

## **A Reading of *Astrophil and Stella* in the Light of *An Apology for Poetry***

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**Abstract.** There were many serious and successful attempts by critics and students of Philip Sidney to read *Arcadia* in the light of *An Apology for Poetry*, and the connection between the imaginative work (*Arcadia*) and the critical one (*An Apology for Poetry*) was made very clear. However, there hasn't been any satisfactory or sustained attempt at establishing the moral and stylistic links between Sidney's practice in *Astrophil and Stella* and his theory in *An Apology for Poetry*. This paper will show how much we can benefit from the *Apology* in our reading of *Astrophil and Stella*.

Looking for Sidney's purpose in writing *Astrophil and Stella* is performing an exercise in speculation, for Sidney left us no conclusive evidence that he intended these sonnets to reflect his poetic ideology. However, his *Apology for Poetry* provides clues for ascertaining his purpose in *Astrophil and Stella* and functions as a kind of overview to the style and structure of the sonnet sequence. It is likely that *Astrophil and Stella* functions to serve that same moral end that the *Apology* declares is the aim of all good poetry — had Sidney not intended to render a moralistic fore-conceit into creative poetic form, he would have failed to honor the high position that poetry deserves, a position he so adamantly defends in the *Apology*.

Significant comments have already been made about the seeming contradictions between Sidney's theory, put forth in the *Apology*, and his practice, seen in *Astrophil and Stella*. One contradiction revolves around the fact that the *Apology* advocates a craftsmanship which stresses that a poet should know how to write poetry, whereas in *Astrophil and Stella*, Astrophil is found to advocate spontaneity and inspiration while at the same time employing deliberate craftsmanship. This kind of contradiction motivated Hallett Smith to attempt a resolution for this problem.<sup>(1)</sup> Another

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(1) Hallett Smith, as discussed in Sherod M. Cooper, Jr., *The Sonnets of Astrophil and Stella: A Stylistic Study* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1968), p. 21.

contradiction that puzzles readers concerns structure. The *Apology* advocates unity and order, and a poet should think of plot, foreground, or central idea to provide a structure for his poetry; however, *Astrophil and Stella* appears to lack structure, and at a glance the sequence seems to be thrown together haphazardly. A number of critics have dealt with this issue with varying degrees of convincing analysis.<sup>(2)</sup> In my analysis I will touch on some of the matters of style (i.e., matters of form related to deliberate craftsmanship versus spontaneous inspiration). In matters of style we can see Sidney's success in applying theory to practice, because in *Astrophil and Stella* he achieves qualitative progress in adapting manner (craftsmanship) to matter (idea), a step ahead of what we see in his *Arcadia*, where ornateness (manner) dominates idea (matter).

In the *Apology*, Sidney states

Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done — neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.<sup>(3)</sup>

Here he contends that nature is the object of Art, and that the poet is blessed with the ability to render things even better than Nature. This blessing is a divine gift which sets the poet above nature and enables him to exceed the actual world — a type of divine inspiration. Because he is inspired to render nature more beautiful, he is like a passive agent to the voice of inspiration; his poetic creation is a “synthetic expression” of some supernatural vision.<sup>(4)</sup> Likewise, in *Astrophil and Stella* wherein Stella is identified as the natural source of poetic expression, Astrophil claims that the “sweet sounds” of Stella's name alone inspire him without concern for proper word choice:

But now I mean no more your [the Muses'] help to try,  
Nor other sugaring of my speech to prove,  
But on her name incessantly to cry:

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(2) Richard B. Young. “English Petrarche: A Study of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*” in *Three Studies in the Renaissance: Sidney, Jonson, Milton* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958); and A.C. Hamilton. “Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* as a Sonnet Sequence,” *ELH*, 36, No. 1 (1969), p. 65-79, found a structure in the Sonnet Sequence. On p. 76, Hamilton takes issue with C.S. Lewis who contends that the sonnets do not provide a sequence and are merely an attempt at an “Anatomy of Love.”

(3) Concerning Sidney's use of nature: “It is commonly assumed that Renaissance artists and critics accepted a fundamentally Aristotelian view of imitation: the representing of general truths in nature.... They tried to capture the significance of the external world of object and action.” Robert L. Montgomery, Jr., *Symmetry and Sense: The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), p. 34. The poet tries to imitate nature because it is that perfect universal norm that teaches us what should be.

