

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!

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 age¹. 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

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.

universe. Thus, Queen Elizabeth is compared in several instances, to the *primum-mobile*, the master-sphere of the physical universe in control of the rest of the chain of being. To be awarded the first place in any classification meant power and control over the rest of the elements. That is precisely the argument Sidney is going to use in his defence of creative literature, namely, poesy, to ward off the attacks of the puritans who argued that poetry was harmful because the world pictured in it was deceitful.

And first truly to all them that professing learning envey against Poetrie, may justly and first be objected, that they go very neare to ungratefulness, to seeke to deface that which in the noblest nations and languages that are knowne hath bene the first light giver to ignorance and first nurse whose milk litle & litle enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledge. (5)

The structure of the hierarchy is organized in such a way that all the elements of the chain excel in a single particular and are arranged in a tripartite division³. Sidney places Philosophy and History directly after Poetry and, although he emphasizes the excelling qualities of Philosophy because "the philosopher teacheth" (18), and those of History because it brings "images of true matters" (18) he, nevertheless, concedes primacy to Poesie because it "tells facts not as they are but as they should be" (18), adding that "neither Philosopher nor Historiographer, could at the first have entered into the gates of popular judgements, if they had not taken a great pasport of Poetrie" (5).

The triple division of elements has the Holy Trinity as a frame of reference and the whole creation is branches into three categories. The classification begins with the division of God-Angels-Man, followed by the division of the world in Angels-Man-Beasts, etc. displaying a set of correspondences between elements of the Macrocosm, the Body Politic and the Microcosm. The correspondences found in the Middle Ages were more intellectual, rather as if they were a mathematical formula in a rigid and immobile order. On the contrary, the Elizabethans used the correspondences with flexibility assuming the disorder provoked by the imperfection of man. As examples of correspondences in the Renaissance we come across such as the correspondence between the Macrocosm

³ Tillyard also acknowledges the importance awarded to the particular excellencies of each element of the chain. "... stones may be lowly but they exceed the class above them, plants, in strength and durability. Plants, though without sense, excel in the faculty of assimilating nourishment. The beasts are stronger than man in physical energy and desires. Man excels the angels in his power of learning" (34).

and the Body Politic when Queen Elizabeth is compared to the *primum-mobile*, or between the Macrocosm and the Microcosm comparing the storms with the stormy passions of man, or between the Body Politic and the Microcosm when Erasmus compares reason in the mind to the king in the state.

As mentioned before, the place of man in the chain of being is after the angels, but before the animals, excelling, not so much in magnanimity, but in his capacity to overcome his internal conflict reaching towards perfection⁴. He is close to the angels because they share the same particular quality; that of *understanding*, although they are qualitatively different for the angels understand intuitively while man has to use his reason. At the same time man is closed to the beasts because of his passions although they are under his control owing to his capacity for learning,

since our erected wit maketh us know what perfectiō is, and yet our infected wit keepeth us frō reaching unto it. (9)

It is the *wit* that permits man to become the nodal point in the chain of being discerning between right and wrong enabling him to make order out of chaos, and to rise from an imperfect state⁵. The human capacity to transform limitations into qualities must be seen in the light of the fact that the "infected wit" is not so much the cause of the fall but supposes man's capacity to rise. Sidney tries to reconcile both aspects of man as other writers of the Renaissance do, such as Erasmus in his *Praise of Folie*⁶. This reconciliation of opposites

⁴ Tillyard comments that the place man occupies in the chain is found on a Neo-Platonic attitude that is not only evident in the *Defence* but also in his verses. Cf. *Astrophil y Stella* (bilingual edition by Fernando Galván):

More fundamental than any Aristotelian belief that poetry was more instructive than history or philosophy was the Neo-Platonic doctrine that poetry was man's effort to rise above his fallen self and to reach out towards perfection. (30).

⁵ It is interesting to note that a Spanish critic, Alfonso García de Matamoros, also points at the *entendimiento (wit)* as a human characteristic that makes man more divine. Matamoros' essay appears in 1553 with the title *De adserenda eruditione sive de viris hispaniae doctis narratio apologetica*. In this passage he describes Marcial's struggles to become an orator:

El entendimiento humano no puede avanzar más allá de los límites impuestos por la naturaleza, pues es ley natural que exista esta predeterminación y aptitud para las cosas en cada hombre, y sus cualidades están circunscritas por ciertos límites de expresión.

For more information on Matamoros see P. Sainz Rodríguez, *Historia de la Crítica Literaria en España* (38).

⁶ D. Connell comments in his book *Sir Philip Sidney. The Maker's Mind*, this symbiosis of paradoxical terms:

Erasmus as a man of reason, exposes and censures human folly. But in the involuted and paradoxical plan of his work, he also gives Folly herself the power to reason (5).

drains an optimistic *energeia* that pictures man not as the poor creature expelled from paradise for ever, but as the poor creature expelled from paradise for ever, but as the creature working his way back to Eden⁷.

