade capture. This imagery and extended argument invite the readers to imagine a scenario where a woman is smarter than the men around her. The poem challenges the idea of simplistic and straightforward pursuit of love, using fishing as a complex analogy. By using fishing scenes instead of the traditional pastoral setting, Donne criticises both Marlowe and the conventions of poetry of his time, revealing the artificiality of traditional Renaissance love. The poem can be said to take a feminist stance on Renaissance love as the woman emerges as the angler and the speaker is revealed as a helpless fish caught by her.

3.1.3 "Raleigh was Right"

The speaker of "Raleigh was Right" by William Carlos Williams rejects the lover's invitation to go to the countryside. The main theme is 'the difficulties related to economic struggles lead to the loss and rejection of romanticism'. It is connected to ideas such as the idealisation of the country, harshness of reality, economic struggles in the city, and the loss of hope. The gender of the speaker is unclear unlike the other poems. For the ease of reading, the speaker in this poem is referred to as female while the lover is referred to as male.

The main theme and these ideas are highlighted through the dominant binary of present vs past. The country life in the poem is associated with love and beauty that the lover tries to bring to the present, claiming that the countryside is still in the same ideal state. In contrast to the perfect pastoral life in the past, the city is exhausting and hostile, burdening him with financial uncertainties and relationship struggles. He turns to the countryside as a place of salvation, hopeful of its promises of past peace and love, seen through the word choices "praise" and "sung our loveliness.". The additional binary countryside/city supports the main binary, as the countryside represents the past and the city the present. This brings forward space vs. time, where the ideal countryside and the past are gone and inaccessible. The past is often

⁴⁵ Yulia Ryzhik, "Spenser and Donne Go Fishing," *Spenser Studies* 31, no. 1 (2018).

seen through rose-tinted glasses, romanticised with a hint of nostalgia; it becomes the lover's platform for escapism.

The speaker argues against the idealisation of life towards the countryside, and by extension, the past. She contrasts the lover's idealisation of the past with the reality of high-cost living and the nature of relationship, integrating the binary idealisation/reality into the argument. She asserts that the countryside does not have the peace they seek because peace is not related to place but rather financial stability as seen through line 19-20. It is a metaphor used to express disillusionment towards the ideal life. The lover also has an idealised concept of romantic relationships where the role of men is to write and sing poetry of women as their object of adoration. However, the speaker realises that in reality, there was no time to spend in idleness. The lover's inability to accept the present leads him to escapism, while the speaker's to hopelessness. Her rejection of the invitation is a clear opposition against the traditional women's role as she is not obedient nor submissive to the lover.

This leads to the next binary question/answer as the speaker challenges the idealisation/reality binary. Through the rhetorical question in the first stanza, she initiates a conversation and swerves the discussion. She questions the significance or wisdom of the ideals, stressing that perhaps a mere fixation towards the ideals will not and could not lead to the achievement of perfection. The rhetorical question is intelligently utilised to establish her beliefs and ideas through her answers. Essentially, she creates a platform for her to explain the tension between the ideals and reality, as she elaborates on her profound understanding of the world, becoming the muser instead of the muser.

As the speaker presents her argument, it leads to a conflict in their relationship where the love vs conflict binary emerges. The binary highlights that economic struggles lead to conflict, in contrast to the illustration of the union of love in the past as people were free from financial burden. Consequently, unresolved conflicts lead to the rejection of romanticism as the speaker realises that relationships are not a bubble of happiness as often idealised. In stanza 2, the union of love in the past is starkly contrasted to the conflicts in relationships in stanza 3. Due to financial ease, the country people are able to cultivate the foundation of their love through "plow and sow," leading to increasing affection and "flowering minds." On the contrary, financial burdens sour the soil of love between the speaker and lover as affection is unable to grow further due to conflicts stemming from financial stress.

The male/female binary and the love invitation are not as prominent as in the other two poems. The gender ambiguity of the speaker adds to the thematic element of economic struggles; both characters are struggling economically regardless of gender and relationship. This contrasts with the other poems where the male character promises materialistic pleasures while the female character is supposed to passively receive these luxuries. The genders of the speakers are evident in the titles of the other two poems shown through the gendered noun and pronoun. The poems place significance on the characters and the stories as they are part of the title of the poem, contrasting with Williams' poem which utilises a metafictional technique as it refers to the poet Raleigh to drive the narrative, drawing attention to the theme of the poem and its own fictional nature. This strategy of breaking the fourth wall not only diverts from the conventions of narrative, it also hints at Williams' intention to address the message and the genre itself. Williams agrees with Raleigh's stance, incorporating the central thematic element

of Raleigh's poem, the rejection of romanticism, into his poem rather than focusing on the characters or the setting.