(4) Cooper, p. 15.

For let me but name her, whom I do love,  
 So sweet sounds straight mine ear and heart do hit  
 That I well find no eloquence like it.<sup>(5)</sup>  
 But know that I, In pure simplicity,  
 Breathe out the flames which burn within my heart,  
 Love only reading unto me this art. [28]

Even the first sonnet shows the faults of other poets who relied on conventional contrivances and highly decorative styles to create their poetry. Astrophil expects to write from the pure truth of Stella's natural effect on his emotions, not from deliberate craftsmanship, even though he cannot avoid using some craft himself in shaping the body of his verse. Actually the aesthetic contradiction of spontaneity and craftsmanship reflects Astrophil's psychic and philosophical conflicts and sets the stage for the division within Astrophil which is played out in the rest of the sonnet sequence:

I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe:  
 Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain,  
 Oft turning others leaves, to see if thence would flow  
 Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburned brain.  
 But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay;  
 Invention, Nature's child, fled stepdame Study's blows;  
 And others feet still seemed but strangers in my way.  
 Thus, great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,  
 Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite:  
 'Fool,' said my Muse to me, 'Look in the heart,  
 and write.' [1]

In the *Apology*, however, Sidney goes on to assert that the poet *should* be conscious of his craft:

They that delight in poesy itself should seek to know what they do, and how they do, and especially look themselves in an unflattering glass of reason, if they be inclinable unto it.<sup>(6)</sup>

Indeed, the "inspired" poet works with the Art, Imitation and Exercise of his own genius to "lead" inspired words into poetry (*Apology*, p. 72). The Glass of Reason leads us to believe that the poet must be conscious of what he is trying to achieve in his poetry, and he cannot be merely a passive transporter of divine reflections.

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(5) Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* in *Sir Philip Sidney: Selected Poems*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), sonnet 55, p. 144. Subsequent references to the sonnets of *Astrophil and Stella* will be given numerically in the text after each quotation.

(6) Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Forrest G. Robinson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1970), p. 72. Subsequent references will be to *Apology* in the text.

rather than treat this later assertion as an inconsistency, I suggest that Sidney was very much aware of the extremes of salish style and ornament that poetry had fallen to (as can be seen in the euphuistic works of John Lyly, his contemporary<sup>(7)</sup>), and his condition prompted him to defend good poetry against criticism in his *Apology*. So, rather than dwell on the stylistic and mechanical aspects of good poetry, he thought he could elevate poetry's significance by stressing the role of inspiration in its creation.

Although Astrophil constantly cries that he is the passive recorder writing only what Stella effects in him, we as readers know that the responsibility of the poetry rests on the poet. We are always conscious that Astrophil is out to convince Stella, by his poetic craft, of his emotional sincerity concerning his being inspired by her. The sonnets reveal logical, rational word choices and fall into conventional rhyme schemes that we know cannot be the voice of pure inspiration alone. In fact, when the poet feels the extremes of joy or anguish regarding Stella, he cannot devise the words to write because his logical thought processes are too muddled:

O joy too high for my low style to show;  
 O bliss, fit for a nobler state than me. [69]  
 O fate, O fault, O curse, child of my bliss;  
 What sobs can give words grace my grief to show?  
 What ink is black enough to paint my woe? [93]

Thus we can see the kind of contradiction between theory and practice that appears to plague the *Apology*.

Hallett Smith makes an interesting, credible argument that helps resolve this apparent contradiction within *Astrophil and Stella*. He proposes that Astrophil is really a dramatic character, separate from Sidney, who is talking about sonnets sent to Stella that we never see. The sonnets we read, then, do not represent Sidney's own convictions because the style of the sequence employs contrivances and styles that Astrophil derides and because protesting sincerity is the typical stance of the Petrarchan lover. Astrophil writes these sonnets as "stage" properties in an attempt to justify his passions.<sup>(8)</sup>

If this theory is accurate, it fairly releases Sidney from accusations that he violates his theory in practice. Nevertheless, we do not need this theory to save Sidney from so grossly violating his own poetic theory. *Astrophil and Stella* is Sidney's break, even though it is incomplete, from the ornateness and stylishness of the Petrarchan conventions that he used so extensively in the *Arcadia*. In his *Apology*, Sidney never

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(7) For an idea of style and ornament in Lyly's work, see his *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* or *Euphues and His England* which are marked by an exuberance of rhetorically repetitive elaboration.

