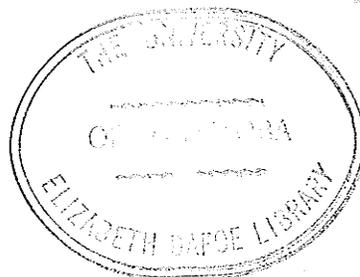


A LESSON IN LOVE:
A STUDY OF THE UNITY OF SIDNEY'S
ASTROPHEL AND STELLA

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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.

other works explore the subject of love. This thesis, however, is concerned only with a part of that larger question, with the way in which the structure of Astrophel and Stella expresses the conception of love advanced in that sequence, and it rigorously excludes all other considerations, excepting only the remarks in the Apologie which seem to pertain most directly to the subject in hand.

Twentieth-century critics of Sidney have universally agreed in using versions of Astrophel and Stella based on the 1598 edition, in preference to the 1591 "bad" quarto, which has been preserved in Feuillerat's complete edition of Sidney (1922-26).¹² Almost invariably, however, they have followed Grosart¹³ in appending to the sequence numbers 31 and 32 of Certaine Sonets, "Thou blind man's marke, thou foole's selfe chosen snare," and "Leave me ô Love, which reachest but to dust." The entrenched disposition to treat these sonnets as part of Astrophel and Stella despite all textual indications to the contrary has been firmly discouraged by Karl A. Murphy.¹⁴ He has amply demonstrated

¹²Albert Feuillerat (ed.), Sir Philip Sidney: Complete Works (Cambridge: The University Press, 1922) II, pp. 241-300.

¹³Ringler, op. cit., p. 423.

¹⁴Karl M. Murphy, "The 109th and 110th Sonnets of Astrophel and Stella," Philological Quarterly, XXXIV, No. 3 (July, 1955), pp. 349-52.

that there is no reason, either poetic or textual, for attaching them to the cycle. Ringler's text does not include them with Astrophel and Stella, nor, one hopes, will they be considered in future studies of Sidney's poetry as anything but part of Certaine Sonets.

Verse citations in the text of the thesis are made in the following way: references to Petrarch's Canzoniere are to the translation of Anna Maria Armi.¹⁵ The poems are referred to in bracketed citations in the text, by the Roman numerals which she uses. References to Astrophel and Stella are also bracketed in the text. They cite the sonnet in Arabic numerals, then the specific line or lines; for example, (10: 12-14), or (10: 9, 11-12). The songs in Astrophel and Stella are referred to in small Roman numerals, for example, (viii: 10-14). Occasional references to other poems are covered in the footnotes.

In the brief acknowledgements permitted a Master's Candidate, I would like to thank Sidney Warhaft for his

¹⁵[Francesco] Petrarch, Sonnets and Songs, trans. Anna Maria Armi. (New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1946). This translation of Petrarch's Canzoniere is a fairly literal but very graceless rendering into English. Its usefulness lies in the fact that it includes the Italian text of each poem on a page facing the English version.

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.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM OF UNITY IN ASTROPHEL AND STELLA

Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet-sequence Astrophel and Stella (1582)¹ surpasses in quality almost every other cycle produced by the sixteenth-century English poets. It is, says Kenneth Muir, "one of the seminal works of the sixteenth century, more influential, because more imitable, than the Faerie Queene."² Its success has been the subject of intense critical scrutiny during the past century. Scholarly writers and amateurs of Sidney's work have surveyed the 108 sonnets and eleven songs of the sequence, looking for the source of its remarkable effect.

Many critics have suggested that the sequence tells a true story of the poet's frustration in love. This theory, based on investigations of the poet's alleged relationship with Penelope Rich, appears, by no means for the first time,

¹William A. Ringler, Jr. (ed.), The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney, pp. 435-47. In the opinion of Ringler, Astrophel and Stella was composed in the summer of 1582. Ringler bases this conclusion on evidence of metrical innovation in the poems and on a modified biographical interpretation of their content.

²Kenneth Muir, Sir Philip Sidney (Writers and their Work, No. 120, London: published for the British Council and the National Book League by Longmans, Green, and Co., 1960), p. 35.

in Symonds's biography of Sidney (1895),³ in almost all of Sidney's other biographers,⁴ and most recently in F.S. Boas's Sir Philip Sidney, Representative Elizabethan, (1955). Boas asserts firmly, "This cycle was born of a passionately felt personal experience."⁵

Other writers agree that Astrophel and Stella embodies a narrative, but emphasize that this narrative is the creation of an artist, faintly based if at all on events in Sidney's life. Of Sidney's early biographers, only Anna M. Stoddart,⁶ in an account prevailingly sentimental, suggests that the sonnets are not entirely genuine in passion. This view was strongly put in 1904 both by W. J. Courthope and

³John Addington Symonds, Sidney (English Men of Letters, Vol. XI, London: Macmillan and Co., 1895), p. 116.

⁴Emma M. Denkinger, Immortal Sidney (New York: Brentano's Inc., 1931), pp. 167-96; Malcolm Wallace, The Life of Sir Philip Sidney (Cambridge: The University Press, 1915), p. 248; Alfred H. Bill, Astrophel (New York and Toronto: Farrar and Rinehart, 1937), p. 217; Percy Addleshaw, Sir Philip Sidney (second edition, London: Methuen and Co., 1910), p. 331; Mona Wilson, Sir Philip Sidney (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1950), p. 180.

⁵F.S. Boas, Sir Philip Sidney, Representative Elizabethan (London: Staples Press, 1955), p. 136.

⁶Anna M. Stoddart, Sir Philip Sidney, Servant of God (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1894), p. 90.

by Sidney Lee.⁷ Wrote Courthope, "The whole series forms a regular design, the object being to exercise the imagination on a set theme according to the traditional rules of a particular poetic convention"⁸ Although study of the conventions of love poetry in the sixteenth century has advanced since the time of Lee and Courthope, this study has not deeply affected the problem of the structure of Astrophel and Stella. T.H. Banks, Theodore Spencer, and J.W. Lever⁹ elected to follow Courthope and Lee in treating Astrophel and Stella primarily as a work of art and only secondarily as a piece of autobiography, though Lever remains interested in relating Sidney's personal interests to the aims of Astrophel and Stella. But all of these critics treat the sequence as narrative, whether autobiographical or not.

Many studies of the development of the Petrarchan sonnet treat the place of Sidney's poetry within that tradition

⁷ Elizabethan Sonnets, with an introduction by Sidney Lee (An English Garner, Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co. Ltd., 1904), Vol. I, pp. xlii-xliii; W.J. Courthope, The Renaissance and the Reformation (Vol. II of A History of English Poetry, 6 vols. London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1904), pp. 203-233

⁸Courthope, op. cit., p. 228.

⁹Theodore H. Banks, "Sidney's Astrophel and Stella Reconsidered," PMLA, L, No. 2 (June, 1935), pp. 403-412; Theodore Spencer, "The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney," ELH XII, No. 4 (December, 1945), pp. 251-78; J.W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1956), pp. 51-91.

but they deal with conventional elements in the sonnets, rather than with the unity of the sequence as a whole. The studies of Janet G. Scott, Lu Emily Pearson, and Lisle C. John¹⁰ are variously concerned with the sources and development of Elizabethan Petrarchist poetry, and devote little attention to the structure of Astrophel and Stella, although John accepts the idea that it is a narrative.¹¹

At least one critic, C.S. Lewis, has asserted that the narrative is an unimportant element in Astrophel and Stella. Lewis opposed strenuously the "perverse demand for story"¹² which has dominated criticism of Astrophel and Stella; Sidney, said Lewis, was writing not a love story but an anatomy of love. Lewis was anxious to divert attention from the merely biographical search for event back to the lyric totality of the sequence. Similarly, Hallett Smith, in the brief section on

¹⁰Janet G. Scott, Les Sonnets élisabéthains (Paris: Champion, 1929), pp. 15-53; 303-7; Lu Emily Pearson, Elizabethan Love Conventions (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1933), pp. 84-103; L.C. John, The Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences (Columbia University Studies in English and Comparative Literature, No. 133, New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1964 [first published 1938]).

¹¹John, op. cit., p. 186.

¹²C.S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 328.

Sidney in his Elizabethan Poetry,¹³ suggested that the problem of the sequence is not one of literal sincerity or biographical revelation. Smith discerned in Astrophel and Stella not a narrative technique but an essentially dramatic method, which exploits the conflict of reason and passion to give the sequence unity.

Thus it is only in very recent years that any attempt has been made to question long-accepted views of the structure of Astrophel and Stella. Nonetheless, these views have been questioned in two major studies: Richard B. Young's English Petrarke: A Study of Sidney's Astrophel and Stella, and in Robert L. Montgomery, Jr.'s Symmetry and Sense: The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney.¹⁴ Both critics have essayed lengthy analyses of the effect of the sequence and the reasons for that effect, seeking to understand the way Astrophel and Stella hangs together. "There are no other Elizabethan sonnets--not even Shakespeare's--with such variety," Kenneth Muir has written, "and no others have such a coherent dramatic

¹³Hallett Smith, Elizabethan Poetry (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952), pp. 142-57.

¹⁴Richard B. Young, English Petrarke; A Study of Sidney's Astrophel and Stella, in Three Studies in the Renaissance: Sidney, Jonson, Milton (Yale Studies in English, Vol. 138, New Haven: Yale University, 1958), pp. 1-88; Robert L. Montgomery, Jr., Symmetry and Sense: The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1961).

structure."¹⁵ Muir does not explicate the structure which he praises so highly, but the studies of Montgomery and Young have made it clear that this structure can be explicated, that it is not a datum but a legitimate object of critical attention. The critic, freed by the initiative they took, can seek to find the principle of organization which gives Astrophel and Stella its coherence, and to ascertain whether that principle, if it exists, is narrative, or poetic, or perhaps philosophical.

Since the works of Young and Montgomery lay important foundations for any study of the unity of Astrophel and Stella, detailed attention must be given to the views which they advance. It is as well to deal with Montgomery first, not only because he builds on the work of Young and therefore serves to introduce his views, but also because some of his observations form an instructive prelude to a study of the unity of this sonnet sequence. In the last chapter of his study, Montgomery examines directly the question of the principle according to which the sequence is organized:¹⁶

One's first impression of Astrophel and Stella is apt to be a sense of its bewildering variety in style and motif . . . In the face of such a poetic kaleidoscope one is virtually forced to search out some guiding principle

¹⁵ Muir, op. cit., p. 33.

¹⁶ Montgomery, op. cit., pp. 100-101.

or structure within the work to justify its status as a 'sequence,' or rest content, as some critics have done, to regard it as near, but meaningful anarchy.

The critic to whom he alludes at the end of these remarks is, as he points out, C.S. Lewis. Keeping in mind Lewis's warning against seeking a story in the sequence, Montgomery is nonetheless anxious to maintain that Astrophel and Stella has a coherence of its own. He believes that the cycle has no "objective structure" as such:¹⁷

The danger in looking for greater coherence in Astrophel and Stella is that we may look too hard and reduce its quite real variety to an oversimplification which can only partly define the character of the work. For example, it is tempting to see a plot behind the brief, though frequent, allusions to the circumstances of Astrophel's life; but a number of sonnets conceivably might be differently placed without doing damage to such plot development as there is, and a record of outward events in a love affair is certainly not the center of interest in Astrophel and Stella.

Montgomery feels that the unity of Astrophel and Stella is not to be found in a clearly-stated succession of events, but in the changing roles of Astrophel, which govern the succeeding changes in the mood and style of the work.

The most persuasive reading of the sequence which has yet appeared, in Montgomery's opinion, is Richard B. Young's English Petrarke, and it is Young who suggests that the unity of the sequence is to be found in the changing persona

¹⁷Ibid., p. 101

of Astrophel. Montgomery refers to Young's study with warm praise, but he proceeds to demonstrate that Young's interpretation of the ending of the sequence is weak, and that his view therefore requires some revision.

Montgomery objects to Young's reading of the concluding sonnet of Astrophel and Stella. This sonnet is based on a disturbing paradox, expressed in the lines (108: 13-14),

That in my woes for thee thou art my joy,
And in my joyes for thee my only annoy.

Sidney has developed a sequence of poems praising Stella as a paragon of beauty and virtue and anatomizing Astrophel's love for her, yet the love of which these poems speak is one which brings at the end both pleasure and pain, joy and despair. Of this development, Young writes:¹⁸

By the end of the sequence, through his relation to Stella, Astrophel has been made aware of the nature of Love as the Petrarchan universal: he has discovered himself as part of the convention, which, by virtue of his participation in it, has acquired permanent validity.

Montgomery¹⁹ believes instead that the end of sonnet 108

must be read not as an announcement of the 'validity' of that convention but as an admission of its hold on a mind unable to recover its independence and order. The resolution of the sequence lies in the irresolution of Astrophel.

This controversy between the critics raises two

¹⁸Young, op. cit., p. 88.

¹⁹Montgomery, op. cit., p. 117.

questions. First, does Young's interpretation of the concluding sonnet weaken the demonstration he has given of the particular principle that he feels orders the sequence? Second, does Montgomery's criticism of Young's view correct a misconception in an essentially worthy interpretation, or without realizing that he is doing so, does he show that this interpretation cannot be completely defended? These questions, taken in their order, will provide a basis for some remarks on the problem of the unity of Astrophel and Stella.

Young in his study of Astrophel and Stella turns his attention to the way in which its "manner" or aesthetic technique is related to its "matter," the love-problems of Astrophel. He maintains that the sequence is "a whole poetic structure which is of a high order,"²⁰ and continues:

Though they comprise a continuous sequence with no interruption of the movement, the sonnets of Astrophel and Stella seem to fall into three major groups or sections, marked by various formal devices and involving definite shifts of tone. That there is some principle of order is suggested at once by the disposition of the various manners adopted by Sidney's poet lover. The majority of the most dramatic sonnets seem to be clustered toward the centre of the sequence; the most conventional, the most 'mannered' sonnets are by and large confined to the beginning and the end.

Young develops from this sketch an interpretation of Astrophel and Stella which supports the conclusions about the ending

²⁰Young, op. cit., p. 40.

of the sequence already quoted. In his opinion Astrophel moves from an initial acceptance of his role as a lover within the Petrarchan convention, towards a less self-conscious, more ironic attitude in the central section, and then back to an acceptance of the universality of the convention in the despair of the ending. Young's treatment of the paradox of the concluding sonnet relies on the belief that Astrophel's despair is absolute, that stung by Stella's rejection of him, he must consciously adopt a manner that gives him a rationale to comprehend his grief. A close examination of the fabric of the last section of the sequence suggests, however, that Young does not respond sufficiently to statements about Astrophel's condition which clearly modify the grief Young feels is so absolute.

It is essential first of all to establish that sonnets 107 and 108 bear at least a passing relationship to each other. Astrophel and Stella belongs to the category of sonnet-sequence that imitates Petrarch's Canzoniere as a whole, rather than imitating individual sonnets by themselves as the early Italian Petrarchists did.²¹ Therefore, although the initial concessions about its unity need not be great, they can at least be made. Though this does not mean sonnets

²¹John M. Berdan, Early Tudor Poetry, 1485-1547 ([n.p.] The Shoe String Press, 1961 [first published 1920]), p. 460.

107 and 108 are necessarily related, it does mean that they have a possible connection. As will be seen, this connection is soon demonstrated. (A contrasting case is that of Wyatt, who belongs to an earlier stage in which the individual sonnet was the focus of the poet's interest. Although Wyatt's love-attitudes and his treatment of his sources can be discussed, one can draw no conclusions at all about the relation of one of his poems to any other.)

Sonnet 107 directs the reader's attention to the way Astrophel himself conceives his situation (107: 5-11, 13-14):

Sweete, for a while give respite to my hart,
 Which pants as though it still should leape to thee:
 And on my thoughts give thy Lieftenancy
 To this great cause, which needs both use and art,
 And as a Queene, who from her presence sends
 Whom she imployes, dismisse from thee my wit,
 Till it have wrought what thy owne will attends.

.....

O let not fooles in me thy workes reprove,
 And scorning say, 'See what it is to love.'

Two considerations emerge from these lines. The reader recognizes immediately that Astrophel values his love; he does not wish to shame it, and he is clearly afraid that he will unless he is able to do what Stella wishes. In the second place, the question immediately arises, what is it that Stella wishes? What is the great cause which needs both use and art? Young, expanding on J. W. Lever's

interpretation of sonnet 107²² says that "Astrophel asks leave to return to the world of affairs he had rejected at the beginning of the sequence . . . to return not released from passion, but as the Petrarchan lover, passion's slave."²³

Yet nothing in this sonnet supports either Young's or Lever's interpretation. The "great cause" on which Astrophel sets forth is not a project in the world of affairs, but "what thy owne will attends." And the effect of the last two lines is not to indicate Astrophel's recognition that he is passion's slave, but on the contrary to make clear that this is precisely the attitude he rejects. He does not wish to embody a love which can be scorned. Young would reply, one hypothesises, that this is exactly what Astrophel does in the concluding sonnet; he demonstrates that he is passion's slave. But Astrophel states in the form of paradox in the last sonnet something else entirely. It is that "thy works in me prevaile" (108: 12), and that their effect is to give both joy and grief. There is no necessary reason why a love which gives him conflicting emotions should also enslave him, particularly since he has demonstrated his desire to adopt some posture worthy of a great love.

²²Lever, op. cit., p. 81.

²³Young, op. cit., p. 87.

Questions about the nature of Astrophel's love raised by sonnet 108 cannot be solved until a solution is found to the still-pressing problem of 107. What is it that Stella's "will attends" and which requires the liberating of Astrophel's wit to carry it out? In the Eighth Song of the sequence, Stella rejects Astrophel's plea that their love be consummated, and when she does so she gives clear reasons why she must act as she does. She tells him that honour requires them to deny the physical passion they have both acknowledged, and implies that to accept the rule of honour is a more mature way to love than to accept the rule of passion. Astrophel responds to those reasons in his own way; he is at first grief-stricken, then in the Eleventh Song he shows that he has learned to comprehend love in a new way. What he had felt as physical passion, a passion which Stella had denied in the Fourth Song, he now knows as a deeply felt sentiment which involves his whole being and is proof against time, absence, and other loves. Not even reason denies his faith (xi: 29-30):

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

If Astrophel feels a love that involves his whole being, as in the Eleventh Song, and which responds in sonnet 107 to Stella's command to do her will, it is clear that the paradox of sonnet 108 does not involve a simple retreat to the guise of conventional despair. If it is a retreat, it is certainly

not a simple one. It would follow that some attempt must be made to re-examine the whole sequence to find out what the development is in Astrophel's love which results in this paradox. The attempt would gain credibility if it were possible to show that the lyric texture of the sequence supports this development.

The difficulties which have just been demonstrated in Young's interpretation of the concluding sonnets suggest that there may well be some faults in his explication of Astrophel and Stella as a whole, for an interpretation which does not respond to all the problems posed by the last sonnets is incomplete. Naturally, the onus is on the new interpreter to demonstrate that there are factors in the development of the sequence which have not been given due consideration. Montgomery's criticism of Young's position attempts to introduce some of these factors. He accepts the idea that at the end of the sequence Astrophel reverts to the guise of the conventional lover, but he contends that Young views this reversion as a resolution of the tensions of the sequence, and that the psychological paralysis of the last sonnet is quite within the convention. With the idea that Astrophel accepts his position within the convention, he disagrees. To support his view, he invokes the Renaissance psychology, with its careful distinction between the reason, which is capable of judging good and bad, truth and untruth, and the will, the

instrument of volition or desire. His view is that this concept of the orderly working of the soul, in which reason should control will, directly underlies all of Astrophel's conflict about his love. As a result, in the consistent affirmations in the latter part of the sequence of the value of physical love, he finds evidence of "the incurable commitment of the will, a perception at the heart of Renaissance love poetry."²⁴ Although he senses in sonnet 107 a return of clarity to Astrophel's mind, he contends that sonnet 108 "admits that no respite is at hand."²⁵ Thus he is able to conclude, as has been noted, that the resolution of the sequence is in the irresolution of Astrophel, that his mind is disordered by a conflict of will and reason and is unable to mend itself. Astrophel is trapped by a love he feels but cannot satisfy, and Montgomery construes this as a denial of the validity of idealism, and an admission of the fact that Astrophel's will has gained ascendance over his reason.

