SEL 24 (1984)
ISSN 0039-3657

The Politics of *Astrophil and Stella*

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The connection between courtship and courtiership is apparent from the etymologies of the two words. Indeed, under "courtship" the *OED* gives headings both for "behaviour or action befitting a courtier" (first example, 1588) and for "the action or process of paying court to a woman" (first example, 1596). Only the attendant at court had courtesy; hence only the courtier was expert in the sophisticated rituals of amorous courtship. But the connection between courtship and courtiership was more than merely verbal. In courtly love, the relation of lover to beloved had long been parallel to the relation of vassal to his lord. As C. S. Lewis wrote, "the lover is the lady's 'man.' He addresses her as *midons*, which etymologically represents not 'my lady' but 'my lord.' The whole attitude has rightly been described as a 'feudalisation of love.'"[1] And Richard McCoy, in his recent book, *Sir Philip Sidney: Rebellion in Arcadia*, argues that in the sixteenth century, "the political aspect of love became . . . explicit with various challenges to the code of courtly love."[2]

But there would appear to be important distinctions between courtship and courtiership. Isn't courtship "private," the activity of chambered lovers, in contrast to the "public" courtiership practiced openly before the entire court under the gaze of the monarch? Could not love lay claim to a disinterested idealism totally opposed to the material self-seeking of the courtier? Did not the frank confession and the sublime raptures of the Petrarchan/Neoplatonic lover contrast starkly to the devious and often corrupt dealings of the politican at court? Some such opposition between courtship and courtiership seems to underlie even so penetrating a treatment of *Astrophil and Stella* as McCoy's.

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[1]C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1951), p.18.

[2]Richard C. McCoy, *Sir Philip Sidney: Rebellion in Arcadia* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1979), p.73.

McCoy brilliantly explores the contradictions between autonomy and submission that map out the realm of sexual, as of court, politics. But he also claims that Sidney's sequence explores these contradictions "in purely romantic terms" and that, as a result, "wit maintains its extraordinary composure and control."[3] We will argue instead that these "romantic terms" are never pure. Even within the poems, the supposedly "private" sphere of love can be imagined only through its similarities and dissimilarities to the public world of the court. The contradictory tyrannies of court life (the need to succeed at any cost versus the ideal pose of disinterested advisor) find their counterparts in the contradictory tyrannies of love: the amorous passion in search of its "food" (Sonnet 71) versus "Tyran honour" (the Eighth Song) with its demands for noble submission. In England, indeed, idealizations of a virtuous private love found one possible resolution in a rededication to that supreme object of public devotion, "fayre Elisa, Queene of shepheardes all."[4] By a peculiar double reflexiveness, love, modeled upon an idealization of court hierarchies, could refashion in mystified form those very relations of power and submission that had structured it in the first place. Virtuous mistress could be collapsed into Gloriana, whose very body could be taken as an emblem of the enclosed, self-protected island, England, the "demi-Eden."

In fact, fulfillment in the service of Gloriana was as elusive as in the service of Stella, and this double distance of lady and monarch made necessary the strategies of manipulation which were the techniques of aspiring courtier and lover alike. In the section that follows, we trace out the relations between "public" courtiership and "private" courtship as they are established within the fiction of Sidney's sequence. In the final section, we examine the ways in which such poetry could function as a complex displacement of the ideological pressures of the court.

"Tyran honour" versus "Desire": strategy and domination in *Astrophil and Stella*

The central rhetorical situation in *Astrophil and Stella* is that Astrophil speaks; Stella is the object of his speech. Whether he writes a solitary meditation, an epistle to Stella, or a defence to outsiders of his love, he controls the experience insofar as he articulates it. This is one of the paradoxes of Petrarchan poetry: although the lover depicts himself as humble suitor to a dominating lady, he actually performs an act of public mastery, demonstrating his virtuosity in the practice of a masculine convention. Astrophil, with uncharacteristic frankness,

[3]McCoy, pp. 72, 109.