(8) Cooper, p. 21.

said that the poet should not use style and ornament — he was impressed by good poets who could “devour [others’ figures and phrases] whole and make them wholly theirs” (*Apology*, p. 82). Sidney does use elaborate Petrarchan descriptiveness in *Astrophil and Stella* that seems deliberately to contradict Astrophil’s professed sincerity (such as in sonnets 9, 32, and 71), but Sidney does it less in *Astrophil and Stella* than in *Arcadia* because he is most concerned that the poet deliver his sincerity and directness without undue reliance on style and ornament, for “acknowledging ourselves somewhat awry, we may bend to the right use both of matter and manner” (*Apology*, p. 85). Sidney apparently thought that the most effective way of establishing sincerity and directness was to incorporate some styliness into the most simplistic expression he knew — he could not break entirely with conventions, but he was moving towards the direction of stylistic restraint and his own “right use both of matter and manner.”

Since Sidney’s sonnets in themselves exhibit a good bit of order and unity, readers often wonder why the sonnet sequence, at the first reading, appears so disordered and haphazard, frequently taking sudden changes in mood and thought. In fact, at the first reading it is easy to believe that C.A. Lewis is right to say that *Astrophil and Stella* is merely an “anatomy of love” with no deliberate narrative thread tying it together.<sup>(9)</sup> However, in the *Apology*, Sidney makes a critical charge against those poets who lack strength, or “poetical sinews,” in their verses:

Do I not remember to have seen but few (to speak boldly) printed that have poetical sinews in them: for proof whereof, let but most of the verses be put in prose, and then ask the meaning, and it will be found that one verse did but beget another, without ordering at the first what should be at the last; which becomes a confused mass of words with a tingling sound of rhyme, barely accompanied with reason.

(*Apology*, p. 74)

He is criticizing their lack of overall structure and reason. From this passage we see that Sidney believes lyrical poetry should convey a meaning, and we should also assume that Sidney’s own attempt to write lyrical poetry would involve work that has a meaningful, structural thread.

Hamilton’s analysis of the sonnets as a sequence is supportive of Sidney’s “poetical sinews” because he proposed that a three-part structure unifies the sonnets — a structure in part determined by Astrophil’s growing intimacy with Stella and his awareness of his plight.<sup>(10)</sup> Richard Young’s theory also revolves around the unity of *Astrophil and Stella* and contends that the shifts and changes in mood and style can be drawn together under purposes consistent with each other.<sup>(11)</sup> These theories are

(9) C.S. Lewis, as quoted in Hamilton, p. 76.

(10) Hamilton, p. 78.

(11) Young, p. 88.

significant in as much as they attempt to find some structure in the sonnets based on a unifying principle that reveals meaning in the sonnets. Furthermore, I am inclined to agree with Hamilton that *Astrophil and Stella* is carefully done with a structure underlying it, but that structure is not necessarily simple and self-evident.<sup>(12)</sup>

That there should be a meaningful idea that permeates the entire work of a poet is implied in Sidney's evaluation of love poetry in the *Apology*:

Many of such writings as come under the banner of unresistable 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, and so caught up certain swelling phrases which hang together ... than that in truth they feel these passions, which easily (as I think) may be bewrayed by that same forcibleness or *energia* (as the Greeks call it) of the writer.  
(*Apology*, p. 81)

Here, according to Robinson, Sidney uses *energia* to mean a conceptual clarity in language, but this clarity can result "only from the poet's precise apprehension of his own 'fore-conceit.'"<sup>(13)</sup> *Energia* as used in this passage helps to emphasize Sidney's belief that the poet is to set forth an Idea, or fore-conceit, that shapes the moral theme of the poem. Any understanding that the reader should gain from the poem depends on that controlling fore-conceit:

For any understanding knoweth the skill of the artificer standeth in that *Idea* or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself. And that the poet hath that *Idea* is manifest by delivering them forth in such excellency as he hath imagined them.  
(*Apology*, p. 16)

So that Idea, or fore-conceit, is

a mental object, a generic concept which comprehends an abundant variety of particular objects in any class. If the poet can translate his general "Idea" into the words of a poem, then he will have produced a moral example superior to the specific or particular objects of external nature.

