

ABSTRACT

KNAUSS, DANIEL PHILIP. *Love's Refinement: Metaphysical Expressions of Desire in Philip Sidney and John Donne.* (Under the direction of R. V. Young.)

Contrary to critics who assert that Elizabethan and Jacobean poets can be categorically differentiated from each other according to their philosophical outlook and style, Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* and John Donne's *Songs and Sonets* indicate that strong continuity exists between them. Petrarchan figurative devices in their poetry reflect a common theory of metaphoric language that is based on analogy through universal correspondences. The elaborate rhetoric and extended metaphors that characterize Donne's metaphysical conceits are preceded and informed by Sidney's humanist poetics. Sidney's writings, primarily *Astrophil and Stella*, aim at harmonizing disparate extremes in a use of wit that can be characterized as metaphysical even in advance of Donne and seventeenth-century "metaphysical" poetry. A comparison of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* and Donne's *Songs and Sonets* shows them to be contiguous and continuous innovators in the Petrarchan love lyric.

Both *Astrophil and Stella* and Donne's *Songs and Sonets* are concerned with the problem of desire which engages the Petrarchan poet-lover in a self-questioning state between his knowledge of Neoplatonic love theory and his own particular experiences in love as an actual, sensual state of being. Astrophil, the speaker and fictive author of *Astrophil and Stella*, shows the failure of the poet-lover who attempts to work his own way to the top of the Neoplatonic ladder of love by inverting it and pulling it down to ground level by the sheer force of his wholly imaginative, fantastic, and increasingly delusional will which dominates and debases his desires. That is, Astrophil upholds his image of Stella, his beloved, not as a figure of a transcendent ideal but as a reality in whom ideality inheres. Rather than attempting to forsake the image of the beloved for a purified, spiritual desire of the ideals and virtues that she represents, he internalizes his image of Stella to such an extent that she becomes an idol confused with his own self-love and his pretensions to poetic inspiration and invention. He embraces the image of Stella more with his will than with his wit in an effort to manipulate and control the actual separation between them. By taking this approach to love, Astrophil becomes increasingly egocentric and withdrawn into a state of self-imposed solipsism.

Refusing to accept the ironies that amass between his false, self-constructed images and the reality of his existence, *Astrophil and Stella* terminates with Astrophil trapped within the conditions he has defined.

This novel conclusion, although firmly based in conventional Petrarchan precepts, exposes the issues that constantly loom before any Petrarchan love lyricist; that is, the problematic identities and relationships of images, ideas, and realities; invention, inspiration, and imitation. On the other hand, *Songs and Sonets* shows a multiplicity of divergent attitudes toward negotiating the Neoplatonic ladder of love rather than a single positive or negative progression. Some of Donne's speakers resemble those in *Astrophil and Stella* in their arguments and attitudes toward love and poetry, but several of the most poignant and exploratory poems admit the necessity of idealized image-making while also accepting the inevitable irony in such images. Thus Donne's sequence can be seen as an acknowledgment of Sidney's exposure of the inherent instability involved in poetic attempts to transpose the ideal into the real, but it can also be seen as an innovative response to this problem that entails embracing the instability and irony of Petrarchan lyricism and then using that instability and irony prominently in poems whose speakers are conscious of the limitations of their conceits. As the primary example of this attitude, Donne's speaker in "A nocturnal upon S. Lucies day, Being the shortest day" explores the inherent irony in idealized images of the union of human lovers while yet recognizing the vision and direction they afford as sacramental foretypes of eternity and divine love.

**LOVE'S REFINEMENT:
METAPHYSICAL EXPRESSIONS OF DESIRE IN PHILIP SIDNEY AND JOHN
DONNE**

by

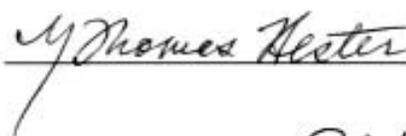
DANIEL PHILIP KNAUSS

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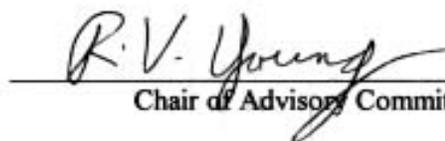
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the many people who have directly and indirectly contributed to its development, through their own writing, correspondence, conversation, and friendship. My special thanks go to Sonya Jongsma, Jason Osborne, Ed Hoffman, and Andrew Damick whose lives have crossed mine during the last three years in such ways as to make the thoughts in this thesis more than merely academic.

BIOGRAPHY

Daniel Knauss was born in Poughkeepsie, New York on October 20, 1973. He received a bachelor of arts degree in English literature with a minor in history from Campbell University in 1995. Prior to continued study toward a master's of arts degree in English literature from North Carolina State University, Dan attended the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in Oxford, England where he became interested in Sir Philip Sidney's writing and Renaissance thought.

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What is the use of the simple act of desiring?

-Francesco Petrarch, *Secretum*

Cognitive transport is caused by love dispositively; for as we have seen, love keeps turning a person's mind to thoughts of the beloved, and intense preoccupation with one thought withdraws the mind from others. . . . in love-of-desire, the lover is 'carried out of himself' in the sense that he is not content to enjoy what is already within his possession, but is anxious to have something which is as yet outside his grasp; but since he is anxious to have that other thing for himself, he is not 'carried out of himself' *tout court*; the ultimate term of his feeling lies within himself.

-St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ, Prima Secundæ*

It seemed to me self-evident that one essential property of love, hate, fear, hope, or desire was attention to their object. To cease thinking about or attending to the woman is, so far, to cease loving; to cease thinking about or attending to the dreaded thing is, so far, to cease being afraid. But to attend to your own love or fear is to cease attending to the loved or dreaded object. In other words the enjoyment and the contemplation of our inner activities are incompatible. You cannot hope and also think about hoping at the same moment; for in hope we look to hope's object and we interrupt this by (so to speak) turning round to look at the hope itself. Of course the two activities can and do alternate with great rapidity; but they are distinct and incompatible.

-C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*

Desire itself is movement
Not in itself desirable;
Love is itself unmoving,
Only the cause and end of movement,
Timeless, and undesiring
Except in the aspect of time
Caught in the form of limitation
Between un-being and being.

-T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton"

Preface

Nearly since the time of his death, Sir Philip Sidney has been viewed as a representative figure of the Elizabethan age for expressing its highest ideals in both theory and practice, in word and deed. Sidney's *Defence of Poetry* is generally regarded as a climactic expression of Elizabethan "literary theory," to use contemporary terms. In the *Defence*, Sidney's conception of poetry and the poet's role provides some key insights into the nature of the modern lyric at its most formative point in English literary tradition. For this reason it seems strange that Sidney is often viewed as quite removed from subsequent poets in both respects. The early Metaphysicals, John Donne in particular, tend to be viewed as men of a different age. Certainly there are appreciable and important distinctions between the specific characteristics of Sidney's verse and those of Donne's, however provisionally their respective historical periods are defined. But, as Rosemund Tuve and other literary historians have shown,¹ the differences between Elizabethan and Jacobean poetry are not the sweeping, categorical kinds that are often assumed to exist as a consequence of the scholarly tendency to try to fit writers into periods and schools of thought. It is helpful to recall that Donne and Sidney were living contemporaries for fourteen years, and that figure would certainly be much larger if Sidney had not been mortally wounded at Zutphen.

A good deal of what seems to separate Sidney from Donne is the twentieth-century critic's tendency to apply the term "realism" to the Metaphysicals and Donne. Calling Donne's poetry "realistic" usually is meant to imply that his immediate predecessors did not write realistic poetry and were in fact idealistic by comparison. One consequence of this view is that Sidney is characterized as "idealistic" in contrast to the alleged "realism" of Donne's "metaphysical" outlook.² Sidney's humanist poetics, with his emphasis on ethical teaching

¹*Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery: Renaissance Poetic and Twentieth-Century Critics* (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1947).

²Using the terms "realism" and "idealism" to make critical distinctions between writers seems to me to be the primrose path toward the misreading of literature prior to the late eighteenth century, especially when the assumptions underlying those terms are unquestioned. Together they reflect a post-Enlightenment materialistic tendency to dichotomize and reduce the whole of reality, and human experience with it, into theoretical and practical, abstract and concrete, subjective and objective, imaginative and empirical categories. Neither word came into common use until the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and when they did it was in the context of revolutionary political ideology.

and eloquence, is similarly contrasted with Donne's bawdy, obscure, rough, and strained Metaphysical wit in which irregularity is seen as indicative of disillusion, revolt, and a realistic awareness of "the seriousness and perplexity of life" (Holman and Harmon, 290). Combined with a view of the transition between Elizabethan and Jacobean culture that emphasizes political, religious, and intellectual upheaval, "realism" as a descriptor of Donne's poetry also suggests that Donne may be seen as an innovator for having dispensed with outmoded Elizabethan ideas and practices. Hence Donne is an original realist; Sidney is an unoriginal idealist.

This view, however, is built out of exaggeration and faulty distinctions. When it is restricted to matters of style and tone, and if by "realism" one simply means that Donne emphasizes and focuses on singular events (e.g., concrete images, impassioned, argumentative dialogues that plead and/or berate) more often and more intently than his Elizabethan predecessors, then any categorical distinction between Donne and Sidney appears strained and implausible. Sidney performs and anticipates the same habits of style and conceit, sometimes in a lesser degree than Donne, sometimes not. Considerable stylistic and tonal differences appear between the two, but there is nothing to indicate substantially that they are not simply two poets working in a common, traditional genre that admits the presence of both the ideal and the real—that is, the Petrarchan love sonnet. As Petrarchists, Sidney and Donne differ in their styles and approach to their subject matter, but this does not constitute a difference in kind. *Astrophil and Stella* and *Songs and Sonets* deal with common Petrarchan themes in similar ways; their imagery, conceits, and argumentative dialogues emphasize the personal tribulations of desire of a poet-lover persona.

Donald L. Guss has argued convincingly that Donne's poetry is fundamentally Petrarchan rather than expressive of "manly realism," yet Guss still makes a division between the sixteenth-century English Petrarchists, who he claims wrote in a "humanistic" mode, and the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Petrarchists, who wrote in an "extravagant" mode (18). The humanistic mode, Guss avers:

. . . aims at universal truths, eternal emotions, and neoclassical decorousness: it is elegant, idyllic, and sentimental. . . . In

England and France, its neoclassical bias was reinforced by a tendency to treat Petrarchism as a noble cultural import on a par with Latin and Greek forms—as another classical genre. Before Donne, humanistic Petrarchism dominates the English lyric.

Donne, however, writes in the other Petrarchan mode—that characterized by fantastic arguments, emotional extravagance, and peregrine comparisons. (18)

Guss's analysis of sixteenth century "humanistic" Petrarchism briefly considers Wyatt and Gascoigne, but Sidney is nowhere to be found.

Guss's view still overemphasizes a rather ill-defined attitude of the "humanistic" Elizabethans that can easily become an uncritical stereotype of naive idealism or simply a lack of contact with "real life." Guss points out that "Spenser's culture . . . is that of the academy, and Donne's that of the court: Spenser seeks erudition and Donne *sprezzatura*, or brilliant ease" (46), but Sidney was much more a man of the court than Donne and a master of *sprezzatura* as well (unfortunately he is again omitted from the discussion). Guss even notes that the neoclassicals saw Donne *and* Sidney as metaphysical poets without making "humanistic" and "extravagant" categories for them:

Joseph Warton attacks Petrarch because 'his sentiments even of love, are metaphysical and far fetched.' And an anonymous contemporary of Warton's blames current stylistic extravagances on two parallel influences: that of Petrarch, with other Italians; and that of the metaphysical poets, with Sidney. (47)

Warton's anonymous contemporary constellates Petrarch, Sidney and the Metaphysicals because of the extravagance they have in common, an extravagance that surely arises from their metaphysical love lyricism. Guss's distinction between "humanistic" and "extravagant" Petrarchan modes, while helpful, relies on a facile dismissal of the underlying ideas that undeniably informed Petrarchism, giving it philosophical and theological coherence, as well

as a vocabulary.

As J. A. Mazzeo suggests, Donne's metaphysical qualities originate not simply in the Petrarchan tradition, but deeper still in the current of thought that informs Petrarchism; that is, the relatively unified Renaissance "theory of wit (*ingeno, ingenio, esprit*) as the faculty which . . . finds and expresses the universal analogies latent in the data of experience" ("A Critique" 83). Such analogies were possible as a result of the inherited classical-medieval cosmological model of the macrocosm and microcosm, i.e., the "Great Chain of Being," and the collision of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought in the Renaissance. Rosalie Colie observes that in this intellectual environment, ontology and aesthetics, the subjects of being and becoming, imitation and invention, were entangled and their distinctions blurred, thus giving rise to an increased usage of paradox in literature:

For Renaissance aesthetics, this blurring is peculiarly important, since the action of paradox is a simultaneous creation and recreation, a simultaneous invention and imitation, cutting across the regulations of conventional Platonic and Aristotelian critical theory, and resolving some of the troublesome ambiguities that the theory turns up. (xiii)

The impact of this synthetic effort on Petrarchan poetry is considerable. Philosophical ambiguities that are exploited and resolved through irony and paradox are the linchpins of the metaphysical conceit, and Sidney makes considerable use of them in his poetry in ways that presage Donne's distinctive style. Because of the conditions that Colie describes, Donne can exploit the paradox between love as a state of being and also one of growth or becoming in poems such as "The Paradox," "Loves growth," and "Lovers infinitenesse." Love, conceived of as a subjective experience, becomes very nearly a solipsistic state for lovers in this view, which Sidney has Astrophil accept and use to justify his feelings and actions toward Stella. But Astrophil takes solipsism to a literal extreme (and to his own ruin), while Donne always exposes the paradoxical nature of love, through ironic disengagement, or through the distance afforded by time and an awareness of an audience and the world outside (e.g., "The Exstasie," "The Sun Rising").

