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SIDNEY'S PURPOSEFUL HUMOR: *ASTROPHIL AND STELLA* 59 AND 83

BY DANIEL TRAISTER

Sidney's words, as Rosalie L. Colie has remarked, "can at once, in triumph, assert and deny the truth of what they say."¹ They give to *Astrophil* a verbal dexterity—or ambidexterity—that is one of his many attractions. Few characters in the literature of the English Renaissance are as engaging as the protean *Astrophil* who speaks to us from the sonnets and songs of Sidney's sequence. Capable of virtuoso emotional somersaults, of a gentle self-mockery in which most readers find Sidney's lightly ironic view of himself, and of an urbane wit which flashes sonnet after sonnet, song after song, *Astrophil* has proven irresistible to almost all audiences. *Stella* alone seems unimpressed. Most of his other readers find it difficult not to feel, when the sequence has ended, that *Astrophil* has failed to reach a goal we should very much like to have seen him reach. Much of this success is due to the witty geniality of his voice.

Astrophil and Stella succeeds as a whole for much the same reason. Most of its readers in recent years have found it witty: lightly melancholy, to be sure, but essentially comic in structure and meaning. Humorous and urbane, the young aristocrat who is its author neither overburdens his work with lumbering seriousness nor violates the canons of *sprezzatura*. In fact, the delicately comedic balance of, first, what most readers regard as Sidney's own most intimate concerns, and, second, his ironic detachment from the tale and its fictional protagonist, has seemed a major source of the poetry's delight.

Yet Sidney's conception of comedy is not very funny. Typical of his age, he believes that comedy is ultimately a didactic mode, "an imitation," as he writes, "of the common errors of our life" represented "in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be, so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one."² For Sidney, comedy is a *negative exemplum*:³ a "foil" that by showing us "the filthiness of evil" increases our capacity "to perceive the beauty of virtue" (*Apology*, 117, and notes, 188). Later in the *Apology*, Sidney remarks that the "end" of comical episodes in

tragedies should “be not upon such scornful matters as stirreth laughter only, but, mixed with it, that delightful teaching which is the end of Poesy” (136-37). He has already differentiated laughter—which “hath only a scornful tickling”—from the more significant comic effect, delight—“Delight hath a joy in it, either permanent or present”—which facilitates teaching (136). If Sidney’s statement of poetic theory in the *Apology* is an accurate guide to his poetic practice,⁴ then the wit to which readers of his sequence respond may be (at least in some part) a seductive tool used to attract interest in ends not in themselves especially humorous—didactic ends, “that delightful teaching which is the end of Poesy.”

Lip service to the validity of this hypothesis is general—but, it seems to me, the implications of such a theory for our reading of Sidney’s sequence are not seriously pursued. In this paper, I consider two sonnets often cited in comment on the humor of *Astrophil and Stella*⁵ in an effort to suggest the direction that such pursuit should take. The first of these is Sonnet 59:

Deare, why make you more of a dog then me?
 If he do love, I burne, I burne in love:
 If he waite well, I never thence would move:
 If he be faire, yet but a dog can be.
 Little he is, so little worth is he;
 He barks, my songs thine owne voyce oft doth prove:
 Bid’n, perhaps he fetcheth thee a glove,
 But I unbid, fetch even my soule to thee.
 Yet while I languish, him that bosome clips,
 That lap doth lap, nay lets, in spite of spite,
 This sowre-breath’d mate tast of those sugred lips.
 Alas, if you graunt only such delight
 To witlesse things, then *Love* I hope (since wit
 Becomes a clog) will soone ease me of it.

The second is the closely related Sonnet 83:

Good brother *Philip*, I have borne you long,
 I was content you should in favour creepe,
 While craftily you seem’d your cut to keepe,
 As though that faire soft hand did you great wrong.
 I bare (with *Envie*) yet I bare your song,
 When in her necke you did *Love* ditties peepe;
 Nay, more foole I, oft suffered you to sleepe
 In Lillies’ neast, where *Love*’s selfe lies along.
 What, doth high place ambitious thoughts augment?
 Is sawcinesse reward of curtesie?
 Cannot such grace your silly selfe content,

But you must needs with those lips billing be?
And through those lips drinke Nectar from that toong;
Leave that sir *Phip*, least off your necke be wroong.

