Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella:*
An Experimental Reading

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Sir Philip Sidney's (1554–1586) *Astrophil and Stella* (*AS*), published posthumously in 1591, may well be called the first virtual sonnet sequence in England in its completion and influence, although Thomas Watson had already published *Hekatompathia or Passionate Centuire of Love* in 1582. There are 108 sonnets and 11 songs in *AS*, and this sonnet sequence is a typical Renaissance literary product, since it contains varied topics pertinent to the period as well as rhetorical techniques which are to influence the later poets. However, there exists one prominent subject –love– which is interwoven throughout the sequence. It is uttered time and again by the main protagonist Astrophil in his mind as well as to his beloved lady Stella. Love, from its incipience to demise, is slowly but steadily developed. Astrophil adores Stella, who is married to other man, and suits her favor in vain. Indeed Stella, as the name shows, is aloof and deaf to his pleas as if she were a star high above in the sky. Therefore his love is futile and unrequited, and his passion is defeated in the end.

Needless to say, this love is called "Petrarchan love," which is one of the literary conventions in western literature. Indeed poetry in English Renaissance is impossible to be discussed without a reference to this Petrarchan love or Petrarchanism in general.

The name of Petrarchanism originates from an Italian poet laureat Petrarch, who composed *Canzoniere* or *The Rime Sparse*. Three handred and sixty-six poems in *Canzoniere* mainly deal with the poet's love to a heavenly beauty, Laura. His passion doesn't die away with Laura's death (267). It flares up more afterwards. This theme of unrequited

love in Petrarch is the very basis of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, though it is not the only composite of Petrarchan love poetry.

Many critics have been discussing Petrarchan poetic discourse in relation with English 16th-century lyrics, —namely sonnets–, and it is a literary commonplace to regard Petrarchanism as a binding influence on many Elizabethan sonneteers. However, there emerges a new point of view in Petrarchan criticism in the last two decades, and it is related to a cataclysmic change in literary criticism. Against the backdrop of this shifting paradigm, Petrarchan poetic discourse comes to have a more urgent relevance, not merely as a literary influence but as one of the cultural systems or apparatuses which affects the composition of Renaissance lyrics. Gary Waller, in his brilliantly clear-cut argument in this new orientation in literary criticism, explains Petrarch and Petrarchanism as follows.

English lyric poetry in the sixteenth century is made up of the traces and struggles of many texts. But the single name that stands above them all is that of Petrarch, who gave not just Renaissance poetry, but Western discourse, one of the most hospitable conceptual schemes by which we have discussed sexual desire and its relationship with language. Francesco Petrarch (1304–74) remains one of the Western Europe's seminal figures....

For three centuries the emergence of what Foucault termed writing "the truth of man's sex" was mediated through Petrarch—or, more accurately, through what became known as Petrarchanism. Generations of commentators and imitators elaborated a collective (mis) reading of his poetry of such power that it was impossible to locate oneself within the discourse of writing sexuality into poetry (or court society) outside the complex and inclusive code of Petrarchanism.[1]

Petrarchanism, as stated in this quotation, is always present in *AS*. Therefore when we read *AS* we have to consider how Sidney adopts this Petrarchanism in his sonnet sequence. In other words, what we

have to do is to locate Sidney's *AS* in the 16th-century literary milieu and gauge his distance from this literary convention. If this is done successfully, we will be able to re-read and re-write Petrarchanism and *AS* once again as part of the cultural institutions which shape history. As this reading necessarily leads to a remarkably different interpretation of literary text, it will be better to quote from the article which clarifies this methodology.