Indeed, Astrophil's anxieties over love and poetry can be related to many of Donne's elaborate conceits, although Donne, in his *Songs and Sonets*, is perhaps willing to risk more than Sidney in terms of doubt, uncertainty, and a tense lack of closure. Yet from Sidney's vantage point at the end of the Elizabethan Age, much of the lyric's future course can be seen as existing *in potentia* in his own writing. More specifically, Sidney's conceits, particularly those concerning the poet as maker and imitator, expounded in the *Defence* and illustrated in *Astrophil and Stella* (by Astrophil's abuse of them), point out the limits of the Petrarchan lyric and its wit of love—limits that are defined and tested by Sidney and then explored and pushed further by Donne. But each poet in his own particular context is intensely concerned with order, balance, and harmony in situations where they are threatened; each poet attempts to find a way to reconcile the idealism implicit in desire with the real state of affairs in the world as he sees it.

I. "Make all this All:" The Elizabethan World Picture

Critics of Donne and Sidney often appear to have considerable difficulty in conceiving of a middle ground between idealism and realism, opting instead for one at the exclusion of the other. Raymond-Jean Frontain, for example, urges that Donne's poetry marks the passing of an idealized Elizabethan worldview as well as a major change in poetry when he describes Donne's association with the recent past as simply an awareness of his disconnection from it. Frontain sees this unusual retrospective tendency in Donne's poetry, e.g., the third *Satyre*, as a reluctant realism driven by "religious nostalgia" (5) for a spiritually, intellectually, and politically united world. Donne's innovative advances and his imaginative "ferocity of spirit and intellect" (5) are attributed to his backward glances at the Elizabethan age which supposedly represented everything that Donne saw as lacking during his adult life. Moreover, Frontain continues, Donne's nostalgia and poetry are both consequences of

the particularly troubling transition period in which the hierarchies that, theoretically at least, guaranteed the cohesiveness of the universe were challenged by the "new Philosophy" which called everything into doubt, and the analogies which characterize Tillyard's idealized Elizabethan World Picture were all but reduced to a set of poetic clichés.

(5)

The "new Philosophy," an unquestioned catalyst for radical change, in effect exposed the ideals of the Elizabethan worldview as false images, and since belief in them was no longer possible, they became the waste material of language—clichés. It is not hard to see Frontain's implicit association of "idealized" with "cliché" here. By contextualizing these words in a causal relationship where one progresses from poetic ideals to hard scientific realism, ideals and clichés become nearly synonymous, and it takes very little effort for Frontain to demonstrate rhetorically the cause of Donne's post-Elizabethan angst.

Frontain's view, however, is rather harsh and unfair toward the Elizabethans. Maurice Evans offers an alternative when he suggests that, "The Elizabethans were realists in the last resort, and like Spenser and Shakespeare who both used the Arcadian myth, Sidney saw it as

an ideal to be striven for but never achieved in full. The Arcadian idyll owes both its poignancy and its appeal as myth to the fact that it can never be attained” (38). But a deeper examination of this statement, however, shows that Evans’ view is quite similar to Frontain’s. Evans extends the domain of “realists” to the Elizabethans, but like Frontain, he really means skepticism. Idealism and realism, in their philosophical and artistic definitions, have little to do with either critic’s usage of them.

Evans and Frontain would claim, then, that neither the Elizabethans nor the Jacobean believed that belief in ideals was a tenable intellectual position; both were “realists” by virtue of their disbelief in belief. Sidney, according to Evans, could admit ideals into his outlook, but he was not so ignorant to believe that they could actually be achieved. Donne, according to Frontain, was simply unable to reconcile himself with such a dichotomy. The common cause cited as an explanation for both Sidney’s and Donne’s views is the conditioning force of the historical process. Sidney was apparently capable of belief simply because he wished to be and the relative stability of his times made this possible. Donne wanted to believe but was unable to because the disorder of his times made it impossible. Through circular reasoning, either poet’s work can be interpreted to “prove” what has already been assumed. Aside from this interpretive fallacy, the dramatic internal struggle of belief and disbelief seems entirely too modern for a pair of “early modern” poets, and it is.

Frontain’s image of Donne as a poet of disintegration seems to locate something akin to T. S. Eliot’s “dissociation of sensibility” in Donne—a division between thought and feeling. Eliot, however, considered Donne a “late Elizabethan” (23) who was not yet fully “dissociated.” The implication of Frontain’s view is that an earlier Elizabethan poet like Sidney was a victim of illusions, subservient to them, and repressed in an idealistic outlook that cannot admit either seriousness or perplexity in life. This notion that Sidney and his peers were immature in relation to Donne and his contemporaries is patently false. Sidney’s wit was by no means a short-ranged one. His poetic theory, with its moral and aesthetic ideals, does not simply amount to “moralism,” “didacticism,” or “idealism” (with their negative modern connotations), nor is it part of a completely idealized world view that can be said to have been simply lost at some point near the end of the sixteenth century. It is at least

arguable that Sidney's poetry is the expression of a stabler (though not at all unthreatened) world order to which a poet like Donne could look back; however, it is conceding too much to suggest that the difference between Sidney and Donne can be generalized as a historically based motion from "idealism" to "realism" due to revolutionary changes in science, philosophy, religion, and politics. Indeed, Frontain's remarks about Donne can just as easily be aimed at Alexander Pope, another recusant Roman Catholic poet concerned with the same processes of change a full century later. For this reason, in *The Elizabethan World Picture*, E. M. W. Tillyard freely ranges from Spenser to Donne and Milton; the scope of the book, and the author's use of the word "Elizabethan," is openly and explicitly applied to "anything within the compass of the English Renaissance, anything between the ages of Henry VIII and Charles I akin to the main trends of Elizabethan thought" (ix). This is not too broad an approach; it sets some useful background against which Sidney and Donne can be seen without losing a judicious discrimination of their various places within the length and breadth of their times.

A constant and traditional characteristic of the Elizabethan worldview is its consideration of the whole created order which includes both the ideal (*idealis, idea*: to see, envision, the Platonic Form) and the real (*realis, res*: a particular thing, fact) together in an attempt to find an appropriate, realizable middle ground that is neither "realistic" nor "idealistic." The apparent division between the ideal and the real results from creation's division into "first" and "second" nature by the Fall of man. This division, however, is not complete and final due to divine intervention in human history, as I will discuss below. Conceiving of the world in these terms, the Elizabethans were not by any means incapable of conceiving of doubt, uncertainty, or dissolution; in fact, a defining characteristic of the period is the tenuousness of their social order. If Donne took this order as an object of nostalgic longing when it was supposedly disintegrating in his own lifetime, as Frontain asserts, then this indicates a severe misreading of the recent past on Donne's part. It is more likely that his occasionally nostalgic tone is not a byproduct of the passing century but one of its signal features. Elizabethan literature itself is often grounded in nostalgic retrospection that is not simply idealized. On this point Evans' example of Sidney's *Arcadia* is instructive. In the

Arcadia, the desire for an ideal state is constantly juxtaposed with a troubled present, and even at the end of the book Sidney does not indulge in an effort to paint a reorganized and perfected state. This sort of limited nostalgia is a chronic feature of English and European literature; it is partly due to a very deep-rooted primitivistic sentiment inherited from the classical world. One finds Greek and Roman mythology, history, and poetry steeped in it, and the pastoral, with all its influence on English Renaissance poetry, was founded on a classical longing for the purity and simplicity of the Arcadian past.³ However, the idea that Sidney upheld the Arcadian myth as an ideal that ought to be pursued but also one that could never be fully realized is not supported anywhere in his writing.⁴

A nostalgic attitude that is constantly checked by self-consciousness seems inevitable and quite natural in cultures that begin their oral and recorded histories with accounts generally concerned with mankind's fall from a perfect state. For the Elizabethans, however, the nostalgic backward glance revealed that the fall of man and the world's present disorder also pointed toward the perfection of both. The capacity to hold a view of the world that is at once damning and redemptive is illustrative of what Tillyard called the Elizabethan "double-vision." This outlook, Tillyard writes, can be seen in Sidney's reference in the *Defence* to the divine breath that gives Adam life in *Genesis* "to describe poetry and *perfection*" (22):

Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the
highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature, but
rather give right honour to the Maker of that maker, who,
having made man in his own likeness, set him beyond and over

³See Lovejoy, Arthur O. and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, with supplementary essays by W. F. Albright and P. E. Dumont, (New York: Octagon Books, 1965).

⁴The preface to the 1593 composite text of the *Arcadia* remarks on the book's conclusion: "though [the audience] finde not here what might be expected, they may finde neverthelesse as much as was intended, the conclusion, not the perfection of Arcadia: and that no further then the Authors own writings, or knowen determinations could direct. Whereof who sees not the reason, must consider there may be a reason which he sees not." The example of the end of the *Arcadia* shows Sidney engaging in "One of the grand accomplishments of humanist poetics . . . present[ing] both sides of a question . . . admit[ing] both reality and fiction, . . . invit[ing] us to consider its own subversive side, as it were. Arising from an age of eristics, a theoretical culture of opposition and competition, it turned that situation into one of "peirastics," of inquiring after the truth, by converting the judge at the disputation, like the author of a fiction, into the interpreter of meaning *and* the reader of the text" (Kinney, 435-36). This is hardly the gesture of an idealist.

all the works of that second nature; which in nothing he showeth so much as in poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth far surpassing her doings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam, sith our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it. (Sidney, qtd. In Tillyard, 22)

Then referring to Sidney's Platonic and Biblical sources in the preceding passage, Tillyard comments:

We should think of both contexts together. The *perfection* is at once that of the Platonic Good and the Garden of Eden, while Adam's fall from it is also the measure of the distance separating created things from their Platonic archetypes. . . . It was then through an intense realisation of this double vision that the Elizabethans could combine such extremes of optimism and pessimism, about the order of the present world. The possibilities of great range were the greater because there was no tyranny of general opinion one way or another. . . . In the Elizabethan world there was an equal pressure on both sides, and the same person could simultaneously be aware of each. (22-3)

In these remarks, Tillyard neglects to mention that it is not simply Adam's original over against his fallen state that establishes the distinctive nature of the "double vision"; this view, or rough equivalents of it, are of course quite ancient in origin. Acquired from the Old Testament scriptures, the Christian conception of man's fall through Adam's sin, however, is unique in that it is not a final and permanent state. The parallel account in the New Testament of redemption through Christ's incarnation, life, death, and resurrection, as the second Adam, allows and indeed demands a total outlook where the human condition, which may be called reality, is an injured pattern of its ideal state, its archetype, which it has fallen

from but is also moving toward. Perfection, as a once and future state, is also always immanent in the present through Christ and his church. Present reality is not to be disparaged for, as Tillyard notes of Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World*, "the glory of God [is seen] not merely in abstraction from secular life, in the contemplation of the divine presence, but *per speculum creaturarum*" (24). Because God's presence is incarnate in nature, nature can be read sacramentally.⁵ Similarly, the idea expressed in the Athanasian creed⁶ of the timeless

⁵The 1662 edition of the *Book of Common Prayer* defines "sacrament" in the catechism as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof." This is the standard Augustinian doctrine. Cf. "The universal sacrament of salvation," *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Missouri: Liguori Publications, 1994):

The Greek word *mysterion* was translated into Latin by two terms: *mysterium* and *sacramentum*. In later usage the term *sacramentum* emphasizes the visible sign of the hidden reality of salvation which was indicated by the term *mysterium*. In this sense, Christ himself is the mystery of salvation: "For there is no other mystery of God, except Christ." [St. Augustine, *Ep.* 187,11,34: PL 33,846] The saving work of his holy and sanctifying humanity is the sacrament of salvation, which is revealed and active in the Church's sacraments (which the Eastern churches also call "the holy mysteries"). The seven sacraments are the signs and instruments by which the Holy Spirit spreads the grace of Christ the head throughout the Church which is his Body. The Church, then, both contains and communicates the invisible grace she signifies. It is in this analogical sense, that the Church is called a "sacrament."

⁶The Athanasian creed was not incorporated into the *Book of Common Prayer* until the 1662 revision, but it was well known as an authoritative and ecumenical statement of faith during the Reformation. It was included in the Lutheran *Book of Concord* in 1580. The concluding section of the prose version of the Athanasian creed, as it appeared in the 1791 edition of the *Book of Common Prayer*, reads:

For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess: that our Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God, God and Man; God, of the Substance of the father, begotten before the worlds: and Man, of the Substance of his Mother, born in the world; Perfect God, and perfect Man: of a reasonable soul, and human flesh subsisting; Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead: and inferior to the Father, as touching upon his Manhood. Who although he be God and Man: yet he is not two, but one Christ; One; not by the conversion of the Godhead into flesh: but by taking of the Manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance: but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man: so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation: descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead; he ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty: from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. [Some modern translations substitute "begotten before the worlds" and "born in the world" with "begotten before time" and "born in time."]

entering time and of human nature ascending to perfection in the person of Christ establishes a sacramental view of reality where the perfect presence of God is mediated to fallen man through the very essence of nature, the higher transposed to the lower, the ideal established in the real, the abstract communicated through the concrete. The central pattern for sacramentalism is the Incarnation of Christ. It is this act which allows men to think and speak of divinity in terms of humanity and humanity in terms of divinity, and to understand paradoxically, by way of mystery, their relation and coexistence.⁷

Describing the kind of equivalence or metaphoric, analogical thinking associated with sacramentalism or symbolism, C. S. Lewis writes:

If our passions, being immaterial, can be copied by material inventions, then it is possible that our material world in its turn is the copy of an invisible world. As the god Amor and his figurative garden are to the actual passions of men, so perhaps we ourselves and our 'real' world are to something else. The attempt to read that something else through its sensible imitations, to see the archtype in the copy, is what I mean by symbolism or sacramentalism. It is, in fine, 'the Philosophy of

⁷Cf. Donne on original sin and salvation:

In the first minute that my soul is infus'd, the Image of God is imprinted in my soul; so forward is God in my behalf, and so early does he visit me. But yet *Originall sin* is there, as soon as that Image of God is there. My soul is capable of *God*, as soon as it is capable of *sin*; and though sin does not get the start of God, God does not get the start of sin neither. Powers, that dwell so far asunder, as *Heaven*, and *Hell*, *God* and the *Devill*, meet in an instant in my soul, in the minute of my quickening, and the Image of *God*, and the image of *Adam*, *Originall sin*, enter into me at once, in one, and the same act. (*Sermons* 2.1.59)

