

Fashioning Figures:
The Construction of the “Self” in *Astrophil and Stella*

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Abstract

In the late 16th century, Sir Philip Sidney produced the first influential English sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*, inspired by his life at the Elizabethan court. Relative to his contemporaries Shakespeare and Spenser, Sidney's work has attracted little scholarly attention in recent years, a curious phenomenon in light of the importance accorded his *Defense of Poesy* and given the excellent fit between the self-fashioning framework introduced by Stephen Greenblatt, who makes scant mention of Sidney himself, and both the tone and the development of Sidney's sonnet sequence. Earlier criticism either divorced the life from the poetry, or collapsed them into one, reading the sonnets as a personal account of Sidney's love for Lady Penelope Devereux.

My thesis studies Sidney's self-conscious project of literary self-fashioning, when "self" is understood to represent a particular role (that of poet) within the context of a particular world, the Elizabethan court. To understand the complexity of this project, this thesis establishes the relevant traditions of Petrarchism, explores narrative structures across the sequence as a whole, conducts highly layered readings of individual poems as they demonstrate particular methods of textual fashioning, and considers the striking self-awareness that characterizes Sidney's work. The primary aim of my study is to enlarge the critical discussion of Sidney as a highly deliberate artist and as a courtier, characteristic of his age not on account of his heroic feats but due to his deep understanding of the court and his talent for fashioning his experience within it into an artwork with its own life and agency.

Key Words: *Astrophil and Stella*, Petrarchism, Philip Sidney, Renaissance, self-fashioning, self-consciousness, sonnet sequence, Stephen Greenblatt

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Short Titles

AS: Sidney, Philip. *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*. Ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones. Oxford:

Oxford UP, 2008. 153-211. Print.

DP: Sidney, Philip. *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*. Ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones. Oxford:

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Introduction

...I will give you a nearer example of myself, who (I know not by what mischance) in these my not old years and idlest times having slipped into the title of a poet, am provoked to say something unto you in defence of that my unelected vocation...
—*Defence of Poesy*

Near-contemporary accounts of Sir Philip Sidney project two different images of the man: the first, a popular “positive tradition” composed of famous accounts of “the perfect Elizabethan courtier”; the second, a lesser-known “anti-tradition,” which details accounts of his life and legacy, sharply opposed to the idealizing literary fashionings to which his image was subjected (Hager, “Exemplary Mirage” 11; Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney* x). This difference is illustrated by a comparison of two anecdotes that project radically different characters. An example of the first tradition, written nearly thirty five years following Sidney’s death, is this anecdote from Sidney’s close friend, Fulke Greville: Sidney, “thirsty with excess of bleeding,” is said to have encountered a dying soldier following a battle and offered the man his own scant supply of water, saying “Thy necessity is yet greater than mine” (Duncan-Jones 304). A story capturing the second Sidney, so to speak, comes from the antiquarian writer John Aubery’s *Brief Lives* and finds Sidney in his hospital bed, not long before his death. In this account, it is not the severity of Sidney’s wound that caused his death, but rather “his refusal, over the best medical advice, ‘to forbear his carnall knowledge of’ his wife” (Hager, *Dazzling* 31). That is to say, according to John Aubery, Philip Sidney died because he refused to abstain from sex with his wife. What I note in this comparison is not the veracity of either account, as neither can be confirmed, but rather how sharply they differ in their characterization of Philip Sidney, the man. One shared feature, however, is that both anecdotes center on the virtue of self-restraint and resistance to appetite. As we will see, this becomes a central issue in *Astrophil and Stella*. Ultimately, the radical opposition between these two characters of Sidney reflects the

mechanisms of a tradition closely associated with and, according to Greenblatt, emergent in Renaissance England in the Elizabethan court: the tradition of self-fashioning.¹ By considering the application of Renaissance fashioning to Sidney himself following his death, we can then come to understand Sidney's own engagement with the tradition in his own writing.

Like many of his fellow writers and courtiers in Renaissance England, Sidney would have not just been familiar with, but immersed in the culture and tradition of self-fashioning. Self-fashioning views the concept of the "self" as something plastic, to be constructed and shaped by the individual, often under the influence of outside forces, such as the church or the court. Stephen Greenblatt characterizes sixteenth-century self-fashioning further: "Perhaps the simplest observation we can make is that in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process" (2).² This self-conscious and artful fashioning of personal identity is the foundation of Sidney's sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*, as Sidney composes layers of "selves" in his creation of

¹ Stephen Greenblatt explains this Renaissance process in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980): "...in sixteenth-century England there were both selves and a sense that they could be fashioned. ...there are always selves—a sense of personal order, a characteristic mode of address to the world, a structure of bounded desires—and always some elements of deliberate shaping in the formation and expression of identity" (1).

² Greenblatt's approach to self-fashioning differs from traditional takes on Renaissance humanism in its emphasis on the socio-historical, that is, Greenblatt combines an understanding of the social and economic context of the Renaissance and the court's role in enabling and encouraging self-fashioning—a self-conscious concept of individually orchestrated "becoming." Greenblatt begins roughly half of the sections of his book with differing anecdotes which seem initially unrelated to the subject of the section, before unpacking the anecdote in relation to the subject and ultimately developing an analytical understanding of the topic, and of the anecdote as miniaturization of the complex scene, character, situation, or discourse of the following section. Sidney himself structures the *Defence* and the individual sonnets of *Astrophil and Stella* in the same way, beginning first with an anecdote to condense a complex process of thought, feeling, or memory in the service of self-fashioning and following with an analysis and moral. For a further exploration of this relationship between Greenblatt and Sidney, see Chapter 3.

the sequence as a whole.³ Therefore, it is strange that Greenblatt mentions Sidney only very briefly in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, and then only in passing relation to another Elizabethan writer. Because Sidney's life and work are so well-suited to a study of self-fashioning, yet so often overlooked, this thesis will confront the gaps left in Greenblatt's work, as well as in recent scholarship on Elizabethan writers, which results from the omission of Sidney and his writing.

The most important distinction when considering Sidney's sonnet sequence against other popular sequences⁴ is Sidney's extreme and dramatized self-consciousness in his writing. In effect, he creates and mobilizes a split between the two parts of the "self," the public and the private, and creates a secondary and mirroring distinction with the sequence as a whole between his courtly "self" and his poetic "self." This split allows one part to manipulate the other as a separate image or persona, which in turn creates the possibility for the representation of inner conflict. Because writing is itself a technology of self-reproduction and image-making independent of the biological self (even prior to the age of print culture) it is particularly well-suited to enact such a split. Sidney creates a sonnet sequence composed of layers of self-fashioning—some of them congruent with each other, many of them dissonant—while at the same time extending that self-consciousness to the level of his writing and narration as the author outside of the narrative who is aware of the traditions and techniques he is using as he uses them. What I observe here is the conspicuous meta-fictional dimension of the sequence that

³ I refer hereafter to Sidney's work from a collection edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones. In this collection, *Astrophil and Stella* (*AS*) falls from page 153-211 and will be cited according to sonnet and line numbers, while *Defence of Poesy* (*DP*), which falls from page 212-250, will be cited according to page number in the collection.

⁴ Other major sonnet sequences of the Renaissance include Spenser's *Amoretti* and Shakespeare's sequence. *Astrophil and Stella* was also published around the same time as Thomas Watson's *Hekatompathia* (1582), John Soowthern's *Pandora* (1584) (which Spiller describes as "probably the worst volume of verse ever printed in English"), and James VI of Scotland's *Twelve Sonnets of Invocations to the Goddess* (1585) (Spiller 102).

distinguishes it from other sonnet sequences. In short, in his construction of *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney turns the culturally shared practice of performative self-fashioning into a literary technique and a narrative principle.

Scholars⁵ agree that Sidney “enjoyed great expectations” in the Elizabethan court due to his family lineage and “personal talents and achievements” (Duncan-Jones x). Although he was well-positioned in court, Queen Elizabeth seemed strangely reluctant to reward Sidney or his father for their actions and achievements, which may have been influenced to some degree by the family’s complicated position with respect to the religious tensions of the time.⁶ Even after proving himself to be a successful ambassador for Elizabeth, Sidney was passed over for knighthood.⁷ In fact, Katherine Duncan-Jones notes that “there is reason to think that Elizabeth, while acknowledging Sidney’s talent, never did quite trust him,” perhaps due to his determination to earn his own reputation rather than be honored for his family’s accomplishments (135). Another factor affecting Elizabeth’s reluctance in rewarding Sidney may have been Sidney’s impatience with the court and its homage to traditions and inheritance, leading to his frustration, his sense of constraint, and his preference for the freedom of travel. It may be the case that Elizabeth saw in Sidney a courtier who was hard to control and “feared that he was too ready to accept foreign honours and powers unsanctioned by herself” (285, 286). Sidney’s position in court would continue to fluctuate, not helped by his “restless, fiery temper,” which Elizabeth was known to dislike in her courtiers (152, 153). Nevertheless, Sidney was

⁵ Including, but not limited to, Katherine Duncan-Jones and Alan Hager.

⁶ Henry Sidney was described as “not at all well informed on religious matters,” and was even “held to be Catholic,” which Duncan-Jones takes as a suggestion that the Henry was “prudently non-committal, waiting to see which way the wind blew” (Duncan-Jones 89).

⁷ This was likely due to his freedom in associating with foreign dignitaries, and their subsequent high ratings of him, which Elizabeth did not appreciate, preferring “to honour him in her own good time” (Duncan-Jones 249).

finally knighted in 1583. The circumstances of his knighthood are less than glamorous, however, the honor occurring only because he was nominated by his friend John Casimir to act as his proxy (249). Overall, Sidney's political life was one of disappointment and dashed hopes, gaining little acknowledgement and accolades for his performance until his death at age 31 on the 17th of October, 1586 from a leg wound obtained at the battle⁸ of Zutphen (Duncan-Jones vix).

In the wake of his death, Sidney's image underwent a dramatic transformation, engineered by other members of the Elizabethan court for political purposes. Following his death, Sidney was honored with an "extravagant" funeral, "the last on its scale before Admiral Nelson's" (Hager, *Dazzling* 27). Much of this display of reverence was deeply political,⁹ designed to reproduce an image of a Sir Philip Sidney that would bolster and benefit those left behind. Alan Hager explains the first form of propaganda from "the Leicester faction," which hoped to develop "a combined Protestant military offensive against Spain on the European continent" by painting Sidney as a fallen hero, martyred while leading the charge (Hager, *Dazzling* 22). However, this image of Sidney as a heroic, militant Protestant does not agree with "Sidney's comparatively lenient attitude towards Catholics" which has been well-documented. In this case, Sidney's image has been appropriated and circulated by writers keen to advance their religious agendas with little to no regard to the actual political or religious position of the man himself.

⁸ Calling the conflict at Zutphen a "battle" is likely the product of mythologizing, Duncan-Jones notes, as eyewitness accounts call it a "skirmish" (296).

⁹ Sidney's funeral parade took place only "a week and a day" after the beheading of Mary, Queen of Scots. Some scholars such as Alan Hager believe the grandeur of Sidney's funeral was a political maneuver by Queen Elizabeth to manipulate public response to the execution: "The ceremonial parade through the capital, lavish and well-attended, would have helped to turn the minds of the populace from the beheading of Mary" (Hager, *Dazzling* 26, 27).

Hager also discusses a second form of propaganda informing Sidney's elaborate funeral: namely, Queen Elizabeth's personal political agenda. In order to "[uphold] the notion of her court as the late flowering of chivalry in fealty to the virgin queen," Hager notes that Elizabeth "metamorphosed [Sidney] from a complicated, often-neglected courtier into the ideal of chivalric heroism and courtesy, an ideal that would serve to control the impetuosity of some of her courtiers" (22). For the advancement of her own goals to encourage devoted and well-behaved courtiers, Elizabeth used Sidney as raw material for the creation of an ideal courtier whose death left a hole to be not easily filled by another in the court. This deliberate idealization is consistent with Elizabeth's use of venerable traditions (e.g., the emphasis on chivalry in Elizabeth's court) to inspire fealty and submission from her courtiers. Indeed, Greenblatt notes that "Elizabeth's exercise of power was closely bound up with her use of fictions" (166). As mentioned, Elizabeth's image of Sidney was one such fiction and far removed from many accounts of the real man. Duncan-Jones notes that "Sidney was a hot-tempered, arrogant, and in many ways 'difficult' young man, who was not liked by all of his contemporaries" (xii) and certainly his relationship with the queen was far more vexed and complicated than her relationship to the "Shepherd Knight" version of Sidney would imply:

[Elizabeth] was moved for a period of time [following Sidney's death] apparently, and then seems to have bitterly complained to Sir Charles Blount that he had thrown away a noble life with an ordinary soldier's death, as if he had never fully understood rank. (Hager, "Exemplary Mirage" 7)

Elizabeth's expression to a confidant contradicts her public expression of grief over Sidney's death, revealing a blurring of the distinction between public and private spheres. The divisions within Sidney's image are complicated by these varying accounts. Sidney is cast in the role of a

pastoral knight—a simplified, idealized, almost typological figure—but the effect and implications of that representation depend on a generalized culture and awareness of self-fashioning, where presentation of the self is understood to be a self-conscious maneuver. The fashioning of Sidney here makes possible the split between the two parts of the self, but also allows for the overcoming of the split between public and private.

