observed in relation to function. The subject function is slightly above 50% of the total in the *Poems*. This is nevertheless restrained by the higher frequency of **WH** in the most complex functions (genitive and adverbial). In relation to the third criterion, a slightly higher complexity might be noticed as well in the *Poems*, in which non-restrictive clauses outnumber in more than 13 points the constructions of this type registered for the *Letters*.

In conclusion, it seems more adequate that in the future the distribution of relative forms should be studied paying attention to register in more detail and in such a way that the linguistic criteria for the selection of each form of this syntactic variable could be examined objectively. Even though the choice of specific items of a variable on the part of speakers/writers might be unconscious, this does not mean that they are isolated, but they are part of an ampler movement in the evolution of the language that takes place as a result of a gradual and cumulative drift. In this sense, the dimensions proposed by Biber and Finegan (1989), for example, with which they try to offer a wider perspective on the evolution of English written styles, deserve being correlated with the use of the different relatives, if less impressionistic and more reliable conclusions are to be obtained as a useful tool for the interpretation of contextual meaning, on the one hand, and for the disclosure of the possible direction of linguistic change in a more general framework.

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"I AM NOT I, PITIE THE TALE OF ME": READING AND WRITING (IN) *ASTROPHIL AND STELLA*

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Twentieth-century criticism on Sidney, and particularly on *Astrophil and Stella*, has mainly emphasized the rhetorical elements and the important debt with the Petrarchan tradition present in his poems. Seminal studies in this field published in the fifties and sixties proved the large extent to which Sidney was not merely or primarily expressing his life in this sonnet sequence. I cannot mention all of them, of course, but I wish to recall, at least, Richard B. Young's long essay "English Petrarke: A Study of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*" (1958), which insisted so much on the presence of the opposition between Art and Nature[1], and the chapter on Sidney in J.W. Lever's essential book *The Elizabethan Love Sonnet* (1956)[2], that also traced the Petrarchan heritage in the poems. In the sixties the scholarly production on this line was really impressive; we started then to talk about *persona*, plot, structure, and dramatic conflict in this sequence due to several books of excellence, such as Robert L. Montgomery Jr. in 1961 (*Symmetry and Sense*), David Kalstone in 1965 (*Sidney's Poetry: Contexts and Interpretation*) and Neil L. Rudenstein in 1967 (*Sidney's Poetic Development*)[3]. These books were accompanied by essays which broke new ground in the field: in 1960 Jack Stillinger showed how difficult and unsound it was to interpret the sonnet sequence as the biographical expression of Sir Philip Sidney[4]; and throughout the decade more studies continued the anti-biographical vein, culminating –so to speak– with three essays published in

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1 Richard B. Young, "English Petrarke: A Study of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*", in *Three Studies in the Renaissance: Sidney, Jonson, Milton*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1958 (reprinted by Archon Books, 1969).

2 J.W. Lever, *The Elizabethan Love Sonnet*, Methuen, London, 1966.

3 Robert L. Montgomery, *Symmetry and Sense: The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney*, University of Texas, Austin, 1961; David Kalstone, *Sidney's Poetry: Contexts and Interpretations*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1965; and Neil L. Rudenstein, *Sidney's Poetic Development*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1967.

4 Jack Stillinger, "The Biographical Problem of *Astrophel and Stella*, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, LIX (1960), pp. 617-639.

1969: one by A.C. Hamilton[5], a second one by Leonora Leet Brodwin[6], both of which dealt with the tripartite division of the sequence; and the third one by B.P. Harfst[7], which defended a seven-part division on the basis of the structure of the *Apologie for Poetrie*.

Naturally, this tendency goes back in time to the end of the nineteenth century, when the biographical bias was being turned over to studies in literary tradition. The pioneering essay by Emil Koeppel in 1890, or Sidney Lee's work in 1904[8], helped decisively in creating a new atmosphere more akin to textual studies, which has steadily developed from Kenneth Myrick's book *Sir Philip Sidney as a Literary Craftsman* (1935) onwards[9]. The evolution of literary theory after the Second World War, and particularly in the last twenty-five years, has not been alien to this and has obviously exerted a great influence on the way Sidney has been read and interpreted, introducing new approaches.

During the seventies we had, certainly, important studies in formalist criticism; critics like Ernst Häublein, Frank J. Fabry, Derek Attridge and William Cherubini dealt with rhetorics and metrics[10]; Ruth Stevenson and Andrew Weiner continued the discussion on the structure of the sequence[11]; Richard A. Lanham and Leonard Barkan studied rhetorical devices and metaphors[12], and some others, in short, tried to shed light on many formal details of the sequence, either on the language of *double entendre* used by Sidney to talk about love and passion, as Alan Sinfield showed in his article "Sexual Puns in *Astrophil and Stella*", or on the poems in praise of the kiss, as James Finn Cotter did in 1970-71, etc.[13]

But we cannot forget that this was also the period when scholars tended to pay more attention to Sidney's ideology: both to his Protestant ethos and to his Platonism. Just a couple of names such as those of Alan Sinfield and Gary F. Waller, early in the seventies, must be enough for those familiar with Sidney criticism[14]. This new preoccupation, exemplified here with Sidney, is –as we know– a mere reflection of that "preparation of the way" for the fascinating explosion of studies on the ideology of the Renaissance in the eighties. It would be very difficult to summarize here the wealth and diversity of approaches that the eighties (as well as the second half of the seventies) have produced; reader-response criticism, deconstruction, new historicism, cultural materialism, and feminism and gender studies have widened and enriched our knowledge and perception of the Renaissance. Thomas Healy has explained all this brilliantly in his recent *New Latitudes*, and Janet H. MacArthur offered in 1989 a splendid synthesis of contemporary criticism in the case of *Astrophil and Stella* and *Amoretti* in her book *Critical Contexts of Sidney's "Astrophil and Stella" and Spenser's "Amoretti"*[15]. Formalist and rhetorical analyses of this poetry were also written in this period, of course, and further contributed to ascertain the subtleties and artistry of Sidney's poems, but new and fresh insights came out of these unusual visions of the contexts in which poems were then produced and read, and of our processes of reading them now. Healy has depicted this situation very clearly in the aforementioned book: "Recent literary and cultural theory has helped us to explore Renaissance texts in the historicity of their own

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5 A.C. Hamilton, "Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* as a Sonnet Sequence", *English Literary History*, XXXVI, (1969), pp. 59-87.

6 Leonora Leet Brodwin, "The Structure of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*", *Modern Philology*, LXVII (1969), pp. 25-40.

7 B.P. Harfst, "*Astrophil and Stella*: Precept and Example", *Papers on Language and Literature*, V (1969), pp. 397-414.