> Literature is part of history, the literary text as much a context for other aspects of cultural and material life as they are for it. Rather than erasing the problem of textuality, one must enlarge it in order to see that both social and literary texts are opaque, self-divided, and porous, that is, open to the mutual intertextual influences of one another....Rather than passively reflecting an external reality, literature is an agent in constructing a culture's sense of reality. It is part of a much larger symbolic order through which the world at a particular historical moment is conceptualized and through which a culture imagines its relationship to the actual conditions of its existence. In short, instead of a hierarchical relationship in which literature figures as the parasitic reflector of historical fact, one imagines a complex textualized universe in which literature participates in historical process and in the political management of reality.[2]

John Freccero, in his important essay on Petrarchan poetics, defines *Canzoniere* as "autoreflexive" which is different from the other type of significantion, "allegorical", typified in Augustine's *Confessions*.[3] As his penetrating insight into Petrarchan poetics is relevant to Sidney's *AS*, I will quote here from his essay.

> On the other hand, for the laurel to be truly unique, it cannot mean anything; its referentiality must be neutralized if it is to remain the property of its creator. Petrarch makes of it the emblem of the mirror relationship Laura-Lauro, which is to say,

the poetic lady created by the poet, who in turn creates him as a poet laureate. This circularity forecloses all referentiality and in its self-contained dynamism resembles the inner life of the Trinity as the Church fathers imagined it. One could scarcely suppose a greater autonomy.[4]

It goes without saying that what is emphasized in this quotation is a non-referential aspect of Petrarchan love poetry. In other words, Petrarchan love never embraces the ultimate or the Almighty God, because the consummation of the lovers is deferred forever. In this scheme, the poet-lover and the beloved lady influence each other, and their relationship constitutes a never-ending circularity. Therefore, this endless relationship necessarily brings about "the poetics of presence." Hence, the object which is created by the poet-lover is fragmentary, artifical and rhetorical. She "is a brilliant surface, a pure signifier whose momentary exteriority to the poet serves as an Archimedean point from which he creates himself."[5]

It is certain that Freccero's argument gives light on Sindey's AS when we consider the sequence focusing our attention particularly on the relation between Astrophil and Stella. In AS, Astrophil declares his intention to write down his innermost thoughts form the very beginning, which in truth is an expression of a strategy to manipulate Stella and their relations. On the contrary, Stella is depicted as a mute and insubstantial woman, who is just like an illusory existence to him. However, Stella's "absent presence" (106) exerts a not so small creative influence on Astrophil to shape himself.

The relationship between Astrophil and Stella is thus hegemonistic and reciprocal at the same time. It is hegemonistic because their love is based on the structure of male domination and female submission. It is reciprocal because the male and the female create each other in the sequence.

Sidney composes his amatory lyric on Petrarchan love with these two aspects, and he seems to be keenly aware of its usefulness. Therefore, he makes his utmost effort to utilize Petrarchanism in the sequence. However, when we examine AS in terms of Petrarchanism, we always have

to remember that *AS* is an amatory lyric composed in the Elizabethan
period. Astrophil is not only a naive lover but also a courtier-politician
who self-consciously confesses his love to his lady. He is indeed a multi-layered
Renaissance man in the very center of the power struggle. Accordingly,
love in *AS* is not an ordinary love, but it is a love which functions
as the apparatus into which many problematics of Elizabethan society
flow. It is no more a sacred and pure love but one of the hierarchical
powers which constitute several homological circles around the most
authoritative power—court. As a result, a relationship between man and
woman overlaps that of courtier and prince (Queen). Recently many
critics, including Arthur Marotti, Louis Montrose, Peter Stallybrass and
Ann Jones, argue Elizabethan poetry from this new historicist premise.
However, this question is not examined here any more because I intend
to deal with this issue in other paper.

The relationship between Astrophil and Stella, from the very beginning
of the sequence, is presented as an unequal, hierarchical one. Astrophil's
superficial humbleness toward distant and somewhat cruel beauty Stella
is, in a sense, his subtle strategy for establishing dominance over a female
object. A poet-lover Astrophil is able to fabricate and fictionalize their
relationship; he is able to set a distance between them and manipulate
Stella's response according to his own wish. This male manipulation of
a female is typically exemplified in sonnet 63.

