

## Sir Philip Sidney's Philosophy of Love and Beauty in *Astrophil and Stella*

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### Abstract

Love is a common theme in the Renaissance poetry dominating the writings of nearly all great writers of the time. Sir Philip Sidney is one of the most celebrated writers of this period who is able to create love poems at their highest level. His sonnet cycle, *Astrophil and Stella*, shows the spectrum of love in its many different shades and colours in the relation between Astrophil (the star lover) and Stella (the star). Although the question of love and its various meanings is more or less self-evident in Sir Philip Sidney's poetry; nonetheless, the unquestionable connection between love and beauty remains to be an interesting subject and can be reexamined in his sonnet cycle in order to reveal the minute details of Astrophil's *love of beauty*, physical as well as spiritual. This reading, therefore, attempts to show how Sidney, as one of the pioneers of Petrarchan love poetry, understands the philosophically *rich* concept of Platonic love and of beauty as a medium for and ideal form of love.

**Key words:** Sir Philip Sidney; *Astrophil and Stella*; Love; Beauty; Platonic

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### INTRODUCTION

When one person falls in love with another, a question occurs to the mind: what makes him/her fall in love?

What quality or qualities in the object of love is/are the cause of love in the subject? When we study the history of love in philosophy, we are able to see many well-known philosophers who have been interested in the subject. Love is inherent in the name philosophy (Philo=love, and sophy=knowledge) indicative of the highest form of love, the love of knowledge. But there is another lofty kind of love which equally matters to the philosophers of love—love of beauty.

There has always been a question for the philosophers of love and/or beauty: Is it the beauty of the object that inspires love in the lover (as subject) indicating that love is objective, or is it the loving feelings in the lover as the subject that makes him/her appreciate the beauty in the beloved making love as a subjective and/or human quality? Sir Philip Sidney directly or indirectly deals with this question and provides the reader with the needed answers in his sonnet cycle, *Astrophil and Stella*. He demonstrates *love of beauty* embodied in Astrophil's love for Stella. Whether it is the subjective or objective love, whether it is Astrophil's individual capacity to love the cause of his pursuit for beauty or the reverse will be the target of our investigation in the sonnet cycle.

### A. Literature Review

*Astrophil and Stella* have been enjoying the attention of critics and researchers. It has been compared to the earlier or later sonnet cycles in order to discover Sidney's poetic style, his creative power as well as his influence on his followers (Laws, 1996; Martínez, 2000). Some comparative studies have been undertaken on the subject of love and male inconstancy, self-indulgence, and even deviousness and sexualized aggression (Cañadas, 2005). The mode and the manner in which Stella, the beloved, is represented by her lover provides a good opportunity for some critics, specially the feminists, to practice their ideas of sex and gender in a predominated masculine writing convention where women have been repressed and worse than that her body is confiscated (Baker, 1991). Some

critics have been attracted to erotic components of Renaissance lyrical poetry as a mask or excuse for literature which is political in nature. *Astrophil and Stella* has been studied to show whether it is a sequence concerned with love or with politics disguised as love (Hull, 1996). Considering sonnet sequences as the projection of the poet's state of mind, some critics travail to expose the social pressures and moral restraint of the poet's time hidden in his desires, regrets, and conflicts of conscience voiced by the poems. Generally speaking, the poet's psyche explores the scientific, historical, religious, and artistic landscape of his society (Donna, 2002). In *Astrophil and Stella*, Andrew Strycharski tries to depict an early modern "literacy affect" results from literacy education's changing place in Elizabethan England through considering writing difficulties as an "absent presence". He believes that "while learning to write promises self-realization, anxieties over meaning and memory threaten self-loss" (2008). Somewhere else Strycharski studies *Astrophil and Stella* considering Astrophil's struggle against his dividing forces and desires such as love and obligation, acceptance and criticism of conventional wisdom, neoplatonic and worldly eros, or desire and convention which he perceives as repressive. Sir Philip Sidney, the most divided of Elizabethan writers, is identified by Astrophil and his *Astrophil and Stella* is studied as recording resistance to two of Sidney's identities: the aristocratic courtier and the humanist (2004).

