





A STUDY OF ASTROPHEL AND STELLA

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PREFACE

This paper is to be taken only as a study of Astrophel and Stella, a sonnet sequence by Sir Philip Sidney. In order to make the present study clearer, I have devoted my first chapter to the life of the poet, in which I did not include any of his other works.

My sincerest thanks go to Dr. Ercüment Atabay without whose help I would not be able to write on this subject.



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I

THE LIFE OF SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

In A History of Elizabethan Literature, George Saintsbury puts Sir Philip Sidney third to Shakespeare and Spenser in Elizabethan poetry.¹ Other critics do not hesitate to call him a first-class poet of his time. Before studying Astrophel and Stella, a sonnet-sequence of Sir Philip, one should take a look at his life in order to understand his main work better.

Sir Philip Sidney, son of Sir Henry Sidney and Lady Mary Sidney, was born at Penhurst on the 29th of November 1554. He came of a noble family some of whose members were misunderstood by the queen and freed from royal service. Sir Henry Sidney was

¹George Saintsbury, A History of Elizabethan Literature (New York, 1910), p. 101.

thought to be unloyal to the Royal Family, yet given the title "Vice-Treasurer and General Governor" of Ireland in 1556. After Queen Elizabeth found out that he was a loyal member of the country, she nominated him as Lord Justice of Ireland, then as Lord President of Wales and Lord Deputy of Ireland. In 1564, Sir Henry Sidney received the honour of the Garter, and "on this occasion he was styled 'The thrice valiant Knight, Deputy of the Realm of Ireland, and President of the Council of Wales.' Next year~~s~~ he was again despatched to Ireland with the full title and authority of Lord Deputy."²

Sir Henry Sidney sent his son Philip to school at Shrewsbury, a city of importance in the sense of wool-trade. It was in that school that he met Fulke Greville, a relative who was going to be his life-long friend.

After leaving Shrewsbury in 1568, Philip entered at Christ Church as a resident and stayed there for three years until he quitted Oxford without a degree. In 1571, Sir Henry Sidney returned to England with "impaired constitution and a diminished estate."³ With him, Sidney passed some months after leaving Oxford.

In 1572, Philip Sidney was sent out of England for two years carrying royal duties as a member to the Earl of Lincoln, the Ambassador Extraordinary of the Queen. When the Earl of Lincoln

²John Addington Symonds, Sir Philip Sidney (London, 1909), p. 11.

³Ibid., p. 21.

returned to England, Philip stayed at Paris where he met the King of Navarre and was admitted to his "intimacy". At the same time Charles IX., who had been installed Knight of the Garter on the same day as Philip's father, appointed him Gentleman in Ordinary of his bedchamber. The patent runs as follows: 'That considering how great the house of Sidenay was in England, and the rank it has always held near the persons of the kings and queens, their sovereigns, and desiring well and favourably to treat the young Sir Philip Sidenay for the good and commendable knowledge in him, he had retained and received him.'"⁴

Sir Philip Sidney was present at the time of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, and he saved his life by taking refuge at the English embassy.

By that time, the two-years' time was due and Master Philip Sidney was expected in England. After he left Paris, he passed through Lorraine, Strasburg, Heidelberg and went to Frankfort where "he found a friend, who, having shared the perils of St. Bartholomew, had recently escaped across the Rhine to Germany. This was Hubert Languet, a man whose conversation and correspondence exercised no small influence over the formation of Sidney's character."⁵

Along with Languet, Sidney went to Vienna in 1573. Later he visited Hungary alone and went to Venice where he sat for his portrait to Paolo Veronese.

After Venice, he met Languet at Vienna

⁴John Addington Symonds, Sir Philip Sidney (London, 1909), pp. 23-24.

⁵Ibid., p. 27.

where he spent the winter of 1574-75. Then through Dresden, Heidelberg, Strasburg and Frankfort, he went to London. "During his absence one of his two sisters, Ambrozia, had died at Ludlow Castle. The queen took the other, Mary, under special protection, and attached her to her person. A new chapter was now opened in the young man's life. His education being finished, he entered upon the life of Courts."⁶

In July 1575, Sir Philip Sidney met Lady Penelope Devereux, a girl of thirteen. Penelope's father, the Earl of Essex, wanted to marry his daughter to Philip and "sent him this message on his deathbed: 'Tell him I sent him nothing, but I wish him well; so well that, if God do move their hearts, I wish that he might match with my daughter. I call him son; he is so wise, virtuous, and godly. If he go on in the course he hath begun, he will be as famous and worthy a gentleman as ever England bred.'"⁷

Symonds, after saying that "what interrupted the execution of this marriage treaty is not certain,"⁸ gives three possible reasons: "the poverty of the Sidneys, may be reckoned among the causes..."⁹, "...that Philip's father was unfavourable to the match,"¹⁰ and "...the proposed bridegroom felt no lover's liking for the lady."¹¹ Be as it may be, on the other hand

⁶John Addington Symonds, Sir Philip Sidney (London, 1909), pp. 32-33.