Through his writing, Sidney creates an image of his own authorship in his work—a self that fashions other selves—through narrative accounts just as he was fashioned in the posthumous uptake of his life and letters. In *Astrophil and Stella*, the role of authorship becomes a performance role not only through Sidney’s own self-conscious involvement in the sequence, but also through Astrophil’s role as the fictional author. Astrophil’s self-fictionalizing becomes a self-conscious doubling of Sidney’s own self-fictionalizing to make the reader aware of the constructedness of the sequence itself. This omnipresent self-consciousness was a feature of not only of Sidney’s art but also of his life. Michael Spiller notes that “The fact that in the *Old Arcadia* [Sidney] surrounds passionate speeches with ironies both of situation and language might justify saying that Sidney was unable to regard anything other than ironically...” (111). *Astrophil and Stella* has within it a significant vein of meta-fictional awareness and humorous, self-conscious irony, and it is through this satisfying, by tone and structure, of ironic construction that Sidney, as the author of the sequence, is able to fashion a work comprising other fashionings. While scholarship on Elizabethan court poetry has tended to neglect Sidney in favor of his contemporaries, this thesis introduces Sidney’s work to a larger discussion of self-fashioning and Renaissance tradition as being a distinctly self-conscious representation of poetic and Elizabethan selfhood.

In Chapter 1, I outline Sidney's relationship to the literary traditions from which he draws to fashion a literary context for his sonnet sequence. Because *Astrophil and Stella* was the first significant (and certainly the first broadly successful) English sonnet sequence,¹⁰ I begin by observing its similarities to and differences from the first sonnet sequence worldwide: Petrarch's *Il Canzoniere*. In this chapter I analyze Sidney's sonnet sequence in relation to the tradition of Petrarchism, observing and reflecting on the ways in which Sidney departs from traditional Petrarchism, adapting the tradition to his own literary objectives.

My second chapter addresses the various methods through which Sidney builds his layers of self-representation, using Stella as a focal point. The narrative of *Astrophil and Stella* is reliant upon the figure of Stella, based on the historical figure of Penelope Rich, née Devereux. Stella, in turn, gives rise to another and yet more idealized character, the muse. I use Chapter 2 to study Sidney's crafting of Stella from the model of Penelope, and of the muse from Stella, with each facet gaining autonomy and independence from its source. With the help of some Lacanian scholars, I consider Sidney's use of gaze and voice in the fashioning of Stella and her avatars throughout the sequence.

In Chapter 3, following these discussions of Sidney's methods of self-fashioning, I consider *Astrophil and Stella* in context as Sidney's self-conscious attempt to reflect his experience as a poet within the Elizabethan court. The style of the sonnet sequence is unquestionably the product of Sidney's hand, as it is both highly layered and suffused with the

¹⁰ Scholars such as Matthew Woodcock may disagree here, as *Astrophil and Stella* is preceded by other attempts at sonnet sequences and translations of formal sequences into English. It should be noted, however, that while *Astrophil and Stella* was not published until 1590, Sidney had begun working on it as early as 1581 (others argue he began in 1582), before Watson's *Hekatompathia* (1582) was even published. Even with this in mind, it should be acknowledged that Sidney's was not the first sonnet sequence published in English, although it is inarguably the most influential and enduring of its predecessors.

artful irony which is so characteristic of his work. This chapter considers Sidney's construction of Astrophil as a fictional "mask,"¹¹ to borrow a term from Alan Hager. Guided by Hager, I track the fashioning from Sidney to Astrophil, then from the composite Astrophil/Sidney figure in the sonnet sequence considered as a kind of enlarged persona acting through a relationship of being at once separate and unified. Continuing to draw on Spiller, I lay out the ways in which Sidney's use of metafiction, proto-deconstructive techniques, and irony in his various levels of fashioning ties the sequence to Sidney as his fashioned poetic identity. Given this relationship, I suggest that to separate a reading of the sequence from a reading of Sidney is to make a category mistake about his work.

While recent historical studies¹² of Sidney's life at court now attempt to reveal more accurate accounts of Sidney, the man, and the role he played within the court, even these accounts have the disadvantage of temporal distance and the documentary inaccessibility that is unavoidable when studying far-removed historical figures. It is my contention that, given the deficits of both contemporary and belated accounts, we should turn to Sidney's own writing, albeit with careful attention to its artifice. Through a close reading of the sonnet sequence, and with the help of scholars such as Hager, Spiller, and Greenblatt, I show that Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* consists of Sidney bringing forth varying layers of "selves" upon different levels of the text in an attempt to fashion for himself representation not only of his own literary identity and style, but of the broader context of the Elizabethan court in which he was writing.

¹¹ Hager uses this term to describe the way in which Sidney employs his own characters to "[remain] shielded from view... through conscious dissimulation" (*Dazzling* 10).

¹² By scholars such as Katherine Duncan-Jones and Matthew Woodcock.

Literary Traditions

*You that poor Petrarch's long-deceased woes
With new-born sighs and denizen'd wit do sing:
You take wrong ways, those far-fet helps be such
As do bewray a want of inward touch:
And sure at length stol'n goods do come to light.
—Astrophil and Stella, sn. 15 ll. 7-11*

Sidney initiates his artistic self-fashioning through the fashioning of literary traditions in *Astrophil and Stella*. By drawing on the themes and rhetoric of Petrarchism and its subsequent incorporation of courtly love themes, he creates a place for his sequence within the literary canon, using this literary tradition as a way to “fashion” the “self” of the narrative. The Petrarchan tradition functions for Sidney as a way of summoning an aura of literary and poetic tradition through which readers can engage the environment and context of the story.

Greenblatt further explains self-fashioning as “suggest[ing] the achievement of a less tangible shape: a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving” (2). By “less tangible shape,” he argues that the product of self-fashioning is not so much seen or felt as it is experienced, as we experience modes of behavior or a posture or address to the world. Applied to Sidney’s use of Petrarchism and courtly love, Greenblatt’s comment suggests that Sidney uses *Astrophil and Stella* to fashion his own address to the world of literature, moving with and beyond the traditions in order to produce a poetic literary space for the characters and identity he will fashion—a kind of theater, in short.

It is difficult to classify the tradition of courtly love because scholars continue to disagree as to its defining characteristics and qualities beyond the consensus that the literary form of courtly love is a courtly romance.¹³ The category of “courtly love” as a set of ideals, practices,

¹³ John C. Moore explains this problem in greater detail in “‘Courtly Love’: A Problem of Terminology.”

meanings, etc., is broad, stretching across many ages and undergoing numerous changes and re-interpretations as it crosses eras and cultures, and making it truly difficult, if not impossible, to define, fix, and classify. Although Sidney unquestionably makes use of this tradition in *Astrophil and Stella*, his is a single contribution to and interpretation of a long-standing literary tradition, making it difficult to identify the ways in which he is fashioning the tradition in his sequence. Rather than attempting to prove the ways in which Sidney matches any specific “tradition of courtly love,” I will address Sidney’s use and interpretation of courtly love in relation to Petrarch’s use of the tradition in his own sonnet sequence, *Il Canzoniere*, which was the first of its kind. Because Petrarchism has a clear influence on Sidney’s sonnet sequence, the relationship between the two is established; comparing the two poets’ interpretations of courtly love is our best access to Sidney’s Petrarchism and a good way to develop broader comparisons between Sidney’s sonnet sequence as a whole and earlier traditions.

It should be noted at the outset that in tracking the differences between Petrarch’s sonnet sequence and Astrophil’s fashioning of the Petrarchan poetic tradition, differences in form are inevitable due to the different languages and sonnet forms. Italian is a rhyme-heavy language, unlike English, and so Petrarch’s rhyme scheme is much more simplistic and regular, with few variations across the sequence. Conversely, Sidney’s rhyme scheme across *Astrophil and Stella* is much less regular and more experimental, though he seems to favor borrowing the ABBA ABBA rhyme scheme of the Petrarchan form, then attaching the much more English couplet conclusion to his sonnets (Smith “Introduction and Sonnet 1”). Furthermore, whereas feminine rhyme is dominant in the Italian sonnet, Sidney seems to go out of his way to avoid feminine rhyme in any of his sonnets; it appears only in the Songs. Though there are certainly a number of

other variations in form, I will not dwell on the subject further, as the rhetorical similarities and differences between the two are more important.

Many of the similarities between the traditions are best illustrated through Sidney's presentation of Stella as the object of affection. In the sonnet sequence, Stella combines the courtly lady and the Petrarchan muse. In *Il Canzoniere*, Petrarch's muse, Laura, exhibits a number of the characteristics of the lady in many courtly love narratives. She is often harsh, cold, and cruel to the poet, while remaining a paragon of chaste virtue. Sidney fashions Stella into a very similar figure, illustrating her lack of pity for Astrophil's suffering wonderfully in Sonnet 44: "And yet she hears, yet I no pity find, / But more I cry, less grace she doth impart" (*AS* ll. 5-6). As is characteristic of the Petrarchan courtly lady, Stella remains cold in the face of her adoring poet's suffering. A difference between the two arises, however, in the fact that although Stella remains virtuous, hers is an adulterous relationship with Astrophil (a characteristic sometimes found in courtly love tradition, but not Petrarch). Although the desire that the poet of the *Canzoniere* has for Laura is, by definition, adulterous, the desire is never acted upon, and is certainly not eroticized so explicitly by the poet. Astrophil, however, goes so far as to kiss Stella without permission while she sleeps (Song 2), and the eroticization of his and Stella's attachment is powerfully expressed in the sonnet's statements and tropes.

In both sonnet sequences, the way in which the women's inspirational power is described differs, as do the authorial motivations behind the women's influence. J. W. Lever compares Sonnet 71 of *Astrophil and Stella* to Sonnet 248 of Petrarch's *Il Canzoniere* to illustrate the similarities and differences. Through a close reading of these sonnets, Lever notes a vital thematic difference: "The Italian poet's conception of love is transcendental, his preoccupations being with the mystery of beauty and virtue, the inevitability of death, and the attitude of the

individual facing these abstractions. Sidney...is concerned with an empirical approach to love in terms of its psychological and moral effects” (Lever 62). Sidney moves beyond Petrarch’s theme of transcendence and virtue, staying instead within the confines of mortal life in order to present a claim of accessible and noble immortality and virtue through art and poetry. To observe this, let us consider the two sonnets Lever addresses:

<p><i>Astrophil and Stella</i> sn. 71</p> <p>Who will in fairest book of nature know How virtue may best lodged in beauty be, Let him but learn of love to read in thee, Stella, those fair lines which true goodness show. There shall he find all vices’ overthrow, Not by rude force, but sweetest sovereignty Of reason, from whose light those night-birds fly, The inward sun in thine eyes shineth so. And not content to be perfection’s heir Thy self, dost strive all minds that way to move, Who mark in thee what is in thee most fair; So while thy beauty draws the heart to love, As fast thy virtue bends that love to good. But ah, desire still cries: “Give me some food.”</p>	<p><i>Il Canzoniere</i> sn. 248</p> <p>Whoever wishes to see all that Nature And Heaven can do among us, let him come gaze on her, for she alone is a sun, not merely for my eyes, but for the blind world, which does not care for virtue; And let him come soon, for Death steals first the best and leaves the wicked: awaited in the kingdom of the blessed, this beautiful mortal thing passes and does not endure. He will see, if he comes in time, every virtue, every beauty, every regal habit, joined together in one body with marvelous tempering. then will he say that my weak rhymes are mute, my wit overcome by the excess of light. But if he delays too long he shall have reason to weep forever. (trans. Durling, <i>Petrarch's Lyric Poems</i> 410-411)</p>
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Each sonnet opens in a strikingly similar way, with the poet directing the reader’s attention towards the beloved in order to reveal and praise “all that Nature / and Heaven can do” (Petrarch ll. 1-2) and “virtue...lodged in beauty” (*AS* l. 2). The opening lines of both sonnets introduce a

pseudo-narrative, invoking a new figure outside of the poet and the muse, the “Who” character at the start of each who seeks to view the idyllic and virtuous woman. This narrative develops differently in each of the poems, but opens in largely the same way, with a focus on the female object and her virtue as something that is so exemplary it cannot be described; it must be experienced. The theme of virtue and beauty is perhaps the primary feature shared between the sonnets. With it, both Stella and Laura are elevated to a higher status: through her virtue, Laura “alone is a sun” (Petrarch l. 3), and Stella the “fairest book of nature” (*AS* l. 1) and “perfection’s heir” (l. 9). This elevation of the women through their virtue allows them to be fashioned into something greater than human: for Petrarch, Laura is celestial, and for Sidney, Stella is poetry. This produces an ironic contrast in the women between name and identity, because Stella, whose name means “star,” is represented by a man-made object and Laura, whose name is derived from “laurel tree,” a natural object, is a celestial figure. By characterizing Stella thusly, Sidney is substituting Petrarch's celestial ideal with poetry; in this way, Sidney suggests that poetry is greater than God or celestial objects, as Stella’s identity as poetry defines her more profoundly than her identity as a “star.”

