

SPENSER'S ALLUSIONS TO SIDNEY'S  
'ASTROPHIL' AND 'STELLA': HISTORICAL OR LITERARY?

THESIS

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For Edna M. Haynes

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Here now have you (most dear, and most worthy to be most dear, lady) this idle work of mine, which I fear (like the spider's web) will be thought fitter to be swept away than worn to any other purpose. For my part, in very truth (as the cruel fathers among the Greeks were wont to do to the babes they would not foster) I could well find in my heart to cast out in some desert of forgetfulness this child which I am loath to father. But you desired me to do it, and your desire to my heart is an absolute commandment. Now it is done only for you, only to you; if you keep it to yourself, or to such friends who will weigh errors in the balance of goodwill I hope, for the father's sake, it will be pardoned, perchance made much of, though in itself it have deformities. For indeed, for severer eyes it is not, being but a trifle, and that triflingly handled. (OA 3)

With these words in the dedication of the *Old Arcadia* to his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, Sir Philip Sidney reveals his reason for never submitting his prose or poetry to universal reading and criticism. He would be amazed, and probably embarrassed, at the volumes of criticism which have

been written in the subsequent four hundred years, especially in the twentieth century, about his life and his literary efforts. He would probably cringe at the thought of his *Astrophil and Stella* sonnet sequence being read and analyzed critically by scholars who are, by his courtly standards, mere commoners.

Sidney did not publish any of his work during his lifetime; instead, he seems to have intended his literary efforts to be read only by close friends and relatives. H. R. Woudhuysen discusses this point, citing W. A. Ringler who asserts that little evidence exists to indicate widespread public knowledge of the sonnet sequence before it appeared in print in 1591. Woudhuysen further stresses the “strong possibility” that Penelope Devereux and Fulke Greville were given copies of the manuscript of *Astrophil and Stella* and that Lady Rich probably kept her copy private, just as Greville closely guarded his copy (366). Woudhuysen further claims Sidney did allow some limited copying of his manuscript, but Sidney probably kept it mostly for himself, his family and his close friends (383). Woudhuysen suggests Sidney’s friends would have been persons who were “local, courtly, or university acquaintances” (385). According to Woudhuysen, “...there can be little doubt that on account of its intrinsic excellence, and perhaps because of its scandalous nature, the sequence was eagerly sought after” (386).

The question of the importance of knowing and using historical and biographical facts as they relate to the interpretation of literature is one which has been explored for decades. Scholars have vacillated between the opinion that a work should be interpreted solely on the basis of its content and the opinion that biography and history are integral to the understanding and interpretation of literature. Richard A. Lanham discusses the “biographical sonnets” in the sonnet sequence, saying that no *Astrophil* speaks in the poem; it is Sidney who speaks. He cites formalist Richard B. Young who, according to Lanham, attempts to see a “consistent *persona*” in the poems, but a “concrete

context" is difficult. Lanham argues, "Why not let the poem be backlited by biography as Sidney intended?" He continues to refute the formalists by asserting that these poems are a real attempt at courtship and that among the original, small audience, the identities of the poet and the object of his love sonnets would have been known. Lanham concedes that the poems can be and have been read outside the biographical context, but he questions why this should be done. He considers the sequence to be "half art and half life" (107-08).

William A. Ringler comments, credibly, on *Astrophil and Stella*:

Professor C. S. Lewis... asserts categorically that a sonnet sequence 'is not a way of telling a story. It is a form which exists for the sake of prolonged lyrical meditation', and therefore 'the narrative, still more the biographical, reading of a sonnet sequence may obscure its real qualities.' But we cannot avoid the biography....The legitimate critical procedure is, not to ignore the biography, but to find out what kind of biography it is. This can be done by comparing what is known of Sidney's activities during the years 1581 and 1582 with the story told by the sonnets. (440)

As Ringler argues, knowledge of biographical and historical facts concerning Spenser and Sidney is essential to understand these authors and their prose and poetry.

The *Astrophil and Stella* sequence of love sonnets has been the object of much scholarly debate. Critics agree that Astrophil is Sidney; however, critics disagree about the identity of Stella. Roger Howell mentions Thomas



Nashe's preface to the first edition of *Astrophil and Stella* (1591) in which Nashe claims the sonnets were "a tale of invented love, 'the argument cruel chastity, the prologue hope, the epilogue despair.' " Howell argues against the view of the sequence as merely an invented love following Petrarchan convention, claiming:

...the poems themselves were more than mere exercises, more than the fulfillment of the courtier's conventional duty to write poetry. They were also the record of his love affair with a real person, Penelope Rich, and the notation of real and warmly felt emotions. (187)

Katherine Duncan-Jones assumes that the identification of Penelope Rich as Stella is biographically correct, stating, "We do not know to what extent it [*Astrophil and Stella*] was composed for the immediate perusal of Stella's real-life model, Penelope Rich" (xi). Thomas P. Roche, Jr., concedes that Penelope Rich is Sidney's model for Stella, but he questions whether Sidney ever actually loved and desired her. He claims the historical facts do not suggest "an undying love of Sidney for Penelope" (210-211). Walter G. Friedrich offers still another interpretation. He insists that neither the Stella of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* nor the Stella of Spenser's "Astrophel" elegy is Penelope Rich (118). He stresses that "after the publication of the 1598 *Astrophil and Stella*, to be sure, some seventeenth-century writers identified Stella as Lady Rich, but others identified her as Frances Sidney (139). Friedrich further explains that, after Spenser's "Astrophel" elegy, it became clear that Stella represented Frances although Friedrich does not wish to suggest that Sidney's sonnet sequence is a record of his wooing of Frances. Friedrich quotes W. L. Renwick, who writes, "Either Spenser tacitly puts Lady Sidney into the place of Stella; or the gossip that connected Sidney with Lady Rich is much

exaggerated; or it was understood that Sidney's love for Lady Rich was a purely literary *amour courtois* in which there was neither sin nor embarrassment for anyone" (117).

Edmund Spenser's elegy "Astrophel" certainly contributes to the confusion in identifying Stella. While most contemporaries of Spenser, as well as recent Sidney and Spenser scholars, agree that Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich is the object and recipient of Sidney's love poems, Spenser identifies Stella as Sidney's wife, Frances Walsingham, in "Astrophel," for he praises her for being at the side of the dying Astrophel. According to Friedrich, letters from Leicester (who was with Sidney in the Netherlands) to Sir Francis Walsingham (Sidney's father-in-law) prove that the historical Frances was at the side of the dying Sidney. Leicester wrote that Frances was "with child" and "seriously ill" and that her dedication to nursing Sidney back to health contributed to her weakened condition (151-56).

This study will examine the arguments of scholars concerning the identity of Stella and Astrophil and focus on Spenser's allusions to Sidney in "Astrophel" and in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*. Because it is important to know how close their social ties were, I will examine the chronologies of Spenser; Sidney; Frances Walsingham; Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich; and her brother, Robert, the second Earl of Essex. To explain Spenser's puzzling identification of Sidney's Stella as Frances Walsingham, Sidney's wife rather than a literary "Stella" or Lady Rich in his "Astrophel" elegy published nine years after the death of Sidney, I suggest that the timing of the publication of Spenser's elegy was no coincidence, and that this is significant in analyzing Spenser's misidentification of Stella as Frances. Spenser's writing and his pursuit of patronage and position suggest that, in 1595 and 1596, the dates of the publication of "Astrophel" and of Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser was courting the patronage of Robert Devereux, the second Earl of Essex;

furthermore, in 1595, Spenser attempted to promote Frances in the esteem of Queen Elizabeth, who had ostracized her from court (Snow 9 ).

As an integral part of this thesis, I will explain why Spenser offers no sense of consolation at the conclusion of his "Astrophel." William A. Oram debates the issue of whether the elegy, "The Doleful Lay of Clorinda" (following "Astrophel" in the collection of elegies published by Spenser in 1595) is actually Spenser's own continuation of "Astrophel" or the work of another poet, possibly Sidney's sister, Mary Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke. Although the narrator of "Astrophel" indicates that Clorinda, the sister of Astrophel, will continue the elegy with her own song, Oram claims the "phrasing and versification recall Spenser's" (564-65). In truth, "The Doleful Lay" offers the traditional consolation which an elegy is supposed to supply; the inconsolable mourner, whom we see in the first sixty-six lines, finds relief after a realization that Astrophel is happy in "blisfull Paradise" (68). If it is Spenser's work, it offers closure with consolation for "Astrophel." It is beyond the scope of this paper, however, to analyze critically "The Doleful Lay of Clorinda." If this elegy is indeed the work of Spenser, he did not at any time lay claim to its authorship. I will look at "Astrophel" as complete, but deviating from the elegiac tradition which Spenser has adapted in that no consolation is offered to the mourner. Instead, the grief-stricken Stella of Spenser's poem immediately surrenders her life to follow her Astrophel in death:

At last when paine his vitall powres had spent,  
His wasted life her weary lodge forwent.  
Which when she saw, she staied not a whit,  
But after him did make untimely haste:  
Forth with her ghost out of her corps did flit,  
And followed her make like Turtle chaste,  
To prove that death their hearts cannot divide,

Which living were in love so firmly tide. (173-180)

The gods then have pity on the lovers and transform the two lifeless bodies into a single flower (184).

Both Spenser's deviation from traditional elegiac form and his identification of Stella as Frances promote Frances as the wife and eternal lover of Sidney, whose life and death by 1595 had become an important means of propaganda for the Queen who needed "an ideal of chivalric heroism and courtesy, and ideal that would serve to control the impetuosity of some of her courtiers" (Hager, 48). Although Sidney was often frustrated by favors not granted by the Queen and she was irritated by his marriage to Frances in 1583 because the marriage was performed without her approval, the Queen took advantage of the creation of the Sidney legend during the years following his death in 1586. Alan Hager discusses two "transformations" of Sidney into a legendary hero after his death. The first was the promotion of the Sidneian legend by Fulke Greville and the Leicester faction for use in their "hawkish" position in the hopes of influencing the Queen to allow a Protestant offensive against Spain on the continent. Hager asserts:

The second transformation of Sidney is the product of Elizabeth's own aims in upholding the notion of her court as the late flowering of chivalry in fealty to the virgin queen. Here Sidney is metamorphosed from a complicated, often-neglected courtier into the ideal of chivalric heroism and courtesy, an ideal that would serve to control the impetuosity of some of her courtiers. (48)

Spenser could have had another motive for honoring Frances through his allusion to her as Stella. I will discuss the possibility that Spenser could

have been trying, through his poem, to teach and delight the Queen. Sidney's definition of the purpose of "poesy" in *The Defence of Poesy* includes the following excerpt:

Poesy therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis*---that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth---to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture ---with this end, to teach and delight. (219 - 22)

He continues to discuss the purpose of teaching through poetry:

For who will be taught, if he be not moved with desire to be taught: And what so much good doth that teaching bring forth (I speak still of moral doctrine) as that it moveth one to do that which it doth teach? (579-92)

Sidney thus defines the purpose of poetry with the Horatian cliché "teach and delight." In "Astrophel" and elsewhere, Spenser assumes the responsibility of a poet, according to Sidney's definition, by using his poetry, to influence the Queen.

Margaret Hannay discusses the efforts of both Spenser and Sidney to teach the Queen through their poetry, especially in Sidney's *Arcadia* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Book VI. Hannay writes:

Conscious that direct speech risked the Queen's disfavor, Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser attempted to teach Queen Elizabeth to read their pastoral fictions aright, hoping that she would reward the flattery and follow the admonition underlying it, as recent scholarship has demonstrated. ("Self-Reflexive Pastoral" 137).

Spenser attempts to teach the Queen about the goodness of Frances and reminds her that Sidney's widow deeply loved and took care of the dying Sidney even though, several years prior to the publication of "Astrophel," Frances had married the Earl of Essex, possibly as early as 1587. According to Snow, Essex was one of the Queen's favorite courtiers until the marriage of Essex and Frances Sidney, revealed in 1590, incurred the wrath of the Queen (6). Snow informs us that, although she forgave Essex within a fortnight, the Queen never forgave Frances (8-9).

