

A LESSON IN LOVE:
A STUDY OF THE UNITY OF SIDNEY'S
ASTROPHEL AND STELLA

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Germaine Warkentin
October 1965



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Germaine Warkentin

Sir Philip Sidney's Astrophel and Stella is not, like some sonnet-cycles, a collection of imitations and translations, but neither is it a novel or an autobiography. It is primarily a poetic fiction and its effect must be sought in the coherence and method of this fiction. Consequently one must seek the poetic effect of the sequence through an examination of its organizing principle, which in the most general terms has to do with love and its conflicts. In the Petrarchan tradition, the conflict between reason and passion is fundamental, and in the Apologie for Poetrie, Sidney himself states that these conflicts are central to works of the imagination such as the poet produces. But Sidney is also deeply concerned with the function of poetry in advancing knowledge and leading the mind to virtue. Thus a full comprehension of the total effect of the sequence can be achieved only when the traditional background, the known views of the poet, and the material afforded by the poems themselves are brought together and examined in concert.

A close reading of the poems uncovers first of all three important themes central to the sequence: the world of the poems, the lady who is the object of love, and the lover whose problems form the substance of the cycle. Once understood separately, these themes provide a basis for an analysis of the poems in their order, particularly an analysis of the conflict of reason and passion in Astrophel and Stella. Out of this conflict arises the principle that gives the cycle its coherence.

The sequence is organized, it turns out, as a lesson in the true relationship of reason and passion. Stella, the exemplar of ideal beauty and virtue, leads Astrophel from a misconceived view of love as physical passion, to a full understanding of the power of love to embrace both the physical and the ideal. Thus, unlike Petrarch, whose vision eternally divides the passion-torn lover from the world of ideal virtue, Sidney seeks to unify the sensual and the ideal. The sequence has a narrative thread, for Astrophel moves from one way of understanding love to another. But it is a set of lyrics, not a tale, and these lyrics are unified by the lesson in love Stella teaches Astrophel.

Throughout the sequence, Sidney treats love as a transforming and educating experience. In the early sonnets, the confidence of Astrophel is destroyed by the unforeseen experience of loving Stella, and in the sonnets on poetry and the power of words, his growing confusion of mind is clearly set out. But at the same time, Sidney shows that Stella is the living embodiment of the ideal of virtue. She is allied with the force of nature that rules an orderly universe, and the power of her example transforms all about her. Conceiving love only as desire, Astrophel cannot understand her power, and he is driven as a result to renounce reason. Stella rejects him but when Astrophel shows he is beginning to understand her view of love, she makes clear that it is honour that separates them; passion has value, but honour as a higher ideal must supervene. Sidney prepares for Astrophel's acceptance of her attitude by evoking in the Sixth and Seventh Songs a condition of harmony that expresses the ability of man to move

toward virtue in a universe of order. The conclusion of the sequence emphasizes that this order includes all levels of experience, for it evokes the Petrarchan dissidio not to express a conflict in *Astrophel*, but to show the inescapable meeting of real and ideal in the experience of one man.

The fiction of *Astrophel* and *Stella* is unified by the idea that love changes, educates, and integrates the lover's world, and this view is central to Sidney's belief that poetry ought to lead man to virtue. He is interested in the regeneration of mankind and his sonnet-sequence draws its coherence from a lyrical setting-forth of that regeneration.

PREFACE

The text of Astrophel and Stella which has been used in this study is that of William A. Ringler, Jr., contained in his edition The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney.¹ This text is based on the version of Astrophel and Stella printed by Ponsonby in the edition of Sidney's works which he published in 1598.² Ringler has corrected his text in 88 places³ by emendations based on fourteen texts which he accepts as substantive.⁴

The spelling of Ringler's version of the poems has been adopted with two variations. In direct quotation of the verse, the spelling adopted in the text has been strictly followed. (Ringler's indentation of lines, which is reconstructed from several sources, among them the 1591 quarto, has also been followed for the sake of consistency.) In the rare instances when words from the poems are used in the body of the thesis for a special purpose, the spelling

¹William A. Ringler, Jr., (ed.), The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962).

²The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia. Written by Sir Philip Sidney Knight. Now The Third Time published, with sundry new additions of the same Author. London imprinted [by Richard Field] for William Ponsonbie. Anno. Domini. 1598." Ibid., p. 535.

³Ibid., p. 457.

⁴Ibid., pp. 447-57.

is that of Ringler's edition if the word or words appears in quotation marks, but if no such marks are used, the spelling has been modernized. This practice affects particularly the word "virtue," which appears consistently in Ringler's text as "vertue."

Ringler's spelling of the name "Astrophel", which he prints as "Astrophil" has not been adopted, except (for the sake of consistency with the printed text) in the direct quotation from the Eighth Song in Chapter V. Ringler's defence of his spelling is excellent, for it is based firmly on the readings of texts which he accepts as substantive, and on references to the name by Sidney's contemporaries.⁵ It is an idiosyncrasy, therefore, that in the light of this very recent critical reconstruction of the original text, I prefer to adopt the spelling "Astrophel." This is done in the knowledge that almost every printed version of Astrophel and Stella since 1598, and most critical works on the sequence itself, have used this spelling, which perhaps ironically, has become itself a matter of convention. But it must be remembered that it is a convention only, and as a result of Ringler's work, may ultimately be discarded. At the present time, however, it has not, and therefore the

⁵Ibid., p. 448, p. 456.

traditional spelling, with the indicated exception in quoting the Eighth Song, has been used throughout.