8 Emil Koeppel, "Studien zur Geschichte des englischen Petrarkismus in sechzehnten Jahrhundert", *Romanische Forschungen*, V (1890), pp. 65-98; and Sidney Lee, *Elizabethan Sonnets Newly Arranged and Indexed*, with an Introduction by Sidney Lee, 2 vols., 1904.

9 Kenneth Myrick, *Sir Philip Sidney as a Literary Craftsman*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1965 (2nd ed.).

10 Ernst Häublein, *Strophe und Struktur in der Lyrik Sir Philip Sidneys*, Herbert Lang, Bern, & Peter Lang, Frankfurt, 1971; Frank J. Fabry, "Sidney's Poetry and Italian Song-Form", *English Literary Renaissance*, 3 (1973), pp. 232-248; Derek Attridge, *Well-weighed Syllables: Elizabethan Verse in Classical Metres*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1974; William Cherubini, "The 'Goldenness' of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*: Test of a Quantitative-Stylistics Routine", *Language and Style*, 8 (1975), pp. 47-59 (for a more complete account cf. A.J. Colaianne & W.L. Godshalk, "Recent Studies in Sidney (1970-77)", in Arthur F. Kinney, ed., *Sidney in Retrospect. Selections from "English Literary Renaissance"*, The University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1988, pp. 220-241).

11 Ruth Stevenson, "The Influence of Astrophil's Star", *Tennessee Studies in Literature*, 17 (1972), pp. 45-57, and Andrew Weiner, "Structure and 'Fore Conceit' in *Astrophil and Stella*", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 16 (1974-75), pp. 1-25.

12 Richard A. Lanham, "*Astrophil and Stella*: Pure and Impure Persuasion", *English Literary Renaissance*, 2 (1972), pp. 100-115; and Leonard Barkan, *Nature's Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1975.

13 Alan Sinfield, "Sexual Puns in *Astrophil and Stella*", *Essays in Criticism*, 24 (1974), pp. 341-355; and James Finn Cotter, "The 'Baiser' Group in Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 12 (1970-71), pp. 381-403.

14 E.K. Gregory Jr., "Du Bartas, Sidney, and Spenser", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 7 (1970), pp. 437-449; Alan Sinfield, "Sidney and Du Bartas", *Comparative Literature*, 27 (1975), pp. 8-20; and Gary F. Waller, "'This Matching of Contraries': Bruno, Calvin and the Sidney Circle", *Neophilologus*, 56 (1972), pp. 331-343.

15 Thomas Healy, *New Latitudes. Theory and English Renaissance Literature*, Edward Arnold, London, 1992; and Janet H. MacArthur, *Critical Contexts of Sidney's "Astrophil and Stella" and Spenser's "Amoretti"*, University of Victoria, B.C., Canada, 1989.

moments of production and in the negotiated moments of their cultural reception until the present" (p. 4). We shall see later how some of these new approaches have helped in the reading of *Astrophil and Stella*.

My main purpose today is to try to combine the formalist method, dealing with some prevailing images in the sequence, and some of the new approaches about the process of production of meaning. I must confess beforehand that I am not sure at all that I can say anything new –which is so difficult with works of this kind, on which so much, and so good, has already been written–, but let me attempt, at least, to reread the sonnet sequence from the perspective of the images of writing and reading along with the lessons that poststructuralist theory have taught us about writing and reading.

Images of writing and reading are in the Renaissance images directly connected to the book, the book as an object that acquired a tremendous importance with the invention and expansion of the printing press. Although these images are as old as writing itself, they had received almost no systematic and comprehensive research until 1948, when the German scholar Ernst Robert Curtius published his seminal work *Europaische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*[16]. Curtius asserts in this book that almost all civilizations have tried to explain the world in terms of writing and reading, so that for the old Babylonians, for instance, the stars were *the writing of the sky*. The book as the object of reading and writing has condensed in itself the metaphors associated with these two activities; the book has become thus a hypermetaphor for the whole world, because writing symbolizes all that exists, *reality*, so that what exists is written and is to be found in the book. Let us remember the French poet Mallarmé, who said that "the world exists to become a beautiful book". And let's recall that in the Middle Ages the images of the world, or of Nature, as a book were constantly recurring. The medieval French author Alain de Lille, who lived in the 12th century, wrote for instance: "Omnis mundi creatura / quasi liber et pictura / nobis est et speculum".

This image was certainly very popular in the Renaissance, as we shall see later, and has reached our times, probably because it involves the idea that in the book you find the diversity, the multiplicity, or the infinite nature of the world, because the *author* of the book is not merely a single author but a multiplicity of authors, whose words, whose debts and influences, appear in the

book. This is also (or rather, seems) an extraordinarily contemporary conception, if I may say so. Think of Roland Barthes and his idea of "the death of the author", of Harold Bloom and his principle of the "anxiety of influence", or of Gérard Genette and his classification of transtextuality. All texts are the results of processes of rewriting, these critics tell us. The metaphor of the book represents the diversity of the world, because the book is authored by many: it is a *collective creation*. Consider the ways this metaphor advances through times and literary periods: in Cervantes's *Don Quijote*, in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, or in Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*... Notice that images of the book, of the fictions that books tell, appear themselves in the fictional world depicted in these books. The book is the BOOK with capital letters, it is the continuous process of writing and rewriting; it is, finally, an *actualization of the world*. One of the authors who have treated this issue with particular depth thought and wrote in Spanish: the Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges. He wrote a fascinating story, "La Biblioteca de Babel", where he equated the whole universe with a library, because the different aspects of the world are contained in different books. The library and the world are really one. He says that the Library exists *ab aeterno*, since it is God's work, while man is simply the librarian, the imperfect librarian, who cannot reach the beauty and perfection of books. He compares the beauty of the words printed on the pages of books with the trembling symbols of man's hand scribbling on them:

> Para percibir la distancia que hay entre lo divino y lo humano, basta comparar estos rudos símbolos trémulos que mi falible mano garabatea en la tapa de un libro, con las letras orgánicas del interior: puntuales, delicadas, negrísimas, inimitablemente simétricas[17].

These are images we cannot easily forget: man is imperfect; only the universe, shaped as the Library, is God's work. Unlike this, the image of handwriting, by the author's hand, is weak, trembling, failing, in comparison with the strong, beautiful, delicate, and black symmetrical images of the words on the pages of books. I will be returning to this later when we look at Sidney's poems.

In short, then, there is a long tradition that links diverse aspects of reality and the world with the image of the book, so that we can find different kinds of books in poetic language: the book of nature, the book of memory, the book of the heart, the book of spirit, the book of reason, the book of experience... Man writes and reads in all these books, and that is how we live our lives upon the Earth.