Montgomery's remarks on the Renaissance psychology lying behind the battle of reason and passion in Astrophel and Stella are entirely appropriate to a discussion of the sequence. But an examination of the sonnets themselves does

²⁴Montgomery, op. cit., p. 116

²⁵Ibid., p. 117

not support his conclusions about the way that battle takes place in *Astrophel*. In developing his idea, he dismisses as a "sophistical rationalization of sexual desire"²⁶ sonnet 71, in which Sidney in one of the most forceful paradoxes of the sequence states the surpassing power of Stella as exemplar of "sweetest soveraigntie / Of reason" (71: 6-7), who strives to move all minds to perfection yet raises in *Astrophel* the insistent cry of desire. An analysis of *Astrophel* and *Stella* which aims to explain the conflict of reason and will *Astrophel* feels must give this sonnet the fullest consideration. This is particularly so since the figure of Stella as virtuous exemplar outlined in 71 is suggested in early sonnets of the sequence, and is the most important element in the Eighth Song, in which Stella so carefully gives her reasons for denying *Astrophel*. If it is possible to demonstrate that this conception of Stella plays a major role in the development of the sequence, a re-examination of the conclusions which Young and Montgomery make about *Astrophel*'s condition at its end becomes necessary. Some of the indicated problems in interpreting the last two sonnets may be resolved if it is demonstrated that they reflect what *Astrophel* has learned about love from Stella in the meditations of the sequence.

²⁶Ibid., p. 115 n.

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

poetic theory and in his humanism which are relevant to a study of Astrophel and Stella. In Chapter IV, attention is concentrated on the three crucial elements in the sequence which have already been mentioned: the world, the lady, and the poet, an understanding of which is necessary before a full assault can be made on the battle of reason and passion.

Chapter V is a full discussion of the sonnets in their order, directing attention firmly to the way Sidney works out the battle of reason and passion, and using as a background the observations of Chapter IV. Chapter VI comprises the conclusions of the thesis; it uses the matters to which attention has been drawn in Chapters IV and V to advance a theory of the objective structure of Astrophel and Stella, and briefly relates this theory to the Petrarchan and neo-platonic background and to the Elizabethan sonnet cycles.

The results of this enquiry are in essence new, but its method is supported by those recent developments in the criticism of Renaissance poetry which begin in an analysis of the uniquely poetic qualities of the work, its tone, its imagery, and its verbal structure, but permit full attention to the consideration of traditional and conventional elements as well. The studies of Montgomery and Young, though they have limitations, are based firmly on this approach, already well-developed in the study of Renaissance drama. The present active state of Wyatt criticism also reflects the effects of

this method. Its justification as method lies in the fact that it consistently emphasizes the poem as a work of the imagination, yet recognizes the effects of the pressure of the state of literature at a given time on that imagination. It attempts to comprehend the elements of the poem in concert and to explain it on that basis.

This, then, is a new interpretation of the unity of Astrophel and Stella. It begins in a re-examination of the sequence's traditional background, and leads to a close reading of the poems themselves. The aim of this procedure is to deduce the view of love Sidney adopts, and to employ this new understanding to comprehend more fully the coherence of the whole sequence.

CHAPTER II

THE TRADITIONS OF CONVENTIONAL LOVE POETRY

An analysis of Astrophel and Stella must begin with the Petrarchan basis on which the sequence is conceived. Commencing therefore with the poems of Petrarch, this discussion will move from a consideration of Petrarchan love poetry backward to its sources in earlier concepts, and then forward to its quattrocento and cinquecento mutations. The result will be an analysis partly historical and partly thematic, but centred firmly in the problem of the relation between passion and reason, or between physical desire and love of God, in Petrarch, his predecessors, and those who followed after him.

Astrophel and Stella is a Petrarchan sonnet sequence. That is, it is a collection of fourteen-line lyric poems (varied occasionally by other forms) modelled on the themes and imagery of the Canzoniere of Francesco Petrarca, known as Petrarch (1304-1370). The 366 poems in Petrarch's Canzoniere comprise, in addition to some occasional effusions on other subjects, an expansive collection of lyrics hymning the love of the poet for a beautiful and virtuous lady, Laura. This love seeks the fulfilment of its desire in the possession of Laura (XXII: 31-36):

To be with her when fades away the sun,
 To be seen by no others but the stars
 Only one night, and not expect the dawn,
 And she never transformed into green wood
 To flee my arms, as happened on the day
 When Apollo pursued her on the earth!

But the lover is endlessly frustrated, both by the adamant chastity of his lady and by his own knowledge that physical desire for its own sake is reprehensible. His love brings him feelings therefore of intense joy and intense pain. Before concluding the Canzoniere in a hymn to the powerful grace of the Virgin Mother, Petrarch writes a stern renunciation of worldly love (CCCLXV):

I go lamenting my past history
 That I spent in the love of mortal things,
 Without soaring up high, though I had wings,
 So as to leave more worthy proofs of me.

You who see my mistake, worthless and bad,
 King of the sky, deathless, invisible,
 Give your help to a soul that strayed and fell,
 Make his defects by your salvation glad;

That if I lived at war and in a storm,
 I die in peace, in port; and if my stay
 Was vain, that my departure may reform.

During the little life that I have left
 And at my death, let your hand not delay:
 Of any other hope I am bereft.

The lover in anguish is the common subject of European love poetry from the eleventh century to the sixteenth. He appears in the poetry of Guillaume IX, Count of Poitou and Duke of Aquitaine (b. 1071), the first of the troubadours,

and in the poetry of John Donne:¹

Hither with christall vyals, lovers come,
 And take my teares, which are loves wine,
 And try your mistresse Teares at home,
 For all are false, that tast not just like mine;

.

O perverse sexe, where none is true but she,
 Who's therefore true, because her truth kills mee.

The Petrarchan lover is in every detail the same afflicted figure who wanders through the poetry of the troubadours. As is well known, Petrarch's own sonnets are the fourteenth-century Italian vernacular expression of themes which were first developed in the eleventh century in Southern France.

The courtly lover of the Provençal poets worships a lady above him in station, a vision of good and beauty who is yet capricious and seemingly cruel, whose single glance can raise the lover to heights of elation, and whose frown can cast him into suicidal despair. Though his respect for the lady's public honour is without question, his love is frankly a sensual one, and his aim is to possess her. The lady, of course, is married, and her husband poses a threat to their security; every precaution must be taken to ensure that the lovers' fragile, melancholy relationship remains secret. Danger from gossiping friends and inimical scandal-

¹John Donne, The Poems of John Donne, ed. Herbert J.C. Grierson (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1912), Vol. I, p. 28, ll. 19-22, 26-27. "S" has been normalized in the quotation.

mongers is ever-present. The ideal of the knight is to serve his lady faithfully and to do her honour, but his main aim is to try to break down the barrier of her virtue. Sometimes this perfect, passive, almost unattainable Rose is plucked, sometimes she is not.² Courtly love, both in the poetry of the troubadours and in the late mediaeval romances which utilize the same concepts of love, is in essence adulterous and unhappy. If the lover is chaste, love makes him suffer. If he is unchaste, he is a sinner, and his religion makes him suffer.

Fundamentally, the Petrarchan sonnet embodies this situation, but stripped of its specifically chivalric and feudal trappings and transferred to the upper echelons of bourgeois society in a late mediaeval city. Like the knight of the troubadours' songs, the Petrarchan lover is enmeshed in a passion which has conquered all injunctions to evade it. Like the lady of the Provençal lyric, Petrarch's Laura is a distant figure; she is the occasion of the conflicts which the poet-lover suffers, but she takes little part in them. The poems are immersed instead in the personality of the lover, and tell in intimate terms of the conflict between his desire and the lady's "cruelty," and of the suffering which

²This account of courtly love is generalized from a variety of sources, listed in the Bibliography under Courtly Love.

results from this conflict.

Instead of the diverse lyric forms of the troubadours, Petrarch used the newly invented sonnet (varied by the canzone and a few other forms) and established it for his age as the appropriate vehicle for the courtly theme. The conflict of passion with idealization which forms the substance of the Canzoniere is expressed repeatedly by means of powerful antitheses in the imagery. Petrarch terms Laura "dolce mia guerrera," his sweet warrior (XXI: 1), and of his anguish he writes (LV: 11-17):

What fire would not be stilled and forced to die
By the water that from my sad eyes falls?
Love--I noticed too late that he is sly--
Wants me to waste between two extreme poles;
And he deceives me with such warring goals,
That the more I dare hope my heart has won,
The more that fair face blinds me like a sun.

Petrarch's sense of the powerful suggestiveness which results from opposing two diverse concepts in antithesis is seen in another form in his attraction to the conceit. A conceit, says Morris Bishop charmingly³,

. . . is like a modern mobile, fantastic, elaborate,
delicately balanced to swing with a gust of air.
It is a fancy, or a comparison, or a coherent
rounded thought, carried to its extreme development.

Petrarch's poetic sensibility, whether working with an antithesis or with conceited imagery is attracted to extreme forms of expression. Often the antithesis itself

³Morris Bishop, Petrarch and his World (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 303.

is expressed in a conceit, as in the closing lines of one sonnet which provided much material for his later imitators (CXXXII):

If not love, then what is it that I feel?
 If it is love, good God, what kind of thing?
 If good, why does the effect smite and sting,
 If bad, why does the torment sweetly steal?

If I burn at my will, why do I cry?
 If in spite of myself, what is the use?
 O living death, o delightful abuse,
 How can you conquer me if I deny?

And if I yield, my heart must quietly break,
 Among such warring winds in a frail boat
 Without a helm on the high seas I float,
 So light in wisdom, so full of mistake,
 That what I want I myself cannot learn,
 And freeze in summer and in winter burn.

This sonnet expresses the extremes of feeling to which the poet's love gives rise, and demonstrates the expression of those extremes in the extravagant conceit of burning and freezing. It is also an example of a Petrarchan formulation which his imitators adopted freely; it is a galley-sonnet, in which the poet compares himself to a rudderless boat tossing on the sea. Wyatt's poem "My galy charged with forgetfulness"⁴ is a translation of another of Petrarch's sonnets based on the same idea, and Shakespeare's sonnet 116, "Let me not to the marriage of true minds" embodies in one quatrain an inversion of the theme.

⁴Kenneth Muir (ed.), Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1949), No. 28, p. 22.

The galley sonnet is only one example of a Petrarchan device which his imitators seized on and repeated. The imagery and thematic material of Petrarch's sonnets were adopted first by multifarious imitators in his own tongue, between 1350 and 1600, then in France in the 1550s, in England between 1580 and 1610, and last of all in seventeenth-century Germany. H.K. Hasselkuss published in 1927 an extensive exploration of the themes of the Renaissance sonnet cycles⁵ which included a table of the Petrarchan ideas--one can only call them formulas--which appear in Petrarch's imitators. (So remote from their source did the conventions become that among those Hasselkuss discusses there are some which do not even appear in Petrarch.) They include: virtue and beauty are two opposites; the virtue of the beloved drives the poet to God; the beauty of the beloved misleads him; the beloved is lovely as the sun; she is beyond compare; she is holy, an angel, a goddess; her hair is gold, it is a snare; her eyes are like stars or like the sun; the fire of love sets the poet's heart ablaze; the loyalty of the lover is unfeigned; the poet calls his beloved unfriendly, cold as ice, proud, cruel; she is his enemy; the poet freezes and

⁵H.K. Hasselkuss, Der Petrarchismus in der Sprache der englischen Sonnettdichter der Renaissance (Inaugural-Dissertation, Münster: Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, 1927), pp. 229-249.

burns; he is in bondage; he is a slave, the prisoner of the beloved; he pleads for mercy; the beloved's beauty is passing, she lives in the poet's imperishable verses; his sleep is disturbed; the poet's life is a living death; the poet enjoys his torments.

This extraordinary catalogue, covering sixty-one formulas and twenty-nine poets (twenty-three of ~~which~~ ^{whom} are English, since it is these poets ~~which~~ Hasselkuss was studying) is not even complete, since it ignores the concept of the poet tossed like a rudderless ship discussed above, and also the role of Cupid, Eros, or Amor, who plays such a large part in these sequences. It does demonstrate, however, the fervour with which Petrarch's followers adopted and conventionalized his ideas.

It has been noted already how much Petrarch's concept of love owed to the courtly love of the troubadours. M.B. Ogle, in "The Classical Origin and Tradition of Literary Conceits,"⁶ and following in his footsteps L.C. John in The Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences, has traced the origins of a number of the formulas of the sort listed by Hasselkuss back to sources which predate the troubadours by many centuries.

⁶M.B. Ogle, "The Classical Origin and Tradition of Literary Conceits," American Journal of Philosophy, XXXIV (1913), pp. 125-53.

In particular, John remarks on the influence of the Ovidian personification of love as "a malicious vindictive tyrant"⁷ on the love conceptions of the Provençal poets and on the romances of Chrétien de Troyes. The figure of Lancelot in the Roman de la Charette, unquestioningly obedient to his lady, epitomizes the thralldom of the lover inherent in the courtly ideal of love service. It is a conception expressed as well by Andreas Capellanus, whose Art of Courtly Love systematizes the rules of the game of love: In one of the dialogues in Andreas's book, a man of the middle class speaks to a woman of the nobility of the way Love obligates all to serve in his army:⁸

. . . many dâys ago I was smitten with the arrow of your love . . . The sight of your face so terrifies my spirit and disturbs my mind that I completely forget even those things I have carefully thought out in my mind . . . I was overcome by the strength of it, by its mighty power it forced me to ask for great things and for a cure to my ever-present pain.

A love which involves such total slavery must presumably place a very high value on the object of that love. Ovid's Art of Love of course does not do so; though Ovid regards love as a tyranny, his work is really a practical handbook of strategy for the young Roman who is luxuriating in that

⁸ Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love, trans. John Jay Parry (Records of Civilization, Sources and Studies, XXIII, New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 45.

tyranny, no matter what its object.⁹ The poets of courtly love who adopted the Ovidian idea that love is a form of thralldom were operating under the influence of the Platonic philosophy that so greatly affected the thinking of their age. This philosophy turned their minds inescapably towards a higher valuation of the object of love than that of Ovid. The influence of Platonist thought in fact led the poets towards the idealization of the whole process of love and the object of this process, the lady. Denomy, however, states an important initial qualification: though courtly love is platonic in form, it is not platonic in substance, for it is directed towards the consummation of love, even if that consummation must be frustrated.¹⁰

The influence of Plato takes very different forms at different times during the period 1000 - 1600. John M. Rist utters, in another context, an important warning against those who seek to treat the works of Plato as a series of tracts:¹¹

⁹E.K. Rand, Ovid and his Influence (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1925), p. 11, p. 34.

¹⁰A.J. Denomy, "An Inquiry into the Origins of Courtly Love," Mediaeval Studies, VI (1944), p. 180.

¹¹John M. Rist, Eros and Psyche (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), p. 3.

Plato's system of thought could not easily be reduced to a system or taught systematically. It contained within itself . . . philosophically fruitful divergences of opinion on the highest topics. . . . The unity of his thought consists only in certain general beliefs, such as that there are supra-sensible realities, and that some aspect of the human soul is immortal.

Thus the critic will not find the same sort of Platonism underlying courtly love as he finds behind the love-concepts of the Renaissance neoplatonists. Some careful distinctions will be made between the two as this discussion proceeds.

The Platonism of the period of the troubadours is the Platonism of St. Augustine, (354-430), the dominating figure in the philosophy of the Church up to the time of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225?-1274). St. Augustine's thought emphasizes that facet of Plato expressed in the Timaeus and summarized by A.E. Taylor as follows:¹²

Timaeus . . . lays down the general principle that our intelligence is the divine thing in us, and the real 'guardian spirit' . . . of each of us. It has truly been said that man, whose divine part resides in the head, is like a tree with its root not in the earth, but in the sky . . . The rule of healthy living for the soul is that this divine thing in us should 'think thoughts immortal and divine', and that the merely human 'parts' of the soul should 'worship' and 'tend' it.

St. Augustine understands this conception of the soul in the terms of the theory of the Form of the Good advanced in the

¹²A.E. Taylor, Plato, the Man and his Work (New York: Meridian Books, 1956 [first published 1926]), p. 460.

Republic, a concept which he knew through the Enneads of Plotinus.¹³ This theory is most familiar to students of poetry from Book Ten of the Republic, where Plato disparages poetry as a craft which offers up a mere imitation of ideal form. Plato's idea is that a Form of the Good exists which transcends and is wholly other than the material predicates through which we discover it. Thus, though the aim of Plato is to posit a universe in which everything mirrors the ideal, it is possible to interpret the theory in a dualistic way, by accepting on one hand that there is an ideal, unknowable Form of the Good, and on the other that the material evidences of this form are so remote from their model that they are merely gross, and must be rejected by a soul which seeks to know the ideal. There is evidence of this dualism in Plato himself. In the Republic,¹⁴ he states that to see the soul as she really is, not as we now behold her, marred by communion with the body and other miseries, you must contemplate her with the eye of reason, in her original purity; and then her beauty will be revealed . . .

The effect of this theory in Christian thought, coupled with the hierarchical conception of the soul found in the Timaeus, was to degrade the role of the body and the lesser

¹³Bruno Switalski, Plotinus and the Ethics of St. Augustine (Vol. I of Neoplatonism and the Ethics of St. Augustine. [Incomplete.] Polish Institute Series, No. 8, New York: Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1946), p. 69.

¹⁴The Dialogues of Plato, trans. B. Jowett (New York: Random House, 1937 [first published 1892]), Vol. I, p. 869.

functions of the soul, and to emphasize the search of the divine intelligence residing in the soul for union with the Good, which the Christian interprets as God. Though Christian thought begins with the concept of the Word made Flesh, its tendency during the first millenium was to disparage the flesh and seek its renunciation. St. Augustine was not a dualist of course; this was why he abandoned Manicheanism before his conversion to Christianity. Following the lead of Plotinus, he saw evil not as a force opposing good, but as a perversion of good itself. Thus he interprets the evil that man does as the result of an excess of will. This excess turns man from the ordered operations of the reason to the less well-ordered operations of the flesh, in which will is rooted.¹⁵ The lures of the flesh must be constantly resisted as the soul seeks God.

It was within this philosophic framework that the conception of courtly love was first formulated. This conception employs the basic Platonic elements as they were known through Augustinian thought: the central, all-comprehending good, and the individual which strives in anguish to unite itself with that good. The process of love was thus idealized by placing the lady at the centre of the striving of the poet's

¹⁵Switalski, op. cit., p. 72.

soul. But this idealization was immensely complicated by the fact that the poet's love for the lady was of course a thing of the flesh, and therefore, in the same context of Augustinian Platonism, reprehensible. In the courtly idealization of love, as Denomy notes,¹⁶ there is an important element of unfulfilled desire. This lack of fulfilment is an expression of the lover's recognition that physical desire is forbidden. But in his striving for a goal which must therefore remain unattainable, the lover sees himself progressing in virtue by the very act of striving. Thus in the same complex vision, he recognizes the endless movement of the soul towards its ideal object, and the source of that movement in a desire on which he is forbidden to act. This vision results in a ceaseless conflict between love conceived as base desire and love conceived as an ennobling process. The ultimate statement of this conflict between the fleshly and the spiritual is to be found in the dialogues between St. Augustine and Petrarch which form Petrarch's Secretum.

Strong social, economic, and religious forces were at work to enhance the development of courtly love ideas in the world of the troubadours¹⁷ (not the least of which was the

¹⁶Denomy, op. cit., p. 176, p. 184.

¹⁷Herbert Moller, "The Social Causation of the Courtly Love Complex," Comparative Studies in Society and History, I, No. 2, (January, 1959), pp. 137-163.

cult of the Blessed Virgin fostered by St. Bernard of Clairvaux). The poets of thirteenth and fourteenth-century Italy were deeply affected by the powerfully suggestive literary idea which these forces brought to birth. It was the theme of fleshly desire for the forbidden love of a highly valued woman, and in Petrarch it is the most essential factor in a fully mature and deeply influential poetic manner.

The Canzoniere are full of the conflict of physical and spiritual ardour and the guilt engendered by that conflict. In the third of the imaginary dialogues with St. Augustine which form his Secretum, Petrarch acknowledges that love has two forms; it can be either "the vilest passion or the noblest action of the soul."¹⁸ His spirited defence of the probity of his love for Laura is eventually recognized by St. Augustine even as the latter breaches that defence. "It was she," says Petrarch, "who turned my youthful soul away from all that was base, who drew me as it were by a grappling chain, and forced me to look upwards."¹⁹ On the contrary, replies St. Augustine, "She has detached your mind from the love of heavenly things

¹⁸Francesco Petrarch, Petrarch's Secret, or the Soul's Conflict with Passion, trans. W.H. Draper (London: Chatto and Windus, 1911), p. 110.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 121.

and has inclined your heart to love the creature more than the Creator: and that one path alone leads, sooner than any other to death."²⁰ When Petrarch counters that Laura has led him to love of God, St. Augustine firmly replies that this is an inversion of the right order of things: we should love God's creatures because we love God. It is an acceptance of this truth which lies behind the renunciation of love in the penultimate poem of the Canzoniere, already quoted.