## B. What Is Beauty?

The Romantic notion of beauty emphasizes the subjectivity of love whereas the classical notion stresses its objectivity. As Hume (1894), in one of his definitions of beauty, puts it,

Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty. One person may even perceive deformity, where another is sensible of beauty; and every individual ought to acquiesce in his own sentiment, without pretending to regulate those of others. (p.136)

What is worth considering in Hume's definition is his view of the mind as a beauty contemplator; our senses perceive things and the mind contemplates whether they are beautiful or not.

In Greek mythology, however, one reads that Venus, the goddess of love, won the beauty contest set up by the goddess of strife (or discord) by promising Paris the most beautiful woman in the world. The promise of the most beautiful woman is not just arbitrary and presupposes a world in which beauty is by degree and from one individual to another and from one being to the next is different in value and nature, that beauty is calculable! In the history of philosophy and art, a lot of thinkers have tried to define and determine the nature of beauty, especially in relation to love.

Sidney, like other Renaissance poets, could not help but yield to the Petrarchan tradition of love poetry. This

tradition renders the beloved as an idealized lady of physical, spiritual, and moral beauty. However, the concept of beauty is as challenging as love is. What is beauty? What kind of beauty, philosophically speaking, can inspire love? There are innumerable definitions of beauty but we can suffice to some which best suit our argument. Plato (2013) believes that

There is a certain age at which human nature is desirous of procreation—procreation which must be in beauty and not in deformity; and this procreation is the union of man and woman, and is a divine thing; for conception and generation are an immortal principle in the mortal creature. (p.53)

He continues claiming that love is not only the love of the beautiful but also

The love of generation and of birth in beauty .... Because to the mortal creature, generation is a sort of eternity and immortality ... and if ... love is of the everlasting possession of the good, all men will necessarily desire immortality together with good: Wherefore love is of immortality. (Ibid.)

He assures that "he who has been instructed thus far in the things of love, and who has learned to see the beautiful in due order and succession, when he comes toward the end will suddenly perceive a nature of wondrous beauty" (p.58).

Beauty, as Plato (2013) defines in his Symposium, has some characteristics. He enumerates them as such:

In the first place is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning; secondly, not fair in one point of view and foul in another, or at one time or in one relation or at one place fair, at another time or in another relation or at another place foul, as if fair to some and foul to others, or in the likeness of a face or hands or any other part of the bodily frame, or in any form of speech or knowledge, or existing in any other being, as for example, in an animal, or in heaven, or in earth, or in any other place; but beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things. (p.59)

The true lover, as Plato depicts, is a seeker of beauty. He recognizes that the beauty is the same in every form. So he will love all beautiful forms. However, sooner or later, he will discover that the beauty of the mind is more honourable than the beauty of the body. Under the influence of true love, the lover perceives that beauty is not far from the end. He begins from the beauties of the earth and steps upward going "from one to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair form to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he reaches the notion of absolute beauty, and at last understands what the essence of beauty is" (Ibid.).

## C. On Love and Beauty

Edmund defines love and beauty's connection declaring: "Beauty ... that quality of those qualities in bodies, by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it" (Burke, 1757, p.83).

Beauty consists of an arrangement of integral parts into a coherent whole, according to proportion, harmony, symmetry, and similar notions. This is a primordial Western conception of beauty, and is embodied in classical and neoclassical architecture, sculpture, literature, and music wherever they appear. (Sartwell, 2015, p.7)

Sartwell regards beauty as “the object of longing” and echoing Plotinus asserts that beauty results in love and longing (Ibid., p.12). Plato detected the connection between love and beauty. From the Platonic point of view, love is “a ladder, of appreciation, beginning with the sensual love of one beautiful individual and gradually ascending to the source of all beauty and goodness” (Waudby, 2013, p.192). For him, beauty is love’s ultimate objective. Love, Plato (2013) declares in *Symposium*, is a quest for the everlasting possession of the good that is beauty, whether of body or soul (p.52).