(*Apology*, p. 16n)

There is a moral example, embodied in the fore-conceit of the poet, which is presented in a meaningful narrative of poetry:

[Men reading poetry] shall use the narration but as an imaginative ground-plot of a profitable invention.

(*Apology*, p. 58)

(12) Hamilton, p. 67.

(13) Forrest G. Robinson, ed., *An Apology for Poetry*, by Sir Philip Sidney (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1970), p. 81n.

It appears that Sidney is very concerned with the structure involved in poetry, and “ground-plot” here emphasizes the importance of a unity or framework that the reader should use to “work out (‘invent’) the full meaning of the poet’s original ‘Idea or fore-conceit’” (*Apology*, p. 58n).

Most crucial to Sidney’s *Apology* is the notion that the poet’s function be not only to teach, by particular example in the poetry, the meaning of the poet’s abstract fore-conceit, but to move the reader to act upon that which has been taught. The end of poetry is to teach and delight, for man often flees from the pure knowledge of the goodness which is taught unless he can be delighted and thereby moved to “take that goodness in hand” (*Apology*, p. 20). The final end of poetry, then, is “to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of” (*Apology*, p. 22). Sidney is concerned that poetry provide the moral which will lead man to the highest moral perfection possible, for after all, “our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it” (*Apology*, p. 17). Because of his heavy emphasis on the moral purpose of poetry, it is difficult to imagine Sidney writing *Astrophil and Stella* without some guiding abstract moral principle or fore-conceit in mind. Let us turn to *Astrophil and Stella* to see if we cannot establish what that moral purpose was.

After being informed by the *Apology* of the moral quality necessary in good poetry and before finishing one-fourth of *Astrophil and Stella*, one can suppose that Astrophil, representing passion, will, and carnal desires, will never be able to conquer Stella, representing virtue and reason (wit). If Astrophil were to succeed in his efforts to undermine Stella’s virtue, Sidney would be defeating all principles of morality. He would be painting a picture of a distorted love wherein passion has the upper hand — this would hardly be an instructive message for us and hardly a framework upon which he could discover Sidney’s fore-conceit. The pedagogical moral purpose which Sidney assigns to poetry would not exist, or at least it would be defeated. In sonnet 8 where love comes into Astrophil’s heart and in sonnet 12 where Stella is described as a citadel of virtue fortified by wit, we form an image of a soldier using all of his skill to get into a castle but finding it impossible:

At length he [Love] perched himself in Stella’s joyful face,  
 Whose fair skin, beamy eyes, like morning sun on snow,  
 Deceived the quaking boy, who thought from so pure light  
 Effects of lively heat must needs in nature grow.  
 But she, most fair, most cold, made him thence take his flight  
 To my heart, where, while some fire-brands he did lay,  
 He burnt unwares his wings, and cannot fly away. [8]

What words so e’er she speaks, persuades for thee [Cupid],  
 That her clear voice lifts thy fame to the skies;  
 Thou countest Stella thine, like those whose powers

Having got up a breach by fighting well,  
 Cry, 'Victory, this fair day all is ours!'  
 O no, her heart is such a citadel,  
     So fortified with wit, stored with disdain,  
     That to win it, is all the skill and pain. [12]

At this point there can be no question that desire will be put down and virtue will reign supreme.

That Sidney had such a fundamental moral concern for virtue over passion is not so difficult to understand if we consider that Renaissance writers accepted Aristotle's concept of rational and irrational (passionate) principles. This concept reveals that the rational and irrational principles are in harmony only when the rational governs the irrational:

For we praise the rational principle of the continent man and of the incontinent, and the part of their soul that has such a principle, since it urges them aright and toward the best objects; but there is found in them also another element naturally opposed to the rational principle, which fights against and resists that principle ... or shares in it in so far as it listens to it and obeys it. <sup>(14)</sup>

