

TONE IN RONSARD'S *SONNETS POUR HÉLÈNE* AND SIDNEY'S *ASTROPHIL*
AND STELLA: A COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION OF INFLUENCE,
NARRATIVE SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS, AND POETIC
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BELOVED IN
THEIR WORKS

By
STACEE LEA GRAVEL

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of English
and the Honors College of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

December 1998

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Stacee Lea Gravel for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of English to be taken December 1998

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Approved: _____

Dr. George Rowe

Pierre de Ronsard and Sir Philip Sidney both composed sonnet sequences in the sixteenth century. While each cycle is written within the same stylistically rigid genre, they differ greatly in tone. In comparing the factors of possible influences of the French author upon the English, the acute narrative self-consciousness of each poet, and their textual representations of the admired central lady around whom the sonnet sequence revolves, it becomes clear that Ronsard's narrator tends towards an overall negative and critical tone, and Sidney's towards a more self-abasing one.

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I. INTRODUCTION – THE PURSUIT OF OBSESSION

Sonnet sequences in sixteenth century Europe were produced abundantly by aspiring poets and professionals alike. Petrarch's *Canzoniere* appeared in the 1300s, and quickly established the sonnet cycle as one of the Renaissance's most popular literary forms; dozens of writers practiced the composition of sequences modeled on his original. The form was in vogue.

Gradually, Petrarch's works spread northward from Italy; by the 1550s, the French court's poet laureate Pierre de Ronsard and the six other poets who comprised the self-named group called the Pléiade (after the constellation of seven stars) took a serious interest in cultivating the sonnet form as a part of their campaign to revitalize French poetry. Ronsard himself wrote three long sonnet cycles (*Amours de Marie*, *Amours de Cassandre*, and *Sonnets pour Hélène*) and several short ones.

The English courtier Sir Philip Sidney visited Paris in the summer of 1572 as part of his Continental tour, and was very likely exposed to the most recent works of the Pléiade during his stay. He pursued his strong interest in poetry, and between 1581 and 1583, he composed his own sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*. His poetry circulated in manuscript form among his acquaintances until its first (and unauthorized) publication shortly after his death in 1586.

The continued interest on the part of the Renaissance's literary circles in this form of poetry is a testament to its potential for psychological exploration as the narrator of

each sequence inquires into the various rich undulations of emotion and obsession that an unrequited lover experiences. In this paper, I will attempt to explain how Ronsard and Sidney use this form of poetry to explore individual paths and with, ultimately, distinct tones.

The stylistically strict tradition behind the Petrarchan sonnet sequence provides a convenient framework from which variances in the custom can be compared. Since the sequences at hand, *Sonnets pour Hélène* and *Astrophil and Stella*, both trace the same general progression of the relationship from first encounter, through the narrator's persistent attempts to gain the ever-virtuous lady's favors, and to the dissolution of the affair, the ways in which the authors veer from the well-wrought path of Petrarch's original are apparent.

In particular, I will focus on the differences of tone in each poet's work by examining three factors: Sidney's possible indebtedness to Ronsard, each author's narrative self-consciousness, and each author's representation of the 'beloved' lady. While working within the same tightly-structured form, these two authors manage to create surprisingly distinct voices for each narrator. This is due in part to each poet's dedication to the pursuit of innovation. Though contemporary literary theory advocated the use of imitation to strengthen poetic aptitude, Sidney and Ronsard both chose of their own volition to go beyond the boundaries imposed by the Petrarchan tradition.

The acquired talent and literary genius of these two men aided them in composing two sonnet sequences distinct not only from Petrarch's, but from each other. The result of their efforts is poetry that not only succeeds in mastering the demands of the form

itself, but that also subtly expresses the unique poetic theories and voices of the authors themselves.

II – THE QUESTION OF INFLUENCE

The establishment of a factual frame of reference encompassing the *Sonnets pour Hélène* and *Astrophil and Stella* is necessary for a comparative and interpretative discussion of the works. To guide the following deliberations, we will here consider such essential matters as the education and careers of Sidney and Ronsard, the dates of composition and / or publication of the above sonnet sequences, and the literary consciousness and interaction between the Continental writers of the sixteenth century and their island counterparts. These not only situate the chronology of the sequences, but offer a foundation which begins to explain reasons for the poets' differences in tone.

The poetic career of Pierre de Ronsard is a well-documented one, particularly because, unlike Sidney who was a courtier serving the interests of the Queen and was subject to civil appointments and duties, it was his primary occupation and an important source of sustenance. Like Sidney, however, Ronsard too, frequented the court (of Charles IX) during the composition of *Sonnets pour Hélène*, performing the traditional courtier's role of vying continuously for royal patronage. During the time he composed this sequence, Ronsard was the official poet laureate of France (beginning 1558), a situation which brings a unique perspective to his writing – to maintain such a status, the pressure to produce verse was high. Hence, Ronsard wrote many more sonnets (approximately one thousand total) than did Sidney, whose poetry was composed not as a

priority, but as an extracurricular exercise, if you will. Nevertheless, all courtiers during this era were expected (as detailed so finely in Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*) not only to make themselves pleasant to the sovereign and other members of the court, but also to be eloquent and adaptable to any situation – in short, to possess modestly that nearly undefinable, but much sought-after, trait of *sprezzatura*. It is therefore not surprising that Sidney actively pursued the cultivation of his poetic arts while not fulfilling duties associated with his role as Cupbearer to the queen (beginning 1575) or while temporarily banned from court, as they are a valuable addition to the repertoire by which the courtier may impress his patron. Though official court poets such as Ronsard were generally employed by sovereigns, any courtier who appear adroit and clever in areas beyond where he was expected to excel possessed a valuable advantage over those who could not. In the perilous climate of the court, where there were often more courtiers wishing to gain admittance to the royal favor than the sovereign wished or needed, any talent which would make a courtier stand out as resourceful or inventive in the mind of the monarch could lengthen the duration of his appointment.

Because Ronsard's career as poet was graciously (but perilously) subsidized by the king, he could not liberally compose whatever kind of verses or odes that he desired, or write works on a topic which appealed to his aesthetic faculties alone. Rather, he was often commissioned by his royal patron to compose verse with a civic aim. For example, Prescott notes that "In 1565...Ronsard directed his suavest flattery to Elizabeth and her associates; Catherine [the reigning monarch] asked him to do so, for she had recently concluded a treaty with England" (82-83). Here we see that his inspiration comes from a demanding patron, on whose contentment his livelihood rests, rather than from the

traditional and fanciful inhabitants of Mount Parnassus. Poetry, though an art, is produced on request. The duality of Ronsard's situation in this case is an interesting paradox; the poet, to be selected for such an honorary title, must have demonstrated the talent in earlier works to persuade the monarch to select his art, yet the result of this 'honor' is that his artistry and genius are bent into the rigid format of rigorous diplomacy. Sidney as poet thus experiences more creative freedom than did an actual poet laureate such as Ronsard. In effect, their poetic autonomy seems to have a negative correlation to civic activities.

Yet another infringement upon Ronsard's poetic liberty during his official career was the fact that he was compelled to compete with rival poets. Scholars generally agree that "Hélène de Surgères aura été distinguée par Ronsard, chantée par Ronsard, entre 1570 et 1576" (Hélène of Surgères was noticed and sung by Ronsard between 1570 and 1576 (Desonay, 203)), thus placing the composition of the sonnet cycle examined in this paper at least twelve years after his succession to the poet laureateship. He to that point enjoyed a period of undisputed supremacy, but after so many years a new competitor began to challenge his title – Philippe Desportes.