## 1. STELLA: THE INCARNATION OF BEAUTY

A brief look at *Astrophil and Stella* shows that many words are employed dealing with beauty. A large number of words are used to create images of beauty and to demonstrate it as it is formed in Astrophil’s mind. Astrophil claims that in order to delineate Stella’s beauty he only needs to look at what nature bestows (“write” is Astrophil’s word) in her and copy it in his sonnets. Astrophil uses different techniques and literary devices to describe Stella’s beauty. Sometimes he compares her to Muses and goddesses as in sonnets I, III, VI, XXXVII, and as in sonnet LV, where he addresses the Muses claiming:

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

Sometimes he highlights his beloved’s beauty through contests and arguments between gods and goddesses:

A STRIFE is growne betweene *Vertue* and *Love*,  
While each pretends that *Stella* must be his:  
Her eyes, her lips, her all, saith *Love* do this,  
Since they do weare his badge, most firmly prove.  
But *Vertue* thus that title doth disprove,  
That *Stella* (ô deare name) that *Stella* is  
That vertuous soule, sure heire of heav’nly blisse:  
Not this faire outside, which our hearts doth move.

(“LII” 1-8)

Sometimes, he creates images such as the architectural image of Stella’s face in sonnet IX, and so and so forth.

Sidney through his protagonist lover, Astrophil, starts his sonnet cycle by claiming that he is going to write to show his love to Stella whom he refers to as “Princesse of

beauty” (sonnet, 28, l.6): “Loving in truth, and faine in verse my love to show” (sonnet 1, line1). Throughout the sonnets, Astrophil unveils his love for Stella through worshipping her beauty. For him, she is the symbol of the earthly perfection, the source of elegance and grace in his life. She is an unobtainable angel, a heavenly entity, a Goddess, an inspiration for all human endeavors. But what is beauty in which Astrophil is obsessed? Which of its aspect(s) does he care? Is it Stella’s appearance and complexion that attract him or her wit and virtue that absorbs Astrophil? Since Astrophil expresses his love for Stella in these sonnets, it would be proper to dissect them in hope of finding out the answer(s).

### 1.1 Physical Beauty: Stella’s Face

In observing one’s corporeal beauty, no doubt it is the face that comes first. More frequently than not, the face is within the observer’s consideration. Astrophil pays much attention to Stella’s facial beauty and talks about it in several sonnets. For instance, in sonnet XLI, he attributes her face a heavenly quality: “*Stella* lookt on, and from her heavenly face / Sent forth the beames, which made so faire my race” (13-14), in sonnet LVII, it is called sweetener of grief: “She with face and voice / So sweets my paines, that my paines me rejoyce” (13-14), and in sonnet LXXIII, he calls it “kisse-worthy face”:

O heav’nly foole, thy most kisse-worthie face,  
Anger invests with such a lovely grace,  
That Anger’ selfe I needs must kisse again (12-14).

He is not convinced by such descriptions and goes further referring to her face as the reflection of “perfect beauty,” “That face, whose lecture shews what perfect beutie is” (“LXXVII” 2). Finally, he concludes that: “let eyes/See Beutie’s totall summe summ’d in her face” (“LXXXV” 9-10).

Astrophil’s infatuation in Stella’s beauty never ends. In sonnet IX, he magnifies Stella’s facial beauty by comparing it to “Queen Vertue’s court” which is “prepar’d by Nature’s chiefest furniture”. He continues his praise for Stella’s beauty elaborating on her facial components presenting them through architectural images extended throughout the sonnet. Stella’s forehead is compared to alabaster, her hair to gold, her mouth to red porphir, her teeth to pearl, her cheeks to red and white marble, and her eyes to the windows through which the most beautiful things can be seen. This is how beautify inspires the beloved to praise every minute elegance on the beloved’s face. Love is beauty’s perfection and beauty’s perfection is the cause of love; Astrophil sees beauty in Stella’s face and loves her eventually.