These poems are obviously humorous: witty and urbane in precisely the ways that have made Astrophil and Sidney's sequence attractive to readers for centuries. But they are also didactic. The Renaissance, after all, knew "no neat separation of the comic from the didactic," Scoular reminds us; "wit and piety were combined in a way that affronts a stricter decorum."⁶ Their didacticism emerges from a reader's amusement as he responds to their humorousness. As laughter proves inadequate to the complex experiences the sonnets record, the reader is forced to reconsider those experiences and the implications of his first response to them. Such reconsideration is designed to teach him his own susceptibility to the errors the sonnets represent and that he must be wary of the deceptive attractiveness of such errors now that he is better able to recognize them.⁷

This sort of flat-footed moralizing seems quite distant from the witty urbanity usually—and rightly—ascribed to Sidney. Yet the very casualness with which the didactic point awaits a reader beneath the amusing surface of both sonnets is a tribute to the poetic skill of the moralist (highly valued in the *Apology*). Sidney is as graceful here as in the exordium to his *Apology* where, for a moment, we think we are about to be told about horsemanship in a particularly engaging manner before being easily wheeled around to face the real subject of the discourse. Sonnets 59 and 83 wheel us around from amused laughter to more sober reflection just as gently, and just as relentlessly.

In both sonnets, Astrophil laments his relations with his love, contrasting his own distance from her with the favored state of her pets—her lap dog in Sonnet 59, her sparrow "Philip" in Sonnet 83. Both beasts possess what Richard B. Young has delicately called certain "sensual advantages" over Astrophil.⁸ Of Stella's dog, Astrophil complains, "while I languish, him that bosome clips, / That lap doth lap, nay lets, in spite of spite, / This sowre-breath'd mate tast of those sugred lips." Phip, Stella's sparrow, peeps "*Love dities*" in Stella's "necke," he "sleep[s] / In Lillies' nest," that is, on Stella's breasts (cf. Spenser, *Amoretti* 64), and he kisses Stella. Sidney's language defines the beasts' "sensual advantages" in terms bearing explicit sexual denotations.⁹ Ignoring for the moment what this language suggests about Stella's sexual preferences, clearly

one locus of the humor in both sonnets is their witty disparagement of Astrophil. Both he and the pets are interested in the same thing, but the animals succeed while the man does not. Such inversion of hierarchy is one of the most common causes of laughter.

Almost simultaneously, however, the sonnets suggest that hierarchy is not inverted to quite the degree it first seems. For both sonnets put more emphasis on Astrophil's near identity with Stella's pets than on his human superiority over them.

In Sonnet 59, of course, Astrophil tries to convince Stella that he *is* superior to her lap dog. The dog merely loves; Astrophil "burnes" in love. If Stella only gave him the opportunity, he would "waite" for, or upon, her with a more steadfast devotion. He is bigger and better-looking than any dog that "but a dog can be," and his songs are more enjoyable than the dog's barking. The dog must be "bid'n" to fetch Stella but a glove; dog-like but better than a dog, Astrophil fetches her, "unbid," his "soule." By mentioning her dog's "sowre" breath, Astrophil reminds Stella how much sweeter his own is. Yet inherent in these comparisons is not Astrophil's superiority but rather the assumption that dog and man are comparable—not an apple and an orange, but two apples. It is no idle ambiguity that, in line 11, the dog who is Stella's "mate" may be understood as Astrophil's mate as well.

In Sonnet 83, in fact, the beast—here Philip Sparrow—has become Astrophil's "brother." *Astrophil* and *Philip* share part of a name, and the author behind Astrophil shares all of a name, and a knighthood, too, with "sir *Phip*."¹⁰ Joined with Astrophil in contention for Stella's favors, Phip is so successful that he merits Astrophil's "envie." He has enough of a relationship with Astrophil to "reward" his "curtesie" with "sawcinesse."¹¹ Hierarchy is amusingly inverted when Stella's pets pursue Stella with greater success than Astrophil; also amusing, Astrophil's language assumes kinship with bestial inferiors who, taking advantage of their new equality by getting "saucy" with patronizing Astrophil, deny hierarchy altogether.

That the beasts and Astrophil are comparable results from no raising of the beasts to a human level, however. Rather, Astrophil's humanity has decayed—metamorphosed—to make such comparisons possible. Love, of course, was frequently thought in this period to cause degenerative metamorphosis;¹² whatever its cause, metamorphosis is not a subject for gay, casual humor. Tuve, who speaks of the gaiety of Sonnet 59 (above, n. 5), knows that metamor-

phosis can be “an image of man’s betrayal of his spiritual allegiances to the intemperance of his other natural desires.”¹³ The reader who laughs at the situation these sonnets represent is laughing at the collapse of a human being into bestiality.