This energetic and flamboyant young poet has been described as having "charm and facile skill," but also as being "ignoble in thought and theme – a sheer court poet" (Taylor, 346). The aging Ronsard (he must have been between the ages of 46 and 52 while composing *Sonnets pour Hélène*; he lived to age 61) needed to prove that he could not only perform the sycophantic function of composing on demand, but accomplish something more philosophical and artful than his younger rival in his verse as well. He has been quoted as having "magnificent scorn for the 'rimeurs' and 'courtizans' who

‘n’admirent qu’un petit sonnet petrarquizé’” [admire nothing but a flippant little Petrarchan sonnet] (Prescott, 77). (Sidney utters a similar statement in his *Defence of Poetry* when he criticizes the “poet-apes” who mimic only and do little to advance the genre.) Ronsard answered the challenge by Desportes by breaking an eighteen-year lack of interest in sonnets altogether (Stone, 106) to compose the *Sonnets pour Hélène*. Stone argues that it was this direct and invasive stimulation which resulted in the sequence’s composition, and not merely a sudden burst of enthusiasm from the poet: “In the case of *Sonnets pour Hélène*, Ronsard was forced to rival Desportes and meet a need to preserve [his] laurel” (160). The factors contributing to the artistic process here veer further from the traditional idea of an all-consuming fervor which demands an immediate intense composition (initially one of the Pléiade’s ideal conditions under which poetry could be written), and more towards the mundane.

Adaptation to temporal constraints, however, did not deaden the quality of Ronsard’s poetry, as one might expect when an author’s aesthetic interests are compromised by the desire of clinging to honor and patronage. Rather, it encouraged him to hone his talents. As a mature poet, he was able to incorporate current demand with artistry, and form an eloquent and evolved sequence. His poetic edge over Desportes came largely from his resources accumulated from past compositions:

Ronsard’s love cycles developed slowly after 1552, passing through various styles and drawing on and discarding many sources. Gradually the personal vision of *Sonnets pour Hélène* was developed, and the poet was able to demonstrate a mastery of his material, a forceful style that communicates his feelings, and a technique in manipulating his sources that does not belittle his own inventiveness but attests rather to that sense of the demands of poetry which assures his position among France’s greatest poets (Stone, 18).

A distinct change of voice and tone occurs between the 1552 sonnet sequence *Amours pour Marie* and *Sonnets pour Hélène*; the pressures of upholding the title bestowed upon him in 1558 reveal themselves in his work. Notably, Ronsard's mature narrator shifts away from stale flattery and standard Petrarchisms typical of the earlier sonnets, as, for example in sonnet XXIV:

Ta bouche seule en parlant m'espouvante,
 Bouche prophete, et qui vraye me chante
 Tout le rebours de tes yeux amoureux.
 Ainsi je vis, ainsi je meurs en doute,
 L'un me rappelle et l'autre me reboute,
 D'un seul objet heureux et malheureux.
 (*Amours pour Marie*, 9-14)

Your mouth alone, terrifies me, when it
 speaks,
 Prophetic mouth, that sings the painful truth
 The very opposite of that which your loving
 Eyes express.
 And so I live, and so I die in doubting,
 One reminds and the other rebuffs me,
 Of this one happy and unhappy object.

The narrator is no longer the generic, unnamed, conventional lamenting lover of *Amours pour Marie* but an identifiable and unique speaker who is so frustrated with the fruitless pursuit that he circumvents Petrarchan and Platonic avenues and conclusions to criticize the lady openly.

By the time of the composition of *Hélène*, Ronsard had realized that to retain fame as well as fortune, he must move beyond petrarchan themes, and create his own personal voice:

With the *Sonnets pour Hélène*...the use which Ronsard makes of the petrarchan conventions and the attitudes which his poetry evinces seem to have shifted quite markedly and to have become altogether more complex and more ambivalent...Ronsard is both accepting the petrarchan conventions and simultaneously rejecting them. It is as though he uses the conventions as a kind of melody against which he can set the continually intrusive counterpoint of a set of attitudes which completely undermine – and indeed make impossible – the conventional petrarchan relationship between the poet and his lady (Castor, 99-101).

It is as though he is acutely aware that he must prove by a poetic evolution that he “is more than a frivolous courtier...he is a serious craftsman of words, forms, and ideas” (Stone, 10).

Sir Philip Sidney was born two years after Ronsard’s earliest sonnet cycle (*Amours pour Marie*) was published, but by the time he entered Oxford in 1567 (Duncan-Jones, 39), the theories and creative writings of the Pléiade would have been easily accessible to a gentleman such as himself, with the resources of the court’s literary élite available to him: “Elizabethan sonneteers came to absorb at first hand much of the poetry of Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso; yet they were never neglectful of Ronsard, Du Bellay, and Desportes” (Lee, 254). The French language was of course taught to him as a regular part of the schooling of a privileged and well-educated child. Indeed, “a copy of the French version of Bandello’s romances...may have been used...to maintain Sidney’s fluency in French, and it is in French that he inscribed it: ‘Je suis appartenant a monsieur Philipe Sidnaie qui me trouve cy me rende a qui je suis’ [I belong to Master Philip Sidney; let anyone who finds me return me to my owner]” (Duncan-Jones, 30). Once his formal education was complete, Sidney reinforced his command of the language on his “Grand Tour” of the Continent in the years 1572-5.

His first European destination was the city of Paris, where he had the unfortunate historical timing of witnessing the horrendous Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of his Protestant counterparts. In the summer preceding this event, however, spent much time with Lancaster in the French court, where he worked very successfully on perfecting the charm and manners he would use later in his career as courtier. These three years coincide with the dates that Ronsard held the title of poet laureate, suggesting a high

possibility of the two meeting. Much speculation and research has been done on this topic, as scholars earlier in our century eagerly searched for any inkling of a clue which would either prove or disprove claims of Ronsard's direct influence on Sidney. More recent criticism suggests such discussions have become a moot point, and that "[Sidney's] knowledge of French poetry and French critical theory came from the Pléiade: a brief acquaintance with Ronsard, even if it could be proved – it is by no means improbable, since Leicester knew him – would have been of less value than a careful reading of his poetry" (Buxton, 48).

While Sidney undoubtedly was exposed to a vast range of French literature unavailable at home, it is important to remember also that Ronsard wrote at least one lyric directly to Queen Elizabeth (and probably many more which have not survived), in whose court Sidney, both due to his relations and own appointments, was a familiar installation. The French poet laureate was therefore a familiar installation, too. Prescott notes that his different sequences even met with varying degrees of success abroad: "these poems to Hélène attracted much less attention in England than those to Cassandre (*Amours pour Cassandre*, 1552), whether because of this same rich maturity or simply because the earlier sonnets had been around longer so Ronsard's reputation as Cassandre's lover and the fame of his poetry to her had had time to set" (81). This indicates that enough readers must have had access to his works to form a general opinion forceful enough to have survived for modern researchers to discover.

Despite the presence of the Pléiade's poetry in England during Sidney's formative years, he may in fact have been deterred from actively seeking out and studying Ronsard's writings, because Ronsard staunchly defended his political position as a

Catholic during the many wars of religion in the mid 1500s. The Batholomew's Day Massacre in 1572 so affronted Sidney that he vowed never to return to France (indeed, perhaps never really had a chance to, due to an untimely and young death). In Ringler's words, "He had probably heard of the programme of the Pléiade, but there is no certain evidence to prove his direct acquaintance with works of the Catholic Ronsard and du Bellay. It may be that his reading of French literature was guided more by his Protestant sympathies than by aesthetic considerations" (xxxv). Indeed, during his Continental tour, his closest acquaintances were all vigorously active Protestants:

Théophile de Banos, minister of the Huguenot church in Frankfurt...dedicate[d] his book to an Englishman of only twenty (Sidney)...Both practically and intellectually, Hubert Languet was the presiding influence over Sidney during his Grand Tour...he was at the forefront of political and religious thought among continental Protestants (Duncan-Jones, 70-71).

A.C. Hamilton, however, notes that "he read in Petrarch, Boccaccio, Tasso, Mantuan, Pontanus, Sannazaro, Erasmus, More, Ascham, Ramus, Bembo, Petrizi, Bodin, Buchanan, Ronsard, du Bartas" (10), a list that includes several Catholics. As an intellectually curious and bright young courtier interested in literature, Sidney had inherited a literary tradition dominated by Catholic authors (a fact which began to change only during his parents' generation); he thus had little choice but to consider and learn from their works.