The acceptance of Ringler's text, with the variations noted above, carries with it an acceptance of the order of the songs and sonnets as they appeared in Ponsonby's edition of 1598. Ringler regards the 1598 volume as the most authoritative early text.⁶ He holds that it derives from a lost transcript, "X", of Sidney's holograph, and he conjectures that X belonged to Sidney's sister, the Countess of Pembroke.⁷ Indeed, Ringler states firmly that the order of the sonnets was determined by Sidney himself.⁸ He also believes that the Countess may have had a hand in the publication of the 1598 edition, for which X is the only ancestor. The order of the sonnets, and the way in which the songs are dispersed among them, is therefore based on considerable authority, and there seems no reason to question Ringler's acceptance of it. Only Ann Romaine Howe,⁹ since the publication of Ringler's edition, has seriously questioned the distribution

⁶Ibid., p. 458.

⁷Ibid., p. 456.

⁸Ibid., p. 423.

⁹Ann Romaine Howe, "Astrophel and Stella: 'Why and How'." Studies in Philology, LXI, No. 2 Pt. 1 (April, 1964), pp. 150-169.

of the songs throughout Astrophel and Stella. None of her rather literal conjectures can be supported if my findings in the following pages have any weight, for the effect of these findings is to support the order of the 1598 edition.

No works of Sir Philip Sidney other than Astrophel and Stella and the Apologie for Poetrie¹⁰ have been used in developing the ideas outlined in this thesis. The problem of the structure of Astrophel and Stella is most profitably discussed in the context of the conventional poetry which gave the sequence birth, and attention within the dimensions of a thesis of this sort must be concentrated strictly on these matters, in order to develop with utmost clarity the theories which are to be advanced. Two sonnets are sometimes appended to Astrophel and Stella: "Thou blind man's marke, thou foole's selfe chosen snare," and "Leave me ô Love, which reachest but to dust."¹¹ Both of them show that Sidney was able to exploit concepts of love which enter only partially into the framework of Astrophel and Stella, and a complete study of Sidney's poems and prose would necessarily have to absorb all the ways in which his

¹⁰Sir Philip Sidney, Apologie for Poetry, in The Great Critics, ed. J.H. Smith and E.W. Parks (revised edition, New York: W; W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1939), pp. 187-232.

¹¹Ringler, op. cit., p. 161.

liberality and patience in dealing with the problems this thesis posed. I would also like to pay--regrettably too late--a tribute to Tryggvi J. Oleson, who supervised my studies of the problem of courtly love before his death.

What happens in Astrophel and Stella is not a novel or a drama. It is a poetic fiction designed to explore certain problems of love. The poetic fiction requires a web of events to carry it forward, but this web is designed as lyric, not as strict narrative. The nature of the fiction must be sought therefore by examining the elements of the sequence as they are set forth by Sidney's lyric technique, which works by meditative analysis rather than by a strictly sequential consideration of events. Only in a full consideration of the factors that enter into the creation of the poetic fiction of Astrophel and Stella can the sequence be understood as a coherent whole.

It is the purpose of this thesis to re-examine the structure of Astrophel and Stella to determine the concepts of love that underlie it and the way these concepts are used to give the sequence coherence. Young sought the organizing principle of its lyric analysis of love in the changing roles of Astrophel, but his view as has been shown ignores very clear problems raised in the last part of the sequence. Montgomery's expansion of Young's theories does not take into consideration elements in the conflict of reason and passion which play a very large part in the development of the sequence as a whole. The present thesis will advance the view that an organizing principle is indeed to be found in Astrophel and Stella and that the discovery of it necessitates a full

understanding of the role of Stella as well as that of Astrophel. It contends that a progression exists within the sequence which leads Astrophel on from a conception of love as mere physical desire to a recognition at the end of a love involving his whole being. To the growth of Astrophel's recognition the influence of Stella is fundamental. Astrophel and Stella is, in effect, a lesson in love, and the principle according to which it is organized reflects this development.

In demonstrating the existence of this principle, it is necessary to keep before the reader's mind Montgomery's exemplary cautions against the use of oversimplifications which can express only a partial conception of the work. However, if it is an oversimplification to state that a plot exists in Astrophel and Stella, it is equally one to state that the sequence develops itself by means of the changing role of Astrophel. No other conclusions can be drawn if the criticisms just made of Young's and Montgomery's interpretations have any validity at all. The method adopted in newly approaching the sequence must give full value to all aspects of Astrophel and Stella; it must consider the traditions of love poetry from which it comes, as well as Sidney's own remarks in the Apologie for Poetrie about ways of writing of love and about the value of poetry in general. It must assemble all the elements of the sequence, Stella, Astrophel, the world in which they exist, and the conflicts of reason

and passion in *Astrophel*, and re-examine them in the light of their effect on each other. It must take into full consideration the way in which Sidney's lyric technique works to set out the problems of the sequence. Only if the various factors which went into the creation of this work are brought together, the traditions of writing love poetry, the thematic elements of the sequence, and the techniques of the poet, can the critic begin to treat the sequence in its totality.