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16 Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europaische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948); there is an English translation: *European Literature and Latin Middle Ages*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1973.

17 Jorge Luis Borges, "La Biblioteca de Babel", in *Ficciones*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1971, p. 91.

In England the tradition was very strong in the Renaissance, and many examples, with interesting variations, can be found in Shakespeare, in Donne, in Milton, in Vaughan, in Herbert, in Crashaw, etc. during the 17th century. Francis Quarles, for instance, writes in his *Emblems* (1635):

> The world's book in folio, printed all
> With God's great works in letters capital:
> Each creature is a page; and each effect
> A fair character, void of all defect.

Here we see the primary metaphorical equation between book and nature expanded to man; now the printed pages are one with human beings. But let us return to Sidney. Although not the first case, surely some of the earliest and most interesting uses of these images in the Renaissance are those by Sidney in his *Astrophil and Stella* sequence, that was so influential in contemporary poetry. Herbert S. Donow's work A *Concordance to the Poems of Sir Philip Sidney* may help as a guide in checking and corroborating this impression; some terms such as "book", "read", "write", "words", "pen", "leaves", "ink", etc. appear very frequently not only in *Astrophil and Stella* but also in the *Arcadia* and in the *Eclogues*[18]. This is obviously an indication of Sidney's conscious effort to draw the attention on this topic. Sidney, as we shall see later, is an extraordinarily self-conscious artist, well aware of what he is doing with his pen. That is why I think it is worthwhile to look closely at some of the poems, trying to read in them "what is written" and what underlies that which is written.

Let us see then how the poet's voice, how Astrophil –the persona Sidney uses to express himself, or rather, perhaps, to disguise himself– writes, and reads, where and how he learns to write and read because this is one way to understand his world view. The first poem has been widely discussed and I think I cannot add anything substantial to what has already been said. It is very interesting to notice, however, that from the very beginning of the sequence we find several images connected with the techniques of writing: *painting, writing, reading, words* and *pen*, on the one hand; and on the other synecdoches such as leaves for "book" and *feet* for "rhythm", along with other references to the literary art (*Invention, step-dame Studie's blowes*). We know that this is the justification for the whole book: how *writing* would favour her *reading*, and this would lead her to *knowledge*, and from it to *pity*, so that ultimately she

would give him *grace*. This process of getting the lady's love is described in the poem through these images of writing and reading, although paradoxically the conclusion that the poet reaches here, and repeats in many other sonnets of the sequence, is that all the techniques that Rhetorics teaches are useless, because the only way to get Stella's love is by avoiding Invention (that is, technique), and by going directly to his own heart, probably representing here the image of the poet's mistress, that is, "the source of his powers of invention", as Kalstone has remarked in his splendid examination of this sonnet[19]. It is the heart, then, the true code of happiness, the centre of the universe for Astrophil, the only source of meaning for the world, the salvation for the lover. Astrophil says that certainly writing requires reading ("I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe, / Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertaine..."), but adds that what one should read is not others' books. One should read the Book with capital letters, that is: the book of the Heart where his mistress dwells, and from which his powers of invention are nurtured. This principle governs the whole sequence, and more examples appear later.

Notice also Sonnet 3, where the Book of Nature is represented in Stella:

> How then? even thus: in Stella's face I reed,
> What Love and Beautie be, then all my deed
> But Copying is, what in her Nature writes.
> (ll. 12-14)

Or Sonnet 6, where we contemplate how some lovers try to express themselves through the Muses or Mythology, using all the tools of writing:

> [...] *strange tales* attires,
> broadred with buls and swans, powdred with golden raine:
> Another humbler wit to shepheard's *pipe* retires,
> Yet hiding royall bloud full oft in rurall vaine.
> To some a sweetest plaint, a sweetest *stile* afords,
> While teares powre out his *inke*, and sighs breathe out his *words*:
> His *paper*, pale dispaire, and paine his *pen* doth move.
> (ll. 5-11)

But all this to no avail, at least for Astrophil, who insists on expressing himself in a "natural" way: notice the adjective ("When *trembling* voice brings forth that I do *Stella* love", l. 14), which is the same adjective as the one we encountered

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18 Herbert S. Donow, *A Concordance to the Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, with programming by Trevor J. Swanson, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London, 1975.

19 David Kalstone, *Sidney's Poetry: Contexts and Interpretations*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1965, pp. 124-129.

earlier, in Borges's description of the difference between the divine and the human. Borges said the human was imperfect, and was represented by those "rough, *trembling* symbols that his failing hand was scribbling on the cover of a book", in comparison with the perfection of the symmetrical, delicate, black, characters inside the book. It is true that Sidney does not set an opposition here between the black ink of the rhetorical style (the language of books, the language of beautiful mythological stories) and the trembling hand scribbling the lover's complaints, but he certainly places that absent ink, represented by books, by rhetorics, in opposition to his *trembling* voice. I think there is no great distance between his *trembling* voice and Borges's *trembling* hand; both reveal the same spirit: human imperfection in front of the divine power, here symbolized by the rhetorics of books. The great paradox, as we know, is that Astrophil, despite all these claims to natural language and rejection of rhetorics, is highly rhetorical in his expression. As Kalstone has also said, "we are bound to be puzzled if we take Astrophel's poems on style as a program of reform rather than as a series of rather troubled and self-conscious gestures"[20]. But there's no real contradiction, if we understand the sequence and the opposition between Invention (Art) and Nature as the manifestation of conflict, of disruption, that is so common in Renaissance love poetry. Sidney, according to Kalstone, shares this feature with his contemporaries, but emphasizes even more strongly "the *discovery* of conflict, the frequent emphasis on disruption itself"[21].

The images of the book, of reading and writing, that we are examining help to understand better the self-conscious nature of this *persona* represented by Astrophil, the *persona* of "the questioning critic", using again Kalstone's words[22]. Notice also how Sonnet 7 insists upon this conception; Nature created Stella, the poet says using the equation with painting to allude to that act of creation: ll. 1-8. And then he calls upon the reader to observe the opposition between beauty and the colour *black*:

> Or would she her miraculous power show,
> That whereas blacke seemes Beautie's contrary,
> She even in blacke doth make all beauties flow?
> (ll. 9-11)

This phrase *in blacke* is an allusion to the colour of *ink*, of *printing*, but also to the colour of *mourning*; and so the poet concludes with this pun, telling us that *black* is necessary in order to place Love in Stella, because this is the only way firstly that "Love should be / Placed *ever* there" (the eternity of the printed word), and secondly, "To honor all their deaths, who for her bleed", that is, all the lovers who die for her. The black colour of Stella's eyes is metaphorically the guarantee of the eternity of art, through the black ink of printing, and through the eternal memory of the lovers who have died unrewarded.