⁷Ibid., p. 35.

⁸Ibid., p. 36.

⁹Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 36.

¹¹Ibid., p. 36.

Penelope married a man unworthy of her, Lord Rich.

In 1577, Elizabeth sent Sidney as an ambassador to congratulate Rodolph of Hapsburg who had become a successor to the throne.

Along with him went Fulke Greville. Before reaching Heidelberg, the group met Hubert Languet, and went to Prague altogether.

After Sidney returned to England, Mary Sidney, his sister, married the Earl of Pembroke. During that period, some people in the palace were working against Sir Henry Sidney. "Sir Henry Sidney was still at his post as Lord Deputy of Ireland; and in his absence the usual intrigues were destroying the credit with the queen. Brilliant, unscrupulous, mendacious, Ormond poured calumnies and false insinuations into her ear."¹²

Philip Sidney wrote a letter to the queen defending his father and it fulfilled his wishes. Symonds says, "Waterhouse wrote to Sir Henry that it was the most excellent discourse he had ever read, adding, 'Let no man compare with Sir Philip's pen.'"¹³

After this event, Philip thought that some people around Sir Henry were working against him. He wrote a letter to Edmund Molineux, Sir Henry's secretary, thinking that he was one of those people. Symonds after saying that no biographer should omit that letter quotes it. It clearly shows an aspect of Sir Philip Sidney:

¹²John Addington Symonds, Sir Philip Sidney (London, 1909), p. 48.

¹³Ibid., p. 50.

"MR. MOLINEUX — Few words are best. My letters to my father have come to the ears of some: neither can I condemn any but you. If it be so, you have played the very knave with me; and so I will make you know, if I have good proof of it. But that for so much as is past. For that is to come, I assure you, before God, that if ever I know you to do so much as read any letter I write to my father without his commandment or my consent, I will thrust my dagger into you. And trust to it, for I speak in earnest. In the meantime, farewell. — From Court, this last of May 1578. By me,

PHILIP SIDNEY."¹⁴

Later, it was understood that Molineux was innocent, and Sidney kept his friendship with him.

During this time, Sidney wrote a masque, entitled The Lady of the May which was not liked by the contemporary readers and critics.

Sidney's second work was Arcadia which he began in 1580 at Wilton, and which was "intended by its author only for his sister and a friendly circle."¹⁵

In 1581, Sidney entered the Parliament as knight of the shire for Kent. At the end of that year, he formed a friendship with Frances, daughter of Sir Francis Walsingham, and married her sometime during ~~in~~ the next seven months. They lived for three years ~~just~~ as man and wife.

After his marriage, one faces almost no event in Sidney's life. In 1585, he left England for his

¹⁴John Addington Symonds, Sir Philip Sidney (London, 1909), p. 52.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 81.

post in the Low Countries. On May 5, 1586, Sir Henry Sidney died in Worcester; "his body was embalmed and sent to PenMurst. His heart was buried at Ludlow; his entrails in the precincts of Worcester Cathedral. So passed from life Elizabeth's sturdy servant in Ireland and Wales; a man, as I conceive him, of somewhat limited capacity and stubborn temper, but true as steel, and honest in the discharge of very trying duties. Later in the same year, upon the 9th of August, Lady Mary Sidney yielded up her gentle spirit. Of her there is nothing to be written but the purest panegyric."¹⁶

Sidney was successful in overcoming his duties. He even captured a town, Axel. On September 22, 1586 he got wounded at Zuthpel, and could live until October 17. His body was taken to St. Paul's and was buried there on February 16, 1587.

Thus was the simple, plain end of an Astrophel.

¹⁶John Addington Symonds, Sir Philip Sidney (London, 1909), pp. 179-180.