When the passions are stirred, these two naturally hostile principles lead us to believe that reason is, or should be, the instrument of self control. Yet reason alone cannot originate action; although "mind" may conceive the objects of action, some element of desire is always necessary.<sup>(15)</sup> Furthermore, the rational power is divided into reason and will; although the former "seeks truth through a logical train of thought ... the reason determines what is good and what is evil and informs the will of its conclusions".<sup>(16)</sup>

It is no coincidence that Sidney chose the names Stella (star: the symbol of the Light of Reason) and Astrophil (star-lover: the Lover of Reason). Astrophil, because of his love of reason, is essentially teachable; he can learn that Stella's virtue is the rational power which dominates his basic nature. However, it is part of Sidney's Protestant theology to show Astrophil's infected will, clouding his erected wit, thus rendering him slow, if not handicapped, in learning Stella's lesson of virtue. Astrophil is certainly used by Sidney as the particular example of what happens when the will is corrupted by the passions and the understanding becomes confused by them. Virtue in sonnet 4 allies with reason, and Astrophil's will, urged by his passion, resents this alliance:

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(14) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, as quoted in Montgomery, p. 104.

(15) Montgomery, p. 105.

(16) Montgomery, p. 105.



Virtue, alas, now let me take some rest:  
 Thou sett'st a bate between my will and wit.  
 If vain love have my simple soul oppressed,  
 Leave what thou lik'st not, deal not thou with it.  
 Thy sceptre use in some old Cato's breast;  
 Churches or schools are for thy seat more fit.  
 I do confess — pardon a fault confessed —  
 My mouth too tender is for thy hard bit.  
     But if that needs thou wilt usurping be  
     The little reason that is left in me,  
 And still the effect of thy persuasions prove:  
     I swear, my heart such one shall show to thee  
     That shrines in flesh so true a deity,  
 That, virtue, thou thy self shalt be in love. [4]

Astrophil is aware of the power of reason, though in his confused state he pays it only token service.

In fact, Astrophil's misfortune in *Astrophil and Stella* is brought about by his abuse of reason. As early as sonnet 10 we witness one major abuse. He charges reason to quit meddling with and framing his passions. Reason should not concern itself with drawing the guidelines of his moral conduct, nor should it busy itself with his personal experience, but it should ascend to a higher level of thought. He wills reason to fail in controlling his morals, and by willing reason to do so, he hopes that reason will release him from the fault of understanding his moral degeneracy:

Reason, in faith thou art well served, that still  
 Would'st babbling be with sense and love in me.  
 I rather wished thee climb the muses' hill,  
 Or reach the fruit of nature's choicest tree,  
     Or seek heaven's course, or heaven's inside, to see.  
 Why should'st thou toil our thorny soil to till?  
 Leave sense, and those which sense's objects be:  
 Deal thou with powers of thoughts, leave love to will.  
     But thou would'st needs fight both with love and sense,  
 With sword of wit giving wounds of dispraise,  
 Till downright blows did foil thy cunning fence:  
 For soon as they strake thee with Stella's rays,  
     Reason, thou kneed'st, and offered'st straight to prove  
     By reason good, good reason her to love. [10]

Sidney has us see Astrophil, confused and passion-ridden, misunderstanding the role of reason. He thinks reason debases itself when it insists on meddling with man's desires, and he insists that reason should only deal with the impersonal, intellectual functions of thought, such as literature, science, and philosophy. He loses sight of the true task of reason which is to help man first understand himself. As Sidney said in the *Apology*, the knowledge gained from all sciences is

directed to the highest end of the mistress knowledge ... which stand (as I think) in the knowledge of a man's self, in the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of well doing and not of well knowing only.

(*Apology*, p. 23)

True knowledge of self dictates that reason should be given a chance to regulate and govern man's desires, thereby creating internal harmony within the microcosm of man. On the other hand, if man allows the irrational, desirous part to dominate the rational part, chaos, confusion, and internal strife will be his lot. Undoubtedly, in a state of confusion, man's moral vision will be chaotic, and desire will be pursued as if it were a virtue. Therefore, before reason is assigned to high intellectual endeavors, it should protect man from falling victim to insatiable desires which can damage man's moral stature. If well doing (moral conduct) and not well knowing is the ultimate goal of man, then Astrophil should use reason to be that moral guide rather than the instrument of high intellectual knowledge.