I will seek to demonstrate, first, that Spenser is catering to the Earl of Essex and the Countess of Pembroke for patronage, and, secondly, that Spenser is attempting to promote Queen Elizabeth's good will toward Frances Walsingham, Lady Sidney and later the Countess of Essex.

## CHAPTER II

### THE IDENTIFICATION OF "ASTROPHIL"

Before considering whether Spenser identifies Stella as Frances, one must demonstrate that Spenser identifies Sidney with his "Astrophel." In some lines of "Astrophel," Spenser demonstrates his knowledge of the historical Sidney; in others, his imitations and allusions demonstrate his familiarity with Sidney's sonnets in which Sidney reveals his own identity as his persona.

When Spenser opens his "Astrophel" elegy with the identification of Astrophel, "A Gentle Shepheard borne in *Arcady*, / Of gentlest race that ever shepheard bore" (1-2), there is no doubt that he describes Sir Philip Sidney, who was born into the aristocracy of England. Although the phrases "gentlest race" and "Gentle Shepheard" appear to be paradoxical, they are a conventional association in the work of Sidney and others. His literary persona, Philisides, in *The Arcadia* is similarly known as the "Shepherd knight." The shepherd's life seems to be one of retreat from the complex, political life at court to one of simplicity in a pastoral setting where one can peacefully contemplate the meaning of life through a study of nature. Sidney's contrast in terms in "shepheard" and "knight" seems to reflect the two opposing facets of his life-- knight and poet; it is a contrast between his public life as an aristocrat and his private life as a poet.

Sidney's family included close associations with the reigning monarchs of England. According to Roger Howell, Sidney's father, Sir Henry Sidney, was a wealthy knight who had served under three sovereigns in many capacities and his mother was from the prominent Dudley family. Her brother Robert

Dudley was the Earl of Leicester, a favorite of Queen Elizabeth from childhood days (183). Although Leicester was a favorite, he angered the Queen many times, but each time the relationship was resumed after the Queen's anger subsided. According to Michelle Margetts, one incident occurred when Leicester married Lettice, the widowed Lady Essex in July or August, 1579. The secret of the marriage was kept from the Queen for about thirteen months when an enemy of Leicester's told the Queen of the marriage. After she angrily confined Leicester to the Mareflore Tower, her councillors persuaded her to release him, at which time he retreated to his country home. He regained favor in "a remarkably short time" when the Queen allowed him to return to court (145). Robert Lacey states that, in 1582, when Leicester took his seventeen-year-old stepson, Robert Devereux, to be presented to the Queen, Dudley was aging and losing his place at court to younger courtiers such as Walter Raleigh; so he made the introduction in an attempt to maintain a connection between Elizabeth and the Leicester faction (30). At about this time, Sidney was writing *Astrophil and Stella* (Ringler 439). When Spenser published his "Astrophel" elegy in 1595, Leicester had been dead for seven years. Lacey gives Leicester's death date as 4 September 1588 (49). For most of his life, Sidney was the heir apparent to his two uncles, the earls of Leicester and Warwick (Howell 183). Sir Philip Sidney was certainly born into a "gentle race" punning on "gentle" as "of the upper classes; of good birth; noble; chivalrous," and on the cultured mode of behavior.

The chivalric life of a knight and the pastoral life of the shepherd seem to be from contrasting worlds. Arthur B. Ferguson writes that chivalry in Elizabethan society was "a balance between the martial, the courtly, and the scholarly qualities--the noble mind equipped with 'the courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword' " (91, inner quotations from *Hamlet* III. 1. 159). Sidney certainly meets the qualifications to be called "gentle" by this standard.



Ferguson further discusses the convention of the *pastoral* shepherd-knight, stating that this chivalric type originally existed only in “literature and pageantry” (92). The pastoral setting was one of peace, but the knight’s world was one of combat. According to Ferguson, Sidney’s and Spenser’s protagonists could exist in the bucolic shepherd’s world only temporarily before they returned to their courtly world with the “duties for which their knightly order had been created” (95). Sidney’s Arcadian knights, Musidorus and Pyrocles, temporarily exist in the pastoral world, but they are really knights, not shepherds, and the world of combat inevitably draws them back. Spenser’s Calidore, similarly, attempts to adjust to the pastoral world, but, as a knight, he does not really know how to live the life of a gentle shepherd: “Not only does he fail to fully comprehend the patriarchal shepherd’s view of a life free from envy, he commits the gaffe of offering money to this man [Meliboe] who has renounced ‘that mucky mass, the cause of men’s decay’ ” (95, inner quotations from *FQ* VI.ix.32-33).

In his elegy Spenser gives Sidney the name of “Astrophel” (6), obviously as a tribute to Sidney and his literary persona. In the following lines, he speaks of Sidney’s noble mother and Sidney’s growth in learning and the gentle manner of life: “In comely shape, like her that did him breed / He grew up fast in goodnesse and in grace/And doubly faire wox both in mynd and face” (16-18). At a young age, Sidney was trained in the life, duties, and manners of a courtier. Malcolm William Wallace states that Sidney had excellent tutors, and among the best was his mother, Lady Mary Sidney. For the first ten years of his life, she took a strong interest in his education and training. Lady Mary is known to have had excellent handwriting, and her writings in Latin and French indicate she had an education in languages; she also spoke fluently in Italian. She had a great interest in literature, which is indicated in Geffraie Fenton’s dedication to her in 1567 of *Certaine Tragicall Discourses* (16). In addition to other factors, it

seems natural, therefore, that Sidney had a love for literature and writing. On 17 October 1564, when he was ten, Sidney entered Shrewsbury School, and in three or four years, he became an undergraduate at Christ Church, Oxford (Duncan-Jones Chronology xxi). Sidney displayed a brilliant mind at Oxford; he left there at the age of eighteen to go on the grand tour of the Continent for three years to "round out his education" (Spencer 338). Spenser's *Astrophel* and Sir Philip Sidney are similar in the possession of "goodnesse and grace."

In his elegy, Spenser continues to describe "Young *Astrophel* the pride of shepheards praise" (7). The reference to "shepheards" may suggest Sidney's circle of poet friends. Howell indicates that Sidney's circle included Thomas Drant, Daniel Rogers, Edward Dyer, Fulke Greville and Edmund Spenser. Howell quotes Ringler, who comments, "their greatest influence was to encourage each other to be themselves" (158). In the 1570's the "Sidney circle was more than a literary group" (160). They were close friends who explored many areas of thought and ideas. According to Howell, Daniel Rogers, in a poem which was probably written in late 1578, referred to this literary group in which he wished to be included:

Nor are you [Sidney] without a faithful and happy circle of companions to whom, in close friendship, there abounds a pious love. In divine virtue Dyer, keeper of judgement, storer of wit, excels. Next comes Fulke, whom you have known since the earliest days of manhood, Fulke, dear offspring of the House of Greville. With them you discuss great points of law, God, or the moral good, when time permits these pious studies. You are all ornaments of the Court, its favourites almost--the Royal Court (Nemesis be my witness) is therefore dearer to me. (161)

After alluding to Sidney's circle of poet friends who praise Astrophel, Spenser continues his description and provides an ironic image of Sidney as an object of pursuit by several young ladies. Spenser alludes to Sidney, "Young Astrophel the rusticke lasses love" (8). These "lasses" would definitely not have been "rusticke." Instead, the young ladies were from noble families, as was the sister of Spain's Prince of Orange. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Sidney was from a noble family. Spenser's "rusticke lasses love" is true to the historical image of Sidney only if we look at the statement as conventional, ironic, and metaphorical. If we consider the metaphorical image of Sidney as a "shepherd," then the image of "rusticke lasses" extends the pastoral metaphor to the young ladies of nobility whose parents or guardians sought matrimony to him. Howell makes the point that Sidney would have seemed a good "catch," and contemporary letters support the idea that many families desired the marriage of their daughters to Sir Philip Sidney. He received many offers, but he turned them down until he married Frances Walsingham, the daughter of one of Elizabeth's most important advisors, in 1583 (12).

Later in the elegy, Spenser returns to the thought of the women's pursuit of Astrophel,

And many a Nymph both of the wood and brooke,  
 Soon as his oaten pipe began to shrill;  
 Both christall wells and shadie groves forsooke,  
 To heare the charmes of his enchanting skill.  
 And brought him presents, flowers if it were prime,  
 Or mellow fruit if it were harvest time.

But he for none of them did care a whit. (43-49)

The references to an "oaten pipe..that..began to shrill," "flowers," and "fruits" (44) suggest Sidney's coming of age--with sexual connotations. This description, again, implies his desirability as a husband. Young ladies pursued him with

gifts in the spring: "flowers if it were prime," or in autumn, "mellow fruit if it were harvest time," but Astrophel had no interest because "For one alone he cared, for one he sight, / His lifes desire, and his deare loves delight" (53-54).

Astrophel was only interested in his "Stella." The wood Gods felt sorry for the ladies in pursuit, but did not consider their gifts to be worthy of his appreciation, although the gifts were good: "yet wood Gods for them [the Nymphs] often sighed sore: / Ne for their gifts unworthie of his wit, / Yet not unworthie of the countries store" (50-52). Spenser could possibly be offering a critical comment about Astrophel for not accepting the offered gifts. Although Astrophel appears to be ungrateful for the gifts, he could be simply uninterested because of his love for Stella. Spenser here seems to criticize Astrophel's single-mindedness in his obsession with Stella.

In Elizabethan society, young ladies might have an interest in a young man, but marriages were usually arranged through negotiations by family or friends. Matchmakers saw Sidney as a potentially very wealthy and influential person. According to Ringler, while Walter Devereux, the first Earl of Essex, was on his death bed in Ireland, he expressed the desire that, "Yf god so move ther hartes," Philip Sidney "might matche with my daughter." After the Earl's death on 22 September 1576, his secretary wrote Philip Sidney's father, Sir Henry Sidney, inquiring, "what will become of the Treaty betwene Mr. Phillip, and my Lady Penelope" (436). Ringler quotes D. E. Baughan who observes, "the Earl's [Essex's] proposal was only one of at least five that were made by various noble families, all of which were refused for political or financial reasons" (437). After Penelope Devereux married Lord Rich in 1581, Leicester attempted to arrange a marriage between his nephew, Sidney, and his stepdaughter, Dorothy Devereux. In January, 1582, before he left for Antwerp, Leicester drew up a will in which he made provisions for his newborn son and for his stepdaughter's future marriage. In this will, he mentions that there had

been “some talk of marriage between my well-beloved nephew Phillip Sidney and the Lady Dorothy Devereux” and as “my hearty and earnest wish was and is that it be so, for the great good will and liking I have to each party...I do most heartily desire that such love and liking might be between them as might bring a marriage” (443). Although Leicester set aside a dowry of two thousand pounds and a yearly income for this couple in the event they married, the marriage never took place. Dorothy Devereux secretly married Sidney's friend, Sir Thomas Perrot, without the consent or blessing of either her guardian or the Queen (442-43). At least one “Nymph” was uninterested in Sidney.

Howell writes of Hubert Languet's attempts, in 1577, to negotiate a marriage between Sidney and the sister of Spain's William, the Prince of Orange. Rumors were reported by the Spanish ambassador Mendoza to the King of Spain, in 1578:

There is much talk here of a marriage between Sidney, Leicester's nephew, the heir of Henry Sidney, of the Earl of Warwick and of Leicester's property, and a sister of Orange, who enters very willingly into the suggestion, and promises as a dowry to make him lord of Holland and Zealand.... (44)

Apparently, the noble sister of the Prince of Orange would willingly have loved Philip Sidney, yet another example of the irony of Spenser's “rusticke” lasses. Languet considered this potential marriage to be politically significant because it would “provide a crucial link in the forming of the Protestant League” (43). He pointed out to Sidney that Orange's sister wanted the marriage and would be disappointed to learn of his rejection (45). Sidney knew the Queen would not consider the marriage favorably because of the diplomatic overtones involving the Protestant League. By March 1578 he rejected the negotiations (45-46).