The approach in this study is based on the considerations just outlined. Chapter II sets forth, by a method partly historical and partly thematic, the traditions of love poetry which form the background of Sidney's sequence, the matrix of Petrarchan and neoplatonic love-concepts which underlies the sonnet sequences of the sixteenth-century English poets. It does not, however, consider such wider problems in the development of the Elizabethan lyric as the history of the Middle English and Tudor song, for attention must be concentrated entirely on the materials which enter into the production of a Petrarchan sonnet. In a consideration of Petrarchism it employs three crucial elements in Astrophel and Stella: the world of the cycle, the lady who is the object of love, and the lover whose problems form the substance of the sequence.

Chapter III briefly considers developments in the sonnet in sixteenth-century France and Italy which affect Sidney's cycle directly, and also discusses some elements in Sidney's

Petrarchan dissidio, is not to be found in all the Petrarchists of the sixteenth century. The creative use of neoplatonic concepts is thus an indication of one kind of individuality in the poets who adopted them; they were able to reassess in a new light the idea of love which the Petrarchan convention offered up. If Sidney was familiar with these concepts, and it is clear from the Third, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Songs, as well as from sonnets 5, 21, and 71 that he knew at least some version of them, it is possible to investigate in Astrophel and Stella the way he relates neoplatonic ideas to the older convention within which he works. Sidney, says Hallett Smith, naturalized once and for all in English lyric poetry the living essentials of Petrarchism, the vitality, as opposed to the mere manner.¹⁰ In defining this vitality, it will be necessary to make an assessment of Sidney's treatment of neoplatonism, to see if it provides some element of his unique contribution.

Janet Scott¹¹ suggests that Sidney may also have been familiar with the poems of Tasso, which began appearing in the anthologies in 1565. One hovers over the inviting suggestion that Tasso's interest in the sensual element in

¹⁰Smith, op. cit., p. 143.

¹¹Janet G. Scott, Les Sonnets élisabéthains, p. 41.

Petrarch, so important an influence on Spenser's Amoretti, may be glanced at as well in Astrophel and Stella.

The poets of the Pléiade were reflecting in their sonnets not only succeeding waves of Italian influence, but also the stimulus of a view of love derived from the Greek Anthology (published in 1494) and the Anacreontea (published in 1554, and translated into French in 1556). Absorbed into the Petrarchan materials was the mischievous Cupid of the pseudo-Anacreon, lightening the dominating Ovidian concept of the malicious tyranny of Eros. This is one effect of the influence on Petrarchan poetry of what Nesca Robb calls the philological period of humanism.¹² Another, of course, is the revival of interest in Plato, an interest originally philological which had important effects in the realms of metaphysics and aesthetics.

When Renaissance humanism passed from matters of philology to those of philosophy, its exponents found a focus for their interest in the classic spirit in the ideal of human behaviour advanced, for example, by Cicero. Indeed, one of the guilty admissions which Petrarch makes to St. Augustine in the Secretum is that he is far too much interested in the study of ancient authors (Cicero was his known

¹² Nesca A. Robb, Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance, p. 31.

favourite). This ideal placed great stress on the harmonious life of the virtuous individual and the importance of knowledge in the achievement of that life, and proved very attractive to those later humanists termed "Christian." The essentially ethical preoccupations of the Christian humanists underlie works as diverse as Castiglione's The Courtier and More's Utopia. "More and Castiglione," says Burton A. Milligan, "saw classical moral philosophy and Christian ethics as guides to life."¹³ Christian humanism plays its part even in the poems of Wyatt; there is in his downright interpretation of courtly themes the same earnest concern with real, as opposed to romantic values as More exhibits in the political conceptions of the Utopia.

The concern with virtue, and with the importance of knowledge in the attainment of virtue, is in Sir Philip Sidney a completely-developed attitude. In the Apologie, defending the craft of poetry against the attacks of Gosson and others, he states a fully thought-out critical position which expresses a viewpoint demonstrated, as will be shown, in the example of Astrophel and Stella:¹⁴

¹³Burton A. Milligan, (ed.), Three Renaissance Classics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. xix.

¹⁴Sidney, op. cit., p. 208.

do not inhibit Sidney; they are, rather, very suggestive. In setting out his analysis of passion, the heart of the sequence, Sidney finds in Petrarchism a mechanism for formulating an approach to feeling, and for controlling it aesthetically, which appeals to the humanist's desire for order and unity.²⁰

The discussion in this and the preceding chapter has set forth the traditions and influences that went into the making of Astrophel and Stella. Petrarch's attraction, for the poets of the Renaissance, resides in his unique vision of the lover, torn between heaven and earth. The effusions of his imitators made the Canzoniere the consummate model of all love poetry, and to its vision the poet of love had to attend. Sidney, steeped in the humanist doctrine of the moral end of art, transformed this tradition in a unique way. The pages which follow deal with the great poem which he contributed to the tradition. They attempt to discern in that poem the singular treatment that made Astrophel and Stella a matchless example of its genre, and which extended the genre far beyond the limits it then had.

²⁰M.C. Bradbrook, Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951), p. 22.

CHAPTER IV

ASTROPHEL AND STELLA: THE WORLD, THE LADY, AND THE POET

Having examined the foundation of conventional love attitudes on which Astrophel and Stella rests, one can begin a reading of the cycle itself, in search of the principle which gives it coherence. As will be seen, the complexity of the sequence necessitates painstaking and detailed analysis. It has seemed advisable, after some remarks on method, to commence by setting apart those elements in the poems which can be considered in relative isolation. As will be demonstrated, these elements, the world, the lady, and the poet, each receive special emphasis in different parts of Astrophel and Stella. Only when they have been examined to discover the way they are developed and how they function in the sequence is it possible to move easily to a study of the sonnets in their order.