Because the *Sonnets pour Hélène* of an already widely popular Ronsard appeared in published form in 1578, it is likely that Sidney, who spoke fluent French and was in the process of composing *Astrophil and Stella* "during the years 1581-3" (Ringler, 435), that Sidney may have assimilated some of Ronsard's works into his own. The purpose of

this inquiry is not to reproach Sidney for copying from or even partially imitating an earlier author, but rather to establish a foundation from which the two authors' literary tones may be compared and contrasted.

Terence Cave has explained that while the amount of imitation prevalent in Renaissance texts may appear to be plagiarism to modern readers, sixteenth-century authors considered such imitation both legitimate and educational. For example, he states that imitation is "ideal reciprocity between nature and art; the poet-orator is... imaginatively installed in a fertile garden where death is absorbed into an endlessly renewed fruition" (*Cornucopian Text*, 73). Ronsard is particularly renowned for engaging in imitation and emulation of classical poets, not with an aim to gain unjust credit or fame from their labors, but rather to "re-enact the achievements of earlier poets *and* contest their superiority" (*Copian Text*, 77, emphasis mine). Without such activity, the program of the Pléiade would never have come into existence.

Sidney, however, seems not to have left much clear evidence of borrowing from other poets, as did so many of his contemporaries. Moreover, while wording and phrases originally French can be identified in authors such as Spenser, Shakespeare, Lodge and Drayton, "Elizabethans rarely made open confession of translation from the Pléiade" (Lee, 213). Whereas the Pléiade proudly proclaimed their works as essays into a vernacular poetry which would emulate in meter, theme, and metaphor the classical Greek authors (Homer, Pindar, Catullus), "Elizabethan poets in the heyday of their energy rarely declared in the marketplace their debts to foreign masters" (Lee, 215). The reasons surrounding the question of why one nation's writers were not only eager but avid about proclaiming in a critical treatise (*Deffence et Illustration de la Langue*

Françoise) their devotion, debt, and acknowledgment of supremacy to long-dead poets, and the other's hesitation in even affirming the sources of direct translations is a matter for another entire study.

Sidney takes the idea of imitation to a greater theoretical height. He explains in the *Defense of Poetry* the importance of pushing the creative limits of an established form, such as a sonnet sequence, when he affirms that the imagination is able to create images which could never truly exist in the temporal world. As Ringler points out:

The tracing of sources is more difficult in Sidney than in almost any other Elizabethan poet, because he did not write, as did so many of his contemporaries, with source books open before him, but from a mind well stored with reading that he had thoroughly assimilated and made his own. He prided himself on being 'no pick-purse of another's wit', and, except for his avowed translations, he only once in all his verse directly repeated the words of another poet, and he was so disturbed at doing this that he later revised the lines in order to insert an acknowledgement of his indebtedness (xxxvi).

A simultaneous examination of Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* and Ronsard's *Sonnets pour Hélène*, for reasons stated above, must necessarily be delicate; it is therefore prudent to explore one specific facet of each text rather than try to reduce the careful wording of each sonnet into a final and blunt conclusion. Cave explains that "Ronsard is addicted to unexpected shifts of style, tone and subject matter, at times amounting to apparent self-contradiction. Hence his work does not respond easily to an attempt to grasp its meaning as a whole" (*Ronsard the Poet*, 2). I will argue later in this paper that the same may be said of Sidney, and that therefore the careful scrutiny of each line which the authors undoubtedly expected of themselves should be replicated in a study of their works. The tone of both sequences is greatly effected and enriched by a simple poetic device – the compound epithet. The use of this mechanism is one of the few established

direct influences of Ronsard upon Sidney (Lee), and for all the resonance and intensity it adds to the reading of the sequences, the recognition of its origins only augments the pleasure of a critical reading of these texts.

While hyperbolic extremes of emotion are common in sonnets from Petrarch on, a subtle difference exists between these and the actual double epithet (see glossary). Phrases such as ‘icy fire’ do much to stimulate the reader’s to sympathize with the narrator’s turmoil and emotions. However, a difference between the conventions established in Petrarch’s *Rime* and Ronsard’s sonnets is indicated by the movement away from descriptions of a lover’s torments in general and towards an individual representation of one lover’s particular experiences in amorous frustration. Particularly in *Sonnets pour Hélène*, arguably the most mature of Ronsard’s sequences, an innovative choice of adjectives and their placement renders each sonnet unique. While Ronsard works within the constraints of the long-established sonnet sequence that depicts the evolution of a courtship from the pair’s initial meeting to the relationship’s dissolution, he differentiates his narrator’s experiences from those of other, earlier, narrators by creating fresh means of expressing emotion and thought: “Ronsard was the first modern European writer to create adjectives and epithets out of combinations of two separate words which were often different parts of speech... the compound epithet came to be recognized in France as a peculiar badge of the Pléiade and a chief element in its reform of poetic speech” (Lee, 245-6). The usage of even a smattering of word-couples in a few lines of the sonnets is a subtle move towards originality of tone.

In particular, Ronsard's double epithets tend to furnish a sensual feeling. These unique word juxtapositions create an environment within the formally-regimented sonnets of an equally particular and very personal relationship.

As with all lovers in Petrarchan-based sonnet sequences, Astrophil too endures his share of frustrations and delights while wooing a chiefly unyielding lady. Like Ronsard, Sidney's sequence "record[s] the stages of a courtship from the lover's first woe when he falls in love, to his joy when he believes that his love is shared, to his final despair when his love is rejected" (Hamilton, 82). Both authors explore the same topic using the same structure, so it is not surprising that Sidney also adopts the compound epithet as a device for expressing complex emotions.

The direct assimilation of Ronsard's new form of description by Sidney is one of the few direct influences which critics have been willing to acknowledge. Sidney Lee affirms that:

The compound epithet is one of the most conspicuous gifts which the lyric effort of the Pléiade made to the vocabulary of Elizabethan poetry. Nothing resembling it is found in English literature of an earlier date, and on its arrival in Elizabethan England it was greeted as a stranger from France. The satirist Joseph Hall noticed how Sir Philip Sidney, who liberally assimilated Ronsardian as well as Petrarchan thought and expression 'drew new elegance from France.' Hall specified the English poet's habit 'in epithets to join two words in one'" (247).

Clearly, the English literary audience believed Ronsard's innovation to be not only entertaining, but also worthy of emulation as an exercise to further one's own poetic talents. Lee claims not only that Sidney deemed the epithet verse-worthy by including it in his own manuscripts, but that he also was the first English author to recognize the aesthetically pleasing mechanism's importance: "Sidney may claim the honour of first

introducing the English reader to Ronsard's 'vocables composez'" (247). The intensity and copiousness created by the epithets in *Sonnets pour Hélène* must have appealed to Sidney as well, because we see uses similar to Ronsard's in *Astrophil and Stella*: "In Sidney's sonnets ...many epithets are found on such models as: love-acquainted (eyes)...and rose-enamelled (skies)" (Lee, 248). Conversely, but while still concurring with the idea that Sidney could not have adopted this particular use of the epithet from anywhere but France, it has also been argued that:

there is no advantage in tracing Sidney's love of the compound epithet, which he used with such felicity, to one French influence, and his interest in classical metre, or in writing poetry for music, to another. What he gained by his stay in Paris was more important, and less easily defined (Buxton, 49-50).

Wherever or whenever he was influenced by the Pléiade in this case is a note of interest and has the potential to illuminate the factors which contributed to Sidney's success and genius, but is not entirely critical to the thesis of this paper.

While using the same poetical device, however, both poets differ creatively. One of the most evident differences is the frequency of usage. It has been mentioned above that Ronsard seems tentative at best in inserting the device he invented into his own poetry, and that perhaps as the intensity of the relationship grew, its usage became more constant. The relationship between creating never-before heard adjectival phrases and suggesting an association so intimate that the world has never experienced such passion, when used by Sidney, far exceeds the daring of Ronsard. As will be discussed later, one factor in this decision to employ many epithets or few may have been whether the living model for the lady of the sonnets (Penelope Devereux for Sidney and Hélène de Surgères for Ronsard) was ever intended to see or have awareness of the actual manuscript.