.....
.
Establish us, O Lord, in all occasions of diffidences here; and when thy hand presses our arrows upon us, enable us to see, that *that* very hand, hath from all eternity written, and written in thine owne blood, a *decree* of the *issue*, as well, and as soon, of the *tentation*. In which confidence of which decree, as men, in the virtue thereof already in possession of heaven, we joyne with that Quire in that service, in that *Anthem*, . . . (*Sermons* 2.1.71)

Hermes that this visible world is but a picture of the invisible, wherein, as in a portrait, things are not truly but in equivocal shapes, as they counterfeit some real substance in that invisible fabrick'. The difference between [allegory and symbolism] can hardly be exaggerated. The allegorist leaves the given—his own passions—to talk of that which is confessedly less real, which is a fiction. The symbolist leaves the given to find that which is more real. (*Allegory* 45)

The same sort of equivocal imitation is described in very similar terms in the *Defence* where Sidney states that the right poet's mimetic art does not imitate sensible things or realities but idealities which exist neither in things nor ideas only. Ideality, for Sidney, is incarnate in the actuality of being. Like the painter of Lucretia, Sidney says the right poet imitates that which originates beyond the particulars of objective reality (ideas perceivable to the mind through the "erected wit") but is only experienced or made actual (capable of being seen with the eye and felt with the senses) in things. The right poet imitates virtue rather than physical beauty because he recognizes physical beauty as a lesser good that is only accidentally related to the higher good, i.e., the essential virtue.⁸ For this reason, right poets "borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be" (81). Thus the range of the poet, "who, having no law but wit" (81) is only limited by "the zodiack of his own wit" (78). Serving rather like a vehicle for divine grace (i.e., a sacrament), poetry, in turn, purifies wit, enriches memory, enables judgment, and enlarges conceit in the total process of learning. As Sidney writes, "the

⁸These Neoplatonic principles have obvious corollaries in Petrarchan verse. Sidney's use of Lucretia as the poet/painter's model who has an outward appearance of sorrow because of her inner virtue is comparable to the common conceits of love poems such as Samuel Daniel's *Delia* sonnets, e.g. Sonnet 3: "Faire is my Love, and cruell as she's faire; / Her brow-shades frownes, although her eyes are sunny" (1-2). The female object of the poem has a disdainful appearance which belies a positive, chaste beauty. The paradox between the speaker's desire and the woman's chastity is maintained in opposition just as the inner and outer elements of "faire" and "cruell" are balanced in the woman. A parallel relationship between the speaker's denied desire and awakened Muse runs in the speaker's closing paradox: "O had she not been faire, and thus unkinde, / My Muse had slept, and none had knowne my minde" (13-14). Sidney would also use this conceit for full effect in *Astrophil and Stella*; Donne's "What if this present were the world's last night?" sonnet in *Divine Poems* puts it to a more original and unusual usage.

final end 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” (82). Sidney’s conditional phrase, “What may be and should be” (81) linked with what we “can be capable of” (82) captures the essence of Christian doctrine that engages the believer, as well as the “right poet,” in the ongoing sacramental process of redemption which will in fact be fully attained at a yet undefined but definite future point in time. The true poignancy and appeal of Sidney’s use of the Arcadian myth stems from this paradoxical mixture of certainty, hope, and desire.

Donne in effect agrees with Sidney about the art of poetry and its underlying theological and philosophical assumptions, both of them identifying David as an ideal or “right poet.” Donne describes David as very nearly a model Petrarchan poet and lover but also as a poet whose writing joins heaven and earth across the unfolding of time:

But these *Psalmes* were made, not onely to vent *David's* present holy passion, but to serve the Church of God, to the worlds end. (*Sermons* 2.1.55)

Similar ideas are found in the *Defence* where Sidney writes:

. . . for what else is the awaking his musical instruments, the often and free changing of persons, his notable *prosopopoeias*, when he maketh you, as it were, see God coming in His majesty, his telling of the beasts’ joyfullness and hills leaping, but a heavenly poesy, wherein almost he showeth himself a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith? (77)

As Katherine Duncan-Jones notes,

Sidney’s poet is a man who religiously cultivates this ability [the mediating function] to the utmost of his powers. His ‘ideas’, being ideas of ‘first nature’, *with the force of a divine breath show* ‘another nature’ to an imperfect world that lives in *second nature*. In this way poesy is the effort of an individual mind to bridge the gap between the sinful state and

the lost paradise or ‘golden’ age of man. Sidney anticipated this theory in every detail when he described the psalmist as ‘a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith’.

(Duncan-Jones, 190n78.22-79.27)

This description summarizes a poetic attitude that can be taken as Petrarchan and metaphysical.⁹ It is the difficult and often paradoxical relationship between the individual human mind and the divine Mind that Sidney pursues in the *Defence*, and Donne shows much of the same sentiment, perfectly restating the *Defence*’s highest ideals in the “quire” and “organ” conceit of his “Upon the translation of the Psalmes by Sir Philip Sydney and the Countesse of Pembroke his Sister.” Prior to establishing this conceit, Donne echoes Sidney’s notion of poetic non-originality where the poet’s making is an imitation in finite form of an inexpressible, infinite subject:

Eternall God, (for whom who ever dare
Seeke new expressions, doe the Circle square,
And thrust into strait corners of poore wit
Thee, who art cornerlesse and infinite)
I would but blesse thy Name, not name thee now;
(And thy gifts are as infinite as thou:)
Fixe we our prayes therefore on this one,
That, as thy blessed Spirit fell upon
These Psalmes first Author in a cloven tongue;
(For ‘twas a double power by which he sung
The highest matter in the noblest forme;)
So thou has cleft that spirit, to performe
That worke againe, and shed it, here, upon
Two, by their bloods, and by the Spirit one;

⁹*Caveat lector*: Duncan-Jones’ emphasis on the “individual mind” is precariously worded and likely to mislead. “Individual mind” in contemporary parlance is close to “original mind,” and Sidney’s poet is, as I have already discussed, convinced that there is no originality except in imitation.

A brother and a Sister, made by thee
 The Organ, where thou art the Harmony.
 Two that make one *John Baptists* holy voyce,
 And who that Psalme, *Now let the Iles rejoyce*,
 Have both translated, and apply'd it too,
 But told us what, and taught us how to doe. (1-20)

Here Donne aptly applies the same principles undergirding Sidney's *Defence* and the Elizabethan "double-vision": The Psalmist, identified by Sidney as the archtypical poet and Neoplatonic lover in the *Defence*, is seen there and here in Donne's poem as a mediator, a conduit, or a translator of the ideal into the real through "forme" rather than content.¹⁰ For David, and again for the Sidneys, divine inspiration has conveyed first nature into second, and man's "poore wit" has been rendered sufficient to convey divine material through human form and poetic convention. Thus the parallels between God, David, and the Sidneys as authors or makers correspond to each other in a triple analogy, and inspiration, itself analogous to incarnation, is depicted as a reciprocal operation. Inspiration works from God toward ancient Israel through the Psalmist's writings as well as toward God from Renaissance England through the Sidneys' translation of those writings. The inspiration and transmission are always part of a relational transaction and can never be identified with a single individual. The author himself cannot claim creation or possession of his work, since he "merely makes to imitate" (*Defence* 81) what he can read of goodness and divinity. As Sidney describes the process in the *Defence*, the right poet is both a creation and sub-creator in relation to God, "the heavenly Maker of that maker" (79).¹¹ As the right poet typified by the Psalmist creates quite literally "with the force of a divine breath" (*Defence* 79) the parallelism in the analogy "God is to the right poet as the right poet is to the poem" disallows clear distinctions to be made about the poet's status. He becomes both author and text, a reader and writer—a mediator, like Christ, between his readers and God. For Donne also, the distinction between

¹⁰Donne similarly attributes *Psalms*' unique aesthetic and moral value to their *form* as poetry in his Lincoln's Inn Sermon on *Psalms* 38.2 (2.1.49-71), partly to assert the aesthetic and moral value of crafted devotional literature, set prayers, and written sermons which were questioned by the Puritans.

¹¹This idea probably originates in *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians* 2.10: "For we are his workmanship [*poiema*] . . ."

the Psalmist and the *Psalms* is slight; both serve together as an “Organ” for God, as do the Sidneys as translators and the Church by singing the translated *Psalms*:

They shew us Ilanders our joy, our King,
They tell us *why*, and teach us *how* to sing,
Make all this All, three Quires, heaven, earth, and spheares;
The first, heaven, hath a song, but no man heares,
The Spheares have Musick, but they have no tongue,
Their harmony is rather danc’d than sung;
But our third Quire, to which the first gives eare,
(For, Angels learne by what the Church does here)
This Quire hath all. The Organist is hee
Who hath tun’d God and Man, the Organ wee:
The songs are these, which heavens high holy Muse
Whisper’d to *David*, *David* to the Jewes: (21-32)

Here, the earthly “Quire hath all” and is in tune with the other “Quires,” because Christ has reconciled, or “tun’d,” the highest order of the universe with the lowest and everything else in between. When Christ is introduced into the poem, the Psalmist and the *Psalms*, the Sidneys and their verse translations, are all drawn into the whole “Organ” of the church, who in singing the *Psalms*, are played upon by Christ, “The Organist.” Donne’s metaphoric language is employed such that symbol and object are identified or con-fused so completely that the unity-in-multiplicity that is the Church is conveyed equivocally through both symbolic and denotative terms, through the vehicle as well as the tenor. And as the poem has already looked from the higher to the lower, from the past to the present, it concludes by raising its vision again, into the anticipated future when

. . . we come th’Extemporall song to sing,
(Learn’d the first hower, that we see the King,
Who hath translated those translators) may
These their sweet learned labours, all the way
Be as our tuning, that, when hence we part,

We may fall in with them, and sing our part. (51-56)

Thus Donne, like David, “makes up his Circle, he begins, and ends in prayer” (*Sermons* 2.1.50), confident that because of Christ, “as men, in the virtue thereof already in possession of heaven, we joyn with that Quire in that service, in that *Anthem* . . .” (*Sermons* 2.1.71).

By J. A. Mazzeo’s definition, the literary and musical conceit of the poem is clearly metaphysical: it expresses “a view of the world founded on universal analogy” (*A Critique* 87) and “the harmonic correlation between two or three knowable extremes, the act whereby the understanding discerns the correspondences between things” (Mazzeo, *Renaissance* 32). In Donne’s poem, the three correlative extremes are the implicit divine creativity and the two lesser kinds that are David’s and the Sidneys’:

God/Spirit - Creation:

David - *Psalms*:

Sidneys - Translations.

As in Dante, “Every part shines to every part,”¹² and the image of the Organ, as both an instrument and anatomical component, signifies the collective body of the Church as well as individuals within it. It is a part that leads to the image of the whole “All”; it is a fully differentiated structural and functional unit or body that points toward and is dependent upon the whole Body that is the Church headed and united by Christ.¹³ The Organ serves as a

¹²*Inferno*, 7.75

¹³“All in all” comes from *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians* 1.17-23 in the *Authorized* (King James) *Translation*. The apostle’s statements quoted below are a foundational source text for the Christian cosmology:

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth *all in all*.

(Cf. note 5 above on the Body of the Church.)

vehicle for a variety of tenors: the Sidneys as translators, and the Church their readers who are also reading, or singing, David's *Psalms* and participating in the transmission of the original source of inspiration as Christ plays on them. The Organ plays a sacramental role, pointing first toward earthly creativity and then back toward divine creativity, thus evincing the united and simultaneous reciprocal relationship between both extremes. The Organ conceit allows Donne to exalt divine love in a way that is inclusive of humanity which participates in it. This is again the "double-vision" that allows Donne, like Sidney, to express a reconciliation of idealism with their unobscured vision of things as they are.

In Sidney's *Defence* and Donne's "Upon the translation," the viewpoint germane to both is that poetry optimally exists as a medium where ideality and reality coincide, where subjective thought encounters objective circumstance. This sort of poetry pursues an expression of the *actuality* of human experience at the point where inner and outer compulsions meet, where wit either purifies or pollutes desire and the will. In other words, Sidney and Donne both assume the general current of Renaissance thought from which the Petrarchan lyrical tradition emanated. In the context of unrequited love, Petrarchism emphasized the battle between the wit and the will with the purpose of properly orienting the ego toward the Good/God through purified desire. Sidney states that this is the purpose of poetry, and Donne's writing also exemplifies that principle. From the same assumptions that define and undergird Sidney's and Donne's Petrarchism, it follows that their poetry is metaphysical in the general sense that it is concerned with ultimate reality—awareness and pursuit of the Good—and also in the more specific sense that it expresses the synthesis of the real and the ideal in the actual through analogical correspondences such as the poet who is both maker and imitator, songwriter and organ that songs are played upon.

It should not be surprising that Donne's "Upon the translation" is quite consistent with Sidney's *Defence*, extrapolating and elaborating the principles behind its statements about kinds of making. As Mazzeo explains,

The [sixteenth-century] interest in metaphor was not only the dominant theme of the theorists of the conceit but was one of the major interests of the humanists as well. Renaissance

theory of metaphor always emphasized the pedagogic aspects of Aristotle's pronouncements on the subject, sometimes to the point of pedantry. Both Castiglione and Erasmus, for example, especially praised the power of metaphor to please while teaching. It was the best means of impressing the reader with an important subject matter, *doctrina*, by means of *eloquentia*, and thereby facilitated the retention of knowledge. (*Renaissance*, 30-31)

But while the humanistic goal of teaching and delighting is a prominent impulse behind Sidney's writing, a similar purpose is rarely considered as a possible basis for in Donne's love lyrics whose "profane" character is well advertised. Since there are compelling reasons to read Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* as a "tragicommodity of love . . . performed by starlight"(Nash, A.3)—a farce about self-indulgence and profane love—Donne's *Songs and Sonets* may follow in their example. Since Sidney's profane lyrics are properly understood as an intentionally devised negative example with an implicit noble purpose that urges readers not to follow Astrophil's example, then might not Donne's *Songs and Sonets* be read similarly, and even more conventionally—read as one would, or should, expect from a Petrarchist who was aware that Petrarch's *Canzoniere* were "more than celebrating an unsuccessful love affair" (Roche, 117)? Guss admits the validity of such a reading of *Songs and Sonets*:

Petrarchism is a poetic manner, not a moral doctrine. Though critics have seen Donne as a culture hero liberating his people from a servile, foreign poetical yoke, in fact there is every reason to think of Donne as a Petrarchist. Indeed, the editor of Donne's lyrics seems to have so thought of him: for he arranges the love poems in a Petrarchan order, beginning with the initiation of love and concluding with its renunciation . . . (51)

Concurrently, a number of meaningful novelties and continuities are apparent in Donne and

Sidney if *Astrophil and Stella* and *Songs and Sonets* are considered from within the tradition of Petrarchan lyricism where the poet-lover is most inclined to speak from the standpoint of his “second nature” which is not often, if even rarely, a vision “cleared by faith,” as David is described in the *Defence* (77).