Ringler states that, until 1578, when the Earl of Leicester secretly married

the widow of the first Earl of Essex and subsequently had a son and heir of his own, sometime prior to July 1581, Sidney was the heir apparent of two wealthy earls, Leicester and Warwick. Leicester's son would also be first heir to Warwick, so with the birth of one child, Sidney lost his apparent heirship to two legacies. Howell remarks, "Sidney's stock was not so high in 1583 as it had been at an earlier date. Regardless of how great the admiration was for him as an emergent Protestant hero, his market value had declined considerably" (93).

In the elegy, Spenser again alludes to Sidney when he describes Astrophel, "in one thing onely fayling of the best / That he was not so happie as the rest" (11-12). Theodore Steinberg quotes William Oram, who interprets "happie" to mean that Astrophel is unlucky, not unhappy; however, Steinberg disagrees with Oram's interpretation and cites two letters from Sidney's teacher and friend, Languet, that seem to indicate Sidney was, indeed, unhappy. In one letter, written 15 January 1574, Languet states, "I am very much troubled by the letter in which you write that you are not in very good health and are even more melancholy than usual." A week later, he writes, "Since you are not at all cheerful by nature, you should seek out companions in whose honourable society you can find good cheer." Steinberg also refers to Spenser's lines in "Astrophel": "Besides, in hunting such felicitie / Or rather infelicitie he found" (79-80). Steinberg argues, convincingly, that Astrophel is hunting happiness and finds, instead, unhappiness, and, because he has a misunderstanding of what happiness is, he looks outside the pastoral world for this happiness. but does not find it (189-90).

Sidney had many disappointments--possible reasons or explanations for his unhappiness. During a well-known tennis match, in August 1579, between Sidney and Edward de Vere, a close friend and admirer of the Duke of Alençon, de Vere, the Earl of Oxford, ordered Sidney to leave the tennis courts. When Sidney refused, the disagreement led to a challenge to a duel, stopped

only by the Queen's orders. Elizabeth further distressed Sidney when she reminded him that Oxford was of higher rank than he, and "inferiors owe respect to their superiors" (Osborn 504). As a result of these events, Sidney left the Queen's court for over a year and lived in the country with his sister, Mary, Countess of Pembroke, at her home in Wilton. Osborn refers to Sidney's absence from court as "his enforced inactivity" (504). During 1580, Philip was "in low spirits, which were acerbated by the lack of proper employment and a shortage of money" (505). In 1581, Sidney petitioned the Queen for financial help, affirming that he had "growen almost to the bottome of my pursse" (506). He even appealed to Leicester, Burghley, and the Vice-Chamberlain, Sir Christopher Hatton, to use their influence with the Queen in the hopes of obtaining money from her. Sidney subsequently wrote Hatton, saying, "If you finde you can not prevaile [with the Queen] I beseeche you lett me knowe it as sone as may be, for I will even shamelessly once in my lief, bringe it her majestie myself; need obays no lawe, and forgetts blusshinge" (507). She did give him money from "the forfeiture of papistes goodes," though less than he needed or wanted. He was not happy, as he commented to Leicester: "Truly I lyke not their [Catholics] persons and much less their religions, but I think my fortune very hard that my reward must be built up on other mens punishments" (507). Osborn indicates that two circumstances contributed to Sidney's financial problems: he spent more than the Sidney family could afford, and Queen Elizabeth did not employ him to do more than "various small errands" (507). The Queen did assign Sidney the task of accompanying Antonio, "the pretender to the Portuguese throne who was preparing ships for an invasion to establish his title in September 1581" (507). On this mission he wrote a letter from Dover to Hatton and complained, "the Quene means, I thinck, that I should go over with him, which at this present mighte hinder me greatlie, and nothing avail the kinge for any service, I should be able to doo him" (507). After this

appeal to Hatton, Sidney did not have to sail with Antonio.

Sidney continued to be disappointed in his job requests for appointments from the Queen or the Council. In April 1582, he wished to go as a cavalry leader to the Netherlands, but that position did not materialize. In July 1582, Sidney attempted to use the influence of Edmund Molyneux, his father's London agent, with Burghley and Hatton to obtain an appointment to the Council, but the appointment was not forthcoming (508). Later, in January 1583, Lord Warwick requested that the Queen make Sidney his partner as joint Master of the Ordnance. Again, Sidney solicited Burghley's help, but he received a subordinate appointment instead of a partnership with Warwick (509).

Sidney's financial troubles, one reason for his unhappiness, were so serious that, on 21 September 1583, when he married, Frances, the daughter of Sir Francis Walsingham, her father had to pay off 1,500 pounds of indebtedness for Sidney and allow the newlyweds to live in his home (509). In looking at historical evidence, one can see that Spenser is factually accurate in his description of Sidney as "not as happie as the rest." In the context of the poem, "the rest" refers to the other shepherds; the allusions are to Sidney and the other poets.

The elegy also speaks of Astrophel's "layes of love he also could compose, / Thrise happie she, whom he to praise did chose" (35-36). Spenser seems to have been aware of Sidney's sonnet sequence and the poems in *Certain Sonnets*. Arthur Marotti states that the *Astrophil and Stella* manuscripts were apparently circulated privately among close friends and clients of the Sidneys and Pembrokes between 1583 and the first publication in 1591; however, they were apparently kept out of the literary mainstream of published, printed works for this period of eight years. Traditionally, privately circulated poems would be included in authorized or unauthorized anthologies. Other



privately circulated manuscripts such as Sidney's poems from *Arcadia*, for example, show up in commonplace books of the period, but the poems from *Astrophil and Stella* do not (406). Sidney's love sonnets were apparently closely guarded by whoever was in possession of them. Most likely, the owner was either the Countess of Pembroke, Frances Walsingham, Penelope, Lady Rich, or all three. Margaret Hannay cites an unpublished letter in the hand of the Countess of Pembroke which reveals that, regardless of a family feud between the Earl of Pembroke and his brother-in-law, Robert Sidney, the "Sidney/Herbert women took no part in the quarrel and continued to treat Frances Walsingham, Philip's widow and Countess of Essex, as a sister." Hannay continues, "Although Mary Herbert [the Countess of Pembroke] was at Wilton with her husband, at the time of the Essex rebellion in 1598, the Sidney family continued to play an important role in protecting both Frances Walsingham, Countess of Essex and Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich" ("Letters" 169). The closeness of the women, coinciding with the Countess of Pembroke's publication of the *Astrophil and Stella* sonnets, suggests the possibility of ownership of the poems by one, or all, of the women.

Spenser must have seen some of the poems by the time of the publication in 1595 of his "Astrophel" elegy, for he imitates many of Sidney's lines. Since Spenser was at court with Raleigh during 1579 and 1580, it is likely that he saw and read some of the circulated manuscripts of the sonnets, even though they apparently did not include those which pointed to Penelope Rich as "Stella" through puns on Lord Rich's name. According to Thomas Roche, sonnets 9, 24, 35, and 37 contain the puns, but the last three were not included in manuscripts and early editions (210). Sonnet 9 does not obviously reveal Penelope as Stella through any associations with her name. Roche states the manuscripts were circulated after Sidney's death but prior to the publication of a "pirated edition" by Thomas Newman in 1591 (139). Sonnet 37, which puns so

heavily on the name Rich, was not published until 1598, when the Countess of Pembroke included it, together with Sidney's other sonnets in the 1598 edition of the *Arcadia* (Friedrich 135). Spenser would not have had the most conclusive biographical identification of Lady Rich as Sidney's Stella, found in sonnets 24, 35, and 37, unless he had seen the manuscript privately. Although Spenser imitates many of Sidney's lines from other sonnets, he does not appear to identify Penelope Devereux as "Stella."

Concerning the publication of the sonnet sequence, Howell points out that it had many inadequacies. Although Newman claimed in 1591 that "he had done his best to produce an accurate edition of the poems," he later revised his own publication, correcting over 350 "misreadings." No authorized text appeared, however, until the Countess of Pembroke's 1598 edition. According to Howell, Mary Sidney apparently had the advantage of a better manuscript than those who published the unauthorized versions, for she placed the poems in a more meaningful order and made some "noteworthy additions" (179). He notes that the order of the sonnets and songs remained the same through various editions of the 1590's. Most scholars agree, the placing of the songs throughout the sonnets is most fitting for the basic structure of the sonnet sequence. Howell asserts, "In some key ways the edition of the poems as supervised by Mary Sidney must be taken to be definitive" because Sidney's sister was the "most competent to judge the intentions of her brother's work" (180). Margetts adds that "It seems safe to say that had Thomas Newman not printed his pirated edition, which forced the eventual inclusion of a corrected version in the Countess's 1598 edition of the *Arcadia*, the sequence, left to the countess's discretion, most probably would never have appeared in print at all" (233). Obviously, Sidney's sister at least had possession of the sonnet sequence by 1598.

Spenser refers to Sidney's love for his Stella in lines 67-72, and, as he

does, he presents the hagiographical Sidney his contemporary readers would recognize.

Ne her with ydle words alone he wowed,  
 And verses vaine (yet verses are not vaine)  
 But with brave deeds to her sole service vowed  
 And bold achievements her did entertaine  
 For both in deeds and words he nourtred was,  
 But wise and hardie (too hardie alas). (67-72)

Line 68 suggests Sidney's deathbed confession in which, according to Katherine Duncan-Jones, he is supposed to have told a chaplain,

I had this night a trouble in my mind, for searching  
 myself, methought I had not a full and sure hold in  
 Christ. After I had continued in this perplexity a while,  
 observe how strangely God did deliver me--for indeed  
 it was a strange deliverance that I had! There came  
 to my remembrance a vanity wherein I had taken  
 delight, whereof I had not rid myself. It was my lady  
 Rich. But I rid myself on it, and presently my joy and  
 comfort returned. (172)

Duncan-Jones argues that the line, "It was my lady Rich," probably is not authentic. She states, "There is something odd about this passage in both MSS of 'The Manner', and the reference to Lady Rich in the Juel-Jensen manuscript cannot be confidently viewed as anything more than a contribution to the Sidney legend" (174). Yet Sidney could have been referring to his love poetry in *Astrophil and Stella* and in *Certain Sonnets*. Chaucer's *Retracciouns to The Canterbury Tales* reveals a similar confession of "vanities":

For oure booke seith, "Al that is writen is writen for  
 oure doctrine," and that is myn entente. Wherefore

I biseke yow mekely, for the mercy of God, that ye  
 preye for me that Crist have mercy on me and foryeve  
 me my giltes; and namely of my translacions, and  
 enditynges of worldly vanities, the which I revoke in  
 my retracciouns. (F. N. Robinson 315)

When Spenser refers to “verses vaine (yet verses are not vaine)” (68) in the elegy, he seems to be commenting on Sidney’s and Chaucer’s near-death confessions. He seems to echo Sidney’s and Chaucer’s words. Spenser demonstrates a strong opinion about the value of poetry while implying a familiarity with Chaucer’s *Retracciouns* and with Sidney’s alleged confession.