In *Astrophil and Stella*, however, if we are to judge solely by the frequency of the epithets' appearance, Astrophil must be far more tormented than the narrator of *Sonnets pour Hélène*. Epithets are employed liberally from the opening sonnet on in Sidney. The state of Astrophil's intellect is immediately represented by the phrase "sunne-burn'd braine" (I, l. 8), and in the second sonnet Astrophil acknowledges himself already a "slave-borne Muscovite" (l. 10). From the outset, then, Sidney crafts densely poetic and fresh phrases to express accurately the mental expression of his narrator's emotions. The condensation of such complicated thoughts as 'feeling worn out with racking my mind for a way to say things with grace and woo this woman' into "sunne-burn'd braine" both adds to the rich language of the sonnet, and allows the layering of poetry to free up precious stanza space, leaving still more room to employ metaphors, conceits, etc.

A relevant example of this doubly-poetic language comes in sonnet 36:

Stella, whence doth this new assault arise,
A conquered, yelden, ransackt heart to winne?
Whereto long since, through my long battred eyes,
Whole armies of thy beauties entred in (l. 1-4).

The compound epithets "conquered, yelden, ransackt heart" and "long battred eyes," especially because of their close proximity, powerfully convey a beaten and frustrated tone. As Hamilton notes, this is the first sonnet where Astrophil directly addresses Stella; by the time he musters the courage to speak to her, he is already feeling "conquered." The swift succession of the compound epithets mirrors the vocabulary within: Astrophil feels that he is being continually bombarded and attacked. The concise nature of the

compound epithet, with its syllable-conserving structure, is a good match for a poem which demonstrates the ceaseless torment of the unrequited lover.

The effectiveness of the compound epithet in this instance was surely apparent to Sidney when he chose to insert it in his sonnets. Dozens of examples could be mentioned here to prove further this assertion, but Sidney uses this device so extensively in *Astrophil and Stella* that it deserves to have an entire study devoted to it. In the interest of continuing the comparison of sequences between his and Ronsard's, however, we are forced to move on.

I believe that Sidney must have been well enough acquainted with Ronsard's work to adapt Ronsard's epithets to his own purposes. Perhaps Ronsard did not fully realize their potential of effectively communicating frenzy in poetry to utilize it as extensively as does Sidney. On the other hand, perhaps he intended *Sonnets pour Hélène* to have an entirely different tone, as will be discussed later. It is nevertheless interesting to note that Ronsard uses the same poetic tool as Sidney to convey a tone of unique and original intimacy, and to form innovative word juxtapositions to convey the individuality of the author and the lady, and above all the particular emotions involved in their relationship; Sidney adapts the same idea of compound epithets to convey a tone of torment and desperation, which, as in Ronsard, is expressed in a way the author would have the reader believe is more extreme than anything previously used within the convention of the Petrarchan sonnet sequence. Within such a thematically rigid genre, the creativity and genius of each poet allows him room to create an original tone, even when the tools he has to choose from are limited.

III. NARRATIVE SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE SEQUENCES

An examination of the opening poems of *Sonnets pour Hélène* and *Astrophil and Stella* reveals much about the authors' approaches regarding the composition of the sequences themselves, and this discussion leads in turn to one concerning the poets' differing professional situations. The marked difference between the very public scrutiny to which Ronsard is constantly subjected, and Sidney's relative poetic privacy leads the authors to propose the narration of their sonnets in two very different ways. While in either case we cannot assume that biographical truth supersedes creative ingenuity, it is arguable that this important distinction between the poets' lives leads to their two separate narrative tones.

Consider, for example, the sonnets of each author's opening which best illustrate the narrator's voice and proclaim how the sequences came to be written by that narrator:

Le premier jour de mai, Hélène, je vous jure
 Par Castor, par Pollux, vos deux frères jumeaux,
 Par la vigne enlacée à l'entour des ormeaux,
 Par les prés, par les bois hérissés de verdure,
 Par le nouveau Printemps, fils aîné de Nature,
 Par le cristal qui roule au giron des ruisseaux,
 Par tous les rossignols, miracle des oiseaux,
 Que seule vous serez ma dernière aventure.
 Vous seule me plaisez, j'ai par élection
 Et non à la volée aimé votre jeunesse.

Aussi je prends en gré toute ma passion,
 Je suis de ma fortune auteur, je le confesse:
 La vertu m'a conduit en telle affection.
 Si la vertu me trompe, adieu belle Maîtresse!
 (*Sonnets pour Hélène*, I, 1)

The first day of May Hélène, I swear to you
 By Castor and Pollux, your twin brothers,
 By the vines coiled around the elms,
 By the fields, by the trees bristling with life
 By the new Spring, oldest son of Nature,
 By the crystal rolling in the streams' laps,
 By all the nightingales, miracle of birds,
 That you alone will be my last love affair.
 You alone please me, I have by choice
 And not by accident come to love your
 youth.
 Also I take pleasure from my passion,
 I am the author of my fortune, I confess:
 Virtue has driven me to such emotion.
 If Virtue tricks me, goodbye sweet Mistress!

Note particularly that the narrator willingly sought out the object of his affection and, ultimately, his torment. We see a similarly-disposed narrator in the second sonnet of Astophil and Stella, whose admiration of the lady also proceeds slowly rather than in a striking flash of overwhelming emotion:

Not at first sight, nor with a dribbed shot
Love gave the wound, which while I breathe will bleed:
 But knowne worth did in mine of time proceed,
 Till by degrees it had full conquest got.
 I saw and liked, I liked but loved not,
 I loved, but straight did not what *Love* decreed:
 At length to *Love's* decrees, I forc'd, agreed,
 Yet with repining at so partiall lot.
 Now even that footstep of lost libertie
 Is gone, and now like slave-borne *Muscovite*,
 I call it praise to suffer Tyrannie;
 And now employ the remnant of my wit,
 To make my selfe beleieve, that all is well,
 While with a feeling skill I paint my hell.

As in Ronsard, the narrator here also speaks from the first-person perspective. What is noteworthy in both is the careful attention both pay to emphasize that their love arises at least partially from personal choice and deliberation. As Ringler points out, “retrospectively recounting the slow development of ... love is another declaration of independence from renaissance conventions, for most sonnet sequences from Petrarch onwards had dealt with love at first sight” (459). In the last chapter I argued that compound epithets made the poems of an already-established and conventionally-based genre not only more innovative, but also more intimate; similarly, in these poems a progressive involvement in love, rather than a “love at first sight” revelation, does more to attest to the narrator’s strong dedication to the cause of love than a random arrow from cupid’s bow. Again, the bond (though both soon refute it) between the lady and the lover is being stressed by both authors, and this is accomplished in the sequences by their conscious remove from a conventional “love-at-first-sight” approach. As with epithets,

both poets are working within the constraints of the established poetic form, yet manage to subtly manipulate the conventions of a sonnet sequence, extending it beyond its Petrarchan beginnings, and injecting into it a degree of innovation as well.

While both authors may be similarly devoted to expressing their profound emotions, it is important to notice that a fine distinction in the tones of the sonnets indicates the different level of responsibility each speaker has over his relationship's evolution. For example, Ronsard, in saying "Je suis de ma fortune auteur" (l. 12), claims not only full accountability, but negates the conventional and mythological idea that love springs from a non-human force (i.e. Cupid). Although he cleverly links Hélène de Surgères to the mythological Helen of Troy by the second line of the sequence (by mentioning Helen's two brothers, Castor and Polydeuces (or Pollux)), and it would therefore seem as though his love, too, might have divine parenthood, by line nine ("j'ai par élection / et non à la volée") we know that the basis for this attraction will instead be firmly grounded on human choice. Perhaps Ronsard wished to persuade the court and his patron that he himself was capable of producing poetry on demand, and was not held to the whims of Muses. For the poet laureate, these traditional sources of inspiration are replaced by political figureheads: "La Cour...est alors son <<temple>> delphique, le roi son <<Apollon>>, et lui-même se compare au <<prestre prophète>> qui n'est inspiré qu'en présence du Dieu" [The court ... becomes his Delphic "temple", the king his "Apollo" and he may compare himself to the "prophet-priest" who is inspired only in the presence of a God] (Laumonier, 262).