Viewing both sequences in this manner, Astrophil and Donne’s speakers are alternately trying to come to terms with their impaired ability to speak authentically about desire as they experience it, often by way of humorous avoidance or inflamed refusal. While they interrogate and even attack Neoplatonic or Petrarchan assumptions about love, they never stray far from them. Donne’s speaker in “The Triple Foole” bemusedly accepts his absurdity as a published Petrarchist in a voice tinged with irony. Astrophil makes similar observations, but Sidney’s most ironic claims are those that announce Astrophil’s powers as a poet. These claims egocentrically and manipulatively reinterpret the role of the right poet described in the *Defence* as Astrophil continually maintains that he possesses illuminating access to inward light and natural conceit while he denigrates the discursive logic of philosophers and scholastic churchmen. Even when Donne’s and Sidney’s lyrics take on the appearances of “anti-Petrarchism,” they admit Petrarchan assumptions that are always inherently metaphysical. Concerned as both poets are with the experience of desire, albeit from various and ostensibly conflicting levels of the Neoplatonic *scala*, the label of “Petrarchist” is inevitable for them, and there is no good reason to see it as a diminution of their poetic abilities. Sidney and Donne both use Petrarchan conventions to recognize and to explore the actual space of considerable tension between the object and experiential reality of one’s desire, which is also the uncertain space between the real and the ideal, the worldly and the heavenly, the human and the divine, the fallen and the perfected.

The speakers of Sidney’s and Donne’s poems can fly toward an emphasis on the self for satisfaction, or they can turn inward in self-denial, which in turn leads to either frustration or self-surrender, toward catharsis or increased anxiety. These two tendencies are both prominent as competing presences in Sidney’s writing. It would not be an exaggeration to say they are central to his thought and writing. The *Arcadia* can be seen as multivalent

exploration of the human self's own limitations and the limits of desire; the *Defence* recognizes both, primarily upholding the necessity of a balance between them, and generally favoring the controlling of passions through the poet's wit toward the end of delighting and teaching. *Astrophil and Stella* intensely questions the relationship between self-restraint and self-indulgence in desire. Astrophil's desires are ultimately discovered to be oriented toward false, self-constructed images of delusional ideals that he cannot renounce or transcend because he has absorbed them into his own ego.

Astrophil's inability to reconcile virtue with beauty and ideal love with the reality of his fruitless and base motives causes *Astrophil and Stella* to terminate in a seemingly perpetual paradox of unsatisfied desire that requires dissatisfaction for his poetry's very existence. He is unable to transcend his own desires which focus on his attachment to the images he has made of Stella. He mistakes the ideal for the real person and confuses his images with both. All authenticity drains from his words as they become dissociated from everything originating outside himself and his frenzy. Donne's speakers in *Songs and Sonets*, on the other hand, are constantly attempting to gain and to cope with an awareness of this problem; they pursue an acceptance and transcendence of irony that must inevitably accompany all images which are temporary and partial. As in his tribute to the Sidney's translation of the *Psalms*, Donne returns us in the *Songs and Sonets* to the understanding latent in Sidney's *Defence* that the most refined essence of poetic self-identity and creation is located in the activity of its archetype, *Deus creator omnium*, which cannot be contained or copied but only figured forth in images that must admit themselves as always subject to the ironic displacement of their object. The Petrarchan or metaphysical conceit is, in this view, always vain and always profane so that it may illuminate the sacred. Desire, so long as it is felt, must leave the lover willing to accept and to live through dissatisfaction, willing to contend constantly with what he already has and what he still feels to be outside his grasp, never losing an awareness of the present absence of love's presence in his own being.

II. “I am not I:” *Astrophil and Stella* and the Limits of Petrarchism

Philip Sidney’s sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*, is not simply “humanistic” or “extravagant” Petrarchism; neither is it anti-Petrarchan. It is a novel variation of the Petrarchan sonnet sequence with metaphysical traits that are more pronounced in Donne’s poems, though not absent in Sidney’s. Sidney can be quite extravagant with his conceits, as in his very Donnean Sonnet 76, where the image of Stella as the sun rising parallels a series of grossly euphemistic metaphors that image Astrophil’s arousal in bawdy anatomical terms beneath the veil of chaste expression. Yet *Astrophil and Stella*, despite its contentual and structural novelties, retains the characteristic principles and Neoplatonic doctrines of Petrarchism. Sidney has Astrophil mock and criticize these principles, usually through a process of elaborate logical fallacies, but the Petrarchan philosophy of love is still the basis for his rhetorical and figurative language; he essentially appropriates them to invert them. As Forrest Robinson writes, “[Astrophil] knows about the Platonic ladder and even tries to climb it, but more often than not he stumbles at the second rung and falls” (193)—yet many of his falls are deliberate; all of them are obvious and immediate consequences of his own actions. Sidney’s sequence shows Astrophil parading his refusal to transcend physical affection as he instead descends in the opposite direction. Rather than striving for a humble disengagement from his ego, he embraces it in pride until all he has left is his isolated, negative existence. Through its blatant failure, Astrophil’s inverted Petrarchism does not undermine but rather illuminates the principles he presumes to overturn.

One of the distinguishing features of Sidney’s novel sequence is the irony maintained throughout the work by Astrophil’s identity as a kind of alter ego for Sidney. Sidney distances himself from the well-known autobiographical content of his sequence by deferring it to Astrophil. This gesture allows and in fact encourages the whole sequence to be read with a constant “tone of absurdity and irony” (Spiller, 108). As with the *Arcadia*, which Sidney referred to as “idle,” a “toy,” and a “trifle,” Sidney’s deliberate distancing of himself from his poetry is an effort to distract or deflect his audience’s attention from himself as author without detracting from the value or authority of the message he intends to present.

Arthur Kinney describes Sidney's disengagement from the *Arcadia* in this way, arguing that it is an announcement that *mimesis* and not *diegesis* is at work. That is, Sidney is calling attention to the ironic relationship between himself and Astrophil by indicating that it is one of analogy rather than equivalence. While the Sidney and Astrophil appear equivocal, they are not equivalent. Astrophil's existence is therefore an "emphatic [signal] that [Sidney] as author is disengaged enough from his work to know what it seems to say and what it does say—or, . . . what it looks like on the outside . . . and what it actually is on the inside" (433).

"On the inside," *Astrophil and Stella* is a negative example aimed at illuminating its opposite, the strikingly absent positive example. The deleterious effects of Astrophil's sort of love are, as Andrew Weiner points out, the real subject or "fore-conceit" of *Astrophil and Stella* (1). They are emphasized with the final *psychogogic* goal of breaking down the reader's ego along with Astrophil's, yet Sidney is still aiming at delighting as well as teaching his audience through ironic self-imagining. Through a *mimesis* of vice rather than virtue, Thomas Roche observes:

Sidney wanted us to be delighted by Astrophil's wit and to be instructed by the image of a man whose reason gives way to his will and whose hopeful desires finally lead him to despair. Astrophil is not a hero, and he is not a hero precisely because he succumbs wholeheartedly to the pursuit of his desires. He teaches morality by negative example. . . . Sidney . . . is using Astrophil's journey from hope to despair as a fictional device for the analysis of human desire in Christian terms. (Roche, 195-6)

Astrophil's journey from hope to despair begins with the reader's awareness that Astrophil's hopes belie his underlying pride as he fancies himself the master of illusory poetic ideals. His archtypical illusion is that he is not an imitative but an inventive poet who has no source except his own wit and sense. Astrophil's confusion over imitation and invention is intimated in the first sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella*, which is largely an adaptation from Petrarch's

Rime:

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 fruitful showers upon my sunne-burn'd braine.
But words came halting forth, wanting Inventions stay,
Invention Nature's 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.

Here Astrophil outlines his own intended dialectical method for the subsequent sonnets and then claims to discard its most imitative and rhetorical aspects by inverting the sequence of *inventio*, *dispositio*, and *elocutio*.¹⁴ As Spiller points out, this sonnet is also an inversion of Petrarch's opening sonnet in the *Rime Sparse*. Whereas the *Rime* "emphasizes persuasion: [Petrarch] asks pardon for the failure of his style to achieve coherence, and simultaneously suggests that the intensity of his incoherence will beget pity; Sidney . . . emphasizes construction" (111). This emphasis continues throughout the sequence and grows more pronounced; eventually construction and coherence appear to become more of a concern to Astrophil than Stella is to him. It is unclear whether his construction of "words from the heart" is upheld as inspired, imitative, or inventive. Astrophil himself does not seem to know which is the case, since he consistently asserts contradictory claims about the sources of his

¹⁴See Roche, 204 and William A. Ringler, Jr., ed., *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p.459.

poetry. However, the overall tendency of the sequence is an inward motion as Astrophil deprecates almost everything external to his ego, and his view of his poetic abilities sways toward one of pure invention. His inward focus on his heart to find inspiration (ostensibly in his contemplation of Stella and his passion for her) also suggests a motion in the opposite direction of the Platonic lover's ascent away from the body and senses toward the intellect and the soul.

Indeed, Astrophil does descend into his own ego, and in the second sonnet he reveals that he is constructing poems about his passions to keep stimulating more passion as well as, paradoxically, to maintain the integrity of his wit:

I call it praise to suffer Tyrannie;
And now employ the remnant of my wit,
To make me selfe beleeve, that all is well,
While with a feeling skill I paint my hell. (2.13-14)

Astrophil is, as he says, painting his hell and additionally the ruin of his wit. His self-focus is directing him toward a disastrous failure as it renders him unable to use the Petrarchan mode for its proper, redemptive purpose, thereby subjecting him to existential ironies that are beyond his ability to accept or transcend.

In line six of the first sonnet, Astrophil studies the original "inventions" or vehicles of expression belonging to other poets and finds that studying them hampers his own invention. Proper invention, significantly "Nature's child" (10), is finally found only in non-imitative, self-expressive poetry which Astrophil asks his audience to read not only as sincere but in accordance with, or stemming from, nature. But nature, as far as it is manifested in Astrophil, is not the epitome of perfection. Astrophil's nature naturally includes an "infected will" or ego; his attempts to cultivate nature by letting his will grow wild produce predictably diseased results.

All of the claims Astrophil makes in the early sonnets are sophistic arguments that attempt to justify his faults and inconsistencies, but they also have the effect of drawing attention to them as he rejects Virtue in Sonnet 4, morality in Sonnet 5, Reason in Sonnet 10,

Truth in Sonnet 11, friends in Sonnets 14 and 21, and literary convention in Sonnet 15 (Roche, 205). These rejections progressively decrease the range of Astrophil's wit. In Sonnet 3 he puts aside "*Pindares Apes*" (3) as well as the muses and the poets who rely on them—an ironic turn, considering that he received guidance from his own muse in Sonnet 1. But he covers himself in Sonnet 13 by turning her into Stella, a tactic which is again reminiscent of Petrarch. The third sonnet ends somewhat contrary to the first with an ironic acknowledgment that blurs inspiration with imitation: "all my deed / But Copying is, what in her Nature writes" (13-14). The deeper irony is that Astrophil's preference for copying nature rather than other poets is itself an old poetic convention. In Sonnet 4, Astrophil addresses "Vertue" but acknowledges that it has set a "[de]bate betweene [his] will and wit" (2) over whether or not Stella is worthy of his desires. He argues that this fundamental Petrarchan moral question is beside the point, for if "Vertue" were to see the image of Stella in his heart, "Vertue" would love her also.

In Sonnet 5, Astrophil affects a more penitential tone, but he is still arguing the same case in favor of pursuing sensual desire and indulging the ego. Here Astrophil finds the reality of his love for Stella incompatible with virtue as it is understood under Neoplatonism's Petrarchan and theological applications. The country-pilgrim conceit in lines 12 and 13 is taken directly from Plotinus' *Enneads*, 1.6.8:

It is most true, that eyes are form'd to serve
 The inward light: and that the heavenly part
 Ought to be king, from whose rules who do swerve,
 Rebels to Nature strive for their owne smart.
 It is most true, what we call *Cupids* dart,
 An image is, which for our selves we carve;
 And, fooles, adore in temple of our hart,
 Till that good God make Church and Churchman starve.
 True, that true Beautie Vertue is indeed,
 Whereof this Beautie can be but a shade,

Which elements with mortall mixture breed:
True, that on earth we are but pilgrims made,
And should in soule up to our countrey move:
True, and yet true that I must *Stella* love.

Stella has become an idol, an image taken into Astrophil's heart in place of God. Astrophil suggests that the Church and clergy are neglected by most people like him, "fooles" though they may be, because Christian theology subordinates human love to divine love.

Reason, like Vertue, is assaulted in Sonnet 10 as Sidney calls for it to "leave love to will" (8) in an argument that polarizes thought and feeling or "sence" (2) as well as the higher and lower desires of wit and will. If Reason must offer resistance to sensual desire, Astrophil argues that it would have need of the senses and love as a motivation, so it too would inevitably succumb to "Stellas rayes" (12). He is quite able to see his impending loss of self, ironically induced by rejecting everything but his own desire, but he unswervingly insists that he is unable to escape his doom and continues to write:

I see my course to loose my self doth bend:
I see and yet no greater sorow take,
Then that I loose no more for *Stellas* sake. (18.12-14)

In Sonnet 25 Astrophil upholds and attempts to justify his desire for Stella by positing the reality of his experience against Plato's idealism and the Neoplatonic scale of love:

The wisest scholler of the wight most wise,
By *Phoebus* doome, with sugred sentence sayes,
That Vertue if it once met with our eyes,
Strange flames of *Love* it in our soules would raise.
But for that man with paine this truth descries,
Whiles he each thing in senses ballance wayes,
And so nor will, nor can behold those skies,
Which inward sunne to *Heroike* minde displaies.
Vertue of late with vertuous care to ster

Love of her selfe, tooke *Stellas* shape, that she
To mortall eyes might sweetly shine in her.
It is most true, for since I her did see,
Vertues great beautie in that face I prove,
And find th'effect, for I do burne in love.