II

"ASTROPHEL AND STELLA"

Astrophel and Stella, the sonnet sequence of Sir Philip Sidney or "the finest love poems" before the publication of Shakespeare's sonnets¹⁷ was written sometime between 1581-1583, but not printed until 1591. This edition was not an authorized one, and the sonnets could be called incomplete if an authorized one would not come out in 1598. This second printing was done under the textual supervision of Sidney's sister, the Countess of Arcadia, as Hallett Smith writes.¹⁸

¹⁷John Addington Symonds, Sir Philip Sidney (London, 1909), p. 116.

¹⁸Hallett Smith, Elizabethan Poetry (Massachusetts, 1952), p. 142.

Sidney, in his The Defense of Poesy, says that poesy "is an art of imitation."¹⁹ In Astrophel and Stella, one can see that he is loyal to his definition. Petrarch and Ronsard influenced him to a high degree. As Sidney Lee puts forth "Sidney's masters were Petrarch and Ronsard. His admirers dubbed him 'our English Petrarch', or 'the Petrarch of our time'."²⁰

Sir Philip was one of the first English poets who got this Petrarchan tradition: "Sidney's sonnets, of course, derive much of their method and technique from the influence of Petrarch and, to a lesser degree, of Petrarch's imitators in various languages. In fact, the vitality (as distinguished from the mere 'manner') of the Petrarchan tradition is first established in English by these 108 poems."²¹

This influence and imitation was not only in the sense of construction, but in the subject matter and characterization, also. Petrarch had put a concept of love to his poems which influenced the later sonnet-writers along with the Petrarchan form of the sonnet and images. Sir Philip Sidney, more or less, had the same ideas on love. Along with the Petrarchan form, a concept of love, which was not an one of Sidney, can clearly be seen in Astrophel and

¹⁹Sir Philip Sidney, The Defense of Poesy (Boston, 1890), p. 9.

²⁰An English Garner (Elizabethan Sonnets), with intr. by Sidney Lee (Westminster, 1904), v. I., p. xliv.

²¹Hallett Smith, Elizabethan Poetry (Massachusetts, 1952), pp. 142-143.

Stella.

simple language "The ardour of the Petrarchan lover, the chastity of the Petrarchan mistress, no doubt had their correlatives in the relationship of Philip Sidney and Penelope Devereux while the poetry of the age lived within them."²²

A certain kind of form had brought forth a certain concept of a certain thing. Along came the certain images... A reader who is familiar with the sonnets of Petrarch and Ronsard can trace the same images and the similar use of the same forms of speech to Sidney. It was through French poetry that Sidney met the Italians and influenced by them. This "influence" is so high that from time to time it leads to "imitation". The resemblance between Laura and Stella is a direct result of that influence.

"Sidney follows Ronsard with greater fidelity in reproaching his mistress with showing more attention to her dog than to himself. Petrarch's addresses to the River Po (Sonnet cxlvii) and to the River Rhone (Sonnet clxxiii) precisely adumbrate Sidney's address to the River Thames (Astrophel, ciii). The apostrophe to the bed (Sonnet xcviii), in which the English poet turns and tosses in the black horrors of the silent night, repeats the cry of whole flocks of Petrarchists in France and Italy," says Sidney Lee and gives more examples of this influence."²³

Other than the concept of love brought by

²²J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London, 1956), p. 57.

²³An English Garner (Elizabethan Sonnets), with intr. by. Sidney Lee (Westminster, 1904), v. I., pp. xlv-xlvi.

Petrarch, there was another cause that lead Sidney not to create his very own ideas on the subject. It was what the world required of him. He was not at all free after a certain degree. He was bound by the rules and concepts of his time. We could also say that the concept of love in his sonnets satisfied him; he did not try to create new perspectives. If he would, this Petrarchan concept or the rules of his time would not be important for him.

Lever gives some excuses for the resemblances between the sonnets of Petrarch and Sidney:

"For each poet of the Renaissance, the power to be himself had been delegated: each one imitated in order to be original.

Considered from the viewpoint of the Elizabethan reader, the same conception of imitation held good. It was the poet's duty to keep the channels of communication open."²⁴

One must, also, not forget the fact that Sidney put himself into his poetry when imitating, and the result is not a Petrarchan or Ronsardian piece, but a Sidneyan sonnet which, from time to time, parts from the works of the previous writers. Although inherited from the past, his images and symbols of love are modernized to a degree. It was ~~was~~ a kind of tradition before him that the sonnet writers fell in love at the first sight. The beginning of the second sonnet of the sequence is a good example in the sense that it shows the rebel of Sir Philip to this tradition:

²⁴J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London, 1956), p. 55.