It is not possible, in dealing with Astrophel and Stella, to follow the method which can be used, for example, in analysing Wyatt's relationship to the Petrarchan tradition. Wyatt's poems resist ideal comparative analysis in one sense because they are not unified in the form of a sonnet sequence. Yet Wyatt translated the work of foreign poets eagerly, and

we can therefore compare exhaustively the way his imagination handles conventional material with the sources he used. Sidney produced in Astrophel and Stella a work which was, like the Canzoniere, complete in itself. But except for a few lines of Sannazaro in one of the poems of the Old Arcadia,¹ he translated no other poet. Analogues in abundance have been found for many of the 119 poems of Astrophel and Stella,² but it has not yet been demonstrated that any of them is a strict rendering of any other poet's work.

For example, Sidney's sonnet 71, "Who will in fairest book of Nature know," has its source in Petrarch's CCXLVIII, "Chi vuol veder." Petrarch's lyric expands on the idea of the mortality of things in the world of nature. Sidney, adopting the initial conception of the role of the ideal in the world of nature, develops a balanced paeon to the transforming power of beauty, terminating in the familiar paradox of sense opposed to reason. The departure is characteristically individual, yet the treatment is that of the orthodox Petrarchist; aussi royaliste que le roi, in fact, because in

¹William A. Ringler, Jr. (ed.), The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney, p. 388.

²The most convenient summary of the sources and analogues of individual sonnets, in Astrophel and Stella is Janet G. Scott, Les Sonnets élisabéthains, pp. 303-307.

emphasizing the power of the beloved to set ideals of behaviour before the lover, Sidney reaffirms themes in Petrarch's own sonnets which had been lost sight of more often than not.

A comparison of any of Sidney's sonnets which uses material derived from another poem has the same result. Thus, the technique of closely comparing individual sonnets with their sources in Petrarch and his imitators, though of practical value in dealing with many Petrarchist poets, must be abandoned in dealing with Sidney. Where others imitate or translate, he transmutes, and it becomes necessary to examine the sequence in its entirety to discern the methods and the aims that govern this transmutation. Comparisons of individual sonnets with their sources must be subordinated to an examination of the direction which the sequence takes, in order to study the total character of the poet's view of love, whether Petrarchan or not. Indeed, within a study of this scope, no attempt can be made to relate separate poems to what are often multiple sources, and attention has therefore been concentrated on the relationship of the themes of Astrophel and Stella to the convention, rather than on the relationship of individual sonnets.

The overriding theme of Astrophel and Stella is of course the conflict of reason and passion, as was demonstrated in the initial stages of this discussion. Hallett Smith

special qualities of Stella, her beauty, her remarkable alliance with the powers of the universe, and her role as instructress in virtue. In this way, he reinforces the conflict taking place within Astrophel by keeping the image of Stella as nonpareil constantly before the mind of the reader. This image is central to the group of great Songs which provides a transitional stage from Part II to Part III, and suffuses all that goes before them as well.

The problem of Astrophel's rejection, and how he is to cope with it, is the dominant theme of Part III; his "wit confus'd with too much care" (93: 8) can "scarce discern the shape of mine owne paine" (94: 4). The problems of his relationship with Stella, which have lead him to become virtually one with her in anguish, "I cry thy sighs, my deere, thy teares I bleede" (93: 14), form the basis for a painful scrutiny of the impasse in which Astrophel finds himself. It is this anguished self-examination which culminates in the exalted tone of the Eleventh Song (xi: 29-30):

Never doth thy beauty flourish
More then in my reason's sight.

It gives rise ultimately to the earnest resolve of sonnet 107, in which Astrophel turns to achieve the renovation of his love which Stella had set before him.

In Part III, the image of Stella is evoked simply by the poems on her absence, and the sonnets centre, therefore,

in the ways in which Astrophel tries to work out the problem of his rejection, and in the explication of the grief which is the result of his defeat. Astrophel's isolation, which turns him inward on himself, is emphasized both by the conscious artistry of the sonnets on the absent Stella, and by the way in which Sidney contrasts the now uniquely experienced Astrophel with the shallower persons who surround him. Central to the analysis of this grief is the abandonment of the role of poet which Astrophel assumes from the beginning of the sequence, and therefore the last sonnets must be viewed in the context of this earlier picture of himself.

Clearly, a firm structural basis exists to justify the choice of themes for isolated study. It is necessary then to undertake a fuller examination of these themes and the way they are developed within the sequence.

In the first part of Astrophel and Stella, Sidney must describe a love existing in secrecy. The isolation of this love is most effectively realized in contrast with a world existing concretely about it. Thus Sidney places both Stella and Astrophel in their respective worlds, Stella in the nature of which she is the most superlative product, Astrophel in the court which has produced him.

In sonnet 21, Sidney draws a picture of Stella, riding amid the ladies of the court in the full glare of a sunny day (22: 9-14):

This sonnet is remarkably effective in setting forth the association between Stella and virtue at the same time as it makes clear the inability of the passion-rent lover to respond to the ideal nature of the relationship: "But that for man with paine this truth descries." In yoking the images of the flames of love and the light of the inward sun of reason, Sidney makes Astrophel's assertion that he burns in love deeply ironic. It becomes not only a figurative, but a literal statement of the effects of the conflict of reason and will.