I state the matter more baldly than my reader may easily accept. Yet Astrophil’s bestialization is more than merely “implicit” in the comparison his language initiates between himself and Stella’s lap dog. Dogs have a large and (as usual) ambiguous range of conventional attributes. That the least favorable of these adhere, not to Stella’s dog, but to Astrophil, forces a reader to regard Astrophil as less than her dog. For instance, her dog fetches Stella’s glove while Astrophil boasts that he fetches her his soul. But her glove belongs to Stella, whereas Astrophil’s soul is properly God’s. It is not his to give away idolatrously to an earthly goddess. In doing its animal duty by subordinating itself to Stella’s humanity, the dog—if in pursuing her it can be said to “hunt” at all—joins in a hunt which recognizes hierarchy and order and is hence a hunt for virtue.¹⁴ But Astrophil seeks to replace the dog as the object of Stella’s “clips” and to lie in her “lap”—and he *does* mean “country matters”: he wants to be like those dogs that Edward Topsell regards as “emblems of vile, cursed, rayling, and filthy men” whose “public and shamelesse copulation” associates them with low sexuality.¹⁵ Astrophil hunts Venus, carnality, and cupidinous self-satisfaction. Choosing to be a dog in the wrong hunt (like Proteus in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*),¹⁶ he displays that failure of reason to which “real” dogs were thought prone.¹⁷ In short, trying to convince Stella of his superiority by comparing himself to a dog, Astrophil inadvertently shows himself to be like a dog—of the worst sort.

Astrophil does not recognize his own collapse into bestiality. As a result, he articulates it only obliquely, largely unaware of what he is telling Stella and us. Indeed, symptomatic of his collapse is a decay of the rational power necessary to understand and combat it. Nonetheless, Astrophil feels the effects of this collapse. In Sonnet 59, the artfully rigorous comparisons between Astrophil and Stella’s lap dog are, from one point of view, gaily humorous. From another, however, they reflect Astrophil’s pathetically desperate effort to attract Stella’s attention. The strident extravagance of the poem’s wit turns that wit back on itself, making it seem strained rather than natural. This strain reflects Astrophil’s strain as he struggles with his tone, trying to moderate his desperation, in the course of com-

posing this plea. His growing bestialization explains the sonnet's strange atmosphere, one in which playfulness becomes intricately intertwined with a cry anticipating the witlessness towards which Astrophil feels himself sliding: "Alas, if you graunt only such delight / To witlesse things, then *Love* I hope (since wit / Becomes a clog) will soone ease me of it." The "manly lover," as John Buxton calls him,¹⁸ turns, before his own and the reader's eyes, into something much less than a man, something unmanned. The sonnet, apparently a wittily sardonic expression of Astrophil's jealousy, points far beyond this relatively simple emotion to realms of tension, insecurity, and desperation paralleled in the period only in certain of Shakespeare's sonnets.

Similarly in Sonnet 83, Astrophil again loses control. Linked here to a bird noted for its lecherousness,¹⁹ he seems again to exhibit less human love than bestial lust. Threatening Phip with death in the last line, Astrophil reveals how bestial his passion has made him, demonstrating a capacity for a kind of violence appropriate to beasts rather than men. Thus he calls his human nature into question. Since the object of his wrath is a mere sparrow, Astrophil's threat is a grotesquely exaggerated response to Phip's "biling" with Stella that also questions his human rationality. Since injury to Phip would obviously injure Stella, whose loved creature he is, Astrophil's threat finally conveys his surprising indifference to Stella's emotional and sentimental concerns. In a context which offers many reasons for a reader to view Astrophil in bestial terms, such indifference encourages additional doubt about the nature of the emotion for Stella that Astrophil professes. He displays what looks like, not human love, but bestial lust directed at mere physical possession of the desired one, desired not as person but as object. Apart from such possession, he is otherwise unconcerned with a complete human being whose interests, affections, or desires matter in any way. It is curiously revealing that Stella is really of no consequence at all in this sonnet. Man and bird compete over her, but she comes into view only in fragments: a hand, a neck, breasts, lip, or tongue. The sonnet gives a reader no reason to think that Astrophil regards her as anything more than an object with whose physicality he is preoccupied, an object he does not even conceive as a whole.

Indeed, the attitude toward Stella which both sonnets imply is very unsettling. A reader should not take too literally the implications in the sonnets' language that Stella's behavior with her pets is

overtly sexual. She may “bill” with Phip and “clip” and “lap” her little dog, but we need not visualize these actions too explicitly (see above, n. 9). Yet some unavoidable suspicion about the effect of this erotically charged language emerges from the fact that Sidney is drawing in both of these sonnets on two poems by Catullus, where sexual imagery often asks to be read as more than subtle *inuendo*.²⁰

In the first of these poems, Catullus’ speaker contrasts the intimate relationship of Lesbia and her pet sparrow with his own isolation from her. The language of this poem is erotically informed: the sparrow, with which Lesbia plays “*in sinu tenere*” (Catullus 2.2), offers her “*soliacolum sui doloris*” (2.7) in an almost certainly sexual sense and functions much like a surrogate phallus.²¹ In the second poem, usually read in conjunction with the first, Catullus’ speaker laments the death of Lesbia’s sparrow because of the tears its loss has caused her.