Sonnet 11 constitutes a beautiful adaptation of this topic: Love is now a boy who approaches *reading* for the first time; the book he uses is *faire*, with *guilded leaves*; it is a *colourd velume*, with pictures. This is probably, as Patricia Fumerton has so accurately described it, an allusion to the beautiful miniatures by Hilliard that were so popular in the court[23]. The boy can only look at the book, but cannot read, so that he only *sees* Stella in *Nature's cabinet*. Thus, unable to read, he remains in *each outward part*, he does not go beyond the surface. That is why the poet finally addresses Love with a tone of scorn: "But, foole, seekst not to get into her hart". We learn, then, that *reading* is deciphering, decoding messages, entering the heart of the matter, the heart of the text (that is, Stella's heart, because she is really the text of the Book of Nature: "Nature's cabinet"). This little boy, Love, is still very young and cannot do so, cannot reach Stella's heart; he is a fool, and that's why he receives the poet's contempt.

Sonnet 15 is simply a reaffirmation of Sonnets 1 and 3, that is, of the necessity to escape from the books of Rhetorics and to advocate a return to the Book of Nature; in this case the message is similar to Sonnet 3: read Stella and find inspiration in her. And Sonnet 28 collaborates further in emphasizing this idea: the rhetorical devices are not necessary, the only thing needed is Love, which is the only creature capable of "reading unto me this art", *reading* being used here, notice, with the value of *dictating*, of *teaching*.

One of the key pieces in the sequence is Sonnet 45, from which I have taken the last line for the title of this speech today. The sonnet starts with the image of *painting* (writing on the body): "Stella oft sees the verie face of wo / *Painted* in my beclowded stormie face", but this does not make her react with pity towards him. Astrophil discovers that Stella is only moved by Art, not by Reality. His "beclowded stormie face" produces no reaction in her;

20 David Kalstone, p. 130.
21 David Kalstone, p. 131.
22 David Kalstone, p. 132.

23 Cf. Patricia Fumerton, "'Secret' Arts: Elizabethan Miniatures and Sonnets", in Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *Representing the English Renaissance*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles & London, 1988, pp. 93-133, especially pp. 111-122.

> Yet hearing late a *fable*, which did show
> Of Lovers never knowne, a grievous case,
> Pitie thereof gate in her brest such place
> (ll. 5-7)

So look! it is Invention, rather than Nature, that provokes her pity. *The power of the written word*, of Imagination, is stronger with Stella than the lover's reality:

> Alas, if *Fancy drawne* by imag'd things,
> Though false, yet with free scope more grace doth breed
> Then servant's wracke, where new doubts honor brings;
> (ll. 9-11)

What can the poet do, then? There's a very simple solution: the poet demands an effort from the lady's side, so that she *reads* also *tales in him*, not only the traces left on his face by woe:

> Then thinke my deare, that you in me do *reed*
> Of Lover's ruine some sad *Tragedie*:
> I am not I, pitie the tale of me.
> (ll. 12-14)

This is a strange conclusion indeed, highly paradoxical. Notice that Astrophil has been telling us all the time that the only way to win Stella's love is through reading and learning the Book of Nature, or the Book of the Heart (where Stella dwells), avoiding the books of rhetorics; and now, all of a sudden, he discovers, and we are told, that Stella's attention cannot be drawn to him unless Stella looks at him *as if he were a tale*, as if his life were a tragedy, like the ones she reads in mythological tales and books. A great paradox of course: *his writings* are not based on other writings but on Love, on the Heart, on Nature. But, for her, Nature is not enough: *Reality must be shaped by writing*, at least for her; otherwise she wouldn't notice it.

Many interpretations have been given of this surprising line; for some this enigmatic "I am not I" points to the autobiography that the sequence really is; Young, for instance, comments on the question whether Astrophil is "real" or a "tale":

> Critical evaluation of the sonnets seems more often than not to have been dictated by the answer to this question, and Sidney's critics have divided widely upon it. Those, like Lee, who emphasize the literary provenance of the sequence conclude that it is simply an exercise in the

Petrarchan manner, with no real matter at all; those who emphasize the allusions to Sidney's own life and times conclude that it is the material record of biographical fact, which the manner serves less to express than to disguise[24].

This same author later says that, for him, this reference to Astrophil being a "tale" is a parody of the character's previous behaviour, that all his suffering, his "grievous case", is now seen as a tale[25]. Kalstone, on the other hand, sees it as an ironical remark on the dangers of the Petrarchan tradition, that is, the risk of encouraging "satisfaction with a literary passion and draw attention from the experience on which the original poems were based"[26]. For Thomas P. Roche, Jr., in a completely different mood, this poem shows "the phallic impudence of Astrophil's erected wit"[27], and particularly the last line is a proof of the confusion that dominates Astrophil, who cannot distinguish "between a response to literature and a response to life"[28]. Following a line of interpretation similar to Sinfield's in his article "Sexual Puns in *Astrophil and Stella*"[29], Roche argues that although Astrophil's defeat here is a logical consequence of his rhetorical confusion, his

> unremitting passion surmounts even such logical defeat by blatantly punning on the word 'tale', for which he would willingly substitute 'tail', a word that he has become in the course of these sonnets, an object that he has elevated in his thoughts to be the principal definition of his being[30].

That is certainly a witty commment, and one which –although minor and marginal, in my opinion– helps in enriching the interpretation of the sequence, one which contributes to "make the poetry better" and to transform radically "the traditional image of the elegant but naive courtier" we have of the poet (Sinfield's words at the end of the article I have just quoted, p. 355).

24 Richard B. Young, "English Petrarke: A Study of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*", in *Three Studies in the Renaissance: Sidney, Jonson, Milton*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1958 (reprinted by Archon Books, 1969), p. 9.

25 Richard B. Young, 56.

26 David Kalstone, *Sidney's Poetry*, p. 158.

27 Thomas P. Roche, Jr., "*Astrophil and Stella*: A Radical Reading", in *Spenser Studies. A Renaissance Poetry Annual*, III, ed. by Patrick Cullen & Thomas P. Roche, Jr., University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982, p. 158.