That Sidney is doing more than extrapolating from a currently popular idea in treating Stella as the fleshly manifestation of the ideal of virtue in sonnet 25 is clear from the import of sonnet 26, which explains the mystery of those important powers of Stella which are to pre-occupy Astrophel throughout the second part of Astrophel and Stella. In sonnet 9, Sidney has already discussed the remarkable effect of Stella's eyes on Astrophel (9: 9-14):

The windowes now through which this heavn'ly guest
Looks over the world, and can find nothing such,
Which dare claime from those lights the name of best,
Of touch they are that without touch doth touch,
Which Cupid's selfe from Beautie's myne did draw:
Of touch they are, and poore I am their straw.

In sonnet 26, Astrophel questions the idea that the stars
(26: 5-8)

. . . have for no cause birthright in the skie,
But for to spangle the blacke weeds of night;

Or for some brawle, which in that chamber hie,
They should still daunce to please a gazer's sight.

He, on the other hand, sees a grand pattern in the works of Nature (26: 10-14); he knows that

. . . great causes, great effects procure:
And know those Bodies high raigne on the low.
And if these rules did faile, prooffe makes me sure,
Who oft fore-judge my after-following race,
By only those two starres in Stella's face.

It is here that the significance of Stella's name is exploited most fully. Sidney relates in one dominating image the "Lampes of purest light" (26: 2) to those two stars in the face of her whom he calls "star." Thus he associates the awesome world of nature and Astrophel's conviction that it exhibits pattern and order, with the way in which that pattern and order affect Astrophel through the agency of Stella. Sonnet 25 has already suggested a rapprochement between Stella's beauty and her virtue which both deepens and complicates Astrophel's understanding of his love. Sonnet 26, immediately following, implies a similar resolution between the two senses in which Astrophel has understood nature. Underlying the praise of Stella's eyes in sonnet 26 is a profound sense that the universe has an order which must somehow be comprehended, and that that order affects the whole life of Astrophel.

Yet Astrophel expresses in sonnet 34 a total confusion of mind that indicates that the discoveries of sonnets

25 and 26 have not yet been assimilated. In such lines as "What idler thing, then speake and not be hard? / What harder thing then smart, and not to speake?" (34: 9-10), there is a contradictory tone which fully supports the disorder of the concluding lines (34: 12-14):

Thus write I while I doubt to write, and wreake
My harmes on Ink's poore losse, perhaps some find
Stella's great powrs, that so confuse my mind.

It is clear that Astrophel has not been helped by the revelations of sonnets 25 and 26. Though the effect of Stella's beauty on him has been justified, and her association with the order of the universe made clear, his confusion of mind is greater than ever.

The powers of Stella that produce this disorder are alluded to or form the subject matter of eleven of the songs and sonnets of Part II.¹¹ There is, for example, the amusing and deliberate parallelism between sonnets 41 and 53. In sonnet 41, the source of Astrophel's excellence in the tournament games is Stella, who ". . . lookt on, and from her heavenly face / Sent forth the beames, which made so faire my race" (41: 13-14). But in sonnet 53, that same glance has dazzled Astrophel completely (53: 11-13):

¹¹Sonnets 41, 42, 44, 48, 53, 57, 58, First Song, sonnets 71, 77, Third Song.

Astrophel has to employ to resist his situation. Cupid, in fact, is a participant in the action of the sequence, as much one of the dramatis personae as the counselling friend or the rich miser. He is Astrophel's antagonist, the personification of a love that Sidney early makes clear is, insofar as Cupid represents it, unworthy. The illicit nature of this love is made very clear in the sonnets in which Sidney discusses Cupid's relationship with Stella, the paragon of virtue. Cupid always uses Stella for his exploits; he is never able to enter into her heart. Only once does Sidney suggest that Stella uses Cupid (sonnet 29) and this sonnet appears at a point where Astrophel's mind is growing more and more confused from the effects of love, and he is expressing his inability to understand why Stella does not respond to him.

In sonnets 4 and 5, Sidney introduces in full dress the self-examination that Astrophel only alludes to in sonnet 2 when he says he tries to make himself believe that all is well. That this self-examination is difficult is clear from the rueful admission (3: 10-11),

Phrases and Problemes from my reach do grow,
And strange things cost too deare for my poore sprites.

Love has disarmed Astrophel, and deprived him of the resources to make a clear analysis of his situation. Sonnet 4 expresses this inability, for it is a flippant neutralization of the

debate between will and wit, passion and reason. It is the first time Astrophel directly states that different values are at war in him, and ~~the~~ ^{the} weak banter ^{of sonnet 4} suggests the extent of his irresolution. The sonnet, however, introduces two ideas Sidney explores at greater length later on: the transforming powers of Stella, and the idea that love as Astrophel then conceives it is outside the domain of virtue. Sonnet 5 forms a striking contrast with sonnet 4; it is an earnest exploration of the concept of reason which has just been treated irreverently. Sonnet 5 states bluntly why the love Astrophel suffers is not under the rule of virtue: it is an illusion. For the first time in the sequence, a critical gaze is cast on Astrophel's experience, and the result is not flattering. A stern morality is evoked against which Astrophel must measure himself. Yet against these values stands the paradox of the last line (5: 14), "True, and yet true that I must Stella love." Thus with consummate skill, Sidney makes clear that the battle is between equally strong and defiantly opposed ideals, and shows that the battlefield is to be Astrophel's soul. Of all the sonnets of the sequence, this one comes closest to the spiritual anxiety of Petrarch, for no rapprochement appears possible between the demands of the spirit and those of the flesh.