While similarly expressing that the love grew slowly, Sidney does revert to the convention of a lover being shot by Cupid's arrow: "with a ...shot / *Love* gave the

wound, which while I breathe will bleed” (l. 1-3). To break with the petrarchan tradition, however, he does augment the profundity of the event by inserting the notion that the woman’s “knowne worth” (l. 3) rather than merely her beauty, encourages his interest. Therefore, the emotion is more logical than spontaneous, although the mysterious element of a divine intervention remains. But whether virtue alone, as in Ronsard, or the urging of Cupid in Sidney that leads his interest beyond sight (l. 5) to liking (l. 5) and finally to love (l. 6), both narrators claim some credit for consciously accompanying the forces, desires, and needs which direct their emotions.

Having placed more emphasis on the contribution of his own decision-making faculties to this affair than Sidney, Ronsard not surprisingly also claims more control over the relationship’s development. After swearing to eight different items and entities that he will love her and that she will be his “dernière aventure” (l. 1-8), he still threatens the mistress and ends the sonnet by saying “si la vertu me trompe, adieu belle Maîtresse!” (l. 14). Stone comments that “his very rational choice indicates also that there is no little detachment in his love...the word ‘adieu’ is significantly pronounced in the very first sonnet” (170). Clearly, he does not fear his ability to end the proceedings if he deems it necessary or desirable, and is therefore different from Astrophil, who remains helplessly engrossed with Stella throughout.

Moreover, because Ronsard claims responsibility and control over the entire affair, as the sequence unfolds his attitude turns to bitterness and despair as he realizes that authority fades. His discontent augments as the sequence progresses. Sidney’s sonnet, however, informs us immediately that Astrophil’s attitude is cynical from the start: “I...employ the remnant of my wit, / To make myselfe beleieve, that all is well, /

While with a feeling skill I paint my hell" (l. 11-14). The narrator's statements parallel in turn the author's attitudes towards the composition of the sonnets themselves, as well as the relationship of the author to these texts¹.

As shown above, the speaker in *Astrophil and Stella* is reluctant to begin the association between the lady and himself, and is guided largely but progressively by the hand of the deity Love. A certain distance between the lover and the woman is thereby evidenced – he did not choose her of his own volition, but was "forc'd" to love her by a persuasive invisible hand. The love which stems from this liaison will grow more intimate, but from the outset it is established that a gap exists – one that foreshadows the frustration to come as the wooer is ultimately thwarted.

A similar and parallel distance is created by the author in his choice of narrator. This personage is not the poet, Sir Philip Sidney, but is a fictional creation, Astrophil. Just as Astrophil is reluctant to align himself with Cupid in the second sonnet, so Sidney

¹ Prior to a discussion of the author and the narrator in each text, it is perhaps important to stop for a moment and affirm that these two persona, particularly in structured and highly intimate poetry such as this, are not the same. Inevitably, a part of every poet seeps into his writings, identifying him with a certain era or even providing recognizably biographical data, but we can never know exactly to what extent (either speculation – much personal matter within the text, or very little), and therefore should not conjecture. In fact, given the well-documented portion of Sidney's civic and professional life, one critic admits surprise that he so carefully conceals every trace of his known public life from the sonnets:

When we compare the known facts of Sidney's life during the years 1581-2 with the sonnets and songs of *Astrophil & Stella*, we are immediately struck with how much of his biography he left out of his poems. He tells us nothing about the disappointment of his hopes in being superseded as the Earl of Leicester's heir, nothing about his trip to Antwerp...nothing about his activities in opposition to the proposed marriage of the Duke of Anjou with the Queen (Ringler, 447).

One exception to this rule may be in sonnet number 30, which scholars have long studied in attempt to identify the events alluded to therein: "Whether the Turkish new-moone minded be / To fill his hornes this yeare on Christian coast" (l. 1-2) and "How *Poles'* right king meanes, without leave of hoast, / To warme with ill-made fire cold *Moscovy*" (l. 3-4) are examples of real political events occurring during the summer of 1582 (Ringler, 470). At any rate, the events described are left deliberately vague . . . the association between them and the author is little more than an affirmation of his knowledge of them. Furthermore, a possible autobiographical reference in one out of 108 sonnets is scanty evidence on which to base an overall argument of biographical influence upon.

A.C. Hamilton reminds us about the debate surrounding this conscious or unconscious inclusion of the poet's identity in his fictional text:

There is an extended controversy on whether the sonnets should be read as fact or fiction, biography or convention, that usually takes the form of gathering the facts or denying their relevance . . . However, any simple 'either-or' position is too simple and reductive for the complex relationship that exists between Sidney's life and his poetry (194).

is reluctant to allow the reader parallels between his poetry and his life. Such a choice is prudent, especially since the choice of real-life model for his Stella was commonly known to be Penelope Devereux, the wife of Lord Rich, and a lady in waiting to Queen Elizabeth. In sonnets 24 and 37, however, Sidney toys cunningly with the reader's identification of her:

24

Rich fooles there be, whose base and filthy hart
 Lies hatching still the goods wherein they flow:
 And damning their owne selves to *Tantal's* smart,
 Wealth breeding want, more blist, more wretched grow.
 Yet to those fooles heav'n such wit doth impart,
 As what their hands do hold, their heads do know,
 And knowing, love, and loving, lay apart
 As sacred things, far from all daunger's show.
 But that rich foole, who by blind Fortune's lot
 The richest gemme of Love and life enjoyes,
 And can with foule abuse such beauties blot;
 Let him, deprived of sweet but unfelt joyes,
 (Exil'd for ay from those high treasures, which
 He knowes not) grow in only follie rich.

The repeated uses of "rich" in this sonnet are generally acknowledged as references to Lord Rich, Penelope's husband. References such as "Rich fooles" (l.1) show the narrator's negative attitude toward the man, and phrases like "that rich foole, who by blind Fortune's lot / The richest gemme of Love and life enjoyes" (l. 9-10) disclose Astrophil's envy that Lord Rich has physical possession of Stella but "blot[s]" (l. 11) her potential, since "he knowes not" (l.14) how to appreciate fully her numerous virtuous qualities, as the poet claims to be able to do.

37

My mouth doth water, and my breast doth swell,
 My tongue doth itch, my thoughts in labour be:
 Listen then Lording with good eare to me,
 For of my life I must a riddle tell.
 Towardes Aurora's Court a Nymph doth dwell,
 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 the riches of a royall hart,
 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.

The word play upon Penelope's married name of Rich is evident in the above example.

The biography of Sidney the man reveals that at one time, the lady and he were nearly arranged to be married by their parents, but the intentions dissolved after her father's death, and the rest of the biography is bereft of any evidence that Sidney had an actual affinity for Penelope Devereux (Duncan-Jones).

Ronsard's choice of model for his beloved was also a lady in waiting (to Cathérine de Medicis). Here, the similarity in narration and relationship between the poets and their targeted women ends, however. While author and narrative persona are always to some extent distinct, Ronsard deliberately complicates this division. In *Sonnets pour Hélène*, the biographical and fictional are consciously mingled – the narrator and author share the same name. Indeed, the appellation 'Ronsard' is always used to designate the lover in this sequence.

If Astrophil is a somewhat reluctant lover initially, and Sidney is disinclined to align himself with the sequence's narrator, we see the opposite in Ronsard. Just as in the opening sonnet, he claims all responsibility and conception for the initiation of the love affair, so his narrator is equally bold in identifying himself as the only possible author of the sequence. Perhaps this is due, as argued above, to his more public station as poet. Though everyone in Sidney's immediate circle may have known of his interest in poetry

or read his works in circulated manuscript, it was in Ronsard's best interest to avoid confusion regarding authorship, and to insure that all had the chance to admire his pieces.