The nature of the defence of his motives which Petrarch forces on himself in the Secretum, the devastatingly honest presentation of each viewpoint, suggests a radically self-critical strain in the poet which can only express itself in the fullest presentation of opposites. Summing up the contribution of a recent Italian book on the Canzoniere, a reviewer writes,²¹

Within the framework of the Christian conscience acutely aware of the problem of salvation but struggling with the values of the earthly life by which it is at times irresistibly attracted, the individual experience of the poet acquires a broader, even a universal significance. It is in the light of this dominant motif of the Canzoniere . . . that the deeper meaning and full poetic justification of certain of Petrarch's well known stylistic devices such as the use of antithesis are vindicated. In

²⁰Ibid., p. 124.

²¹Nicholas Perella, reviewing Nicolae Iliescu, Il Canzoniere Petrarcesco e Sant' Agostino. Renaissance News, XVII, No. 3 (Autumn, 1964), p. 215.

Petrarch, more so than in his predecessors in poetry, the antitheses function to reveal the divided soul and the instability of man's sentiments, while bringing into sharp focus the meeting or conflict between the positive and negative elements that make up all human engagement. . . . The particular usage (and its insistence) of this stylistic feature derives not so much from the lyric preceding Petrarch (Provençal or Italian) as from the Confessions.

The paradoxical conception of love fundamental to Petrarch thus arises out of the sensitivity to opposites and to extremes manifested both by Petrarch's attraction to the conceit, and his full assertion of Augustinian values. For the flesh is very much present in St. Augustine, as is shown by the fact that it must be denied so persistently and firmly. Petrarch sees the universe under the aspect of this antithesis between the sensual and the ideal, and he expresses his vision in the verbal antitheses of his poetry. This unique formulation, blending the fleshly and the heavenly in one paradoxical statement, is the Petrarchan "dissidio," "the internal psychological conflict between the poet's human nature and his divine vision."²² In assessing the nature of a poet's response to Petrarchism, an understanding of this divided vision of the human and the divine is essential. The vitality of Petrarchism, dominating European love poetry

²²Jerrold E. Siegel, "Ideals of Eloquence and Silence in Petrarch," Journal of the History of Ideas, XXVI, No. 2 (April-June 1965), p. 169.

for two hundred and fifty years, lies in the suggestiveness of the dissidio, with the intense exploration it made possible of the full range of experience from the sensual to the philosophical. It is this immense potential which draws to Petrarch poets as diverse as Serafino and Desportes, Wyatt and Spenser. Wyatt's imaginative world is torn by considerations very different from Petrarch's. Spenser uses Petrarch as the starting point for a journey through the heaven of Platonic idealization to the comfortable Protestant one of Calvin. But a study of each poet has to begin with Petrarch. Similarly, in analyzing the place of Astrophel and Stella in the Petrarchan tradition, the critic must be constantly aware of the dual vision of the dissidio, and responsive to the ways in which Sidney adopts or transforms it.

Petrarch sets out the opposing aspects of the dissidio in a multitude of ways in the Canzoniere; as has been suggested, even his imagery employs extreme and often conflicting elements to achieve its effect. Some commentary on the way in which these opposites are expressed in the themes of his poetry is necessary for an understanding of the way in which his followers, and Sidney in particular, utilized his poetic approach. It has seemed advisable to trace in Petrarch those elements that, as will be seen, pertain most closely

to a study of Astrophel and Stella: the world, the lady, and the poet. The following observations, therefore, are intended as a gloss on the themes of Astrophel and Stella, and not as a definitive summary of the themes of the Canzoniere.

The setting of the Canzoniere is first of all, the inimical society from which the lover is set apart. As an individual driven by guilty desire, he sees himself isolated by his problems from those around him who accept the common values which tell him his love is wrong. Petrarch writes (I: 9-11):

But I have seen enough that in this land
To the whole people like a tale I seem,
So that I feel ashamed of my own name.

But another aspect of the world of poems is that of the physical world of nature, a nature which relates itself intimately to the lover's feelings (CCCI: 1-4, 9-11):

Vale that are filled with my lamenting words,
River that swell with all the teares I pour,
Beasts of the woods, fishes, and pretty birds
That are contained between either green shore

.

I recognize in you the usual traces,
But not in me, who from that happy soil
Have been set in a dwelling of despair.

Not all of the poets who imitate Petrarch respond to his feeling for the world of nature and his use of natural detail to express states of feeling. But they sense the essence of Petrarch's treatment of the lover's surroundings--

whether human or natural--as a foil for the lover's painful moral isolation.

The cause of the lover's fleshly torment is the lady, even though (or because) her virtue is unimpeachable. In one sense, she is the possible occasion of sin, yet in another she appeals to sentiments which the poet refuses to stigmatize, and this is why Petrarch leaps so quickly to Laura's defence in the Secretum, maintaining she has brought out only the best in him. The poet must therefore rationalize the dual function of the lady in his scheme of things, to decide what relation the physical desire she occasions bears to the best in him. Within the expansive scope of his 366 poems, written over four decades, Petrarch can conceive of Laura in many ways, as angry girl, virtuous matron, and celestial revelation. She appears in many guises, says Morris Bishop, and the guises tend to change with the poet's mood.²³ But even in the sonnets in morte, where desire for the fleshly Laura has largely given way to praise of her in her special place in heaven, Petrarch does not treat his love for her as a way of reaching the divine, as Dante treats his love for Beatrice. Petrarch, at the end of his Canzoniere, must renounce love; for him the flesh does not begin a journey which

²³Bishop, op. cit., p. 157.



ends in God.²⁴

Within the personality of the lover, the conflicting terms of the dissidio are most effectively polarized. For the lover is divided by the force of his feeling and the knowledge that to consummate it is forbidden. It is here, in the landscape of the lover's inner world, that the battle of reason and passion is really enacted. Thus, the Petrarchan sonnet sequence turns inward with a vengeance. The lady is a distant figure; it is the poet-lover's torment which colours every song and sonnet. In this context, the error of treating the Canzoniere (in fact any such sonnet sequence) as a literal statement of an attempted seduction is amusingly pointed out by Morris Bishop:²⁵

To compass a woman's downfall one must capture her heart.
 . . . Pity is no good. Ask for pity, and that is all
 you'll get. One must actually--even though temporarily--
 love her. . . . One must forever breathe, with conviction,
 You, You, You, not Me, Me, Me.

²⁴In Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1935) Nesca A. Robb discusses Petrarch's Platonism at length (cf. pp. 17-30, pp. 178-79). She deals very little with the Canzoniere but suggests that these poems form part of a tradition of neoplatonism stretching from the middle ages to the Renaissance. In "Platonism in Petrarch's Canzoniere," Modern Philology, XXVII, No. 2 (November, 1929), pp. 161-174, Robert V. Merrill examines the poems with very great care, and concludes that the evidence of Platonism in them is almost nonexistent.

²⁵Bishop, op. cit., p. 83.

But Petrarch was fascinated only by himself. Most of his love-poems are not so much celebrations of his beloved's merits as they are analyses of his own feelings in certain situations, usually the sequel of a rebuff. Even his three canzoni on his lady's eyes barely mention her eyes; they deal almost entirely with his own sufferings. We prize them as masterpieces of self-analysis; but self-analysis is not a means of amorous conquest.

The poetic results which Petrarch's Canzoniere presented to his imitators, then, may be summarized in the following way: his poems reflect a conception of love which recognizes both love of woman and love of God, but can relate them only in a paradox. Laura is a paragon of virtue for Petrarch, she brings out all that is best in him and he feels she has a special place in heaven after her death. But his love for her cannot be integrated into the scheme of things which he recognizes as the right one, because it is based in fleshly desire, and therefore he ends his Canzoniere in renunciation. His sense of the paradoxical pull of the conflicting elements of desire and idealism finds its expression in repeated antitheses which contrast the extremes dominating his universe. These extremes are also part of his poetic technique; he is drawn to the unusual contrast and the startling comparison. This unique conception of love, and the antithetical technique which expresses it were adopted as a model by a host of imitators who were not always sensitive to all aspects of Petrarch's practice. In this way was developed the concept of Petrarchan poetry which dominated the

European love lyric until the early seventeenth century.

This model did not lack modifications by the time the English sonneteers came to adopt it. These modifications were the result of a new interest in certain Platonic dialogues, chiefly the Symposium, which had not affected the thought of the early Church. Even by Petrarch's time, the formal philosophical influence of Augustinian Platonism was waning in the face of the Church's new official theology, Thomism. But ultimately the Renaissance pre-occupation with Greek literature and ideals--that transference of Plato from a philosophical to a literary influence remarked on by Spingarn²⁶--led to a revival of interest in Plato; not the philosopher of the Timaeus, but of the Symposium.

The new Platonism of the Florentine cleric Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), central to Bembo's long discourse in the fourth book of Castiglione's The Courtier, was not that of St. Augustine, with its contempt for the flesh. It was instead that of the Plato of the Symposium, where love is conceived as both an educative process and as a condition of the harmony of the universe. Socrates demonstrates in the Phaedrus that love can begin on the sensual level if it is between two spiritually beautiful souls. The soul then uses

²⁶ Joel E. Spingarn, A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance (New York: Harbinger Books, 1963 [first published, 1899]), p. 98.

the physical as a springboard in its flight towards God, or the One. In the Symposium, Socrates recounts how he asked the prophetess Diotima, what is Love? She answered,²⁷

He is a great spirit . . . and like all great spirits he is intermediate between the divine and the immortal . . . He interprets . . . between gods and men . . . he is the mediator who spans the chasm which divides them, and therefore in him is all bound together . . . For God mingles not with man; but through Love all the intercourse and converse of god with man, whether awake or asleep, is carried on.

But this idea of a love which links god and man is not based, either for Plato or for the Renaissance neo-platonists, in sheer sensuality. In Ficino's Commentary on the Symposium (completed c. 1474, pub. 1544), a careful distinction is made between human love and divine love. Summarizing his views on the distinction, Nesca Robb writes:²⁸

If love, therefore, is the desire for beauty, and beauty is only perceived by the mind and the senses of sight and hearing, it must follow that love will be content with such perception and that the other senses can have no part in it. Sensual appetites are not love, but a madness that drags the mind toward deformity . . . the true lover . . . will scorn to profane the name of love by applying to it the disorders of passion.

Later in the Commentary, however, Ficino states that love is of two kinds, corresponding to the terrestrial and celestial Venuses. "The one is drawn by Innate love to contemplate the Supreme Beauty; the other, by a kindred impulse, is moved

²⁷The Dialogues of Plato, trans. Jowett, I, p. 328

²⁸Robb, op. cit., p. 77.

to create a likeness of that beauty in material form." Thus,²⁹

The mind reverences and loves beauty as an image of the divine and at the same time the soul, dwelling in matter, desires to create a form resembling the beautiful object. Here Ficino makes a characteristic observation by insisting that both loves are honest and have the divine image for their object; it is only when 'Venere volgare' usurps the place of her sister that evil ensues. Elsewhere he emphasizes the division, and even the enmity between the body and soul, human and divine love, but here he makes the two loves two moments of one activity.

The way in which the love treatises of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries expanded on Ficino's conception of the related roles of the two kinds of love may be gauged from the speech of the impassioned and transfixed Bembo in the last pages of The Courtier. Bembo begins his discourse by noting that the lover first recognizes his beloved through the agency of sight, and that it is her beauty, which is a shadow of the Divine Beauty, which causes him to love her. If he is to shun the filthiness of common love and enter into the holy way of love, guided by reason, he must cast aside the blind judgement of his other senses and enjoy her with his eyes alone. If he does so he will begin to recognize in the particular beauty of one woman, the universal beauty behind it, and his love will prove the first step on a stair which will lead him from the human to the divine. One step will lead to another, and soon his soul will be able to turn

²⁹Ibid., pp. 79-80.

inward to discern a spark of the divine beauty in itself:³⁰

And therefore burning in this most happie flame, she [the soull] ariseth to the noblest part of her which is the understanding, and there no more shadowed with the darke night of earthly matters, seeth the heavenly beautie: but yet doth she not for all that enjoy it altogether perfectly, because she beholdeth it onely in her particular understanding, which cannot conceive the passing great universall Beautie.

Whereupon . . . love giveth unto the soule a greater happinesse . . . through particular understanding hee guideth her to the universall understanding.

Thus the soul kindled in the most holy fire of true heavenly love, fleeth to couple her selfe with the nature of Angels, and not onely cleane forsaketh sense, but hath no more neede of the discourse of reason, for being chaunged into an Angell, she understandeth all things that may be understood: and without any veil or cloud, she seeth the maine sea of the pure heavenly beautie and receiveth it into her, and enjoyeth the soveraigne happiness, that can not be comprehended of the senses.

Thus it is, says Bembo, that we can see in the corruptible body of a beloved woman a beauty which ignites the incomparable happiness of a vision of the pure heavenly beauty. Two points important for an understanding of Astrophel and Stella must be noticed here. The first is that like Ficino, Bembo bases his discourse on a distinction between love rightly conceived, which moves from beauty perceived in the flesh towards the divine beauty, and love wrongly conceived, which is base physical desire for its own sake. The second is that the

³⁰Baldassare Castiglione, The Courtier, trans. Sir Thomas Hoby, in Three Renaissance Classics, ed. Burton A. Milligan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), pp. 611-12.

movement up the stair which Bembo describes is a way of expressing the education of the soul. The process he elaborates is a metaphysical one, but underlying it is a hierarchy of values, in which each step up the stair marks an advance in the operations of reason, until reason itself is left behind in the final vision.

Thus, where Petrarch had to renounce the flesh in order to attain his salvation, the love theorists of the following century were able to give that flesh a limited role as the initiator of the soul's search for union with God. St. Augustine told Petrarch that the death of the soul would result if he tried to love God through God's creature, Laura. But in Ficino and Castiglione, the love of God's creature is linked to the love of God in a new unification of the human and the divine.

This development had important consequences for the Tudor Petrarchists, as for their colleagues in France and Italy. The Petrarchan convention was based in the dissidio that arises out of Petrarch's Augustinian Platonism, and had produced a wealth of literary models rooted in that dissidio. Now the poets of love met with a renovated Platonism which emphasized not the baseness of the flesh, but its proper role as the first point of departure in a journey towards God. Had the influence of Dante been central to the sixteenth-century sonneteers, this development might not have occurred,

since Dante provides through the agency of Beatrice a complete ladder from man to God, by means of a love which is conceived in Christian terms as caritas.³¹ But the difficulty which Petrarch finds in relating his personal experience of love to love of God is not solved for his followers until Ficino's Commentary on the Symposium. The nature of the response to this intricate interrelationship is a touchstone in defining the character of Petrarchism in the sixteenth-century sonneteers, and in assessing the nature of their individual treatments of the concept of love.

An analysis of the elements of Petrarchism and neo-platonism forms a necessary prelude to the study of Astrophel and Stella. But before turning to this study, it is important also to trace the effect which these elements had on the poetry of Sidney's own century. It is necessary also to examine some aspects of Sidney's intellectual background, to prepare the reader for the way in which his work utilizes the conceptions of love with which he was familiar. The following chapter therefore briefly discusses some of the sixteenth-century influences that affected Astrophel and Stella.

³¹Sears Jayne, "Ficino and the Platonism of the English Renaissance," Comparative Literature, IV, No. 3 (Summer, 1952), p. 226.

CHAPTER III

BACKGROUND FOR A STUDY OF ASTROPHEL AND STELLA

But truely of many such writings, as come under the banner of unresistable love, if I were a Mistres, would never perswade mee they were in love: so coldely they apply fiery speches, as men that had rather red Lovers writings, and so caught up certaine swelling phrases . . .

These often-quoted remarks about Petrarchan poetry which Sidney made in his Apologie for Poetrie (1580-86?)¹ embody a mature criticism of a verse manner which was vastly more important for Sidney than it was for say Wyatt, who is said to have introduced Petrarch to English love poetry when he translated some of the Italian's sonnets and canzoni in the second quarter of the sixteenth century.

Wyatt imported to England the mannered Petrarchism of the period of Serafino (1466-1500), and imported it into a literary milieu which, one assumes, he intended to prepare for new ways of writing poetry. Wyatt's audience knew its Petrarch through Chaucer; the direct influence of the Canzoniere in the original Italian had not, either in England or in France, been great until the sixteenth century.² In France, however, this influence, once established by the

¹Sir Philip Sidney, Apologie for Poetrie, p. 228.

²Mario Praz, The Flaming Heart (New York, Doubleday Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1958), p. 6.

Lyons group and the Pléiade, was continuous through the middle of the century. Rollins, however, in the introduction to his edition of Tottel's Miscellany, notes that the uncertain authors of Tottel "show comparatively little knowledge of the Italian poets who had dominated Wyatt and Surrey," and that classical and humanistic influences predominate over them and account for their "frequent references to classic mythology as well as for their translations or paraphrases from Ovid, Lucretius, Seneca, and Horace."³

As is well known, the influence of strictly Petrarchan love-poetry in England is very small between the publication of Tottel in 1557 and that of Watson's Hekatompathia, or Passionate Centurie of Love, in 1582, during the very period in which it is strongest in France. Hallett Smith notes that Watson's annotator "seems wholly unaware of the priority of Wyatt and Surrey in introducing Petrarchan motifs into English. In fact, when he thinks of an earlier translator and compares Watson's version with his, it is not a sixteenth-century poet which comes to his mind, but Chaucer . . ."⁴ As a result, Sidney's strictures on conventional poetry, written between 1580 and his death in 1586, may embody some censure of Watson, but more certainly are coloured by an attitude to the poetry

³Tottel's Miscellany (1557-1587), ed. Hyder E. Rollins (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1929), II, p. 80.

⁴Hallett Smith, Elizabethan Poetry, p. 136.

of the *Pléiade* (and perhaps that of the post-Bembist Italian poets) which was being read by his circle.

In addition, Sidney's own travels in Italy and his familiarity with the language put at his disposal the entire corpus of Italian love poetry, not only that of Petrarch, but also that of his most sterile imitators as well. He is, for example, says Buxton, the first Englishman to mention Dante's Beatrice.⁵ Also, Sidney's extensive correspondence with continental figures formed one of the chief channels through which continental influences, literary and philosophical, passed over to England.

The Petrarchan materials with which Sidney's large literary acquaintance made him familiar had undergone important transmutations since their abortive introduction into England at the time of Wyatt. In Italy, the mannered Petrarchism of Cariteo and Serafino, the final dissolution of a great manner into formula and artifice, had been rejuvenated under the guidance of Pietro Bembo (1470-1547). Bembo was an influential Italian ecclesiastic and poet, and he appears as one of the characters in Castiglione's The Courtier. Bembo, says J.B. Fletcher,⁶

⁵John Buxton, Sir Philip Sidney and the English Renaissance (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1954), p. 73.

⁶Jefferson Butler Fletcher, Literature of the Italian Renaissance (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 222.

recalled the Italian lyric to sanity,--from this conceited travesty of Petrarch back nearer to the real Petrarch, though more to the elegant stylist than to the deeply moving poet that Petrarch is at his best.

Bembist poetry, which for unknown reasons did not influence Wyatt, is⁷

strongly tinged with the Platonic theories expounded in such works as the dialogues of Leone Ebreo and Bembo himself, and the treatises on love with which the Cinquecento abounded.

Like his French contemporary Maurice Scève, Wyatt was deeply influenced by Serafino. By the time Sidney and the English sonneteers had begun to write Petrarchan poetry, the reforming influence of Bembo had given way to another wave of highly conceited poetry, which was to culminate in the work of Marino at the end of the sixteenth century. Bembism had its effect on the poetry of Ronsard and Du Bellay, but the succeeding influence of the new conceited style was felt quickly as well. Sears Jayne remarks on the fact that the French poets by and large adopted neoplatonism "merely as a means of varying the standard Petrarchan poem of physical passion; there is little attempt to poetize the Ficinian theory, or to deal with truly idealized love at all in its own terms. Platonic love is treated mainly as a pleasant variation and a source of casual detail within the framework

⁷Praz, *op. cit.*, p. 270. The account of sixteenth-century Italian poetry in this study relies heavily on the work of Praz.

of Petrarchism."⁸

The English writers reading the work of the Pléiade was therefore faced with a poetry reflecting swiftly succeeding waves of influence. Praz holds that in England, the Bembist reaction was felt very indirectly, and that "the English sonneteers were in the first instance always imitating flamboyant models."⁹ But Sears Jayne maintains that only such sonneteers as Lodge, Watson, Linche, and Barnes took this decadent version of Petrarchism as their model; Sidney and Spenser by contrast were able to go directly to the Italian commentaries on Plato as well as to the trattati d'amore. He feels, therefore, that their poetry reflects a much more ideal conception of love. Clearly Praz's statement requires some modification, when it is kept in mind that of the work of the English sonneteers, the important sequences of Sidney and Spenser are deeply marked by neoplatonic influences, and that in these poets certainly a highly conceited style does not indicate an indifference to new ways of conceiving love.

What is apparent is that the rationale which the neoplatonic ladder or "stayre," as Castiglione calls it, affords for a resolution of the conflicting elements of the

⁸Sears Jayne, "Ficino and the Platonism of the English Renaissance," p. 233.