[4]Edmund Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calender*, "Aprill," line 34.

lays bare his control of Stella as *his* literary construction in the Fifth Song. He adopts the role of poet-as-blackmailer, replacing his earlier eulogies with a list of her crimes against love and assuring her that only a change in her response to him will convince him to represent her favorably again:

> You then ungratefull thiefe, you murdring Tyran you,
> You Rebell run away, to Lord and Lady untrue,
> You witch, you Divill, (alas) you still of me beloved,
> You see what I can say; mend yet your froward mind,
> And such skill in my Muse you reconcil'd shall find,
> That all these cruell words your praises shall be proved.[5]
> (p. 215)

Praise and blame, like any other version of the lady's conduct, are the properties of the lover-poet, and Astrophil's speeches to the world as well as to Stella can be seen as strategies—however subtle and witty—of manipulation and domination.

Nonetheless, these strategies can be articulated only through a central opposition on which the fiction of the poems is based: public life versus the private world of love. Astrophil claims the world of love as a fine and private place, a privileged site from which the concerns of courtiers can be recognized as trivial and finally banished. Yet this site is bounded and shaped by his reactions to the "foolish wits" and "harder Judges" who represent the demands of the public world. The separation of the two spheres is neither as sharp nor as solacing as Astrophil claims, and the logic of his poems coincides with political rhetoric in ways that raise the question of whether the lover-poet is in control of the situation—or whether he is constructed by it.

Sonnet 23 turns around Astrophil's separation of the spheres of love and court life. He writes it to correct the impression observers have of him: he is preoccupied not with public matters, as they think, but with love. But his revision of their interpretation is shaped as much by their guesses as by the self-image he attempts to project instead. The sonnet opens as Astrophil identifies the "curious wits," those onlookers whose obsession with courtly trivia he mocks at other moments of the sequence as well (the "busie wits" of 30, the "envious wits" of 104.)[6]

[5]Quotations from *Astrophil and Stella* are from *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. William A. Ringler, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

[6]The "wits" emphasize the interconnection between the world of the lovers and the world of the court—a world that Sidney depicts with greater specificity than his Continental predecessors. Charles Lamb, in an otherwise rather disparaging view of the sequence, concedes that, thanks to its inclusion of the courtiers and court life, it is "full, material and circumstantiated," in *Last Essays of Elia*, ed. Malcolm Elwin (London: Macdonald, 1952), p. 357.

He discredits them by announcing that they "With idle paines, and missing ayme, do guesse." Yet the body of the poem turns almost entirely around their opinions. They represent two views of what a young man's career might be: poetry or politics.

> Some that know how my spring I did addresse,
> Deeme that my Muse some fruit of knowledge plies:
> Others, because the Prince my service tries,
> Thinke that I thinke state errours to redresse.

Because public careers move through predictable stages, the "wits" take Astrophil's beginnings as premises by which his present distraction can be explained: his youthful study of poetry, his appointment as a state servant. According to Astrophil in his new role as lover, however, such explanations fail because they fail to admit the contradiction he insists upon between public performance and private desire. Nonetheless, he includes enough of his past history to justify his observers' reasoning. His youthful industry might well support the assumption that he is mentally composing learned verse, and he emphasizes that an important judge, "the Prince," has singled him out for a role as adviser. As Astrophil mocks the automatic thinking of his public, he also reveals his participation in their world and their ways of seeing.

Then a third system of interpretation comes into play, the discourse of Christian morality and *de casibus* suspicion of political aspiration:

> But harder Judges judge ambition's rage,
> Scourge of it selfe, still climing slipprie place,
> Holds my young braine captiv'd in golden cage.

In this tercet Astrophil adopts a discourse with a long history of assumptions underlying it: ambition is always insatiable and dangerous, hence its "rage;" its every triumph is short-lived, a "slipprie place" from which a fall is likely; and as it lures men on with false glitter, it blinds them to deeper values: Astrophil is "captiv'd in golden cage." Moreover, he assigns this interpretation to the emphatic final position in the series. The density and the placement of the moralists' accusation suggest that it is the most difficult of the three to contend with. Why this should be so is a question best answered by looking at more of the sequence — beginning with Sonnet 27, which shares one of its rhymes and its central term with 23. Astrophil admits that ambition does in fact underlie his self-absorption:

But one worse fault, *Ambition*, I confesse,
That makes me oft my best friends overpasse,
Unseene, unheard, while thought to highest place
Bends all his powers, even unto *Stella's* grace.