Spenser speaks of Astrophel’s “brave deeds” (69) and “bold achievements” (71), alluding to Sidney’s “deeds,” which are well-documented historically. Howell comments that Sidney was actively participating in political activities during the time these sonnets were written, but it is interesting that Sidney does not allude to key events (192). Ringler gives examples of some of Sidney’s activities not mentioned in the poems. Sometime before July 1581, the Earl of Leicester’s wife, Penelope’s mother, bore a son, and thus changed Sidney’s status as heir to both of his uncles, Leicester and Warwick (441); however, Sidney does not mention this key event and major disappointment anywhere in the sonnets. Ringler writes that Sidney likewise says

nothing about his trip to Antwerp, nothing about  
 his dominating interest in politics and international  
 affairs--his friendship with the exiled Earl of Angus  
 and the Portuguese pretender Don Antonio, and, most  
 significant, nothing about his activities in opposition to  
 the proposed marriage of the Duke of Anjou with the  
 Queen. His sonnets concern courtship, and yet they  
 do not contain a single hint of the attempts being made

to marry him to Stella's sister, Dorothy Devereux, or of  
 his own interest at the same time in Frances  
 Walsingham. (447)

Lady Rich may have known of Sidney's activities but did not need Sidney's narration of them. Ringler sets the time period during which Sidney wrote *Astrophil and Stella* between 1 November 1581 and 1583. According to Ringler, "The surviving records indicate that, for most of 1581, Sidney was extraordinarily active in social and political affairs, but that after the spring of 1582 he retired from court and spent several months in apparent inactivity on the borders of Wales" (439). During 1581, the same year that Penelope was brought to court by Lady Huntingdon, Sidney had presented the Queen with a gift on New Year's Day, a whip garnished with small diamonds (440). On 22 January 1581, he participated in a tournament with the Earl of Arundel. From January through March, he attended regular sessions of the House of Commons. Then, during the months of April and May, he entertained the French commissioners attempting to negotiate the marriage of Queen Elizabeth to the Duke of Anjou. He was one of the challengers in the May Fortress of Beauty tournament, a celebration of the beauty of the Queen. After July, Sidney was often in the company of the Earl of Angus from Scotland, the head of the pro-English faction in Scotland who had fled to Elizabeth's court for protection against Scottish nationalists. Sidney apparently read his *Arcadia* to Angus during this time, for, as Ringler quotes Hume, "the Earl was delighted to listen to it" (441). From July through September 1581, Sidney also was, as noted above, one of the courtiers assigned to entertain Don Antonio, the Pretender to the Portuguese throne (443-45). During part of 1582, Sidney was away from the court, but he returned to travel with Leicester as he escorted Anjou to Antwerp.

Sidney's *Astrophil* does not elaborate on his deeds in his sonnets; however, he does write of activities which Spenser refers to as "bold

achievements" that "did enttaine" Stella (70). Sonnet 41 praises Stella for inspiring the speaker to win a tournament. Sidney was in fact involved in the Queen's tilts, just as his father, grandfather, and two uncles had been, and Sidney specifically refers to Astrophil's participation in lines 9-11. Ringler warns, however, "It would be futile to try to identify a particular tournament as the occasion of this sonnet..." (474). Ringler states that many records have been lost. Between 1579 and 1585, more tournaments were probably held than records reveal, but extant records do list seven tournaments during this time period. Among these, Sidney is listed as participating in four: the challenge of the Earl of Arundel, 22 January 1581; the Fortress of Perfect Beauty tournament, 15-16 May 1581; the Accession Day tournament of 17 November 1581; and the tilt between the married men and the bachelors, 6 December 1584 (474). According to Duncan-Jones, Sonnet 41 probably refers to a tilt known as the "Triumph," arranged as an entertainment for the French delegation of ambassadors (363). Whether Sidney refers to one of these tournaments, to one for which no records now exist, or to some fictional tournament, cannot be stated with certainty. Astrophil entertains Stella with his bold achievements in a setting with which Sidney is familiar:

Having this day my horse, my hand, my launce  
 Guided so well, that I obtain'd the prize,  
 Both by the judgement of the English eyes,  
 And of some sent from that sweet enemy *Fraunce*;  
 Horsemen my skill in horsemanship advance;  
 Towne-folkes my strength; a daintier judge applies  
 His praise to sleight, which from good use doth rise;  
 Some luckie wits impute it but to chaunce;  
 Others, because of both sides I do take  
 My blood from them, who did excell in this,

Thinke Nature me a man of arms did make,  
 How farre they shoote awrie! the true cause is  
*Stella* lookt on, and from her heavenly face  
 Sent forth the beames, which made so faire my race.

(1-14)

Thus, Astrophil praises Stella for the inspiration he derived from her looking on as he participates in a tournament, "...and from her heavenly face / [she] Sent forth the *beames* which made so fair my race" (13-14), my emphasis. Her smiles encouraged him to win. In Sonnet 53, Stella's looking on produces a different result, however. We see Astrophil "dazzled" by a look from Stella, and, because of this, he is struck down:

In Martiall sports I had my cunning ride,  
 And yet to breake more staves did me addresse:  
 While with the people's shouts I must confesse,  
 Youth, lucke, and praise, even fild my veines with pride.  
 When *Cupid*, having me his slave describe  
 In *Marse's* liverie, prauncing in the presse:  
 "What now sir foole," said he, "I would no lesse,  
 Looke here, I say." I look'd, and *Stella* spide,  
 Who hard by made a window send forth light.  
 My heart then quak'd, then dazzled were mine eyes,  
 One hand forgott to rule, th'other to fight.  
 Nor trumpets' sound I heard, nor friendly cries;  
 My Foe came on, and beat the aire for me,  
 Till that her blush taught me my shame to see. (1-14)

We see a contrast between defeat in Sonnet 53 and the victory in Sonnet 41 as each is related to the presence of Stella. In Sonnet 41, Astrophil is telling Stella her near presence enables him to be victorious; however, in Sonnet 53, he

begins with boasting about his skill in “martial sports,” but he tells Stella that her near presence distracted him into defeat.

Because the purpose of an elegy is to praise the person who is being remembered, and by doing so, to bring some consolation to those who mourn, Spenser’s elegy reveals and points to the real, historical Sir Philip Sidney. Throughout the elegy, Spenser identifies characteristics attributed to Sidney through Astrophel’s descriptions. Sidney was of a “gentle race” (1-2) and educated in “goodnesse and grace” (16-18), and the Sidney circle is represented with Spenser’s remark, “the pride of shepheards praise” (7). As we have shown, Sir Philip Sidney was considered to be a good marriage prospect by many young ladies, treated ironically by Spenser as “the rusticke lasses.” Spenser comments, “That he was not so happie as the rest” (11-12), and a study of Sidney reveals many disappointments in his life which frustrated and depressed him. There is no doubt that Sidney wrote “layes of love” (35), especially those for or about his “Stella” in which he strongly professes his love for her. Spenser alludes and responds to Sidney’s dying confession about his “vanities” by referring to...“verses vaine (yet verses are not vaine)” (68). Although Sidney did not elaborate on many of his deeds in his sonnets, Spenser mentions his “brave deeds” (69). Finally, Spenser alludes to Sidney’s persona, Astrophil, demonstrating some familiarity with the circulated manuscripts of the sonnet sequence, as he writes, “And bold achievements” that “did entertaine” Stella (70). No doubt Sidney’s literary persona, Astrophil, shadowed his own life; Spenser clearly makes historical and literary allusions to Sidney and Astrophil.



## CHAPTER III

### THE IDENTIFICATION OF "STELLA"

We have seen that Spenser in the elegy uses historical allusions and some literary allusions to depict Sidney through his praise of Sidney as Astrophel (1-52). As he turns to the description of Stella, however, his allusions appear to be mostly literary rather than historical; he adopts and imitates Sidney's own words in *Astrophil and Stella*. In this chapter, I will examine biographical and historical facts about Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich, and explain her relationship to Sir Philip Sidney and *Astrophil and Stella*. Different viewpoints of scholars concerning the identification of Sidney's Stella indicate disagreement regarding the identity of Stella. In addition, I will explain why I have concluded that the object of Sidney's love in his sonnet sequence is Penelope Rich, and examine some possible explanations for Spenser's apparent identification of Sidney's wife, Frances, as Stella in his elegy.

Records do not indicate just when Spenser wrote the "Astrophel" elegy, which was published in 1595; it could have been composed immediately after Sidney died in 1586, but H.S.V. Jones places its composition after *The Ruines of Time* (329) which, Oram concludes, was written between April and the fall of 1590 (225). Spenser may have known Sidney's "Stella" through reading the love sonnets, but these would have been the unpublished, circulated manuscripts. The poems Spenser would have read did not include, apparently, the sonnets which pointed to Penelope Rich as "Stella" through the slurs and puns on the name of her husband, Lord Rich. As discussed in the preceding chapter, Sonnets 9, 24, 35, and 37 contain puns on "rich," but the last three were

not included in manuscripts and early editions (Roche 210). Roche states that the manuscripts were circulated after Sidney's death but prior to the publication of a "pirated edition" by Thomas Newman in 1591 (139). The controversial Sonnet 37, which puns heavily on the name "Rich," was not published until 1598, however, when the Countess of Pembroke included it in the 1598 edition of the *Arcadia* (Friedrich 135).

During his stay in England from 1589 to 1590, Spenser probably had no close association with Lady Rich. William A. Ringler concludes that Sidney's sequence was composed after Penelope's marriage on 1 November 1581, at which time Spenser was already in Ireland (438). According to Michelle Margetts, Lady Huntingdon, Penelope's guardian, did not bring Penelope and her sister to London to seek positions at court and suitable husbands until January 1581 (151); Spenser lived in Ireland from 1580 until October 1598 (9-10). In October 1589, Spenser returned to England at the urging of Sir Walter Raleigh, perhaps to oversee the publication of the first three books of *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser's narrative of his journey to London with Raleigh in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, reveals he was taken to court by Raleigh and had the opportunity to read for the Queen (lines 332-36, 359-367). William Oram notes that the dedication of *The Ruines of Time* indicates that Spenser remained in England until 1591, "possibly returning to Ireland briefly in 1590" (230). It was during this period that Penelope was probably already becoming involved with Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy, although still married to Lord Rich (Margetts 387). She was out of London much of the time, sometimes in the country and at other times, at Leighs, the Rich family manor in Essex County. While Spenser was in England, Penelope gave birth to Henry, her last child by Lord Rich, and spent much of her recovery at various places in the country (373-78). Her absence from court during this time suggests that Spenser did not have the opportunity to have any association with Penelope Rich before he

composed his elegy.

In his elegy, Spenser alludes to Sidney's literary Stella through language that is similar to the language and meaning in Sidney's sonnets. The two poets speak metaphorically of Stella's eyes in several passages. Both poets use references to a mistress's eyes as the "beams" conventional to Petrarchan poetry. Spenser's Stella "Shot her sharp pointed beames through purest aire" (58), an echo of similar lines from the sonnet sequence: "Yet still on me, o eyes, dart downe your rayes" (Sonnet 43 11); "Can those black beams such burning marks engrave..." (Sonnet 47 2); "Stella's eyes sent to me the beams of bliss" (Sonnet 68 11). The sonnets contain many references to Stella's eyes as "beames" or "darts." In the second Song, for instance, Sidney writes, "Since sweet sleep her eyes hath charmed, / The two only darts of love" (5-6).

Spenser and Sidney use similar language and metaphors to proclaim the beauty of Stella, comparing her fair beauty to a star. Spenser's words, "the faire, the fairest star in skie, / As faire as Venus or the fairest faire: / A Fairer star saw never living eie" (55-57) seem to play with Sidney's naming and depictions as Stella as "star." In the fifth Song, Sidney's Astrophil addresses Stella, "I said thou wert most faire, and so indeed thou art" (7). In the eighth Song, Sidney plays on astral imagery to describe the mistress:

*Stella* soveraigne of my joy,  
 Faire triumpher of annoy,  
*Stella* starre of heavenly fier,  
*Stella* loadstar of desier. (29-32)

When Spenser writes, "For one alone he cared, for one he sight, / His lifes desire, and his deare loves delight" (53-54), his words echo those of Sidney in Sonnet 68 :

Stella, the onely planet of my light,

Light of my life, and life of my desire,  
 Chiefe good whereto my hope doth only aspire,  
 World of my wealth, and heav'n of my delight. (1-4)

Later in the elegy, Spenser continues to praise Astrophel's Stella, echoing Sidney's descriptions:

To her he vowd the service of his daies,  
 On her he spent the riches of his wit:  
 For her he made hymnes of immortall praise,  
 Of onely her he sung, he thought, he writ. (61-64).