⁹Praz, op. cit., p. 271

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

¹²Nesca 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.

. . . as vertue is the most excellent resting place for all worldlie learning to make his end of: so Poetrie, beeing the most familiar to teach it, and most princelie to move towards it, in the most excellent work, is the most excellent workman.

And again:¹⁵

For if . . . Speech next to Reason, bee the greatest gyft, bestowed upon mortalitie: that can not be praiselesse, which dooth most pollish that blessing of speech
 . . .

Memory, says Sidney, is the only treasurer of knowledge, and those words which are most fit for memory are likewise most convenient for knowledge. For this reason, verse is far superior to prose for the knitting up of knowledge. The poet, however, affirms nothing, and therefore never lies. Sidney in effect postulates a world of art which, through the special transforming agency of the imagination, moves the reader by knowledge to virtue.

Sidney's insistence that knowledge leads to virtue is deeply humanistic. His defence of poetry, says Hugh Maclean, is "built around central attention to the three criteria identified by Bernard Weinberg as characteristic of the literary criticism of the Italian Renaissance: morality, truth, and unity."¹⁶ It is a critical expression of the humanist's stress on the harmonious, rigorously moral life advocated

¹⁵Ibid., p. 214.

¹⁶Hugh N. Maclean, "Greville's 'Poetic'," Studies in Philology, LXI, No. 2, Pt. 1 (April, 1964), p. 178.

by the school of More and Vives. The generation of humanists among whom Wyatt developed distrusted the works of the imagination,¹⁷ but those of Sidney's day were developing a more flexible attitude towards the role of art in the good life. Sidney's humanism, says K.O. Myrick, is Castiglione's, not Ascham's.¹⁸ "Ascham's obligations to the Italian humanists," writes Spingarn, "did not prevent his stern and unyielding antagonism to the romantic Italian spirit as it influenced the imaginative literature of his time."¹⁹ But Myrick detects in Sidney the sprezzatura of Castiglione, the graceful manner which disarmingly conceals the earnest motives of the Christian humanist.

In both Sidney and Watson can be found an alliance between the humanist's world and that of the Petrarchan poet. It is plain from even the most cursory reading of Astrophel and Stella that the formal demands of the Petrarchan convention

¹⁷Robert P. Adams, "Bold Bawdry and Open Manslaughter: The English New Humanist Attack on Mediaeval Romance," Huntington Library Quarterly, XXIII, No. 1 (November, 1959), pp. 33-48, outlines some of the changing attitudes towards imaginative literature in the generation before Sidney.

¹⁸K.O. Myrick, Sir Philip Sidney as a Literary Craftsman, (Harvard Studies in English, XIV, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), see especially Chapter I, pp. 3-45.

¹⁹Joel E. Spingarn, A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, p. 162.

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 paean 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

writes,³

Aspects of this struggle provide the specific framework for about one-fifth of the sonnets, and these sonnets are disposed throughout the cycle in such a way that they influence most of the others.

In the exposition of this central conflict, the sequence falls into three parts, though Ringler⁴ and Young⁵ disagree about where the parts begin and end. It is possible nonetheless to indicate a rough division based on central themes in each part.

In the early sonnets (those most often criticized for their dry conventionality), Sidney⁶ is occupied with an exploration of the Petrarchan posture in the world in which Astrophel moves. This milieu is composed both of the

³Hallett Smith, Elizabethan Poetry, p. 154.

⁴Ringler, op. cit., p. xlvi-xlix, suggests the following division: Part I: 1-51; Part II: 52-Eighth Song; Part III: Ninth Song-108.

⁵Richard B. Young, English Petrarke: A Study of Sidney's Astrophel and Stella, p. 40, p. 54-5, p. 71, divides the sequence in the following way: Part I: 1-43; Part II: 44-83; Part III: 84-108.

⁶An effort has been made throughout this study to separate the personalities of Sidney the creator of the sequence and Astrophel, its protagonist. It is necessary to do so in order to separate statements made about Sidney's motives and techniques from statements that pertain only to Astrophel and his problems. The confusion that has grown up between the real poet-courtier and the fictional one has a long scholarly history (some of which is examined in Chapter I), so it seems advisable to make the distinction. Richard B. Young characterizes the relationship of Sidney and Astrophel very well in a remark quoted on page 90.

physical world, and of the world of the poet "most alone in greatest companie." (27: 2) Besides the courtier poet and his Stella, its inhabitants include the friend who counsels Astrophel, fellow courtiers and ladies, and the immemorially conventional gilos, the rich "miser" who has Stella in thrall. In sonnet 31, "With how sad steps, ô Moone," there is an effort, at once both literary device and intellectual speculation, to relate the courtly and the heavenly worlds: "Are Beauties there as proud as here they be?" (31: 11). Sidney moves, in the central part of the sequence, to a consideration of the consequences of the love outlined in these early sonnets.

Sidney's analysis in Part II centres in the psychological predicament of the lover caught in a situation in which his lady acknowledges a love which is not the love he has to give (ix: 31-40):

Why alas doth she then sweare,
That she loveth me so dearely,
Seeing me so long to beare
Coles of love that burne so clearely;
And yet leave me helplesse meerey?

Is that love? forsooth I trow,
If I saw my good dog grieved,
And a helpe for him did know,
My love should not be beleaved,
But he were by me releaved.

Though the conflict which results in this quandary takes place within the soul of Astrophel, Sidney throughout the central part of the sequence emphatically restates the

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):

Stella alone with face unarmed marcht,
 Either to do like him, which open shone,
 Or carelesse of the wealth because her owne:
 Yet were the hid and meaner beauties parcht,
 Her daintiest bare went free; the cause was this,
 The Sunne which others burn'd did her but kisse.

Stella, it seems, is exempted by the sun from the toll which it exacts from other mortals. Thus is suggested the strength of the alliance of Stella with the physical world of which, it is made clear in the early sonnets, she is chief treasure. In sonnet 3, Astrophel has seen a contrast between the muses which inspire the poetry of "Pindare's Apes" (3: 3) and the muse which inspires his own (3: 12-14):

How then? even thus: in Stella's face I reed,
 What Love and Beautie be, then all my deed
 But Copying is, what in her Nature writes.

This establishes, of course, the entirely conventional idea that the poet seeks to demonstrate his sincerity by showing his freedom from convention. But it also carefully evaluates the source of Stella's beauty by relating it to what the poet states are his most genuine sentiments. That Stella is the supreme product of this nature is reiterated in sonnet 7, in which Stella's eyes are termed nature's chief work, and in sonnet 9, in which Stella's face, Queen Virtue's court, is said to be "prepar'd by Nature's chiefest furniture" (9: 2). And sonnet 35 both reaffirms the uniqueness of Stella as product of nature and pursues the logic of praise to its ultimate, in asserting (35: 3-4):

Within what bounds can one his liking stay,
Where Nature doth with infinite agree?

These sonnets build a careful picture of the source of Stella's beauty in the works of nature. The alliance of that beauty with the forces of the cosmos alluded to so mysteriously in sonnet 22 is explained in sonnet 26. This poem sets forth the important idea that the force of nature and the world created by the force mingle in a powerful nexus which rules the world of the lover through the agency of the beloved's eyes (26: 12-14):

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.

Yet there is in the first part of the sequence a second movement which suggests that Astrophel conceives another role for nature. Nature appears not as the creator of beauty and love, but as a stern ideal, pitiless towards matters of the heart. Sonnet 5 sets forth the idea that a nature exists in which the works of Cupid contravene the proper order of the universe. A discussion of the role of this sonnet in the debate of reason and passion must be deferred until later. But it is important to make clear at this point that sonnet 5 depicts the effects of love as illusion (5: 1-6):

It is most true, that eyes are form'd to serve
The inward light: and that the heavenly part
Ought to be king, from whose rules do swerve,

Rebels to Nature, strive for their owne smart.

It is most true, what we call Cupid's dart,
An image is, which for ourselves we carve.

As a result, the beauty of Stella prepared by that other nature becomes by implication "but a shade, / Which elements with mortall mixture breed" (5: 10-11).

A similarly critical attitude is at the root of sonnet 17, an Anacreontic charade in which the personifications of Nature, Venus, Mars and Cupid enact a frivolous drama in which Astrophel becomes the hapless victim and Stella unwittingly the culprit. This sonnet insists on the family relationship between Venus, her mother Nature, and her son Cupid. Thus Nature here is allied with the lust of Venus, chafing at Cupid (17: 2-3):

Because that Mars, growne slacker in her love,
With pricking shot he did not thoroughly move.

Sonnet 18 reiterates the pre-occupations of sonnet 5 (amplified in the domestic squabble of sonnet 17), restating the idea that there is another and greater concept of nature to which Astrophel owes a duty (18: 1-6):

With what sharp checks 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.

A dualism is thus established throughout the first part of the sequence between the nature whose chief work is the beauty that precipitates Astrophel's downfall, and that other

nature which is the legitimate object of the works of reason in sonnet 10, and which places before Astrophel ideals of achievement very different from those of love. This dual vision is an important characteristic of Astrophel's thinking as the sequence progresses. It is clear that his mind is in conflict as a result of the effects of love. Sidney himself does not adopt a double view; as will be shown, in sonnet 26 he firmly relates the two natures to each other. But Astrophel, the protagonist of the sequence, is a divided man, and the conflict in his view of nature expresses this division.

In sonnet 22, where the mystery of Stella's alliance with the powers of the universe is set forth, the beloved, seen among the other ladies of the court on horseback, takes her place also in the world of which Astrophel is the product. His relationship with this world is central to the subsequent poems of Part I, and has already been initiated in the colloquy with the admonishing friend in sonnet 14. Just as Stella is a figure of special power in her own world, so Astrophel is in his, although his powers are always represented in negative: the birthright unpaid which he owes to nature (18: 5-6), the best wits which invent their own disgrace (19: 5). "Mad March great promise made of me," he tells his unnamed counselor (21: 9), and when he takes part in a tournament he is commented on by all (41: 5-7, 9-11):

Horsemen my skill in horsemanship advaunce;
 Towne-folks my strength; a daintier judge applies
 His praise to sleight, which from good use doth rise:

.....

Others, because of both sides I do take
 My bloud from them, who did excell in this,
 Thinke Nature me a man of armes did make.

But Astrophel attributes all his skill not to his own ability, but to Stella's glance, in a gesture which epitomizes the devastating effect she has on him and his resultant inability to assert the worth of his own endowments. What those endowments are worth can be judged from the expectations that others have of Astrophel, exemplified in the "Rubarb words" of the friend in sonnet 14. Though the experience of love has distracted Astrophel from the realization of his talents, his values, as they are asserted in the criticisms he makes of himself, are those of a conscientious and superbly endowed man. They are in fact, the values of Castiglione's ideal courtier: the pursuit of learning and the responsible exercise of power. When Astrophel is at his best, he knows that for him, as for Castiglione, the end of life is virtue, and the responsible man seeks that end.

In this part of the sequence, Sidney builds up a sunlit world of ladies and "curious wits" (23: 1), that "greatest companie" (27: 2) amidst which Astrophel is alone and sleepless. It is important to see this world as a background for Astrophel. Sonnet 30 makes clear that it is

not a world of pastoral or romance; it is associated firmly with the responsibilities of politics, the natural pre-occupation of a court. Astrophel is conscious of his duty here also (23: 7-8):

Others, because the Prince my service tries,
Thinke that I thinke state errours to redresse.

Such musings are pre-eminently those of a man deeply concerned with the proper functions of the good courtier. Sidney shows that Astrophel is alert to the surpassing importance of the problems of man as they touch him through court affairs, and that he seeks to solve these problems, by correcting, advising, and generally asserting the good courtier's standard of virtuous action. The claims of virtue press insistently on Astrophel throughout the early part of the sequence (particularly in sonnet 5), and Sidney makes it clear that Astrophel is a man to whom virtue was once important.

Thus, the predicament in which the two lovers find themselves is stated in terms of a conflict between love and virtue, early established in the lines (4: 1-2),

Vertue alas, now let me take some rest,
Thou setst a bate betweene my will and wit.

But when Sidney sets forth the reason why this debate must take place, he brings us most harshly into the "dark world of actual fact."⁷ Sonnet 24, punning viciously on the name

⁷Young, op. cit., p. 22.

of Rich, introduces the figure of the jealous husband, prominent in Provençal love poetry but not frequent in its Petrarchan mutation. An important element in autobiographical interpretations of the cycle, sonnet 24 is even more significant for the questions it raises about the view of love Sidney develops later in the sequence. Why was it important for him to identify Astrophel's nemesis in this sonnet à clef? If he as a person was involved in the drama of which he wrote, it would of course be deeply satisfying for him to do so. Yet he does not have to invoke the gilos, let alone name him. The Petrarchan convention offers him other approaches. And on other occasions he rejects parts of the convention; he does not, for example, use the eternizing conceit which Ronsard fully exploits.

What is of critical importance is that the figure of the rich fool who enjoys "the richest gemme of Love and life" (24: 10) established immediately an insurmountable obstacle to the achievement of Astrophel's desire within any honourable code, and turns the debate of reason and passion away from a pre-occupation with chaste and unchaste love to a concern with honourable and dishonourable love. The reasons which Stella is to give in the Eighth Song for refusing Astrophel will not be based on a rejection of the value of physical love, but rather on an assertion of the greater importance

of honour. Thus, the question posed in Astrophel and Stella is not what value desire itself has, but what the place of that desire is in a larger scale of values. And throughout the sequence, Sidney reminds the reader several times of the egregious husband whose presence requires this question to be answered.

The aspect which Astrophel presents to the world, as has been shown, is that of the courtier, the supremely endowed man of affairs. But to himself and to the reader he appears throughout the sequence as the courtier-poet, "faine in verse my love to show" (1: 1). Through the changing role of Astrophel the poet, developed in what are commonly referred to as the "critical" sonnets, the reader acquires important information about the effect love has on the lover. To the subject of Astrophel as poet-lover this discussion will return at greater length towards the end of this chapter. But before this takes place, a study of the remarkable lady who causes Astrophel's love is necessary.

"Laura," writes J.W. Lever, "is a revelation, Stella is merely a heroine."⁸ This conception of the role of Stella in Sidney's sonnet sequence is very limited, but it does however reflect an important aspect of the way Stella is

⁸J.W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet, p. 60.

presented. In contrast with the shadowy ladies of the Canzoniere and the Amoretti, Stella is an appealing and vivid presence in the sequence. But at every point in the lengthy conflict between reason and passion, Sidney supports Astrophel's deliberations by an emphatic setting-forth of the unique qualities of Stella which makes it clear that she is more than a beautiful and praiseworthy woman. This approach is particularly noteworthy in the pairing of sonnets 71 and 72. These sonnets stress Stella's power as instructress in virtue, and the honourable bearing which she enjoins on Astrophel, at the same time as they affirm the increasing power of his desire (72: 9-14):

Service and Honor, wonder with delight,
 Feare to offend, will worthe to appeare,
 Care shining in mine eyes, faith in my sprite,
 These things are left me by my only Deare;
 But thou, Desire, because thou wouldst have all,
 Now banisht art, but yet alas how shall?

Despite the forceful characterization of Stella's transcendent powers throughout the sequence, her image is outlined almost entirely in terms of the convention. This effect goes far towards undermining the sort of excuse L.C. John makes for the brittle and artificial effect of conventional poetry on the sensibility of the modern reader,⁹ for a careful comparison of the sonnets of a Sidney or a

⁹L.C. John, The Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences, p. 46, see also p. 83.

Spenser with those of a Watson shows that conventional material is only as conventional as the mind of the artist who uses it. The energy, for example, of Sidney's highly conventional sonnets on Cupid forms a remarkable contrast with the flaccidity of Watson's "If Cupid were a child."¹⁰ It is another example of the vitality Sidney was able to infuse into well-worn material.

As has been demonstrated, Sidney dwells at length on the physical beauty of Stella as a manifestation of the work of Nature. Sidney toys with this theme with facility, stating it simply, as in sonnet 3, or in an elaborate conceit, as in sonnet 7, in which the blackness of Stella's eyes Nature has made a "mourning weed, / To honor all their deaths, who for her bleed" (7: 14). Although in sonnet 6 the poet-lover rejects the formulas of convention, the Petrarchan among others, he plays with the terms of Petrarchism in these sonnets as nowhere else: Stella is one who "shrines in flesh so true a Dietie," (4: 13) she is "most faire, most cold," (8: 12) "fortified with wit, stor'd with disdain" (12: 13).

Yet a close analysis of the first part of the sequence will show that Stella is often shielded from certain implications of the convention, for though Sidney sketches in the concept

¹⁰J.W. Hebel, H.H. Hudson, et al., Tudor Poetry and Prose (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1953), p. 147.

of the "cruel fair," he does not weld it into the fabric of the sequence. Astrophel's doubts are about love itself, not about the value of his lady. This accounts for the shock value of sonnet 16 (16: 13-14):

I now have learn'd Love right, and learn'd even so,
As who by being poisond doth poison know.

Heretofore Stella has been insulated from the debate between will and wit, passion and reason. But in this sonnet, she is linked with the disturbing emotions which make Astrophel paint his hell with such a feeling skill (2: 14). Significantly, this sonnet appears at a critical juncture in the debate between reason and passion which is concurrently pre-occupying Astrophel, at a point when the disorder that afflicts his mind is becoming manifest. Astrophel has asserted in sonnet 2 that his love proceeded not from the first sight of Stella but from her known worth (2: 1-3). In sonnet 17, Sidney protects Stella by implying she is just as much a victim of Nature as Astrophel is of Cupid. The careful modulation of sonnet 40 sustains the same idea; though Stella's power has brought Astrophel's mind, none of the basest, to moan (40: 3-4), the whole sonnet is grounded carefully in the image of Stella on "the height of Vertue's throne," (40: 5) and in the appeal of the wretched Astrophel to her unquestioned magnanimity.

A digression is necessary here into matters more

nearly central to Chapter V, in order to establish certain facts about the way Stella's image is developed. In sonnets 8, 17, and 20, Sidney states that Astrophel was the victim of the traditional love-wound caused by the arrow of Cupid. But there is more than a suggestion in sonnet 2 that Sidney has in mind in describing the onset of love Castiglione's "stayre"; not a strict version of the neoplatonic theory, but rather a sense of the effects of love as a process (2: 5-6):

I saw and liked, I liked but loved not,
I loved, but straight did not what Love decreed.

Sidney describes the effects of this process in negative terms, but Astrophel does in fact feel them, and bows to their pressure. His reluctance in responding to the power of love, "At length to Love's decrees, I forc'd, agreed, / Yet with repining at so partiall lot" (2: 7-8), is reiterated in the stern theorizing of sonnet 5 (5: 5-8):

It is most true, what we call Cupid's dart,
An image is, which for our selves we carve;
And, fooles, adore in temple of our hart,
Till that good God make Church and Churchman starve.

As a result of Astrophel's doubts, there is a recurring tension in the early part of the sequence between the beauty of Stella which draws Astrophel to love, and the lover's confessed feeling that the effects of love are a self-created illusion. The basis of the dualism in sonnet 5 between the true beauty of virtue, and the fleshly beauty which is only

its shadow is of course Platonic in origin. But the Platonism of this sonnet is sternly Augustinian; it denounces that fleshly beauty and its works. As a result, the concluding paradox, "True, and yet true that I must Stella love" (5: 14), sets up a serious conflict between Astrophel's recognition of Stella's superlative qualities (already established in the idea that he has really responded to Stella's known worth), and his feeling that his passion itself is unworthy.

The Stella whose face is Queen Virtue's court (9: 1), and whose alliance with cosmic forces is to be set out in sonnets 22 and 26, must therefore be fitted into the stern morality of sonnet 5, if she is to be protected from the doubts which Astrophel is expressing about the value of his passion. Thus, in sonnet 25, Sidney exploits directly and fully the neoplatonic schema, in an effort to justify by theoretical means the relationship between Stella's beauty and her virtue which Astrophel already senses intuitively (25):

The wisest scholler of the wight most wise
 By Phoebus' doome, with sugred sentence sayes,
 That Vertue, if it once met with our eyes,
 Strange flames of Love it in our soules would raise;
 But for that man with paine this truth descries,
 While he each thing in sense's ballance wayes,
 And so nor will, nor can, behold those skies
 Which inward sunne to Heroicke minde displaies,
 Vertue of late, with vertuous care to ster
 Love of her selfe, takes Stella's shape, that she
 To mortall eyes might sweetly shine in her.
 It is most true, for since I her did see,
 Vertue's great beautie in that face I prove,
 And find th'effect, for I do burne in love.

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.

One hand forgott to rule, th'other to fight,
 Nor trumpets' sound I heard, nor friendly cries;
 My Foe came on, and beat the aire for me.

The effect of loving Stella has diminished still further his ability to act and to judge.