The "harder Judges" of Sonnet 23 are right, in spite of the way Astrophil juggles the terms by which ambition is to be understood: he claims as his goal not a "slipprie place" but a lofty private ideal, Stella's acceptance of his love. He is, after all, caught in a cage, obsessed by erotic ambition; and his eventual fall from Stella's approval confirms how "slipprie" love's place can be. Thus the structure of desire turns out to resemble the structure of ambition.

Astrophil's dismissal of the "curious wits" is a defense against assumptions that are meaningful to him, as well, then, and although he ends the poem with a counter-affirmation of his dedication to the private pleasures of love, he addresses his self-defense directly to the literati, courtiers and moralists whose concerns he apparently rejects:

O fooles, or over-wise, alas the race
Of all my thoughts hath neither stop nor start,
But only *Stella's* eyes and *Stella's* hart.

To call the wits "fooles" seems a firm enough dismissal, but how are they "over-wise?" Because they seek out over-elaborate explanations? Why, then, reproduce them? And Astrophil's "alas," though it may express simply the conventional self-pity of lovers, seems in this context to indicate a regret for the clear paths in which literary and courtly careers move forward. So does his use of the sporting metaphor "race," which suggests that the focus of his desire is uncomfortably narrow, compared to the course of athletic or political competition.

Sonnet 23 demonstrates that, resist as he may, Astrophil responds to external expectations by setting up a deceptively simple antithesis: public ambitions versus the privacy of love. Public careers and their accompanying discourses actually determine both halves of his antithesis. As lover, as private man, he defines himself as non-poet, non-courtier; he justifies himself toward a public whose claim on his attention consists precisely in their indifference to love. The privileged realm of love, in the economy of the poem, occupies an area defined by the *subtraction* of the worldly activities of poetry-writing and courtiership. Both nonetheless determine the structure and phrasing of the poem, and they are powerfully present, precisely, in Astrophil's denial of them.

If the public world is apparently rejected in 23, it is actively appropriated in 69, in which Astrophil's delight at Stella's conditional acceptance of him as a lover is conceived in the language of the court's hierarchies:

> O JOY, too high for my low stile to show:
> O blisse, fit for a nobler state then me:
> . . . . . .
> My friend, that oft saw through all maskes my wo,
> Come, come, and let me powre my selfe on thee;
> . . . . . .
> For *Stella* hath with words where faith doth shine,
> Of her high heart giv'n me the monarchie:
> . . . . . .
> And though she give but thus conditionly
> This realm of blisse, while vertuous course I take,
> No kings be crown'd but they some covenants make.

But 69 suggests that there is some equivocation about Astrophil's "Joy," as there was about his ambition in 23. The equivocations of 69 are related to those in 68, in which Astrophil hopes "so faire a Vertue to enjoy." It is tempting to see ambiguity—deliberate polysemy—as a weapon in Astrophil's hands, through which he can both hint at and deny sexual desire. While he praises his own "noble fire" (68, line 7), which burns for the higher good of the "onely Planet of my light," the nature of his fire is deliberately left vague, as is the kind of "Vertue" (Stella's mind or her body?) which he wishes to "enjoy" (to admire or to ravish?). The "Joy," then, with which 69 begins is a slippery concept. Is it the joy that worshipper feels toward deity and courtier toward monarch, or is it the joy whose fulfillment is the enjoyment of the beloved's body? A suspicious reading would recognize the obscurity of Astrophil's desire as *functional*, allowing him to shine in contrast to the base machinations of the world while at the same time manipulating verbal ambiguity to his own advantage.

Moreover, however ecstatic Astrophil may be, his choice of interlocutor—the long-term confidant he addresses in this poem—ties his rhetoric to a world of shared masculine understanding. In earlier poems, Stella was the privileged listener who alone understood Astrophil's state of mind, but here only a certain kind of "friend" can participate in his evasions. To Stella, Astrophil speaks of love as service; to his friend, he can suggest a sub-text of love as masculine domination. Similarly, the conceit that elevates a successful lover to the status of monarch is at one level a graceful compliment to the beloved, suggesting that she alone has the ability to create monarchs. But at the same time, Astrophil is seeking the power that will enable him to "powre" himself on Stella as he now does on his friend. Read suspi-

ciously, Astrophil's equation is implicitly coercive: since he has the monarchy, he can say "she is mine," using his new-found authority to interpret that "mine" as he will. Stella says she loves him, but he transforms the conditions that give her love its grounding. Her language founds love in virtue; his language now founds love in power.