If any doubt exists in Sidney in regards to possible relations between himself and Lady Rich, Hélène de Surgères takes it upon herself to assert that the edition of poetry dedicated to her will not lead to any hypothesizing courtly gossip. Before the publication of the sonnets, she attempted to have the printer include a disclaimer of sorts at the beginning:

Desonay quotes an anecdote to prove conclusively that there could have been no love between Ronsard and Hélène: "Une nouvelle édition des Oeuvres de Ronsard ... allait voir le jour; rencontrant Du Perron chez le cardinal de Retz, Hélène de Surgères l'aurait prié de faire précéder cette édition d'une 'epistre ... pour monstrier qu'il ne l'aymoit pas d'amour impudique'; et voici l'insolente réponse de Du Perron: 'Je luy dis: au lieu de cest Epistre, il y fault seulement mettre vostre portraict'" ['When a new edition of Ronsard's works were about to be printed, Hélène encountered the publisher, Du Perron, with the cardinal of Retz, and asked him to precede the edition with a letter "to show that Ronsard did not love her with improper love"; and the insolent response of Du Perron was "I told her, in lieu of a letter, it is necessary only to print your portrait"'] (Stone, 165)

The usual speculation surrounding the truthfulness of what the poet's narrator professes in the sonnet sequences is in this case rendered an improbability by the reality of the situation, even if the poet himself is ambiguous about distinguishing himself from his actual narrator. Beauty alone is of course no basis for a love affair or an entire sonnet sequence, and we are reminded of the fruitlessness of imagining such circumstances ourselves:

To call...the sonnet simply a 'love poem' reduces the work to dimensions incommensurate with its content...Ronsard is making a philosophical statement, and that it should have

relevance within what can be inferred of the relationship between the narrator and the woman may attest to the poem's richness but does not follow from any element in it (Stone, 9).

In examining each poet's narration, we see two subtly different consciousnesses emerge, both of which affect the overall tone of each sonnet sequence. Astrophil admits that his embroilment was "decreed" (2, l. 6) rather than chosen, but he thereafter allows his initial hopeful attachment to deepen into "miserie" (47, l. 5) as he is continually rebuffed. A dominant tone in *Astrophil & Stella* is one of pleading, of a helpless lover attempting every tactic to win his lady's favor, yet never succeeding. The "slave-borne Muscovite" who "call[s] it praise to suffer Tyrannie" (2, l. 10-11) is still suffering feelings of servitude and neglect half way through the sequence:

Can those blacke beames such burning markes engrave
In my free side? Or am I borne a slave,
Whose necke becomes such yoke of tyranny?
Or want I sense to feele my miserie?
Or sprite, disdaine of such disdaine to have?
Who for long faith, tho dayly helpe I crave,
May bet no almes but scorne of beggerie (47, l. 2-8)

Even at the end of the sequence, we see that he has not yet found the capacity to either break relations with her or consummate his love. The same feeling of dependent entanglement we see in the opening sonnets remains even in the final sonnet: "So strangely (alas) thy works in me prevaile, / That in my woes for thee thou art my joy, / And in my joyes for thee my only annoy" (108, l. 12-14).

Ronsard, like Sidney, composes sonnets that detail his commitment to wooing his beloved. Among them, many likewise express a feeling of irreparable complication and embroilment; yet a their tone differs significantly. We have seen that *Sonnets pour Hélène* begins as a bolder sequence, with a more self-assured narrator, who is guided

only by his own decision-making faculties and not by allegorical persona. This tone of independence proceeds throughout the sonnets, although it is necessarily overshadowed from time to time with verses reflecting a more dependent nature. For example, while Astrophil often describes his complaints at having been so long neglected he very seldom criticizes Stella or blames her for his suffering. Ronsard, by contrast, sees little wrong with his style of courtship, and places blame more directly on the lady for the relationship's stagnancy.

Ronsard suggests even in the opening sonnet that H  l  ne is obligated to the narrator for choosing her to sing about. The phrase "vous seule me plaisez" [you alone please me] (l. 1. 9) implies that he selected her not because of an all-consuming passion, but mostly because her character is unsullied. Because H  l  ne possesses the qualities of "vertu" (l. 13), Ronsard singles her out from a vast number of ladies. In Sidney, on the other hand, although the narrator's attitude is reluctant and somewhat resentful, he nevertheless remains awe-stricken at having been chosen for life-long torment.

The two ladies are thus treated with very different degrees of respect and veneration. In Sidney, she is virtually infallible no matter what cruelty she chooses to inflict, whereas in Ronsard, she is criticized continually for not yielding. For example, in sonnet 33 of the first volume, the narrator and H  l  ne are strolling together when he recounts how sweet songs displease her, and that she prefers lovers' laments: "un chant vous d  plaisait, s'il   tait doux; / Que vous aimiez les plaints des tristes amoureux" (l. 2-3). The narrator Ronsard is offended because she appreciates his sonnets, where he has ostensibly revealed his innermost emotions, for merely aesthetic reasons. Instead of

being elated, as Astrophil might be, at the fact that she at least reads his work, he criticizes her:

Vos propos sont trompeurs. Si vous aviez souci
De ceux qui ont un cœur larmoyant et transi,
Je vous ferais pitié par une sympathie;
Mais votre œil cauteleux, trop finement subtil,
Pleure en chantant mes vers, comme le crocodil,
Pour mieux me dérober par feintise la vie.
(l. 9-14)

Your words mislead. If you had concern
For those with pierced and crying hearts,
I would give you pity and sympathy;
But your wily eyes, too finely subtle,
Cry like the crocodile, reading my verse
To better steal my life by pretence.

This intense bitterness and condescension is simply absent from *Astrophil & Stella*.

Ronsard, perhaps because he identifies himself, at least by name, to be the narrator of *Sonnets pour Hélène*, is highly conscious of the direct relationship between his poetry's success and his reputation, patronage, and career. This self-awareness explains the heightened self-confidence and willingness to critique the lady in his sonnets. Sidney, being distanced from his narrator at least by name, if not by other factors as detailed above, aligns his sonnets' narrative voice more consistently with the modest Petrarchan attitude that faithfully upholds the woman's infallibility. Both perspectives contribute to a unique tone for each sequence, and are equally intricate.

In *Astrophil and Stella* and *Sonnets pour Hélène*, Sidney and Ronsard explore the ways a sonnet sequence's narrator comes to admire his lady, as discussed above, and also consider the reciprocity involved between admiring her and composing sonnets for her. Both authors entertain the traditional idea that without the woman, the poet would lack subject matter. Consequently, when the sonnets are read at face value, it appears Astrophil and Ronsard give credit for the creation of these sequences to the respective ladies. Since both view the women as an extension of purest nature, however, they also are thanking nature for their inspiration. The poets, though they seemingly remove themselves from the entire process of craftsmanship, in fact attempt to secure their own

fame via worshipping the lady but their methods of accomplishing this literary immortality differ.

In the fourth sonnet, Ronsard states the direct relationship he recognizes between Hélène and nature, and the option that this alliance leaves him as an artist:

Tout ce qui est de saint, d'honneur et de vertu,	All that is sacred, honorable and virtuous,
Tout le bien qu'aux mortels la Nature peut faire,	All the good Nature can give to mortals
Tout ce que l'artifice ici peut contrefaire,	All that artifice can here conjour up
Ma Maîtresse en naissant dans l'esprit l'avait eu...	My mistress was already born with.
La voyant si parfaite, il faut que je m'écrie:	Seeing her so perfect, I must exclaim:
Bienheureux qui l'adore, et qui vit de son temps!	Happy he who adores her, and who lives
	At the same time as she! (l. 1-4 & 13-14)

Clearly, Ronsard says Nature has bestowed Hélène with more merits than he ever could.

It is "seeing her so perfect" that inspires him to write of her, but it is evident from the first sonnet, where Ronsard proclaims "j'ai par éléction...aimé votre jeunesse" [I chose to love your youth] (l. 9-10), her immaculate virtue merely deems her a worthy enough subject for his superior talents. He nevertheless acts grateful for the chance to exercise his poetic talents in venerating her.