In the sonnets lying between these two poems, Sidney returns several times to the subject of Stella's eyes, and they become a symbol of the special power which she has over Astrophel. This theme is particularly stressed in sonnets 42 and 48. In the former, Astrophel begs that Stella continue to look on him (42: 5-8):

O eyes, where humble lookes most glorious prove,
 Only lov'd Tyrants, just in cruelty,
 Do not, ô do not from poore me remove,
 Keepe still my Zenith, ever shine on me.

But the way in which he conceives these eyes working has special significance; they are the prime movers of the universe of beauty, a theological formulation which profoundly colours the statement (42: 2-4)

Whose beames be joyes, whose joyes all vertues be,
 Who while they make Love conquer, conquer Love,
 The schooles where Venus hath learn'd Chastitie.

So majestic is the power with which Stella's eyes rule Astrophel that if he dies from their effects, it will not be the melancholy love-death of the suitor who has perished of frustrated amour, but a triumphal exit.

Sonnet 48 mirrors almost line for line the exposition of sonnet 42. Stella's eyes make virtue strong by the

power of their beauty; they turn love to chasteness, and humbleness to majesty. In the knowledge that they transform love's anguish into joy, Astrophel is again willing to offer his life on the altar of love (48: 13-14):

Deare Killer, spare not thy sweet cruell shot
A kind of grace it is to slay With speed.

~~These sonnets combine an assertion of Stella's transforming power, in the octave, with an audacious use of the conventional love death, in the sestet. In the sequence as a whole, Sidney is developing with very great care the image of Stella as a transforming agency. He makes it quite clear in both poems that he is pre-occupied with the way Stella turns the gross materials of passion into the substance of the ideal. This is a conception which, as will be seen, weighs very importantly in Astrophel and Stella. It is delightful, from the stand-point of technique, to observe the apotheosis of all love-conventions in the last part of each sonnet, sustaining ideas in the opening sections which are peculiarly Sidney's.~~

Sidney shows as well that Astrophel is pre-occupied with the transforming effect of Stella. In sonnet 44, Astrophel analyzes the problem of this effect himself (44: 4-5, 7-14):

Her heart, sweete heart, is of no Tygre's kind:
And yet she heares, yet I no pittie find;

.

Alas what cause is there so overthwart,
That Noblenesse it selfe makes thus unkind?

I much do guesse, yet find no truth save this,
 That when the breath of my complaints doth tuch
 Those dainty dores unto the Court of blisse,
 The heav'nly nature of that place is such,
 That once come there, the sobs of mine annoyes
 Are metamorphosd straight to tunes of joyes.

Similarly, Astrophel brings one of his poems to Stella, who sings the words (57: 12-14):

A pretty case! I hoped her to bring
 To feele my griefes, and she with face and voice
 So sweets my paines, that my paines me rejoyce.

Likewise (58: 12-14) the sound of Stella's voice reading his verse

. . . Maugre my speeche's might
 Which wooed wo, most ravishing delight
 Even those sad words even in sad me did breed.

Plainly, the weapon of poetry with which Astrophel planned in the first sonnet to approach Stella has been rendered useless by an irresistible force.

Stella's eyes, it seems, turn love to chasteness, pain to delight, and humbleness to majesty, and her voice transmutes even Astrophel's melancholy into joy. One finds in the First Song, therefore, an ^{quality} effect of simple, necessary truth. Although Stella's power is presented at this stage in the battle of reason and passion in deliberately courtly rather than idealistic imagery, the result of the song is to make sublimely clear the all-conquering nature of the powers that have pre-occupied Astrophel so much (i: 29-32):

Who hath the voyce, which soule from senses sunders,
 Whose force but yours the bolts of beautie thunders?

To you, to you, all song of praise is due:
Only with you not miracles are wonders.

A new movement in the sequence is forecast in sonnet 55; Astrophel abandons the aid of the Muses he has hitherto invoked, and declares that henceforth he will arm himself only with the eloquence of Stella's name. The nature of the battle for which he is preparing is suggested immediately in sonnet 59, an intimate scene in which Astrophel displays his jealousy of the pet dog who is so free with the person of his beloved. This sets his love immediately in the context of sexual desire on which the succeeding poems of Part II dwell at length.

Sidney sets out the nature of this battle unflinchingly; the Stella who is the object of this desire can give him no other comfort than this (62: 6-11):

. . . love she did, but loved a Love not blind,
Which would not let me, whom she loved, decline
From nobler course, fit for my birth and mind:
And therefore by her Love's authority,
Willd me these tempests of vaine love to flie,
And anchor fast my selfe on Vertue's shore.

Thus Astrophel recognizes at last that the golden-haired basilisk whose glance struck his virtue from him at the tournament is in fact a gentle teacher. To her the lover is ready to concede, "Thou art my Wit, and thou my Vertue art" (64: 14). He is aware that she labours "to kill in me this killing care" (68: 2). But having arrived again at a recognition of Stella's function in his life, Astrophel is still unable fully

to comprehend this new truth. Stella sets high ideals before him, but he does not assimilate them. Plainly, he is unworthy to enter into the serene love she stands for, and this unworthiness is shown by the fact that the authority which teaches him these higher ideals still breeds only disorder in his mind.

In two sonnets, Sidney exploits the Petrarchan paradox to express Astrophel's full sense of Stella's transforming, teaching power and the potent force of that desire which she forbids, yet which is to drive him to filch the kiss in the Second Song. Sonnet 77 takes the form of the blazon of the mistress's beauties; it relates with considerable force the physical attributes of Stella and the superlative authority they bear, mingling Petrarchan compliment ("That face, whose lecture shewes what perfect beauty is" [77:2]) with a full affirmation of Stella's role as teacher (77: 10-13):

That conversation sweet, where such high comforts be,
As consterd in true speech, the name of heav'n it beares,
Makes me in my best thoughts and quietst judgement see,
That in no more but these I might be fully blest.

"Yet ah," says Astrophel, "my Mayd'n Muse doth blush to tell the best" (77: 14), re-emphasizing the force of desire which he has stated with unparalleled effect in sonnet 71:

Who will in fairest book of Nature know,
How Vertue may best lodg'd in beautie be,
Let him but learne of Love to reade in thee,
Stella, those faire lines, which true goodnesse show.
There shall he find all vices' overthrow,
Not by rude force, but sweetest soveraigntie

Of reason, from whose light those night-birds flie;
 That inward sunne in thine eyes shineth so.
 And not content to be Perfection's heire
 Thyselfe, doest strive all minds that way to move,
 Who marke in thee what is in thee most faire.
 So while thy beautie draws the heart to love,
 As fast thy Vertue bends that love to good:
 'But ah,' Desire still cries, 'give me some food.'

In this sonnet, centrally placed in the early part of the drama in which Astrophel is attempting to win Stella's body as well as her mind, Sidney arrays the full force of the themes which he has been developing. Almost everything is here which the reader knows about Stella and Astrophel's love for her that is important for an understanding of the crucial debate just beginning. To the role which Stella plays in that debate this discussion will return when it arrives at the conflict of reason and passion. It is the role of Astrophel himself that now requires some study.

When Astrophel is forced to a realization that Stella's refusal of his insistent plea for consummation of their love is obdurate, he turns in the poems from the Ninth Song to the end of the cycle to a detailed analysis of the consequences of that refusal. Although the nature of his conclusions will be treated when the discussion turns to the topic of the conflict of reason and passion, it is necessary at this point to examine in some detail the persona which Astrophel adopts throughout the sequence in order to understand something of his problem in the last sonnets.

The relationship of Astrophel the poet-courtier to Sir Philip Sidney, the courtier-poet, has been a recurrent problem in Sidney criticism. On this subject, R. B. Young's distinction seems definitive:¹²

The function of the identification . . . is not autobiographical revelation. Rather, it is a means by which Sidney, the real historical figure, in a sense lends his reality to Astrophel the dramatic character . . . It identifies Astrophel with Sidney, not as Sidney.

^{Young makes clear} Astrophel ^{belongs,} ~~is~~, not to the brazen world of Sir Philip, but to the golden world of nature which "the Poets only deliver."¹³ He is a product of the artificer's imagination. ~~A fiction himself, he is also~~ ^{Like Sidney} a creator of fiction, ^{Astrophel is a fiction himself.} Sidney plays ^{wittily} ~~with considerable wit~~ on this distinction in sonnet 45, when Stella, moved by a tale of woeful love, still shows herself impervious to Astrophel's complaints, and the lover demands (45: 12-14):

Then thinke, my deare, that you in me do reed
Of Lover's ruine some sad Tragedie:
I am not I, pitie the tale of me.

When Sidney sets Astrophel in his courtly context in the first part of the sequence, one of the most important things that is learned about him, and which was earlier alluded to briefly, is that he is a poet, a creator of works of the imagination. Sidney's opening sonnet emphasizes the

¹² Young, op. cit., p. 20.

¹³ Sir Philip Sidney, Apologie for Poetrie, p. 195.

fact that Astrophel is a writer and that he sees his craft as a way of approaching Stella (1: 1-5):

Loving in truth and faine in verse my love to show,
That the deare She might take some pleasure of my paine:
Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know,
Knowledge might pitie winne, and pitie grace obtaine,
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe.

Sonnets concerning the problems of writing and the power of words are important in the sequence as a whole, but in Part I they receive a slightly greater emphasis than in Parts II or III.¹⁴ Although to the world Astrophel is a courtier, to himself he is a poet. ~~Sidney presents Astrophel as counselor, soldier, and scholar in Part I. But Astrophel appears world of Astrophel with multifarious detail in Part I, but most importantly he presents him chiefly~~ ^{Sidney presents Astrophel as} in the guise of poet grappling with the problems of bending his art to an all-absorbing theme. Clearly in seeking to understand Astrophel, the critic must look carefully into the attitudes to his craft which he displays in the whole sequence.

Astrophel dwells from time to time on the question of why he should write at all, and answers himself (34: 1-8):

. . . 'And to what end?' To ease
A burthned hart. 'How can words ease, which are
The glasses of thy dayly vexing care?'
Oft cruell fights well pictured forth do please.
'Art not asham'd to publish thy disease?'
Nay, that may breed my fame, it is so rare:
'But will not wise men thinke thy words fond ware?'
Then be they close, and so none shall displease.

¹⁴Part I: 15 of 43 poems; Part II: 12 of 45 poems;
Part III: 5 of 31 poems.

bankrupt (18: 9-11)

My youth doth waste, my knowledge brings forth toys,
My wit doth strive those passions to defend,
Which for reward spoile it with vaine annoyes.

Sonnet 19 continues the same meditation (19: 5-8):

My best wits still their owne disgrace invent:
My verie inke turnes straight to Stella's name;
And yet my words, as them my pen doth frame,
Avise themselves that they are vainely spent.

Thus, in the "critical" sonnets, as elsewhere in the sequence. Sidney depicts Astrophel as a man divided by two ideals, disordered and ambivalent in his thinking as a result of the onslaught of love. A temporary resolution of the pressure of this conflict between the lover's assertion that "I in pure simplicitie / Breathe out the flames which burne within my heart" (28: 12-13), and his knowledge that the plaints which he utters are not the great work of which he is capable is suggested in sonnet 35 (35: 1-2, 12-14):

What may words say, or what may words not say
Where truth it selfe must speake like flatterie?

.....

Wit learnes in thee perfection to expresse,
Not thou by praise, but praise in thee is raisde:
It is a praise to praise, when thou are praisde.

But the ambivalent attitude which Astrophel expresses towards poetry in Part I, and which he tentatively tries to resolve in sonnet 35, recurs in the second part of the sequence when Astrophel's disorder is increasing rapidly. Sonnet 44 suggests that words will no longer suffice to achieve

Astrophel's aim (44: 1,5):

My words I know do well set forth my mind,

.....

And yet she heares, yet I no pittie find.

The breath of his complaint, says Astrophel, is metamorphosed by Stella "straight to tunes of joyes" (44: 14). He returns to this conceit twice, in sonnets 57 and 58, making it clear that his virtue as a poet has fallen under the same spell as his virtue as man-at-arms. Astrophel's concern with the fact that his words are no longer completely within his control is emphasized by his feeling that they are inadequate even to express what he wants to write. In sonnet 50 he has already stated that his thoughts of Stella cannot be held in; they demand expression in poetry (50: 5-14):

And yet as soone as they so formed be,
According to my Lord Love's owne behest:
With sad eyes I their weake proportion see,
To portrait that which in this world is best.
So that I cannot chuse but write my mind,
And cannot chuse but put out what I write,
While those poor babes their death in birth do find:
And now my pen these lines had dashed quite,
But that they stopt his furie from the same,
Because their forefront bare sweet Stella's name.

Thus sonnet 58, dwelling as it does on the supreme power of the orator to print "his owne lively forme in rudest braine" (58: 8) is especially devastating, for when Stella can blunt this speech's might, Astrophel is stripped of his chief source of self-identification. Thus it is that he

has already, in sonnet 55, carried his earlier strategy of renouncing convention one step further, and has renounced the aid of the Muses themselves (55: 9-14):

But now I meane no more your helpe to trie,
Nor other sugring of my speech to prove,
But on her name incessantly to crie:
For let me but name her whom I do love,
So sweete sounds straight mine eare and heart do hit,
That I well find no eloquence like it.

The fact that Stella's power has stripped Astrophel of his virtue as poet underlies the treatment of poetry as a weapon of love throughout the rest of Part II. His confusion of mind still increasing, ^{he begins to abandon the guise of poet, and} he is able to satirize the role he earlier adopted so seriously. He is freed, for example, to devise the ecstatic play on words in sonnet 63, "O Grammer rules, ô now your vertues show," and to tease his Muse joyfully (70: 3-4, 12-14):

She oft hath drunke my teares, now hopes to enjoy
Nectar of Mirth . . .

.

Cease, eager Muse, peace pen, for my sake stay,
I give you here my hand for truth of this,
Wise silence is best musicke unto blisse.

And in fact, what little ~~what~~ identity his poetry gives him is by now totally dependent upon Stella; ~~and~~ this is acknowledged with grace in sonnet 74, where the pleasure his verse gives to "best wits" is inevitably attributed to the inspiration of Stella's kiss.

Sonnets dwelling on Astrophel's role as poet play a markedly less prominent role in the third section of

Astrophel and Stella than elsewhere in the sequence, but they make explicit the uncertain attitude which Astrophel has earlier expressed to the persona which he adopted with such sureness and which Stella's great power has undermined. Indeed, their tone, for which the reader has been prepared with some care, is central to the analysis of his own vulnerability that occupies Astrophel in his despair. R.B. Young suggests that in the Fifth Song¹⁵

the intensely individualistic lover, who had affirmed the supreme importance of the personal experience, and had attacked so enthusiastically all the institutionalized values, is here being forced back upon some sort of general norm, some sort of impersonal authority or standard. In other words, he is forced to invoke the very convention he had attempted to eliminate.

Young stresses, perhaps with too great emphasis, the quality of exultant parody, of sweet comedy, in a number of the sonnets leading up to the Fifth Song. ^{However,} ~~but~~ it is clear that this song cannot be handled critically in the context of Astrophel and Stella without a recognition of the specially satiric and flippant manner Sidney uses in it. Astrophel does not invoke the convention because of any special power it has for him. He does so because it is a form of words whereby he can test his independence from Stella. The inversion of Petrarchan formulas which forms the substance of the song is a strategy to reduce Stella's reluctance to manageable proportions. It

¹⁵Young, op. cit., p. 76.

A nest for my yong praise in Lawrell tree:
 In truth I sweare, I wish not there should be
 Graved in mine Epitaph a Poet's name:
 Ne if I would, could I just title make,
 That any laud to me thereof should grow,
 Without my plumes from others' wings I take.
 For nothing from my wit or will doth flow,
 Since all my words thy beauty doth endite,
 And love doth hold my hand, and makes me write.

This poem is an intricate reaffirmation of Stella's unique authority and Astrophel's own vulnerability to it, and at the same time an expression of the destruction of his old persona. Sonnet 90 completes the destruction, for in it Astrophel discovers that in his anguish he must renounce complaint; it is grief ^{that} ~~who~~ must find the words which in his pain he cannot form.

In the "critical" sonnets of Astrophel and Stella, Sidney uses certain statements about poetry to give the reader important information about Astrophel the poet-lover. Astrophel is characterized initially by his confident use of poetry as an approach to Stella. This characterization is developed through Astrophel's changing attitude to his craft and to the function of words as the sequence progresses. The "critical" sonnets do not tell us how Sidney is writing his sonnet sequence, nor how Astrophel is writing his (those unnamed plaints which Hallett Smith says he presents to Stella¹⁶) but rather how Astrophel relates his primary role

¹⁶Smith, op. cit., p. 151.

as artificer to the conflict in which he is involved. And the abandonment of this role in the latter sonnets is a device of remarkable force in making clear the realignment of feeling into which Astrophel is compelled.

This discussion must move now to a full analysis of the sonnets and songs in their order, ^{in order to see how the} ~~in search of the way~~ conflict of reason and passion is developed as the sequence progresses. ~~in which the conflict of reason and passion is developed.~~

Before turning to this analysis, it may be useful to summarize the observations which have been made on the themes of the three parts of the sequence.

In delineating the world in which Astrophel and Stella move, Sidney has shown first of all that Stella is a supreme product of nature, and that her influence on Astrophel symbolizes the orderly working of awesome forces. But he also shows that Astrophel does not understand that order sufficiently, for he is the victim of conflicting ideas about it. On the one hand, Astrophel responds immediately to the beauty nature has created in Stella. On the other hand, he has serious doubts about the love this beauty elicits in him. Another nature, he thinks, beckons him, and sets before him ideals which have nothing to do with love. Sidney shows in sonnets 25 and 26 that these two natures are in fact one, but the reader begins to realize that Astrophel, routed by the effects of love, is past understanding this.

Turning to examine Astrophel in his background, the

world of the court, one becomes aware that though his talents are great, he regularly deprecates them, or admits that they are unrealized. This unsureness of his own worth is directly caused by the experience of love, which has initiated a conflict between his appreciation of Stella and his feeling that there are more lofty values than those of amour.

Astrophel is furthermore a man of the court; his natural pre-occupations are public affairs and matters of the intellect, as befits a good courtier. And in the world of men he encounters an obstacle which sets Stella immediately beyond his reach: the figure of the jealous husband who has her in thrall. Thus the sequence becomes deeply concerned with honour, a value pre-eminently that of the world of men.

As has been shown, Stella, though treated in the terms conventionally applied to the lady of the sonnet sequence, is protected in many ways from the usual associations of cruelty and pride. Sidney early makes clear that she is a unique exemplar of both beauty and virtue, and that she has a remarkable effect on Astrophel. It is an indication of his unworthiness to enter fully into her world that this effect breeds disorder in him, rather than the serenity of mature love. This disorder is exemplified by his inexorable progress towards a complete acknowledgement of physical passion, even as he becomes fully aware of the way Stella transforms base passion to ideal love. This passion, and the countervailing ideals for which Stella

stands, are fully set forth in sonnet 71.

The sonnets of the sequence which dwell on Astrophel's role as poet and on problems of words and writing serve as a series of clues to the changes which he undergoes as the sequence moves onward. At first, he is confident in approaching Stella through his poetry. But his inability to cope with the conflicting values of his love expresses itself in his attitude to his craft as well, and he is overcome with a growing sense of his inadequacy as a poet. The effect of loving Stella is ultimately to strip him of his identification as poet, and he begins to stand back from his earlier role and use his craft as a weapon of satire. At length, in the new self-evaluation to which he is forced, he abandons the role of poet, and thus symbolically renounces the last vestiges of his passion-driven self.

All of these developments are fundamental to the way in which Sidney develops the conflict of reason and passion in the sequence as a whole. They must be kept in mind during the exposition of that conflict, the threads of which require much care to disentangle.

CHAPTER V

REASON AND PASSION IN ASTROPHEL AND STELLA

In the initial stages of this study, it was stated that Astrophel and Stella is not a novel or a drama, but a poetic fiction designed to explore certain problems of love.¹ In seeking the nature of this fiction, the principle that makes it a coherent whole, the critic must examine the elements of the sonnet sequence. Three of these elements, the world, the lady, and the poet, have already been isolated for study. But they are subordinate parts of a greater whole; it is the conflict created between these parts that dominates the fiction of Astrophel and Stella. This conflict, as has been seen, is one between reason, which tells Astrophel his love is not worthy, and passion, which drives him to consummate that love. In seeking the principle that gives Astrophel and Stella its coherence, the critic must trace the development of this conflict from the first sonnet to the last, for despite the great variety of the sequence, there is nothing in it that does not pertain, in some way, to this battle.

¹See ante, p. 17.

In the Apologie for Poetrie Sidney alludes, ~~whether by design or coincidence,~~ precisely to the conflict that is the subject of Astrophel and Stella, and to the propriety of that conflict as a subject for poetry:²

Neyther let it be deemed to sawcie a comparison to ballance the highest poynt of mans wit with the effiacie of Nature: but rather give right honor to the heavenly Maker of that maker: who having made man to his owne liknes, set him beyond and over all the workes of that second nature, which in nothing hee sheweth so much as in Poetrie: when with the force of a divine breath, he bringeth things forth far surpassing her dooings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam: sith our erected wit, maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will, keepeth us from reaching unto it.