O grammer rules, o now your vertues show;
So children still reade you with awfull eyes,
As my young Dove may in your precepts wise
Her graunt to me, by her owne vertue know.
For late with heart most high, with eyes most low.
I crav'd the thing which ever she denies:
She lightning *Love*, displaying *Venus* skies,
Least once should not be heard, twise said, No, No.
Sing then my Muse, now *Io Pean* sing,
Heav'ns envy not at my high triumphing:
But Grammers force with sweet successe confirme:

> For Grammer says (o this deare *Stella* nay,)
> For Grammer says (to Grammer who sayes nay)
> That in one speech two Negatives affirme.
>
> <div align="right">(sonnet 63)</div>

In this sonnet, Astrophil intentionally distorts Stella's negative response, "No, No", which is uttered emphatically into a double negative in order to make it imply affirmative. William A.Ringler, Jr., who is an editor of Sidney's complete poems, explains Astrophil's sophistication in this sonnet as follows.

> Astrophil's argument is doubly sophistical: (a) in the sixteenth century the double negative was a common and accepted English, so that his "grammer rules" apply only to Latin and not to English; and (b) grammatically "no,no" is a repetition for emphasis and not a double negative at all.[6]

This forced interpretation of Stella's answer, used to his advantage, is a typical example of Astrophil's locus in the sequence. Though he seems to ask in the sequence in earnest and his desperation over her final rejection seems to be genuine, male-dominated love frequently appears in *AS*. Astrophil is able to write their relationship from his vantage point as a poet, and he is also able to interpret Stella's attitudes and words into other meanings different from her original intent. Astrophil, the subject, freely molds up Stella, the object, and accordingly flesh and blood Stella does not exist anywhere in the sequence. She shows her figure only through Astrophil's depiction. In short, love in *AS* is not a mutual one between lovers but one which is hegemonistic. This hegemonistic relationship is evident in sonnet 1.

> Loving in truth, and faine in verse my love to show,
> That she (deare she) might take some pleasure of my paine:
> Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know,
> Knowledge might pitie winne, and pitie grace obtaine,

I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertaine:
Oft turning others leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitfull showers upon my sunne-burn'd braine.
But words came halting forth, wanting Inventions stay,
Invention Natures child, fled step-dame Studies blowes,
And others feete still seem'd but strangers in my way.
Thus great with child to speake, and helplesse in my throwes,
Biting my trewand pen, beating my selfe for spite,
Foole, said my Muse to me, looke in thy heart and write.

(sonnet 1)

Apparently this opening sonnet is based on Platonic notion. Astrophil refers here to the Platonic image of ladder when he argues his desired favor by Stella (1–4). It is needless to say that the last line strengthens this notion once again: the poet's true source of love is a preserved image of Stella in his innermost heart. His poetic inspiration is adumbrated to flow not from the real Stella but from Stella reflected in the male poet, which is not an unusual invocation in Western literature. Here, Astrophil seems to declare his love to Stella and his intention to write what is inside him very naively. However, this sonnet is a definite orientational poem revealing the characteristics of the whole sequence because he makes it clear that his amatory lyric is a self-conscious fictionalization of Stella. Astrophil professes in his seemingly humble lover's posture that he is going to describe a distorted and fabricated image of Stella.

This image of Stella in Astrophil's heart is a lady created by the male poet's desire; she is a woman fictionalized as an object of man's desire and gaze. Consequently, to "looke in" his own heart and "write" import double meanings. To "looke in" one's heart occludes the gaze toward outside reality—real Stella—and these inward eyes impede establishing an equal relationship between the lover and the beloved.

There are many examples of this hierarchical relationship throughout the sequence and this clearly proves that Petrarchan love necessarily

embodies a domination-submission relationship. Sidney, through creating Astrophil, exploits this thematic mannerism in order to exhibit a Renaissance version of Petrarchanism.