28 Thomas P. Roche, p. 159.

29 Alan Sinfield, "Sexual Puns in *Astrophil and Stella*", *Essays in Criticism*, 24 (1974), pp. 341-355.

30 Thomas P. Roche, p. 159.

Other critics offer equally suggestive interpretations that do not question the more traditional image of the poet, that of an elegant courtier and a sophisticated man of letters. One of the most interesting is Rosalie L. Colie's reading in her book *Paradoxia Epidemica. The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox.* She associates this "I am not I, pitie the tale of me" with Petrarch's first sonnet in the *Canzoniere*; the Italian poet, in fact, confesses from the very beginning that he is writing of his "real" self:

> Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono
> di quei sospiri ond'io nudriva 'l core
> in sul mio primo giovenile errore
> quand'era in parte altr'uom da quel ch'io sono
> (ll. 1-4)

Nevertheless he has a fear, a fear of being misunderstood by his readers; in the first tercet of this first sonnet he puts it very clearly:

> Ma ben veggio or sí come al popol tutto
> favola fui gran tempo, onde sovente
> di me medesmo meco mi vergogno;

This shame, this fear of being seen as a "fable", as a "fiction", is obviously a false fear, because this is precisely what he was and what he wanted to be. Colie says that as he pretended to record the "real" Petrarch, growing old, "he made an ideal Petrarca, a poet fabulous in his fidelity and endurance, remarkable even for his very reality, a poet whose life took on the air –'l'aura', as he said himself– of the laureateship of love"[31]. So when Sidney makes Astrophil say this "I am not I, pitie the tale of me", he is ironically recalling these Petrarchan lines, reversing their meaning and making fun of them. He is thus manipulating language and tradition. Colie concludes her argument with a statement I find extremely illuminating:

> The paradoxical "I am not I" can be taken as the motto for the whole sequence, perhaps for any such set of poems where the writer is both subject and creator: Sidney is, but also he is not the "I" that is Astrophil– although, of course, Astrophil's words must come from Sidney's mouth as Pantagruel's do from Rabelais'; words which create the truth and can therefore uncreate it, since they made it in the beginning; words which can at once, in triumph, assert and deny the truth of what they say[32].

Also J.G. Nichols has contributed to the clarification of this poem. Although he says he can accept the presence in it of the love situation and the possible disguise under which the poet hides, he prefers to regard this sonnet as a way of talking about literature. He says: "the literary theory involved is that poetry may move us when reality does not"[33]. And obviously, this sophisticated reading shouldn't surprise us in the context of Renaissance Petrarchan tradition, and particularly within the context of the sequence. Nichols also adds:

> Astrophil's sophistication (a reflection of course of the sophistication of his creator) must be matched by a sophisticated reading. A sophisticated reading demands a constant awareness of the poems as artefacts, human fabrications which could have been different. One of the greatest pleasures of Sidney's poetic masterpiece is missed if we are not always alive, not only to the effects created, but also to the ways in which they are created[34].

I do agree with Nichols, of course, and my purpose here is precisely to illustrate this kind of reading, Sidney's complete awareness as a poet and his attitude of self-consciousness. The metaphors of writing and reading we see in the sequence are undoubtedly the product of this sophistication. Sonnet 45 is, then, exemplary in this respect, but neither the only example, nor one out of a few. Another critic who has also noticed this kind of thing, although she does not develop it sufficiently, in my opinion, is Anne Ferry in her book *The "Inward" Language. Sonnets of Wyatt, Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne.* Talking about this sonnet, she remarks the use Sidney makes of the terms *tale* and *fable* in the sequence and in An *Apologie for Poetrie*, where both share the meaning of "fiction". She goes a bit further, and notices that in the first two lines of this sonnet "Astrophil's face is itself a poem, in which he (or woe, or Nature, or perhaps even Love) has depicted an image of a visage other than his own"[35]. This makes Astrophil not a direct representation of a reality, at least in this grievous mood in which he is depicted here, but a contrived image ingeniously devised to attract Stella's pity; for Ferry, this interpretation explains the last line of the poem like this: "'I am not I' lays claim to what it wittily denies: that behind the pitiable 'tale of me', admittedly false and calculated to move Stella,

31 Rosalie L. Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica. The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1966, p. 87.
32 Rosalie L. Colie, p. 95.

33 J.G. Nichols, *The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney. An Interpretation in the Context of His Life and Times*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 1974, p. 152.
34 J.G. Nichols, p. 153.
35 Anne Ferry *The "Inward" Language. Sonnets of Wyatt, Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1983, p. 134.

is an 'I' with an identity distinct but unexpressed, held in reserve"[36]. I find this very interesting because it implies a high degree of awareness and reflection (self-reflection) on the act of writing itself: Astrophil knows he is a product of Sidney's imagination and Invention, and as such, "false", merely an image. His "own identity" –so to speak– is denied to us, because all his being is vehicled, mediated, through the language of rhetorics. Ferry discusses this from the perspective of the opposition between "inward" and "outward" expressions, that is the main concern of her book. She says:

> Unlike the lover in Wyatt's song in which the lover bids farewell to cruelty, Astrophil does not easily identify himself with a representative "one" or "he". On the contrary, he playfully assumes such an identification only in order to set himself apart from it. Beyond even these distinctions is Astrophil's sense of himself as separate from what can be shown through direct outward expression of inward states. For his troubled countenance makes visible only a portrait –and here such artistic images are "false"– of suffering. Undefined but implied by contrast with the verbal representations of "fable", "Tragedie", "tale", is something unspoken; by contrast with the vocabulary of painting and showing, something unseen but true to Astrophil's sense of being who "I am"[37].

The reflection on the construction of one's own identity which underlies this line in Sidney's sonnet is surely a fascinating topic, one with which Stephen Greenblatt has also dealt brilliantly in his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning. From More to Shakespeare*. When he discusses the character of Othello, Greenblatt quotes Astrophil's line, and comments that although it is Iago who says in the play "I am not what I am" ("the motto of the improviser, the manipulator of signs that bear no resemblance to what they profess to signify"), "it is Othello himself who is fully implicated in the situation of the Sidney sonnet: that one can win pity for oneself only by becoming a tale of oneself, and hence by ceasing to be oneself"[38]. This fictionalization of life is –as we know very well– a common theme of Renaissance art and literature. Sidney is perhaps one of the first artists to fully develop it and he does it so successfully that some of his achievements are later the source of quotations by others, such as Shakespeare in this case.