Stella, conversely, is the epitome of reason since she uses reason to serve and fortify her virtuous stance. Reason for her is not divorced from the practical, personal experiences and daily moral decisions with which one has to cope. Song 8, the only song written in the third person, gives us an observation of an incident between Stella and Astrophil. It gives an indication of Stella's ability to employ reason to master her impulses. She admits that she is very much in love with Astrophil; they sigh with arms crossed and communicate to each other their powerful emotions:

Sigh they did; but now betwixt  
Sighs of woes were glad sighs mixed,  
With arms crossed, yet testifying  
Restless rest, and living dying.

Their ears hungry of each word,  
Which the dear tongue would afford,  
But their tongues restrained from walking,  
Till their hearts had ended talking.

(Song 8, 11. 17-24)

However, just as soon as Astrophil tries to express a physical desire for Stella, she assumes complete control of her rational powers:

There his hands in their speech fain  
Would have made tongue's language plain:  
But her hands, his hands repelling,  
Gave repulse, all grace excelling.

.....

Trust me, while I thee deny,  
In my self the smart I try;

Tyrant honour thus doth use thee;  
Stella's self might not refuse thee.  
(Song 8, 11. 65-68, 93-96)

Even though she admits that honor can be restraining and cruel (“tyrant honour”), she maintains control over her own passions and knows better than to jeopardize her virtuous honor.

That reason in the form of concern for her reputation guides her at all points in relation to Astrophil is apparent when we consider that Astrophil puts her in critical positions a number of times. When Astrophil sneaks under her window at night, Stella does not lose track of the jeopardy in which he places her:

‘Peace, I think that some give ear;  
Come no more, lest I get anger.  
Bliss, I will my bliss forbear,  
Fearing, sweet, you to endanger,  
But my soul shall harbour there.

‘Well, be gone, be gone. I say,  
Lest that Argus’ eyes perceive you.’  
O, unjust is fortune’s sway,  
Which can make me thus to leave you,  
And from louts to run away.  
(Song 11, 11. 36-45)

Stella is not refusing Astrophil only for public honor; her sense of virtue presides even in the most private situations:

Your fair mother is abed,  
Candles out, and curtains spread;  
She thinks you do letters write;  
Write, but first let me endite:  
Take me to thee and thee to me.  
‘No, no, no, no, my dear, let be.’

Although Astrophil sneaks a kiss from her while she sleeps, she becomes angered at his risk-taking:

And yet my Star, because a sugared kiss  
In sport I sucked, while she asleep did lie,  
Doth lour, nay chide; nay, threat, for only this.  
Sweet, it was saucy love, not humble I.  
But no ‘scuse serves, she makes her wrath appear  
In beauty’s throne; see now, who dares come near  
Those scarlet judges, threatening bloody pain? [73]

Although Astrophil loses sight of the dangers, the dishonor, and the scandal that could befall him in his attempt to fulfill his desires, Stella never loses sight of these dangers, letting her rational concern for consequences guide her moral conduct.

Knowing what Sidney says about philosophy and its inability to move man towards virtuous action in the *Apology*, we can see what a grave mistake Astrophil commits when he tries to confine reason to the exploration of the abstract sciences; if man puts his faith in and devotes his reason to these abstractions, he starves morally:

One that hath no other guide but the philosopher shall wade in him till he be old before he shall find sufficient cause to be honest.

(*Apology*, p. 27)

Astrophil again abuses reason when he tries to employ it in the service of carnal desires. He formulates logical arguments throughout the sonnets to conquer virtue and get some food for desire (as in sonnet 71). In sonnet 5 in particular, we see that Astrophil is aware that there are dangers in trying to create a wilful illusion regarding reason's role in his life, but he does not wish to escape these dangers. He is aware that if he prefers passion to virtue, he is rebelling against reason and his own nature; yet he feels compelled to love Stella passionately:

It is most true, that eyes are formed to serve  
 The inward light; and that the heavenly part  
 Ought to be king, from whose rules who do swerve,  
 Rebels to Nature, strive for their own smart.  
 It is most true, what we call Cupid's dart,  
 An image is, which for ourselves we carve;  
 And, fools, adore in temple of our heart,  
 Till that good god make Church and churchmen starve.  
 True, that true beauty virtue is indeed,  
 Whereof this beauty can be but a shade,  
 Which elements with mortal mixture breed;  
 True that on earth we are but pilgrims made,  
 And should in soul up to our country move;  
 True; and yet true, that I must Stella love. [5]