Similar language is also found in *Astrophil and Stella*. Sidney speaks often of his "wit," as in Sonnet 60: "Now I, wit-beaten long by hardest Fate, / So dull am, that I cannot looke..." (9-10). In Sonnet 90, Astrophil says, "For nothing from my wit or will doth flow, / Since all my words thy beauty doth endite, / And love doth hold my hand, and makes me write" (12-14). Sidney's Astrophil persona and Spenser's Astrophel seem to have a common problem: Each has "spent his wit" in writing praise of Stella.

Spenser turns from his shadowing of Sidney's language and metaphors in praise of Stella to a confusing association of Stella with Sidney's wife, Frances, when he brings Stella to the bedside of the dying Astrophel:

She when she saw her love in such a plight,  
 With crudled blood and filthie gore deformed:  
 That wont to be with flowers and gyrlands dight,  
 And her deare favours dearly well adorned,  
 Her face, the fairest face, that eye mote see,  
 She likewise did deforme like him to bee. (151-56)

Sidney's wife, Frances Walsingham, went to the Netherlands to attend Sidney as he lay dying. According to letters from Leicester to Sir Francis Walsingham, she was "with child" and "seriously ill," and her dedication to nursing Sidney

contributed to her weakened condition (Friedrich 130-31). Subsequent lines in the elegy describe Stella as she cares for the dying Astrophel. He gradually weakens, and she becomes pale and grief-stricken:

She fiersly tore, and with outrageous wrong  
From her red cheeks the roses rent away.  
And her faire brest the treasury of joy  
She spoyld thereof, and filled with annoy. (159-62)

Spenser's depiction of her grief is heart-rending as "His palled face impictured with death / She bathed oft with teares and dried oft" (163-64), and "oft she cald to him, who answerd nought, / But onely by his lookes did tell his thought" (168-69). Spenser seems to praise Frances Walsingham as "Stella." No other "Stella" rushed to be at his side after his mortal wound.

In a passage quoted in chapter one, he breaks from the historical context, however, when he has Stella die:

At last when paine his vitall powres had spent,  
His wasted life her weary lodge forwent.  
Which when she saw, she staied not a whit,  
But after him did make untimely haste:  
Forth with her ghost out of her corps did flit,  
And followed her make [mate] like Turtle chaste.  
To prove that death their hearts cannot divide,  
Which living were in love so firmly tide. (173-180)

As I plan to discuss more thoroughly in chapter four, Spenser here shifts from a historical to the fictive element because he wants to promote Frances to Queen Elizabeth as the faithful, ever loving, and caring wife of Sir Philip Sidney, reminding the Queen of the place Frances once held in Sidney's life.

Many theories have been submitted to identify the "Stella" in Spenser's elegy with that of Sidney's sonnet sequence. Friedrich suggests Frances is

Spenser's Stella, reasoning that Spenser would not have dedicated the elegies to a woman whose husband had obviously called another woman his only love. He further states that Frances Sidney, to contemporary friends, was the "true and faithful love of Sir Philip," and, since Astrophil is obviously Sidney, then Stella has to be Frances. He mentions Sidney's will, written on his deathbed, which gave his wife a life interest in all his manors, lands, and other properties and made her sole executrix of his estate (131-33). Indeed, why would he not? She was his wife, the mother of his daughter, and she was also pregnant with his second child at the time of his death. Sidney's interest in the original Stella--Penelope Devereux--was prior to his marriage to Frances in 1583. No evidence exists that Sidney continued to seek the love of Penelope Rich after his marriage to Frances. Bequeathing his estate to his wife was the right thing to do. It would not have been the usual procedure to leave his property to another love from another time in his life.

In the elegy, Spenser seems to honor the historical Frances by alluding to her as Sidney's literary "Stella," praising her through allusions to Sidney's words in *Astrophil and Stella* and through a few allusions to historical facts. Yet, Spenser's identification is controversial because it conflicts with Sidney's allusions to Penelope Rich as "Stella" in the love sonnets.

Scholars have long advanced other opinions concerning the identification of "Stella." Theodore L. Steinberg notes that the opening of "Astrophel" is addressed to an audience of fellow poets and quotes Donald Cheney, who suggests that Stella is "quite simply the Stella of Sidney's sonnets; after the death of the maker of those sonnets, she continues to live only as he does, a part of Sidney's poetic genius" (192). In contrast, Roche asserts that Spenser's Stella is neither Penelope Rich nor Frances Walsingham Sidney. When this fictive Stella transforms herself into a flower with the dying Astrophel, she "literally dies at the death of Sidney." His idea is that poet and

poem die together. Spenser's "Astrophel" allows Astrophil and Stella to become one, a union which Philip Sidney did not allow in his sonnets (220-21). Roche's idea does not seem valid, however, because, as I have indicated, Spenser does make obvious allusions to Frances Sidney in the elegy.

Many critics present evidence that Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich, is Sidney's Stella. Clark Hulse quotes Ringler, one of Sidney's editors, who says Sidney "took considerable pains to indicate the *Astrophil and Stella* poems were based on personal experience. Sidney intended, and contemporaries believed that Lady Rich accepted this identification of herself as Stella" (272-73). Ringler writes,

As soon as the sonnets began to circulate after Sidney's death, a number of contemporaries identified Stella as Lady Rich, and in five of the seven books dedicated to her between 1594 and 1606, the authors went out of their way to associate her with Astrophil, which shows that she was pleased with and accepted the identification. That Sidney intended, that contemporaries believed, and that Lady Rich herself accepted the identification is established by an overwhelming amount of evidence, as certainly as any historical fact can be. (436)

Howell points out that Penelope Rich was the only woman by the name of "Rich" in the court circles during the time of the sonnets (181), so that the name is a key to the identification of Lady Rich as Sidney's Stella. Sonnet 24 speaks of "Rich fooles there be"...with... "base and filthy hart..." (1) and continues the puns with an allusion to Penelope's husband: "But that rich foole who by blind Fortune's lot / The richest gemme of Love and life enjoyes / Ah foule abuse such beauties blot" (9-11, emphasis mine). Howell notes that Penelope was not

happily married and that Lord Rich was not a pleasant person. Howell describes him as “a little man who played things safe, and was willing to sacrifice self-respect for advantage....He would retreat at any sign of opposition....When he wished a favour at court, his wife approached holders of patronage....When a lawsuit threatened his estates, he sent for his wife to bring influence upon the judges” (191). According to Margetts, the marriage was so unhappy that a friendship between Penelope and Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy, that had begun about 1589, blossomed into a full-fledged, open affair by the spring of 1591 (389). Eventually Penelope divorced Lord Rich. G. B. Harrison reports that the divorce was entered in the records of the High Commissioners on 21 November 1590 :

My Lord Rich and his Lady (who have been separated these many years) were divorced before the High Commissioners, when my Lord of Canterbury chid Lord Rich very much, and gave my Lady great commendations, telling what an honourable house she was of, and how hardly my Lord hath used her, and in the end bade my Lord go amongst his Puritans. (*Jacobean* 251)

This record indicates Lord Rich was as abusive as Sidney describes in Sonnet 24: “And [Rich] can with foule abuse such beauties blot” (11).

As I have indicated, Sonnet 37 makes the most pointed identification of Penelope as Stella:

Rich in all beauties which man's eye can see:  
 Beauties so farre from reach of words, that we  
 Abase her praise, saying she doth excell:  
 Rich in the treasure of deserv'd renowne,  
 Rich in those gifts which give th'eternall crowne:



Who though most rich in these and everie part,  
Which make the patents of true worldly blisse,  
Hath no misfortune, but that Rich she is. (6-14)

Margetts concludes, "When at death he stepped into legend, he took her with him. Poets who knew her wrote for her because she loved poetry and could appreciate their work; poets who did not know her wrote for her because she was Stella" (234).

It seems clear that Sidney's Stella shadows Penelope Rich, but Spenser does not identify Lady Rich as Stella; he does not focus on Penelope Rich through literary and historical allusions. Instead, he directs the attention of the reader to Frances Sidney through historical allusions to her concern and attendance at the side of the dying Sidney. He honors Sidney, the poet, in his literary allusions to *Astrophil and Stella*, and Sidney, the courtier, in his historical allusions to his brave deeds and achievements. But why does he focus on Frances rather than Penelope? Could Spenser could have had a personal interest in honoring Frances, rather than Penelope, as Stella?

Spenser bases his *Astrophel* on the historical Sidney in the description and narrative of Sidney's life in the elegy, although he glorifies the battle, as did the various chroniclers; with Stella he becomes more imaginative. It is probable that he did not have the advantage of the identifying sonnets when he wrote his elegy. Spenser could not have missed the implications if he had had access to Sonnets 24 and 37. If he *had* read these sonnets, Spenser chose to ignore the identification of Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich, as Stella. The next chapter will explain why he would choose to do so and propose that Spenser did not have access to these sonnets when he wrote the elegy, since he was in Ireland for most of that time.

The lives of Frances Sidney and Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich, had changed greatly by 1595, when "*Astrophel*" was published. Lady Rich's

widowed mother had married Sidney's uncle, Leicester, and Sidney's widow had married the young Earl of Essex, Penelope's brother. By 1598 the Devereux, Sidney, and Walsingham families were quite intermingled. The Countess of Pembroke had worked to publish a complete collection of Sidney's works which he had never published, in print, during his lifetime. Yet his writings had come to be seen as an important legacy of English literature, as his sister apparently recognized.

Contemporary politics may have interfered with Elizabethan readers' identification of Penelope Rich as Sidney's Stella. Howell suggests that Sir Philip Sidney's reputation as a pure knight would mean he could not be seen as capable of an affair with a married woman (182). Alan Hager asserts that Sidney had been promoted as a hero-knight for purposes of propaganda by Queen Elizabeth in order to promote among commoners the idea that she was surrounded by chivalric knights who worshiped her as Queen. Also, the Leicester faction wanted to promote Sidney as a martyred Christian knight in order to influence the queen to pursue warfare against Catholics on the continent (48).

Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich, who died on 6 July 1607 (Margetts 409-10), outlived Spenser by almost eight years, and Sidney by twenty-one. I have found no evidence that, during this time, she attempted to refute his identification of Stella as Frances. Penelope and Frances had become sisters-in-law when Robert Devereux married Frances. Margetts states that Penelope and Robert Sidney became close friends after Philip's death:

The less generous might suppose her husband's love for (or obsession with) Penelope, though prior to his marriage, would preclude any affection between them. Lady Sidney was, however, a woman of great sweetness, little inclined to pass judgment. Penelope,

at any rate, had never been in direct rivalry with lady Sidney for her husband's esteem and had long since ceased to figure prominently in his life. (232)

In the elegy, Spenser's allusions to Sidney's "Stella" are primarily and conventionally literary as he describes her eyes, beauty, and wit (55-62). When Spenser alludes to Stella as she arrives to be at the side of Astrophel, he offers historical allusions, not to Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich, but to Sidney's wife, Frances Walsingham Sidney. It was Frances who went to his side, staying with him until he died on 17 October 1586. Spenser honors Sidney's wife by making her Astrophel's Stella.

## CHAPTER IV

### FRANCES, ESSEX, AND PATRONAGE

I have discussed Spenser's identification of Sidney's Stella in the "Astrophel" elegy. He appears to indicate that Stella is Sidney's widow, Frances. This seems strange, however, because Frances had been married to the second Earl of Essex for several years by the date of the publication of the elegy in 1595. As I have indicated, the actual date of the composing of the elegy is not known. William A. Oram suggests the possibility that "Astrophel" could, perhaps, have been written as early as 1586 when Sidney died or as late as the date of publication (563). H.S.V. Jones claims the elegy was written after the publication of Spenser's dedication of the *Ruines of Time* where he writes that he had not yet "shewed anie thankful remembrance...to Sidney (329). Raphael Falco states it is difficult to say when the elegy was written (7). In any case, why Spenser would make the "mistake" of identifying Frances as Stella when the poem was published in 1595? Would he not know that Frances was not the original object of Sidney's love sonnets? Did he know Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich, and not know she was Sidney's Stella? Or, was he seeking some private advantage, and if so, from whom? Although we cannot know Spenser's intentions with certainty, some clues may be found in the lives of the historical figures. Recent research based on original papers and records reveals much about the lives of Frances, Essex, and Penelope and hence about Spenser's possible motives. In this chapter, I plan to investigate how biographical information is important in arriving at some conclusions concerning Spenser's reasons for honoring Frances Sidney Devereux in

“Astrophel.” In particular, I will examine the relationship between Frances and the Earl of Essex to show that Spenser could have been honoring Frances with the motive of potential patronage, particularly from Essex..