In the aforesaid sonnet, by describing Stella’s face as a well-wrought structure whose parts collaborate together to highlight and keep its harmony, Astrophil brings forward the classical concept that:

Beauty consists of an arrangement of integral parts into a coherent whole, according to proportion, harmony, symmetry, and similar notions. This is a primordial Western conception of

beauty, and is embodied in classical and neoclassical architecture, sculpture, literature, and music wherever they appear. (Sartwell, 7)

### 1.2 Physical Beauty: Stella's Eyes

Astrophil does not desist praising Stella's beauty and this time he devotes a whole sonnet to the "Nature's chief work", Stella's eyes. He has referred to Stella's eye(s) more than 66 times in the whole sonnet cycle. As in sonnet VII, Stella's eyes are not ordinary. In order to stress their extraordinary quality, Astrophil begins the poem setting forth a question: "When Nature made her chiefe worke, *Stella's eyes*, /In colour blacke, why wrapt she beames so bright" (1-2). He himself answers the question referring to some of these qualities. They are black to show Nature's power by making the color black look beautiful. They are black but at the same time "beamish" and shining.

In colour blacke why wrapt she beames so bright?  
Would she in beamy blacke, like Painter wise,  
Frame daintiest lustre, mixt of shades and light?  
Or did she else that sober hue deuise,  
In obiect best to knitt and strength our sight. (2-6)

Finally, they are black as a sign of mourning because many a lover has died for her love; they were killed by her glance:

Plac'd euer there, gaue him this mourning weede  
To honour all their deaths who for her bleed. (13-14)

### 1.3 Physical Beauty: Stella's Lips

Astrophil does not leave any of Stella's facial components untouched by his admiration. Every part of her face has its own quality. Her lips are so sweet that every wise person is obliged to praise them: "Sweet swelling lip, well maist thou swell in pride, / Since best wits thinke it wit thee to admire" ("LXXX" 1-2). In sonnet LXXIX, Astrophil recalls the sweet reminiscence of stealing a kiss from Stella which he addresses as: "Sweet kisse, thy sweets I faine would sweetly endite, / Which even of sweetnesse sweetest sweetner art" (1-2). He refers to the kiss as a couple of doves, as Venus' charioteer, as "a double key, which opens to the heart" (6), as the source of joy and delight. The way Astrophil describes the stolen kiss emphasizes his interest in physical beauty. Meanwhile, for him, the kiss is not a simple event but a range of connected and pleasing experience. Even more, the kiss sweetens his words and inspires him to worship Stella's beauty more and more.

### 1.4 Physical Beauty: Other Parts

In sonnet LXXVII, Astrophil once more builds up the sonnet all around praising and admiring Stella's beauty, mostly physical. He lists her attributes of physical beauty starting with her eyes, "whose beames be joy, whose motion is delight" (2). Her hair is fair and golden. Her

cheeks are as red as a rose. He is so infatuated with her beauty that he confesses that he loves these physical attributes in other women because they remind him of hers:

Some beautie's peece, as amber colourd hed,  
Milke hands, rose cheeks, or lips more sweet, more red,  
Or seeing jets, blacke, but in blacknesse bright.  
They please I do confesse, they please mine eyes,  
But why? because of you they models be,  
Models such be wood-globes of glistring skies.  
Deere, therefore be not jealous over me,  
If you heare that they seeme my hart to move,  
Not them, ô no, but you in them I love ("XCI" 6-14).

Her face is beauty itself in its perfection. She is so beautiful that her presence guides and illuminates dark hearts. In sonnet LXXVII, he goes on praising by depicting her hands, "which without touch holds more then *Atlas* might" (5), her lips, "which make death's pay a meane price for a kisse" (6), her skin, "whose passe-praise hue scorns this poore terme of white" (7), her voice, "which makes the soule plant himselfe in the eares" (9). Having finished admiring Stella's beauty, in the following lines, Astrophil admits that in his best state of mind and thoughts he thinks about her beautiful features but oftentimes he is involved with her other attributes which are so sexual that his "Mayd'n Muse doth blush to tell the best" (14). This very sonnet alone unveils to what extent Astrophil favours his beloved's physical attributes and how his mind and emotions are involved and affected by sensual beauty.