Sidney here uses the Biblical story of the Fall to express the truth he presents in a Platonic form in sonnet 25: that though our reason knows perfection, our passion prevents us from attaining it (25: 5-8):

But for that man with paine this truth descries,
While he each thing in sense's ballance wayes,
And so nor will, nor can, behold those skies
Which inward sunne to Heroicke mind displaies.

The passage from the Apologie cited above directly relates the role of poetry to the need for argument to lead man to perfection. Poetry is an instrument for transforming the brazen world of "that second nature" to the golden one of which the poet is master, and his mastery over it is itself

²Sir Philip Sidney, Apologie for Poetrie, pp. 195-96.

an example of his ability to aspire to perfection. Astrophel and Stella depicts exactly that process of argument leading the mind to perfection. It does so in the form of the imaginative transformation of the doings of real life which is the poet's unique prerogative. Astrophel and Stella is centred in the matter that lies at the root of man's inability to realize the ideal in himself: the conflict of reason and passion.

Although Astrophel the poet-lover is the victim of this division, which he must learn to resolve or at least to master, Sidney the artificer demonstrates a firm control over the conflict's elements. Hallett Smith suggests that the love convention that is Sidney's vehicle is a convenient strategy for exploring the dilemmas of idealistic and sensual love.³ But R. L. Montgomery, Jr. criticises Smith, and with him J. W. Lever for this approach:⁴

They present the dialectics of Astrophel's mental conflict mainly as an artistic tool handy to Sidney's purpose, the implication being that any other set of ideas might do as well. These concepts are in fact much more: they are intimately concerned in the process by which Astrophel sees his own experience and evaluates it, and they are responsible, I suspect, for the underlying seriousness with which the love affair is treated.

³Hallett Smith, Elizabethan Poetry, p. 154.

⁴Robert L. Montgomery, Jr., Symmetry and Sense: The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney, p. 104.

The Petrarchan convention, based as has been shown in a conflict between the claims of the flesh and the claims of the spirit, is for Sidney, as for his age, the most universally sanctioned formula for the analysis of love. As such, it is deeply involved in the problem of "that first accursed fall of Adam," and the ways Sidney develops the traditional conflict cannot be dismissed as mere device.

Nonetheless, the technique whereby Sidney uses the Petrarchan convention to analyze the problems of Astrophel's love is one of the most difficult aspects of the sequence to discuss. The events of the conflict require a narrative thread on which to hang, while the convention overwhelmingly suggests lyric meditation. In Petrarch, the thread is supplied by a powerful evocation of the passing of years and the imminence of death. Sidney's sequence is much more compressed; there is little suggestion of passing time, and the events are linked by a masterfully woven tissue of themes. Thus, in meditating on the problems of love, Sidney constantly introduces in one part of the sequence material for contemplation that is only developed later. This is the case, for example, with the Third Song, the only one of the songs that could be excised from the sequence without doing harm to the unity of the whole. The Third Song foreshadows the neoplatonic attitudes of the Sixth and Seventh Songs, but it is placed a little in advance

of them, in the midst of the sonnets where Astrophel is most confident in the base desire then moving him. Thus, in examining what happens in Astrophel and Stella, the critic must never force the development of the action. The roles of Astrophel and of Stella can be schematized to a degree as has been shown, but the development of Astrophel's lesson in love is much more generalized and meditative. In examining the conflict of reason and passion in the sequence, it is necessary to impose an order on the material that is almost crude in comparison with the delicacy with which Sidney's technique works, and the following observations must be read with this warning in mind.

In sonnet 2, Sidney tells how love struck Astrophel (2: 1-7, 10-11):

Not at first sight, nor with a dribbed shot
Love gave the wound, which while I breathe will bleed:
 But knowne worth did in mine of time proceed,
 Till by degrees it had full conquest got.
 I saw and liked, I liked but loved not,
 I loved, but straight did not what Love decreed:
 At length to Love's decrees, I forc'd, agreed,

.....

..... now like slave-borne Muscovite
 I call it praise to suffer Tyrannie.

Some important characteristics of Astrophel appear in these lines: he is independent of mind, for he resisted love's first onslaught. He has values, for he responded "in mine

of time" to the worth of his lady. And he is vulnerable, for once love took hold, he submitted completely to its rule. In sonnet 16, the reader is to learn more about what Astrophel was like before he met Stella. He had loved before (16: 5-8),

But finding not those restlesse flames in me,
Which others said did make their soules to pine:
I thought those babes of some pinne's hurt did whine,
By my love judging what Love's paine might be.

This statement confirms the impression of Astrophel given in sonnet 2. Before he met Stella, he was easy, assured, and confident in his assumptions about love. But sonnet 2 makes clear that this confidence has been shattered. Astrophel tries to make himself believe that all is well (2: 13) but he knows it is not. Sonnet 1, which looks back on the events chronicled in the second sonnet, has already introduced Astrophel in the throes of love, trying to write eloquently of his passion in order to win Stella's favour. But "great with child to speake" (1: 12) he is helpless to do so; invention has flown, and he can only turn to the image of Stella in his heart in order to find what he wants to say. Plainly the confident man has been replaced by one shattered by the effects of a new experience.

The personification of Cupid, or Love, introduced in sonnet 2 and exploited continuously throughout the first two parts of the sequence, is an effective device in showing the involuntary nature of Astrophel's plight, and also the strength

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

and reason. In the process of this meditation, he has appeared more and more as a man divided by an experience for which he was unprepared. Sonnet 21 makes clear that he has submitted to the rule of passion, and that this submission marks the renunciation of his ability to judge and discern. Whereas in sonnet 14 he argued with his friend, in sonnet 21 he is merely flippant. The effects of this change in Astrophel are to be set forth in the sonnets immediately following.

The transition is marked by the splendour of the explication in sonnet 22 of the frivolous question in 21, "Hath this world ought so faire as Stella is?" Here, Sidney brings to the fore the unique mystery of Stella as a product of nature which, as was noted earlier, he has also been developing in the first sonnets of the sequence. In many of these poems, Sidney has depicted the works of Eros as a self-induced illusion, a creation, Astrophel is willing to admit when he is perhaps being most honest with himself, of his own mind in rebellion against what he knows is right. In this depiction, the tyrannical phantom of Cupid serves his most useful purpose, functioning as an externalization of what in Astrophel is wilful, pernicious, and rank. But as has been shown, there is in sonnet 22 a splendid picture of Stella marching untouched beneath the burning sun, in mysterious alliance with the forces of nature. And this image is reinforced in sonnet 26, which introduces

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-

ing sonnet 26. He emphatically asserts in sonnets 23 and 27 Astrophel's feeling that he is, by virtue of his love, outside of civilized society and that this love still makes him ignore considerations of duty which he should acknowledge (23: 5-6):

Some that know how my spring I did addresse,
Deeme that my Muse some fruit of knowledge plies.

And again (27: 9-14):

Yet pride I thinke doth not my soule possesse,
Which lookes too oft in his unflattring glasse;
But one worse fault, Ambition, I confesse,
That makes me oft my best friends overpasse,
Unseene, unheard, while thought to highest place
Bends all his powers, even unto Stella's grace.

Astrophel is able to enter fully into his passion, but he is aware that in doing so he is leaving behind his former self, the courtier earnestly attentive to responsibility. This is devastatingly expressed in the defiant assertion (28: 5-8):

When I say 'Stella', I do meane the same
Princesse of Beautie, for whose only sake
The raines of Love I love, though never slake,
And joy therein, though Nations count it shame.

Plainly, if Astrophel has become without shame, the effects of love have changed him seriously, for his own self-criticisms and the warnings of his friend make it plain that the old Astrophel was dutiful, earnest, and aspiring.

That this change is part of the disorder brought on by love is clear from the attempt Astrophel makes in sonnets 29 and 31 to analyze both Stella and his passion. In sonnet 29, Astrophel tries to explain the difference between the

external Stella who serves the works of Eros, and the internal Stella who is impervious to love (29: 5-12):

. . . Stella's heart, finding what power Love brings
 To keepe it selfe in life and liberty,
 Doth willing graunt, that in the frontiers he
 Use all to helpe his other conquerings:
 And thus her heart escapes, but thus her eyes
 Serve him with shot, her lips his heralds arre,
 Her breasts his tents, legs his triumphall carre:
 Her flesh his food, her skin his armour brave.

The ornamental technique of this sonnet, with its luxurious anatomizing of the parts of Stella's body, conveys a tone of implicit desire which is confirmed in the ^{ardour} abandonment of the conclusion (29: 13-14):

And I, but for because my prospect lies
 Upon that coast, am giv'n up for a slave.

But more importantly, this disassembling of Stalla indicates an inability on Astrophel's part to relate elements in a coherent whole. To understand Stella, he has to take her apart. Similarly in sonnet 31, Astrophel tries, and fails, to ascertain the relationship between heavenly and earthly love (31: 9-14):

Then ev'n of fellowship, ô Moone, tell me
 Is constant Love deem'd there but want of wit?
 Are Beauties there as proud as here they be?
 Do they above love to be lov'd, and yet
 Those Lovers scorne whom that Love doth possesse?
 Do they call Vertue there ungratefulnessse?

But the attempt results only in a sublimely expressed querulousness, and not in any new understanding. Indeed, sonnet 31 forms an ironic comment on the revelation of sonnet 26 that the universe has an order and a pattern that takes in both the

With shield of prooffe shield me from out the prease
 Of those fierce darts,dispaire at me doth throw:
 O make in me those civill warres to cease;
 I will good tribute pay if thou do so.

In sonnet 40 he invokes the aid of Stella herself, and although it is yet again the familiar request for her grace, the tone is one of intense vulnerability (40: 5-8, 14):

Alas, if from the height of Vertue's throne,
 Thou canst vouchsafe the influence of a thought
 Upon a wretch, that long thy grace hath sought;
 Weigh then how I by thee am overthrowne:

.

O do not let thy Temple be destroyd.

Stella's eyes spur him on to achievement in the tournament (41). But in sonnet 42, they become the subject of an analysis that indicates only Astrophel's imperfect understanding of their power. The eyes that conquer Love and teach Venus chastity do not belong in the world of the love-death. Stella's alliance with the ordered world of nature forbids such a conclusion. Indeed, the full and mature love to which she eventually brings Astrophel involves a complete moral regeneration: a new life, rather than an outworn death. But in these sonnets, Astrophel, apprehensive and despairing, can conceive love only as disaster.

Sonnet 46 again shows the anxiety Astrophel is experiencing, and asks how Eros is to learn "not alone to love and see,/ Without desire to feed of further grace" (46: 7-8).

This time the approach is impudent and the comic tone carries over to the next poem (47: 9-14):

Vertue awake, Beautie but beautie is,
 I may, I must, I can, I will, I do
 Leave following that, which it is gaine to misse.
 Let her go. Soft, but here she comes. Go to,
 Unkind, I love you not: O me, that eye
 Doth make my heart give to my tongue the lie.

But the problem cannot be exorcised by humour, and sonnet 48 returns to the meditation already developed in 42, mingling again the themes of the heavenly virtue of Stella's eyes and their mortal effect in Astrophel's world of experience.

The difficulty of coming to terms with such conflicting allegiances is set forth in the conceit of horsemanship in sonnet 49, which focusses all Astrophel's anxieties in one monstrous emblem:

I on my horse, and Love on me doth trie
 Our horsmanships, while by strange worke I prove
 A horsman to my horse, a horse to Love;
 And now man's wrongs in me, poore beast, descrie.
 The raines wherewith my Rider doth me tie,
 Are humbled thoughts, which bit of Reverence move,
 Curb'd in with feare, but with guilt bosse above
 Of Hope, which makes it seeme faire to the eye.
 The wand is Will, thou Fancie saddle art,
 Girt fast by memorie, and while I spurre
 My horse, he spurres with sharpe desire my hart:
 He sits me fast, how ever I do sturre:
 And now hath made me to his hand so right,
 That in the Manage myselfe takes delight.

Sidney likes horses and he likes being a horseman; the genial opening of the Apologie for Poetrie tells us this. The handling of a horse and the gallant arts that attend it are

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):

Stella, the fulnesse of my thoughts of thee
 Cannot be staid within my panting breast,
 But they do swell and struggle forth of me,
 Till that in words thy figure be exprest.

But the tone of vulnerability that dominated the poems immediately preceding is present here too (50: 5-8):

And yet as soone as they so formed be,
 According to my Lord Love's owne behest:
 With sad eyes I their weake proportion see,
 To portrait that which in this world is best.

Unsure any longer of the power of his own words, yet willing the battle to go on, Astrophel "cannot chuse but write my mind, / And cannot chuse but put out what I write" (50: 9-10).

This restless assertiveness results in the rebuke to an unidentified bore in sonnet 51, and is also the subject of low comedy in the disastrous tournament in sonnet 53. But most important, it is at this point in the sequence that Astrophel makes his first audacious declaration that the force of his desire is beginning to express itself in action.

Sonnet 52 states explicitly the problem over which Astrophel agonized in sonnets 32 to 49, the relationship between Stella's virtue and his own passion. But now his new assertiveness has made a solution possible (52):

A strife is growne between Vertue and Love,
 While each pretends that Stella must be his:
 Her eyes, her lips, her all, saith Love do this,
 Since they do weare his badge, most firmly prove.
 But Vertue thus that title doth disprove,
 That Stella (ô deare name) that Stella is
 That vertuous soule, sure heire of heav'nly blisse:

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

speaking picture of Stella to keep its lesson before his mind.

Heretofore Astrophel has vacillated between fear and desire, as the orthodox Petrarchan lover is required to do. But in moving Astrophel out of the Petrarchan impasse into a world where such dilemmas do not long remain unsolved, Sidney is departing markedly from the conventional model. Petrarchism is essentially static; for the drooping lover, suspended between the heavenly and the fleshly, the only action that can ever be adopted is renunciation. But Sidney is not interested in static poses; the world of Astrophel and Stella hums with the sound of moral conflict. The sonnet sequence itself begins in medias res, and thrusts the reader immediately into the mortal battle of conflicting values. Such battles demand an outcome, by the very nature of the awesome forces that conflict in them. Though Sidney's protagonists are garbed in the theatrical costumes of the convention, they are not puppets. They express values he has already stated are at the heart of the human condition, and they are not to be dallied with. Thus it is that Sidney takes the approach of a consummate dramatist, and allows his protagonists to behave as they would in life.

In sonnet 59 commences the action in which Astrophel, eased of his wit by love, is to press his plea for "the thing which ever she denies" (63: 6). In an intimate scene, Stella fondles her pet dog, while Astrophel laments (59: 9-11),

Yet while I languish, him that bosome clips,
That lap doth lap, nay lets, in spite of spite,
This sowre-breath'd mate tast of those sugred lips.

These lines express with intense suggestiveness the urgency that drives Astrophel onward. His pressing demands provoke at last a reply from Stella, and significantly, it is directed at the assertion of self (61: 4-8):

But this at last is her sweet breath'd defence:
That who indeed infelt affection beares,
So captives to his Saint both soule and sence,
That wholly hers, all selfnesse he forbeares,
Thence his desires he learnes, his live's course thence.

That Astrophel, driven by passion, cannot comprehend this lesson in chaste love is clear from his immediate appeal to Cupid, the symbol of fleshly desire (61: 12-14):

O Doctor Cupid, thou for me reply,
Driv'n else to graunt by Angel's sophistrie,
That I love not, without I leave to love.

Astrophel's inability to understand the kind of love Stella offers him is made clear in sonnet 62, one of the most important in the whole sequence for a full understanding of the view of love Sidney is expounding (62):

Late tyr'd with wo, even ready for to pine
With rage of Love, I cald my Love unkind;
She in whose eyes Love, though unfelt, doth shine,
Sweet said that I true love in her should find.
I joyed, but straight thus watred was my wine,
That love she did, but loved a Love not blind,
Which would not let me, whom she loved, decline
From nobler course, fit for my birth and mind:
And therefore by her Love's authority,
Willd me these tempests of vaine love to flie,

And anchor fast my selfe on Vertue's shore.
 Alas, if this the only metall be
 Of Love, new-coind to helpe my beggery,
 Deare, love me not, that you may love me more.

There is a clear distinction in this sonnet between the maturity of Stella, who is capable of uniting love to virtue, and the ~~japery of~~ ^{immaturity of the self-consciously witty} Astrophel: "Deare, love me not that you may love me more." The paradox inherent in the idea that blind Cupid shines in Stella's eyes although she does not feel his presence is resolved immediately by her statement that she feels true love for Astrophel, that in effect the love that Cupid personifies is not true love at all. The imagery of the sonnet reinforces this truth with full effect; the force of desire in Astrophel produces a rage, a tempest, a disorder very different from the peace of the nobler course that leads to virtue's haven. In this sonnet, in fact, the Petrarchan and the neoplatonic conceptions of love meet head-on. Astrophel has been the Petrarchan lover par excellence, a man deeply divided by conflicting values. His answer to this conflict has been to assert the worth of the physical. But in his treatment of this assertion Sidney has been uniformly critical. He consistently weighs the case against Astrophel by demonstrating his confused frustration, and by balancing against it a strong portrayal of Stella as virtue's chief exemplar in Astrophel's life. She is, in fact, the true neoplatonic mistress, a unifying

influence, rather than a disruptive one. Astrophel's extreme reaction to the love she causes does not indicate a fault in her, but rather an unworthiness in him. Sonnet 62 makes these ideas explicit; Stella stands for a love that embraces and unites the aims Astrophel once held most dear, and Astrophel has travelled too far along the course of passion to recognize that this is so. Thus this new-coined love is a desperate puzzle for Astrophel, for it has no value in the currency of the world of desire. Astrophel shows that he is far gone in his self-deception by reducing the puzzle to absurdity in the foolery of sonnet 63, where Stella's reply "No, no" is facetiously transformed through the agency of the grammatical rule of the double negative, into consent to Astrophel's plea, in complete defiance of the lesson she has tried to give him in sonnet 62.

The sublime compliments of the First Song sum up the way passion dominates Astrophel's world: "only in you my song begins and endeth" (i: 4). The song is a blazon of the mistress's fleshly charms, and the imagery is that of the lover completely abandoned to the physical (i: 25-26):

Who hath the haire which, loosest, fastest tieth,
Who makes a man live then glad when he dieth?

It is the physical attributes alone of Stella that are the subject of these luscious compliments; there is no hint of her ideal qualities in any of the phrases Astrophel applies

to her.

The sensuality of the First Song provides an important prelude to Astrophel's inevitable plea (64: 1-2):

No more, my deare, no more these counsels trie,
O give my passions leave to run their race.

Astrophel bases his plea on a passionate renunciation of all that the world can offer him: fame, learning, public renown, and preferment. "Thou art my Wit, and thou my Vertue art," he concludes (64: 14), making clear that Stella has become his sole standard of action. But his pressing demand that she grant him her favours rests on an entirely false conception of the standard she offers. He still assumes that she can be won, and that he can win her, whereas she has already made clear (62) that such vain assumptions represent a completely false view of love.

The succeeding sonnets embody an attempt to absorb Stella into the sensual world that indicates the disorder that love, wrongly conceived, has bred in Astrophel. Astrophel fancies that the love which Stella has said she cherishes for him conceals a desire for further gratification (66: 8-14):

Desire still on the stilts of feare doth go.
And yet amid all feares a hope there is
Stolne to my heart, since last faire night, nay day,
Stella's eyes sent to me the beames of blisse,
Looking on me, while I lookt other way:
But when mine eyes backe to their heav'n did move,
They fled with blush, which guiltie seem'd of love.

Similarly in sonnet 67, Stella appears in the extraordinary guise of melancholy lover (67: 7-9):

Looke on againe, the faire text better trie:
 What blushing notes doest thou in margine see?
 What sighes stolne out, or kild before full borne?

In this sonnet, Sidney is exploiting the conventional signs of love's presence with ironic intent; such a characterization of Stella can only indicate the falsity of the view Astrophel is taking. That it is a self-deception consciously adopted is bitterly admitted by Astrophel in the same sonnet (67: 12-14):

Well, how so thou interpret the contents,
 I am resolv'd thy errour to maintaine,
 Rather then by more truth to get more paine.

In sonnet 69 Astrophel accepts the conditions of honour which Stella imposes on him, but it is not because he adopts them as his own. He is, rather, making a bargain (69: 9-14):

. . . Stella hath with words where faith doth shine
 Of her high heart giv'n me the monarchie:
 I, I, ô I may say, that she is mine.
 And though she give but thus conditionly
 This realme of blisse, while vertuous course I take,
 No kings be crown'd but they some covenants make.

Sonnet 68 has prepared the reader for his capitulation. Here Astrophel announces that he brings Stella a love she will find worthy (68: 7-8):

. . . the noble fire,
 Fed by thy worth, and kindled by thy sight.