Despite similarities regarding noble characteristics and characters, the sonnets differ in a number of crucial ways, not least in the development of their narratives. In Petrarch, the figure of the man, the “Who” character who is seeking out Laura’s beauty before it is gone, persists as a character through the entirety of the sonnet, until the final line where Petrarch says that “if he delays too long he shall have reason to weep forever” (Petrarch l. 14), (ie., if he is not able to witness Laura before her death, his suffering and regret will be extensive and long-lasting). In Sidney, however, the “Who” or “he” figure seems to be little more than a catalyst to trigger the opening of the sonnet; in fact, the final mention of him comes as early as line 5: “There shall he

find all vices' overthrow." From that line until the end of the sonnet, his character is not mentioned again, with Sidney instead directing the focus of the narrative towards Stella, addressing her directly. While Petrarch sees Laura's beauty as something intended to teach all men virtue, Sidney sets up Stella to inspire her audience much more personally and individually; the distinction here parallels the distinction between the master-symbols through which the two poets trope their beloveds; Petrarch's sun (many can experience the sun at once and be awed) versus Sidney's poetry (it too teaches, warms, dazzles, and inspires, but always in a private, personal, and intimate way).

Both Sidney and Petrarch make their muses into symbolic objects; however, the objects these women are compared to are very different. Laura "alone is a sun" (Petrarch l. 3), and is "all that Nature / and Heaven can do" (ll. 1-2). On the contrary, Stella is the "fairest book of nature" (*AS* l. 1) rather than a celestial object (despite the symbolism of her name, the dominant figure for Stella is that of a page, book, or poem, adding another note of irony to the sequence). In Sidney's sonnet, Stella is not simply related to a book—she effectively, within the context of the sonnet, becomes one herself. Her audience is advised to "read in [Stella]...those fair lines which true goodness show" (*AS* ll. 2-3)—her "lines," of course, a pun referring to both "the lines of her countenance" (Lever 59) and the lines of a book or poem. As Lever says, "[Stella] is remarkable only in that she demonstrates better than any other person how two excellent qualities, beauty and virtue, may live together. While Laura is a revelation, Stella is merely a heroine" (60). Stella is not presented as a paragon of virtue and existence, nor is she something unattainably divine in this poem like Laura. In taking the form of a book or poem, though, she, and by extension the sonnet, reflects and symbolizes multiple arguments Sidney makes about the importance and impact of poetry in *The Defence of Poetry*. Most notably, Stella's beauty and virtue inspire her

audience to their own virtue: “while thy beauty draws the heart to love, / as fast thy virtue bends that love to good” (*AS* ll. 12-13). Compare this line to Sidney’s claim that the poet “doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue” through his poetry and the similarities become clear (*DP* 227).

The audience that Sidney wrote *Astrophil and Stella* for was not intended to be extensive. In fact, it was likely never intended to be widely published. Rather, Sidney probably intended his work to be personally distributed to those who were close with him. Katherine Duncan-Jones explains: “Probably, apart from a few of the songs, [*Astrophil and Stella*] was effectively kept ‘close’, so that ‘wise men’ in Sidney’s immediate circle knew little of it. Penelope Devereux was good at keeping secrets... Physically, as well as thematically, *Astrophil and Stella* may have been confined to her and her immediate circle” (247). This is important to consider because, if this was the case (we know, at least, it was not published publicly until after his death) and Penelope’s immediate circle—as well as some of Sidney’s very close friends—were the only ones with access to the sequence, Sidney’s audience would have likely been predominantly female. Considering this, his intentions would have been less to address male courtiers and more to flatter Penelope with the sequence as a tribute and to act as a kind of instruction to ideal female behavior through art, and specifically poetry. Stella encourages this audience to “learn” by reading her (*AS* l. 3), rather than by “gaz[ing]” passively at her beauty and virtue (Petrarch l. 2). Sidney himself praises poetry’s ability to inspire learning as an argument in favor of poetry as a cultural necessity due to its ability to elevate its audience morally and spiritually in *The Defence of Poesy*: “This purifying of wit...which commonly we call learning, ...the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls...can be capable of” (*DP* 219). There is a clear distinction Sidney is drawing here between the “Who” that “will...know” (*AS* l.

1) and the “who” that “wishes to see” (Petrarch l. 1). In one case, the reader is an active party engaging with its material, while the other reader is wholly passive and unwilling or unable to interact with its object. While Petrarch intends for his audience to achieve moral inspiration from Laura by passively “seeing” her, Sidney calls his audience to take an active role in reading Stella to move beyond merely “seeing” her to *understanding* and “knowing” her. Sidney’s intention here is to encourage his readers to be active in encountering Stella and the sonnet sequence so they can know why the virtue she teaches is important.

It is from this divide between the earthly and the celestial—the man-made and the divine—that a contrast arises. Though Laura is equated to a heavenly object, Petrarch’s sonnet is laden with acknowledgements of the reality of her mortality. The “Who” character is constantly rushed by the poet, urged to hurry and find Laura before it is too late: “And let him come soon, for Death / steals first the best and leaves the wicked” (Petrarch ll. 5-6). This sense of hovering, threatening temporality is ever-present: “this beautiful mortal thing passes and does not endure” (l. 8), “He will see, if he comes in time” (l. 9), “if he delays too long he shall have reason to weep forever” (l. 14). Petrarch’s sonnet is heavy with the language of death and endings; conversely, although she is created as a book, and thus an artifact whose lifespan, like all material objects, is limited by its materiality, Sidney’s Stella is surrounded by language of creation and immortality. The language of Sonnet 71 is a language of legacy. Stella is “perfection’s heir” (*AS* l. 9), the use of “heir” summoning the image of a continuing biological lineage and reproductive life. That a man-made object offers immortality while the celestial object is shrouded in mortality is deeply ironic. Despite its irony, however, it reflects Sidney’s concluding argument in *The Defence of Poesy*: “I conjure you all...to believe [poets], when they tell you they will make you immortal by their verses. Thus doing, your name shall flourish in the

printer's shops;... thus doing, your soul shall be placed with Dante's Beatrice, of Virgil's Anchises" (*DP* 249). Sidney's belief in the immortalizing ability of poetry is addressed a number of times throughout the sequence, most often as a result of Astrophil's desire for poetic fame. Here, though, the idea of immortality is associated directly with Stella and her connection to life and legacy.

The most effective way in which Stella is able to create this legacy is through her ability to evoke a response from those who "read" her. As a "book" of virtue and beauty, Stella provokes her audience to act in response to her: "Thy self, dost strive all minds that way to move / who mark in thee what is in thee most fair" (*AS* ll. 10-11). This stimulation is in direct opposition to Laura, who, rather than encouraging an artistic or intellectual response, makes it impossible to create. Her audience beholds her and views her, but even Petrarch notes that he struggles to praise her with his "weak rhymes" which are ultimately "mute" (Petrarch l. 12) and that his "wit [is] overcome by the excess of light" from her eyes (l. 13). Where Stella's moves her readers' minds to action, Laura seems to act as a kind of vacuum of expression. Such an active response is a key element of Sidney's case in *The Defence of Poesy*: "[the poet] doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way, as will entice any man to enter into it" (*DP* 226). Stella exemplifies this idea, enticing men to love with her beauty and using her virtue to bend that love into goodness, as well as striving "all minds that way to move" and improve themselves (*AS* ll. 12-13, 10).

Using a highly pondered and distinctive language and contrasting form and rhyme, Sidney further distances his sonnet from Petrarch's with a differing presentation of the union of beauty and virtue. Where Petrarch describes Laura as a whole constructed of two unified parts, "every virtue, every beauty, every regal habit, / Joined together in one body with marvelous

tempering” (Petrarch ll. 10-11) Stella is figured as two separate forces that have united, even as they remain distinct within that unity: “How virtue may best lodged in beauty be” (*AS* l. 2).

While Laura’s virtue and beauty meet each other “joined together in one body with marvelous tempering” Stella’s virtue is “lodged in beauty,” and later in the sonnet, the two characteristics work alongside one another, still functioning separately: “ while thy beauty draws the heart to love, / as fast thy virtue bends that love to good” (ll. 12-13). Ultimately, these two poems illustrate that, in *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney shifts to a more active realm of art and morality, aligning it with his own beliefs on the cultural and personal influence of poetry.

Finally, with the 14th line of Sonnet 71, Sidney breaks the illusion of well-mannered praise for Stella: “But ah, desire still cries: ‘Give me some food.’” This line is an overtly, even violently sexual reversal of the themes of virtue hailed by the sonnet up until the final line. The blatant eroticism of this line reflects Astrophil’s inability to resist his sexual appetite, despite his best efforts and the threat of losing Stella’s affection as a result. This lack of restraint refers back to the problem of appetite in Aubery’s anecdote of Sidney on his deathbed. Concluding turns such as this are not uncommon in the sequence; in fact, one occurs at the end of Sonnet 1, and another occurs in the sonnet directly following this one, Sonnet 72. In Sonnet 72, Astrophil rebukes that same desire which disrupts Sonnet 71, acknowledging that he “may no more in [desire’s] sweet passions lie” and must sacrifice his relationship with desire in favor of Stella, until the second half of the final line: “But thou, desire, because thou would’st have all, / now banished art—but yet, alas, how shall?” (*AS* ll. 13-14). Here, Astrophil contradicts the poem again, still unable to let go of his erotic desire for Stella, which ultimately leads to his downfall in the sequence, just as Sidney’s inability to refrain from indulging his sexual appetite causes his death in Aubery’s anecdote. In this way—clinging to desire rather than following the virtuous

instruction of the Petrarchan muse—Astrophil deviates from the traditional Petrarchan courtly lover, choosing his own desires above his lady's. Although Sidney was not the first to introduce this erotic desire to his Petrarchan sonnet sequence,¹⁴ Sidney is employing Astrophil's lack of restraint in order to engineer his downfall as a failed Petrarchan lover.

In reading Sidney's Sonnet 71 against Petrarch's Sonnet 248, one sees a clear disconnect between the ethos of the two poets. While Petrarch shows, over the course of *Il Canzoniere*, a movement from human desire to heavenly love following Laura's death, Sidney's narrative has Astrophil fall from Stella's graces into a final sort of limbo, rejected, but unable to cease loving and desiring Stella. The final lines of Sonnet 108 conclude the sequence in a dark, complex paradox of emotions:

So strangely, alas, thy works in me prevail,
That in my woes for thee thou art my joy,
And in my joys for thee my only annoy. (*AS* ll. 12-14)

Whereas Petrarch's poet achieves religious and emotional transcendence, Astrophil is left to conclude his sequence, hopeless, with a darkly morose sonnet where, "as soon as thought of [Stella] breeds [his] delight, / ...Most rude despair, ... / Clips straight [his] wings" (ll. 5, 7-8). The sonnet illustrates a cycle of unending despair for Astrophil where no possible resolution is envisaged.

Sidney's sequence is related to and removed from Petrarchism in very specific ways. In his chapter on Sidney and *Astrophil and Stella*, Spiller lays out the relationship between Sidney's writing and Petrarch's sequence:

¹⁴ As Michael Spiller acknowledges, "What distinguishes Sidney's sequence from others is not its relative sexual explicitness—Ronsard and Jean-Antoine de Baïf, in particular, had brought the sensuality of Greek lyric verse and of Ovidian poetry into the sonnet before Sidney wrote..." (106).

[Sidney] gives with great immediacy all the Petrarchan marks of the lover—his anguish, his oscillating feelings, his humility, his idealism, his commitment to serve, her cruelty, and his devotion; but he adds to that the sensuality of Ovid and the French sonneteers, with a colloquialism of style which his contemporaries perceived as very English, and wittily deconstructs the whole enterprise.... (115)

That is to say, Sidney's fashioning of Petrarchism engages a wide variety of the themes that characterize Petrarch's sonnet sequence, while at the same time departing from the tradition through changes in many of the themes and above all, in the goal of the sequence. Sidney's goal with *Astrophil and Stella*, Spiller claims, is the illustration of meta-fiction and proto-deconstruction—a concept that I will develop further in later chapters of this thesis.