In his celebration of Stella's natural beauty, Astrophil goes beyond this world and enters the realm of myth. Sonnet XIII narrates a story of Phoebus (Apollo) who was elected "judge between Jove, Mars and Love" to determine "of those three gods" whose coat of arm is the best. Cupid or Love, who had decorated his shield by an image of Stella's face and his crest by her golden hair, was crowned the winner. Astrophil invents this contest to magnify Stella's fairness by showing that her beauty favors Cupid, the god of love, over the two other gods. It can be added that he indirectly highlights the connection between love and beauty, i.e., between him as a lover and Stella, the beautiful beloved.

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## 2. ASTROPHIL: THE PLATONIC LOVER OF SPIRITUAL BEAUTY

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Astrophil, the studied lover of this paper, is expected to appreciate Stella's beauty. Nevertheless, the way he observes Stella's beauty is unique. Astrophil looks upon Stella as a source of inspiration in sonnet III and admits that he learns what love and beauty is when he looks at her face, "in Stella's face I read / What love and beauty be" (pp.12-13). In the first stage, Astrophil beholds

Stella's outward form as beauty's incarnation. As Plato (2009, p.3) emphasizes, "it is commonly the case that a lover desires his beloved's body before he has come to appreciate his character or got to know his other attributes". It can be inferred that in Astrophil's view, Stella is the emblem of goodness and what she does be just.

The beloved being beauty's incarnation emphasizes the objectivity of beauty and stresses the invalidity of the expression *beauty is in the eye of the beholder*.

This view easily finds its place in love poetry, *Astrophil and Stella* here as an instance, where lover's concept of what is beautiful is a fundamental issue and his unique observation of the beloved's beauty is the source of inspiration for his loving words.

Plato insists on inspiring quality of love (by love, he means the love of beauty), calling it a poet and the source of poesy. If love touches somebody, he claims, they become poets, even if they had no music in them before. It is love that grants the Muses the power of inspiration. (Jowett, p.37). Astrophil, in accord with Plato's assumption, considers love the true inspirer of poesy. In sonnet XV, he criticizes those poets who exhaust themselves to create far-fetched metaphors, look up dictionaries to find rhymes, rummage mythology in search of imagery, and imitate or plagiarize other poets. He believes that they are on the wrong path. They lack the love that is the true source of inspiration for composing genuine poetry:

You take wrong wayes; those far-fet helps be such  
As do bewray a want of inward tuch,  
And sure, at length stol'n goods doe come to light:  
But if, both for your loue and skill, your name  
You seek to nurse at fullest breasts of Fame,  
Stella behold, and then begin to indite (9-14).

Regarding his own art of poesy, Astrophil claims that he only knows one Muse whom he sets his eyes on and writes down his poetry:

For me in sooth, no Muse but one I know:  
Phrases and Problemes from my reach do grow,  
And strange things cost too deare for my poore  
sprites.

How then? even thus: in *Stella's* face I reed,  
What Love and Beautie be, then all my deed  
But Copying is, what in her Nature writes. ("III" 9-14)

Somewhere else he praises Stella's beauty and magnificence, bestows her heavenly grace, and compares her to Aurora, the Roman goddess of dawn:

Rich in all beauties which man's eye can see  
Beauties so far from reach of words, that we  
Abase her praise, saying she doth excel:  
Rich in the treasure of deserved renown,  
Rich in the riches of a royal heart,  
Rich in those gifts which give th'eternal crown.  
("XXXVII" 6-11)

The word "mind", sometimes spelled as "minde", is used in more than 16.5 percent of the sonnets. This fact marks the comprehensive role of the mind and highlights its function in understanding love and beauty and their interrelatedness. Admitting that he "cannot chuse but write" his mind, Astrophil confesses that it is occupied by Stella's image: "The first that straight my fancie's error brings/Unto my mind, is *Stella's* image", and it is affected by her power. In sonnet XXXII Astrophil asks Morpheus, the god of dreams and the son of the god of sleep, wondering how he could create such a pleasing image of Stella in his mind. Morpheus answers that Stella's image is already in his heart:

"Foole," answers he, "no *Indes* such treasures hold,  
But from thy heart, while my sire charmeth thee,  
Sweet *Stella's* image I do steale to mee" (2-14).