But, if we conclude that the Sidneian version of Petrarchanism is governed only by this hegemonistic aspect of love, we will fail in comprehending the other important aspect of it; reciprocality of Petrarchanism in which the creater is created by his own creation. At first this may sound contradictory, but afterwards it does not, because when we argue that love in *AS* is hegemonistic and hierarchical, we do not necessarily posit Astrophil's fixed entity. Astrophil asserts his intention of creating Stella and claims his genuine love to her at the earliest stage. However, his identity or entity as a poet and lover, namely his identity as a real "I", is always threatened because he bases his substantiality on Stella. In this sonnet sequence, Stella is a focul point from and toward which Astrophil extracts and projects his own writing. As far as Stella is his own creation and remains to be a silent object, how is Astrophil's substantiality reified? The answer to this question is negative. Astrophil himself has no other recourse except his language to prove his entity. Sidney and the poet Astrophil recognize this paradox well, and sonnet 45 is its good example.

> *Stella* oft sees the verie face of wo
> Painted in my beclowded stormie face:
> But cannot skill to pitie my disgrace,
> Not though thereof the cause her selfe she know:
> Yet hearing late a fable, which did show
> Of Lovers never knowne, a grievous case,
> Pitie thereof gate in her breast such place,
> That from that sea deriv'd teares spring did flow.
> Alas, if Fancy drawne by imag'd things,
> Though false, yet with free scope more grace doth breed
> Then servants wracke, where new doubts honor brings;
> Then thinke my deare, that you in me do reed
> Of Lovers ruine some sad Tragedie:

I am not I, pitie the tale of me.

<div align="right">(sonnet 45)</div>

In this sonnet, Astrophil implores Stella to be more compassionate to him and he bemoans the fact that she does not care for his love, though she cries over other lovers' sad stories. Therefore, in the last line, he tries to convince Stella that his love to her is a fictional story which she can read and enjoy.

In this last line, Astrophil's precarious fluidity is definitely expressed against the backdrop of the image of fiction reading by Stella. Furthermore, Astrophil himself is well aware of this uncertain existence concerning his relation to Stella: he manipulates and fabricates Stella as his desired object, but he has to ground his existence on this insubstantial figure. One of the two essential aspects of Petrarchanism—reciprocality of lovers—is exhibited here by the male lover's words.

This unsettled identity of Astrophil is discussed in the context of Petrarchanism amd Protestantism in Elizabethan England by Waller.

> Here I will argue that despite their reliance on the seemingly autonomous subject, especially as mediated through Christianity and radically reinforced by the Reformation, both Protestantism and Petrarchanism put into discourse a historically specific, radically decentered self, one that finds its only recourse in language, that creates itself only as it is continually drawn into writing, and which discovers that the more it write, the more it is in fact written, as words interpose themselves as frustrating and perpetually tantalizing yet always negative mediations between the anxious desiring subject and the object of his (or, though rarely, her) desire.[7]

To plead with Stella to read his own love story in which he himself is a protagonist with a keen self-consciousness for the story's fictionality seems to me one of the examples of "Renaissance self-fashioning" which Stephen Greenblatt discusses in his epochal book entitled *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare.*

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.[8]

Though in his book Greenblatt does not deal with Sidney in particular, chapter 3 on Wyatt, where he argues the poet's faith in manliness and centrality which turn out illusory, gives a good perspective to Sidney's case.

Love between man and woman is one of the most private human affairs in life. Therefore, the form of sonnet which is best suited to express amatory feeling because of its length must be one of the most private literary artifacts. However, poet Astrophil's declaration to compose a love poetry shifts this private sphere of love into a public area. Indeed, to write poetry inevitably signifies the author's desire to displace love from its private domain to a public field. To adore a beautiful lady almost always generates composition of love sonnets and the author is then unavoidably induced into their publication for others to read.

Sonnets 24 and 37 whose topic is a pun on Stella's real name exemplify this desire of a male poet to publicize his private love and, at the same time, to show his artistic skill.

Rich fooles there be, whose base and filthy hart
Lies hatching still the goods wherein they flow:
And damning their owne selves to *Tantals* smart,
Wealth breeding want, more blist, more wretched grow.
Yet to those fooles heav'n such wit doth impart,
As what their hands do hold, their heads do know,
And knowing *Love*, and loving lay apart,
As sacred things, far from all daungers show.
But that rich foole who by blind Fortunes lot,
The richest gemme of Love and life enjoyes,
And can with foule abuse such beauties blot;
Let him deprived of sweet but unfelt joyes,

(Exil'd for ay from those high treasures, which
He knowes not) grow in only follie rich.