Through the combination of courtly love themes and Petrarchan rhetoric, and a meeting of passion and virtue embodied within his characters, Sidney sets the stage for a sequence of sonnets that are complicated and new, yet rooted in that which came before them. *Astrophil* is marked for failure from the moment his passions overtake him and he deviates from the Petrarchan conventions of the male lover. This deviation is foundational for the world of Sidney's sonnets, allowing for the development of new sonnet forms, new kinds of narrative sequence, and also, for a new model of poetic identity specific to the political context of the Renaissance Elizabethan court.

Methods of Fashioning

'Fool,' said my muse to me; 'look in thy heart, and write'
—*Astrophil and Stella*, sn. 1 l. 14

There is some debate as to when Sidney first encountered Penelope Devereux; it is certain that, from 1577-80, she and her sister lived “in the custody of Sidney’s aunt,” meaning Sidney may have been introduced to Stella when she was as young as 14¹⁵ (Duncan-Jones 196). What is known, however, is that for a considerable amount of time during Penelope’s infancy through her introduction to court, Sidney was the match for her favored by her father, Walter Devereux, first Earl of Essex. Ultimately, she was matched with Lord Robert Rich due to political and financial complications.¹⁶ Regardless as to the reality of Sidney’s feelings for Penelope Rich,¹⁷ scholars agree that she is the inspiration for Stella, the object of Astrophil’s desire in the sequence. From the image of Penelope, Sidney fashioned his own literary lady for his own, and his lovelorn poet persona’s literary purposes.

Building on this, we might note that Sidney fashions himself not only by adapting literary and cultural traditions (ie. Petrarchism, courtly love) but by shaping real, historical people into the characters of the sequence, and then again, into literary motifs. From the image of Penelope

¹⁵ Duncan-Jones also notes that there is a possibility Sidney visited Walter Devereux, one of his “Dutch uncles,” at the man’s Chartley estate while still in school; if so, he would have encountered Penelope “aged no more than two or three,” though we cannot know if this ever occurred (33).

¹⁶ Following the death of the elder Robert Rich, a match between Stella and the younger was made, potentially fueled by the differing religious associations of Sidney and Rich, the latter’s wealth, and the fact that at this time, Sidney may have already lost the title of heir apparent to his uncle Leicester (Duncan-Jones 198).

¹⁷ Sidney did not seem to show interest in the potential engagement when Walter first suggested it, and Duncan-Jones suggests that “the emotional naturalism achieved [in *Astrophil and Stella*] may testify only to Sidney’s brilliant mastery of the arts of persuasion, not to any real-life experience,” a claim potentially supported by Sidney’s lack of any sexual scandal or gossip in court (Duncan-Jones 181). At the same time, a number of moments in the sequence’s narrative line up with historical events regarding Penelope and Sidney (242).

Rich, Sidney fashions Stella, the lady of the sequence; subsequently, Astrophil produces the muse figure from Stella. Each of these parts then has or develops real independence from its point of origin—as it were, an agency of its own. In order to fashion the selves of Stella and her counterparts, historical and archetypal, into literary figures who are more accessible to their poets, Sidney employs a variety of literary maneuvers through the use of Astrophil’s perspective as the sequence’s narrator, asserting his control over the sequence and producing a work composed of autonomous characters.

Sidney fashions Stella from the idea and image of Penelope to play the role in the sonnet sequence of the courtly lady, the Petrarchan muse. Like Penelope Rich, Stella is a lady of the court who is, as Laura is to Petrarch, inaccessible to Astrophil due to her marriage. At the same time, her behavior towards Astrophil is callous and commanding. Throughout the sequence, Astrophil repeatedly laments Stella’s cruelty and lack of pity for him. The first sonnet expresses Astrophil’s desire for her sympathy and his goal for the sequence:

That she (dear she) might take some pleasure of my pain;
 Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know;
 Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain. (*AS* ll. 2-4)

The sequence itself opens with this expression of Astrophil’s desire that “Knowledge might pity win” from Stella, and that through that pity Astrophil might acquire Stella’s “grace,” meaning not only the acquisition of her divine favor, but also “permission to do something,” which in this case may likely refer to Astrophil’s uncontrolled sexual desire for Stella (“grace” *n.* 3c). This desire drives Astrophil to respond to his Petrarchan lady in a way not seen in Petrarch’s sequence. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Sidney was not the first to introduce explicit sexual desire in his sonnet sequence; other sources following the *Canzonere* beat him to it. However,

Astrophil's desire is structurally important to the sequence. It functions as the force that causes the downfall of Astrophil and Stella's affair. Astrophil's desire drives him to defy her condition that he take "virtuous course" in any relationship they have and he proceeds to kiss her without permission while she sleeps in Song 2 (*AS* sn. 69 l. 13). Though Stella confesses to feeling an attraction to Astrophil in return in the Eighth Song, she rebukes him and ends their relationship so as to force him to control himself "Lest... / [She] should blush when [Astrophil] art named" (ll. 98, 100). By rebuking Astrophil's attraction and ending the relationship, Stella asserts her control over her "poor slave" and affirms herself as a Petrarchan lady whose purpose is, above all, to inspire virtue and "true goodness" in those who encounter and love her (Ninth Song l. 50, sn. 71 l. 4). Stella fits the traditional characteristics of the courtly lady from Petrarchism, and though Astrophil's own aggressive desire challenges the boundaries of that role, she is fashioned thoroughly enough as the Petrarchan lady to resist his attempts at coercion and respond in the way a true Petrarchan lady would. Although Stella becomes more accessible to Sidney than Penelope because Sidney, as the author, is able to experience Stella more intimately, she remains inaccessible to Astrophil because she is designed by Sidney to be virtuous, whereas Sidney fashions Astrophil such that he cannot subdue his physical desire. Astrophil's excessive appetite is reminiscent of Sidney's own lack of restraint in Aubrey's anecdote of Sidney on his deathbed, drawing another parallel between the two poets and creating a reason for Astrophil's lady to remain inaccessible to him.

As the first-person narrator of the sequence, Astrophil's power takes root through his control over gaze and voice over Stella. While Stella is the focal point of the sequence, Sidney fashions many of the pieces of the sonnet sequence through Astrophil by employing Astrophil's narrative gaze and poetic voice. The power of these tools is best outlined in the introduction to

Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek's *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, a collection of essays by Lacanian scholars on the subject of gaze and voice:

Is voice, as a catalyst of love, not the medium of hypnotic power par excellence, the medium of disarming the other's protective shield, of gaining direct control over him or her and submitting him or her to our will? Is gaze not the medium of control (in the guise of the inspecting gaze) as well as of the fascination that entices the other into submission (in the guise of the subject's gaze bewitched by the spectacle of power)? (3)

Salecl and Žižek's description of the influential power of gaze and voice, specifically related to matters of love, is helpful in approaching the sonnet sequence. It is undeniable that Astrophil is in a powerful position as the first-person narrator; however, I argue that these descriptions of gaze and voice and their ability to induce the submission of the object are deeply complicated in the relationship between Astrophil as the subjective narrator and Stella as the object-muse. While Astrophil's power is significant and his perspective is necessary in allowing him to assert his role as narrator in order to fashion the "self" of Stella, that very perspective and its use of Stella as an oppositional object is what makes it impossible for her wholly to submit and subsequently develop a degree of autonomy in response to Astrophil.

On a very high level of generality, one could describe poetry, and indeed all written art, as a verbal re-fashioning of events, ideas, and perception on the part of the author through selected voices, devices, and structures. Through Astrophil's voice, Sidney fashions the reality of the sonnet sequence and its components, and in this construction of sequence Astrophil further constructs his artistic self, reflecting Lacan's idea of the "mirror stage" in child development, where the mirror, and the reflection of one's self-image within it acts

...to provide the minimal support needed to produce a self-recognition, the imaginary completion offered to the multiple body, the imaginary blinding that goes along with it, the recognition that is intrinsically a miscognition, the constitution of an 'I' as well as the matrix of a relationship to one's equals....

(Salecl and Žižek 13)

To clarify, Lacan argues that it is not until the child experiences its reflection in a mirror (or reflective surface, more broadly) that it can create an "I," a unified self-identity through the duplication of the self-image, and, paradoxically, in that replication there is an insurmountable division of self into two: the self-identity in reality and the ideal self-identity contained in that initial mirror-image, which the self in reality strives toward. Mladen Dolar argues voice to be a precursor to the "mirror stage" in development, saying, "To hear oneself speak—or just simply to hear oneself—can be seen as an elementary form of narcissism that is needed to produce a minimal form of self...isn't hearing oneself, and recognizing one's voice, an experience that precedes the recognition in the mirror?" (13). With this, Dolar asserts that the voice has its own power to provoke Lacan's "mirror stage" recognition before the mirror stage even occurs because the recognition of one's own voice occurs before the recognition of one's self through a confrontation with the reflected image.

This power of self-recognition and identification through the replicative nature of voice creates a problem of power for Stella, as her voice is removed through the influence and control of the narrative speaker of the verses, that is to say, Astrophil himself. The only time in the sonnets in which we see her speak for herself, the Eighth Song, is revealed ultimately to be a narrative farce in the final lines when, grief-stricken from his rejection, Astrophil reveals himself to have been the third-person narrator—"...therewith my song is broken"—and so even her

dialogue in the song has been filtered through Astrophil's voice (*AS* l. 104). The voice she has is not her own, but rather a fashioning of her identity by an identity outside of her own. She is fashioned, then, through Astrophil, and her identity is formed and controlled by him. This repeated construction of Stella through and by Astrophil—and by extension, Sidney—is perhaps best exemplified by his repeated use of her name in the Eighth Song. In his speech to her, Astrophil says Stella's name a total of seven times, with each "Stella" beginning its respective line, while Stella only uses Astrophil's name once, and to begin her speech. The faux-third-person of the song has already set the two characters up in opposition to one another, and through his repeated use of Stella's name Astrophil is acting to assume a distinct subject position in the scene. The use of her name within the context of the dialogue is not an act of passive acknowledgement, but rather an act of creation—of summoning up the Stella who exists in Astrophil's understanding--that is to say, speaking from Astrophil's perspective, the "you" as understood and defined by "me." This subject position and verbal power structure allows Astrophil to fashion Stella as a distinct "self" originating from imagination, rather than reality, just as Sidney is fashioning a "Stella" who is distinct from Penelope.

Dolar himself presents a description of the power and danger of the voice, and while he considers it specifically in relation to music, his warning regarding voice should be addressed:

...music, in particular the voice, shouldn't stray away from words, which endow it with sense; as soon as it departs from its textual anchorage, the voice becomes senseless and threatening, all the more so because of its seductive and intoxicating powers. (17)

Here, Dolar explains the relationship between the written and auditory aspects of voice, where the "voice beyond sense" is then "equated with femininity" (17). This creates a problem in

applying Dolar's description of voice to the sonnet sequence because the sonnets and songs contained within the sequence are not performed verbally by Astrophil, but written through his voice and perspective in non-vocalized words. Instead, then, the voice of the sequence becomes better reflected by Dolar's description of the voice transferred "into the dimension of the Other, ...a deferred voice" (14). Dolar summons the case of Narcissus and Echo to explain this concept, citing the replication of Narcissus' voice through Echo as the reproduction of his voice by the Other, rather than a return of his own voice. A similar phenomenon occurs through the construction and production of the sonnets. Slavoj Žižek describes a process of "'hear[ing]...with our eyes'" in cases such as viewing the painting *The Scream*, which can be much the same as reading the verses in the sonnet sequence—though the words are silent, we hear them in the process of reading (Salecl and Žižek 94). Though they are written and presented in Astrophil's voice, the sequence is removed from him, and "heard" by the eyes of the reader, making the audience of the sonnet sequence into the Other. The poems and songs are written in his voice, yet verbalized and recreated by their reader, removing the ultimate power of voice from Astrophil. In this separation, Astrophil achieves his goal of poetic fame and narrative control; though the true power of vocalization is removed from him, it is his voice and presentation of his and Stella's identities, which are duplicated over and over again through the audience's repeated experiences of his work.

While moving beyond the importance of voice in defining identity and affirming and enforcing power relations, I cannot neglect the importance of gaze within the sonnets; most notably, Sidney constructs the entirety of the sequence through Astrophil's narrative gaze. The perspective that the audience is given is the intimate, deeply subjective, and affectively charged view through the eyes of the narrator. The reader is ushered into the sequence to view the events

as Astrophil himself does: seeing Stella as he sees her, experiencing the story from his point of view. At the same time, Astrophil maintains control over the reader's experience, as he has the ability to present the reality of the narrative and its progression as he sees fit. We become especially aware of this manipulation of presentation in the false third-person perspective in the Eighth Song, as well as in the turnaround in the final line of Sonnet 71. Sidney uses Astrophil to show that he is a master of his poetic craft, as seen through the highly wrought and sophisticated poetic form throughout the sequence, and in this vein of ability and craft, he plays with the narrative presentation to manipulate and disorient the reader.