In a platonic sense, as it is mentioned before, love is the guide to all beauty and goodness. These lines show how Astrophil's love for Stella which dwells and is felt in his heart, transposes to an image of her beauty by and in his mind.

Sometimes the mind pays off his debts to love simply by giving away his rationality. Plato (2009) asserts that there are two kinds of madness, one caused by human illness, the other by divine bestowal. He divides the divine kind of madness into four parts each with its own deity, prophetic inspiration to Apollo, mystical inspiration to Dionysus, poetic inspiration to the Muses, and the fourth kind to Aphrodite and to Love. He claims that the fourth kind happens when a lover sees earthly beauty and conceives it as the true beauty. Because he perceives what others are incapable of perceiving and fails to behave in accordance with some conventions, the lover is accused of being mad (p.38). Astrophil experiences the loss of his *mind* when he sees Stella, when he is *charmed* by her beauty. He feels that his love for Stella (as it was mentioned before, she is the paramount of beauty for him) ravages his rationality, as a bankrupt who loses his wealth. He knows that he has lost himself, too. But after all he regrets that he has no more to give away for Stella's love:

My wit doth strive those passions to defend,  
Which for reward spoile it with vaine annoyes.  
I see my course to lose my selfe doth bend:  
I see and yet no greater sorow take,  
Then that I lose no more for *Stella's* sake. (10-14)

The same story happens in sonnet XXI but this time an outside observer, a friend, criticizes Astrophil reminding him that his love for Stella disagrees with his expectations of life and with his intellectuality, that it will harm his public position. He points out that Astrophil has lost his reason and misbehaved due to his love for Stella. But Astrophil convinced that there is nothing more beautiful than Stella's love:

Sure you say well, your wisdom's golden mine  
Dig deepe with learning's spade, now tell me this,  
Hath this world ought so faire as Stella is? (12-14)

In spite of his awareness of himself as a socially responsible man, Astrophil observes something so beautiful and worthwhile in Stella that he thinks it worth losing himself and what he possesses. Not only is Astrophil satisfied and content to lose his rationality but he is also mournful to preserve it. In sonnet XXXIII, Astrophil chides himself for being so traditional ("to my selfe my selfe did give the blow") that he could not perceive his love for Stella in time. He recognizes his love for Stella but it is too late. She is married. Therefore, he blames himself for being blinded by his reason and wit, addressing himself:

I MIGHT, unhappie word, ô me, I might,  
And then would not, or could not see my blisse:  
Till now, wrapt in a most infernall night,  
I find how heav'nly day wretch I did misse. (1-4)

Subjectivity is one side of the coin. The other side is objectivity. It seems implausible to claim that the individual's perception of beauty is totally subjective. Human beings are not isolated entities. They are born and grow up in communities in which they share common historical experiences and cultural biases, along with the experience in the society and which all together shape their judgement or taste. Since no one can escape such cultural influences, observers' vision of beauty cannot be totally subjective. Philosophers such as Hume and Kant added more to the issue. They

perceived that something important was lost when beauty was treated merely as a subjective state..... They agreed that if beauty is completely relative to individual experiencers, it ceases to be a paramount value, or even recognizable as a value at all across persons or societies..... they both treat judgments of beauty neither precisely as purely subjective nor precisely as objective but, as we might put it, as intersubjective or as having a social and cultural aspect, or as conceptually entailing an intersubjective claim to validity. (Sartwell, 2015, p. 3)