Although Frances was not of the nobility, her father held some of the most important positions in Queen's Elizabeth's court. According to Conyers Read, Frances was probably born in 1567 to Sir Francis Walsingham, who then held the important position of Secretary to the Queen; he also ran an effective intelligence service. One of Spenser's dedicatory sonnets to the *Faerie Queene* addresses Walsingham: “To the Right Honourable Sir Francis Walsingham Knight, Principall Secretary to Her Maiesty, and of her Honourable Priuy Counsell” (Roche *Faerie Queene* 30). At various times, he held other official positions which were mostly a matter of dignity and influence and required few duties: Custos Rotulorum of Hampshire; Chief Steward of Salisbury; and High Steward of Ipswich, of Kingston-on-Hull. He did not have influence in the governments of these towns, but instead probably held the positions to protect their interests at court (420-421).

Although Walsingham's name is prevalent throughout records of the political dealings at court, limited information exists concerning his personal life. Read asserts that Walsingham did not marry until he was about thirty years old, and that his first wife, Anna Carleill, died within the next two years without bearing any children. About two years after her death, he married Ursula Worsley, a widow with two sons. She bore him two daughters, the older being Frances, named after her father, and the younger, Mary, who lived to be about seven years old. The date of Frances' birth can be approximated by means of a letter written by Ursula's brother, John Worsley, to William More, dated 18 July 1567, in which he mentions that his sister is near her time of confinement. Frances is listed as twenty-four years of age when an inventory of her father's estate was taken on 27 September 1592. Hence, she was apparently about

sixteen years old when she married Sir Philip Sidney on 20 September 1583 (421).

Frances married, but she still lived in her father's house. Sir Philip Sidney and his wife had to live in the Walsingham home for most of their three-year marriage because Sidney had overspent his family's finances. According to Read, at his death in Zutphen, 17 October 1586, Sir Philip left an estate that was quite entangled; he had many debts that Walsingham had backed, so, after the death of Sidney, Walsingham was responsible for paying them (424-25). As a result, Walsingham's own financial position grew much worse than it had been before his daughter married Sidney: "Frances was her father's sole heir, but the nightmare settlement of Philip Sidney's will had left his father-in-law with an estate reduced practically to nothing" (Margetts 361). Alan Hager asserts that Sidney's funeral was postponed from October until 16 February 1587, initially due to the expense of returning his body to England and to difficulties in liquidating Sidney's debts. In addition, Sidney's will contained a mistake in legality: he provided for payment to his creditors through the sale of his mortgaged land, but the law did not allow the sale of property *post mortem* to pay debts; therefore, Walsingham had to raise six thousand pounds from his own resources (53). Prior to his marriage to Sidney's widow, Robert Dudley, the second Earl of Essex, confided to John Overall, later Bishop of Norwich, that "money was not his incentive: the Earl went to Walsingham and told him that he was 'a suitor' unto his daughter, not for any wealth or portion, for it was thought he had little" (361-62). Although Essex said Walsingham had little wealth, his motive could have been Walsingham's considerable influence at court.

As I have indicated in the previous chapter, when Spenser's Stella goes to the side of Astrophel, this seems to allude to Frances, who went to the Netherlands to care for Sidney after he was wounded in Zutphen. Read advises that Frances was pregnant when she went to Sidney's side. Leicester

wrote a letter to Walsingham, dated 25 October 1586, in which he mentioned the pregnancy:

Your sorrowful daughter and mine is here with me  
at Utrecht till she may recover some strength, for she  
is wonderfully overthrown through her long care since  
the beginning of her husband's hurt, and I am the more  
careful that she should be in some strength ere she  
take her journey into England, for that she is with child  
(424).

This letter proves that the biographical Frances was at the side of Sidney under great physical and mental stress, and that she is the person who is honored by Spenser's "Astrophel."

Frances and Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, were both at the side of the wounded and dying Sidney in the Netherlands. Essex and Sidney became close friends while serving in the military expedition in the Netherlands. Robert Lacey says Essex sailed to the Netherlands on 8 December 1585 with his stepfather, Leicester, and other English military men who went to fight the Spanish Catholics who were occupying the country. In fact, the Spaniards considered this to be a part of their empire. The English feared the Spanish occupation because it was too close to London. Essex, young and eager to fight, fought courageously and, according to Strong, Essex and Sidney became close friends during this military campaign (36-37). Sidney added to his will while on his deathbed, giving Essex his sword, and he asked Essex to take care of Frances (79). Whether Essex did so out of a sense of chivalrous duty is not known, but he did marry her. Because Frances and her father, Francis Walsingham, in failing health, had little money, the marriage could not have advanced Essex much (Lacey 33-38). Strong says Walsingham died 6 April 1590, shortly before a report of her marriage to the Earl of Essex reached the

Queen (79). The exact date of the marriage is not known, but Margetts suggests that Frances and Essex were possibly married as early as 1587 or as late as the spring of 1590, in Surrey or possibly at Walsingham's London house in Seething Lane. The marriage was kept secret until October 1590, when Frances became pregnant, at which time Essex admitted the marriage and claimed the child, much to the anger of Queen Elizabeth (363).

Scholars disagree about the extent and duration of the Queen's angry reaction to the marriage of Essex and Lady Sidney. Lacey reports the Queen "stamped and raged and roared when she heard of Essex's marriage"; however, after about two weeks she forgave Essex (80). However, Roy Strong asserts that Elizabeth "never forgave Frances Walsingham, who was banished from court and forbidden ever to set eyes on the Queen" (79). Concerning the marriage, Vernon Snow states that Essex "was soon forgiven and recovered any ground he might have lost because of the Queen's displeasure. But a different fate awaited the Countess, who was caught between Elizabeth and Essex. The jealous Queen never forgave her" (8). Snow explains the Queen's extreme reaction toward Frances by noting that Frances had twice married her "handsome admirers" and had twice borne them children. The Queen felt Frances was not the equal of either of these courtiers:

The Countess soon felt the full impact of Her Majesty's wrath. She was banished from Court and forbidden ever to set her eyes upon the Queen's person. All subsequent attempts to win royal favor and recover her lost position failed miserably. (Snow 8-9)

When Essex tried to persuade the Queen to allow his wife back at court, she refused (13). It is possible that Spenser honors Frances in "Astrophel" in an attempt to persuade the Queen to accept her at court again. By presenting Frances as the Stella who grieved so much at the death of her Astrophel,



Spenser could be reminding the Queen that Frances was Sidney's wife, and the two cannot be separated. As soon as Astrophel dies, Stella follows: "Forth with her ghost out of her corps did flit, / And followed her make like Turtle chaste. / To prove that death their hearts cannot divide, / Which living were in love so firmly tide " (177-80). These lines would seem to contradict the identification of Frances as Stella because Frances is still alive, but, as I will discuss in chapter five, it can be viewed as symbolic of the uniting love of Sidney and Frances. Spenser could be promoting the idea that kindness to Frances is also kindness to Sidney.

If Spenser intended to help Frances, it was a futile attempt, however. Historical and biographical evidence indicate the Queen never received Frances. According to Snow, the finality of the Queen's rejection of Frances became apparent when Essex himself offended the Queen in 1599. Essex had been commander of the Queen's military forces in Ireland when he returned to England "so suddenly and contrary to royal command" that he incurred the wrath of the Queen (Lacey 248). He was placed under house arrest while awaiting trial by the Privy Council. Frances attempted to send a gift of a costly jewel to Elizabeth, but the Queen refused it. A few days later, Frances ignored the Queen's rebuff; she went to court and attempted to talk to the Queen in spite of her banishment. Snow states: "By appearing in an inexpensive, unbecoming black dress, which was completely incongruous with her station, the Countess irritated the Queen and shocked the gossipy peers" (13). The Queen ordered Frances away from court again. Harrison's modern version of *The Elizabethan Journals* (records of events, official and unofficial, around the Court) reveals an entry dated 27 November 1599, when Frances went to court and attempted to persuade the Countess of Huntingdon to be an intermediary for her with the Queen. Lady Huntingdon refused to meet with Frances (57). Snow reveals that Rowland Whyte wrote a letter to Robert Sidney in December 1599 saying, "My

Lady Essex rises almost every Day, by Day light to goe to my Lord Treasurers and Sir John Fortescue; for to this Court she may not come" (13). Edith Sitwell explains that Essex was ill, and Frances was attempting to obtain permission to have Essex moved from where he was confined in York House to his own Essex House (246). In reporting Frances's situation to her former brother-in-law, Whyte appears to be sympathetic, yet he must have felt unable to help her.

In contrast to his wife, Essex regained influence and was again in favor at court. According to Lacey after a "fortnight of petulance," the Queen forgave him for the marriage (80). In 1593, he was sworn into the Privy Council. In the same year, he served the Queen in Spain by leading a very successful assault on the port of Cadiz, and, again in 1594, by leading an expedition to Portugal. He returned a hero from these engagements and gained even more popularity and a larger following at court. His many exploits gained him much influence at court (Snow 12-13). His influence is important to the evaluation of Spenser's motives for alluding in "Astrophel" to Frances rather than Penelope Rich. One purpose for Spenser's elegy could have been a bid for patronage, in the form of money or preferment, from the influential Essex.

Essex was infamous for his extramarital affairs. He openly had affairs with several ladies around the court and received reprimands from the Queen; he was even rumored to have had encounters with the Queen herself. Whether these were sexual or not is not known (Snow 13). One of Essex's servants, Anthony Bagot, was a source of the gossip. In May 1587, Anthony wrote a letter to his father in which he reported the Queen would have no one else around her if Essex was available: "When she is abroad, nobody near her but my Lord of Essex and, at night, my Lord is at cards, or one game or another with her, that he cometh not to his own lodging till birds sing in the morning" (Lacey 43). Essex was a favorite of the Queen in 1587 when "They laughed through their first lovers' idyll and stormed through the first of their quarrels" (39). Essex was

the Queen's attendant at the 1594 Twelfth Night celebration where he "flirted, squabbled, and laughed with his Elizabeth" (111). He danced with her, and the two of them were so graceful together that another courtier remarked, "She was so beautiful to my old sight as ever I saw her" (111). Although the Queen was old enough to be the mother of Essex, he often played cards in her chambers until the wee hours of the morning (43). Their relationship was stormy, however. Sometimes Essex was in favor, and sometimes he was not. Essex fell into disfavor with the Queen in February of 1601, when he attempted to lead an attack on the palace to overthrow her government. Essex was deeply in debt, but the Queen kept his creditors at a distance. On the other hand, his many extramarital affairs angered the Queen. Essex had some rivals who became his enemies at court. Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Robert Cecil were among those who were pleased when Essex was in disfavor, and they plotted to ruin him at court (14-15). Snow continues that, on 8 February 1601, Essex, "...now defeated, bankrupt, humiliated, outwitted, and outmaneuvered..." gathered his dwindling supporters to assist him in a revolt that sought to capture Elizabeth, secure London, and replace his enemies at court. Some of the conspirators were captured with little fighting, and the revolution was a failure (14-15). Essex was captured, tried, and sentenced to be beheaded. After spending the intervening time in confinement, he was taken to the scaffold on 25 February 1601. The execution was carried out, and it was said that the queen wept upon hearing that Essex was dead. Although the Queen may have had regrets that Essex had to be executed, she had defended her throne and power following his bold attack.