Implicitly, Plato, the wisest pupil of Socrates, “the wight most wise” (1), is incapable of addressing the reality of the pains of desire that Astrophil feels. He is no better than a poet sugaring words, a highly ironic reversal of Plato’s high status as a true poet in Sidney’s *Defence*. Even worse, Astrophil is impiously using his “burning” as proof of virtue’s beauty as he sees it in Stella who becomes Love incarnate. Hoby’s translation of Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier*, IV images the ascent of the soul as a flame of holy fire. Sidney adds irony to the sonnet by Astrophil’s misappropriation of this well-known flame conceit. The implied analogy is that Astrophil’s purely physical desire is to Stella’s beauty as the Platonist’s spiritual desire is to virtue, and it is the former relationship, Astrophil claims, that is most true. Thus Astrophil rhetorically transfers a higher, spiritual love into a lower, physical form in a complete inversion of the Neoplatonic *scala*. The “inward sunne” (8) of desire for virtue, or the Platonic Good, is invisible to Astrophil who concedes that he is not of the “Heroike mindes” (8) who can perceive those “skies” (7) above. Instead, Astrophil remains solidly grounded on the earth, bringing transcendental, spiritual passion, and the virtue of Love herself down to his level rather than ascending to it. This happens in an ironically unconventional way as Virtue, stirred into “love of her selfe” (10), though with “vertuous care” (9) takes on Stella’s form. Hence there is no need for the soul’s upward motion to a higher love.

Astrophil’s scheme to fuse virtue with Stella and thereby justify his own desire resembles his association of her with perfection in Sonnet 35:

What may words say, or what may words not say,
Where truth it selfe must speake like flatterie?
Within what bounds can one his liking stay,

Where Nature doth with infinite agree?
What *Nestors* counsell can my flames alay,
Since Reason selfe doth blow the cole in me? (1-6)

Astrophil claims that, although his poems may appear as vain praise for Stella, he is merely using high and noble words to suit her as his subject. But this is really an oblique compliment to his own “perfect” skills as a poet. The absent but implied “My” at the beginning of line 12 is hard to miss:

Wit learnes in thee perfection to expresse,
Not thou by praise, but praise in thee is raise:
It is a praise to praise, when thou art praisde. (12-14)

Astrophil hints in these lines at his earlier claims to follow natural invention by taking Stella into his heart: as she is perfect, so is he the perfect poet for being able to tell her so.

The same conceit wherein Astrophil appropriates perfection is more pronounced in Sonnet 71 as Astrophil observes “Vertue . . . lodg’d” (2) in Stella’s beauty, which is again the typical formula for Astrophil’s inverted Petrarchism. Astrophil has it that Stella is inspired by “Vertue” so that the distinction between her and it is obscured; she is not depicted as a real person who reflects or “figures forth” virtue, she very nearly is Virtue. Consequently Astrophil is unable to distinguish his desire of virtue from his desire for Stella in her physical beauty. According to his “natural philosophy” of love, his desires should be automatically purified by her:

So while thy beautie drawes the heart to love,
As fast thy Vertue bends that love to good: (12-13)

This, however, does not work when Astrophil realizes that his desire will not be so easily managed: “But ah, Desire still cries, give me some food” (14). Astrophil’s plea for some “food” for his desire is a clear denial of the Petrarchan, Neoplatonic ascension of the soul through love (See Kalstone, p. 117ff.), and so is his implicit refusal in Sonnet 72 to banish Desire from himself as Stella has “banisht” (14) it from her. These poems are followed by the *Second Song* where Astrophil steals some food—a kiss from Stella while she is sleeping

(Sonnet 82 uses “cherries” to refer to her kisses). The kiss only increases his frenzied desire for more (a term he repeats often) because, once taken, it becomes yet another abstraction in his poetry. In this manner, Astrophil consistently transfers the objectivity of sense and experience into the subjective domain of his own mind.¹⁵

Rather than following the route prescribed for the “right poet” in the *Defence*, Astrophil does not engage his wit in *mimesis* of the virtuous ideal that Stella represents. He compounds that ideal with his image of her and draws it into himself. By internalizing his idealized image of her (which was never truly an image of Virtue) so he can bend it to his ego and claim it as his source of inspiration, poetic invention, and love, he progressively forces himself into a narcissistic and solipsistic existence where actual, relational love and desire (either spiritual or carnal) cannot exist. By confusing an inferior kind of imitation with inspiration and invention, Astrophil is constantly forced to argue against the truth that he is really not much of a poet, and even less a lover since he has disconnected himself from everything external and has only his own voice go on as a result. If he had translated the *Psalms* into verse form, he would probably choose to eulogize himself by saying that his translation was not really a translation at all but an entirely new inspired work that ought to be accepted as Scripture.

Indeed, if Sidney’s *Defence of Poetry* defines the right poet’s mimetic art as a sub-creative activity analogous to its superior archetype, i.e., divine creativity, then *Astrophil and Stella* appears as an unusual violation of this definition. The *Defence* removes inspired *poiesis* to the unrepeatable past—the inspiration of biblical authors like David and pagan poets

¹⁵Speaking of Sidney’s punning on “art” and “heart” throughout the sonnets, Heather Dubrow remarks that

If the seat of [Stella’s] image is equated with his art, the seemingly stable boundary between deriving inspiration from Stella and from aesthetic strategies collapses; the writer whose *Apology for Poetry* praises Antonius and Crassus for the art that conceals art here conceals “art” within his own heart . . . it implicitly equates ostensibly unmediated personal emotion with the mediations of art and thus also calls into question the stability of the subject . . . poststructuralism could have taught Sidney nothing he did not already know and manifest here about threats to subjectivity. (103-4)

like Orpheus whose respective avocations would be blasphemous and heretical to attempt to repeat or emulate. Yet Astrophil repeatedly claims inspiration and invention for himself as he denies being imitative in any way. By assuming this position, Astrophil cuts himself off from the holistic vision of “all in All” that Donne describes in “Upon the translation.” Astrophil makes himself and the subjectivity of his desire his All which turns out to be the high road to the very narrow dead-end of despair.¹⁶

Underlying Astrophil’s failure to distinguish the true natures and relationships of inspiration, invention, and imitation is a powerful and irrational aspiration to reach well beyond his limited creative capacities. With Stella as the object of his affections and the subject of his poems, he is forced to imitate her in his writing or else alternatively to focus on himself and his own feelings, a choice which inevitably removes his poetry and emotions even further from their source. It is quickly apparent in the sequence that Astrophil simultaneously desires Stella as the embodiment of a poetic ideal and as an ideal love. He cannot have both, but he will not give up either one, so he simply turns inward. His poetry is a means to capturing Stella’s love, but she is also a means to his end of producing that poetry. Desiring both objects at once puts both beyond his reach since they are mutually exclusive and will eventually negate each other. So, although Astrophil’s pursuit of Stella’s love is also his

¹⁶Sidney’s imitation of Petrarch in *Astrophil and Stella* is consistent with the *Defence*; it is Astrophil who is inconsistent by denying the precepts and examples of Sidney and Petrarch. Like Petrarch, Sidney admits a considerable degree of uncertainty about the proper role of the poet in his prose and poetry, but that role was for both men fundamentally an issue of self-control. In the *Defence*, Sidney’s opening declarations of the poet as *vates* (prophet) and *poietes* (maker) describe the role in positive terms that sound like an endorsement of invention:

Only the poet, disdain[ing] to be tied to any such subjection [to which all other disciplines are subjected], lifted up with the vigour of his owne 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, as the heroes, Demigods, Cyclopes, Chimeras, Furies, and such like: so as he goeth hand in hand with Nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiak of his own wit. (78)

But these statements are modified later when Sidney confesses “that as the fertilest ground must be manured, so must the highest-flying wit have a Daedalus to guide him. . . . that is, art, imitation, and exercise” (111-12). Astrophil shuns all guides, and the range of his wit turns out to be painfully short as he sets himself up for his own downfall.

pursuit of producing the poetry that he hopes will bring her to him with its sincerity and beauty, it is also his progressive realization of the impossibility of both ends. He strives to create her presence in his art, an aesthetic presence based so closely on her real absence that the distinction between art and reality disappears from his mind. The paradox Astrophil begins to inhabit puts him into a conspiracy against himself until his own existence becomes paradoxical:

Now I wit-beaten long by hardest Fate,
So dull am, that I cannot looke into
The ground of this fierce *Love* and lovely hate:
Then some good body tell me how I do,
Whose presence, absence, absence presence is;
Blist in my curse, and cursed in my blisse. (60.10-14)

In lines such as these, Astrophil's recognition of the poet-lover's subjectivity and the dilemma it presents him with raises moral and aesthetic questions of far-ranging significance for Sidney. Although his *Defence* is in some ways a response to the English Puritan objections to poetry and is more directly concerned with the charges of vanity and deceit leveled against poets, these moral objections are not far removed from Continental debates about the virtues and vices of the passions of love and their expression in poetry. Careful to subordinate the poet to God by whom the human creative capacity is given, Sidney acknowledges that the poet should be employed "in singing the praises of the immortal beauty: the immortal goodness of that God" (116), and remarks on the poverty of much verse that comes under the banner of "irresistible love" (117). His view of the authors of bad Petrarchan imitations is that they

so coldly apply fiery speeches, as men that had rather read
lovers' writings—and so caught up certain swelling phrases
which hang together, like a man that once told my father that
the wind was at north-west and by south, because he would be
sure to name winds enough—than that in truth they feel those

passions. (117)

In short, the outstanding fault of these poets is that they lack “forcibleness or *energia*” (117).

Sidney then is only speaking against Petrarchan sonnets that are poor imitations of passion and do not exhibit an invention that has sprung from the nature and wit of the true poet. Given this negative criterion, *Astrophil and Stella* is posited as an example of *eikastik* love poetry—“figuring forth good things” (*Defence* 104) ironically by exposing Astrophil’s *phantastik* verse “which doth, contrariwise, infect the fancy with unworthy objects” (*Defence* 104). The sonnets claim original invention of the first sort described in the *Defence*: the ideal which, if it is pursued, produces the poet’s *energia* and the second kind of invention, a skillful imitativeness based on wit and experience. This poetic compromise between the two views of invention is one that Astrophil has a difficult time dealing with. Astrophil is reluctant to forsake the ideal of autonomous inventiveness, and the resulting conflict is portrayed in *Astrophil and Stella* in the moments when the poet-lover’s control over mimetic invention is disrupted by the strength of his desire to capture fully the ideal love in art and in reality. Self-inspiration requires emptying the mind of everything other than the self, and whatever other success he has at this, Astrophil is unable to rid himself of the image of Stella. The image keeps drawing him back to the real woman who is rejecting him rather than the transcendental idea of her or his fantasy of her where she welcomes his advances.¹⁷ Unfortunately for Astrophil, he cannot accept that Stella, in any form, is beyond his reach.

Astrophil sometimes turns to naive innocence and ignorance as a justification for his actions: he is “full of desire, emptie of wit” (80.9). The poetic corollary of this state is *vacatio mentis*, a means of inventive or inspired writing that is nearly automatic or spontaneous in nature. Of the seven types of *vacatio mentis* described by Ficino, the first is sleep, which is signified by Orpheus.¹⁸ Sidney’s sleep-related sonnets are consistent with a Platonic reading of the Orpheus-Eurydice myth where sleep is mythically associated with

¹⁷Yates’ *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1947) 128-29 discusses *vacatio mentis*, which is comparable to the notion of the poet’s ignorance. See also Michael J. B. Allen, “Poetic Madness,” chapter 2 in *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino*.

¹⁸*Platonic Theology* 13.2

death and Platonically with the pre-incarnate soul since the river Lethe emanates from the cave-palace of Somnus, flowing from there down into Hades. (This material appears in Ovid's story of Ceyx and Halcyone in *Metamorphoses* XI following the death of Orpheus). In Sonnet 32 the shade of Stella is approached by Astrophil as a dream from Morpheus in Somnus' quasi-underworld of sleep:

Morpheus the lively sonne of deadly sleepe,
Witnesse of life to them that living die:
A Prophet oft, and oft an historie
A Poet eke, as humours fly or crepe,
Since thou in me so sure a power doest keepe,
That never I with close up sense do lie,
But by thy worke (my *Stella*) I descrie,
Teaching blind eyes both how to smile and weepe. (1-8)

Even while he is asleep, Astrophil asserts that his senses are active and open, which allows him to accept the dream image of Stella as a reality. He has confused and combined in Morpheus the arts of prophecy (vision of truth), history (accounts of particular truths), and poetry (mimetic figuring forth of universal truths) in these lines—arts Sidney carefully set apart from each other in the *Defence*. Believing that Morpheus, a fellow poet, is responsible for his dreams of Stella, Astrophil questions him to find out if he is engaged in imitative or mimetic art when he sends Sidney a dream of Stella. He asks Morpheus about his source material:

Vouchsafe of all acquaintance this to tell,
Whence hast thou Ivorie, Rubies, pearle and gold,
To shew her skin, lips, teeth and head so well? (9-11)

In Morpheus' answer, Astrophil finds confirmation for his own superior powers of self-inspiration—Morpheus is an imitator and has plagiarized Astrophil:

Foole, answers he, no *Indes* such treasures hold,
But from thy heart, while my sire charmeth thee,

Sweet *Stellas* image I do steale to mee. (12-14)

This new configuration of creativity with Astrophil supplanting the deity of sleep parodies divine creativity, but nocturnal repose, death, and echoes of Hades point toward Astrophil's and *Astrophil and Stella's* infernal end. His artistic ego momentarily assuaged, Astrophil soon finds greater problems when the focus turns to the dream-image itself; he will not sleep well again. In Sonnet 38, Stella's image is beyond his power to control, and the idea of verisimilitude is interrogated:

This night while sleepe begins with heavy wings
To hatch mine eyes, and that unbitted thought
Doth fall to stray, and my chiefe powres are brought
To leave the scepter of all subject things.
The first that straight my fancies error brings
Unto my mind, is *Stellas* image, wrought
By *Loves* owne selfe, but with so curious drought,
That she, me thinks, not onely shines but sings.
I start, looke, hearke, but what in closde up sence
Was held, in opend sence it flies away,
Leaving me nought but wailing eloquence:
I seeing better sights in sights decay,
Cald it anew, and wooed sleepe againe:
But him her host that unkind guest had slaine.