Regarding Kant and Hume's intersubjective view of beauty, Astrophil, on behalf of Sidney, is no exception. According to Schiller, beauty is the integration of nature and spirit. He believes that

beauty or play or art (he uses the words, rather cavalierly, almost interchangeably) performs the process of integrating or rendering compatible the natural and the spiritual, or the sensuous and the rational: Only in such a state of integration are we—who exist simultaneously on both these levels—free. This is quite similar to Plato's "ladder": Beauty as a way to ascend to the abstract or spiritual." "But Schiller—though this is at times unclear—is more concerned with integrating the realms of nature and spirit than with transcending the level of physical reality entirely, à la Plato. It is beauty and art that performs this integration. (Ibid., p.11)

Meanwhile, Aristotle believes in combination of both rational (spiritual) and non-rational (sensual or natural) parts of human beings. This combination leads the

individual to virtue or what he calls excellence of character. Aristotle believes that the virtuous person is characterized by self-love. Yet this self-love is not an individual achievement but rather requires friendship by which the individual comes to desire the good of others for others' own sakes (Homjak, 2015).

Plato (2013) calls evil and vulgar those lovers who are only concerned with physical beauty,

because he loves a thing which is in itself unstable, and therefore when the bloom of youth which he was desiring is over, he takes wing and flies away, in spite of all his words and promises; whereas the love of the noble disposition is life-long, for it becomes one with the everlasting. (p.20)

For him, love without virtue cannot be a true one and is incapable of leading lovers to perfection. He believes that "noble in every case is the acceptance of another for the sake of virtue. This is that love which is ... heavenly, and of great price to individuals and cities, making the lover and the beloved alike eager in the work of their own improvement" (p.22).

Spending much time elaborating on Stella's physical charm, Astrophil does not disregard her soul, although he pays less attention to it than he does to her body. One's beauty cannot attain perfection if each of its aspects (natural or spiritual) is ignored. Since Stella is equated to the goddess of beauty by Astrophil, he cannot help talking about both aspects of her beauty.

Virtue is the most important attribute of Stella's spiritual beauty. She is presented so virtuous that *Vertue*, the goddess, herself will fall in love with Stella if she perceive her inherent virtue: "That *Vertue*, thou thy selfe shalt be in love" ("IV" 14). Interestingly enough, besides his admiration and glorification of physical attraction, Astrophil, favour virtue, which he calls "true beauty", over the superficial features of beauty:

"True, that true Beautie Vertue is indeed,  
Whereof this Beautie can be but a shade,  
Which elements with mortall mixture breed:  
True, that on earth we are but pilgrims made,  
And should in soule up to our country move:  
True, and yet true that I must *Stella* love." ("V" 9-14)

Not being satisfied with his preceding approval of Stella's virtue, he quotes Plato, the philosopher of philosophers, as a proof:

"The wisest scholler of the wight most wise  
By *Phoebus*' doome, with sugred sentence sayes,  
That Vertue, if it once met with our eyes,  
Strange flames of *Love* it in our soules would raise."  
(*"XXV"* 1-4)

As we see, love and virtue are concretized by Stella's beauty. Thus, physical beauty embodies the spiritual beauty. On the one hand, Plato claims that the true love is the love of reason and virtue. On the other, Astrophil declares that love and virtue find form in Stella. He arranges this syllogism to acknowledge Stella's virtue.

Moreover, in sonnet LII, Astrophil accounts for Stella's virtuous soul as it is what really affects people's heart, not her physical appearance: "That vertuous soule, sure heire of heav'nly blisse: Not this faire outside, which our hearts doth move." (pp.7-8).

In spite of the fact that Astrophil is sensually infatuated with Stella, he couldn't help referring to the beauty of her soul and confessing its influence on him. In sonnet XVI, he admits that Stella teaches him the true love. He claims that by transcending her physical appearance, he could reach the true beauty that is the true love. Before getting to know what true love is, Astrophil had seen and noticed the lady's physical beauty and had thought that the impression he had got is love. But when he sees Stella and gets to know her soul he finds out that he was wrong:

In her sight I a lesson new have speld,  
I now have learn'd Love right, and learn'd even so,  
As who by being poisond doth poison know. (12-14)