According to the law, "traitors" and other convicted felons and their families were treated with great harshness. Snow quotes prosecuting attorney Coke's legal handbook as to the penalties:

First, the forfeiture of all his [a traitor's] manors, lands,

tenements, and hereditaments in fee simple or fee-tail of whomsoever they be holden. Secondly his wife to lose her dower. Thirdly, he shall lose his children for they become base ignoble. Fourthly he shall lose his posterity, for his blood is stained and corrupted, and they cannot inherit to him or any other ancestor.

(Snow 17)

Essex had already acquired a deep indebtedness and had mortgaged much of his property to creditors to whom Frances had to forfeit household valuables, and, according to the law, the estates became the property of the Crown when the owner was convicted as a traitor. After the execution of Essex on 25 February 1601, Frances had so little left that she had to depend on relatives for support. She begged her husband's enemy, Sir Robert Cecil, to help her regain her forfeited estates from the Queen, but he refused. Frances could not go to the Queen herself because she was still banished: "Only the Queen could remit some of the forfeited estates and thus provide her with adequate means. Yet Elizabeth would not allow her an audience" (17). She would not make an exception to the law .

The lives and fortunes of Robert Devereux, Lord Essex and Lady Essex explain why Spenser deviates from the traditional consolation in a pastoral elegy, offering no solace; why he misidentifies "Stella" as Frances Walsingham, even though she was a woman married to another man. Through his allusions, Spenser may have appealed to the Queen on behalf of the ostracized Frances, in the expectation of patronage and preferment from Essex.

Spenser was not alone in attempting to gain patronage and preferment as records indicate, dedications were prolific during Elizabeth's reign. During Queen Elizabeth's reign, authors often dedicated their literary works with the intention of gaining attention and support and to enhance their personal

financial and social position “through preferment.” (Van Dorsten 192). Van Dorsten notes that authors attempted to please their dedicatees. If the patron liked poetry, the author wrote poetry. If he liked poetry in Latin, the author wrote poetry in Latin. In England, the writer/patron relationship was more informal, involving “some few individuals [as patrons] and their houses either in London or deep in the country” (192). Sidney did not have the money or power to be a forceful patron. He was, however, very interested in learning. Although very intelligent and interested in poetry and prose, Sidney did not offer financial support in patronage to clients to any extent (Buxton 1). After Sidney left the court circle over the tennis court incident in August 1579, he had time to write poetry of his own and to read and encourage others (201). According to Katherine Duncan-Jones, Spenser dedicated *The Shepherds Calendar* to Sidney later in the year, December 1579 (Chronology)--“to the noble and vertuous Gentleman most worthy of all titles both of learning and chevalrie M. Phillip Sidney” (Van Dorsten 200). Van Dorsten claims Sidney probably knew Spenser and recognized his ability before publication of *The Faerie Queene*, “The Hymnes,” the “Prothalamion,” and “Epithalamion.” The exact relationship of Spenser and Sidney, however, remains vague and unclear. Although the two did not write alike, they had similar ideas or theories about writing. Van Dorsten asserts that

Spenser’s *The English Poet* does not survive, and we do not know whether it was as close to [Sidney’s] *A Defense of Poetry* as the October Eclogue or certain passages in the Letter to Raleigh; but his practice in *The Faerie Queene* certainly agrees with the principles outlined in the *Defence*. For in spite of all the differences--tone and manner, personal prestige, perhaps also talent--the two men shared a literary

ideology that each of them appears to have independently acquired from abroad (202).

Patrons offered poets more than financial rewards for their poetry; they provided an environment in which to develop their art of writing. Buxton asserts that poets were not “soft-bodied parasites” who were simply looking to him to support their living. Instead, they came to Sidney because of his knowledge of Renaissance Europe and the atmosphere and environment that he could offer. Elizabethan poets desired to visit together, to discuss poetry and to experiment with new styles of writing in an atmosphere of friendly rivalry. Sidney and his sister, Mary Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke, could offer this environment (2). While on his tour during 1572-1575, Sidney’s mentor, Hubert Languet told him he should know about languages, especially Latin, and history; they studied ancient and modern literature (5). Buxton claims that Sidney’s continental experience drew poets to Sidney. Royalties did not exist at this time, so poets hoped for patrons who would help them financially. A patron had to have the good taste to recognize and demand the best in whatever the client was doing. Poets sought Sidney’s “critical encouragement, his example, his knowledge of the Renaissance in Europe, above all his taste and judgment” (2). They enjoyed visiting Sidney and his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, at her homes at Wilton or Penshurst or at Leicester House where Sidney and Lady Pembroke provided environments and aristocratic hospitality for poets to think, discuss and study (2-3).

Essex succeeded Sidney as patron to Spenser after Raleigh and Spenser came to court and remained in London for about a year and a half during 1589 and 1590 (Buxton 208). In *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, Spenser claims that he had read his *Faerie Queene* (presumably only Books I to III) to Elizabeth. He could have had more in draft by this time. It is likely Spenser read selections, possibly small sections, from *Faerie Queene* instead

of the entire work, and it is likely that this reading was done over a period time instead of at one sitting. Since Essex was in great favor with the Queen at this time and was apparently at court and in her private chambers quite often, it is possible that Essex was a listener, too (Lacey 43). Apparently, Spenser admired Essex, or at least flattered him; possibly, this could have been Spenser's way to encourage a patron and reader to live up to the ideals presented in the poem. As Buxton points out, Spenser alludes to Essex in *Prothalamion*:

Great Englands glory and the Worlds wide wonder,  
Whose dreadfull name, late through all Spaine did  
thunder,  
And Hercules two pillors standing neere,  
Did make to quake and feare:  
Faire branch of Honor, flower of Chevalrie,  
That fillest England with thy triumphes fame  
loy have thou of thy nobel victorie,  
And endless happinesse of thine owne name  
That promiseth the same. (208)

Buxton notes that Spenser's poetic tribute to Essex was written shortly after the Earl's triumphant return from Cadiz in 1587, and that it fulfilled Spenser's promise in the dedicatory sonnet to the *Faerie Queene*, wherein Spenser had promised to honor Essex after becoming a better writer. In his *Vewe of the Presente Staet of Ireland*, Spenser again shows his appreciation and friendship for Essex by recommending him for the position of Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland (208).

In considering Spenser's bid for patronage, it is beneficial to look at Sir Walter Raleigh, another patron of Spenser's. That they were good friends is evident in Spenser's poem *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* which narrates

the story of their trip from Ireland to England together. Steven W. May writes that the two men were, for a few months in 1589, neighbors in Ireland and that they had "common interests in the Protestant cause and the overthrow of Spain" (May 11). Moreover, Raleigh appreciated the significance of *The Faerie Queene* and encouraged Spenser to go to England and read the work at court (11). They sailed together for England in October 1589 (Oram Chronology). According to Buxton, Spenser showed his appreciation and friendship by addressing his prefatory letter as well as one of the dedicatory sonnets to Raleigh (219). In the dedicatory letter accompanying *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, Spenser writes:

Sir, that you may see that I am not alwaies ydle as yee  
thinke, thought not greatly well occupied, nor  
altogither undutifull, though not precisely officious, I  
make you present of this simple pastorall, unworthie of  
your higher conceipt for the meanness of the stile, but  
agreeing with the truth in circumstance and matter. The  
which I humbly beseech you to accept in part of paiment  
of the infinite debt in which I acknowledge my selfe  
bounden unto you for your singular favours and sundrie  
good turnes shewed to me at my late being in England...  
I pray continually for your happinesse. From my house  
of Kilcolman, the 27 of December, 1591. (Oram 526)

Although the letter is dated 1591, Spenser apparently withheld publication of *Colin Clouts Comes Home Againe* until 1595. Katherine Koller suggests that the work was finally published in 1595 as an attempt to assist Raleigh to regain favor with the Queen. Raleigh had previously angered her by secretly marrying Elizabeth Throckmorton in 1592, for which she had him thrown into the Tower. Although Raleigh was released, he was not restored to favor at court until 1597



(48). Koller claims that there is a consensus that Colin *Clouts Comes Home Againe* was written in 1591, as Spenser says in the dedication, but that it was revised several times before being published in 1595. Furthermore, although the first draft may have been sent to Raleigh, the printing could have been held up until a more appropriate time, since Raleigh was in the Tower in June 1592 (51).

Patrons appear to have been less generous during the 1590's. Alistair Fox notes that patronage declined during the 1590's, contrary to the perception one would get from reading the multitudes of dedications in books of the period. One might expect the Queen to be the dedicatee of the most poems and books, but Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, in fact, garnered the most with sixty-six dedications between 1590 and 1600. The obvious reason for so many dedications is his position as a source of preferment at the court and as a favorite of the Queen. Just because a writer wrote an elaborate dedication, however, did not insure that he would receive some benefit or preferment. Fox further states that, in the 1570's and 1580's, Richard Robinson had been well rewarded under the patronage of Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Henry Sidney, and Edward the Earl of Rutland. However, in the later 1590's, patrons were not giving as much financial support to writers as before. Robinson received less and less reward from his patrons. When Robinson dedicated his third installment of his translation of the *Psalms, A Proceeding in the Harmony of King David's Harp* to the Queen, she refused to pay him anything. Robinson wrote, "...Herewith I departed from youre Highnes Court at Richmond, paciently as a pore man before, but now (by this meanes) become a Porer" (Fox 234). He received another rebuff when he dedicated his *Fourth Instalment* to Thomas Egerton, newly appointed to the position of Lord Keeper of the Great Seal. Robinson wrote, "...Bothe his Royal Antecessors in office not onely receyved my good will and good workes with lyke good will, but all so worthely rewarded me

for the same...He [Egerton] turned mee away bycause of my poverty" (234). According to Fox, one reason for less patronage was the retirement of courtly patrons such as Sir Christopher Hatton, Lord Chancellor, and Sir John Puckering, Keeper of the Great Seal. Powerful administrators in the middle 1590's were less inclined to offer patronage--William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and Thomas Egerton, Keeper of the Seal. Patronage further decreased due to an explosion of literary works, which meant there were too few patrons to go around (234-35).

Although Spenser received some benefits of patronage and preferment for his writing, he complained that he was unappreciated. Fox specifically discusses Spenser's bids for patronage. He refers to a letter to Gabriel Harvey, dated October 1579, wherein Spenser writes that he has "succeeded in attracting the favourable attention of prominent courtiers, through whose offices he expected to gain preferment" (235). Beginning with *The Shepherds Calender*, which he dedicated to Sidney, Spenser seems to have succeeded in attracting the patronage of the Earl of Leicester, Sidney's uncle, and to have opened the doors to court. He complains, however, in *The Shepherds Calender* :

*Piers*, I have pyped erst so long with payne,  
That all mine Oten reedes bene rent and wore:  
And my poore Muse hath spent her spared store,  
Yet little good hath got, and much lesse gayne.

("October" 7-10)

Instead of obtaining a position at court, Spenser was sent to Ireland in 1580 as secretary to Lord Grey, a position with an income although, perhaps, not the position he would have preferred over one at court. As we have seen, Spenser's next overt bid for patronage came in 1590 when he returned to England with Raleigh. He visited at court for over a year, hoping to receive

some preferment; he eventually did receive an annual pension of fifty pounds from the Queen. For his dedication of *Fowre Hymnes* to the Countesses of Cumberland and Warwick, in 1598 he also received from the Privy Council an appointment as Sheriff of Cork. It is not known whether his appointment was due to the influence of Essex, Raleigh (now back in favor) or Burghley's death, the latter freeing Spenser from his obstruction of patronage (236-241). Fox alleges that Spenser felt Burghley was to blame for his inability to obtain patronage. In *Mother Hubbard's Tale*, written in 1579, but published in 1591, Spenser writes of Burghley:

For men of learning little he esteemed;  
 His wisdom he about their learning deemed...  
 Yet none durst speake, ne none durst of him plaine;  
 So great he was in grace, and rich through gaine,  
 Ne would he anie let to have accesse  
 Unto the Prince, but by his owne address. (1191-92, 1199-1202)

The tone in these lines seems to be one of jealousy or resentment.