"Not at the first sight, nor with a dribbed
shot,

Love gave the wound, which while I breathe
will bleed:"²⁵

"It should be noticed that," says Lever,
"while Sidney has treated his source material with
great freedom, his primary theme is expressed in and
through the conventions of his medium. At the crux of
attention in each sonnet, Sidney is at once most
conventional and most himself."²⁶

What was the reason that made Sir Philip
Sidney write Astrophel and Stella? Who was Stella?
Was she a real person who lived, or was she only a
fictitious character? In A History of English Poetry,
W. J. Courthope says that Stella was a person who
never lived. I would like to take all his argument
here before saying that she was a person who lived:

"(1) It is opposed to the facts of the
case. Penelope, Lady Rich, was the daughter of Walter
Devereux, Earl of Essex. She made Sidney's acquaintance
in 1576, when he was between twenty-one and twenty-two,
and she herself less than fifteen. Her father was fond

²⁵An English Garner (Elizabethan Sonnets), with intr.
by Sidney Lee (Westminster, 1904), v. I., p. 12.

²⁶J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London,
1956), p. 69.

of him, and was desirous to bring about between him and his daughter one of those mariages de convenance which were common at the time; but there is nothing to show that the affections of either party were engaged; while, two years later, a letter written to Languet proves that Sidney had no inclination whatever to be fettered by matrimony. In 1581 Penelope was constrained to marry the second Lord Rich, who is said to have treated (with neglect and even harshness, with whom she, however, lived till 1592; after which they lived apart till 1604, when Lord Rich obtained a divorce, while Penelope married the Earl of Devonshire, by whom she had already had several illegitimate children. Beyond, therefore, there is nothing to indicate that Sidney was ever really in love with Lady Rich, or she with him; on the other hand, her later history is not of a kind to lead one to conclude that, had there been genuine passion on both sides, the lover's advances would have been repelled with that severe regard for virtue which one enthusiastic biographer is disposed to set to the credit of the lady.

(2) The theory of a romantic and boyish passion on Sidney's side is inconsistent with what we know of his character. All testimony proves that from his earliest days he was distinguished by a certain gravity and seriousness of temper. By Languet, a religiously-minded Humanist, he had been taught to control his desires according to the half-Stoic doctrines favoured by that sect. The bent of his imagination caused him to interest himself deeply in public affairs, whether it were the cause of the

Reformed Religion in Europe, the independence of England, or the great discoveries of travel and science, which seemed to open out boundless prospects to the active mind. To suppose that such a man, after having been seasoned in all the fashions of a society, should suddenly have been carried away by an irresistible passion for a woman, with whom he had long been accustomed to associate without any feelings beyond those of simple friendship, and who had just become the wife of another, is as injurious to his intellect, as his readiness to blazon abroad his illicit relations with Stella, assuming that his passion was sincere, would be to his delicacy and sense of honour.

(3) But in truth the Sonnets themselves are the best proof of the fictitious character of his feelings. They number 110, and so far from having been casual expressions of emotion, as the moment prompted, it is plain enough to the careful reader that the whole series form a regular design, the object being to exercise the imagination on a set theme according to the traditional rules of a particular poetical convention, which required, above all things, a display of "wit" by the poet, partly in placing a single thought in a great number of different lights, partly in decorating it with a vast variety of far-fetched metaphors. Throughout these Sonnets the poet will be found to conform to all the Petrarchan rules; his style differs from that of his master only in this, that while Petrarch seems often really to be moved by a genuine feeling of tenderness, Sidney's love analysis never once penetrates beyond the bounds

of fancy."²⁷

On the other hand, J. W. Lever thinks that Stella is a character drawn from life:

"Sidney declares with much emphasis that Stella is no cryptically-conceived Una or Britomart, but a character drawn from life. In all these sonnets her effect upon his own poetic powers is considered."²⁸

Another critic, John Addington Symonds is perfectly sure that Stella is Lady Rich.²⁹

One has not to be a genius in order to see the puns on the name "Rich" in Sidney's sonnets:

"Rich fools there be"³⁰ is the beginning of Sonnet XXIV and I think it implies on Lord Rich. The same sonnet ends as follows:

"Let him deprived of sweet but unfelt joys,
(Exiled for aye from those high treasures,

which

He knows not) grow in only folly rich!"³¹

The XXXVth sonnet is more plain:

"Honour is honoured, that doth possess
Him as thy slave; and now long needy FAME
Doth even grow rich, naming my STELLA's name."