If such a reading is adopted, any remaining pretense that Astrophil might make to private virtue, as opposed to the pragmatism of the public world, is dropped. (The virtue of his love has, of course, been in doubt throughout the sequence, and Ringler rightly points out that the turning point comes in Sonnet 52, in which Astrophil explicitly admits his pursuit of Stella's body, leaving Stella's "selfe" to "Vertue."[7]) A traitor to love's "privacy," Astrophil invokes the public world of unscrupulous politics in the insouciant Machiavellianism of his last line ("No kings be crown'd, but they some covenants make"), thus breaking down the oppositions (public/private, vice/virtue) that we noted in 23. Here he triumphs by showing that the structure of his desire and the structure of the political world are analogous: the lover treats his lady as the king treats his subjects. At the same time, Astrophil's love turns out to be not so private: it is his lust now (as it was his "wo" before) that unites him to a male world in which language can become an instrument of domination and women the naive subjects (that is, objects) of men's desire.

But perhaps the poem requires a reading more sympathetic to Astrophil's predicament. Is it possible that 69 manifests the difficulty of which he complains in 72, in which he "scarcely can descrie" desire from pure love? Might not such a confusion be dramatized in line 11 of 69, in the stuttering hesitation of "I, I, ô I may say, that she is mine"? Yet even if we read the ambiguities of the sonnet as signs not of manipulative strategy but of the inherent instability of desire, it must be noted that the plurality of meanings set up within the fictional narrative can benefit only the lover/poet. It is he who has everything to gain from the postponement of too open a labeling of desire. In other poems, such as 71 and 72, the distinction between "pure love" and desire is made explicit. But such an opposition, placed within the Christian problematic alluded to throughout the sonnets, threatens to foreclose the sequence by resolving the dilemma at once: if what Astrophil feels is lust, he must give it up; if it is pure love, there is no problem to solve. Sonnet 69 shows, rather, how a "veil of enchanted

[7] *Poems*, Introduction, xlvii.

relationships" allows what Pierre Bourdieu calls "symbolic violence"[8] to continue, a violence written into the contradictory inequalities that map out the positions of the lovers: the inequality of the servant (Astrophil) to his master (Stella), the inequality of the subordinated sex (Stella) to the dominant sex (Astrophil). The blurring of these two discourses is the method by which Astrophil can continue to maneuver without too blunt a naming of unequal positions. He is concerned, indeed, not so much to alter the categories as to manipulate them so as to redistribute power. The mixture of discourses, far from being a subversion of power, becomes here one of power's subtlest ruses.

By 107, Stella has been restored to her position as princess, queen, and master, and Astrophil is once again her servant and lieutenant; once more, Stella is the distant star and Astrophil the star-lover:

> *STELLA* since thou so right a Princesse art
> Of all the powers which life bestowes on me,
> That ere by them ought undertaken be,
> They first resort unto that soueraigne part.

But their respective positions are, as in the Fifth Song, fixed by Astrophil himself, and here again the maneuvering of positions is an aspect of his manipulation of power. In *Astrophil and Stella*, positions are not simply givens (although Astrophil can start only from the social and literary conventions that "create" him as lover); they are, as well, elements to be interpreted and worked on.

Indeed, in the course of the poem, Astrophil totally transforms his opening compliment to Stella. The poem is a series of subtle shifts in discourse, leading from praise to blame, from the realm in which Stella's powers are all-important (the private world of the lover) to a realm in which the blame of "fooles" is a serious consideration (the public world of the court). But although the public world may contain "fooles" who would judge their love too hastily, it is also the place of a great cause which it would be blameworthy to ignore:

> Sweete, for a while give respite to my hart,
> Which pants as though it still should leape to thee:
> And on my thoughts give thy Lieftenancy
> To this great cause, which needs both use and art.

[8]Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as "*censored, euphemized*, i.e. unrecognizable, socially recognized violence." He argues that "when domination can only be exercised in its *elementary form*, i. e. directly, between one person and another, it cannot take place overtly and must be disguised under the veil of enchanted relationships . . . ; in order to be socially recognized it must get itself misrecognized" (*Outline of a Theory of Practise*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), p. 191).