The effort to gain conscious, corporeal apprehension of Stella, like Eurydice for Orpheus, negates her existence by showing it to be merely a shadow. This event rudely dispels Astrophil's illusory hope of having Stella. Sidney perhaps is hinting at the cause of the problem with the denotative ambiguities of "unkind"—"unnatural" and "uncompassionate." Stella's image is unnatural as well as uncompassionate, not because it flees Astrophil's wooing (that is quite a natural and traditional response), but because she is not from nature—she is Astrophil's fantasy. Having created this image, it is Astrophil who is in an

unnatural relationship, but he does not call attention to this as he did in Sonnet 32. It is “*Loves owne selfe*” (38.7) that has made Stella this time, rather than the more personal location of Astrophil’s own heart (32.13). Thus sleep, Stella’s image’s “host,” is “slaine” (38.14) rather than Astrophil, but the distinction between sleep and Astrophil as her host is slight. This ambiguity combined with the sexual connotation of “slaine” thinly covers the suggestion of an autoerotic interest in Astrophil as the author of Stella’s image, and it is this implicit analogy between auto-eroticism and auto-inspiration that exposes the egocentrism at the heart of Astrophil’s desires.

In the *Third Song* and Sonnet 36, Stella takes on Orpheus’ and Amphion’s powers over nature which Astrophil has aspired to but never reached. Sonnet 36 ends with an admission of his failure, again in a fitting display of hackneyed verse, since it is only Stella whose art has power over rocks and trees:¹⁹

With so sweete voice, and by sweete Nature so
In sweetest strength, so sweetly skild withall,
In all sweete stratagem, sweete Arte can show,
That not my soule, which at thy foot did fall,
Long since forc’d by thy beams, but stone nor tree
By sences priviledge, can scape from thee. (36.9-14)

The same trope is elaborated on in the *Third Song*:

If *Orpheus* voyce had force to breathe such musickes love
Through pores of senceless tree, as it could make them move:
If stones good measure daunc’d, the *Theban* walles to build,
To cadence of the tunes, which *Amphions* lyre did yeeld,
More cause a like effect at leastwise bringeth:
O stones, o trees, learne hearing, *Stella* singeth. (*Third Song* 1-6)

This admission is as close to a resolution that *Astrophil and Stella* gets and as close as

¹⁹In Sonnet 68 Stella is described as fit to wed Amphion’s lyre. Amphion and Orpheus are cited early in the *narratio* of the *Defence* as examples of the great poets of Greek mythology.

Astrophil comes to telling the truth about his situation, despite his hyperbole. Stella is the truer poet, the maker whom Astrophil can only imitate in a debased fashion that is not true *mimesis*. He cannot represent her as he claims to see her—as a virtuous, noble subject—with an appropriate form because he has rejected all form, and his understanding of virtue is highly suspect. He has knowledge and understanding of virtue perhaps, but he does not practice it. In spite of this glaring Sidnean irony, Astrophil persists in attempting to return to the rhetorical artifice of the first sonnet where complete control seemed within his reach. His last effort in Sonnet 106 is a wish to find and to reclaim Stella just as Orpheus reclaimed Eurydice. As in Orpheus' case, inevitable failure awaits him:

O absent presence, *Stella* is not here;
False flattering hope, that with so faire a face,
Bare me in hand, that in this Orphane place,
Stella I say my *Stella* should appear. (106.1-4)

The other “Orphane” place evoked here is Hades, not Arcadia’s idyllic countryside. Like Orpheus, Astrophil will be surrounded by the possibility of other loves and choose to reject them all:

But heere I do store of faire Ladies meete,
Who may with charme of conversation sweete,
Make in my heavy mould new thoughts to grow:
Sure they prevaile as much with me, as he
That bad his friend but then new maim'd to be
Mery with him, and not thinke of his woe. (106.10-14)

Astrophil’s renunciation of love in these lines is not the kind of renunciation expected at the end of Petrarchan sonnet sequences. His renunciation of all other women only serves to make his monomaniacal obsession with Stella more pronounced. As Orpheus was ruined by a similar dissatisfied, uncathartic renunciation of love after losing Eurydice, Astrophil’s end is also close at hand. In the concluding sonnet, Astrophil resigns himself to a hellish existence in which he remains constantly aware that he has been deprived of Stella, his only light, whom

he still desires. Without her there is no possibility of transcendence so long as she is his sun, and it is his conceit that makes her so:

Ah what doth *Phoebus* gold that wretch availe,
Whom iron doores do keep from use of day?
So strangely (alas) thy works in me prevaile,
That in my woes for thee thou art my joy,
And in my joyes for thee my only annoy. (108.10-14)

Consequently, at the end of the sequence, Astrophil has been seduced by his own rhetoric and trapped in his own frenzy. Sidney does not reveal the means whereby the poet-lover can negotiate the Platonic ladder, but he does create a memorable image of where the poet-lover will be if he does not. Astrophil's words in Sonnet 45 may then be spoken in considerable sincerity to the reader as well as Stella with their significance only realized once the "tragedie" has played itself out:

Then thinke my deare, that you in me do reed
Of lovers ruine some sad Tragedie:
I am not I, pitie the tale in me. (45.12-14)

These lines expose the limits of the conventional, Petrarchan mode of expressing desire as too limited for the lofty purpose of expressing ideal love in the "realistic" way Astrophil had intended. Ideal love cannot be pulled down into the poet's art without taking it, to a greater or lesser extent, down Astrophil's corrupting path at the end of which the subject "I" turns in on itself. Ideals cannot be made realities, simply because they are real only in their own native, ideal context. They are essentially otherworldly, and any effort to get them into this world can only be a temporary masquerade of symbols which may be edifying as sacramental types of sacred truths if they are understood in this way. Masquerades and symbolism are good, delightful, and instructive insofar as they are accepted for what they are, but one should not go on believing in dramatic personae after the play is over, mistaking *mimesis* for *diegesis*. Plato expelled poets from his ideal state to avert this sort of confusion for fear that too many people would lose the capacity to hold the ideal and the real together in their minds,

knowing each for what it is. Astrophil's negative example illustrates what Petrarch had learned himself—the poet-lover must eventually relinquish his authorial and amorous roles which make his will and ego the diegetic focal point of the art of love and the art of poetry rather than a mimetic image of true love or true creativity. To realize these ideals, the poet-lover must transcend the irony of his own existence as a sub-creative maker. He must embrace the limits of his subject and himself as a subject who makes. He must also accept that he is an object who is made by “the heavenly Maker . . . who having made man to his own likeness, set him beyond and above all the works of that second nature . . .” (79). In Donne's poetry the poet-lover's propensity for becoming aware of and accepting his limitations becomes apparent in the use of paradox as well as sacramental imagery and language.

III. “Let mee prepare towards her:” The Outer Limits of Petrarchism

Contrary to the assumptions behind Astrophil’s argument in Sonnet 5—that the throes of passion and good theology can’t mix—it was in fact a fellow poet, who would eventually become a churchman, who explored the possibilities of expressing both ideal and real, earthly and heavenly desire in his poetry by picking up the problems *Astrophil and Stella* defined but inconclusively answered. The poetic and amorous limitations that Astrophil discovers are far less restrictive in John Donne’s *Songs and Sonets* because they are typically admitted as limitations by Donne’s self-consciously Petrarchan speakers. It is no wonder, then, that Donne’s metaphysical conceits appear extremely novel in their forcefulness and extravagance, fusing disparate images and ideas together to skirt the limits of Petrarchism. Nevertheless, Donne’s poetry still struggles with the same Petrarchan irony inherent in images that represent desire, love, or a lover. He is, like Sidney, and even more so, a “meta-Petrarchist.”

Both Sidney and Donne figure Petrarchism as a metaphysical problem: the desiring subject-self, the lover and the poet, stands by his very nature in the way of his own satisfaction and also in the way of a poetic expression of it. Whether he desires or believes he enjoys an ideal love, he is yet a real man living in a world where ideals do not and cannot exist in an unmediated form. On this point, Donne agrees with Sidney and even Petrarch; it is only in his poetic handling of the problem that he diverges significantly.

For Donne, the “metaphysical” conceit offers a unique means to deal with the problem that desire itself, in a human subject, presents a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to its object. Developed by the Italian poets and theorists of the fifteenth century, the conceit was regarded in the sixteenth century as an expression of the correspondence between objects through the principal of universal analogy since a more direct apprehension of things is barricaded by the observing subject (Mazzeo, *Renaissance* 32-3). So, rather than focusing on the impasse between these extremes and all that is associated with them, “[t]he conceit is . . . the harmonic correlation between two or three knowable extremes, the act whereby the understanding discerns the correspondences between things” (Mazzeo, *Renaissance* 32). Thus Donne, like the theorists of the conceit, “did not abandon old issues, but emphasized

metaphor and expression” (Mazzeo, *Renaissance* 42) in new directions anticipated by Sidney’s *Defence*. During the time both men wrote, the theory of art as an imitation of nature was developing into a theory of art as nature modified or elaborated by the wit or *ingegno* of the artist, the binding faculty that produces metaphors and conceits. At the extreme extension of this theory, the poet creates both the object and its representation by finding and joining correspondences:

The poet, in a sense, corrected the defects of nature, a nature which had to be explored and whose objects had to be ‘joined’ to be given conceptual as well as poetic reality. Art was thus an elaboration of experience and not its mere representation. The more passive role assigned to the poet by much of the criticism of the Renaissance and which had theoretically made his personality disappear in the work, was overthrown and the poet emerged in a more active and creative role. The *ingegno* [wit], by means of the conceit, conferred ‘form’ and was the instrument for the creative and poetic exploration of reality. (Mazzeo, *Renaissance* 43.)

Many of the speakers in *Songs and Sonets* tend toward this identification of poetry as an autonomous, inventive force and would end up facing some of the same obstacles that Astrophil encountered, particularly his belief in his image-making and therefore reality-controlling skills as a poet, if they did not make use of an extravagant style that self-consciously exposes the metaphoric and ironic nature of its conceits. For example, in “The Canonization,” “all” undergoes “contraction” (or alchemical extraction) to be placed in the eyes of a woman, a common Petrarchan conceit:

You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage,
Who did the whole world soule contract, and drove
Into the glasses of your eyes
So made such mirrors, and such spies,

That they did all to you epitomize,
Countries, Townes, Courts: Beg from above
A patterne of our love. (39-45)

In an inversion of Platonic thought, the universal and general look down, “begging” to receive the “patterne” (idea or form) of the particular, i.e., the lover’s relationship, rather than the lovers in their particular circumstance finding the pattern of their love in a wider range of generalized items and relationships like “Countries, Townes, Courts.” In spite of Donne’s witty inversion (which Sidney used in Sonnet 25 of *Astrophil and Stella*), the final line is still concerned with the abstract concepts of pattern and form. “A patterne of our love” is highly personalized, but it is still necessarily engaged in love as an idea and an abstraction.

To avoid abstracting love, in “Loves growth” the speaker is careful to justify his adherence to the practice of abstracting love by stating that its “mixt” (9), “elemented” (16) nature allows it to be expanded as well as contracted without a loss of integrity:

But if this medicine, love, which cures all sorrow
With more, not onely bee no quintessence,
But mixt of all stuffes, paining soule, or sense,
And of the Sunne his working vigour borrow,
Love’s not so pure, and abstract, as they use
To say, which have no Mistresse but their Muse,
But as all else, being elemented too,
Love sometimes would contemplate, sometimes do. (7-14)

The speaker further qualifies his abstraction of love through metaphoric language by stating that this act does not make love itself “greater, but more eminent” (15). Thus love can be safely compared to spring, even though this conceit is so common to be nearly a cliché, because the season literally and figuratively does in fact induce a revelation of love’s growth. This said, Donne can move on to his elaborate conceits, comparing the growth of love to stars, blossoms on a tree, ripples in water, and taxation, of all things:

Love by the Spring is growne;

As, in the firmament,
Starres by the Sunne are not inlarg'd but showne,
Gentle love deeds, as blossomes on a bough,
From loves awakened root do bud out now.
If, as in water stir'd more circle bee
Produc'd by one, love such additions take,
Those like so many spheares, but one heaven make. . . . (16-23)

At this point Donne reaches his apogee and turns inward again. Love still remains a singular, unique reality to be expressed in the most immediate, concrete terms which constitute the center around which all else circles—the lover whom the speaker has been addressing:

For, they are all concentrique unto thee,
And though each spring doe adde to love new heate,
As princes doe in times of action get
New taxes, and remit them not in peace,
No winter shall abate the springs encrease. (24-28)

The poem closes by suspending the abstract and the concrete, the real and the ideal in a unitary relationship without the intense focus on the tenor of Donne's metaphors, i.e., mutual love, as in "The Canonization." In fact, the last four lines speak of love wholly in terms of its vehicle—taxation and the seasons. Thus Donne starts from a particular circumstance, draws in a great deal of specialized thought and learning while constantly linking it all to his starting point, and ends where he began—with particular, concrete images of the state of love in the relationship he is describing.

Many critics have attempted to fit Donne's *Songs and Sonets* into Petrarchan and anti-Petrarchan categories.²⁰ This, however, seems overly reductive since, as I have shown, and as Roche and Guss argue, the "elegant, idyllic, and sentimental" (Guss, 18) form of

²⁰Using the earlier divisions of Grierson and Gardner, Arthur Clements divides the *Songs and Sonets* into three groups expressive of (1) inconstancy, false or incomplete love, anti-Petrarchism, (2) faithful or true love, usually both physical and spiritual, and (3) Platonic love (in the sense that they express love apart from sex) with Petrarchan elements. A large fourth group of "uncertain" poems is also added. See also J. B. Leishman, *The Monarch of Wit*, 174-5.