Both of Catullus’ poems give rise to a tradition—followed in Latin by Ovid and Statius; in English by Skelton, Gascoigne, Drummond of Hawthornden, Herrick, and William Cartwright; and by others in these and additional languages²²—in which, after the death of a loved one’s or friend’s pet (not necessarily a sparrow), the poet attempts to console his friend or lover by praising the pet. He envisions for it a lovely tomb and a cheerful afterlife, or creates for it a fit epitaph. Such concern for an animal presupposes, indeed demonstrates, the poet’s much greater regard or love for the dead beast’s owner. The specifically sensual-sexual attributes of the phallic sparrow are not essential to the tradition, though they suggest a variant within its limits that a poet (such as Skelton) may wish to explore. The rhetorical flourishes through which the poet elaborates his praise for the dead pet, bewails its loss, fashions its poetic urn, and, above all, suggests his regard for its owner: these are essentials in this tradition. Quite self-consciously, Sidney inverts them all, implying at the same time a comparison between Stella and Lesbia that, in view of the sexual profligacy of the latter, is by no means flattering to the former.

Such implications point again to ambiguities in Astrophil’s feelings about Stella, but more immediately significant is Sidney’s inversion of the Catullan tradition. Phip, of course, is not dead in Sonnet 83, which is closer to Catullus 2 than 3. But for the reader aware of the tradition to which *both* of Catullus’ poems are antecedent and to which Sonnet 83 is clearly related, the threat in the final

line to strangle Phip, while funny, is also a shock. A deformation of expected social patterns (and, obviously, of the conventions of love relationships), the threat also deforms hitherto conventional literary patterns that the informed reader anticipates. By undermining the conventional expression of the poet's normal solicitude for both pet and owner, the threat—considered purely as a literary gesture—reinforces a reader's sense of Astrophil's utter indifference to Stella.

Moreover, as flat statement, unadorned and unelaborated, the threat is almost a plain style antithesis to the ornate amplification in praise of the pet a truly conventional poem would at this point have reached. Indeed, the plain style of the threat reverses the ornate style of the sonnet's opening. From the courtly salutation of the first line, a form of the trope *prosopopoeia* disguising momentarily the fact that the addressee is just a sparrow, to the blunt threat with which the sonnet ends, Astrophil has taken his reader down a steep stylistic descent, inverting the rhetorical amplification that the tradition of such poems leads their readers to expect. This rhetorical inversion parallels the sonnet's inversion of conventional praise for the pet and its owner.

Astrophil's descending rhetorical levels also parallel a reader's sense of the decay of his capacity to feel. As he becomes increasingly similar to the animal his poem concerns, he loses his full courtly humanity, ideally capable of elevated feeling dressed appropriately in elevated speech. The plain style may be a vehicle for "truth" (some such notion seems to be at the basis of Astrophil's poetic theory, as is frequently noticed). But its use, as here, to assert cruelty perverts the proper uses of the style. It contravenes the stylistic expectations aroused by the traditions from which the sonnet emerges, and represents a descent from the stylistic levels on which Astrophil could have chosen to address his loved one and all she holds precious. After all, the plain style is not the only vehicle for truth. As a courtier, Astrophil might decorously have adopted that "eloquence" which Henry Peacham told his complete gentleman is "a principal means of correcting ill manners, reforming laws, humbling aspiring minds, and upholding all virtue."²³ And though early in the sequence (in Sonnet 6, for instance) Astrophil had claimed the plain style as the particularly appropriate vehicle for the expression of the depth and truth of his feelings about Stella, this use of bluntness in Sonnet 83 for the purpose of threat is hardly consonant with what, earlier, he had had in mind.²⁴

There is little need to belabor the obvious ways in which Sonnet

59 similarly inverts the Catullan tradition (to which, lacking any reference to a pet's death, it is admittedly less clearly related than the later sonnet; but see n. 22). Far from praising Stella's dog, Astrophil urges his superiority to it. He bewails its success, not its failures or loss, and does not praise its owner but instead, as Young notes (27), criticizes her "witlessness" in caring for her dog as she does. The enjambement of the last three lines yields a tortuously prosaic conclusion that, like the stylistic descent of Sonnet 83, is very different from the sort of rhetorical display such poems usually attempt.

