

Sir Philip Sidney's
Astrophil and Stella

English Literature (I), week 8

Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*¹

- Introduction to the Sixteenth-Century Literature
- Society: Caxton, Columbus, Martin Luther, Elizabeth, Armada
- Poetry: Sonnet Sequences, Pastoral Romances, Chivalric Allegory, Modern Epic, Erotic Idyll, Masque
- Drama

¹ Greenblatt, Stephen, et al., eds. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 8th ed. New York: Norton, 2006.

- Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender & The Faerie Queene*
- Philip Sidney's *The Defense of Poesy, Astrophil and Stella*
- Thomas More's *Utopia*
- William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlow

Utopia

- Thomas More's Criticism
- Main Characters: the narrator, Raphael Hythloday
- The Underlying Principle of Utopia: Reason
- “Of all the different pleasures, they seek primarily those of the mind, and prize them most highly. The foremost mental pleasures, they believe, arise from the practice of the virtues and the consciousness of a good life” (Book 2, *Utopia*)

Utopia

“Just as no man is forced into a foreign war against his will, so women are allowed to accompany their men on military service if they want to—not only not forbidden, but encouraged and praised for doing so.

>>Next

A Passage from *Utopia*

They place each woman alongside her husband in the line of battle; and in addition they place around him all of a man's children, kinsmen, and blood- or marriage-relations, so that those who by nature have most reason to help one another may be closest at hand for mutual aid." (from the section on the Utopians' military practices)

Question

- Do you think a country can be run solely on the principle of reason?

The Shepheardes Calender & The Faerie Queene

- Spenser's Language and *The Shepheardes Calender*: 12 Eclogues
- The Basic Structures of *The Faerie Queene*: Each Book an Exploration of a Virtue

Sidney's *The Defense of Poesy*

- Literature in Comparison with History and Philosophy
- Accusations against Literature:
 1. “that there being many other more fruitful knowledges, a man might better spend his time in them than in this.”
 2. “that it is the mother of lies.”
 3. “that it is the nurse of abuse, infecting us with many pestilent desires [...]”

Sidney's Answers:

1. “if it be as I affirm, that no learning is so good as that which teacheth and moveth to virtue: and that none can both teach and move thereto so much as poetry: then is the conclusion manifest that ink and paper cannot be to a more profitable purpose employed.”
2. “Now, for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth.”
3. Literature is a doctrine “not of effeminateness, but of notable stirring of courage; not of abusing man's wit, but of strengthening man's wit; not banished, but honored by Plato [...].”

Question

- Do you think that Sidney has adequately answered the accusations? If not, why?

Astrophil and Stella

- Sonnet & Petrarch
- Octave: abba abba (Sidney)
- Sestet: cdcdee
- Quatrain
- Couplet
- Iambic pentameter

An Example of Iambic Pentameter

- U ' U ' U ' U ' U '
- When Nature made her chief work, Stella's eyes,
- U ' U ' U ' U ' U '
- In color black why wrapped she beams so bright?

Art of Writing, Sonnet 1

1

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,
That the dear She might take some pleasure of my pain,
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know,
Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,

>>Next

I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain,
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburned brain.

>>Next

But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay
Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows
And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.
Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,
 Biting my trewand pen, beating myself for spite,
 "Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart and write."

The Lover's Suffering, Sonnet 2

2

Not at first sight, nor with a dribbèd shot

Love gave the wound, which while I breathe will bleed,

But known worth did in mine of time proceed,

Till by degrees it had full conquest got.

>>Next

I saw and liked, I liked but loved not,

I loved, but straight did not what *Love* decreed:

At length to Love's decrees, I, forced, agreed,

Yet with repining at so partial lot.

>>Next

Now even that footstep of lost liberty
Is gone, and now like slave-born Muscovite,
I call it praise to suffer tyranny;
And now employ the remnant of my wit,
 To make myself believe that all is well,
 While with a feeling skill I paint my hell.