Among men, the poet has the inalienable mission of using the wit to help man rise from the fall. Sidney describes the poet not as someone special, a prophet foreseeing chaos, but as an ordinary man who has been endowed *with the force of divine breath* (8). What the author is trying to emphasize is the power any man has to create, to use the *wit* as a means to reach for divinity, for it is the Maker of all makers, the first in the chain of being, who confers this power to man. However, he also acknowledges that the world he creates is merely a fleeting vision of the real one:

... believe themselves, when they tell you they will make you immortal
by their verses. (45)

Sidney is overtly stating that the poet can only create an ephemeral world doomed to disappear. But the question of mortality is not a cause for anguish because man is a product of nature and like the rest of the natural world he is perishable. Therefore, the poet's mission is to *make the too much loved earth more lovely* because he goes *hand in hand* (8) with nature. The poet joins mortality and immortality in his verses when he sings to death and love⁸, a binomial that is inherent to the human condition asserting the place man takes in the chain:

... that while you live, you live in love, and get favour, for lacking skill
of a sonet, and when you die, your memory die from the earth for want
of an Epitaph. (46)

7 This optimistic portrait of man is humourously expressed in Lope de Vega's poem "Huerto Deshecho":

Eva y Adán, finalmente
iban desnudos por donde,
aunque otros ojos los vieran,
no les salieran colores (281-284).

8 The common belief shared in the Renaissance is that love and death made people equal. With this combination, the opposite qualities of immortality and mortality are justified and are considered as basic human characteristics, such as Cervantes states in Don Quixote's words:

Advierte, Sancho –dijo Don Quijote–, que el amor ni mira respetos ni guarda términos de razón en sus discursos, y tiene la misma condición que la muerte, que así acomete los altos alcázares de los reyes como humildes chozas de los pastores (Part II, chapter LVIII).

For a better understanding of the beliefs and disbeliefs on this age see C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* and also M. Roston, *Sixteenth Century English Literature*.

But Sidney is a writer who offers solutions and he does not only lecture on the mortal condition of man, he also gives a reason why this condition is not to be considered negatively. Man is the only element in the chain who is capable of learning, and he aspires to a self-knowledge which begins with an appreciation and estimation of what he does. Consequently, his life becomes part of that learning as he expresses it at the beginning of the *Defence*:

... that selflove is better than any guiding to make
that seem gorgious wherein our selves be parties. (3)

As Pugliano has mastered the art of horsemanship in Sidney's argumentation, so he masters the art of poetry, and this self-knowledge is worked upon from the basis of his *wit*, that excellence that once strengthened permits the enabling of judgement and the profound and inner knowledge of the self. The divorce between knowledge and the art of living has not taken place yet, on the contrary the marriage results in a well-balanced couple that allows man to reconcile *man's erected wit and man's infected wil* perfecting the latter by self-knowledge that leads to self-love. Thus, man becomes aware of his limitations and acts accordingly without despairing.

In order to entwine the eternal characteristic of the soul and the perishable condition of the body, both the spiritual and the material components of man are treated evenly, as essential features of human condition. In the process of learning, man needs to feed both the soul and the body, and Sidney is aware of the fact that in order to perfect man's self-knowledge, he has to find something kind for him to digest. He, thus, considers Plato's doctrine as the epitome of the means to help man achieve a better self-knowledge, because Plato moralizes in philosophy with the skin of poetry. He states that teaching must be followed and preceded by delight and Sidney put this theory into practice and his works can be considered in the modern linguistic term as the *performance* of his theory. His *Defence* is full of concepts taken from other critics such as Scaligero, Minturno, Aristotle and Plato but his work does not result in a dull heavy essay of didacticism but in an enjoyable and ironic look upon human conceit. His style so fresh and direct gives praise to poesis through the *wit*⁹.

9 The above mentioned Spanish critic, Matamoros, also coincides with Sidney in the maxima of teaching with delight:

hay que enseñar no con estudio árido y triste, sino con la desenvoltura y alegría de las fiestas populares (37).

It is his irony that is what makes possible the final coupling of self-knowledge and learning in delight, combining his gift as orator in a perfect structure of rhetoric, organizing a work of art in which all human capacities are acknowledge and embroidered in a piece of a logician who re-creates a world that mirrors the ordered but flexible Elizabethan chain of being.

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NARRATIVE AND ITS REPRESENTATION IN *OTHELLO*

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The Clown appears only twice in *Othello*; both appearances are brief but pulsing with proleptic energy. The first is at the start of the third act. Cassio has instructed the musicians to play something to wake Othello, who has spent his first night with Desdemona in Cyprus. The Clown asks if their instruments are wind instruments, and when they say they are, he quips: "O, thereby hangs a tale"¹. Not "hearing" the pun, the first musician asks: "Whereby hangs a tale, sir?". He expects a story and all he gets is an allusion to flatulence². Cassio then offers the Clown some gold to arrange a meeting with Desdemona. The Clown pretends to misunderstand him,

Cassio: Dost thou hear, mine honest friend?

Clown: No, I hear not your honest friend: I hear you.

(III.1.21-22)

Iago is invoked without being named. As the Clown leaves, it is the newly reinstated Lieutenant who enters.

The Clown's second appearance (three scenes later) is just as fleeting and no less gratuitous. This time it is Desdemona who asks for Cassio. Once again the Clown's response is punning: "I know not where he lodges, and for me to devise a lodging, and say he lies here, or he lies there, were to lie in my own throat." (III.4.11-13) The pun is a bad one but cruelly anticipatory of Othello's grim play on the word in Act IV:

Iago: Lie—

Othello: With Her?

1 This and future references to the text are to the Kenneth Muir edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987). In both Q1 and F1, no orthographic distinction is made between the two terms, though the pun is obviously intended.

2 Touchstone, in *As You Like It*, uses the same expression, but this time referring to the passing of time: "And so, from hour to hour we ripe and ripe, / And the from hour to hour we rot and rot, / And thereby hangs a tale". Jaques, who quotes these words, thinks he has found a kindred spirit, though the Fool's words might equally be interpreted as an allusion to impotence.