We are not dealing simply with the "curious wits" of 23 (although even they could not be dismissed without an "alas"). If in 23 all Astrophil's public ambitions were displaced by Stella, here she is assigned a double role: the barrier to but also the potential aider of public service. In fact, only as the supporter of the public world can she escape the charge of having entrapped his heart for her own narcissistic purposes; this is the accusation implied in the last lines of the poem:

> On servants' shame oft Maister's blame doth sit;
> O let not fooles in me thy works reprove,
> And scorning say, 'See what it is to love.'

Astrophil arrives at this point by three steps in a concealed argument against Stella: 1) she is his controller, the "author" of him as lover; 2) but he is also subject to the authority of others—hence his "shame"; 3) this authority will direct its blame not essentially at him (for he is merely Stella's servant) but at Stella, the "Maister." In the process of this argument, the imperatives, which at first have the look of invocations to a higher being ("give respite," "give thy Lieftenancy") take on the force of threats ("O let not fooles reprove"). If Stella fails to give him "respite," it will be *her* works the "fooles . . . reprove."

It is clear from preceding poems that by 107 Astrophil has finally been repulsed by Stella (she is only an "absent presence" for him in 106), but the sonnet shows his attempt to manipulate even this calamity. How can she be completely distant from him if she still controls his thoughts? And if she controls his thoughts, is it not then her fault if his thoughts remain witless? As objects of reproof, Stella and Astrophil (one of Stella's "workes") are once more united against the "fooles" of the world. But by making himself a neutral medium for proverbial wisdom ("On servants' shame oft Maister's blame doth sit"), Astrophil is able to suggest both his loyalty to Stella (his "Sweete") and the fact that he is at least halfway of the "fooles'" mind. Astrophil, in other words, transforms himself in the course of the poem from humble servant to implicit critic. And Stella, at the same time, is brought down to earth. Whatever powers she may have over him, he is able, in the world of the poem, to subject her to public judgment and scorn.

It is important, however, not to overstate Astrophil's mastery. Whatever his machinations, Stella controls the outcome of the sequence. Her judgment of Astrophil, her limited consent, her final rejection determine his responses. The lady's supremacy is a given of the sequence, as it is in all the poetry contributing to the conventions within which Sidney worked: troubadour lyrics to the lady as *dompna*, stilnovist eulogies of *donne angelicate*, the Petrarchan and Neoplatonic sequences written throughout Europe in the century preceding *Astrophil and Stella*. The basic situation in such sequences is the same: the

lover entreats, the lady grants only those favors she chooses. Sidney comes closer than most writers in the tradition to depicting a successful seduction, but Astrophil, like his fellows, is finally stopped short. When the lady (or "Tyran honour," as Stella says in the Eighth Song) shuts the door, the lover has no other court of appeal.

But as our analysis of the poems has suggested, Astrophil's role as poet allows him to control most of the fiction, and the activity, within the sequence. The descriptions of Stella, the interpretations of her behavior, the eulogies and casuistry addressed to her, the reactions set directly before us are all Astrophil's. He determines how each sonnet unfolds; his is the wit and the voice that we hear in its rhetorical strategies. Stella, as subject or agent, is absorbed into the performances of the I-speaker; she becomes his subject (in the sense of "topic") and also the instrument through which he studies himself.[9]

This contradiction between Astrophil as the voice uttering the poems and as a lover submitting himself to Stella disappears only once in the sequence, in the Eighth Song, in which a third-person narrator reports the lovers' farewell meeting:

> *Astrophil* with *Stella* sweete,
> Did for mutual comfort meete,
> Both within themselves oppressed,
> But each in the other blessed.

We hear as much about Stella as about Astrophil in the first stanzas, and as much from her as from him in the speech she contributes to their dialogue. But the balance between roles provided by this dramatic interlude comes into play only once. More typical is Astrophil's use of Stella's words in the Fourth Song, in which her "'No, no, no, no, my Deare, let be'" is merely a refrain against which the lover-poet deploys nine ingenious arguments of seduction. He rarely quotes Stella directly, and his paraphrases of what she says have to be treated with suspicion, as 69 makes clear. It is Astrophil's elation or despair, and his verbal manipulations, that determine what we will hear or not hear about Stella.