Art of Writing, Sonnet 6 (iambic hexameter)

6

Some lovers speak, when they their muses entertain,
Of hopes begot by fear, of wot not what desires,
Of force of heavenly beams infusing hellish pain,
Of living deaths, dear wounds, fair storms, and freezing fires;

>>Next

Some one his song in Jove and Jove's strange tales attires,
Broidered with bulls and swans, powdered with golden rain;
Another humbler wit to shepherd's pipe retires,
Yet hiding royal blood full oft in rural vein.

>>Next

To some a sweetest plaint a sweetest style affords,
While tears pour out his ink, and sighs breathe out his words,
His paper pale Despair, and pain his pen doth move.
I can speak what I feel, and feel as much as they,
But think that all the map of my state I display,
When trembling voice brings forth that I do Stella love.

Praise of Stella's Beauty, Sonnet 7

7

When Nature made her chief work, Stella's eyes,
In color black why wrapped she beams so bright?
Would she in beamy black, like painter wise,
Fame daintiest luster, mixed of shades and light?

>>Next

Or did she else that sober hue devise,
In object best to knit and strength our sight,
Lest if no veil those brave gleams did disguise,
They sun-like should more dazzle than delight?

>>Next

Or would she her miraculous power show,
That whereas black seems beauty's contrary,
She even in black doth make all beauties flow?
Both so and thus: she, minding Love should be
 Placed ever there, gave him this mourning weed,
 To honor all their deaths, who for her bleed.

Astrophil and Stella

Question 1.

- Suppose you are a poet. Would you write a love poem like Sidney's? Why?

Conflict between Reason and Love, Sonnet 10

10

Reason, in faith thou art well served, that still
Wouldst brabbling be with sense and love in me:
I rather wished thee climb the Muses' hill,
Or reach the fruit of Nature's choicest tree,

>>Next

Or seek heaven's course, or heaven's inside to see.

Why shouldst thou toil our thorny soil to till?

Leave sense, and those which sense's objects be:

Deal thou with powers of thoughts, leave love to will.

>>Next

But thou wouldst needs fight both with love and sense,
With sword of wit, giving wounds of dispraise,
Till downright blows did foil thy cunning fence:
For soon as they strake thee with Stella's rays,
Reason thou kneel'dst, and offeredst straight to prove
By reason good, good reason her to love.

The Lover's Suffering, Sonnet 16

- In nature apt to like when I did see
- Beauty, which were of many carats fine,
- My boiling sprites did thither soon incline,
- And, Love, I thought that I was full of thee:

- But finding not those restless flames in me,
- Which others said did make their souls to pine,
- I thought those babes of some pin's hurt did whine,
- By my love judging what love's pain might be.

- But while I thus with this young lion played,
- Mine eyes (shall I say cursed or blessed) beheld
- Stella: now she is named, need more be said?
- In her sight I a lesson new have spelled,
- I now have learned love right, and learned even
so,
- As who by being poisoned doth poison know.

Conflict between Reason and Love, Sonnet 18

18

With what sharp checks I in myself am shent,
When into Reason's audit I do go,
And by just counts myself a bankrout know
Of all those goods, which heaven to me hath lent;

>>Next

Unable quite to pay even Nature's rent,
Which unto it by birthright I do owe;
And which is worse, no good excuse can show,
But that my wealth I have most idly spent.

>>Next

My youth doth waste, my knowledge brings forth toys,
My wit doth strive those passions to defend,
Which for reward spoil it with vain annoys.
I see my course to lose myself doth bend:
I see and yet no greater sorrow take,
Than that I lose no more for Stella's sake.

The Lover's Suffering, Sonnet 31

31

With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the skies,
How silently, and with how wan a face!
What, may it be that even in heavenly place
That busy archer his sharp arrows tries?

>>Next

Sure, if that long-with-love-acquainted eyes
Can judge of love, thou feel'st a lover's case;
I read it in thy looks: thy languished grace,
To me that feel the like, thy sate describes.