²⁷W. J. Courthope, A History of English Poetry (London, 1904), pp. 227-228.

²⁸J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London, 1956), p. 75.

²⁹John Addington Symonds, Sir Philip Sidney (London, 1909), p. 116.

³⁰An English Garner (Elizabethan Sonnets), with intr. by Sidney Lee (Westminster, 1904), v. I., p. 23.

³¹Ibid., p. 23.

³²Ibid., p. 28.

I would like to give all of Sonnet XXXVII
in order to show how striking the pun is:

"My mouth doth water, and my heart doth swell,
My tongue doth itch, my thoughts in labour be
Listen than Lordings with good ear to me!
For of my life I must a riddle tell.

Towards AURORA's Court, a nymph doth dwell
Rich in all beauties which man's eye can see:
Beauties so far from reach of words, that we
Abuse her praise saying she doth excel.

Rich in the treasure of deserved renown.
Rich in the riches of a royal heart.
Rich in those gifts, which give th'eternal
crown:

Who, though most rich in these and every
part,

Which make the patents of true worldly bliss;
Hath no misfortune, but that RICH she is."³³

One can take this as a kind of confession.

Two critics, Hallett Smith and George
Saintsbury do not think that this is an important
problem:

"A naive or romantic account will overlook
the distinction between the two roles which I have
called Sidney and Astrophel and proceed to the question
of whether Stella is to be identified with Lady Rich.
Presumably she is. But it makes no difference to the
quality of the Sonnets whether Stella is Penelope

³³An English Garner (Elizabethan Sonnets), with intr.
by Sidney Lee (Westminster, 1904), v. I., p. 29.

Devereux, Frances Walsingham, or an entirely imaginary lady."³⁴

And,

"It is of the smallest possible importance or interest to a rational man to discover what was the occasion of Sidney's writing these charming poems — the important point is their charm."³⁵

Be as it may be, whether fictitious or non-fictitious, we get the following information from Lever about Stella's physical beauty:

"The sonnet tradition required that Stella should be endowed with all the womanly virtues. Accordingly she is chaste and fair; she exercises a beneficent influence upon those around her; above all, she inspires the poet to noble and unselfish conduct. Even in physical appearance she is a blood-relation to the Déliés, the Diances, and the Olives who populate the works of the Pléiade, and may ~~we~~ trace her descent back to the incomparable Laura. But a closer inspection of Sidney's sonnets reveals the treatment of her character, and especially of the poet's reactions to it, which is markedly individual."³⁶

After Stella, I may as well quote some passages from Smith about Astrophel:

"...he is natural, unartistic, being dictated to directly by love... ..an exile from society...
...Astrophel is a poet who uses no art and keeps

³⁴Hallett Smith, Elizabethan Poetry (Massachusetts, 1952), p. 152.

³⁵George Saintsbury, A History of Elizabethan Literature (New York, 1910), p. 101.

³⁶J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London, 1956), p. 71.

swearing that he uses no art...³⁷

It is believed by some critics that we do not possess the sonnets in the original order. The story, which gets complicated from time to time, makes them think so. Symonds, on the other hand, believes that "we possess them in the order in which Sidney wrote them."³⁸ He gives three reasons for this. First is that the "first nine sonnets form a kind of exordium."³⁹ Then, "many of the sonnets are written in sequence."⁴⁰ He cites Nos. 31-34, 38-40, 69-72, 87-92, 93-100 as examples of this. And, "it may thirdly be observed that Astrophel and Stella, as we have it, exhibits a natural rhythm and development of sentiment, from admiration and chagrin, through expectant passion, followed by hope sustained at a high pitch of enthusiasm, down to eventual discouragement and resignation."⁴¹

If we accept C. S. Lewis' statement that

³⁷Hallett Smith, Elizabethan Poetry (Massachusetts, 1952), pp. 149-151.

³⁸John Addington Symonds, Sir Philip Sidney (London, 1909), p. 118.

³⁹Ibid., p. 119.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 119.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 119.