(sonnet 24)

Here, Stella's husband is fooled and Stella herself is mentioned as "The richest gemme of Love and life" (10). This gem, which refers to Stella, is a crystalization of the warmth that is always kept in secrecy. In this sonnet 24, the poet denounces "foolish Lord Rich" for abusing this treasure by showing it off, though it is Astrophil himself who reveals this secrecy to the public by clarifying the identity of his love with a crude rhetorical device of pun.

This cunning strategy of revealing his love by concealing is more evident in sonnet 37.

My mouth doth water, and my breast doth swell,
My tongue doth itch, my thoughts in labour be:
Listen then Lordings with good eare to me,
For of my life I must a riddle tell.
Toward *Auroras* Court a Nymph doth dwell,
Rich in all beauties which mans eye can see:
Beauties so farre from reach of words, that we
Abase her praise, saying she doth excell:
Rich in the treasure of deserv'd renowne,
Rich in the riches of a royall hart,
Rich in those gifts which give th'eternall crowne;
Who though most rich in these and everie part,
Which make the patents of true worldly blisse,
Hath no misfortune, but that Rich she is.

(sonnet 37)

The first two lines situate the whole sonnet in the context of the male desire; what Astrophil really wants to depict here is not a sophisticated adulation for heavenly Stella, but a gross and direct physical desire for the female body. This depiction of Astrophil's explicit desire coincides with

connotative meaning that the word "Rich" evokes. Though Stella's (=Lady Rich's) beauties are expressed in traditional Petrarchan phraseology, the repetition of the word "Rich" strategically reveals the hidden meaning buried thus far; Stella is Lady Rich (married to Lord Rich) and, furthermore, she is rich as an object of exploitation by male desire. Maureen Quilligan in her recent essay adroitly argues this hegemonistic male-female relationship in *AS* and she shows the significance of the name Rich in reference to this relationship.

> The signal point of interconnection between poetic text and cultural context is that Sidney distinctly identifies Stella as Penelope Devereux. He does so, moreover, by punning on her husband's name. To do so is to name Stella specifically in terms of the traffic in women, a procedure that may have carried for Sidney the complicated history of Penelope Devereux's involvement in that quite circumscribed traffic, since she had once earlier been named as a possible bride for him. The certainty of this historical identification makes Sidney's sequence unique....We do know, absolutely, that Stella is Lady Rich. If we pause for a moment to ask why the identification is through her husband's name rather than her own, we can see how the word "Rich" and the meanings it sustains in the sonnets not only names for Sidney his various sociopolitical failures, it offers a strategy for revaluing them.[9]

This kind of contrast between the private and the public is once again depicted in sonnet 23.

> The curious wits seeing dull pensivenesse
> Bewray it selfe in my long setled eyes,
> Whence those same fumes of melancholy rise,
> With idle paines, and missing ayme, do guesse.
> Some that know how my spring I did addresse,
> Deeme that my Muse some fruit of knowledge plies:
> Others, because the Prince my service tries,

Thinke that I thinke state errours to redresse.
But harder Judges judge ambitions rage,
Scourge of it selfe, still climing slipprie place,
Holds my young braine captiv'd in golden cage.
O fooles, or over-wise, alas the race
Of all my thoughts hath neither stop nor start,
But only *Stellas* eyes and *Stellas* hart.

(sonnet 23)

"The curious wits" (1) of the court surmise the reason of Astrophil's "dull pensiveness" (1), enumerating three reasons. They speculate wildly that his melancholy arises from his sincere brooding over public affairs. But in the last tercet, Astrophil reveals that his thoughts are completely on Stella.