Sonnet LI retells the same story but in a different way. Stella tries to entertain the courtiers by her witty conversation. Astrophil is not pleased by her doing so. He, whose heart now is connected to Stella's eyes and "confers with *Stella's* beames," ("LI" 12) believes that any conversation is unnecessary. He gets the warmth of a transcendent relation from the beams of Stella's eyes. He sustains the spectrum of platonic love when he looks into Stella's eyes. As mentioned before, in Plato's opinion, love is the understanding of what is beautiful. Here Astrophil tastes a different kind of love, the love of one's beauty of soul, which is different from the sensual love of one's physical beauty. His discovery of Stella's inner beauty, a part of which is manifested in her eyes, eclipses her physical appearance.

Having set forth that Stella taught him the true love:  
She in whose eyes *Love*, though unfelt, doth shine,  
Sweet said that I true love in her should find.  
I joyed, but straight thus wated was my wine,  
That love she did, but loved a Love not blind,  
Which would not let me, whom she loved, decline  
From nobler course, fit for my birth and mind.  
(“LXII” 3-8)

He counts the reason for his claim. She is virtuous, chaste, and wise.

Once more, in sonnet LXIV, Astrophil reiterates Stella's virtue. This time, he is more serious in his statement. He has no doubt that his love for Stella transcends that of physical beauty and reaches the realm of spirituality. As it mentioned before, Plato (2013) claims that love is a ladder to virtue. He states that the lover will do voluntary service for his love since he recognizes that his love for the beloved leads him to wit and virtue. He believes that if a lover comes to realize this

fact he is prepared to do everything for his beloved with a view to virtue and improvement. He will think nothing is nobler. For him the acceptance of beloved for virtue's sake is noble in every respect (pp.21-22). In sonnet LXII, Astrophil is so determined in this claim that, in series of oaths, he tells us how much he is ready to give up whatever he possesses for Stella whom he calls not only his love but also his wit and virtue, "Thou art my Wit, and thou my Vertue art" (p.1). He does not regret losing his fortune, social position, intelligence, fame, wise men's approval, and even more. He swears to forfeit whatever he could. The only thing he yearns for in return is being in love with Stella:

Let Fortune lay on me her worst disgrace,  
Let folke orecharg'd with braine against me crie,  
Let clouds bedimme my face, breake in mine eye,  
Let me no steps but of lost labour trace,  
Let all the earth with scorne recount my case,  
But do not will me from my *Love* to flie.  
I do not envie *Aristotle's* wit,  
Nor do aspire to *Cæsar's* bleeding fame,  
Nor ought do care, though some above me sit,  
Nor hope, nor wishe another course to frame,  
But that which once may win thy cruell hart.  
(“LXIV” 3-13)

Nothing matters to Astrophil except for Stella's love. She is the ultimate goal one could look for; she is the only thing that he seeks. His Platonic quest for Stella's love inspired by her physical as well as spiritual beauty leads him to realms above the mundane needs such as fortune or fame. He becomes heavenly because he is spiritually connected with a divine being.

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## CONCLUSION

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Sir Philip Sidney, in his *Astrophil and Stella*, demonstrates how beauty inspires love and not the reverse, hence making Astrophil a good candidate for the Platonic love, the love that is thought to be independent from its subject and resides in the realm of Forms, the love that must be sought by individuals and when found elevates and exalts the one who finds it. Throughout the sonnet cycle, Astrophil delectates, praises, highlights, and magnifies Stella's beauty. He allocates a large portion of the cycle to the description of Stella's physical beauty with which he is severely infatuated. But he does not neglect his beloved's spiritual beauty. In other words, Astrophil, consciously or not, declares that both body and soul embody and/or induce love. Astrophil's love of beauty includes both physical or sensual and spiritual beauty. Astrophil demonstrates that his love is not a mere Romantic or subjective feeling gushing out of his heart to make everything else in the world look beautiful. Rather,

the reverse; it is the beauty in its elevated form that inspires his body and soul with love, the feeling or ability to appreciate beauty in the most perfect form.

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