Many sonnets throughout *Astrophil and Stella* question the precise meaning and value Astrophil gives to and finds in his "love," exploring ambiguities inherent in his (usually very complicated) attitudes towards Stella. These two humorous sonnets are among the most effective. Their Catullan echoes question Stella's nature by tainting her with Lesbia's sexual athleticism. They cast doubt on the nature of the love for Stella that Astrophil professes by demonstrating how indifferent he is to her as a person. By comparing Astrophil to beasts, in contexts which equate bestiality primarily with violence and sexual lust, the sonnets trace Astrophil's divergence from norms of courtly behavior in which human nature is most richly articulated and suggest the degree to which his metamorphic love has altered his humanity for the worse.²⁵

Most significantly for our present purpose, these sonnets indicate Sidney's ability to mix within a basically comic mode serious moral concerns about Astrophil's decline from normatively "human" behavior patterns.²⁶ A multiplicity of conflicting attitudes is characteristic not only of Astrophil's feelings about Stella but also of Sidney's continuously shifting—and even shift—presentation of the story his sequence relates. These various attitudes and the resultant multiple viewpoints are highly functional. The sonnets' humorlessness, for instance, may offer something like "comic relief" from the didactic moral concerns they also display. Their humor helps also to "implicate" the reader in the action of the sequence. Throughout most of *Astrophil and Stella*, the reader sympathizes with Astrophil's love-quest and wants him to succeed in it. But the reader who smiles over Astrophil's difficulties with two beasts, seeing only comic impediments to Astrophil's attainment of Stella, becomes entangled in the most doubtful aspects of his quest. Smiling at comic impedimenta, he must unexpectedly come to grips with Astrophil's unstated, ambiguous comparison of Stella to Lesbia,

and his indifference to her; with the evidence these sonnets offer of lust, not love; and with the divergence from ideals of human behavior—and to a great degree from humanity itself—that Astrophil exhibits.

Sonnets can be reread instantly, as soon as their first jarring inconsistency is felt. They educate their reader in bits and pieces rather than, as Fish demonstrates of *Paradise Lost*, over a long journey through print.²⁷ As soon as the reader recognizes that smiles alone are insufficient to the experience of Sonnets 59 and 83, the inadequacy of his initial response forces him to reconsider the sonnets' significance(s) and the import of that first response. Such reconsideration, I think, makes clear that what he is reading "negatively exemplifies" first, what love is not (it is not simply physical lust), and second, how not to love (proper love does not reduce the lover to acting confusedly, irrationally, and bestially).²⁸ Insofar as the reader's amusement demonstrates how prone he himself is to mistake as "love" something that is so clearly something else, he must reconsider too his conception of what love is. Increasing awareness of the ambiguities inherent in Stella's portrayal may also lead to reexamination of the reader's notion of love's proper object. His laughter, originally genial as it indulgently contemplates Astrophil's plight, turns gradually critical—if not altogether censorious—as Astrophil's situation becomes more clearly the moral quicksand we have seen it to be; and it becomes corrective as the reader's indulgence of Astrophil, seen as less than fully justified, demands self-criticism.

The humor of these sonnets is necessary to provoke such reconsideration. It also makes the process considerably more pleasant and vital than a sermon or abstract philosophical argument (*Apology*, 104-09). The laughter such humor arouses sneaks past the slothful "infected will" to the knowledge of "perfection" possessed by man's "erected wit" (101), by which standard its inadequacy is plain. The reconsideration consequently demanded begins the active engagement of the reader necessary for the process—basic to Sidney's defense of poetry (112-15)—of *moving* men "to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger," and teaching them, albeit indirectly, to "know that goodness whereunto they are moved" (103).²⁹

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FOOTNOTES

¹ *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 95.

² *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (1965; rpt. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1973), p. 117.

³ Geoffrey Fenton provides a contemporary explanation of the negative exemplum in *Certain Tragicall Discourses* (London: Thomas Marthe, 1567), ★3r. Generally, see A. D. S. Fowler, "Protestant Attitudes to Poetry, 1560-1590," Diss. Oxford 1957, pp. 309-11, 443-71. On the negative exemplum in Sidney, see D. W. Robertson, Jr., "Sidney's Metaphor of the Ulcer," *MLN*, 56 (1941), 56-61; Andrew D. Weiner, "'Erected Wit' and 'Infected Will': A Study of Sir Philip Sidney's *Old Arcadia*," *DAI*, 31 (1970-71), 736A (Princeton); Russell Morton Brown, Jr., "'Through All Maskes My Wo': Poet and Persona in *Astrophil and Stella*," Diss. SUNY-Binghamton 1972, p. 226; James J. Scanlon, "Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*: 'See What it Is To Love' Sensually!" *SEL*, 16 (1976), 66 et passim; and Alan Sinfield, "Sidney and Astrophil," *SEL*, 20 (1980), 38-41.

⁴ Sinfield, "Sidney and Astrophil," 28.