But his insistent sensuality is clear from the sexual pun in the concluding lines (68: 11-14):

Thy reasons firmly set on Vertue's feet,
Labour to kill in me this killing care:
O thinke I then, what paradise of joy
It is, so faire a Vertue to enjoy.

In accepting Stella's conditions Astrophel has not moved from his conception of love as desire; he has simply made a temporary compromise with her scruples. This fact emerges with inescapable force in sonnet 71. Stella in this extraordinarily successful lyric assumes the mantle of sovereign reason itself; perfection's heir, she not only shows all true goodness in her person, but bends all about her to the same ideal (71: 12-14):

So while thy beautie drawes the heart to love,
As fast thy Vertue bends that love to good;
'But ah,' Desire still cries, 'give me some food.'

Stella is presented as the fleshly nonpareil of all ideal virtue, but the effect of the paradoxical conclusion is to assert with equal strength the force of a passion that contradicts everything for which she stands.

Sonnet 71 dwells on the extraordinary power of Stella's virtue, and contrasts it with the insistent claims of desire; sonnet 72 deals with that desire itself, and the honourable love for which Astrophel must renounce it. The opening lines state clearly that Astrophel recognizes he has been through a

deeply troubled phase (72: 1-4):

Desire, though thou my old companion art,
 And oft so clings to my pure Love, that I
 One from the other scarcely can descric,
 While each doth blow the fier of my hart.

This admission has a surprising note of humility, a tone attributable to the surpassing evocation of Stella's moral force in sonnet 72. It is clear that the covenant Astrophel made with Stella appears to him in a new light, for his re-statement of its terms is devoutly serious (72: 5-12):

Now from thy fellowship I needs must part,
Venus is taught with Dian's wings to flie:
 I must no more in thy sweet passions lie;
Vertue's gold now must head my Cupid's dart.
 Service and Honor, wonder with delight,
 Feare to offend, will worthie to appeare,
 Care shining in mine eyes, faith in my sprite,
 These things are left me by my only Deare.

Astrophel may still be the victim of misconceptions; one wonders what sort of "will" he is going to find worthy to present to Stella. But there is no mistaking his earnestness.

For this reason, the concluding lines of the sonnet have ~~a devastating~~ ^{an annihilating} effect (72: 13-14):

But thou Desire, because thou wouldst have all,
 Now banisht art, but yet alas how shall?

Sonnet 71 created a powerful image of Stella's teaching example, then concluded with a forceful assertion of contradicting values. Sonnet 72 likewise states an intensely serious viewpoint, and then demolishes it with a blunt admission of the facts of experience. These two sonnets mark a critical point

in the development of the sequence, for they assert the seriousness of the conflict now reaching its climax. Sidney is not interested in easy solutions; although in earlier sonnets he has purposely shown Astrophel gulled by his own confused evasions, here he presents him as earnest and quite perceptive, just when his hard-won covenant is demolished by the admission that desire can not be banished.

Thus it is that pressed on by the force of a desire he cannot relinquish, Astrophel steals a kiss in the Second Song, precipitating himself into a prolonged examination of its quality which moves the sequence firmly into the sensual context so important for the Fourth Song. Significantly, it is only when Stella's eyes, the symbols of her special power, are closed in sleep that Astrophel can seize his chance. The tone of the Second Song is very important in controlling the reader's reaction to what Astrophel is doing; it is one of audacious sophistry--"Who will read must first learne spelling" (ii: 24) --and fully anticipates the coarseness of the concluding observation, "Foole, more foole, for no more taking" (ii: 28).

Having committed himself by stealing a kiss, Astrophel in the following sonnets adopts an attitude of exultant good humour and sure self-assertion. When Stella chastises him for kissing her so stealthily, he rejoins (73: 12-14):

cuckoldry: "Is it not evill that such a Devill wants hornes?" (78: 14).

A tone of delicate but mounting sensuality characterizes sonnets 79 to 82, which are written in praise of the stolen kiss. So pervasive is the tone of physical delight and so effectively does the ornament render the praise that even the line "Where Beautie's blush in Honour's graine is dide" (80: 8) seems to slip by as mere compliment in a sonnet which ends, "Sweet lip, you teach my mouth with one sweet kisse." (80: 14). There is a similar sensuality in the next sonnet (81: 5-14):

O Kisse, which soules, even soules together ties
 By linkes of Love, and only Nature's art:
 How faine would I paint thee to all men's eyes,
 Or of thy gifts at least shade out some part.
 But she forbids, with blushing words, she sayes,
 She builds her fame on higher seated praise:
 But my heart burnes, I cannot silent be.
 Then since (deare life) you faine would have me peace,
 And I, mad with delight, want wit to cease,
 Stop you my mouth with still still kissing me.

It is difficult to believe that Sidney is here asserting the Platonic concept of the joining of souls in the kiss with other than ornamental intent; the Platonic kiss, in Castiglione, is "rather a coupling together of the soule, than of the body,"⁷ whereas for Astrophel, it is "poore hope's first

⁷Baldassare Castiglione, The Courtier, p. 607.

wealth, ostage of promist weale" (79: 12), a favour which he has caught at when "full of desire, emptie of wit" (82: 9).

Sonnet 83, like sonnet 59, uses the device of the Catullian pet to create an intimate picture of frustrated sexuality (83: 5-8):

I bare (with Envie) yet I bare your song,
 When in her necke you did Love ditties peepe;
 Nay, more foole I, oft suffered you to sleepe
 In Lillies' neast, where Love's self lies along.

Just as Astrophel often transfers his own sentiments to the scapegoat Cupid, so here he transfers his own perilous situation to the sparrow. He wants to wring its neck because it makes free with what he has not, but the last lines are also an ironic reflection on the audacity of the stolen kiss and the "baisers" which have resulted from it (83: 9-14):

What, doth high place ambitious thoughts augment?
 Is sawcinesse reward of curtesie?
 Cannot such grace your silly selfe content,
 But you must needs with those lips billing be?
 And through those lips drinke Nectar from that toong;
 Leave that, sir Phip, least off your necke be wroong.

The tone of the sonnets leading up to the Fourth Song is one of mounting confidence (84: 1, 5, 12-14):

Highway since you my chiefe Pernassus be,

.....

Now blessed you, beare onward blessed me

.....

And that you know, I envy you no lot
 Of highest wish, I wish you so much blisse,
 Hundreds of yeares you Stella's feet may kisse.

Travelling along the highway to the meeting at which he is confident his arms are to embrace "the globe of weale" (85: 13), Astrophel has to remind himself (85: 1-2):

I see the house, my heart thy selfe containe,
Beware full sailes drown not thy tottring barge.

There is an emphasis, in sonnet 85, on order, on decorum, on what is fitting (85: 9-14):

But give apt servants their due place, let eyes
See Beautie's totall summe summ'd in her face:
Let eares heare speech, which wit to wonder ties,
Let breath sucke up those sweetes, let armes embrace
The globe of weale, lips Love's indentures make:
Thou but of all the kingly Tribute take.

But this is the false decorum of an entirely sensual world. Astrophel, anticipating his victory, catalogues the delights of the senses. He passes from sight to hearing, the two senses accepted by the neoplatonic theorists as the legitimate means to the appreciation of beauty.⁸ But he moves onward, to smell, taste, and touch, the senses most explicitly associated with sexual desire. Thus the order so consciously imposed expresses Astrophel's awareness of his authority, and the full range of the senses catalogued expresses the complete sexuality of his intent. In this way the groundwork is laid for the Fourth Song, where nature and occasion are likewise perfectly ordered, and Astrophel can ask "take me to thee

⁸ See ante, p. 147.

and thee to me" (iv: 5 et passim).

The Fourth Song expresses ~~fully~~ the aims and motives of the fleshly desire that has driven Astrophel on, and its ~~musical~~ persuasiveness expresses the surpassing power of the physical love of which it sings. The arguments Astrophel uses to persuade his lady are all those of the world of experience, a world rendered at its most entrancing (iv: 7-8, 13-17):

Night hath ~~closed~~ all in her cloke,
Twinckling ~~starres~~ Love-thoughts provoke:

.

Better place no wit can find,
Cupid's yoke to loose or bind:
These sweet flowers on fine bed too,
Us in their best language woo:
Take me to thee, and thee to me.

The moon gives but little light, the household is in bed, all nature conspires to help them, and Niggard Time threatens that such a chance will not soon come again (iv: 43-48):

Sweet alas, why strive you thus?
Concord better fitteth us:
Leave to Mars the force of hands,
Your power in your beautie stands:
Take me to thee, and thee to me.
'No, no, no, no, my Deare, let be.'

And when Stella refuses to be swayed, Astrophel's defence of his action still comes from the limited world of experience. He maintains in sonnet 86 that he has offered her a spotless faith, and implies that her acquiescence is a just return for

his probity. But the honour he offers her belongs to the same experienced world as his arguments in the Fourth Song. His awareness that such worldly incorruptibility is not enough he makes clear in the guilty tone of the plea (86: 9-14):

O ease your hand, treat not so hard your slave:
 In justice paines come not till faults do call;
 Or if I needs (sweet Judge) must torments have,
 Use something else to chast'n me withall,
 Then those blest eyes . . .

The daring invective of the Fifth Song results from Astrophel's recognition that his worldly values have somehow failed him and he may have to substitute others. As has been demonstrated,⁹ Astrophel here evokes the Petrarchan convention as a form of words whereby he can express his half-angry, half-teasing response to Stella's refusal. The choice of tone here is psychologically very acute for it suggests an entirely suitable state of embarrassed indignation.

The arguments Astrophel adopts, however, must be treated very ~~delicately~~ ^{carefully} by the critic. One must not only remember that the convention is evoked only half seriously, but also that the song may have been written for another work. Ringler demonstrates very convincingly¹⁰ that the Fifth Song was originally

⁹ See ante, pp. 96-98.

¹⁰ Ringler, op. cit., p. 484.

written for the Old Arcadia. But he errs in saying that it depicts a situation the reverse of that in Astrophel and Stella.¹¹ It is true that Stella was first cold and then showed her favour, but what provokes the song is that she seems to have given Astrophel hope at last, and then dashed that hope, and the Fifth Song depicts fully and accurately one logical sort of response to that rejection.

The clearest example of the difficulty in interpreting this song is the line "Rebell by Nature's law, Rebell by law of reason" (v: 63). The nature and the reason which Astrophel calls upon for his standards here are not the same ones Sidney has been developing throughout the sequence; they are not sanctions in the world of idealistic love but in the world of practical experience, as the lines that follow make clear (v: 64-5, 69-72):

Thou, sweetest subject, wert borne in the realme of Love,
And yet against thy Prince thy force dost dayly prove:

.....

Both Rebell to the Sonne, and Vagrant from the mother;
For wearing Venus' badge, in every part of thee,
Unto Dianae's traine thou runaway didst flee:
Who faileth one, is false, though trusty to another.

R. B. Young points out that the song is structured on the neoplatonic sanctions against the unresponsive lover, and

¹¹
Ibid., p. xlv.

quotes Ficino's words:¹²

Anyone who is loved ought in very justice to love in return, and he who does not love his lover must bear the charge of homicide, nay rather, the triple charge of thief, homicide, and desecrator.

But Sidney does not seem anxious to pursue all the avenues which his approach suggests. Just as the invective is lightened by the tone, so also the apparatus of neoplatonism is not exploited. It does not require too great a forcing of line 82, "For thy face tempts my soule to leave the heav'n for thee," to show that Astrophel is in fact working on assumptions quite the opposite of neoplatonic; his heaven is one in which physical desire is a natural element. Thus, though the materials of the song may be second-hand, its values are perfectly characteristic of Astrophel at this stage in his development.

What Astrophel pleads for in the delicious accents of the world of experience in the Fourth Song, he begs again in the Eighth. But this time the world of nature, earlier used to evoke the ideal setting for desire, becomes the transcendental world of ideal passion. The nature which is in collusion

¹² Marsilio Ficino, Commentary, Oration II, viii (trans. Sears Jayne), cited by Richard B. Young; English Petrarke; A Study in Sidney's Astrophel and Stella, pp. 75-6.

with the forces of rank desire in the Fourth Song becomes the expression of a love which moves the universe (viii: 49, 51-64):

'Graunt . . .

.

. . . not I, but since I love you,
Time and place for me may move you.

'Never season was more fit,
Never roome more apt for it;
Smiling ayre allows my reason,
These birds sing: "Now use the season."

'This small wind which so sweete is,
See how it the leaves doth kisse,
Ech tree in his best attiring
Sense of love to love inspiring.

'Love makes earth the water drink
Love to earth makes water sinke;
And if dumbe things be so witty,
Should a heavenly grace want pitty?'

None of these arguments differs in naked logic from the arguments of the Fourth Song. Time and place, Astrophel implied then, would move Stella, but they did not. Nature in the Fourth Song conspired to shroud the lovers in darkness, for a secret and sinful consummation. But here Sidney invokes the natural framework to indicate in Astrophel a love which transforms the total experience of life, and binds the ideal to the real. Astrophel still offers Stella his body, and it is her body which he desires. His plea, however, is not based in shame and secrecy, but in a profound affirmation

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.

conflicting worlds of the lovers. But in the Eighth Song, these worlds become one (viii: 5-16):

Astrophil with Stella sweete,
 Did for mutuall comfort meete,
 Both within themselves oppressed,
 But each in the other blessed.

Him great harmes had taught much care,
 Her faire necke a foule yoke bare,
 But her sight his cares did banish,
 In his sight her yoke did vanish.

Wept they had, alas the while,
 But now teares themselves did smile,
 While their eyes by love directed
 Enterchangeably reflected.

How is it that Astrophel has suddenly become a partner in Stella's world? A development along these lines can be sensed in the Sixth and Seventh Songs, although Sidney there moves on the level of theory, reserving the full force of the recognition on the personal level for the Eighth Song. The Sixth Song is a legalistic debate between Stella's voice and her face over which deserves the foremost place. The arbiter of the debate is "common sence," which cannot decide between the two. The song ends when the question is placed before "reason, Princesse hy," whose judgement is requested, though not handed down. Although this song appears simply as the most charming sort of compliment, its effect in the context of the whole sequence is that though ostensibly a debate, it in fact neutralizes all conflicts and establishes a tone

of enchanted harmony (vi: 19-36):

For beutie beautifies,
 With heavenly hew and grace,
 The heavenly harmonies;
 And in this faultlesse face,
 The perfect beauties be
 A perfect harmony.

Musicke more loftly swels
 In speeches nobly placed:
 Beauty as farre excels,
 In action aptly graced:
 A friend each party drawes,
 To countenance his cause:

Love more affected seemes
 To beutie's lovely light,
 And wonder more esteemes
 Of Musick's wondrous might:
 But both to both so bent,
 As both in both are spent.

In the Seventh Song, this harmony forms the basis of a new concept of order, one which replaces the decorum of physical passion which was elaborated in sonnet 85 and in the Fourth Song. It is the harmony of a neoplatonic scheme, in which delight breeds wonder, and wonder leads to a knowledge of realities even "past bounds of wit" (vii: 6). There is a clear reference here to Bembo's statement in The Courtier, quoted earlier,¹⁴ in which he talks of the way in which the soul moves from worldly beauty to a union with the divine beyond even the understanding. When this process is impeded, Sidney lays the blame on "stepdame Nature" (vii: 1), a per-

¹⁴ See ante, pp. 46-7.

course, quite true. The passions of the flesh as they exist in the personification of Cupid are left behind in this song. But what is more important is that this rejection of rank desire for its own sake is part of an attempt to harmonize all the levels of human experience. Sidney makes clear that the response to beauty is an important initial stage in entering into the greater harmony that leads ultimately to "things past bounds of wit" (vii: 6). The agent of this harmonization is Stella, transforming as always the materials of base passion into the substance of the ideal.¹⁶

Yet the grace for which Astrophel pleads in the Eighth Song is still the grace of a consummation in the flesh. And it is this desire that Stella grants in theory, though not in fact (viii: 85-96):

'If to secret of my hart,
I do any wish impart,
Where thou art not formost placed,
Be both wish and I defaced.

'If more may be sayd, I say,
All my blisse in thee I lay;
If thou love, my love content thee,
For all love, all faith is meant thee.

'Trust me while I thee deny,
In my selfe the smart I try,
Tyran honour doth thus use thee,
Stella's selfe might not refuse thee.

The lesson in love, therefore, that Stella sets before Astro-

¹⁶ See ante, p. 86.

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.

But in conceiving her role as tutor in virtue, Sidney takes a distinctively neoplatonic course, one amply forecast in earlier sonnets. Stella's function is not to divide Astrophel from love, but to bring him to a new understanding of it. She does not reject him, she simply reunites his divided vision by asserting values to which he has been known to respond in the days before he met her.

But even in outlining a neoplatonic vision of a world where love is the great messenger between gods and men, Sidney has an individual viewpoint. Castiglione makes clear that desire is for young and unformed men: older and more mature courtiers are better fitted for the nobler experience of an ideal passion commencing solely in the contemplation of the beloved's beauty.¹⁷ But in Astrophel's lesson in love, passion has its place, for if circumstances were otherwise, Stella admits, she could not refuse him. Sidney does not hesitate, therefore, to interpret neoplatonic doctrine according to his own views. He is interested in the regenerating and transforming power of love, but he is also interested in the real experience of love, and what it demands of men who seek virtue, yet remain men.

What Sidney seeks to advance here, drawing with his

¹⁷Castiglione, op. cit., pp. 595-97.

"charming sweetness, the wild untamed wits to an admiration of knowledge,"¹⁸ is the concept of a universe of behaviour founded on right order. Just as Astrophel's successive rejections have shown him that rank desire is not part of that order, so also the Eighth Song does not blink the idea that not even rightly-based desire, in fullest consort with the universe, has authority to destroy that universe. Indeed, it is not in fullest consort unless it accepts this fact: "if thou love, my love content thee" (viii: 91). The early emphasis on Stella as teacher, and the firm assertion of her alliance with nature rightly conceived, is essential to an understanding of the conception of order on which the Eighth Song is based. It is in this context that the renunciation of his old identity by Astrophel, outlined earlier, has its fullest force; in attempting to refashion his world in accordance with the example of conduct Stella sets him, he must in effect refashion himself.

The songs and sonnets which conclude Astrophel and Stella depict Astrophel in the process of this reconstruction. The Ninth Song and the ensuing sonnet mark an immediate reaction to Stella's refusal which is remote from the teasing rage of the Fifth Song. In the Ninth Song, Astrophel attempts to distance his immediate anguish by adopting the guise of the pastoral; "it is a means for expressing his

¹⁸Sidney, Apologie, ~~op. cit.~~, p. 191.

awareness that the role is not one he has chosen to create but one that is forced upon him."¹⁹ In sonnet 87, Stella is seen in the role of melancholy lover again. But this time the conception is not used ironically, as it was in sonnet 67, to express Astrophel's disordered acceptance of the rule of physical passion; it sets forth instead the unity of lover and beloved (87: 1, 4-8):

When I was forst from Stella ever deere,

.

By iron lawes of duty to depart:
 Alas I found, that she with me did smart,
 I saw that teares did in her eyes appeare;
 I saw that sighes her sweetest lips did part,
 And her sad words my sadded sence did heare.

Duty to be affirmed in the face of desire, love to be maintain^{ed} in the midst of absence, order to be sought when disorder presses in on all sides, all of these problems in their insolubility dominate Astrophel's mind. There is a marked return in these sonnets to the dissidio, to an essentially Petrarchan characterization of Astrophel's despair. Such paradoxes are accounted for not by a conscious reversion on Astrophel's part to the conventional, an affirmation of the Petrarchan situation, as Young suggests,²⁰ but by the

¹⁹Young, op. cit., p. 80.

²⁰Ibid., p. 82.

fact that Sidney as poet finds in the conventional paradox the most literal expression of Astrophel's plight (89: 13-14):

. . . living thus in blackest winter night,
I feele the flames of hottest summer day.

Divided from Stella forever by the husband who stands between them, Astrophel can only express his deprivation in the conventional extremes. But these extremes do not indicate a division of soul. They are simply a profoundly realistic view of his present agony.

That desire still oppresses Astrophel is clear from sonnets 88 and 91, where Sidney uses the theme of the ^{attractions of} ~~remedia~~ another woman ~~amoris~~ to express both Astrophel's physical desire ~~for the womanly Stella,~~ and the strength of his new faith. The expression of this consciousness of Stella's physical presence, even in absence, goes hand in hand with a return to the setting of court life. Other creatures--an alluring lady, a laconic courtier--break into Astrophel's melancholy, yet serve only to mark by their presence his outcast lot and the absence of Stella.

In the Tenth Song, Astrophel fails the injunctions of duty, and rhapsodizes (x: 19-36):

Thought see thou no place forbear,
Enter bravely every where,
Seaze on all to her belonging;
But if thou wouldst garded be,
Fearing her beames, take with thee
Strength of liking, rage of longing.