Despite his subjection to his courtly lady, as per Petrarchan tradition, Astrophil uses the influence of his power as narrator to subject Stella to violation through his use of imagery and metaphor. She is often described in militant terms, particularly at the start of the sequence when Astrophil metaphorically expresses his quest to obtain her love and affection. In Sonnet 12 he describes Cupid's success at penetrating her body:

Cupid, because thou shin'st in Stella's eyes,
 That from her locks, thy day-nets, none 'scapes free,
 That those lips swell, so full of thee they be,
 That her sweet breath makes oft thy flames to rise,
 That in her breast thy pap well sugared lies,
 That her grace gracious makes thy wrongs, that she,
 What words so e'er she speaks, persuades for thee,
 That her clear voice lifts thy fame to the skies. (*AS* ll. 1-8)

The first octave of the sonnet, quoted above, lists the many details of Cupid's victory. Astrophil praises and envies Cupid for his ability to shine through Stella's eyes, fill her lips, speak through

her voice, and more. The first tercet of the sestet continues this praise of Cupid's "Victory" in seizing Stella; however, the *volta* reverses this celebration, noting that "her heart is such a citadel, / So fortified with wit, stored with disdain, / That to win it, is all the skill and pain" (ll. 12-14), that is, her heart is the real prize, and it remains untouched, and so the siege is not yet a success. This sentiment is repeated later in the sequence where, in Sonnet 29, a similar (if not the same) siege is described, this time positioning Cupid's conquest as something that Stella "Doth willing grant" in order to keep her heart "in life and liberty" (ll. 7, 6). Astrophil himself takes part in this conquest and possession of Stella even later in Sonnet 61: "I Stella's eyes assail, invade her ears" (l. 3). His language here is aggressive, penetrative, and violently sexualized, and is associated directly with bodily invasion.

Another way in which Astrophil asserts his power as the narrator, and specifically with the use of the gaze, is in his blazoning¹⁸ of Stella. Sonnet 9 is a particularly apt example of this, with Astrophil describing Stella's face as "Queen Virtue's court," and with subsequent lines praising her forehead as a "front built of alabaster pure" and her mouth as "The door" made of "red porphy... which lock of pearl makes sure" (*AS* ll. 1, 3, 5). These descriptions and others through the sequence show Astrophil fashioning Stella through his gaze, displacing her from the category of "woman" and even "human," and casting her as a building, a court made from fine and hard materials (the latter trait—using hard, cold materials to describe her—being a deviation from metaphors conventional in the blazon). By asserting the dominance of his gaze in blazoning Stella he not only objectifies her physically as a woman, he fashions her into a feminine symbol of the court itself: she is hard, cold, and unyielding, yet lovely to look at and expensive,

¹⁸ There is a disagreement in scholarship as to whether this term should be spelled "blazon" or "blason." Regardless of the spelling, I use the word as it is understood in feminist poetics to mean "an instance of appropriation and control... a male inventory of the female body" (*The Princeton Encyclopedia* 151).

maintaining a firm virtuous front. In many ways Stella becomes the symbol of the virgin Queen Elizabeth's court. Thus does Astrophil assert the dominance culturally permitted him through poetry: dominance not only over Stella, but over the Elizabethan court for which she stands as a symbol.

While it is true that the narrative is presented entirely through the eyes of Astrophil, the most important eyes encountered in the sequence are, without a doubt, Stella's. A recurrent image through the songs and sonnets, Stella's eyes are perhaps her most important feature for Astrophil. They are important enough to have an entire sonnet—Sonnet 7—devoted to them, describing their color and power: “in colour black...beams so bright” (*AS* l. 2), “if no veil those brave gleams did disguise, / They, sun-like, should dazzle more than delight” (ll. 7-8), and although they are black, Astrophil defends them, saying “whereas black seems beauty's contrary, / She even in black doth make all beauties flow” (ll. 10-11). Stella, then, is largely characterized by her eyes and, by extension, her gaze in opposition to Astrophil's own. And, while the inclusion of her gaze and its frequency and intensity are subject to Astrophil's desire as narrator, the importance of her eyes and gaze in identifying and characterizing her should not go unmentioned.¹⁹

So, we are left with two gazes within the narrative: Astrophil, as the narrator, and Stella, characterized by her eyes, beholding both Astrophil and ourselves, the readers. It is here that Salecl and Žižek's analysis of gaze as that which “entices the other into submission (in the guise of the subject's gaze bewitched by the spectacle of power)” becomes complicated in its

¹⁹ It should be noted here that Stella's eyes are emphatically black in the sequence, and that that blackness is explored and employed in different ways by Sidney. For a further exploration on the blackness of Stella's eyes in relation to the racial aesthetics of English Renaissance poetry, see Kim Hall's chapter on *Astrophil and Stella* and the Renaissance in *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (1995).

application to the sonnets (3). It cannot be contested that Astrophil's gaze holds more power than Stella's, as Astrophil controls the perspective and visual presentation of the narrative. Because of this, and his subjective role in the sequence, Astrophil's gaze should entice Stella into submitting to him, or at least taking a submissive role in opposition to him. However, and somewhat ironically, it is precisely *because* of Astrophil's role as the first-person narrator that *he* is the one forced into a submissive role in opposition to Stella. This is because, while both Astrophil and Stella gaze, it is only Astrophil who is presented as taking the image of the Other into himself—that is to say, while both figures gaze, only Astrophil is *shown* being penetrated, and his penetration is shown and required *precisely* because of his role as first-person narrator. Seeing is an oddly passive act, as it requires an acceptance of images and external stimuli into oneself to be processed and interpreted. In his role as the narrator of the sequence, Astrophil resigns himself to a position in which he must submit to receive Stella to allow for his construction of the sequence at all. Astrophil must perform passivity in order to achieve creative agency, much in the same way that biological reproduction requires penetration to allow for creation. It is Astrophil, not Stella, who must prostrate himself and submit to Stella in order to achieve the power and ability to create his poetic project. This manipulation of power dynamics allows for Stella to separate herself not only from Astrophil, who has fashioned her, but from any initial bonds to her source, Penelope, which may linger through Sidney's use of Astrophil. As such, in the same way that Sidney uses Astrophil's gaze to assert control over Stella in fashioning her into text, he employs Stella's own gaze in return to make her distinct from her source and allow her to become a somewhat autonomous figure with enough independence to allow her to oppose Astrophil, making her less accessible to him.

Astrophil's acceptance of Stella into himself in order to reproduce her sexualizes the process of gazing which results in the production of the sonnets composing the sequence, furthering the metaphor of biological reproduction. Through the sequence this sexualization of production is made explicit, with Astrophil describing the process of writing the sonnets as labor: "Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes" (*AS* sn. 1, l. 12). He repeats this metaphor again, "My mouth doth water, and my breast doth swell, / My tongue doth itch, my thoughts in labour be" (sn. 37, ll. 1-2), and again with an image of breastfeeding, "dear sighs...you with my breast I oft have nursed" (sn. 95, ll. 1, 3). Astrophil's repeated use of this pregnancy metaphor when describing the process of writing the sonnets reveals his own desire for physical consummation of his attraction to Stella. The sonnets are presented as the only possible product, or child, of their impotent relationship (Hager, *Dazzling* 68). Combining this pregnancy metaphor with his gaze position as submissive to and receptive of Stella in order to reproduce her through him in his own image, the sexualized nature and desire for an erotic consummation becomes clear. Astrophil takes the receptive position in the relationship, and it is only through Stella's inspiration that he is able to be impregnated with the sonnets at all. In other words, the combination of Astrophil and Stella's respective gazes ultimately inspires the production of the sonnets.

In the sonnets and songs, Astrophil clearly and quite comfortably acknowledges that the sequence is written not only *for* Stella, but *from* Stella. Sonnet 50 expresses this influence, with Astrophil characterizing his work as an imperfect attempt "To portrait that which in this world is best," that is, Stella's image (*AS* ll. 7, 8). In this same sonnet, he takes a meta approach in presenting his process of writing this "portrait":

Stella, the fullness of my thoughts of thee

Cannot be stayed within my panting breast,
 But they do swell and struggle forth of me,
 Till that in words thy figure be expressed. (*AS* ll. 1-4)

In this passage, Astrophil is describing the process of creating his poem, inspired by thoughts of Stella. Reading more closely into the use of “figure” here can introduce some interesting points about Stella and Astrophil’s artistic production of her. The word “figure” has a variety of meanings that apply here and complicate its use in the sonnet. Of course, we can first take the most obvious definition, referring to the “figure” of Stella herself, that is, the figure “Of a living being: Bodily shape, occas. including appearance and bearing” (“figure” *n.* 4a). However, we can also view “figure” as “The image, likeness or representation of something material or immaterial” (“figure” *n.* 9a), or, “An artificial representation of the human form” (“figure” *n.* 10), that is to say, the “figure” of Stella within the art object poems that Astrophil writes about her. On an even more textualized level, the word figure can refer to “A written character” such as “a letter of the alphabet” (“figure” *n.* IV, 18). In addition, “figure” of course signifies a “figure of speech” in poetics (“figure” *n.* 21a). With this definition, Sidney not only fashions Stella into a figure of speech, but as a metaphor for metaphor itself. Stella is not only textualized on a physical level, then, but a rhetorical level, becoming a poetic device that reflects itself. And through all this complex defining of “figure” as Stella’s physical body, artificial poetic body, and his own poetic devices and letters which construct her and his work, there is the final connecting point of “figure” as a verb: “To give figure to; to form, to shape; to bring into shape” or “With complement: To shape into; also, to shape *into* (a specified form)” (“figure” *v.* 1a,b). This definition of “figure” as a verb helps draw the other definitions together through Sidney’s (and,

within the narrative, Astrophil's) figuring of this textual and artistic "figure" of a poetic Stella constructed by the figures of letters and words from the original figure of the woman.

Sidney moves beyond acknowledging Stella's influence in inspiring the sonnets' content to suggest repeatedly in the narrative that Stella is the inspiration for and even the very substance of the poems—their physical body, as it were. A number of moments in the sequence show Astrophil explicitly linking Stella to the sonnets themselves. One of the most significant examples comes in Sonnet 71, which I analyzed against one of Petrarch's sonnets in Chapter One. In Sonnet 71, Astrophil addresses Stella as the "fairest *book* of nature" (*AS* l. 1 *emph. mine*) and calls for those who encounter her to "read in" her and her "fair lines" to "learn of love" and "goodness" (ll. 3, 4). As I noted in Chapter One, throughout *Astrophil and Stella*, Astrophil continues to present Stella in a way that closely ties her to Sidney's characterization of poetry in his *Defence of Poesy*. Again, in Sonnet 90, Astrophil praises Stella as the reason for and source of his poetry: "Since all my words thy beauty doth endite, / And love doth hold my hand, and makes me write" (ll. 13-14). In the first line, it is Stella's beauty which endites (indites)—"compose[s]," "give[s] a literary or rhetorical form to" or "inscribe[s]"—the words of the poetry ("indite" *v.* 3a, 4). Finally, in the sequence of poems covering Stella's sickness, Astrophil describes her pale, sickly face as "paper perfect white" which love will use "to write more fresh the story of delight" (*AS* sn. 102, ll. 12, 13). By describing Stella's face as paper, Astrophil constructs her in the poem as a blank canvas upon which he, and love, can write. Sidney uses Stella's body as a foundation for the physical form of the sonnet sequence, a space or field upon and from which Astrophil can write.

While Stella is characterized by Astrophil as being a Petrarchan Muse similar to Laura, there is also a “muse” character in the sonnets who is herself²⁰ fashioned from Stella. She enters the sequence early, in the final line of Sonnet 1: “‘Fool,’ said my Muse to me; ‘Look in thy heart, and write’” (*AS* l. 14). Most striking about this introduction, particularly in relating Stella to the muse, is that whereas Stella’s voice is removed from her until far into the sequence,²¹ the muse enters explicitly through her own voice, and in reported dialogue with Astrophil. The line of her introduction is even structured so as to reveal her voice before her name: “‘Fool,’ said my Muse to me...” (l. 14). It is with this advice—which acts as a disruption of the sonnet by halting its narrative progress—that Astrophil’s writer’s block is resolved. Up to this point, he had spent the opening poem lamenting his struggle to find inspiration and words to write praises to Stella that were not already written or cliché. The resolution of Astrophil’s struggle to find words to praise Stella comes through the introduction of the muse’s voice: Astrophil finds his words through the muse’s words. The muse is introduced only lines after the “she (dear she),” Stella, in Sonnet 1 as a separate character who, while Astrophil laments the excess of emotions Stella inspires in him, directs him to his “heart” to produce his work. Although Astrophil can use Stella’s body as the canvas for his sonnets, it is only with the muse’s guidance that he can transform Stella into words. While Stella is the inspiration to the sequence, the “heart” he must look towards, the muse’s voice and words are required for Astrophil to allow for the physical production of the sonnets. In this way, Sidney establishes a much closer artistic relationship between Astrophil and the muse, as the two are required to communicate and Astrophil would be poetically impotent without the guidance of the muse. In the same way that Stella is the Petrarchan muse for

²⁰ I refer to the character of the muse in the feminine in this thesis, as muses are traditionally understood to be female.