After this initial recognition of why he feels compelled by admiration to write a sequence with Hélène as its main subject, he creates a similarly-themed sonnet which again links her directly to inspiration and poetry in particular:

Voici le mois d'avril, où naquit la merveille	Here's the month of April, when the marvel was born
Qui fait en terre foi de la beauté des cieus,	Who gives proof on earth of the beauty of the skies,
Le miroir de vertu, le Soleil de mes yeux,	The mirror of virtue, the Sun of my eyes,
Seule Phénix d'honneur, qui les âmes réveille.	Only Phoenix of honor, who revives souls.
Les oeilleux et lis et la rose vermeille	The sweet william, lily, and the vermilion rose
Servirent de berceau; la Nature et les Dieux	Were her cradle; Nature and the Gods
La regardèrent naître, et d'un soin curieux	Watched her birth, and with a curious care
Amour enfant comme elle allaita sa pareille.	The child Love, as she nursed her equal.
Les Muses, Apollon et les Grâces étaient	The Muses, Apollo, and the Graces were
Tout à l'entour du lit, qui à l'envi jetaient	All around the bed, and threw truly as they wished
Des fleurs sur l'Angelette. Ah! Ce mois me convie	Flowers on the little Angel. Ah! This month urges
	me
D'élever un autel, et suppliant Amour	To construct an altar, and to beg Love
Sanctifier d'avril le neuvième jour,	To sanctify the ninth day of April,
Qui m'est cent fois plus cher que celui de ma vie.	That is a hundred times more dear than the day of my
birth. (I, 37)	

The invocation of the Muses and other gods related to poetry directly link Hélène to this art. The word choice of “altar” and “sanctify” positively uphold the commitment Ronsard stated previously to worship the lady as a goddess. The innocent circumstances of her birth also attest to Hélène’s virtue as a woman. The hyperbolic statement that the 9th of April, being her birthday, is “a hundred times more dear” than his own, however, makes us wonder whether some venom and wit are being expressed. By creating this extended image and winsome poem, Ronsard is ostensibly expressing the natural purity and divinity of Hélène, but at the same time he indirectly informs the reader that he has mastered the mythology surrounding poetical invention, and that he is capable of incorporating it into his verse. He is aware that readers will recognize his scholarship. The critical theory of the Pléiade states that reviving and incorporating Greek and Roman mythology into poetry artistically enlivens the French language, so it is not surprising that such imagery is conjured. The creation of poetry for the woman is really only a means for the poet to experiment with his talent.

To further prove this point, Ronsard gives us sonnet number forty-three from the second section of *Sonnets pour Hélène*. In this piece, we see without a doubt that the narrator is acutely aware of his power to immortalize himself and her in literature:

Quand vous serez bien veille, au soir à la chandelle,
Assise auprès du feu, dévidant et filant,
Direz chantant mes vers, en vous émerveillant:
<<Ronsard me célébraït du temps que j’étais belle.>>

Lors vous n’aurez servante oyant telle nouvelle,
Déjà sous le labeur à demi sommeillant,
Qui au bruit de mon nom ne s’aïlle réveillant,
Bénissant votre nom de louange immortelle.
Je serai sous la terre, et fantôme sans os
Par les ombres myrteux je prendrai mon repos;
Vous serez au foyer une vieille accroupie...

When you are very old, in the evening by
candlelight,
Sitting next to the fire, spooling and spinning,
You will say, singing my verses, and marveling:
“Ronsard celebrated me when I was still
beautiful.”
Then you will have no servant,
Already half-asleep while labouring,
Who, at the sound of my name does not awake,
Blessing your name with eternal praises,
I will be underground, a fantome without bones
By the myrtle’s shadows I will take my rest;
You will be at home an old lady crouched
down... (l. 1-11)

If Ronsard previously merely hinted at the idea of literary fame being immortal, he makes the readers and Hélène aware here that he has believed it throughout the entire sequence. The fact that he momentarily endows the lady with the faculty of speech for the sole purpose of praising his own name attests to his conviction that everyone will recognize “Ronsard” as a prominent figure in literature -- his ‘beloved lady’ will still be flattered by his choice years after the actual date of the sequence’s composition, too:

in [this] sonnet...the narrator attempts to isolate himself from the woman. The image of the first tercet is explicit in itself, almost cruel in its self-complacency, as it opposes the aged Hélène, still suffering the travails of this life, to the poet who is at rest, free from his earthly ties and body...Ronsard is clearly...interested in presenting an image of his immortality to coexist with Hélène’s unhappy end. With or without Hélène’s love, Ronsard will be famous. It is through Ronsard that Hélène’s name will continue to be sung (Stone, 8).

The earlier sonnets confirming Hélène as the source of all his innovation now show his underlying intent to apply his poetic talents to her cause, and to insure their recognition.

Sidney also explores the ideas of the lady as a natural source of inspiration, and, like Ronsard, shifts these issues smoothly into a meditation on his own literary immortality. A considerable difference exists between their tones, however. Whereas Ronsard expresses his pride regarding the sonnets’ composition from the beginning, Sidney more carefully conceals the idea that he is using the Astrophil/Stella relationship in part to consider the concepts of innovation and enduring literary fame.

Astrophil and Stella opens with a sonnet which not only “peforms the double function of praising Stella as the ground of all poetical invention and of providing a brief essay on the proper method of writing love poetry” (Ringler, 458), but humbly confesses

that the composition of love sonnets is a new process to him, and that he initially made a mistake:

Loving in truth, and faine in verse my love to show,
 That the deare She might take some pleasure of my paine:
 Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know,
 Knowledge might pity winne, and pitie grace obtaine,
 I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,
 Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertaine:
 Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow
 Some fresh and fruitfull showers upon my sunne-burn'd braine.
 But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay,
 Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Studie's blowes,
 And others' feete still seem'd but strangers in my way.
 Thus great with child to speake, and helplesse in my throwes,
 Biting my trewand pen, beating my selfe for spite,
 'Foole,' said my Muse to me, 'looke in thy heart and write.'

While Astrophil is eagerly searching through other poets' "leaves" (l. 7) and metrical "feete," (l. 11) he is unable to compose. It is only when he thinks about Stella's effects on *his* "heart" (l. 14) that "Invention" (l. 10) returns to help him: "Astrophil began in the wrong order with an inadequate method. He first sought words rather than matter, and tried to find words through imitation of others rather than by the proper processes of imitation" (Ringler, 458-9). It would be unlikely for Ronsard to admit either that he had any trouble writing poetry, or to call himself a "Foole" (l. 14). Like Ronsard, Sidney invokes Nature and the Muses, thereby acknowledging his mastery and knowledge of the mythological deities involved with poetry. Unlike Ronsard, however, Sidney sets the tone of his poem to be humble rather than vaunting:

Sidney reveals his knowledge of classical mythology in his scattered references to the muses, Morpheus, Amphion, Venus, and so on, and in his frequent mention of Cupid, but only sonnet 13 on the debate between Jove, Mars, and Cupid even approaches the French practice... The poets of the Pléiade were learned men who apparently gloried in displaying their erudition in their poetry. In contrast, Sidney preferred To use his knowledge to illuminate his ideas rather than to supply Subjects for poems (Cooper, 143).

To the discerning reader, Sidney appears no less educated or talented than Ronsard, merely less obviously eager to announce his accomplishments. In this instance, he exemplifies the trait of *sprezzatura*.

To reiterate the modest attitude towards the poet's duty in glorifying his beloved, Astrophil states in sonnet 3 "no Muse but one I know...in *Stella's* face I reed, / What Love and Beautie be, then all my deed / But Copying is, what in her Nature writes" (l. 9-14). The lady is entirely responsible for the poet's existence as such. The self-abasement here functions on one level to glorify the lady as the spring of all inspiration, and on another to draw attention to the poet. He could compose sonnets praising various aspects of the beloved without ever mentioning the critical principles involved, but Sidney consciously chooses to discuss them within the structure of the sequence. Though it seems from a superficial reading that "the poet himself has no skill, but rather functions as a mechanical recorder of Stella's beauty" (Cooper, 16), Sidney layers the symbolism in his sonnets to draw attention subtly to his craftsmanship.