Sonnet 18 reveals that Astrophil knows he has been given wit and reason as spiritual gifts to be used to protect virtue, but instead he lets himself slip into a lost moral path as he uses wit to defend passionate carnal desires:

With what sharp checks I in myself am shent  
 When into reason's audit I do go,  
 And by just counts myself a bankrupt know  
 Of all those goods, which heaven to me hath lent,

Unable quite to pay even nature's rent,  
 Which unto it by birthright I do owe:  
 And which is worse, no good excuse can show,  
 But that my wealth I have most idly spent.  
 My youth doth waste, my knowledge brings forth toys,  
 My wit doth strive those passions to defend  
 Which for reward spoil it with vain annoys.  
 I see my course to lose myself doth bend:  
 I see, and yet no greater sorrow take  
 Than that I lose no more for Stella's sake. [18]

Astrophil's third major abuse of reason occurs when he rebels against it. Instead of using wit to fortify virtue and muster every atom of intellectual, rational energy in service of virtue, he sets reason against virtue and tries to persuade virtue to break up with him and divide property with him if it continues to work against his passion:

A strife is grown between virtue and love,  
 While each pretends that Stella must be his.  
 Her eyes, her lips, her all, saith love, do this,  
 Since they do wear his badge, most firmly prove.  
 But virtue thus that title doth disprove:  
 That Stella (O dear name) that Stella is  
 That virtuous soul, sure heir of heavenly bliss,  
 Not this fair outside, which our hearts doth move;  
 And therefore, though her beauty and her grace  
 Be love's indeed, in Stella's self he may  
 By no pretence claim any manner place.  
 Well, love, since this demur our suit doth stay,  
 Let virtue have that Stella's self; yet thus,  
 That virtue but that body grant to us. [52]

Either virtue submits to passion or it should be banished with her share (Stella's soul).

Astrophil's abuse of reason repeats itself in its various forms in other sonnets, and the sonnets end with Astrophil in a paradox, for his passions still torment his virtuous devotion to Stella. Astrophil faces the reality that his love will be unconsummated because he has no other choice but to accept defeat at the hands of Stella's constant virtue. We receive a small indication that though he remains tortured by conflicting emotions, Astrophil is beginning to recover from his confusion — his mind begins to clear and he contemplates the active life again:

Sweet, for a while give respite to my heart,  
 which pants as though it still should leap to thee;  
 And on my thoughts give thy lieutenancy  
 To this great cause, which needs both use and art. [107]

He has learned something from his experience even though he cannot escape its frustrations. Perhaps he knows himself better now and is moving towards that end which, for Sidney, is “virtuous action, the end of all earthly learning” (*Apology*, p. 23).

We cannot stop at the examination of Astrophil’s predicament, however, for Astrophil’s story is a mere particularization of the generalized fore-conceit that the poet sets out to impress on the reader. The poet is inspired to labor not to “tell you what is or what is not, but what should or should not be” (*Apology*, p. 45). Sidney expects us to see beyond the experience of a sad situation wherein we know Astrophil is fated to be overcome by Stella’s virtue, and to realize his message “teacheth the uncertainty of the world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded, that maketh us know ...” (*Apology*, p. 45).

Sidney’s use of Astrophil as a tormented, introspective character is particularly effective for us to see the array of feelings and the mental quandaries to which all of us can relate. In delighting us to teach us his moral fore-conceit, Sidney does a most thorough job. He has essentially given feelings a visible form in words that make us understand those troubled feelings. Sidney wants to impart to us readers that “true lively knowledge” (*Apology*, p. 28) that only poetry can give us:

an image of that whereof the philosopher bestoweth but a wordish description, which doth neither strike, pierce, nor possess the sight of the soul so much as that other doth.  
(*Apology*, p. 27)

In essence, we are taken inside Astrophil to share in all of his responses, and in doing so we can

see things vividly as if they were present, to make us participate in their life ... Place objects, and mood unite to create a poetry which is immediately persuasive and which expresses the power of that ‘inward touch’ Sidney and Astrophil found lacking in the lyrics of other courtly poets.<sup>(17)</sup>