But what are the boundaries of this small world in which Astrophil's language is law? To answer that question, we need to examine in his-

[9]Maurice Scève frankly asserts the lover's use of the beloved as a mirror for his own aspirations in dizain 271 of *Délie*:"Ie quiers en toy ce, qu'en moy i'ay plus cher. / Et bien qu'espoir de l'attente me frustre, / Point ne m'est grief en aultruy me chercher." (I seek in you what in myself I hold most dear / and although hope of reaching it eludes me, / there is no pain for me in seeking myself in another (our translation)), *Délie*, ed. J. D. McFarlane (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1966), p. 267. On narcissicism in male-authored love poetry, see also Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Finding Feminist Readings: Dante-Yeats," *Social Text* 3 (Fall 1980):73-87.

torical context those silences in the text which are the preconditions of the sequence: its silences about the real relations of power between men and women and between courtier and monarch.

Courtship, courtiership, and the sonnet sequence

We have argued that Sidney's sequence, like nearly all sonnet sequences, is based on a formula by which the man is subjected to his lady while, at the same time, the situation enables him to pour forth his eloquence in an attempt to influence her. But what does this "love" have to do with the property rules and family interests that regulated the exchange of a woman between the father of the bride and the father of the groom in a Renaissance marriage? Why did an ideal that subjected man to woman retain such popularity at the same time that male domination within the family was being strengthened?[10] We cannot answer this question from *within* Sidney's work. We need to discover the relation between the ideology implicit in the genre he uses and the dominant social practices of his time.

One thing Sidney's poems show is that in the course of writing a sequence, a poet learns the use of compliment, wit, and persuasion. These were the very qualities necessary to the new courtier in relation to his prince. As the need for brute strength declined, most strikingly in England but also throughout Renaissance Europe, the value of education and, in particular, of the *ars bene dicendi* increased.[11] Although military accomplishment was still important, it tended to become one of the many graces which the courtier needed to woo his prince.[12] The relation of courtier to prince was reproduced further down the scale in the relation of suitor to patron, in a patronage system of which literature formed only a small part.[13] The professional

[10]See Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), pp. 137-64; Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 151-218.

[11]Castiglione's modeling of the courtier is in many ways analogous to the modeling of a lover. As Castiglione's courtier works to raise himself above the vulgar herd by his appearance, his skills, and his eloquence in order to attract and influence the prince, so does the lover in order to attract and influence his beloved. On the relation between courtiership and eloquence in England, see Daniel Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978).

[12]In England, prolonged periods of peace between 1552 and 1662 meant that "the opportunities for military service were consequently reduced," as Lawrence Stone notes in *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 266. See also Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso Editions, 1979), pp. 113-42, for the significance of England's early "de-militarization."

[13]For the general problems of patronage in England during this period, see Stone, *Crisis*, pp. 385-504.

poet—Daniel and Drayton, for example—like the courtier, or, indeed, like any suitor for favors, was precariously dependent upon his ability to win support from an undependable superior. At the level of actual writing, then, the sonnet sequence could play a part in developing the courtier-poet's eloquence.

More important, the structure of the lovers' relationship is a variant *not* of the actual relationship between men and women, which was one of female subordination to father or to husband, but of the relationship of the courtier to his prince, or the suitor's to his patron. Even the silence of the sonneteer's beloved has more in common with the prince's silence, in which his or her every look must be interrogated for the slightest sign of favor or disfavor, than with the forced silence and obedience of daughter or wife. One can identify a set of homologies between lover/beloved, suitor/patron and courtier/prince. As the lover must have absolute loyalty to his beloved, the courtier must have absolute loyalty to his prince; as the lover is apparently totally subjected to his lady, the courtier must appear to be totally subjected to his prince. But at the same time, both lover and courtier can attempt to influence and even to subject the beloved/prince to their own will through their accomplishments.

There are also analogies between conditions of service at court and the conditions of service within the sonnet sequence. Daniel Javitch has shown the similarity recognized by sixteenth-century rhetoricians such as Puttenham between poetic artifice and the artifices necessary for the courtier's success.[14] The sonnet sequence emphasizes two kinds of artifice: rhetorical figures (that is, poetic ornament) and the false logic by which the lover attempts to seduce his beloved. The two kinds find their counterpart in the courtier's accomplishments and in his necessarily devious use of them to secure advancement. At the same time, the courtier, like the lover of the sonnet sequence, was usually doomed to a life of waiting (more or less patiently) and of frustration; this was true of Sidney's own life at court.[15] The love the sonneteers depicted, then, was a peculiarly appropriate symbolic version of a courtier's life: a life of constancy, obedience, and devious means, all in the service of a beloved/prince who all too rarely granted mercy. If, as Javitch says, "the esthetics of the courtly code were shaped by the political pressures of despotism as much as by the social

[14]Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness*, passim.