Spenser spent most of his adult life writing and seeking monetary favors and positions of preferment at court through patronage of the nobility of England. If he aspired to earn his living as a writer, he needed a patron because, as I stated earlier, royalties had not been instated at this time. He did obtain more than many writers, but he was not satisfied that he was being rewarded for all his work, as we can see in some of his poetry. *Prothalamion* (1596) reveals Spenser's frustration, complaining of "...my long fruitlesse stay / In Princes Court, and expectation vayne / Of idle hopes, which still doe fly away, / Like empty shadows (5-9). Spenser was making a bid for patronage with his "Astrophel." A study of the biographical connections of Robert Devereux, the second Earl of Essex, Frances Walsingham, and Penelope Devereux gives some understanding of reasons for Spenser's identification of Frances as

Sidney's Stella instead of Penelope, Lady Rich. Essex was in a position to help Spenser with patronage and preferment. By promoting Frances as Sidney's eternal love, Spenser may have been endeavoring to cause a change in the attitude of the Queen toward Frances. If he had been successful, he could have expected some reward from the Earl of Essex. In my concluding chapter, I will explore the importance of examining historical and biographical backgrounds of persons whose lives intertwined with Spenser's.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

As I have pointed out, most scholars agree on the identification of Astrophel in Spenser's elegy as the shepherd knight himself, Sir Philip Sidney, but disagreement enters into the identification of the Stella in Spenser's poem. Some critics believe Spenser did not know that Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich, was the subject of Sidney's sonnet sequence, possibly because he was in Ireland for nearly twenty years from 1580 until late in 1598 with only one or two short visits back to England.

For decades, scholars have been questioning the value or importance of knowing biographical and historical facts as they relate to the interpretation of literature. Some have thought the literature should be studied based only on content; others have thought biographical and historical facts cannot be separated from the text. In my discussion of Edmund Spenser's allusions to Sidney and his literary persona, Astrophil, I have found it important to investigate Spenser's misidentification of Frances, Lady Sidney and later Lady Essex. It is important to explore the possible reasons for Spenser's allusions to Frances instead of Penelope, Lady Rich as Stella.

Spenser may have had other reasons for clearly making an identification of Frances as Stella. The elegy was published nine years after Sidney's death, so the usual purpose of providing consolation and solace to those who grieve was not pertinent. Even though Frances was married to the Earl of Essex long before the elegy was written, Spenser dedicates it thus:

### ASTROPHEL

A Pastorall Elegie vpon  
the death of the most Noble and valorous  
Knight, *Sir Philip Sidney*

Dedicated

To the most beautifull and vertuous Ladie, the Countesse  
of Essex. (564)

It is not unusual to honor Frances, Lady Essex, in the poem as the lover of Astrophel. To the contrary, Spenser deliberately wrote this elegy to promote the goodness of Frances, who loved and cared for Sidney so unselfishly.

Queen Elizabeth had forbidden Frances to appear at court after the Queen learned of Essex's marriage to her in 1590. Frances obviously made many attempts to change the sovereign's mind, including offering gifts and going to court uninvited on the chance of being received. Essex, too, had attempted to sway the Queen to allow his wife back into favor at court, but Elizabeth would not budge from her position. When Essex himself was in trouble with the Queen in 1599, Frances attempted to give her a gift, which she refused, as we have discussed earlier. Attempting to move the Elizabeth to release Essex in 1600, Lady Rich wrote letters and sent gifts which the Queen read and accepted. Lady Leicester sent an expensive gift which the Queen then accepted (Snow 65). Since the Queen accepted gifts from the other ladies, but not from Frances, it would seem, therefore, that the Queen was especially vindictive toward Frances.

Queen Elizabeth was noted in many contemporary records and writings for her jealousy. One example is found in *The Elizabethan Journal*. An entry in the court news dated 15 February 1598 discusses an affair of Essex: "The Earl of Essex is again fallen in love with his fairest B.; it cannot choose but come to the Queen's ears, and then he is undone and all they that depend on his favour" (Harrison 258). I suggest the Queen was more jealous of Frances for her being

married to Essex, one of her favorites, than she was angry that he married beneath his position of nobility. After regaining his favor after his marriage, Essex spent much time with the Queen. Strong quotes a member of the Earl's household who wrote to his father, "When she [Queen Elizabeth] is abroad, nobody near her but my lord Essex...he cometh not to his own lodging until birds sing in the morning" (79). The Queen evidently ignored Essex's marriage, showing disrespect or contempt for Frances.

In his elegy, Spenser does not offer consolation in the classical convention of elegies. He allows Stella to die instantly after Astrophel, and the two are transformed into a flower (175-186). Although lovers being transformed into a flower is a classical convention, I believe there is some additional reason for this transformation. Elizabeth had had her problems, at times, with Sidney; however, she allowed the promotion of the heroic Sidney legend for propagandistic reasons. Spenser used the symbol of the flower to create the image of a Frances and Sidney whose love was so great that, at his death, their souls were still united. Even though Frances is now married to Essex, this symbol implies that Frances and Sidney are still united, and makes the implication that the Queen should treat Frances well because, in so doing, she will also be treating Sidney well. In the last lines of the elegy, Spenser speaks directly to the Queen (and to others at court who may be mistreating Frances) about the flower that symbolizes the union of Philip and Frances,

That hearbe of some, Starlight is cald by name,  
Of others *Penthia*, though not so well:  
But thou where ever thou doest find the same,  
From this day forth do call it *Astrophel* .  
And when so ever thou it up doest take,  
Do pluck it softly for that shepherds sake. (193-198)

(emphasis mine)

Spenser is saying to the Queen, "For the sake of Sidney, treat Frances 'softly.' "

Strong interestingly associates Leicester, Sidney, and Essex: "As the heir apparent to the political power of his stepfather, Leicester, and as the reincarnation of that flower of chivalry, Sidney, Essex swept all before him" (79). The transformation of the souls of Astrophel and Stella into a flower indicates a symbolic reincarnation of Sidney in the merging of the souls of Astrophel and Stella (Phillip and Frances). The identifications are attempts to persuade the queen that Frances and Sidney were so perfectly in love when Philip was alive that Frances is still a part of Sidney, even though she has remarried; she should be forgiven and returned to favor at court.

Spenser is doing a favor for Essex as well as Frances by attempting to change the Queen's attitude and stance against his wife, Frances. It would certainly have been an embarrassment to Essex to have his wife banned from court, even though he was somewhat of a philanderer.

Spenser probably wrote "Astrophel" with another personal motive--a bid for patronage. Essex was in a position to give patronage to Spenser. It is evident that he was interested in poetry and literature. Essex wrote poetry, although little survives. Lacey reveals that Essex House was a center for a "glittering social circle" of some of the most promising young courtiers, warriors, and poets. They discussed their dreams of glory in foreign wars, "blending their militarism with talk of poetry, scholarship, and music " (111). One of Essex's closest companions during this time was the Earl of Southampton, known to have been the patron of Shakespeare. Essex and Southampton could have been involved in like enterprises of patronage. Snow writes, "By patronizing poets and subsidizing essayists...[Essex] could secure a good press. [He]... seemed well on his way to everlasting fame, greatness, and immortality" (13). Of course, this was prior to his attempted coup in 1601; Spenser died before Essex completely lost favor with the Queen.



When Spenser died, 13 January 1599, the notice in *The Elizabethan Journal* indicated that Spenser "is interred in the Collegiate Church near Chaucer at the charge of the Earl of Essex, his hearse being attended by poets and mournful elegies and poems with the pens that wrote them thrown into his tomb" (5). Many critics agree that Essex's paying for Spenser's funeral indicates he was a patron to Spenser. According to Rowe, Long claims Essex was Spenser's patron in 1590; Rowe further quotes Devereux, "who also says 'Essex was a great admirer of Spenser, whose patron he would doubtless have been had not that poet been attached to Sir Walter Raleigh' " (134). Essex and Sir Walter Raleigh were rivals. Strong speaks of an incident with the Queen in which Essex stormed out of her presence "accusing her of acting 'only to please that knave Raleigh' " (79). Spenser would have been in a delicate position between the two because he had to consider his earlier patronage under Leicester and Sidney while attempting to honor Essex and his wife. According to Roche, "Astrophel" had to give praise not only to Sidney's widow for the decease of her first husband but also praise to the second husband, whose sister was the Stella of whom the first husband wrote" (218).

In "Astrophel," Spenser could be praising both Essex and Sidney. Spenser's deviation from the traditional elegiac purpose of bringing the mourner to some emotional feeling of consolation is a tribute to Essex, also. The united, transformed souls of Astrophel and Stella are immediately happy. The Stella of the elegy does not mourn because she is instantly reunited with Astrophel in death. Frances, in a very short time, was married to Sidney's close friend and successor, Robert Devereux, the second Earl of Essex. Sidney selected Essex to be his successor when he willed to him the treasured sword with which Sidney had been dubbed a knight. Snow suggests this was an obvious request from Sidney that Essex carry on for him in their mutual interests. Essex did ally himself with the anti-Spanish group and did cultivate

Sir Francis Walsingham's backing. Furthermore, Sidney is reported to have requested that Essex take care of his pregnant wife, Frances, and protect their daughter (6). Essex apparently took his successorship seriously, as I have pointed out. Spenser's elegy can be seen as a tribute to Essex, as well as Sidney and Frances. The eternal love of Sidney and Frances has been extended to Essex. Spenser knew Essex was a favorite of the Queen; to honor Essex would please the Queen, and if the Queen saw Frances as united in the love of Sidney, perhaps she would reinstate Frances at court. If Spenser could be successful, perhaps Essex would be inclined to assist him even more with preferment.

At the same time, Spenser, who, according to Fox, spent much of his literary career in an effort to obtain patronage, could not afford to offend Mary Sidney Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke (235). This lady was certainly in a position to give patronage. As I pointed out, Penelope and Frances were protected by Robert Sidney and by the Countess of Pembroke after Essex was accused of treason. Lady Pembroke would have been happy with Spenser's portrayal of Frances as Stella, especially in the context of a transformation or reincarnation of their love. As the sister of Sidney, she would have been happy with Spenser's honor and praise of Sidney as Astrophel and she would have been personally flattered with the dedication of *The Ruines of Time* and dedicatory sonnet to *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser's portrayal of Frances as Stella and the portrayal of Sidney as Astrophel would have been well-received by Lady Pembroke.

Scholars have discussed the use of historical and biographical facts as they relate to the interpretation of literature, swinging like a pendulum from one position to the other. I have found that researching lives and historical facts surrounding Spenser and Sidney has been essential for understanding "Astrophel." Consider the words of Sir Philip Sidney in *The Defence of Poesy*:

...these third [type of poets] be they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be... For these indeed to merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach; and delight, to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger; and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved. (218)

If a reader is reading simply to be delighted, then Spenser's poetry can be enjoyed for its literary value. Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, *The Shepherds Calender*, "Astrophel" and all his other poems and elegies have delighted readers for four hundred years. One can look at the literary components, such as structure, rhythm, rhyme, and figures of speech and delight in the beauty of his poetry. But if poets are attempting to teach, then it is important to know who is being taught and what is the point of the lesson. In "Astrophel," Spenser is attempting to teach the Queen a lesson in kindness, civility and courtesy, all virtues which, according to Sidney's definition, are the duty of a poet to teach through delighting by means of poetic beauty. Hannay writes, "Conscious that direct speech risked the queen's disfavor, Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser attempted to teach Queen Elizabeth to read their pastoral fictions aright, hoping that she would reward the flattery and follow the admonition underlying it" (Self-Reflexive Pastoral 137).

Spenser was fulfilling Sidney's idea of the duty of a poet, to teach and delight when he wrote the "Astrophel" elegy and *The Faerie Queene*. The poet can present the material. It is up to the reader after that. Did he teach? If

Queen Elizabeth's subsequent actions toward Frances are any indication, Spenser did not teach the Queen. Did he delight? He was acclaimed as a poet by his contemporaries, and he has been delighting readers for four hundred years.

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