I believe that Sidney created *Astrophil and Stella* to represent that “speaking picture,” that poetic fusion of moral abstractions with actual characters, which teaches and delights us. Sidney presents a two-part speaking picture to show what passion does to a man when it disrupts his mundane life and renders him distraught and sleepless, and what the person is like who is controlled and balanced with that perfect harmony between reason and passion (Stella). Stella is painted with light, radiance, alabaster white and other vivid colors, all of which signify her controlled, calm, harmonious moral stance, whereas Astrophil in the background is painted with

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(17) Neil L. Rudenstine, *Sidney's Poetic Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 227.

darkness, night, sorrow and chaos. Sonnet 99 illustrates to what depth of darkness Astrophil slips in the picture:

When far spent night persuades each mortal eye,  
 To whom nor art nor nature granteth light,  
 To lay his then marked-wanting shafts of sight,  
 Closed with their quivers, in sleep's armoury;  
 With windows ope then most my mind doth lie  
 Viewing the shape of darkness and delight,  
 Takes in that sad hue, which with the inward night  
 Of his mazed powers keeps perfect harmony.  
 But when birds charm, and that sweet air, which is  
 Morn's messenger, with rose-enamelled skies,  
 Calls each wight to salute the flower of bliss:  
 In tomb of lids then buried are mine eyes,  
 Forced by their lord, who is ashamed to find  
 Such light in sense, with such a darkened mind. [99]

With such a speaking picture before us, how can we fail to be delighted? And what can be more human, interesting, and engaging than the full display of a man divided against himself, with his reason and appetites at war against each other? Astrophil is a man who tries hard to cling to his dignity, honor, and nobility in the face of the strongest desire which pulls him down. If the poet comes to the reader “with words set in delightful proportion ... and pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue” (*Apology*, p. 38), Sidney certainly had in mind to delight and move when he wrote *Astrophil and Stella*.

All of this delight that we get from viewing the “picture” of *Astrophil and Stella* teaches us to know what Sidney set out to establish — our moral well-being depends on whether we listen to our will, infected by passion, or arm ourselves with reason, fortitude and patience in a fight against the flesh. Self control is the key to dignity and the cornerstone of one's moral well-being. Sidney's purpose is not so hard to determine considering that

the conflict between right reason and un-regulated passion is fundamental in Sidney's work both at the personal and the political level. Right reason, sensing the existence of a universal order, judges all actions in relation to that order; whereas passion, lacking such knowledge, can see only the particular and immediate, and pursues its aims as in a moral and metaphysical vacuum.<sup>(18)</sup>

The *Apology* can therefore prove useful in helping us to determine Sidney's purpose for writing *Astrophil and Stella*. Not only can it allow us to see the reasons

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(18) Maurice Evans, ed., *Sir Philip Sidney: The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977), p. 28.

behind Sidney's use of stylistic variations in *Astrophil and Stella*, but it also helps us in our understanding of the sonnets as a structural whole. Most important, the *Apolo-gy* clearly established that poetry must have a moral purpose — a purpose which should guide all of the poet's other considerations in his poetry and undoubtedly guided Sidney in his writing of *Astrophil and Stella*.



## قراءة لـ أستروفيل وستيلا في ضوء الدفاع عن الشعر

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ملخص البحث . لقد قام السير فيليب سدني وطلابه بعدة محاولات جادة وموفقة بقراءة «أركاديا»، مهتمين بآرائه النقدية التي ناقشها في كتابه الدفاع عن الشعر، ونجح الكثيرون منهم في ربط النظرية بالعمل الإبداعي ربطا واضحا، وذلك بسبب الانسجام بينَ بينهما.

لكن لم تكن هنالك أية محاولة جدية ومستفيضة لدراسة أستروفيل وستيلا في ضوء الدفاع عن الشعر، ولربط النظريات النقدية فيه بالتطبيق الفعلي في أستروفيل وستيلا، ولربما كان السبب هو أن العلاقة بينهما لم تكن مباشرة وواضحة كالتي ربطت بين أركاديا والدفاع عن الشعر، لذا سيبين هذا البحث كيف يمكن الاستفادة من والاستعانة بـ الدفاع عن الشعر في دراسة أستروفيل وستيلا .