Thinke of that most gratefull time,
 When my leaping hart will clime,
 In my lips to have his biding,
 There those roses for to kisse,
 Which do breathe a sugred blisse,
 Opening rubies, pearles deviding.

Think of my most Princely power
 When I blessed shall devower,
 With my greedy licorous sences
 Beauty, musicke, sweetnesse, love
 While she doth against me prove
 Her strong darts, but weake defences.

This regression to the vocabulary of desire is a clear outgrowth of the difficulty Astrophel has in renouncing his former self; sonnet 93 plainly depicts his reaction to the inevitable rebuke. It is difficult to see why Ringler²¹ finds no hint in sonnet 93 of the misdeed that has upset Stella so. There is no need to postulate an unnamed transgression outside the sequence; the failure which has vexed her is chronicled in the Tenth Song. Sonnet 93 acknowledges that "wit confus'd with too much care did misse" (93: 8), and concludes significantly with a reaffirmation of the lovers' oneness: "I cry thy sighs; my deere, thy teares I bleede" (93: 14).

It is at this point that the fullest examination of Astrophel's anguish begins, and the next six sonnets are the

²¹ Ringler, op. cit., p. 487.

lyrical expression of a complete devastation (94: 1-4):

Griefe, find the words, for thou hast made my braine
 So darke with misty vapors, which arise
 From out thy heavy mould, that inbent eyes
 Can scarce discerne the shape of mine owne paine.

Night in sonnets 96, 97, and 98 becomes a metaphor for the
 isolation of his own pain (96: 1-4, 9-14):

Thought with good cause thou likest so well the night,
 Since kind or chance gives both one liverie,
 Both sadly blacke, both blackly darkned be,
 Night bard from Sun, thou from thy owne sunne's light;

.....

In both a mazefull solitarinesse:
 In night of sprites the gastly powers stur
 In thee or sprites or sprited gastlinesse:
 But, but (alas) night's side the ods hath fur,
 For that at length yet doth invite some rest,
 Thou though still tired, yet still doost it detest.

In sonnet 98, the bed "where joye's peace some do see, /
 The field where all my thoughts to warre be traind" (98:
 1-2) becomes an ironic symbol of desire "raind / With care's
 hard hand," (98: 7-8) where Astrophel is denied even the
 peaceful sleep of chastity.

Sonnet 100 marks a return to the theme of Stella; it
 is a luscious, melancholy piece of complimentary verse that
 varies the painful tenor of this section of the cycle at
 the same time as it with sobbed out words a perfect music
 gives (100: 11). The image of Stella weeping with pity,
 and the ensuing conceit of Stella fallen prey to illness
 provide vehicles for compliment, evoking the fleshly woman

who is equally involved in Astrophel's plight, and whose flesh is, like any other's, vulnerable. In these sonnets, Sidney's treatment of his themes is at its most delicate. The manner of courtly praise revived in these poems after the more personal approach of the central part of the sequence has disturbed Richard B. Young.²² It seems a pale reversion after the series of great songs which precedes these poems. But in the setting of lyrical meditation, the tone is appropriate; Astrophel has not renounced his love, although he must learn a new way of feeling it. There is no poetic or narrative reason why the ability to praise gracefully should leave him either. Indeed, the final development of the sequence depends on a continuous affirmation of Stella's power and grace, an affirmation in which the effect of these sonnets plays an important part.

The uniqueness of Stella is affirmed as well in sonnet 103, but this time with a passionate irony that recalls Stella's fatal glance from the window in sonnet 53. In sonnet 103, in which the Thames wears joy's livery because Stella embarks on it, and the very boat she rides in dances for joy, it is Astrophel who watches from the window, and witnesses an apocalyptic vision of beauty and grace insepar-

²²Young, op. cit., pp. 84-5.

ably allied with the power of the universe (103: 6-14):

. . . wanton winds with beauties so devine
 Ravisht, staid not, till in her golden haire
 They did themselves (ô sweetest prison) twine.
 And faine those Aeols' youthes there would their stay
 Have made, but forst by Nature still to flie,
 First did with puffing kisse those lockes display:
 She so discheveld, blusht; from window I
 With sight thereof cride out: ô faire disgrace,
 Let honor' selfe to thee graunt highest place.

The reappearance in sonnet 104 of the envious wits who taunt Astrophel with the signs of melancholy love which at last are manifest in him marks a return to the practical world of the early sonnets and of the Fourth Song. But Astrophel, in his new understanding of love, is grimly contemptuous of their gossip, and the defiant tone of the sonnet effectively sets him apart from their petty concerns as a man bitterly experienced. This return to the world outside the lovers has its effect in the Eleventh Song also. The situation of this last song evokes with irony that earlier one of love in a world where lovers' meetings must remain secret; the irony is in the fact that in the Eleventh Song Astrophel makes his clearest declaration that his love is not shameful but has changed and matured. Stella's brusque recognition that they are part of that practical world is yet another irony. Each of her arguments, namely that his fancy ought to have changed, that absence, time, other loves, the light of reason, the pain of love denied ought all to have driven him away, is realistic

and practical. She has moved yet another step away from Astrophel in her knowledge that secrecy, silence, denial, and eventually renunciation are the gross necessities of life in a world of louts. But the louts from whom he must run away and the envious wits who spy on all sides do not prevent Astrophel from turning Stella's arguments into a stunning affirmation of his own love and his ability to grow in that love (xi: 16-20, 26-35):

'But time will these thoughts remove:
Time doth worke what no man knoweth.'
Time doth as the subject prove,
With time still th'affection groweth
In the faithfull Turtle dove.

.....

'But your reason's purest light
Bids you leave such minds to nourish.'
Deere, do reason no such spite,
Never doth thy beauty florish
More then in my reason's sight.

'But the wrongs love beares, will make
Love at length leave undertaking.'
No, the more fooles it do shake,
In a ground of so firme making,
Deeper still they drive the stake.

The image of Stella, who has slipped away from Astrophel to resume her journey through an antagonistic world, is powerfully evoked in sonnets 105 and 106, as a vivid presence, seen and then vanishing, or as an absence palpable by the very nature of the gap it leaves. The physical separation that is so allusively set forth in these sonnets is a

symbol of the ultimate recognition she requires of Astrophel.
 He must learn
 that their special understanding cannot be comprehended in
 the everyday world in which they exist, and ~~that~~ they must
 therefore bid farewell, if not to love, at least to each other.

These, then, are the lees of love Astrophel is left with,
 and sonnet 107 contains the grave resolution to which his quan-
 dary gives birth (107):

Stella, since thou so right a Princesse art
 Of all the powers which life bestowes on me,
 That ere by them ought undertaken be,
 They first resort unto that soveraigne part;
 Sweete, for a while give respite to my hart,
 Which pants as though it still should leape to thee:
 And on my thoughts give thy Lieftenancy
 To this great cause, which needs both use and art,
 And as a Queene, who from her presence sends
 Whom she imployes, dismisse from thee my wit,
 Till it have wrought what thy owne will attends.
 On servants' shame oft Maister's blame doth sit;
 O let not fooles in me thy workes reprove,
 And scorning say, 'See what it is to love.'

Lever errs in saying²³ that Astrophel departs to purge his
 misery in affairs of state. The "great cause" Astrophel cites
 has nothing to do with politics; it is the full assimilation
 of the lesson in love he has learned throughout the sequence
 and in particular in the Eighth and Eleventh Songs. It is
 the learning of this lesson, including both full acceptance
 and complete renunciation, which is what Stella's "will
 attends." That this lesson is of immense importance to
 Astrophel is made clear by the full assertion of Stella as

²³ J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet, p. 81.

princess of Astrophel's "souveraigne part," of all the powers that he has at his command, ~~and by the fact that~~ He does not wish to shame a love which has so transformed his whole being.

The love whose worth Astrophel seeks to preserve in the last lines of this poem is the subject of the meditation of the last sonnet, in which he examines the lesson of Stella and its effect in himself, the mingling of joy and despair with which he must learn to live (108: 10-11):

Ah, what doth Phoebus' gold that wretch availe,
Whom iron doores do keepe from use of day?

To say as Young does²⁴ that Astrophel accepts the paradoxical position of the Petrarchan lover is not correct. Astrophel is not the victim of sentiments which conflict but of sentiments which harmonize. Stella's works have not made him take refuge in an assumed, conventional manner; they have brought him to the recognition of a new kind of love, and it is only a grim accident of his particular situation that this love cannot come to fulfilment. What Astrophel contents himself with, what is the entire justification for the moral journey on which he sets out in sonnet 107, is that this new recognition of love, which is her work, prevails. Thus the fact that the sequence ends with the lyric, and not the resolve, is of immense importance. It underlines with bittersweet acceptance that time indeed works what no man knows (xi: 17), and that in the

²⁴Young, op. cit., p. 87.

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.

CHAPTER VI

ASTROPHEL AND STELLA:

THE PROBLEM OF OBJECTIVE STRUCTURE

This thesis has sought to discern in Astrophel and Stella a principle of order which will account for all the elements in the sequence, yet will not do violence to its quality as lyric. It has examined in some detail the structure of Astrophel and Stella and the way its concepts of love are developed by that structure. This examination can be summarized in the following way.

In the first part of the sequence, Sidney depicts the onslaught of love in Astrophel. He says that it is not a sudden process, and proceeds from the known worth of Stella. But if Astrophel knows Stella is worthy, he is not so sure about the effects of love itself; he debates the matter, arguing that his desire for her contradicts the more exalted values he knows he should pursue. At the same time as this debate is proceeding, Sidney is elaborating Stella's relationship with the cosmic powers of the universe. Astrophel perceives this relationship, a demonstration of which has been necessitated by the disordered state of his mind, which has expressed an ambivalent attitude towards the works of nature. But if he perceives it, he does not understand it;

the concurrent development of his persona as poet shows that the effect of his passion for Stella has been to devastate his personality, and this devastation is increasing.

In Part II of the sequence, desire presses Astrophel on, first to steal a kiss while Stella is sleeping, then to demand from her the ultimate gift of her body. In the early sonnets of this section, he still expresses anxiety over their relationship, but slowly he submits to the domination of physical passion, and his conception of Stella reflects his wish to imagine that she feels desire also. Thus, when she first indicates her favour, he decides to accept a compromise, but his acceptance indicates the falsity of his motives. He says he will try to follow the course of honour and repress his passion, but he breaks his covenant and steals a kiss while Stella sleeps, and the force of desire reasserts itself, not to be denied. In the Fourth Song, Astrophel uses every device of a luxuriant setting to persuade Stella to give in to him. And when she refuses, he expresses his anger in the teasing of the Fifth Song. In the Eighth Song, Astrophel enters the world of Stella fully, by demonstrating a mature sense of the power of love to involve the whole being. This event is prepared for in the Sixth Song by the evocation of a condition of total harmony, and in the Seventh Song by the demonstration that such a harmony does not include the

kind of disordered thinking of which Astrophel has been a victim. The lesson in love is carried forward in the Eighth Song by Stella's demonstration that physical desire has its place in the order of things, but that it has no right to overturn that order. Considerations of honour prevent the consummation of their love, and honour, as a higher value than desire, must take precedence.

Part III of the sequence depicts Astrophel's attempt to absorb this lesson and rebuild his personality to accord with it. After the relapse of the Tenth Song, there is first a descent into pure grief, then a delicate reaffirmation of the power of Stella. Then in the Eleventh Song Astrophel shows that he has attained the full maturity which Stella demanded, only to discover that a complete divorcement is necessary as a result of her recognition that the world around them cannot comprehend their special understanding. This divorcement is expressed in the sonnets of absence that follow, where Stella is only a fleeting presence, or an empty place. The sonnet sequence ends in Astrophel's resolve to undertake the full demonstration of Stella's lesson by putting the experience behind him. But his motive for doing so is his desire to stand as a proud example of her works in him, and the concluding lyric states with surpassing effect that these works--the lesson which Stella has given--continue to exist

in his example, though they exact a dreadful toll from his feelings.

The concluding paradox of the sequence requires some further discussion in the light of the exposition by Young and Montgomery examined in Chapter I. When Astrophel is rejected by Stella in the Eighth Song, a very important aspect of him, his desire, is nonetheless accepted. His recognition of this is particularly noticeable in sonnet 87, which stresses the unity of the lovers and the mutuality of their love. Astrophel first thought that his love was outside the order he accepted as the right one, then adopted that love anyway. Ultimately he discovered that his knowledge of that order was insufficient. In his new and more complex understanding, he saw that sensual love has its place within the order. But in a bitter twist on the Petrarchan situation, he discovered that fatal circumstance would divide him entirely from Stella if he accepted this new understanding, and that she would not have him in any other way. Thus he was forced back on the original conflict between the ideal and the physical in a new and tragic way.

Both Young and Montgomery accept the idea that Astrophel has undergone a conflict, and that the conflict has been between sensuality and the control of reason. But Young errs in saying that Stella has taught Astrophel Petrarchan love, and Montgomery

errs in thinking that the result has been disorder and irresolution. That Stella's works prevail in Astrophel, and that these works comprise the total experience of her as fleshly woman and sovereign reason expressed in sonnet 71, is the critical factor here. That Astrophel is prepared to absorb this total experience of Stella is manifest in the resolution of sonnet 107. Thus, the concluding paradox is an affirmation not of the eternal conflict of the dissidio, which has been exorcised in the gentle words of Stella in the Eighth Song, nor of disorder and irresolution on Astrophel's part, specifically eliminated in sonnet 107, but of Astrophel's personal experience of love which includes both the rational and the sensual within the framework of his new understanding. Sidney's rigour as a creator of poetic fiction is nowhere better demonstrated than in his audacious use of the ultimate conventional formulation, in the last lines of 108, to express a unique vision of the real and the ideal blended in one man's experience. That this vision separates Astrophel from a world in which love can be conceived solely as physical desire is an important discovery of the latter part of the sequence. There the world of fashionable amour that produced the courtier-poet has become a world of louts, and the isolation of the lover from those who lack his special understanding is the estrangement of the convert from the unconverted.

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

sixteenth-century edition, and it requires no fanciful re-ordering of the sequence to support its views. It bases the sequence firmly in the orthodox Renaissance love theories (and no one has yet demonstrated that Sidney was in the least heterodox). It recognizes that this orthodoxy conflicts in no way with the broader tradition of Elizabethan love poetry. Most important, it accepts fully the power of Sidney's imagination to transform and unify all these elements into the purely poetic.

Some further analysis of these elements is required in order to attain a full understanding of the total effect of Sidney's technique in the context of the love poetry of his time, and it is as well to begin, as before, with Petrarch.

Sidney is not really responsive to Petrarch's feeling for nature. Reading Astrophel and Stella, one senses that he knows and understands this aspect of Petrarch, but that his own sensibility works in different ways. Nature personified as the creator of Stella plays a large part in the sequence; nature seen as a mirror of the poet's feeling is absent. As a result when on four occasions Sidney does evoke the physical world, it is with an effect of conscious artistry, and each evocation is at a critical point in the sequence: sonnets 22 and 26, where Stella's alliance with the powers of the universe is made clear, the Fourth and Eighth Songs, with

their contrasting treatments of the lovers' garden, and sonnet 103, which restates the alliance of Stella and nature. What Sidney does respond to in Petrarch is not the natural world but the world itself. Petrarch interpolates occasional sonnets on affairs of state in the Canzoniere; to Sidney the imagery of politics and the court is fundamental.¹ It is significant that he conceives nature as a personification, and that the rank aspect of Astrophel's desire is likewise personified in the figure of Cupid, the grandson of Nature. Like the ladies of the court, the admonishing friend, the laconic courtier, and the inimical husband, these personifications constitute the way Sidney poetizes the world around the lovers; he sees it in terms of human forces, not elemental ones. Thus sonnet 26, which relates the elemental forces of the universe to the lover through the agency of Stella's eyes is an important statement of concepts which pervade the entire fabric of Astrophel and Stella, for it asserts the surpassing force of the personal influence in leading man to virtue.

In the long dialogue at the end of Petrarch's Triumph of Death, from which Sidney may perhaps have drawn the germ of his Eighth Song, Laura tells Petrarch:²

¹See sonnets 8, 13, 23, 29, 30, 41, 64, 75, 85, 98, 104, 107.

²The Triumphs of Petrarch, trans. Ernest H. Wilkins (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 64.

. . . Never was my heart
 From thee divided, nor shall ever be
 Thy flame I tempered with my countenance
 Because there was no other way than this
 To save us both, and save your youthful fame.

.

More than a thousand times anger appeared
 Upon my face, while love glowed in my heart,
 But reason ever conquered my desire.

A comparison of the Eighth Song and the lines just quoted makes clear the very different ways Sidney and Petrarch conceive of love. In both cases the love is sensual, and is rejected. In both cases the role of the lady is that of the exemplar of a higher order of understanding. But Laura tells Petrarch he must renounce desire because it cannot be integrated into the scheme of things which they recognize as the right one. Stella tells Astrophel that he must renounce desire because its place in the scheme of things is only a relative one.

In the setting-forth of the concept of order that lies behind Astrophel and Stella, the role of Stella is therefore of extreme importance. It has been noted how carefully Sidney places her in the context of the nature that has produced her, how he emphasizes her role as teacher and exemplar, and how sonnet 71 sums up all of these themes just as Astrophel is about to commit the transgression of kissing her when the chastening eyes are closed in sleep. Within the neoplatonic

scheme, Stella serves the function of the mistress whose fleshly beauty starts the lover on a new life. But the nature of this new life differs from the metaphysical explication put forth by Bembo in the last pages of The Courtier.

The degree of Sidney's indifference to the metaphysical aspect of Castiglione's theory may be gauged in an examination of the two sonnets in which he comes closest to a straightforward statement of neoplatonism. The first is sonnet 5, "It is most true, that eyes are form'd to serve." Two things are apparent in this poem. The first, as has been pointed out, is that Sidney adopts the Platonic unification only to disparage its fleshly base, thus expressing a radical criticism of the works of Eros in *Astrophel*. The second is that he sees the universe under an ethical, and not a metaphysical formulation, and that the emphasis is not therefore on the loss of self in the One to which Bembo refers, but on the relation of the individual conscience with the moral universe.

In sonnet 71, the beauty that Sidney called an illusion in sonnet 5 becomes the "faire lines, which true goodnesse show." (71: 4). The inward light of sonnet 5 is transformed into the inward sun which shines in Stella's eyes. Yet significantly the expression of these ideas is

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 beautie 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

which reflects Sidney's pre-occupation as a Christian humanist with the problem of values and conduct.

The ways in which Sidney transmutes Petrarch and Plato arise from the same source as his special interest in the power of poetry to persuade to virtue, which has already been discussed. Among all the courtly, Petrarchan, and neoplatonic concepts which were available to him, Sidney was most responsive to the formulation of love as an educative and perfecting experience, for it gave him an immediate grasp of elements central to his conception of poetry. Behind Petrarch lies the Ovid of the courtly poets, the scheming and practical Ovid of the Ars Amatoria. Behind Sidney and most of his fellow Elizabethan poets lies the Ovid of the Metamorphoses, in which change and flux, and by implication, development, are the conditions of existence.³ In the Canzoniere of Petrarch there is an intense perception of the passage of time and the imminence of death; Petrarch's Augustinianism forces these things on his consideration. The English poets, however, do not write sonnets in morte. This is why the moral death in Shakespeare's Sonnets is so devastating, for like Marlowe, and unlike Sidney, Shakespeare sees a Lucretian universe, and in it the ines-

³M. C. Bradbrook, Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry, p. 53.

capable manifestations of mortality and decay.⁴ These themes are almost totally absent from Astrophel and Stella. Sidney is interested not in the death of the spirit, like Shakespeare, nor even in the death of the body, like Petrarch. He is pre-occupied rather with the regeneration of the whole man and the means to that regeneration.

It is a truism to say that Sidney moves within the Petrarchan convention. He uses its language easily and without inhibition, and the paradox which is the natural expression of the lover in frustration in the early part of the sequence is still employed at the end for the most individualistic expression of his own vision of love. But another strain dominates the Petrarchan, enlarging the Petrarchan essentials and incorporating them into a poetic world in which the rhetor dominates the metaphysician.

The findings of this thesis may be briefly summarized. Astrophel and Stella is a Petrarchan sonnet sequence which exploits the traditional conflict of reason and passion to advance a later conception of love as a transforming and educating experience. The poetic fiction that comprises the sequence is organized to carry forward this developing exper-

⁴ Ibid., p. 52.

ience, but by methods appropriate to the lyric, rather than to strict narrative. The conception of love is neoplatonic in origin, but highly individualized in the treatment, which is essentially ethical rather than metaphysical. By treating the sequence as a lesson in love, and by concentrating on the ethical rather than the metaphysical, Sidney expresses his known belief in the importance of the ethical life and the power of works of the imagination to persuade man of the value of that life.

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