Sonnet 30 has a homological structure as sonnet 23. Here, historical events pertinent to Sidney are expressed in order, and critics agree in their arguments that the contrast between the current public affairs and private love reveal the implicit politics seen throughout the sequence. In this sonnet, the public (court) and the private (love) are presented as sharp contrastive spheres, but they simultaneously betray the hidden locus of Astrophil's desire.

Arthur Marotti brilliantly discusses this duplicity of love in *AS* as follows.

In *Astrophil and Stella*, metaphorizing of ambition as love presupposes an interpretation of poetic text and biographical-social context, a situation we must accept if we are to understand the sonnet sequence historically. Sidney deliberately located his fictionalization of love in the very political framework in which he hoped to succeed. But he ironically made his love-porsona repeatedly deny ambition and profess love. It is significant, for example, that Astrophil's first direct address to Stella takes place in the most historically allusive of the poems, sonnet 30, a lyric that emphasizes the conjunction between the political and amorous even as it repudiates it:[10]

Sonnet 41 is another example of this.

Having this day my horse, my hand, my launce
Guided so well, that I obtain'd the prize,
Both by the judgement of the English eyes,
And of some sent from that sweet enemie *Fraunce*.
Horsemen my skill in horsmanship advaunce:
Towne-folkes my strength, a daintier judge applies
His praise to slight, which from good use doth rise:
Some luckie wits impute it but to chaunce:
Others, because of both sides I do take
My bloud from them, who did excell in this,
Thinke Nature me a man of armes did make.
How farre they shot awrie? the true cause is,
Stella lookt on, and from her hav'nly face
Sent forth the beames, which made so faire my race.

(sonnet 41)

William A. Ringler, Jr., in his notes to *AS*, says that the date of this tournament has not been identified and is futile to try.[11] At any rate, this tournament was reportedly held in front of both the British and the French, and Astrophil boasts that he won and had the prize. In the last three lines, Astrophil reverts the preceding lines in which "Horsemen" (5), "Some luckie wits" (8) and "Others" (9) attribute his win to his "horsemanship" (5), "strength" (6) and "sleight" (7) which arise from his "use" (=practice) (7), "chaunce" (8) and his biological heredity respectively. Astrophil describes that Stella was present at the tournament court and she looked at the game with other courtiers, but strangely, we can't recognize her substatiality at all. Oxymoronicly, she seems like a vacancy and an illusion, and it is through Astrophil that we hear her root for him. He is consciously self-delusive in convincing the readers to make Stella the source of his strength. But we can never be convinced of her existence who cheers him to victory.

Sonnet 69 is again a good example of male-dominated drama. Here,

Astrophil expresses he may be accepted by Stella at last; he is filled with jubilant cries over these expectations.

> Gone is the winter of my miserie,
> My spring appeares, o see what here doth grow.
> For *Stella* hath with words where faith doth shine,
> Of her high heart giv'n me the monarchie:
> I, I, o I may say, that she is mine.
>
> (7–11)

But, no matter how emphatically Astrophil shows his pleasure at Stella's seeming acceptance, she does not assume her corporeality at all. She remains only a nomenclature forever. It is Astrophil who mediates her words to us.

Gary Waller, in a chapter on Sidney in his recent book on 16th-century poetry, explains this absence of Stella as follows.

> Stella is, like other Petrarchan mistresses, reduced to a dis-
> connected set of characteristics, acknowledged only as she is manip-
> ulated by or impinges on her lover's consciousness. She is entirely
> the product of her poet-lover's desires.[12]

This kind of Stella's absence in the sequence testifies, as I have argued, hegemonistic characteristics of Petrarchanism, and in it, a male desire plays a central role. Sonnets 71 and 72 explicitly reveal this male desire encoded in *AS*.

> Who will in fairest booke of Nature know,
> How Vertue may best lodg'd in beautie be,
> Let him but learne of *Love* to reade in thee
> *Stella,* those faire lines, which true goodnesse show.
> There shall he find all vices overthrow,
> Not by rude force, but sweetest soveraigntie
> Of reason, from whose light those night-birds flie;

That inward sunne in thine eyes shineth so.