Williams' poem is in support of Raleigh's poem and in opposition to Marlowe's poem. This poem explores the tense relationship between the characters due to economic struggles — echoing Raleigh's poem — in contrast to the original poem whose materialistic pleasures are used to enhance their romantic relationship. Relationship tension between the characters in this poem contrasts the illustration of union in Marlowe's poem — a deviation from the conventions of the pastoral genre. William's loss of hope is contrasted with Marlowe's idealisation of the countryside, highlighting the idea of the rejection of Romanticism. The contrasting thematic element of the two poems leads to the binary embrace/rejection, where Marlowe embraces the pastoral tradition while William rejects it. Consequently, Williams offers a Modernist take on Renaissance love and passion. He overhauled the original poem with Modernist ideas such as loss of hope and disillusionment that not only subvert the conventions of Renaissance love poetry, and reject the genre in its entirety. The first line "We cannot go to the countryside," is a clear rejection to the invitation in the first line of the original poem. The poem reveals the lies of pastoral life as a life that cannot be attained; the economic struggles due to World War I and the Great Depression worsen the quality of life.

4.1 Conclusion

"The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" by Christopher Marlowe, "The Bait" by John Donne, and "Raleigh was Right" by William Carlos Williams convey different thematic elements through varying binaries which are influenced by their respective genres and eras. Marlowe sets the dominant binary as male/female, lover/loved, and speaker/listener which influenced the portrayal of gender roles in the other poems. His portrayal of love, relationship, and gender roles is simplistic and straightforward due to the influence of Renaissance love poetry and pastoral poetry. The portrayal of love and relationship was made more intricate under Donne's ministrations. Donne's fresh depiction of the role reversal female/male in his poem is highlighted and maintained through his use of supporting binaries, creating a poem that is united in its theme of the complexity of love. Williams' poem, on the contrary, lacks the gender binary as he instead focuses on economic struggles in the modern age. However, he makes up for this absence with a myriad of other binaries that not only exhibit but also enhance the complexity of the theme of economic struggles that lead to the loss and rejection of romanticism. With Williams, the gender binary lost much of its resonance, highlighting the changing times and values of society as poets seek to tell new stories, creating new traditions. The shift in the male/female binary reflects the changing values of society in how gender is perceived; the norms and values of society are continuously changing as people discover new concepts or experiences.

Marlowe's poem can be considered an epitome of the zeitgeist of literature at the time with the central theme of the invitation to love. The poem reflects the societal norms and power structures of its time, that is the male's authority and the marginalisation of the female voice in the Renaissance era. The absence of the female's voice in the poem alludes to the power dynamic of active male and passive female. This scenario creates an imbalanced power dynamic where the male has more authority than the female, silencing the female's voice.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Douglas Bruster, 68.

Thus, the poem portrays the conventional gender roles and ideas of its time, resonating with the audience of the Renaissance era.

"The Bait" also touches on similar values of Renaissance society. The poem challenges the traditional idea of love and gender roles through the exploration of a more multifaceted notion of the concepts; love is destructive rather than protective — it is not as simple as society believes. The poem explores the dangerous aspect of love, the act of giving and receiving taken to the extreme to the point of devouring and being devoured.⁴⁷ The existence of a different yet widely accepted interpretation of the poem itself can point to the multilayered notion of love. In another interpretation, the traditional idea of gender roles is challenged through the shifting power dynamics — the male pursuer becomes pursued by the female.⁴⁸ She becomes the one who holds the power in the relationship, an unconventional concept at the time where traditional gender roles are rigidly adhered to. This exemplifies that human emotions and gender roles in romantic relationships are not in a perpetual state.

Written during the modern era, Williams' poem "Raleigh was Right" echoes the cultural crisis and consequences of the industrial revolution, contrasting the idealised life portrayed in the original poem. It indirectly challenges the traditional gender roles through the rejection of the notion of idyllic pastoral life, highlighting the inability of creating an ideal life at the time of economic turmoil. The poem utilises several pastoral elements such as nature and countryside to support its argument and negative view of idealised life. The catalogue of pleasures in the poem is simply absent, highlighting the despair of the modern era.

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⁴⁷ Lynn Hamilton, 13.

⁴⁸ Eugene R. Cunnar, 1989.

A Structuralist Study of Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" and its Pastiches

Nik Liyana binti Nik Ahmad Zahid - Homam Altabaa

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