²¹ Although it is through Astrophil, Stella does “speak” in the Eighth Song, as mentioned previously.

Astrophil, the muse is solely artistic, and the united influence and presence of both of these female characters, the traditional and the artistic, allow Astrophil to produce a result.

Following the muse's introduction, her connection to Stella, from whom she was fashioned, is made apparent through Astrophil's voice in the sonnets. First, and perhaps most significantly, only two sonnets after her introduction, Astrophil claims "For me, in sooth, no muse but one I know," a line whose rhythm and syllables echo in the following second tercet's beginning: "How then? Even thus: in Stella's face I read" (*AS* sn. 3 ll. 9, 12). Each line follows a full stop and each reflects the other, creating an association between "no muse but one I know" and "in Stella's face I read" (Smith "Astrophil and Stella, Sonnet 3"). Through this association, there arises the connection between the Muse and Stella, as well as the opposition of "knowing" the muse and "reading" Stella. By introducing this distinction of "knowing" and "reading" these two, Sidney uses Astrophil's voice to set Stella and the Muse into the categories prescribed by Astrophil. Sidney fashions Penelope Rich into Stella, who incites, inspires and, to some extent, embodies the text of the sequence. Conversely, Astrophil finds Stella to be distanced from him, and unattainable due to her insistence on maintaining virtue; therefore, the muse is fashioned further from Stella for the purpose of being "knowable" to Astrophil in a way Stella is not because she is produced from his imagination, and therefore more accessible.

The connection between Stella and the muse is physicalized as well in the Fifth Song, as Astrophil addresses Stella: "And O my muse, though oft you lulled her in your lap, / And then, a heavenly child, gave her ambrosian pap, / And to that brain of hers your hidd'nest gifts infused" (*AS* ll. 25-27). In this passage, Astrophil set Stella as a maternal figure who comforts, feeds, and educates the muse character. By presenting these two characters in this way, there is not only a relationship developed, but a maternal implication of lineage in her nursing and education. The

muse is produced not just from Astrophil's ideas or feelings, but also from Stella's body; similar to the construction of the sonnets, the muse is fashioned through the combination of Astrophil's voice and emotions and Stella's inspiration. Alongside the implication that Stella is the mother of the muse is the parallel implication that Stella is herself the *source* of the muse, meaning that the muse is a figure that has been fashioned from Stella and shares intimate and unchangeable similarities with her. In the body of the muse, Stella's body exists, and in the mind of the muse, Stella's "hidd'nest gifts" are "infused."

At the same time, just as Stella gains autonomy from Penelope, the muse gains her own independence from Stella. Just as they are introduced as separate characters and addressed separately, the muse has a very different relationship with Astrophil than Stella does, and this difference creates tension, even rivalry when Astrophil feels Stella has wronged him. In Sonnet 70, immediately following Stella's agreement to engage in a relationship with Astrophil in the previous sonnet, Astrophil begins by assuming his muse would be relieved to write happy sonnets, rather than "[drinking his] tears" (*AS* l. 2). By the end of the sonnet, however, he tells his "eager muse" to "cease" in writing because he determines that "Wise silence is best music unto bliss" (ll. 12, 14). Here, Astrophil halts his muse from helping him to write sonnets regarding his satisfied love, preferring the "wise silence" which follows the end of the sonnet. Because his desire for reciprocation from Stella has been satisfied, Astrophil dismisses the muse; in obtaining Stella physically, Astrophil no longer needs or desires the presence of his muse because he has no further reason to write his sonnets. The sequence, of course, continues from this point, but with Sonnet 71, when Astrophil reveals in the final line that his physical desires for Stella remain unsatisfied, and so he still has reasons to lament.

Another example of the separation between the muse and Stella comes in the Fifth Song. This song is an ugly expression of Astrophil's frustration with Stella; its language moves from vague hostility to outright threats and cutting, ugly reproaches, and in this song Astrophil summons the figure of the muse. However, where the muse acted as a force of inspiration and guidance in previous sonnets, in the Fifth Song she is employed by Astrophil as a force of revenge:

Your client poor my self, shall Stella handle so?
 Revenge, revenge, my muse; defiance' trumpet blow;
 Threaten what may be done, yet do more than you threaten.
 Ah, my suit granted is.... (*AS* ll. 31-34)

Astrophil invokes the muse to enact punishment on Stella, to "threaten" and then "do more" than she threatens. It is also implied that, in the gap between lines 33 and 34, the muse may have even responded positively to Astrophil's request by granting his "suit." In the conflict between Stella's virtue and Astrophil's anger, the muse takes the side of Astrophil against Stella, from whom she is fashioned. She is summoned again in the final stanza for Astrophil to blackmail Stella: "You see what I can say; mend yet your froward mind, / and such skill in my muse you, reconciled, shall find, / That all these cruel words your praises shall be proved" (ll. 88-90), a threat which is well summarized by Duncan-Jones: "If Stella will only be kind to Astrophil, he will again write skillful poetry in her praise, instead of the present inelegant abuse" (*The Major Works* 368, note ll. 89-90). While I think Duncan-Jones' summary is astute, it is important not to downplay the muse's role in this threat. The muse's place in this song is to allow herself to be used as leverage in Astrophil's threats against Stella, a role that clearly marks her as existing and acting completely separately from Stella and solidifies her close relationship to Astrophil. Poetry

remains by Astrophil's (and Sidney's) side even when their emotional inspiration is cold to them or rejects them.

In summary, Sidney uses the muse to fashion for Astrophil a more accessible artistic form of Stella, just as Sidney fashions Stella as a more accessible Penelope. The muse plays the role of the poetic, artistic Stella who accompanies and guides Astrophil, as opposed to the traditional Stella whose very role as the Petrarchan muse requires her to reject his amorous advances. As Sidney's poetic, literary "self," Astrophil replicates his actions to fashion himself a more accessible, reliable "self" from Stella, herself taken to allow Sidney better access to a "self" of Penelope. Just as Sidney fashioned Stella because his courtly context required them to be apart, Astrophil overcomes his own separation from Stella in the same way: attempting to reach her through fashioning her into poetry. In this way there is a process of repetition in the creation of the sonnet sequence: Sidney creates Astrophil from himself and Stella from Penelope in order to allow himself greater access to her, then Astrophil uses his narrative power as the poet of the sequence to create the muse from Stella in an effort to make his own accessible poetic figure of his lady.

Sidney uses a number of methods in complex projects of self-fashioning enacted within the sequence, with a specific focus on Stella and the muse. By employing Astrophil's gaze and voice as the sequence's narrator, Sidney is able to fashion the context and characters of *Astrophil and Stella* into distinct characters, autonomous from one another. This creates degrees of accessibility for both Sidney and Astrophil to interact with Penelope through Stella, and Stella through the muse in the poetic space of the sequence. By textualizing each of these female characters, Sidney fashions selves that, because they are each produced from the imagination of the poet more than from their predecessor, are closer and closer to the Platonic ideal—the

“golden” world of poetry which Sidney addresses in his *Defence of Poesy*, and which I will address further in the final chapter. Sidney uses self-fashioning to produce an artistic product over which he has control and from which he can build the sonnets of his sequence.

Thinking in Context

*Then think, my dear, that you in me do read
Of lover's ruin some sad tragedy:
I am not I, pity the tale of me.
—Astrophil and Stella, sn. 45 ll. 12-14*

In order to understand the mechanisms of creation that both generate and are dramatized in *Astrophil and Stella* the sequence, it is vital to consider the figure who directs that process. We must address Sidney's authorship and context in any discussion of his self-conscious fashioning of the sequence into a distinct self. To examine *Astrophil and Stella* as the product of Sidney's experience, we must look to *The Defence of Poesy*, which Sidney wrote around the same time as *Astrophil and Stella*, as another example of Sidney's perspective on the role of art and the artist. Sidney does not simply fashion a poetic self, but one that functions as a "mask" of himself that helps him to actualize the final product, the sequence.

Before we begin parsing Sidney's authorship in *Astrophil and Stella*, we should address the similarities between his method of structuring his sequence and the *Defence* and Greenblatt's method in constructing *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*; that is, both Sidney and Greenblatt begin much of their writing with a socio-historical account or dramatic narrative of the Renaissance in order to illustrate the particular tone, idea, or focus of the work in relation to the court tradition of fashioning. Greenblatt opens half of his chapters with an anecdote, followed by a rich, multi-faceted analysis of that anecdote that reveals a pattern or illustrative example central to the power relations and traditions of the time, becoming a synecdoche for an otherwise inaccessible network of cultural relations: the anecdote tells all. For example, Greenblatt's first chapter begins with a description of "A dinner party at Cardinal Wolsey's" (11), his second begins "In 1531" with "a lawyer named James Bainham... accused of heresy [and] arrested" (74), and so on for Chapter 5 and the Conclusion. In the same way, *The Defence of Poesy* opens with its own brief

and witty narrative, seemingly unrelated to the topic of the essay: “When the right virtuous Edward Wotton and I were at the Emperor’s court together, we gave ourselves to learn horsemanship of John Pietro Pugliano...” (*DP* 213). The anecdotal opening is Sidney’s adaptation of the conventional rhetorical element, the exordium; however, he uses this anecdote from his own life as inspiration for his own project of defending his profession and ends by regaling the immortalizing power of poetry as well as cursing those who remain opposed to it (that “when [they] die, [their] memory die from the earth for want of an epitaph” (250)).

With this, I call attention to a surely inadvertent parallel between the rhetorical and, by implication, logical structure of Greenblatt’s arguments and the structure of the *Defence* which one could even see extending to the individual sonnets of *Astrophil and Stella*. The very structure of a sonnet nearly insists upon this format of dramatic narrative, exploration, and precept of elucidation, and this is illustrated in each of the sonnets throughout the sequence. For an example, let us consider Sonnet 12, which is composed of only two sentences. The first is the anecdote of the sonnet, with Astrophil observing Cupid in Stella, as he (Cupid) has gained entry into Stella’s body (*AS* ll. 1-11). Astrophil describes the scene of Cupid’s influence on Stella until the start of the final sentence, which acts as the analysis of the situation: “O no, her heart is such a citadel, / so fortified with wit, stored with disdain” (ll. 12-13), before finally concluding with the moral: “...to win [Stella’s heart], is all the skill and pain” (ll. 14). This homology reflects on the process of self-fashioning as well, as *Astrophil and Stella* is, in effect, Sidney’s anecdote, taken from his life and fashioned to teach a certain moral. He then leaves the reader to interpret the sequence in order to determine the sequence’s meaning, impact, or precept, particularly because he leaves the ending of the sequence open, with his tragic narrator suffering in a state of

limbo : “...in my woes for thee[Stella] thou art my joy, / And in my joys for thee my only annoy” (sn. 108 ll. 13-14).

Throughout *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney displays (and plays with) his role as author and his context, “baring the device” of the sonnet’s literariness, and in that way, paradoxically, achieving a strikingly sincere effect. Sidney plays on the insincerity of love poetry’s tropes; in the first sonnet Astrophil laments his lack of success writing despite “turning others’ leaves” (*AS* l. 7). He is blocked by “others’ feet,”²² which stand in the way of his writing (l. 11). He personifies the characters of Invention and Study, noting that “Invention, nature’s child, fled step-dame study’s blows” (l. 10); this line echoes Sidney himself in *The Defence of Poesy*: “There is no art delivered to mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object... Only the poet, ...lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature” (*DP* 215-216). Sidney claims that the poet’s ability to invent beyond nature is what elevates poetry above other forms of art, a message which acts as the central point of the first sonnet. Clearly, Sidney is working from a similar understanding of poetry and the poet’s goals in the sonnets and the *Defence*.

On the other hand, we see a disconnect between the two through Astrophil’s behavior as the poet of the sequence. Sidney himself, or certainly, the image of Sidney whom he presents as the author of the *Defence of Poesy*, harshly criticises “that lyrical kind of songs and sonnets” for wasting itself on the love poetry of insincere men, rather than being used to praise “the immortal goodness of that God”:

²² Here, “feet” is used to pun on the “feet” of a poem.