⁵ See, e.g., Rosemond Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery: Renaissance Poetic and Twentieth-Century Critics* (1947; rpt. Chicago: Phoenix Books, 1961), p. 321; Richard B. Young, "English Petrarke: A Study of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*," in *Three Studies in the Renaissance: Sidney, Jonson, Milton* (1958; rpt. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1969), pp. 27-28, 60; David Kalstone, *Sidney's Poetry: Contexts and Interpretations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 160; A. C. Hamilton, "Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* as a Sonnet Sequence," *ELH*, 36 (1969), 68; and J. G. Nichols, *The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney: An Interpretation in the Context of his Life and Times* (Liverpool: University Press, 1974), pp. 147-48. All quotations from Sidney's poetry are from the edition by William A. Ringler, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962).

⁶ Kitty W. Scoular [Datta], *Natural Magic: Studies in the Presentation of Nature in English Poetry from Spenser to Marvell* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), p. 81.

⁷ I am indebted for this approach to Stanley E. Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (New York: St. Martin's, 1967). I have also found useful his essay, "Affective Stylistics," now the appendix to *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) and reprinted again in his *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), as well as related studies by Stephen Booth, Paul J. Alpers, Lowry Nelson, Jr., and Wolfgang Iser.

⁸ "English Petrarke," p. 27.

⁹ On the erotic potentialities of Sidney's language (not frequently enough emphasized), see Dorothy Jones, "Sidney's Erotic Pen: An Interpretation of One of the *Arcadia* Poems," *JEGP*, 73 (1974), 32-47. An obvious instance of sexual wordplay in AS occurs in Sonnet 69; see also Alan Sinfield, "Sexual Puns in *Astrophil and Stella*," *EIC*, 24 (1974), 341-55. *Lap* in AS 59 indicates some of the difficulties a reader faces in judging the erotic force of a word at any given point in an Elizabethan text. Though *lap* as "vagina" is well established (*OED* 2b), its implications in AS 59 need not be sexual at all. Lap dogs were thought to ease the pains in a lady's bowels, taking such pains upon themselves through proximity. This notion is at least as old as Pliny (*The History of the World: Commonly Called The Natural History*, trans. Philemon Holland, sel. Paul Turner [1962; rpt. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964], pp. 315-16); it is repeated as late as the seventeenth century on a sheet of Richard Napier's medical prescriptions: "Apply a puppy dog all night till[e?] it aswageth the swelling of the spleene" (Bodleian MS. Ashmole 1488, Part II, fol. 3v). In any event, poets may use obscene or perverse erotic details for profoundly antierotic motives, a

point reiterated by Dustin H. Griffin, *Satires Against Man: The Poems of Rochester* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 81-86 et passim.

¹⁰ Identity of names reinforces conventional recourse to autobiographical readings at this point: see, e.g., James Finn Cotter, "The 'Baiser' Group in Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*," *TSL*, 12 (1970), 400. But Sidney often uses autobiographical details to "flesh out" the verisimilitude of his characters, as is suggested by Jerome Mazzaro (*Transformations in the Renaissance English Lyric* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970], p. 104) and others. See most recently Sinfield, "Sidney and Astrophil," 25-41. In any case, Dyce notes that "*Philip*, or *Phip*, was a familiar name given to a sparrow from its note being supposed to resemble that sound" (*The Poetical Works of John Skelton*, ed. Alexander Dyce [London: Thomas Rodd, 1843], II, 121).

¹¹ Compare the effect when, in *OA*, Pyrocles disconcertingly speaks to the lion that has been chasing Philoclea as his "competitor" and finds that it merits his "disdain" (*The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* [*The Old Arcadia*], ed. Jean Robertson [Oxford: Clarendon, 1973], p. 47). Such an attitude is among the sources of humor in both the *Arcadia* and *AS* 83.

¹² As well as the obvious places in Spenser and Shakespeare, see, e.g., Geoffrey Fenton, *Monophylo* (London: William Seres, 1572), Y1r, or Geoffrey Whitney, "Homines voluptatibus transformantur," in *A Choice of Emblemes* (Leiden: Christopher Plantin, 1586), p. 82. Metamorphic love could also be ennobling, of course. But Sidney's images do not tend that way.

¹³ *Allegorical Imagery: Some Mediaeval Books and Their Posterity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 33. Irving Massey's study of literary metamorphosis, *The Gaping Pig: Literature and Metamorphosis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), which is concerned largely with modern works, similarly asserts at its outset that "metamorphosis is a morbid subject"; it considers its subject, however, from a point of view very different from mine. In the Renaissance, of course, metamorphosis can be positive, a sign of man's protean capacity to change himself, or—with specific regard to love—a sign of the ennobling transformation or new unity with his beloved that the lover experiences. But when, in an "ordinary," not particularly "literary" context, we meet the word "metamorphosis" as we meet it in Francis Clement's *The Petie Schole* (London: Thomas Vautrollier, 1587), C4v—"common playes," he writes there, "metamorphize, trāsfigne, deforme, peruert and alter the harts" of their audiences—we get an insight into its common, negative associations in the period. For an unusually rich view of the interpretive range available to Renaissance writers in just one metamorphic myth, see Leonard Barkan's excellent study, "Diana and Actaeon: The Myth as Synthesis," *ELR*, 10 (1980), 317-59.