"the sonnet sequence does not exist to tell a real, or even a feigned, story"⁴² we may also accept that the problem of order in Astrophel and Stella is not an important one.

The plot of the sequence is a plain one without complications. As J. W. Lever puts forth, "the principal theme of Astrophel and Stella appears, the, as a study of inner conflicts that romance precipitates in the personality of a contemporary man. Astrophel's character is disclosed, in glimpse, over the whole course of the sequence."⁴³

Astrophel (star-lover) is in love with Stella (star), a married woman. Friends warn him "against the indulgence of anything so ruinous as this passion for a woman who belonged to another."⁴⁴ Stella accepts him as her lover, and confesses that she loves him. She also tells him that his love should be a virtuous one. It does not take long time for separation. They have to part. Passion does not leave Astrophel, "and frequently its pain returns; but his thoughts are slowly passing to another plane where the loveliness of the world of things impresses itself more and more upon his senses."⁴⁵

The story is told in 108 sonnets, but later Dr. Grosart added two more sonnets to the sequence, thus making them 110. Today the sequence is accepted with his additions.

⁴²C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century (Oxford, 1954), p. 328.

⁴³J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London, 1956), pp. 74-75.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 129.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 81.

While dealing with the concept of love in Astrophel and Stella, one of the first words to be remembered should be "romance", or "the other manifestation of Love"⁴⁶ in J. W. Lever's words. From time to time, the reader meets the images of a traditional romance poet; and as a traditional romance poet does, Sir Philip Sidney ends the romance "in dust and ashes"⁴⁷. Although this end is not told in a plain and open manner, one gets the feeling of a "romance end".

Throughout the sequence, the argument of Love and Virtue exists. From time to time, this argument turns out to be a conflict of Reason and Desire. Astrophel is always present with one of the two personified concepts that Lever points, "Cupid, who symbolizes the physical urge of desire, and the more sensitive, susceptible youth Love, who represents the imaginative condition of romance."⁴⁸

In the same passage, the attention is drawn to the new and positive role of the love god, and that it dramatizes the erotic side of Astrophel's nature.⁴⁹

In the plot of Astrophel and Stella, when Astrophel's friends warn him that Stella

⁴⁶J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London, 1956), p. 70.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 95.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 85.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 85.

belongs to another, the conflict between Reason and Passion enters. Love is in the form of Love God or Desire. Sidney "was familiar with the Platonic psychology which divided the soul into three categories: the rational part which existed to serve truth; the spiritual part, promoting virtue (in its original connotation of courage and public spirit), and the sensual, appetitive part which represented physical desire. Whereas in the good man, reason was king and governed his lower faculties through virtue..."⁵⁰

But "despite all principles, desire persists: Stella must be loved. Like any philosopher with the toothache, Astrophel perceives that no amount of reasoning will ease the pain."⁵¹ Stella asks Astrophel that he should not let Desire overcome Reason, and acts like a Platonist.

Along with the Platonist thought, we see Protestant teachings in the sonnets, "that the godly life is also the true 'life according to nature,' and the cult of courtly love a mere pagan heresy; while side by side with them marches the Platonic doctrine that mortal beauty is no more than a weak reflection of the heavenly ideal virtue towards which man on earth must aspire. In this context the flat assertion that Stella must be loved has no more serious claim upon the

⁵⁰J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London, 1956), p. 84.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 79.

*Let's go again
to the beginning
supposedly
1956*

intellect than Desire's cry for food in LXXI — and has clearly been prompted by the same urge. Sidney's English training appears most plainly, however, not in the moral principles to be abstracted from the poem, but in their place as an integral part of the poetic outlook of the sequence."⁵²

As Lever says, "the conflict of attitudes is always present"⁵³ in Astrophel and Stella and the conflict of Reason and Passion is the major theme of the first thirty-two sonnets. "Scholars draw a distinction between the first thirty-two sonnets and the rest," writes C. S. Lewis. "At XXXIII the 'real' (that is, historical) passion is supposed to begin. The change, we are told, coincides with the marriage of Penelope Devereux to Lord Rich; and XXIV, which does not fit the theory, must have been put in (as God, in some anti-Darwinian theologies, put in the fossils) to deceive us. My concern is not with the truth or falsehood of the theory, but with its inutility. Grant is true, and what have we gained? Nothing, apparently, but an obstacle to our appreciation of the first thirty-two sonnets. These seem dull only because they do not fit into the story. Read without the perverse demand for story, they will not be found to differ much from the others either

⁵²J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London, 1956), pp. 78-79.