Petrarchism is denounced by writers like Sidney who still remain within the genre. Similarly, Donne is able to find a unique and viable means of poetic expression within the general parameters of Petrarchan verse which are too often improperly identified as naive (Guss, 16). Theodore Redpath groups the *Songs and Sonets* of Grierson's canon into two broadly generalized thematic groups that help to organize the great variety of their attitudes toward love. Since the ontological and aesthetic facets of the metaphysics of love are the fundamental concern of the post-Petrarchan love lyricist, Donne's attitudes toward them are best observed by attending to the speakers of his poems. According to Redpath, among the poems of *Songs and Sonets* there are "(1) those in which the predominating attitude is *negative* and (2) those in which it is *positive*" (xxiii). The first group, comprising eighteen poems or one third of *Songs and Sonets*, expresses hostility toward love, women, or a particular woman, person, or thing, and the second group

expresses some buoyant outlook upon love or woman, or in which [the speaker] courts or praises some woman, or deals sympathetically with the growth of love, or expresses satisfaction with a love which appears settled for some time at least, or fear lest that valued love should cease or the loved person be lost through death, or in which the overall attitude is, in general, one of love, liking, approval, or something similar, towards anyone or anything. (xxiv)

In both of these groups, Donne defies stereotypical Petrarchan conventions. However, avoiding the influence of Petrarch is difficult for Donne to do since his poems often retain the problematic premises that led to those conventions (e.g., the inferiority of the body, earthly love, etc.), and so they often begin in explicit or implicit philosophical arguments.

Two poems escape Redpath's "positive" and "negative" groups—"Negative Love" and "The Paradox." These are usually regarded as problematic anomalies within the *Songs and Sonets* by any categorization of the poems. Both balance the negative and positive aspects of love, showing how Donne eludes the Petrarchan tendency to see love and desire in terms

of complete satisfaction or complete dissatisfaction that Astrophil is unable to escape. Taking these two as a key to the others, it is difficult to regard any of the *Songs and Sonets* as simply Platonic or anti-Platonic, Petrarchan or anti-Petrarchan.

Donne's "Negative Love" (or "The Nothing") from *Songs and Sonets* illustrates the paradox in his *Paradoxes and Problems* "that by discord things increase" (19-21). The poem expresses the same situation that Astrophil laments in Sonnet 108, but through a mirror image whereby everything is reversed. As Astrophil finds that his pursuit of the positive perfections, whether they are physical or spiritual, is really the way down the ladder of love. Admiring virtue and praying upon love becomes committing vice and preying upon Stella. Donne, however, points out that the *via negativa*, the way down, or away from love, is the only way up and towards love:

I never stoop'd so low, as they
Which on an eye, cheeke, lip, can prey,
Seldom to them, which soare no higher
Then vertue or the minde to' admire,
For sense, and understanding may
Know, what gives fuell to their fire:
My love, though silly, is more brave,
For²¹ may I misse, when ere I crave,
If I know yet, what I would have. (1-9)

What Sidney exposes as the various sources of Astrophil's Petrarchan obsession with Stella, her "eye, cheeke, lip," her "vertue," or her "minde" are exactly what Donne's speaker avoids because they foster a kind of desire which precludes gaining *both* a sensual and rational apprehension of love. Even if the Platonic appreciation of "vertue" and "minde" is achieved, this is only grasping half of love. Its "fuell," like Astrophil's desired food, remains out of reach.

The poem explains the speaker's "silly" (plain) and simple "negative love" in the

²¹"For: 'Both' (acc. To some MSS)" (Patrides, 63n5).

second stanza:

If that be simply perfectest
Which can by no way be exprest
 But *Negatives*, my love is so.
 To All, which all love, I say no.
If any who deciphers best,
 What we know not, our selves, can know,
Let him teach mee that nothing; This
As yet my ease, and comfort is,
 Though I speed not, I cannot misse. (10-18)

“Negative Love” declines “the positive perfections, which are what everybody loves” (Redpath, 119), observing the basic tenets of the truth that Sidney wishes to convey through *Astrophil and Stella* and *A Defence of Poetry*: the Socratean maxim of “know thyself” is paradoxically juxtaposed with the insistent declaration that one knows nothing. But unlike *Astrophil*, Donne’s speaker wants “nothing,” a desire that creates a paradox: the object of desire must be something, a positive object, but here that object is simultaneously created and negated as “nothing.”

For both Sidney and Donne, positive objects of desire present a barrier to desire’s satisfaction since the Other-as-object is constructed out of need and self-interest by the fallen, infected will of the subject. Both poets recognize the theological and poetic corollaries of this lover’s dilemma which is the immediate context for *Astrophil and Stella* and *Songs and Sonets*. Even Adam in unfallen first nature, Donne states in the *Sermons*, declined to name himself of all God’s creatures because “he understood himselfe lesse then he did other creatures” (9.11.256). Self-knowledge is blocked by the very existence of the knowing subject, a condition exacerbated into a state of alienation by Adam’s Fall after which understanding of other creatures was eliminated. Consequently Sidney and Donne figure the condition of postlapsarian man as one in which all pursuits (knowledge, love, poetic creation, etc.) as desire must be turned inward through the negation (*via negativa*) of desire and the

conformity of the complete will (body, mind, and soul) with Divine Will. For Sidney and Donne this is a mimetic process of a negative kind, and they both figure David as its greatest exponent, a poet-lover whose erected wit exemplifies the highest communion man may have with God and all creation since Adam.²² The right poet, whom David typifies, turns inward and simultaneously away from himself toward a love that can encompass the earthly and the heavenly so long as the two are held as related but distinct forms of love. This process involves neither attachment through desire to what is mutable and corruptible, nor a complete ascetic detachment from the physical, sensual world. For Sidney and Donne the negative way of *mimesis* as *architektonike* is political since it pursues knowledge of the judicious, right relation of things, but it only accomplishes this insofar as it is completely personal. As it detaches the political concern from self-concern in order to discover the true self, its fruit is the proper attachment of the one and the many, the microcosm with the macrocosm, in complete concord through the purification of wit, memory, judgment, and conceit (*Defence* 82).

In this way love as positive desire is balanced by its opposite, “negative love.” Donne often complements this antithesis by creating an analogous antithesis between life and death, by which positive desire corresponds to life and negative desire corresponds to death. Each resembles its opposite, and their total unity is required for their completion, or full meaning. It is in the search for this resolution—the exposure of the essential unity—of such extreme contraries that Donne’s poetry finds its most profound conceptual designs, e.g., “A Nocturnall.” The life-death paradox is *the* paradox for Donne, as he shows in his poem “The Paradox,” which takes the ideas behind “Negative Love” much farther:

No Lover saith, I love, nor any other
Can judge a perfect Lover;
Hee thinks that else none can or will agree,
That any loves but hee:
I cannot say I lov’d, for who can say

²²See Donne’s *Sermons* 2.1.49-71 and Sidney, *Defence* p. 77.

Hee was kill'd yesterday. (1-6)

As in "Negative Love," Donne summarizes the Petrarchan dilemma in his first four lines. Here his focus is on the utter subjectivity of love which prevents the possibility of the lover's communicating its present reality in his own experience. In line five, the speaker points out that one cannot even assert the existence of a positive state of love by looking back on its fixed existence in the past. No one can say that he has loved if he is not in love now, and if he is not in love now then he had either a less than perfect love or no love at all in the past. Perfect love, like death, totally engulfs the subject and the object; its victims cannot escape from it to explain it—unless they come to us as a ghost (e.g., "A Nocturnall").

In the next lines, Donne establishes a triple analogy whereby love, youth, and heat are opposed to the absence of love, old age, and cold. Each of these states leads to death: "Love with excesse of heat, more yong than old, / Death kills with too much cold" (7-8). Because death equalizes all these states as their common, unifying end, the speaker concludes that since "Wee dye but once, and who lov'd last did die, / Hee that saith twice, doth lye" (9-10). Anything resembling life in someone who has died in love is merely an illusion; it is like the dying but still lingering light in the evening after sunset or the slowly waning heat of a dead fire:

For though hee seeme to move, and stirre a while,
It doth the sense beguile.
Such life is like the light which bideth yet
When the lifes light is set,
Or like the heat, which fire in solid matter
Leaves behinde, two houres after. (11-16)

The previous lines bring the speaker to the inevitable conclusion about himself:

Once I lov'd and dyed; and am now become
Mine Epitaph and Tombe.
Here dead men speake their last, and so do I;
Love-slaine, loe, here I dye. (17-20)

The only way to speak at all about love is through death; poet and poem become a tomb and an epitaph. This negative approach to developing conceits that operate through paradox and antithesis is fundamentally metaphysical in the broadest sense. Detached and indifferent to self and other, it envisions the harmony and reconciliation of the most discordant opposites.

Indifference also contributes to the “negative” group of *Songs and Sonets*. As Redpath notes, throughout most of the negative group, hostility is diffused through Donne’s humor, wit, and irony, and his conceits perform as a positive countermeasure to his negative subject-matter. This is certainly true of the paradoxical imagery of “Song (Goe, and catche a falling starre)” and the blatantly anti-Petrarchan alchemical metaphors of “Love’s Alchymie” since after an elaboration of conceits in these poems, Donne’s closing attacks on women are anticlimactic. There is also progress in the negative group toward a positive tone and positive content since in “Womans Constancy” the speaker forcefully detaches or disassociates himself from the relationship being described, and this detachment makes the poem border on the positive group as neither the woman nor the relationship is the sole target for criticism (xxvi). There are probably far fewer of the negative poems than those of a positive nature since the theme of hostility, although diversely handled by Donne, is limited in range and threatens to become redundant and negative purely for the sake of being negative. Open hostility toward love also dodges the real challenge of anti-Petrarchism: finding a way to express an ideal love in realistic terms without the frenzy and artifice of Astrophil or Petrarch’s entire renunciation of earthly love.

Donne’s poetry definitely refuses to be read as simply idealistic, however. The majority of the poems that fall into the positive group are not simply positive expressions of consummate love; some deal with as yet unfulfilled desire, others are threatened by parting or death, and the most satisfied express anxiety toward the permanence of a satisfying love. Donne is unwilling to be merely positive or negative--there is motion in both directions. The Petrarchist’s complaints and satisfactions undermine each other, as *Astrophil and Stella* shows so well, because they present love in only these two mutually exclusive conditions: unsatisfied or satisfied love. Donne breaks away from the Petrarchan mode most successfully

when he defeats its oppositional, dualistic design by presenting love as a paradoxical unity of both conditions. Focusing on the spirit as the uniting principle of the body and soul was Donne's means of rising to the challenge of the traditional, neoclassical Petrarchan mode's limitations.

In the first subcategory of the positive group, by Redpath's definition, Donne attempts to escape the dejected Petrarchan resentment of unrequited love by undermining the Petrarchan poet's assumptions about constancy in love. Perfect love must be constant, and ironically it is often a woman's constancy to someone other than the Petrarchan poet-lover that keeps her from him, but he will nevertheless go on being constant in his unrequited love for her. Donne circumvents this whole situation with an "anti-complaint" (Ferry, 237) in "The Indifferent," where the speaker tells us that he is content with and prefers his own inconstancy as well as that of the woman he is addressing: "I can love her, and her, and you and you, / I can love any, so she be not true" (8-9). This non-hostile, indifferent attitude of acceptance toward inconstancy is countered by "Womans Constancy" where the speaker claims that he/she "could / Dispute, and conquer, if I would," (14-15) his/her lover's arguments justifying infidelity, but the speaker will "abstaine to doe" (16) this, since they can more easily threaten to be unfaithful as well. However, the previous thirteen lines of "Womans Constancy" protest and argue too much against inconstancy to take the speaker's threat as seriously as that expressed in "The Indifferent," and they do build up an accusatory tone toward the person they address. The ambiguity of the speaker's gender in "Womans Constancy" supports Coleridge's idea that the poem should be called "Mutual Inconstancy." The male voice is unusually equalized with the female in a glimpse of "the poems of mutual love [which] ascribe subjectivity, independent ideas and desires, and effective agency to a woman who is not a passive object either of sexual desire or of adoration" (Slights, 79). This equality is far less present in Sidney's Stella although she is given a more direct voice on the few occasions she appears than any of Donne's female voices. Additionally, the speaker's threatened inconstancy in "The Indifferent" is expressed in the subjunctive, as it is in "Woman's Constancy," indicating in both cases that it is still a potential and not yet a reality for the

speaker, male or female. It is the psychology of both fidelity and infidelity that is being examined here, and not promiscuous behavior or misogynistic arguments, as Achsah Guibbory suggests (204).

Similarly, it is not just a state of desire or satisfied love that the other poems of the positive group attempt to express, but rather their psychological character. Redpath recognizes twelve “courting poems” in the positive group where to a greater or lesser degree, depending upon the individual poem, Donne’s conceits and casuistic arguments are made in an attempt to stir the physical affections of the woman the speaker is addressing. As in the negative group, by concentrating the sense of his arguments in the imagery of his conceits, Donne creates a neutral set of objects to represent desire analogically rather than focusing on the woman or the speaker’s internal feelings. Donne finds a variety of figures in “Air and Angels,” “The Dream,” “The Token,” and others to represent analogically male and female union in a highly physical, concrete way; but the abstract correspondence between concrete images in his analogies makes them simultaneously spiritualized, and the unity between the two sides of human existence is quietly emphasized in a way quite alien to Petrarchan poetry. As Achsah Guibbory writes, Donne expresses love in sacramental terms; it “is committed, exclusive, and as permanent as possible in a mutable, contingent world” (205).

Toward this end, Donne’s *Songs and Sonets* show a consistently oblique treatment of love, even in a poem as direct and explicit as “The Flea.” Rather than representing the union of the finite and the infinite as a completely realizeable, continuous state of self-perfected man, Donne facetiously shows it as a fleeting, sacramental foretaste of the life to come; even the visceral image of a flea in which a couple’s “two bloods mingled be” (4) contains a high seriousness in its relationship by analogy to marriage as a sacramental union with earthly and heavenly counterparts. The ingenious combination and mingling or joining of the two extremes of man and woman, lover and beloved, subject and object are united here in a short, dramatic moment where a synthesis and harmony (albeit one that is provisional and short-lived) is achieved. The idea of the couple’s “marriage” may be an illusory product of the speaker’s conceit, but it is strongly fused in the concrete physicality of the flea in a way

that is unlike anything Astrophil ever accomplishes, no matter how much he revels in the kiss he has gotten from Stella. (In fact, the more Astrophil revels in it, the more he internalizes and abstracts it until it disappears inside his mind as yet another conceit for his sonnets.) The flea's consecration weighs more substantially; it is a sign with a significance that remains even after it is crushed and the poem ends.