[15]See F. J. Levy, "Philip Sidney Reconsidered," *ELR* 2 (Winter 1972):5–18; and McCoy, *Rebellion in Arcadia*, pp. 1–35.

habits and tastes of the aristocracy,"[16] that despotism finds its idealized image in the capricious but exquisite lady of the sonnet sequence and in the literary aesthetics of frustrated love.

It is scarcely surprising, then, that we find princes throughout Europe exploiting this game of Petrarchan love. For it is a game in which three powerful discourses meet and join hands: love, religion, and politics. As the lover worships the beloved, the believer worships God, and the subject worships the prince. In the symbolism of Elizabeth's court (for example, in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, in the portraits of Elizabeth I, in the madrigals of Morley and his contemporaries), we find these three different practices "miraculously" reinforcing each other.[17] Though the courtier may suffer, who would not suffer in so great a cause? The suffering of the lover, then, functions as a displacement of the sufferings of the courtier.

That such love might be a sophisticated game of the "idle" courtier (that is, the courtier waiting to be given employment), who had time to kill and the opportunity for dalliance, is suggested by Colin's sarcastic comment in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*: "love aboundeth most at court." He continues,

> For all the walls and windows there are writ,
> And full of love, and love, and love my deare,
> And all their talke and studie is of it.
> Ne any there doth brave or valiant seeme,
> Unlesse that some gay Mistress badge he weares.[18]
> (lines 776–80)

Colin's dismissal of such love as "courting vaine" suggests a more critical view of the connection between love and politics: the lover is debased through lust, the courtier through ambition and corruption. The frustrated pursuit of love and glory may well explain certain

[16]Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness*, p. 117. See also Louis Adrian Montrose, "Celebration and Insinuation: Sir Philip Sidney and the Motives of Elizabethan Courtship," *RenD*, n. s. 8 (1977):3–35, for a related argument about courtly/literary interconnections. Montrose suggests that "much of the ubiquitous amorous literature of the period enabled a transformed expression of desires for socioeconomic advancement. In an ideological system dominated by hostility to personal ambition and social change, desires for wealth, status, and power might be intentionally disguised or unconsciously displaced in metaphors of erotic and spiritual desire" (p. 26).

[17]In the Rainbow Portrait, for example, the discourses of love, religion and politics eloquently reinforce one another. See Frances A. Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 215–19; Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), pp. 50–52.

[18]*Spenser: Poetical Works*, ed. J. C. Smith and E. de Selincourt (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1912), p. 554.

courtier-poets' turns to counter-conventions: a misogynistic satire in which the lover rejects the object of lust and a pastoral in which the courtier rejects the corruptions of the court.

But the homology between courtiership and love breaks down at a crucial point: as Sidney's sequence makes clear, Stella is *not* the prince. For her to submit to Astrophil's lust would radically lower her status, while Elizabeth's accession to a courtier's ambitions would normally enhance hers. What in Stella would be seen as scandalous liberality would in the Prince be seen as the liberality of royal magnificence. Lust is, indeed, the inescapable element that destroys the picture of Stella as Platonic ideal or image of Gloriana, because it calls into question not only the role of the lover but the position of the beloved. As Sonnet 69 shows, it is quite possible to think of deceiving and ruling Stella, and however high her heart may be, she is in danger of becoming no more than Astrophil's prey. We are reminded, in these and other poems, that no matter how ethereal she may at times seem, she is nonetheless a woman, subject to the laws of chastity (laws which only a real queen could manipulate for her own ends). Although Stella's point of view is largely suppressed in the sequence, we see that she must submit to "Tyran honour" with its "cruell might" (Sonnet 91). Indeed, within the sequence, chastity belongs to two contradictory discourses: it points both to her exalted virtue (her majesty) and to her role as woman/body (threatened with loss of virtue). As Ruth Kelso notes in her study, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, chastity was the central virtue; it constituted a woman's honor:

> The quality most frequently praised is chastity. Enough could not be said of it as the foundation of womanly worth. Let a woman have chastity, she has all. Let her lack chastity and she is nothing.[19]

The sonneteers, moreover, did not altogether suppress the disaster that would befall a woman if she submitted to her lover. Daniel's *Delia* was bound with *The Complaint of Rosamond* and Shakespeare's *Sonnets* with *A Lover's Complaint*, both laments spoken by women who have submitted and lost their honor.