⁵³Ibid. p. 71.

in subject or merit. They introduce most of the themes on which the sequence is built. We have in them sonnets about sonnet-writing (why not? Milton writes about the epic in his epic, Pindar about odes in his odes) as we shall have again in XXXIV, I, LVI, and XC. We have glances at the outer world of moralists, losengiers, and impertinents; we shall meet them again in XXXV and XLVIII. The 'Platonic' solution which occupies us from LXIX to LXXI has already been hinted in XI. The director conceited celebration of the lady's beauty occurs as often after the thirty-third sonnet as before it. That none of the most passionate sonnets come before XXXIII is true. I know no reason why they should. The earlier pieces deal with the conflict between Love and Virtue (or 'Reason'). Structurally it is very proper that this theme should come at the beginning."⁵⁴

Sir Philip Sidney does not hold any side in this conflict, for he "was no doctrinaire moralist; he was more concerned with understanding himself than with edifying his readers."⁵⁵

In the sequence, one sees psychology as the center of attitudes to sexual love. The approach is made in terms of psychological effects, and metaphysics does not have any part in this approach. Throughout the conflict, the reader sees

⁵⁴C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century (Oxford, 1954), pp. 328-329.

⁵⁵J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London, 1956), p. 84.

the important role of psychology.

In Astrophel and Stella, one meets Love in different guises. Either it is in symbols or in human guise as in the VIIIth sonnet:

"Love born in Greece, of late fled from
his native place;

Forced by a tedious proof, that Turkish
hardened heart

Is no fit mark to pierce with his fine
pointed dart:

And pleased with our soft peace, stayed
here his flying race.

But finding these North climes do coldly
him embrace;

Not used to frozen clips, he strave to
find some part

Where, with most ease and warmth, he might
employ his art.

At length he perched himself in STELLA's
joyful face;

Whose fair skin, beamy eyes, like morning
sun on snow:

Deceived the quaking boy; who thought from
so pure light,

Effects of lively heat must needs in nature
grow.

But she most fair, most cold, made him
thence take his flight

To my close heart; where, while some firebran
he did lay,

He burnt un'wares his wings, and cannot fly
away."⁵⁶

⁵⁶An English Garner (Elizabethan Sonnets), with intr.
by Sidney Lee (Westminster, 1904), v. I., p. 15.

double quatrain

(This is, also, one of the sonnets which the critics draw the attention of the reader to the close resemblance between it and the Epigram CCLXVIII in the Greek Anthology.⁵⁷)

Sidney Lee writes that Sir Philip Sidney was a poet who was bound to rules:

"Sidney sought no such freedom. Alone of the Elizabethans he declined to obey the anglicised rules of sonneteering. In nearly all the one hundred and eight sonnets of which his collection entitled Astrophel and Stella consists, the principle of the double quatrain is faithfully respected."⁵⁸

Perhaps this boundness to rules created his metrical skill.

Sir Philip Sidney preferred Italian models of forms. Lever mentions four types of octave (abba abba : abab abab : abab baba : abab cbeb) and six types of sestet (cdcdde : ccdced : cddcee : ccdccd : cdcdd : cddece) with fourteen different combinations

⁵⁷ J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London, 1956), pp. 66-69.

⁵⁸ An English Garner (Elizabethan Sonnets), with intr. by Sidney Lee (Westminster, 1904), v. I., p. xlvi.

of rhyme.⁵⁹ He preferred ending the sonnet by a rhyming couplet. 81 sonnets out of 108 end by a rhyming couplet. His vocabulary is not rich in the sense of rhyming. The rhyme (prove-love) is repeated 13 times while (move-love) enters the sonnets as rhymes for 10 times. (Show-flow), (know-show), (know-grow), (love-remove), (is-this), (this-kiss), (bliss-is), (is-kiss), (me-be-see), (heart-part-dart-art) are the most used rhymes throughout the sequence.