And not content to be Perfections heire

Thy selfe, doest strive all minds that way to move:

Who marke in thee what is in thee most faire.

So while thy beautie drawes the heart to love,

As fast thy Vertue bends that love to good:

But ah, Desire still cries, give me some food.

(sonnet 71)

From line 1 to line 13, love is developed in a Neo-Platonic framework; beauty →Love →Vertue. But the final line, in a rather shocking way, destabilizes the preceding 13 lines and discloses the crude reality of love. Desire, which is a real name of male physical lust for a woman, seeks Stella's body bluntly.

Sonnet 72 also deals with male desire and Astrophil tells us here that he will leave it, which is an "old companion" (1) to dedicate himself to a more sacred and purified love. However, he knows he can't sever himself from it.

Reference to "Desire" in these two sonnets shows that *AS* embraces male desire as a given. In other words, Petrarchanism necessarily subsumes male desire because it presupposes a hegemonistic dichotomy between male and female. And desire always functions as an apparatus to solidify the supremacy of male domination.

"Desire", at the same time, separates the subject, the one who desires (male), and the object, the one who is desired (female). Hence the technique of "blazon" to testify male desire for discrete fragmentation of the female body is often used in the sequence. Sidney's blazon of Stella in *AS*, of whose typical example is sonnet 77, is a direct flow from Petrarchan literary convention. Nancy Vickers, in her essay on Petrarch entitled "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scatterd Rhyme," adroitly discusses Petrarchan strategy of "scattering" the female.

Petrarch's particularizing mode of figuring that body, the product of a male-viewer/female-object exchange that extends the

Actaeon/Diana exchange, thus reveals a textual strategy subtending his entire volume: it goes to the heart of his lyric program and understandably becomes the lyric stance of generations of imitators.[13]

AS employs Petrarchan love structure and sonnet sequence is a very good literary form to develop this time-honored theme. However, as we have seen, this Petrarchan love is not so naive as we might expect it to be. The true aspect of Petrarchanism is revealed by exploring Astrophil's utterance as a dominant male poet. At the same time, we have seen that this male poet, Astrophil, does not have a fixed, immobile entity. He is always in the process of being shaped and controlled by his creation, Stella. Stella is almost always mute, and she may be called a blank space in which Astrophil freely writes his wishes. Her words are even changed to be used for his advantage. However, she is able to control Astrophil by keeping silence. Indeed, in sonnet 106, Astrophil grieves over Stella's rejection referring to her oxymoronic existence as "absent presence *Stella*" (1). Stella is all the more present because she is absent, and when she takes a real woman's shape and appears before him, she can't but utter enigmatic words. She always remains unattainable.

Petrarchanism in *AS* is both hegemonistic and reciprocal. And in this duplicity, the accomplishment of love is always suspended in order to keep this love moving forever. Against the backdrop of it, Stella is a symbolic center of the poem who is slippery. Whenever Astrophil thinks he reaches her, Stella always gets away. It may be right to say that this center never materializes. Male desire which is clearly depicted in sonnets 71 and 72 illuminates this total lack of the Other—female.

NOTES

1. Gary Waller, *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century* (Longman, 1986), pp. 76–77.

2. Jean E. Edward, "The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies," in *Renaissance Historicism: Selections from English Literary Renaissance,* edited by Arthur F. Kinney and Dan S. Collins (Amherst, 1987), p. 15.

3. John Freccero, "The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics," in

Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts, edited by Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore and London, 1986), p. 21.

4. Ibid., pp. 26–27.

5. Ibid., p. 30.

6. William A. Ringler, Jr., *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney* (Oxford, 1962), p. 478.

7. Gary Waller, "The Rewriting of Petrarch: Sidney and the Language of Sixteenth-Century Poetry," in *Sir Philip Sidney and the Interpretation of Renaissance Culture*, edited by Gary F. Waller and Michael D. Moore (London, 1984), p. 70.

8. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, 1980), p. 2.

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