¹⁴ The dog is involved in both types of the two hunts, the one for Venus and earthly love, the other for virtue and Christ's love, an image which retains its force well into the Renaissance; see, e.g., George Gascoigne, *Complete Works*, ed. John W. Cunliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907-1910), I, 386.

¹⁵ *The Historie of Fovre-footed Beastes* (London: William Jaggard, 1607), p. 143. The erotic associations of dogs—specifically of lap dogs—remain important well beyond the sixteenth century. "Lap-d—s!" writes Robert Gould in *Love Given O're: or, A Satyr Against the Pride, Lust, and Inconstancy, & c. of Woman* (London: Andrew Green, 1682), p. 5, "to whom they [women] are more kind and free, / Than they themselves to their own Husbands be. / How curst is Man! when Bruits his Rivals prove, / Ev'n in the sacred bus'ness of his Love." See also Richard Ames, *The Folly of Love; or, An Essay Upon Satyr Against Woman* (London: E. Hawkins, 1691), p. 8. Both poems may be found in *Satires on Women*, intro. Felicity A. Nussbaum, Augustan Reprint Society, no. 180 (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1976). Belinda's lap dog Shock awakens her "with his Tongue" in *The Rape of the Lock* (I.115-16) in 1714, and the theme of the erotic dog retains

vitality through the eighteenth century; see Donald Posner, "The Lady and Her Dog," in his *Watteau: A Lady at her Toilet*, *Art in Context* (New York: Viking, 1973), pp. 77-83.

¹⁶ I.i.63-69. Citations to Shakespeare are to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton, 1974).

¹⁷ Associated with drunkenness and "the irrational antics of toppers" (H. W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Studies of the Warburg Institute, 20 [London: Warburg Institute, 1952], p. 246; cf. *Othello*, II.iii.48-51), dogs are connected with the failure of human rationality that AS 59 represents. Dogs are also associated with ungoverned passionate desire, not only by bestiaires such as Topsell's (above, n. 15) but also by mythographical interpretations of the Actaeon story (e.g., Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes*, p. 15, or *Twelfth Night*, I.i.18-22); Walter R. Davis demonstrates Sidney's knowledge of this tradition in "Actaeon in Arcadia," *SEL*, 2 (1962), 102-05 et passim. The association of dogs with hydrophobia and hence madness—which, like inebriation and unbridled love, are types of the failure of human rationality—needs no reference. On dogs generally, see Guy de Tervarent, *Attributs et symboles dans l'art profane, 1450-1600: Dictionnaire d'un langage perdu*, Travaux d'humanisme et renaissance, 29 (Geneva: Droz, 1958), s.v. *chien* (cols. 93-96); Beryl Rowland, *Blind Beasts: Chaucer's Animal World* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1971), pp. 153-65; William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words*, 2nd ed. (1952; rpt. Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1967), pp. 158-84; and Posner (n. 15, above).

¹⁸ *Elizabethan Taste* (New York: St. Martin's, 1964), p. 275.

¹⁹ See OA 10.79, and Ringer's note, p. 482. Generally, see Tervarent, *Attributs et symboles*, s.v. *passereau* (col. 299), and George Reeves Throop, "The Bird of Venus," *Washington University Studies, Humanistic Series: Heller Memorial Volume*, 9, no. 2 (April 1922), 275-91.

²⁰ Catullus 2 ("Passer, deliciae meae puellae") and 3 ("Lugete, o Veneres Cupidinesque"), in *Carmina*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), pp. 1-3. Sidney's interest in Catullus is well known: see James A. S. McPeck, *Catullus in Strange and Distant Britain*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, 15 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), pp. 45, 240-41. He is the first poet to have translated Catullus into English (CS 13); a later translation, from Montemayor's *Diana*, echoes the theme of this Catullan poem (CS 28.33-40), and suggests that Catullan themes frequently interested Sidney. The Catullan sparrow reappears in Sidney, in conjunction with Urania, in *OP* 4. The use to which Sidney puts the sparrow in this poem contrasts quite markedly with the use of the sparrow in AS 83. Urania's eroticism seems innocent alongside Stella's, and her sparrow avoids any hint of phallic possibilities (see Fish, n. 21, below).