But truly many of such [lyric] writings as come under the banner of irresistible love, if I were a mistress, would never persuade me they were in love; so coldly they apply fiery speeches, as men that had rather read lovers' writings... than that in truth they feel those passions, which easily (as I think) may be bewrayed by that same forcibleness or *energia* (as the Greeks call it) of the writer. (*DP* 246)

In this passage, Sidney condemns the very type and style of lyric poetry that he writes in *Astrophil and Stella*, accusing the writers of insincerity and cold imitation. Astrophil echoes this sentiment himself; for example, in Sonnet 3 he calls these unoriginal poets “Pindar’s apes,” and shames them for “flaunt[ing]... in phrases fine, / Enam’ling with pied flowers their thoughts of gold” (*AS* ll. 3-4). He further criticizes them for “Ennobling new-found tropes with problems old” and making use of “strange similes” to force comparisons (ll. 6, 7). He then praises his own writing, noting that he knows “no muse but one,” which is revealed to be blatantly false through the complicated dynamic between Stella and the Muse, as my previous chapter shows. He then insists that “all [his] deed / But copying is, what in [Stella’s] nature writes” (ll. 13-14). Here, similar to the turn of the 14th line in Sonnet 1 (“‘Fool,’ said my muse to me; ‘look in thy heart, and write’”), Astrophil insists upon his own poetic sincerity; however, the way in which he performs this sincerity is constructed and deeply artificial—one could even say, artifactual—nonchalance, the practiced carelessness of the *sprezzatura* so prized in the Renaissance. Therefore, this assertion goes directly against Sidney’s claim in the *Defence* because it is an act of imitation that falls into the tropes of love poetry and Sidney’s Renaissance context itself.

Above all, Sidney controls and directs the actions of the characters in order to create the plot and sequence of the sonnets, and is careful and self-conscious in his construction of the sonnets themselves in order to develop a complex and, in its way, unified sequence

representative of his poetic identity. As Stephen Greenblatt explains, “[Self-fashioning] invariably crosses the boundaries between the creation of literary characters, the shaping of one’s own identity, the experience of being molded by forces outside of one’s control, the attempt to fashion other selves” (3). That is to say, the result of self-fashioning is a unity of literary characters, the identity of the self, constructing others, and being constructed by external forces. Such is the case for Sidney with the creation of the sonnet sequence. Sidney is the product of a society that engages in self-fashioning and is familiar with the process, just as he himself is a product of cultural fashioning in ways that he sometimes welcomes and sometimes rejects. Additionally, he creates artistic “selves” outside of himself in the form of the characters who occupy and develop his own writing—in this case, *Astrophil and Stella*.

In this way, the tradition of self-fashioning lines up with Sidney’s own conception of the artist’s goal and method of producing poetry, namely that “the poet... doth grow in effect another nature,” using the nature surrounding him “for his principal object” and that “poetry is an art of imitation... a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth” (*DP* 216, 217). The “nature,” in the case of Sidney, from which *Astrophil and Stella* is “[figured] forth” is that of the Renaissance court within which he was writing. The courtly romance is fashioned from Sidney’s contexts, literary and social: a combination of the rich and diverse tradition of courtly love and Petrarchan poetics and Sidney’s personal experience. In this way, Sidney develops a sonnet sequence that takes the shape of a “golden” world, as opposed to nature’s “brazen” one through his own glorious talent for poetic “invention,” that is, through his method of fashioning the sequence, the “nature” that he uses as a basis gains value and becomes precious and separate from that same nature (216). However, nature must undergo transformation through the filter, or

rather the agency of the artist's imagination over the course of the fashioning. In that way, the art is produced as the result of a combination of influences from nature and the artist.

Sidney conceptualizes this "golden" world of poetry as "a speaking picture" in his *Defence*, produced as the result of the poet's imitation. This "speaking picture" takes form through the creation of Astrophil, Sidney's poetic persona, who enacts the role of the sequence's poet. Sidney fashions Astrophil as a "mask" of himself to work as a literary image from which he can develop the sequence. As the author, Sidney enacts a literary self-fashioning of himself in order to develop the character of the "busy loving courtier" whom he summons up in the *Defence* (DP 245). Astrophil, as the "busy loving courtier," becomes the figure of the *adolescens* of the Roman comedy: "a peculiarly self-conscious persona out of a precise tradition" (Hager, *Dazzling* 65). Sidney himself praises this figure in the *Defence*, characterizing this figure as "a heartless threatening Thraso; a self-wise-seeming schoolmaster; an awry-transformed traveller" (DP 245). In other words, Astrophil takes on the role of this traditional character by putting on a performance of his own identity in such ways as teaching while himself only seeming self-wise. He is a courtier who performs the role of being a courtier, though perhaps not so successfully as he could; Alan Hager notes that Astrophil is a character living within the context of a court who does not understand the "convention and decorum" of his own context (*Dazzling* 80). That is to say, certain rules and directions that shape the lives and behaviors of courtiers such as arranged marriages and proper expressions of desire seem either foreign to Astrophil or consciously defied. By fashioning Astrophil into an *adolescens*, Sidney creates a character who incites "delightful laughter, and [teaches] delightfulness" (DP 246). This is similar to Sidney's introduction of Pugliano at the start of the *Defence* where, despite acknowledging his talent and position, he fashions the horseman as the butt of the joke, emphasizing how extensively he spoke

in praise of himself and his profession, saying: "...if I had not been a piece of a logician before I came to him, I think he would have persuaded me to have wished myself a horse" (212). Like Astrophil, Pugliano is a boaster, who speaks with "strong affection and weak arguments"; however, despite his slightly laughable persona, Pugliano inspires Sidney to compose his own defence of his "faculty": "But thus much at least with his no few words he drave into me, that self-love is better than any gilding to make that seem gorgeous wherein ourselves be parties." This connection shows that Sidney fashions these characters to teach the reader almost by accident; these characters boast and speak/write largely for themselves, but the way in which they go about it inspires those who encounter them. Astrophil is a teacher we can laugh at and learn from in turn, who behaves wrongly and thinks too much of himself, and whom Sidney can easily manipulate and control; because of this he is ideally suited to the role of *Astrophil and Stella's* fictional poet.

Astrophil's role as a poet in the sequence is an elaborate performance, and one which Sidney himself deems characteristic of and necessary to being a poet: "it is not rhyming or versing that maketh a poet... it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by" (*DP* 218-219). Sidney considers the act of feigning, then, to be a necessary part of the poet's ability to teach and inspire; in Sidney's own sonnet sequence this feigning is enacted through Sidney's self-fashioning of characters and traditions. Sonnet 1 begins with Astrophil's own claim of this: "Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show" (*AS* l. 1). In true Renaissance and poetic form, this line projects the illusion of casual sincerity. He is "fain in verse," or eager and favorable through the following sequence to express the depth of his love for Stella ("fain" *adj. adv.*); at the same time, the sonnet opens with a pun, using "fain" to point the reader to

Astrophil's efforts of "feigning" his love through his verse. This, then, refers us to Sidney's own question as to the sincerity of lyric love poets in the *Defence*. Therefore, *Astrophil and Stella* opens with, in the first line, a self-conscious reference to the artifice of poetry and poetic identity. With his self-fashioning, Sidney creates a sequence intended to inspire and teach readers using performances and feigning to generate an atmosphere of *sprezzatura* and self-fashioning, and therefore to idealize his own experience within the Elizabethan court. He is able to enact this creation, and the creation of the fictions various parts (such as characters, literary context, etc.) due to the "idea or fore-conceit"²³ from which he is writing (*DP* 216). Sidney constructs the text from his own experience as a poet through Astrophil's performance as one and fashions his characters, traditional context, and larger poetic project from the context of the Elizabethan court that he understood and knew. That is to say, it is only through his own experience with and understanding of those around him and the requirements of becoming and living as a courtier that Sidney, as a poet, is able to produce the "golden" world of *Astrophil and Stella*.

One of the clearest examples of this creation from "fore-conceit" is Astrophil himself, fashioned by Sidney from his conception of himself. Essentially, Astrophil exists only as a fictionalized fashioning of Sidney himself who has undergone, just like the other products of Sidney's self-fashioning, a change through Sidney's poetic "imagination"; or, as Hager characterizes him, "nothing more than a well-wrought Renaissance mask, a tool for showing us a simultaneously coherent and dis-eased imagination" (*Dazzling* 82). Hager's description of Astrophil is certainly apt, as Sidney himself hailed the teaching power of poetry repeatedly in the

²³ Katherine Duncan-Jones clarifies Sidney's language further in an endnote: "Sidney uses Plato's word 'idea' and his own phrase 'fore-conceit' to denote the original conception in the artist's mind to which he attempts to give expression in poetry" (216)

Defence of Poesy; however, his choice of the word “mask” to typify Astrophil’s place in the narrative should be examined. What are the implications of naming Astrophil a “mask” of Sidney? Hager certainly seems to be using the word as it is understood in literary theory, that is, “The narrative voice of a text regarded as a persona, distinct from the true voice of the writer” (“mask” *n.3 9b*). Though this definition is fitting and necessary here, it is necessary to consider further what significance might exist is Astrophil acting as a “mask” of Sidney. First, masks are understood to act as a “disguise” for their wearer, “hiding something else from view” (“mask” *n.3 1a, 2b*). In this case, Astrophil is the disguise Sidney wears to put himself in the narrative—the poet who is not the real poet. At the same time, a mask is a constructed image one can choose to wear in presenting oneself. Sidney has fashioned Astrophil specifically as he is to play his part in the sequence, representing the very particular face that Sidney intends to show, much in the same way that courtiers in the Renaissance would undertake self-fashioning to alter their behaviors and expressions in court and present themselves a certain way. In this sense, Astrophil fits the theatrical definition of “mask,” becoming “a hollow figure of a human head intended both to identify the character represented and to amplify the voice” (“mask” *n.3 1b*). However, to wear a mask is to have two representations of a self unified in a close physical relationship, while at the same time those images act and react separately from one another. Such an intimate relationship of simultaneous unity and separation is reflective of the tradition of self-fashioning, with images that undergo self-fashioning at once representing and presenting the figures they portray and potentially going against the actuality of the figure’s lived experience, as was the case with the fashioning of Sidney’s image after his death.

As much as characterizing Astrophil as a “mask” may imply that Sidney is using him as a disguise, a mask can also be understood as a ‘truer’ representation of the self, as it purges the

‘natural’ of all that is extraneous to its central ‘idea.’ In other words, the mask removes impurities of the face, or self, which distract from the character of the image. By embellishing or otherwise altering the image, the mask reveals a deeper truth than the hidden image would have expressed; in this way, the mask is an actualization of the “golden” world, the Platonic ideal which can only be known through artistic idealization. This division between the surface and depth distances the hidden image from direct observation, just as Sidney is able to disguise himself behind Astrophil.²⁴

In creating Astrophil as a mask, Sidney distances himself from the narrative while still producing an effect. Making his persona a lovelorn poet introduces an awareness as to the construction of the sonnets and sequence itself, because Astrophil must enact the layers of his experience of attempting to fashion the sequence. Through this distantiation, Sidney gives himself freedom to play with the space between his natural self and his mask. Sidney’s relationship with Astrophil provides him with the freedom to play with the space between the self that he is and the self that he can manipulate. Therefore, the mask not only acts as a mode of self-knowledge, but as a technology for creativity and play. This is a behavioral understanding of the mask—a way of expanding Sidney’s existential, rather than epistemic, scope.²⁵ Thirteen of the sonnets in the sequence focus very self-consciously on the “creation of texts,” such as Sonnet 70, which itself acts as “a sonnet about the intention to compose a sonnet” (Spiller 109, 110). Sidney uses Astrophil as a way to draw attention to the act of writing a sonnet sequence and performing the role of a poet. He achieves this distancing through what Hager calls the “Seven Levels of Starlover’s Ambiguity,” namely names, complex words, oxymorons, ambiguous metaphors, allusion to myth, *descriptio*, and *narratio* (Hager, *Dazzling* Ch. 5). While Hager sees

²⁴ Conversation with Marjorie Levinson.

²⁵ Conversation with Marjorie Levinson.

these levels as “Astrophil’s means of instruction” designed to trap “the reader in ambiguities,” I see them as another way for Sidney himself to introduce complex and conceptually generative patterns of unity and separation within the sequence, at the same time characterizing his own relationship to Astrophil as his creation textually for the audience (83). In the cases of each of these layers of ambiguity, the rhetorical devices within the text draw associations between their subjects at the same time that they make them distinct. This technique works similarly to puns, which are used frequently throughout the sequence. Hager himself notes, “no age reveled more in the pun and other forms of rhetorical ambiguity than the Elizabethan” (*Dazzling* 82). To pun is to use “a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations,” with those meanings distinct from each other but contained within the same written word or vocalization (“pun” *n.*). In this way, the two meanings are joined but not collapsed into one; each retains its distinctness. Similarly, these “other forms of rhetorical ambiguity” such as oxymorons, allusions, and metaphors enact a bringing together and association between two separate objects of situations, while they simultaneously remain separate from one another as well. This unity and separation, as was the case with Sidney and his “mask,” is a literary execution of the tradition of self-fashioning in the Renaissance, as well as a reflection of the complexity of the self-presentation that courtiers were expected to perform in the Elizabethan court. This summons again the understanding of “figure” as a “figure of speech,” or metaphor for metaphor. Despite the initial distance of the self-fashioning, Sidney performs a further distancing by making that same tradition into literature.