>>Next

Then even of fellowship, O Moon, tell me,
Is constant love deemed there but want of wit?
Are beauties there as proud as here they be?
Those lovers scorn whom that love doth possess?
Do they call virtue there ungratefulness?

Insomnia, Sonnet 39

39

Come sleep! O sleep the certain knot of peace,
The baiting place of wit, the balm of woe,
The poor man's wealth, the prisoner's release,
Th'indifferent judge between the high and low;

>>Next

With shield of proof shield me from out the prease
Of those fierce darts Despair at me doth throw:
O make in me those civil wars to cease;
I will good tribute pay if thou do so.

>>Next

Take thou of me smooth pillows, sweetest bed,
A chamber deaf to noise and blind to light,
A rosy garland, and a weary head:
And if these things, as being thine by right,
Move not thy heavy grace, thou shalt in me
Livelier than elsewhere Stella's image see.

Dramatic, Sonnet 45

45

Stella oft sees the very face of woe

Painted in my beclouded stormy face,

But cannot skill to pity my disgrace,

Not though thereof the cause herself she know.

>>Next

Yet hearing late a fable which did show,
Of lovers never known, a grievous case,
Pity thereof gate in her breast such place
That, from that sea derived, tears' spring did flow.

>>Next

Alas, if fancy, drawn by imaged things,
Though false, yet with free scope more grace doth breed
Than servant's wrack, where new doubts honor brings,
Then think, my dear, that you in me do read
 Of lover's ruin some sad tragedy:
 I am not I; pity the tale of me.

Praise of Stella's Virtue and Beauty, Sonnet 71

71

Who will in fairest book of Nature know

How Virtue may best lodged in beauty be,

Let him but learn of Love to read in thee,

Stella, those fair lines, which true goodness show.

>>Next

There shall he find all vices' overthrow,
Not by rude force, but sweetest sovereignty
Of reason, from whose light those night-birds fly;
That inward sun in thine eyes shineth so.

>>Next

And not content to be Perfection's heir
Thyself, dost strive all minds that way to move,
Who mark in thee what is in thee most fair.
So while thy beauty draws the heart to love,
As fast thy Virtue bends that love to good;
“But, ah,” Desire still cries, “give me some food.”

Love Requited, Sonnet 87

87

When I was forced from Stella ever dear,
Stella, food of y thoughts, heart of my heart,
Stella, whose eyes make all my tempests clear,
By iron laws of duty to depart,

>>Next

Alas, I found that she with me did smart;
I saw that tears did in her eyes appear;
I saw that sighs her sweetest lips did part,
And her sad words my sadded sense did hear.

>>Next

For me, I wept to see pearls scattered so,
I sighed her sighs, and wailed for her woe,
Yet swam in joy, such love in her was seen.
Thus while th'effect most bitter was to me,
And nothing than the cause more sweet could be,
I had been vexed, if vexed I had not been.

Torn between Despair and Joy, Sonnet

108

108

When Sorrow (using mine own fire's might)

Melts down his lead into my boiling breast,

Through that dark furnace to my heart oppressed

There shines a joy from thee, my only light;

>>Next

But soon as thought of thee breeds my delight,
And my young soul flutters to thee, his nest,
Most rude Despair, my daily unbidden guest,
Clips straight my wings, straight wraps me in his night,

>>Next

And makes me then bow down my head and say,
“Ah, what doth Phoebus’ gold that wretch avail,
Whom iron doors do keep from use of day?”

That in my woes for thee thou art my joy,
And in my joys for thee my only annoy.

Astrophil and Stella

Question 2.

- The Elizabethan poems are highly decorated and ornate. Here is a famous Middle English lyric: “My Lief Is Faren in Londe.” Can you compare it with any of Sidney’s sonnets to show the change in the styles of poetry?

>>Next

My Lief is Faren in Londe

My Lief is faren in londe (My beloved has gone away)—
Allas, why is she so?
And I am so sore bonde (bound)
I may nat come her to.
She hath myn hearte in holde
Wherever she ride or go (walk)—
With trewe love a thousand folde.