Gary F. Waller has also tackled this issue of the identity from an ideological point of view in two important essays: "Acts of Reading: The Production of

Meaning in *Astrophil and Stella*" and "The Rewriting of Petrarch: Sidney and the Languages of Sixteenth-Century Poetry"[39]. In the first essay Waller discusses the role played by readers in the reception and interpretation of texts, following particularly Barthes's poststructuralist position in *S/Z*, and Derrida's notions of "textuality"; for Waller, then, there are no texts by themselves (as the formalists conceived it), but a combination of "the author (as scriptor as well as reader), the poems' readers, and the history of their readings"[40]. The elucidation of these multiple aspects of textuality leads Waller to treat the Petrarchan and Protestant ideologies that produced certain types of texts in the Renaissance, which were vehicled through the figure of the author. This proposal is certainly fascinating, and extremely demanding, I must add, so that Waller naturally cannot exhaust its potentialities (he doesn't have that intention, on the other hand). He is perfectly aware of this, when he writes about Sidney's poetic sequence being a *scriptible* text in Barthes's sense. That means, as he clearly explains, following Barthes's proposals in *S/Z* very closely:

> Sidney's texts are not lines of words realizing a single message; they are "multi-dimensional" spaces in which "a variety of writings", including those of his readers, "blend and clash". We can enter the texts by any of several routes, none of which we are forced to accept as the authentic one –however strongly Astrophil, or even Sidney, may try to persuade us. As Barthes puts it, we enter "a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds". We play within a ludic space, and the codes thereby mobilized will "extend as far as the eye can reach, they are interminable", or at least will extend through the work's history[41].

This is, to my mind, fundamental in our contemporary reading of Sidney, as our reading of the images of reading and writing show in this case. What is the meaning, in fact, of those recurrent signifiers in the text? How can we ascribe to them a structure of signifieds?

In his second essay Waller pursues a more concrete goal, to show how the Protestant poet that Sidney was tried to negotiate the Petrarchan ethos with

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36 Anne Ferry, p. 135.

37 Anne Ferry, p. 135.

38 Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning. From More to Shakespeare*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1980, p. 238.

39 Gary F. Waller, "Acts of Reading: The Production of Meaning in *Astrophil and Stella*" (in *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, XV, 1, Spring 1982, pp. 23-35) and "The Rewriting of Petrarch: Sidney and the Languages of Sixteenth-Century Poetry" (in Gary F. Waller & Michael D. Moore, eds. *Sir Philip Sidney and the Interpretation of Renaissance Culture. The Poet in His Time and in Ours. A Collection of Critical and Scholarly Essays*, Croom Helm, London & Sidney, and Barnes & Noble Books, Totowa, N.J., 1984, pp. 69-83.

40 Gary F. Waller, "Acts of Reading: The Production of Meaning in *Astrophil and Stella*" (in *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, XV, 1, Spring 1982, p. 24.

41 Gary F. Waller, ibid., p. 28.

Protestantism, taking as a starting assumption the conviction that "any 'literary' movement is always (indeed, always already) overdetermined, the product of a complex, perhaps infinite, network of codes which continually write and rewrite one another"[42]. He discusses the presence of the 'I' in Petrarchanism and Protestantism, showing how the desiring subject speaks without being free. For him, the 'I' is allowed to speak under the control of an "Other" (a mistress in Petrarchanism and God in Protestantism); this mediation is what makes speaking possible, welling up "as a seemingly obligatory truth-bearing act and which asserts or desires to reveal a stable, given, pre-existent, autonomous and originating self"[43]. This fighting among multiple discourses is perhaps best summarized in sonnet 45, because the assertion of unity, consistency and selfhood that appears in other poems (in the first sonnet, for instance) is here disrupted in the final line: "I am not I, pitie the tale of me". Waller says that in this sonnet we find that the "radically decentered self that the Petrarchan situation unfolds as an attempt is made to write itself into the world"[44]. This writing leads to unravelling the lack of stability, the anxiety underlying the identity of the poet himself as well as of his contemporary courtly audience.

What does all this mean? –some of you will very likely be wondering, perhaps in desperation, by now–; the answer is very simple: that the enigmatic sentence, whose diverse interpretations I have tried to summarize up to this point, is just a token of the multiplicity of voices and ideologies living and fighting, as in a palimpsest, under the beauty and apparent neutrality of these love poems. Astrophil says that he is not himself, perhaps alluding to his creator, who is indirectly speaking through his voice, but also perhaps referring to his own condition of fiction ("fable", "tale"), his anxious condition of being an empty or floating "signifier" in the midst of a tradition so replenished with beautiful words and *topoi*. As Jacqueline T. Miller writes in an article entitled "'What May Words Say': The Limits of Language in *Astrophil and Stella*", referring to Murray Krieger's formulation, "Renaissance poets, among them Sidney in particular, confront 'the emptiness of words as signifiers –their distance from their signifieds' and 'can accept words as insubstantial entities existing on their own, not to be confounded with their signifieds'"[45]. But what interests me today is not so much

talking about the struggling ideologies behind this evanescent identity of the 'I' (something already done brilliantly by critics such as Waller, Greenblatt, Sinfield, Jones and Stallybrass, or Miller, among others)[46], but rather to emphasize the rhetorical elements used by Sidney to draw the reader's attention to all these gaps in the text. Through all these images of writing and reading we can see how Sidney is consciously reflecting on his own process of writing, on his own mechanisms to disguise and to produce his own ideological discourse.

If we go on reading the sequence we shall undoubtedly encounter more examples of these images. In what is normally considered by critics as a second part, or phase, in the sequence, we see basically the same images, the same insistence upon the necessity to pay attention to the book of Nature, to the single book represented by Stella herself, forgetting about all the other books. What is perhaps distinctive in this second group is a slight difference of tone: we notice a more vigorous resolution, we see how Astrophil now shows a higher degree of audacity and decision. In sonnet 55, for instance, he rejects the Muses with strength, and declares the value of a single word, her name:

> But now I meane no more your helpe to trie,
> Nor other sugring of my speech to prove,
> But on her *name* incessantly to crie:
> For let me but *name* her whom I do love,
> So *sweete sounds straight mine eare and heart do hit*,
> That I well find no *eloquence* like it.
>
> (ll. 9-14)

The substance of the message remains much the same as in the other sonnets of the first phase; what is different here is probably –as I have just said– the tone, which is much more assertive. We can even say that the rejection of the Muses represents the rejection of the written word (since the Muses are reflected on the writings of other poets), while the defence of Stella's name as his only salvation enacts the privileging of speech over writing. Derrida would have much to say on this, and perhaps what we learn from sonnet 45 could fruitfully be applied here, but this is a complex question, that I prefer to put aside for the time being.

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42 Gary F. Waller, "The Rewriting of Petrarch: Sidney and the Languages of Sixteenth-Century Poetry", op. cit., p. 69.
43 Gary F. Waller, ibid., p. 70.
44 Gary F. Waller, ibid., p. 74.
45 Jacqueline T. Miller, "'What May Words Say': The Limits of Language in *Astrophil and Stella*" (in Gary F. Waller & Michael D. Moore, eds., Sir *Philip Sidney and the Interpretation of Renaissance Culture. The Poet in His Time and in Ours. A Collection of Critical and Scholarly Essays*, Croom Helm, London & Sidney, and Barnes & Noble Books, Totowa, N.J., 1984, p. 95.