The image of the flea is "consecrated" in that it is made to capture the idea and reality of love's consummation, suggesting that it has already occurred and exists once the correspondence between the flea and the lovers has been pointed out:

And in this flea, our two bloods mingled bee; (4)
.....
Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where wee almost, yea more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our mariage bed, and mariage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,
And cloystered in these living walls of Jet. (10-15)

Donne's fusion of multiple levels of abstract meaning in concrete imagery overcomes the traditional duality of the Petrarchan lyric in its recreation and representation of sexual love in Eucharistic terms. As M. Thomas Hester explains, Donne's use of "this," "that," "temple," and "mingle" are

The most outrageous, the wittiest, and the most thorough application of the terms of the "currant" debate in which Catholics asserted the "mysteries" of divine love were to be read not only in the "booke" of Scripture but also in the "honor" of sexual intercourse in "The Flea." (377)

A similar pattern of sexual and theological innuendo is repeated in "The Exstasie."

"The Exstasie" can be read as part of the courting group if it is taken as a poem about sexual frustration, as Harold Skulsky has suggested, or "as an attempt to convince [the] lady

of the advisability of ‘going to bodies’ by suggesting that she already sees the wisdom of doing so” (Redpath, xxvi). On the other hand, Guibbory’s compelling reading of sacramental imagery in “The Exstasie” places it in the group that is expressive of an existing, satisfied relationship:

in the experience of sexual love “soule into soule may flow”
by “repaire[ing] to the “body” (59-60), Donne presents sexual intercourse as analagous to the sacrament as he echoes the Catholic understanding that Christ mingles with the individual human soul when the bread and wine are taken into the body of the communicant. The implication of Donne’s language is that through sexual intercourse his lovers may apprehend divinity and touch the spirit (205-06).

It seems most plausible that Donne is pursuing an explanation of “the nature of humans as a union of soul and body” (Clements, 41) since there is no indication in the poem’s conceits that the unity being described is primarily a matter of rhetorical artifice aimed at seduction, as in “The Flea.” The lovers’ stillness, “like sepulchrall statues” (18), posits an image of constant fixity, like death, which lasts “all the day” (20). Time is not mentioned again until the end of the poem where the reader is projected forward to the lovers’ dying day and beyond—a time which will show “small change” (76) in their relationship.²³ But even there, as at the beginning of the poem, the active agent between them is love, which acts as the purifying, joining spirit infusing and “interanimate[ing]” (42) both souls in one “new soule” (45). Even without being aware of symbolism behind the accompanying violet analogy in lines 37-40

²³Ovid’s influence on Donne’s elegies has commonly been cited, and there may also be Ovidian elements in “The Exstasie.” The “entergrafted” lives of the lovers in this poem seems so complete that the implication is that they will leave their bodies, i.e., die, simultaneously and yet remain as an earthly monument to their love. This idea parallels Ovid’s account of Baucis and Philemon in *Metamorphoses* 8 who were allowed by the gods to die simultaneously and be transformed into oak and linden trees standing so closely together than they became one tree. Achelous’ statement to Theseus at the end of the story, “O bravest hero, there are many people whose form has once been changed, who now remain in their new state. . .” lends itself to a Christian allegorical interpretation based on *I Corinthians 15*, a text that “the Exstasie” also evokes.

(which is humility, especially that of Christ incarnate²⁴), the poem connects Love with the *pneuma*, the new man or last Adam (Clements, 27). Lines 61-68 “are an extended analogy using the idea of spirits as a *tertium quid* bonding body and soul, spirits being the vapors produced by the blood to form a link between body and soul” (Clements, 41):

As our blood labours to beget
Spirits, as like soules as it can,
Because such fingers need to knit
That subtile knot, which makes us man:
So must pure lovers’ souls descend
T’affections, and to faculties,
Which sense may reach and apprehend,
Else a great Prince in a prison lies.

The endurance of love is assured in the closing lines by having moved from the body to the soul through the action of the spirit, but the body is returned to as the necessary point of departure, now necessary for others still in bodies to see and learn from:

To’ our bodies turn we then, that so
Weak men on love reveal’d may looke;
Loves mysteries in soules doe grow,
But yet the body is his booke.
And if some lover, such as wee,
Have heard this dialogue of one,
Let him still marke us, he shall see
Small change, when we’are to bodies gone. (70-76)

As in “The Flea,” Donne includes more oblique references to the Eucharist here which solidify its incarnational orientation:

After [the poem’s] reliance throughout on Catholic symbology
and its saucy defense of sexuality as analogous to the

²⁴George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966) 40.

Incarnation (as Christ's "descent to affections" [65-66]), the lover finds his plea for the physical Incarnation of their spiritual love on a reformulation of the contemporary doctrine formulae. The Protestant emphasis on the Book of Mystery, the Bible, is turned into an ironic support for his incarnational, "Roman" view of love in his rephrased analogy [lines 70-71] the "Protestant" auditor [is] characterized as a voyeur--a frequent quip by Catholic polemicists about the Reformers as mere onlookers to a supper in which nothing occurs--but that "lover" (even though "grown all mind") is also sarcastically dismissed as incapable of understanding these lovers once again, for "Small change" is English for the precise term that Catholic apologists such as Cardinal Bellarmine and Father Wright use in their contemporary explanations of the presence of Christ's body in the Eucharist. (Hester, 376-77)

In keeping with his incarnational imagery, and the poem's preoccupation with the meeting of the infinite in the finite, two souls and two bodies becoming one being, Donne uses a narrative past tense, and the verbs themselves indicate "states of being rather than dynamic action: 'sat,' 'were cimented,' 'was,' 'were gone out,' 'hung,' 'lay,' 'were.' They slow physical activity and temporal progression to a halt and support the notion of a near-timeless ecstasy" (Marotti, 147). This slight distancing effect is unusual for Donne; as Anthony Low suggests, it shows meditation from the outside, rather than as a present occurrence in the speaker (109). The view from outside actually leads us to read the poem in a more personal way similar to the speaker's reading of himself and his lover—we are the intelligences, they the spheres.

Another instance of "meditation from the outside" is "A nocturnal upon S. Lucies day, Being the shortest day" where the speaker meditates on love in life and in death from a position that is neither in love, nor in life, nor in death. Donne binds astrological, alchemical,

and theological imagery into paradoxical conceits expressive of the whole range of love experienced throughout the speaker's life. Consistent with the conclusion of "The Paradox," the speaker, having lost his love through death, is an epitaph--more dead than the time and place he speaks from: "the yeares midnight, and . . . the dayes" (1). The conditions are like those of the first act in *Hamlet*--we are addressed by a spectral being of an uncertain nature. In the play, Horatio notes the affinity of ghosts for darkness, and that at the first sign of dawn, "Th' extravagant and erring spirit hies / To his confine" (I.i.154-55). But Donne's speaker exists in the pre-dawn hours of the Christian year, the season of advent, a time when "no spirit dare stir abroad, / The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike, / No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm, / So hallow'd and so gracious is the time" (*Hamlet* I.i.161-64). The apparition is ghostlike, without life, possessing neither form, nor soul, nor body. Like the ghost of Hamlet's father, Donne's speaker is the incarnation of irony--a talking enigma. Yet, as in *Hamlet*, there is a strange authority in the demeanor of this apparition. If he is what he claims and seems to be, then here is a speaker who can truly say something about the nature of love, or at least earthly love, in its totality. Saying, however, is not the action to which Donne calls attention. In a state of being from which time has retracted, leaving him timeless, the speaker can only be studied, not heard, for like Yeats' "monuments of unageing intellect," he is a document, an epitaph of all appearances of death (cf. "Valediction of the booke"):

Tis the yeares midnight, and it is the days,
Lucies, who is scarce seaven houres herself unmaskes,
 The Sunne is spent, and now his flasks
 Send forth light squibs, no constant rays;
 The worlds whole sap is sunke:
 The general balme th'hydroptique earth hath drunk,
 Whither, as to the beds-feet life is shrunke,
 Dead and enterr'd, yet all these seeme to laugh,
 Compar'd with mee, who am their Epitaph.

Study me then, you who shall lovers bee
At the next world, that is, at the next Spring:
For I am every dead thing,
In whom love wrought new Alchimie.
For his art did expresse
A quintessence even from nothingnesse,
From dull privations, and lean emptinesse
He ruin'd mee, and I am re-begot
Of absence, darknesse, death; things which are not. (1-18)

His story reveals that Love, here fused with Christ in alchemical terms (cf. “Resurrection, imperfect”), reduced him to nothing, and “re-begot / [him] Of absence, darknesse, death; things which are not” (17-18)—an inversion of St. Paul’s account of the bodily resurrection in I *Corinthians* 15. Instead of a new, bodily life harmonizing with the soul through the spirit’s purification, all that is now negated in a gesture that allows Donne to upset conventional, Platonic conceptions of the new life. From this vantage point, Donne’s speaker turns to consider his past life and love:

All others, from all things, draw all that’s good,
Life, soule, forme, spirit, whence they beeing have,
I, by loves limbecke, am the grave
Of all, that’s nothing. Oft a flood
Have wee two wept, and so
Drowned the whole world, us two; oft did we grow
To be two Chaosses, when we did show
Care to ought else; and often absences
Withdrew our soules, and made us carcasses.

But I am by her death, (which word wrongs her)
Of the first nothing, the Elixer grown;

Were I a man, that I were one,
I needs must know, I should preferre,
If I were any beast,
Some ends, some means; Yea plants, yea stones detest,
And love, all, all some properties invest,
If I an ordinary nothing were,
As shadow, a light, and body must be here. (19-36)

In line 28, despite his claims in the previous stanza, the speaker is not in any real, physical state of death; the artifice of the conceit aims at emphasizing his response to the death of “her.” After her death, the speaker claims he has become the quintessence of the universe’s uncreated form, a Nothing whose positive absence or negative presence is like a void unfilled by intervening shadow, light, or matter. By describing himself this way, Guss argues that Donne’s speaker

reveals that the lovers were a complete world, and each other’s soul (1-6). Thus, with dramatic appropriateness, as he thinks of his dead lady he remembers how much they meant to each other. Furthermore, he compares his past to his present state. With a bitter-sweet emotion, he remembers the sorrows of love: absence, weeping, and caring for other things. The sorrows were drownings and deaths to the united lovers. But this is far worse, more absolute: it has left Donne numb, naked of desire and hope. (102-03)

To make such a statement, Guss has to step outside the poem and the speaker’s conceit. If, on the other hand, the reader provisionally accepts the validity of the conceit and suspends disbelief, then the speaker is seen to submit himself as an object of the forces of Time. He is not a subject who defines other things in relation to himself. He presents a scenario wherein he and his lover were only as complete as life, soul, form, and spirit allowed; there is no sign of the speaker’s preference for that past over the present state of Nothing. His eye is on the

future again: the next world, the next spring. And so he prepares “towards her” (43) in devotion as to a saint, and also toward a reunion with her which will be his own advent:

But I am None; nor will my Sunne renew.
You lovers, for whose sake, the lesser Sunne
At this time to the Goat is runne
To fetch new lust, and give it you,
Enjoy your summer all,
Since shee enjoyes her long nights festivall,
Let mee prepare towards her, and let mee call
This houre her Vigill, and her eve, since this
Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is. (36-45)

Louis Martz sees the anticipation of reunion in these lines as an example of Donne’s religious sentiment overwhelming any residual Petrarchan elements (215-16), while Guss takes it, alternatively, for “sentimental extravagance” (103). It is in fact extravagant devotion, extravagant in its telling and aesthetic rendering as poetry, but nevertheless compellingly sincere, at once overwhelmingly Petrarchan and far beyond anything the genre traditionally offered in English poetry. What might be read as morbid asceticism is counterbalanced by the speaker’s words to earthly lovers and his real connection with the spring and summer of his own life. He is only following through to the unstated but implicit corollary of the negative rebirth being described; that is, the positive rebirth of the resurrection of the body. As Donne explains this is his funeral sermon for Lady Danvers, man compared to God is nothing:

Creatures of an inferior nature are possesst with the *present*;
Man is a *future Creature*. In a holy and usefull sense, wee
may say, that *God is a future God*; to man especially hee is so;
Mans consideration of *God* is specially for the *future*. . . . If
we bee compar’d with *God*, our *Being* with his *Being*, we
have no *Being* at all wee are *Nothing*. . . . (8.2.75-6)

However, man in his fallen, earthly (and earthy) bodily life can still point, through the irony

of his injured image, toward the perfected, heavenly life:

That *body* that was eyes to the blinde, and hands, and feet to the lame, whilst it liv'd, and being dead, is so still, by having beene so *lively* an example, to teach others, to be so, That *body* at last shall have her last expectation satisfied, and dwell *bodily*, with that *Righteousness*, in these *new Heavens*, and *new Earth*, for *ever*, and *ever*, and *ever*, and *infinite*, and *super-infinite evers*. (8.2.92)

A recurrent theme and source of Donne's conceits in the *Songs and Sonets* is inconstancy or dissatisfaction with various forms of desire. Where constancy or satisfaction is expressed, there is always the threat of dissolution by internal or external, natural or human forces. These poems attempt to unify and to express the tensions between being and becoming through contrary themes of constancy and inconstancy, attachment and detachment, parting and union, life and death. In accordance with the negative theology behind Donne's idea of "negative love," the poems in *Songs and Sonets* serve mainly to acknowledge the often discordant ontological and aesthetic bases that Donne recognized, as did Sidney, in the continual process of knowing, doing, and saying through a denial and renunciation of desire as a self-concerned pursuit. The final end to this process is to represent accurately the ideal (but not idealized) vision of the divine consideration and the reconciliation of that vision with one's material, earthly condition.

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