What possible analogy can exist, then, between the exalted role of beloved and the subjected position of women? One answer has already suggested itself: the beloved, like a good wife, is passive. She is reduced to the monotonous repetition of "no," "perhaps," and, if only in the lover's fantasy, "yes." The beloved, that is, has no value in *herself*. It is in relation to unfulfilled male desire that she takes on

[19]Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1956), p. 24.

value. If the desire is fulfilled, as the complaints appended to Daniel's and Shakespeare's poems make clear, she loses all value (except, perhaps, as a king's possession or a monitory example to other women). But the beloved's passivity enables the lover to show his skill in the use of language. The more passive the lady, the more active he must be; as the lady recedes out of sight and hearing, the lover comes into focus. And it is possible that he finds in her mainly the necessary precondition for his own dazzling pyrotechnics. As Kelso says of Renaissance courtship, "Love is primarily a game at which men play, and women are involved because there have to be two to play it."[20]

But the beloved remains a crucial *symbol* in that game, for it is through her that the public/private division comes into being. Through her, it is possible to envision a retreat from the claustrophobic court and its "curious wits" into a world of private desire. And at the same time, by making Stella the prince, Astrophil can imply that his ambition is of at least as great moment as the ambition of court "fooles." Indeed, it might seem that if Stella, both as prince and lover, were merciful, Astrophil would find public and private fulfillment simultaneously.

Even Astrophil's private desire, however, can be articulated through processes of symbolization which are not his own creation but already given. And the conflicting discourses of politics, love, and lust cannot finally be reconciled. For if Stella, like the queen, is valued as gift-giver, she, unlike the queen, can only lose status by giving, as a consequence of the gifts she has to give: her body (Sonnet 69) or the lover's release from the entire situation (107). If Stella moves from beloved to lover, she is at Astrophil's mercy, as 69 suggests. (Indeed, outside the decorum of the sonnet sequence, Stella yielding would be seen to deserve the unambiguous titles of adulteress and whore.) But a Stella reduced to a possession (indeed, as mistress her public status would be lower than that of wife or daughter) would scarcely have been worth such pursuit. Hence the double bind of discourses that, even as Astrophil attempts to manipulate them, actually position *him*, either as the ever-despairing suitor or as the successful captor of a woman who, precisely through his capturing her, will lose her value. Astrophil may well be perfecting his eloquence. But in contrast to the courtier, his words fall on deaf ears; and in contrast to the faithful lover, he attempts to usurp the beloved's throne.

Sidney's sequence, then, takes the search for transcendence or the hopeful resolution of other sonnet sequences to an absolute dead end. Petrarch can attempt a turn from Laura to the Virgin Mary; Maurice Scève can predict an eventual celestial reunion with Délie. But Astro-

[20]Kelso, *Doctrine*, p. 171.

phil never attains a higher vision in which $\frac{\text{beloved}}{\text{lover}} = \frac{\text{prince}}{\text{courtier}} = \frac{\text{God}}{\text{worshipper}}$. If he works out any synthesis, he does so only by exerting symbolic violence, by inventing (and by denying) linkages that debase love and politics alike. His refusal of any resemblance between love and ambition in Sonnet 23 will be contradicted as the "race" of his thoughts leads him to his manipulations of power in 69 and to his self-interested play with the conceit of Stella as "Princesse" in 107. He continues to oscillate between incompatible and equally unsatisfactory ways of constructing the beloved: as prince (but a prince whose only gift is her body); as lover (but, within this society, a lover reduced to the status of food, as in Sonnet 71: "'But ah,' Desire still cries, 'give me some food.'"). This second possibility must, of course, be censored if the economy of the sonnet sequence is to survive. In love, as in politics, symbolic violence (that violence which is "socialized," euphemized, unrecognized) depends for its continuation on "the veil of enchanted relationships."