There is a brief respite in sonnets 6 to 9 from the

Astrophel acknowledges in sonnet 10 that his reason tells him his love is wrong, but he makes clear that as things now stand, love and reason can have nothing to do with each other (10: 1-2, 7-8):

Reason, in faith thou art well serv'd, that still
Wouldst brabbling be with sence and love in me:

.....

Leave sense, and those which sense's objects be
Deale thou with powers of thoughts, leave love to will.

R. L. Montgomery, Jr., asserts that in this sonnet, Astrophel consciously and deliberately wills the failure of reason as an instrument of moral control. "His very acknowledgement of traditional dialectical terms eliminates blindness of understanding as a cause of error," says Montgomery.⁵ That Astrophel wills his error is true, but that he does so in full understanding is not quite as correct. As has been shown, the effect of love has been to breed disorder in his mind. Astrophel's use of the traditional assumptions about the rule of reason does not prevent his confused attempt, in sonnet 10, to set love outside that rule. Ultimately, under Stella's guidance, he will come to a true understanding of the relationship between reason and love, but ~~as yet~~, he has not ^{as yet} done so. This is borne out by the sophistry of the concluding lines of the sonnet (10: 9-14):

⁵
Ibid., p. 107.

But thou wouldst needs fight both with love and sence,
 With sword of wit, giving wounds of dispraise,
 Till downe-right blowes did foyle thy cunning fence:
 For soone as they strake thee with Stella's rayes,
 Reason thou kneel'dst, and offeredst straight to prove
 By reason good, good reason her to love.

In sonnet 14, Sidney cuts to the bone of Astrophel's conflict, for what Astrophel cannot say to himself, indeed what he has refused particularly to say in the evasions of sonnet 10, can be said by the friend who reproves him so sharply. The "Rubarb words" are intended to purge Astrophel of his self-deception, but instead they provoke his strongest defence yet of his love (14: 9-14):

If that be sinne which doth the maners frame,
 Well staid with truth in word and faith of deed,
 Readie of wit and fearing nought but shame:
 If that be sinne which in fixt hearts doth breed
 A loathing of all loose unchastitie,
 Then Love is sinne, and let me sinfull be.

The irony of this defence is considerable, for it is yet a further self-deception. This is not the lesson in love Astrophel thinks he has learned from Stella. The true import of his new experience will be made clear in sonnet 16 (16: 12-14):

In her sight I a lesson new have speld,
 I now have learn'd Love right, and learn'd even so,
 As who by being poisond doth poison know.

That Astrophel's pain bites as bitterly as poison is a truth already amply demonstrated in the confusion that his new experience has brought on. Thus the association of love and poison is a more honest characterization of his experience than the one

he makes to his friend when he boasts that his love is "readie of wit and fearing nought but shame" (14: 11).

In sonnet 18, Astrophel turns away from the fabrications of sonnet 14 to expound the bitter truth of his love (18):

With what sharpe checkes I in my selfe am shent,
 When into Reason's audite I do go:
 And by just counts my selfe a banckrout know
 Of all those goods, which heav'n to me hath lent:
 Unable quite to pay even Nature's rent,
 Which unto it by birthright I do ow:
 And which is worse, no good excuse can show,
 But that my wealth I have most idly spent.
 My youth doth waste, my knowledge brings forth toyes,
 My wit doth strive those passions to defend,
 Which for reward spoile it with vaine annoyes.
 I see my course to lose myselfe doth bend:
 I see and yet no greater sorow take,
 Then that I lose no more for Stella's sake.

Sonnet 18 appears closely patterned on sonnet 5. As he did earlier, Astrophel reviews the sharpest criticisms of his situation, and then states in the concluding couplet that the power of love draws him just as strongly as the power of reason. In fact, he asserts more than that; where he had earlier arrayed love and virtue as equal opponents, here it is clear that love has begun to win, for he is willing to hazard his noblest aims for Stella's sake. In a like fashion, sonnet 19 admits that Astrophel sees his ruin, yet embraces it, in defiance of all that he knows is wise (19: 12-14):

O let me prop my mind, yet in his growth
 And not in Nature for best fruits unfit:
 'Scholler,' saith Love, 'bend hitherward your wit.'

Thus, the opening line of the next sonnet is deeply significant

(20: 1): "Flie, fly, my friends, I have my death wound; fly."

Thus, in the space of twenty poems, Astrophel has passed from the initial devastation of first love, to a more serious kind of disorder, in which the debate of passion and reason is beginning to be won by passion. The love for which he is willing to risk so much draws its character ~~not only~~ from the fact that he almost always (except for the self-deception of sonnet 14) opposes it firmly to reason, ^{It is also coloured by the} ~~but also from sonnet 17, in grossness of the domestic squabble among the gods in which a gross domestic squabble amongst the gods is caused by sonnet 17. lust, and Astrophel is accidentally affected by it.~~ Sonnet 21 marks the terminal point in this development. In it, Astrophel responds again to the warnings of his friend, but this time his answer is frivolous, even destructive. The sonnet makes perfectly clear that Astrophel is wasting his expectations on something worthless. But the application of the Petrarchanism "friendly foe" to these great expectations indicates Astrophel's wariness; he has already gone over to the side of passion, and has guiltily acknowledged this to himself. Thus, the assertion of the last lines (21: 12-14):

Sure you say well, your wisdom's golden mine
Dig deepe with learning's spade, now tell me this;
Hath this world ought so fair as Stella is?

reduces the friend's criticisms to absurdity by its wilfulness.