46 The full bibliographical reference to Jones and Stallybrass is: Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, "The Politics of *Astrophil and Stella*", *Studies in English Literature*, 24 (1984), pp. 53-68.

Robert L. Montgomery has examined this sonnet from another interesting perspective, justifying this insistence on the rejection of the rhetorics of others in the construction, by Astrophil, of a deliberate policy of persuasion in order to win Stella: "Astrophil's various styles and repeated claims of poetic simplicity and authenticity are really at bottom strategies of desire[47]; Montgomery goes further, arguing that all these sonnets dealing with the process of writing are merely the expression of "the ethos of the hopeful but frustrated lover, not Sidney's own critical stance or the general rightness of a kind of style"[48]. We have, then, more arguments for the consideration of Astrophil as "fiction", as "fable".

Sonnet 67 offers a beautiful image of writing and reading, particularly of reading, of interpretation, and one that I find especially appealing today, because it seems as if it were one of our usual contemporary images, an image of the postmodern period. A few years ago Nona Fienberg read this poem from a feminist point of view, commenting on how Stella's silence acquires a powerful significance in this context. For this critic, this silence, this "marginalized discourse to which her femininity relegates her" exerts a dominating position, to the extent that she "translates her deprivation into a mode of domination"[49]. In her final conclusion she says that Astrophil (or Sidney) in this sonnet "thematizes the difficulty of writing and of understanding the gaps, those alternative discourses through which culturally marginalized groups communicate"[50]. I think this point is crucial in the interpretation of this sonnet, and to a large extent of the whole sequence, but perhaps not because we are dealing with a marginalized group, such as women, but simply because of the intrinsic difficulty of any text, no matter whether it is produced by a marginalized group or not. This is one of the dominating elements of *Astrophil and Stella*: the difficulty of reading and interpreting texts. Notice that Hope, here personified, *reads* Stella's heart and *interprets* her feelings; the result is that the *language of her eyes is translated* by Hope. And here we have a problem, Astrophil faces a problem: can Hope really understand the text she is reading? is not that text (Stella's heart, remember I referred to that image in connection with Sonnet 11) very difficult to interpret? can we trust Hope's interpretation? has Hope read the whole text,

or only some parts, and so misinterprets the totality? All these questions are condensed in the following lines:

> But failst thou not in phrase so heav'nly hie?
> Looke on againe, the faire text better trie:
> What blushing notes doest thou in margine see?
> What sighes stolne out, or kild before full borne?
> Hast thou found such and such like arguments?
> Or art thou else to comfort me forsworne?
> (ll. 6-11)

Astrophil uses the language of textual commentary (*speech, translated, phrase, text, notes, margine, arguments, interpret, contents*) to refer to Stella's body, to Stella's face, and implies, as you can see, that the text should be read in its totality, including the margins, not only the centre. He tells us that what at first sight seems accidental, marginal, may become substantial; this is why Hope fails in her reading: she doesn't perceive the *blushing notes in the margin*, and all the other elements that accompany them. This makes her interpretation dubious, uncertain. But Astrophil, in this phase of fighting, prefers this *mis*reading (this partial reading) to crude reality, to the naked truth:

> Well, how so thou interpret the contents,
> I am resolv'd thy errour to maintaine,
> Rather then by more truth to get more paine.
> (ll. 12-14)

The text is then not only Stella's eyes, but Stella's whole body. If we read only her eyes, as Hope has done, we get a partial information about her heart: eyes are not the mirror of the soul, the poet seems to be telling us; we must also read other things, in order to get a more complete appreciation of the text. Appearances might induce to error.

This tone of problematizing interpretation, which paradoxically tackles the necessity to secure interpretation, is increased in Sonnet 71, one of the undisputable central pieces in the whole sequence, although in this case reading seems simpler, and Astrophil's assertion is clearer:

> Who will in fairest booke of Nature know,
> How Vertue may best lodg'd in beautie be,
> Let him but learne of Love to read in thee...
> (ll. 1-3)

47 Robert L. Montgomery, "Astrophil's Stella and Stella's Astrophil", in Gary F. Waller & Michael D. Moore, eds., *Sir Philip Sidney and the Interpretation of Renaissance Culture. The Poet in His Time and in Ours. A Collection of Critical and Scholarly Essays*, Croom Helm, London & Sidney, and Barnes & Noble Books, Totowa, N.J., 1984, p. 52.

48 Robert L. Montgomery, ibid., p. 53.

49 Nona Fienberg, "The Emergence of Stella in *Astrophil and Stella*", *Studies in English Literature*, 25 (1985), p. 12.

50 Nona Fienberg, ibid., pp. 12-13.

This gives certainty, security, to a reading, because it is a direct reflection of Nature, this being, again, the spirit of the whole sequence, in its opposition between *Nature* (positive) and *Invention* (= Literature, negative). But the contradictions, the struggles that Astrophil suffers are not absent here either. Compare Sonnet 71 with Sonnet 70. Notice the sharp contrast: in Sonnet 70 the poet is trying to *describe* Love and particularly Joy, and is suspicious of the possibilities offered by his Muse to him:

> My Muse may well grudge at my heav'nly joy,
> If still I force her in sad rimes to creepe...
>
> (ll. 1-2)

so that, being afraid of his inability to *paint his joy*, even in black and white, he feels defeated, and yields. He prefers to keep silent, not to write. This feeling of disappointment, despondency even –being an anticipation of the third phase–, is expressed at the end of the sonnet with a great power:

> Cease eager Muse, *peace pen*, for my sake stay,
> I give you here my hand for truth of this,
> Wise silence is best musicke unto blisse.
>
> (ll. 12-14)

It is important to remark again that Sidney was consciously working with these images of the book and of writing and reading, even when he was adapting a previous text; notice in this respect that Sonnet 71 is a well-known version of Petrarch's sonnet 248, "Chi vuol veder quantunque pò Natura", that contains no reference at all to the image of the book of Nature. It is Sidney who introduces the metaphor in Sonnet 71, because he obviously needs it for making his purpose more explicit. As Kalstone has written:

> Sidney's poem develops the metaphor of the book and concerns itself, almost systematically, with the process of learning from Stella. The observer will 'know', will 'read'. Petrarch asks us to see, to admire [...] A sense of illumination is implicit in the tone and dramatic situation, but is not conveyed as explicitly as it is in Sidney's sonnet[51].