Sidney’s engaged-disengagement with the sequence introduces an interesting aspect of self-fashioning that Sidney realizes through Astrophil, namely, that “...one can win pity for oneself only by becoming a tale of oneself, and hence by ceasing to be oneself” (Greenblatt 238).

In the same way that Sidney becomes a tale of himself through the fashioning of the various layers of *Astrophil and Stella*, he is performing that same textualization of the self through Astrophil for the reader, as exhibited explicitly in Sonnet 45, which concludes with the line “I am not I, pity the tale of me” (*AS* l. 14). Even the language of Greenblatt’s claim reflects Sidney’s assertion through Astrophil here, becoming a “tale of me” to obtain pity. Just as Sidney fashions himself into the literary character of Astrophil, he repeats that same process for Astrophil to fashion himself into “a narrative of his own love” (Spiller 113). Just as Astrophil is, to some degree, a disingenuous representation of Sidney, the sequence realizes a fictionalized Astrophil to obtain his lady’s pity. The opening of the line also suggests the complex relationship between the identities and relationship between Sidney and Astrophil, as Sidney connects and dissociates himself (“I”) from Astrophil (“I”) and, by doing so, also creates an ambiguity of identity. The reader cannot be sure which “I” represents whom, therefore defining both through their lack of association with one another; however, as is the case with puns and wordplay, the two are also united in their identification as “I.” That mutual identification then becomes complicated in his continuation into becoming a “me.” Grammatically, as Spiller notes, the “subject [changes] inexorably into object” in both a symbolic and literal sense. Sidney fashions himself and Astrophil into a singular object, a “me,” together in the form of the sequence. Therefore, *Astrophil and Stella* becomes the product of the unification of Sidney and Astrophil, with Sidney actualizing the sequence by writing through Astrophil, whom he uses to characterize the role of the poet. The sonnet sequence, then, is produced through the necessary relationship and cooperation between Sidney and Astrophil.

The language of the sequence reinforces this joint creation and includes another figure in the production: Stella. Astrophil repeatedly uses feminized and maternal language to characterize

his relationship to the text, lamenting in Sonnet 1 that he is “great with child to speak, and helpless in [his] throes” (*AS* l. 12). He then progresses this birth metaphor in Sonnet 37, noting “My mouth doth water, and my breast doth swell, / My tongue doth itch, my thoughts in labour be” (ll. 1-2). Finally, in Sonnet 95 Astrophil completes the metaphor: “But as you [his sighs] with my breast I oft have nursed” (l. 3). This movement from pregnancy to labor and lactation sets Astrophil, in his role as poet, in the position of the sequence’s mother; this metaphor is strikingly similar to the maternal relationship between Stella and the muse. Whereas Stella gives birth to the muse, who is herself symbolic of traditional artistic inspiration, Astrophil gives birth to the language of the sequence, which consists often of expressions of emotion. Together, these pieces—tradition/inspiration and language/emotion—result in the whole of the *sonnets*, and ultimately, it is Sidney’s orchestration of this complex unity through developing the characters themselves who summon up these traditions and sonnets that creates the sonnet *sequence*. The sequence comes into being through the combined forces of Sidney, Astrophil, and Stella; in so doing, “sequence” takes on a certain spatial stability; we come to experience the whole as an elaborately plotted and interrelated field or network rather than a narrative.

One of the defining characteristics of *Astrophil and Stella* that links the sequence to the author is, as Michael Spiller notes, the fact that “it is, lightly and pervasively, funny” (106). One thing Sidney scholars tend to agree upon is his penchant for light, sophisticated, witty irony, both in his writing and his life; Alan Hager characterizes Sidney as “a man who saw his own life as a kind of irony” which he then illustrates with examples of Sidney’s “corrective irony”²⁶ (*Dazzling*

²⁶ Hager further explains the term “corrective irony” as “...a special kind of humor, a kind of constructive irony, a dissembling, a pretending that [Sidney] is less than he is, or that circumstances are less grave than they are, something far more “humorous” in all senses of the word than *sprezzatura*, which is a more voluntary posture than Sidney’s reflexive irony” (*Dazzling* 28-29).

28-29), while Spiller provides a similar description: “Sidney was unable to regard anything other than ironically,” before then referencing Hager himself (111). It is understandable that Sidney would, in attempting to fashion a poetic identity for himself, produce a sonnet sequence that is laden with layers of ironies and self-conscious production. By including this characteristic irony, Sidney ties this sequence even further to himself, despite his previous attempts to maintain distance from the narrative through self-fashioning. And, in another turn of the screw, we might note that irony is a distancing device; in other words, Sidney is most himself when most not himself.

Spiller makes a claim that Sidney’s “deliberate enhancing of the artifice of the text” makes *Astrophil and Stella* “the first deconstructive lyric persona in the sonnet’s history,”²⁷ a metafictional work of poetry (106). He certainly knew his audience—choice members of the Elizabethan court—and he employed his characteristic irony in writing for them: “The more intense the effort expended upon rhetorical and artistic ‘creation,’ the greater the irony of having to treat that creation as if it were real, and its language as if it really represented things” (Spiller 113). Sonnet 1 illustrates this concept beautifully because, as discussed previously in this thesis, the message of the sonnet—to write, as a love poet, from the heart—is undercut by the presentation of that message being laden with literary references and complex wordplay. While I agree that Philip Sidney is being self-consciously ironic in his sequence, I disagree that this irony is “the obverse of the Renaissance courtier’s obsession with pageant and show,” as Spiller claims; rather, I think he is intentionally performing this irony to reflect the mentality of his

²⁷ Spiller makes this claim despite the fact that Deconstruction was not introduced until Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* (1967). Calling *Astrophil and Stella* an example of a “deconstructive lyric persona” is the result of considering the text from a post-Derrida standpoint, and applying theories of critical thinking that appear centuries after Sidney’s text was written.

physical and temporal context. This is the enactment of the studied nonchalance of *sprezzatura*, the widespread self-fashioning style and virtue that dominated the court. He is self-aware enough of his environment to actualize the traditions of his context as well as those that preceded him in such a way as to highlight the irony inherent in them. In this way, I agree with Hager's claim in response to Greenblatt that Greenblatt's "studies... overestimate... the unconscious in [Renaissance courtiers'] posturing" that Sidney's posturing and self-fashioning in his work is in no way unconscious (11). I believe he was self-consciously attempting to fashion a "self" for his context, and in this representation, attempting to parody the social environment of the Elizabethan court. His work is designed to expose the actuality and ironies of the courtly environment and the role and hypocrisy of the lyric love poet in fashioning their art. At the same time, as we have seen, there is an energy to his writing, a sense of play, which livens this satiric disenchantment. While Sidney acknowledges and exposes the ironies of his context, he does so in a way that revels in their artifice, because it is that same artifice which allows for him to play in his poetry.

It is impossible to gain a full understanding of *Astrophil and Stella* without understanding Sidney's relationship to the text as a poet writing from within the Elizabethan court. Sidney's self-consciousness in fashioning and constructing his work relates the sonnet sequence to Sidney's own context within the Elizabethan court. He sets up the complicated relationship between unity and separation that ultimately allows him to write the sonnet sequence through his relationship with Astrophil. In constructing *Astrophil and Stella* and his own identity through the self-conscious layers of fashioning, Sidney produces an identity and sequence that are distinct due to their connection and reflection (and refraction) of Sidney's experience within the Elizabethan court.

A Defence of Sidney

I conjure you all that have had the evil luck to read this ink-wasting toy of mine, even in the name of the nine Muses, no more to scorn the sacred mysteries of poesy...

—*Defence of Poesy*

Over the course of this thesis, I have striven to bring Sidney's context and complicated identity into my reading of his groundbreaking sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*. Building upon the work of scholars such as Lewis and Spiller, I began by illustrating Sidney's engagement with literary traditions and the ways in which he deviates from those traditions in order to set his work within a broader artistic context from which he fashions his sequence. I then explored Sidney's use of narrative gaze and voice as tools for fashioning the characters of Stella and the muse. In my second chapter, I tracked the fashioning of Stella from Penelope and the muse from Stella in order to illustrate the ways in which their fashioning grants them autonomy from one another and introduces degrees of accessibility for their male counterparts, Sidney and Astrophil. Through the fashioning of these women, I ultimately saw an attempt by Sidney to transform the reality of Penelope into the more ideal and accessible artistic figures of Stella and the muse. Finally, I turned to consider Sidney's work in context, exploring Sidney's role as poet and author and his relationship with his "mask," Astrophil. In my final chapter I observed the ways in which Sidney brings together the Elizabethan court and his own understanding of poetry and artistry to produce a representation of art and artist in context in *Astrophil and Stella*.

Stephen Greenblatt claims that "Man can only exist in the world by fashioning for himself a name and an object, but these...are both fictions" (217). In the case of Sidney's work, it is that same "fiction" which reveals and makes accessible the "golden" world fashioned from nature described in the *Defence*. *Astrophil and Stella* becomes the "mask," the fashioned "self" of the Elizabethan court experience produced by Sidney through a unity of historical and literary

traditions. The sequence acts not only as a foundational text of English literature, but as an illustration of poetry's ability to produce, from the raw, unpolished reality of "nature," the "golden" world of the Platonic ideal. Philip Sidney is not only important because, as Spiller notes, "he made...the courtly Petrarchan sequence the fashion of his age," but because by writing *Astrophil and Stella*, he constructed a poetic representation of himself, the identity of the poet, and his literary and social context (117). With his sonnet sequence, Sidney self-consciously engages with the traditions and conceptions of selfhood understood and accepted in the Renaissance. From this engagement he fashions a poetic "self" of a poet working from within the context of the Elizabethan court with an intimate understanding of courtly practices.

Despite Sidney's extensive "literary biography" composed of the impressive amount of work he produced in only 31 years of life²⁸ and the radical significance of not one, but three of those texts,²⁹ he remains tragically underappreciated²⁹ by modern scholarship. Though Sidney precedes Spenser and Shakespeare, his contributions and extensive skill have been neglected in favor of other prominent works of his time, particularly in recent years; this neglect becomes more unfortunate due to the fact that Sidney's influence was not restricted to the literature he produced. His image was immortalized in the Elizabethan court following his death, influencing the behavior and motivations of courtiers looking to improve their favor with Elizabeth by filling the hole left by her "Shepherd Knight" (Hager, "Exemplary Mirage" 7). In this way, the range and depth of Sidney's impact on the Renaissance may even overshadow his contemporaries. The purpose of this thesis has been to open a new discussion not only of Philip Sidney's literary

²⁸ Collectively, we have access to "two versions of a romance; ... two sonnet sequences; a literary treatise; several other poems and entertainments; verse translations of the first forty-two Psalms; ... three political discourses; and well over a hundred letters" as well as "many other documents and life records" and "numerous early 'lives' or memoirs" (Duncan-Jones vix).

²⁹ *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, *The Defence of Poesy*, and *Astrophil and Stella* all remain major foundational texts of English literature.

legacy, but of the relationship of his work to his lived context. Through his writing, Sidney unites his understanding of the literary with his experience of the Renaissance in order to produce an accessible Platonic ideal, the “self” of the Elizabethan experience.

To conclude, I revisit the anecdotes with which I began my thesis, and their relationship to Sidney’s capacity for restraint. In the first story from Greville of the wounded soldier to whom Sidney gave his water, Sidney is disciplined and restrained, aware of the needs and plight of others. Katherine Duncan-Jones invokes this anecdote as an illustration of Sidney’s wealth of generosity, giving freely of “his money, his time and his talent” with the wounded soldier acting as a metaphor for us, “the unknown beneficiaries of his literary genius” (306). In ironic contrast, Aubrey’s anecdote illustrates a Sidney without restraint, driven by his appetite, who acts recklessly and against the advice of others. In life, Sidney was generally a generous and friendly man; his literary personas, however, reveal a man who exhibits the same lack of restraint in terms of sexuality and humility that appears in Aubrey’s story. Each of these anecdotes is equally likely to have occurred historically, with neither being more or less reasonable than the other. The relationship of these two Sidneys, and the potential for both to have existed at once, encapsulates the irony of Sidney’s life: the tension between representations of selfhood, the self-fashioning of a Renaissance courtier, the ultimate multiplicity of his “self” as a result of his context. In the same way that we have come to understand Sidney as a union of the self-fashioned figures in his work and his biographical image, we can unite these two oppositional anecdotes of Sidney’s life in such a way as to allow for an image of complex unity of the man. The two Sidneys in these anecdotes are at once unified and separate, but fashioned and understood together they may just become the most complete, *true* image of the man.

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