²¹ "In sinu tenere" may mean either "to her breast" or "in her lap": see Catullus, *The Poems*, ed. Kenneth Quinn (New York: St. Martin's, 1970), p. 92, and Quinn's earlier study, *The Catullan Revolution* (Melbourne: University Press, 1959), p. 98. The translation by Reney Myers and Robert J. Ormsby places the sparrow forthrightly "between her thighs" (*The Complete Poems for American Readers* [New York: Dutton Paperback, 1970], p. 3). Playing with this pet, in her lap or between her thighs, and engaged in "fingertip" (Quinn ed., *Poems*, p. 92) relations with it and, presumably, with the proximate portions of her own body as well, Lesbia can be imagined engaging in a highly stylized form of masturbation. Fish remarks on the "phallic possibilities of the sparrow in the tradition of Catullus and Ovid" in *John Skelton's Poetry*, YSE, 157 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 102; Greek antecedents are suggested, and winged phalloi illustrated, by William Arrowsmith, "Aristophanes' Birds: The Fantasy Politics of Eros," *Arion*, n.s. 1 (1973-74), 119-67, esp. pp. 164-67. At least one of Sidney's contemporaries uses an image of a bird (not a sparrow) in a context explicitly masturbatory (Thomas Nashe, *The choise of valen-*

tines, ll. 239-44, in *Works*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, rev. F. P. Wilson [1958; rpt. Oxford: Blackwell, 1966], III, 412-13).

²² Writing on Herrick's *Hesperides* 256, J. Max Patrick notes that the relevant genre includes poems on more than sparrows alone. Ovid, of course, laments Melior's parrot (*Amores* II.vi); Marvell's "Nymph Complaining for the Death of a Faun" is also part of the genre. See Patrick's edition of *The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick* (1963; rpt. New York: Norton, 1968), p. 144; he is preceded in this point by McPeck, *Catullus in Strange and Distant Britain*, pp. 69-71. The point is important, for it explains why both McPeck (p. 296, n. 17) and I treat AS 59 as well as AS 83 as part of this tradition.

²³ *The Complete Gentleman, The Truth of Our Times, and The Art of Living in London*, ed. Virgil B. Heltzel, Folger Documents of Tudor and Stuart Civilization (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 18.

²⁴ Such a reading of AS 83 supports, from another point of view, Neil L. Rudenstine's observation that "rhetoric and all the uses of language have a strong symbolic character for Sidney." He adds: "the formal and colloquial [styles] are set against one another; control, aspiration, and reason are set against their opposites." To find, as in this sonnet, both styles together indicates "extreme tension and self-division" (*Sidney's Poetic Development* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967], pp. 176, 178-79, 180). Cf. Jonathan Smith on *The Winter's Tale*, I.ii.128-46, in "The Language of Leontes," *SQ*, 19 (1968), 317-18. Tension and self-division are only to be expected in a sonnet that questions, as Sonnet 83 does, its speaker's feelings and human capacities.

²⁵ In the most extensively developed bestial imagery in AS, Sidney compares Astrophil to the horse in order to reinforce this point. The image is considered in detail in Arvilla Kerns Taylor's fine study, "The Manège of Love and Authority: Studies in Sidney and Shakespeare," Diss. Texas 1969, *DAI*, 30 (1969-70), 3025-26A. I am grateful to Maurice L. Shapiro of Tulane University for drawing my attention to this work.

²⁶ Sidney's ability to work with mixed modes is gaining increased attention: see, e.g., Stephen J. Greenblatt, "Sidney's *Arcadia* and the Mixed Mode," *SP*, 70 (1973), 269-78.

²⁷ But Fish's assumption that the initial reading produces the only significant response is questionable in any case: see Joseph H. Summers, "Stanley Fish's Reading of Seventeenth-Century Literature," *MLQ*, 35 (1974), 405; and David Newton-De Molina, rev. of *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, *Anglia*, 94 (1976), 531-33.

²⁸ See Scanlon, "Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*," which argues that Bembo's discourse in Castiglione's *Cortegiano* (Book 4) offers the standard against which Astrophil's behavior is to be negatively judged. Sinfield ("Sidney and Astrophil," p. 34) remarks that "Sidney is involved in the same protestant re-evaluation and redirection of love poetry" that Spenser's *Amoretti* exhibit, through "charting . . . Astrophil's fall from reason and virtue into sensuality and eventual desperation."

²⁹ An important essay on the *Apology* by Lawrence C. Wolfley discusses in considerable detail the significance to Sidney's poetic theory of his notions concerning poetry's ability to move men to virtuous action ("Sidney's Visual-Didactic Poetic: Some Complexities and Limitations," *JMRS*, 6 [1976], 217-41; Wolfley is by no means in agreement, however, with the assumption of this essay that Sidney's practice accords with his theory [241]). See also Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery*, chap. 14, esp. pp. 399 ff.