This aspect of *learning* that Kalstone associates with *reading* is, no doubt, a substantial point in the interpretation of the sequence.

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51 David Kalstone, *Sidney's Poetry: Contexts and Interpretations*, op. cit., p. 120.

In the third phase, finally, we can also see how disappointment, anxiety, and even desperation, are reflected in the Book he is writing and reading. Illustrations of this appear, among others, in Sonnets 90, 93 and 102. The feeling of despondency and abandonment is revealed, with an extraordinary power, in Sonnet 90; he says he is no great poet, he insists on repeating that nothing comes from his wit or his will, but that all that he has written has been dictated to him by love, so that he is a mere copyist. This is obviously an idea we have already seen in the first part of the sequence (Sonnets 1, 3, 6, 15...). But notice the richness of metaphors of writing here:

> In truth I sweare, I wish not there should be
> *Graved* in mine Epitaph a *Poet's name*:
> Ne if I would, could I just *title* make,
> That any *laud* to me thereof should grow,
> Without my *plumes* from other's *wings* I take.
> For nothing from my wit or will doth flow,
> Since all my *words* thy beauty doth *endite*,
> And love doth hold *my hand*, and makes me *write*.
>
> (ll. 7-14)

Sonnet 93, on the other hand, deals with writing about his own woe; we see the return of the image of black ink, an ideal colour to paint his woe. The tone is clearly one of pessimism and frustration, but the images are the same ones we found earlier:

> What sobs can give words grace my griefe to show?
> What inke is blacke inough to paint my wo?
> ....
> That all thy hurts in my hart's wracke I reede;
> I cry thy sighs; my deere, thy teares I bleede.
>
> (ll. 2-3; 13-14)

This final reference to bleeding, that we also found in Sonnet 7 associated to ink, is recurrent near the end again. Notice Sonnet 102. Ink is no longer black, now it is *red*, the colour of blood, which in the tradition was normally Christ's blood, but also, by extension, the lover's or Love's blood. Here the red ink is used to describe the beauty and delight of the love story that has been told. After many questions about where the red colour of roses, of cheeks, of shame... has gone, Astrophil finally says that it has been given to ink in order to depict Venus, that is, Love. The power of the images is extraordinary:

> Where be those Roses gone, which sweetned so our eyes?
> Where those red cheeks, which oft with faire encrease did frame
> The height of honor in the kindly badge of shame?
> Who hath the crimson weeds stolne from my morning skies?
> ....

It is but love, which makes his *paper perfit white*
To write therein more fresh the story of delight,
While *beautie's reddest inke* Venus for him doth sturre.

(ll. 1-4; 12-14)

White is the colour of the paper on which the love story is written, and white is certainly Stella's face on which this story is represented. But this simple explanation does not suffice; we would like to know more. As a matter of fact, the whole collection can be seen as forming –in Patricia Fumerton's words– "an ornamental pattern encircling and pointing to the 'space', the white parchment, that is the ground of the poet's love"[52]. In my opinion, this is a subject for a fascinating research that could render interesting results about the uses and significance of the rhetorical devices Sidney employed in writing *Astrophil and Stella*. Today, four centuries after the publication of the sonnets, we are, methodologically, much better equipped than the preceding generations to unravel some of the mysteries that are still buried in the text. A methodology that would proceed on the lines sketched in this speech, taking into account the dominating role played by the images discussed here, and considering *Astrophil and Stella* as a *scriptible* text, would probably make a decisive contribution to the knowledge of the rhetorical and ideological devices of the Renaissance.

A full-length monograph is really required to give an adequate treatment of the immense richness of *Astrophil and Stella* in this aspect, something that, of course, I have not been able to do in this speech today. The intricacies of the text are many, multiple, and extremely suggestive. I have only dealt superficially with a small group of sonnets, with the purpose of showing how much we ignore still about the enigmas of the sequence. But more sonnets are awaiting scholarly treatment on this line. In addition to the sonnets which I have commented on or simply alluded to, my final words are an invitation to you to go on pursuing these images of writing and reading in many other poems, both sonnets and songs, of *Astrophil and Stella*[53]. I admit that the task is not a minor one, but I am also persuaded that it is important, and surely a very exciting challenge. So, if you accept it, good luck! Thank you very much!

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52 Patricia Fumerton, "'Secret' Arts: Elizabethan Miniatures and Sonnets", in Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *Representing the English Renaissance*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles & London, 1988, pp. 120-121.
53 Cf. Sonnets 14, 19, 21, 31, 34, 35, 37, 38, 40, 44, 50, 51, 54, 56, 57, 58, 60, 61, 63, 69, 74, 77, 80, 81, 84, 92, 94, 98, 100 and 104, as well as Songs 2, 5 and 8.

THE PLACE OF MAN IN THE CHAIN OF BEING ACCORDING TO SIDNEY'S *DEFENCE OF POESIE*

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According to the Renaissance, the Medieval world had been an age of obscurantism, theocentrism and order that was going to be annihilated by the brightness, homocentrism and ordered chaos of the new era. But this period was not a spontaneous outburst of light that gave birth to the Magnanimous Man, dweller of a world ruled by disorder as portrayed by the Elizabethan drama. In fact, the greatness of the Elizabethan age was to plant its roots in the Medieval world where a primum-mobile mastered all the actions of the universe in a fixed order, thus showing that the Elizabethan world was not "out of order".

E.M.W. Tillyard elucidates in his *Elizabethan World Picture* the conception the Elizabethans had of their own age[1]. Given the difficulty of staying outside the mainstream current of criticism established by the Renaissance, Tillyard's attempt to shed light on the Elizabethan world enables us to overcome some of the stereotypes.

One of the authors mentioned in Tillyard's book is Sir Philip Sidney for he represents the bulwark of these commonplace concepts among the Elizabethans that, paradoxically, are not always obvious in the creative literature. His *Defense of Poesie*[2] clearly delineates the image of a universe ranged in an unalterable order and wrapped in a direct and fresh style, similar to the overall tone that permeates the portrait expounded by Tillyard.

One of the most important principles governing the lives of the Elizabethans was that of hierarchical order, a medieval conception that was evident from the stratification of social classes and the cosmological understanding of the

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1 All the quotations are taken from Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, 1972. In this book the author aims to "extract and expound the most ordinary beliefs about the constitution of the world as pictured in the Elizabethan age" (8). In his book he includes a collection of quotations from different authors of this period, but I have concentrated on Sidney's *Defense of Poesie*.
2 The quotations are taken from the prose works of the Feuillerat edition that follows the edition of William Ponsoby, *The Defense of Poesie*, and not the edition by Henry Olney, An *Apology for Poetry*. Both editions see the light some years after his author's death in 1595.