7 Unlike his rhyming, Sir Philip Sidney's use of the forms of speech is mostly successful. "In Astrophel and Stella he coined such compounds as 'rose-enameld skies', 'past-praise hue', 'long-with-loue-acquainted eyes'; employed technical and somewhat recondite words like 'quintessence', 'metamorphosed', 'demurre', 'flegmatike'; and indulged in elaborate word-play and burlesque alliteration —

Of touch they are that without touch doth
touch (IX)

Into your rimes, running in ratling
rowes (XV)

Even more striking was his use of colloquialisms and current speech-rhythms. To a certain extent Wyatt had practised these methods in his sonnets, but he was never so confident of his medium as to ring changes we find in Astrophel and Stella:

⁵⁹J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London, 1956), p. 89.

Guesse we the cause, what is it thus?

file; no:

Or so? much lesse: how then? sure thus
it is: (LXXIV)

What, he? say they of me, now I dare
sweare,

He cannot louse: no, no, let him
alone' (LIV)"⁶⁰

Along with the successful use of the forms of speech, there are many unsuccessful ones. I would like to take a paragraph of Lewis who illustrates it nicely:

"There is so much careless writing in Astrophel and Stella that malicious quotation could easily make it appear a failure. Sidney can hiss like a serpent ('Sweet swelling lips well maist thou swell'), gobble like a turkey ('Moddels such be wood globes') and quack like a duck ('But God wot, wot not what they mean'). But non ego paucis."⁶¹

Astrophel and Stella was a work which had influence on other writers and their works. A full list of sonnet sequences that were written after it

⁶⁰J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London, 1956), p. 86.

⁶¹C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century (Oxford, 1954), p. 329.

is given in The Cambridge History of English Literature:

"Sidney's example, far from discouraging competition, proved a new, and a very powerful, stimulus to sonneteering endeavour. It was, indeed, with the posthumous publication of Sidney's sonnet sequence, Astrophel and Stella, in 1591, that a sonneteering rage began in Elizabethan England. Each of the six following years saw the birth of many volumes of sonnet-sequences, which owed much to the incentive of Astrophel and Stella. Samuel Daniel's Delia and Henry Constable's Diana first appeared in 1592, both to be revised and enlarged two years later. Three ample collections followed in 1593; they came from the pens respectively of Barnabe Barnes, Thomas Lodge and Giles Fletcher, while Watson's second venture was then published posthumously and for the first time. Three more volumes, in addition to the revised editions of Daniel's Delia and Constable's Diana, appeared in 1594, viz.: William Percy's Coelia, an anonymous writer's Zepheria and Michael Drayton's Idea (in its first shape). E. C.'s Emaricdulfe, Edmund Spenser's Amoretti and Richard Barnfield's Cynthia, with certaine Sonnets, came out in 1595. Griffin's Fidessa, Linche's Diella and William Smith's Chloris appeared in 1596. Finally, in 1597, the procession was joined by Robert Tofte's Laura, a pale reflection of Petrarch's effort (as the name implied), although travelling far from the metrical principles

of the genuine form of sonnet. To the same period belong the composition, although the publication was long delayed, of the Scottish poet, Sir William Alexander's Aurora and of the Caelica of Sidney's friend, Sir Fulke Greville."⁶²

As last words to this paper, I would like to borrow a paragraph from Lewis that makes one remember the "inside flap cover" quotations; yet a valid one in my opinion:

"Considered historically, then, and in relation to his predecessors, Sidney is one of our most important poets. Nothing which that century had yet produced could have led us to predict the music, passion, and eloquence of Astrophel and Stella. It is not all in the 'sugared' manner. Sidney can come down to earth when he chooses -- 'He cannot love: no, no; let him alone', or even 'Is it not ill that such a beast wants hornes?' And these passages may please the modern reader as much as any. The historian, who comes to it almost numbed with Drab, is more likely to notice what is unprecedented, the conceits that 'with wings of love in aire of wonder flie', the 'golden sea whose waves in curles are broken' or the
shafts of light

Closed with their quivers in Sleeps armoire.
Notice again how few of these words exist only for

⁶²Ed. by Sir A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller, The Cambridge History of English Literature, "The Elizabethan Sonnet" by Sir Sidney Lee (Cambridge, 1932), pp. 256-257.

the sake of other words; notice the variety of the vowels; notice the hint, the finer spirit, of alliteration. Then consider how far it overgoes the common (though excellent) equation of eye-glances with arrows, and yet preserves it. There had been nothing like this in English before. There had hardly been anything like it in Latin; you must go back to Greeks, whom Sidney almost certainly did not know, to find a parallel."⁶³

Birth etc.

Geography sent 02.15.

⁶³C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century (Oxford, 1954), p. 330.

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