Sonnet 21 concludes that movement of the sequence in which Astrophel meditates directly on the opposition of sense

the important conception that Nature in her sublime order rules Astrophel through Stella's eyes. Sidney thus establishes the new idea that the illusion of love may not in fact be an illusion, if the works of love and the order of the universe can be associated in such a powerful way.

The force of sonnet 22, depicting Stella's exemption from a degree of mortal frailty, and the furious anger of sonnet 24, which sets forth the nature of the rightful possessor of this treasure, requires Astrophel to make a new analysis of his situation. And sonnet 26 makes clear that the results of this analysis have deepened and complicated his understanding of the role Stella plays in his life. Although his love is still ^{rooted} ~~based~~ in rank passion, it has become clear that ^{he must reassess} ~~the facts~~ of his experience ~~must be reassessed~~ in order to assimilate these new conceptions. In the succeeding sonnets this attempt to relate his greater awareness of Stella's power to the desire he feels results in a failure of understanding in Astrophel.

What Astrophel knows as a new fact of his experience must be understood by his reason; sonnets 25 and 26 depict his attempt to attain this understanding, but the reader learns in Part II of the sequence that this attempt has failed; if it had succeeded, the assertion of physical desire for its own sake in that section could not have come about. Sidney prepares the ground for this failure of understanding carefully in the poems surround-

often a figure of accomplishment for him, and sonnet 53 gains no little effect from the image of Astrophel, "prauncing in the presse" (53: 6), struck powerless by Stella's glance. But sonnet 49 invokes the mystique of horsemanship to express a mortal conflict. Astrophel is brought to submission by the force of desire just as a horse is subdued by his rider. And in the admission that Astrophel himself delights in being broken, there is an intensely ironic reflection that indicates how far his soul has gone towards moral death. But sonnet 49 also makes another fact clear. Astrophel is "curb'd in with feare." This reverence for Stella's power is implicit in many of the sonnets of this part of the sequence, and is particularly marked in the two great sonnets on her eyes, 42 and 48. It is also implicit in his admission that he ought to learn to "love and see" without seeking further favours (46: 7). Thus, the grotesque image of the horse in sonnet 49 sums up both his submission to desire, and his knowledge that that desire must be repressed, and the sonnet expresses the complete impasse at which he has arrived.

In the ensuing poems, there is an attempt to break out of this impasse by an assertion of individuality, a special energy that expresses the power of "will" in Astrophel (50: 1-4):

Not this faire outside, which our hearts doth move.
 And therefore, though her beautie and her grace
 Be Love's indeed, in Stella's selfe he may
 By no pretence claime any maner place.
 Well Love, since this demurre our sute doth stay,
 Let Vertue have that Stella's selfe; yet thus,
 That Vertue but that body graunt to us.

The tone of this sonnet is highly facetious, but the solution the conclusion offers is a serious one, as the following sonnets very quickly show. And the facetiousness is important too, because it indicates the falsity of the course Astrophel suggests here, and which he is soon to adopt. That he can contemplate a division between Stella's virtuous soul and her beautiful body reveals the extreme disorder into which his mind has fallen, for the sonnet sequence moves firmly towards the assertion that virtue and beauty are but two aspects of one great truth. Sidney indicates the mistaken nature of Astrophel's view by allowing the lover to be humiliated in the tournament in sonnet 53.

But having suggested to himself a course of action, Astrophel now begins to pursue it. It has already been noted that the sequence takes a special turn in sonnet 55, when Astrophel renounces his Muses. It is a critical juncture in the revised role he sees for himself, and marks the abandonment of his old vulnerable persona and the adoption of a new and more decisive way of acting. Thus sonnet 56 states firmly that patience can no longer be tolerated without the

of the maturest power of sensual desire.

In this affirmation, the setting of the lyric is of intense importance; unlike the other poems of the sequence, the Eighth Song is in the third person, a device which immediately sets it apart as a poem demanding a special attitude on the part of the reader. To come upon it unexpectedly in a first reading of Astrophel and Stella is to feel immediately that the lovers are framed in a special way by their setting, and are distanced from the reader. In R. B. Young's words, "from this objective point of view they appear in a new intimacy; the distinction Astrophel is constantly forced to make between 'I' and 'she' is eliminated in the 'they' of the song."¹³ On one level, the distancing of the lovers, and their meeting in the timeless garden, universalizes the situation and forces on the reader's attention the almost archetypal quality of the encounter. On another level, the setting of the pair apart emphasizes suddenly and with great effect the mutuality of their love. They belong to a world set apart from the one that has imposed its yoke on them. The battle of reason and passion in Astrophel, the victory of passion, and the conflict of that passion with the defences of Stella have all been developed in terms of a battle between the separate and

¹³ Ibid., p. 77.

sonification not of the grossness of the flesh but of a kind of disordered thinking which does not permit man his natural growth towards the ideal (vii: 7-12):

Who have so leaden eyes, as not to see sweet beautie's
show
Or seeing, have so wodden wits, as not that worth to
know;
Or knowing, have so muddy minds, as not to be in love;
Or loving, have so frothy thoughts as easly thence to
move:
O let them see these heavenly beames, and in faire
letters reede
A lesson fit, both sight and skill, love and firme love
to breede.

The lesson Astrophel is learning from Stella is that "wodden wits" can be transformed by a setting-forth of the proper way in which the processes of love ought to work, and "frothy thoughts" can give way to an understanding of "firme love." Thus, the disordered thinking that has led Astrophel into the maze of physical passion is specifically attacked, and a lesson in the harmonious working of mature love is set before him.

R. B. Young notes that like the Third Song (in which the ideas of these later poems have been lightly anticipated), the Sixth and Seventh Songs "are confined to the two senses in which, along with Reason, Love alone resides according to the Platonist. That is, the desire which has led to Astrophel's rejection is specifically omitted."¹⁵ This is, of

¹⁵Young, op. cit., p. 77.

phel, is one that neither denies the worth of the flesh, nor recognizes the flesh while denying the ideal. Instead, beside the Platonic pattern of love moving from worldly experience to the ideal, it sets a parallel model of honourable behaviour. This model belongs, like the ladder of love, to a world in which progress towards the ideal is possible, and where the higher ideal must always take precedence over the lower.

It will be clear from the discussion of Petrarchism and neoplatonism in Chapter II that this vision is highly individual. The Petrarchan convention, based in a conflict of flesh and spirit, is uniquely suited to express the division of mind that early afflicted Astrophel. But when Astrophel renounces debate and anxiety, and makes a direct assertion of desire, Sidney moves away from the dissidio, for the melancholy reflections of Petrarch offer no model for such firm realism. But as has been stated, the motives that lead Sidney to move Astrophel out of his Petrarchan posture also require him to suggest some solution to the problems that result when Astrophel tries to act on his desire. Sonnet 62 marks the change from an essentially Petrarchan exploration of love to one that is more neoplatonic. In the advice Stella gives Astrophel in that sonnet, she appears of course as the Petrarchan mistress, anxious about her lover's moral life.

continuing power of Stella's works in *Astrophel*, the order to be affirmed exacts even in the affirming, a mingling of pain and sweetness which is indissoluble.

The conception of love that is to be deduced from this exposition is as follows: Sidney in Astrophel and Stella treats love as a transforming and educating experience, which raises the one who loves from an initially limited perception of love as physical desire to a full understanding of the proper function of desire within the order of the universe. The universe he recognizes is a hierarchy of values in which the essential principle is one of harmony, but this harmony requires each value to take a greater or lesser place, and physical love is of less importance than honourable conduct.

The principle according to which Astrophel and Stella is organized is based on this concept of love. In a limited sense, the sequence is a narrative, for it begins in physical passion and concludes in mature love. But its lyric technique produces a tightly knit whole in which all the themes of the sequence are continuously developed. For this reason, the critic experiences great difficulty in extracting certain themes for separate consideration without doing damage to the whole. The disintegration of Astrophel's conception of himself as poet, for example, takes place at the same time as the development of Stella's extraordinary powers. Each movement has to be understood separately in order to comprehend the sequence's progress, yet the two movements mutu-

ally support each other and can only be sundered with difficulty.

The ultimate result is a complex fabric indeed, but it is demonstrably one that contains a progression from one way of understanding love to another. If the sequence is approached with this principle--the conception of love as an educative process--in mind, it discloses a remarkable unity. It is the unity of a poetic fiction that progresses from one point to another, but is composed of tightly interlocking elements which can only be understood in their relation to each other. None of the songs of Astrophel and Stella, with the possible exception of the Third, could be eliminated from the sequence without drastically affecting the conception of love Sidney is setting forth. There is a number of sonnets that could be left out without loss to the progressive effect of the sequence, but this is only because the points they make are amply supported in other sonnets. It is not because they are truly irrelevant, for there are no extraneous parts in the sequence, and nothing to distract attention from the central conflict and the way it is resolved.

The principle which has been outlined is the simplest possible explanation of Astrophel and Stella which still takes into consideration all the aspects of the sequence. It accepts the order of the sonnets and songs in the best

again in terms of the personal. Stella embodies the sovereignty of reason in her unique person, and the effect she has on Astrophel is one of ethical instruction (71: 12-13):

So while thy beautilie drawes the heart to love,
As fast thy Vertue bends that love to good.

The problem of progress towards the ideal in Astrophel and Stella is therefore not expressed in metaphysical terms.

Sidney's universe is not one of metaphysical elements to be related, but of values to be related. And these values are presented both poetically and dramatically on an intensely personal level. When he writes of the power of Stella's beauty to draw Astrophel to perfection, he is expressing at once the moral aspect under which he sees that universe, and the force of the personal in realizing its values.

The evidence, both of his own learning and of the neoplatonic psychology utilized in Astrophel and Stella forbids the suggestion that in his indifference to the Platonic metaphysic, Sidney was rejecting Platonism for some other order. Within the grand scheme of neoplatonism, Stella quite evidently functions as an approach to the ideal for Astrophel, and this approach is strongly reaffirmed, rather than denied, towards the end of the sequence. When Sidney turns away from a metaphysical statement of his conception of the ideal, it is to posit a universe that is an analogue of the neoplatonic order, one that proceeds within the same scheme of things but

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