This preoccupation with the theory behind the mechanics of composition leads to a meditation on literary immortality, as we saw also in Ronsard. Sidney, however, broaches this topic from a more circuitous route than Ronsard, who proclaims that the main comfort in H  l  ne's (the elder) life will be the memory of his flattering verses. While Sidney touches on this theme in a few lines of sonnet three, he waits until near the end of the sequence to devote an entire sonnet to the ramifications of literary immortality:

Stella thinke not that I by verse seeke fame,
Who seeke, who hope, who love, who live but thee;
Thine eyes my pride, thy lips my history:
If thou praise not, all other praise is shame.
Nor so ambitious am I, as to frame
A nest for my yong praise in Lawrell tree:

In truth I sweare, I wish not there should be
 Graved in mine Epitaph a Poet's name:
 Ne if I would, could I just title make,
 That any laud to me thereof should grow,
 Without my plumes from others' wings I take.
 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. (90)

Here, the narrator is clearly conscious that other poets (i.e. Ronsard) aim for renown and fame by composing sonnet sequences. Sidney still upholds his initial statement that “love doth hold [his] hand, and makes [him] write” (l. 14), and his attempt to persuade her that he writes only for her glorification and not his, with the line “thinke not that I by verse seeke fame” (l. 1) points towards a humble attitude on the surface. Besides the fact that, as in sonnet three, he chooses to write on such a subject is evidence that he is fully aware of potential literary immortality, two important considerations dispel this apparent humility. First, back in sonnet fifteen, he berates and then advises other poets who seek celebrity:

Into your rimes, running in ratling rowes:
 You that poore *Petrarch's* long deceased woes,
 With new-borne sighes and denisend wit do sing;
 You take wrong waies, those far-fet helpes be such,
 As do bewray a want of inward tuch:
 And sure at length stolne goods do come to light.
 But if (both for you love and skill) your name
 You seeke to nurse at fullest breasts of Fame,
Stella behold, and then begin to endite (l. 6-14).

Whereas in sonnet 90 Astrophil refutes all charges made against him for seeking renown, he here recommends that all poets who wish to gain fame can do exactly what he has been doing for 108 sonnets: “*Stella* behold” (l. 14). According to this sonnet, all other methods of becoming famous besides the one he chooses are “wrong waies” (l. 9). He even states that working within the Petrarchan convention, as he does himself, to have been misled. The important difference here is one of the lady – none of the other poets

have the opportunity to sing of Stella, who is the only subject worthy of such elaborate devotion. Sidney intricately continues to give credit for his work to Stella, but at the same time acknowledges from his discussion of poetic theory within the poetry itself, that his name, too, will be remembered.

In conclusion, it is clear that analyzing Sidney's concern with immortality in literature requires a more critical reading of the sonnets than is necessary in Ronsard. Working within the same convention of the sonnet sequence, both poets discuss the implications entailed in composing literature. The tones of their respective works differs, however, because of their separate approaches. Ronsard "a voulu...les résultats éternellement durables auxquels il est arrivé" [wanted eternally lasting results, which he accomplished] (Laumonier, 711). His poems to Hélène reveal his eagerness for recognition. Sidney, too, exposes his desire for fame, but unlike Ronsard does not turn on the lady and declare that he has essentially used her only as the means of attaining his ends. Consequently, the tone of his poems is more consistently modest and admits his ambitions less transparently.

IV. TONE AND REPRESENTATION OF THE LADY

The ladies of the sonnet sequences *Sonnets pour Hélène* and *Astrophil and Stella* are both represented as adhering to the conventional petrarchan position which emphasizes their constant defense of virtue while would-be lovers (the sequences' narrators) continually attempt to elicit physical favors from them. The narrators, however, react differently and disobey the traditional petrarchan stance, to these constant rebuffs. In the course of investigating the myriad ways a lady might be seduced, the narrators show the relationship's evolution from their first struggles to reconcile rational and emotional impulses, to their emotions as the association slips from their control and initial positive viewpoints change to frustration. Astrophil resigns himself to Stella's refusal, while Ronsard becomes increasingly bitter towards Hélène. Examining each narrator's tone while he attempts various approaches of persuasion demonstrates his opinion of the lady.

The inevitable disappointment both narrators will encounter is suggested to the reader by the titles of the sequences. The name choices of Astrophil (meaning star-lover) and Stella (meaning star) impart a feeling of passion that surpasses mortal definitions, but also hint at the physical futility inherent in petrarchan-based sonnet sequences:

For the sensual lover the imagery of the star and the star-lover suggests inevitable frustration. He is earth-bound and the star remains forever beyond his reach in another sphere (McCabe, 110).

The narrator in this framework aspires to a lady who is utterly intangible. Virtue elevates her to the station of a celestial body. The lady's exalted standards also reveal a dissimilarity between herself and the narrator, who wishes to enjoy her on a base physical level, and not a Platonic one (like the narrator of Petrarch's *Rime*). This staunch adherence to upholding virtue causes the tension of the entire sequence:

Vertue alas, now let me take some rest,
 Thou setst a bate betweene my will and wit,
 If vaine love have my simple soule opprest,
 Leave what thou likest not, deale no thou with it.
 Thy scepter use in some old Catoe's brest;
 Churches or schooles are for thy seate more fit:
 I do confesse, pardon a fault confest,
 My mouth too tender is for thy hard bit.
 But if that needs thou wilt usurping be,
 The litle reason that is left in me,
 And still th'effect of thy perswasions prove:
 I sweare, my heart such one shall shew to thee,
 That shrines in flesh so true a Deitie,
 That *Vertue*, thou thy selfe shall be in love (4).

Astrophil knows that his chances of succeeding in winning the lady's favors are slim, but his desire or "will" (l.2) for her keeps him in a prolonged state of agitation as it battles his rational thoughts, or "wit" (l. 2). Astrophil's address illustrates a use of rhetoric to explain his emotions – he claims that he could show *Vertue* a "such one" (l. 12) so enchanting that *Vertue* herself (himself?) would yield to fleshly desire. If the goddess of virtue herself would surrender logic to passion, what hope for purity does a mortal have?

Astrophil's continued and various attempts at persuading the lady to submit to his advances are what make the sonnets intriguing, though many of them reflect the same themes: "What exercises our attention is Astrophil's ceaseless speculation on the problematic relationship between reason and passion, love and desire" (McCabe, 103).

His impulse is to follow his emotions, but his logical side hinders him. The vacillations between these two forces, along with his indecision and agitation render him psychologically intriguing.

Throughout his torment, Astrophil's high opinion of the lady does not change. Instead, he adapts to her rebuffs with new methods of analyzing his continued unproductive pursuit:

My youth doth waste, my knowledge brings forth toys,
My wit doth strive those passions to defend,
Which for reward spoile it with vaine annoyes (l. 9-11).

Astrophil is rational and capable of acute self-scrutiny. From this early in the sequence, it is apparent to Astrophil that nothing but "vaine annoyes" (l. 11) will come from continuing, but he does, for another ninety sonnets. This moment of self-doubt is fleeting, but it contributes to an overall tone, as we shall see. Throughout the sequence, Astrophil criticizes only himself, and never the lady, for the fact that the relationship does not develop physically.

In contrast, Ronsard chastises the lady more frequently as the sequence progresses, in correlation to the number of times he has been rejected. Earlier, the discussion pertaining to his attitude regarding the act of composing poetry showed his tendency for arrogance; this is also apparent as he considers Hélène's rebukes.

In his opening sonnet, as we have seen, Ronsard introduces the sequence by showing how logical his control over the relationship will be: "Je suis de ma fortune auteur" (l. 12). Like Astrophil, however, he too experiences vacillations between adhering to reason and wanting to let pure emotion take over his actions. In the second

sonnet, he begins by describing the intense physical manifestations of overwhelming passion that occur when he looks into H  l  ne's eyes:

Quand    longs traits je bois l'amoureuse   tincelle
Qui sort de tes beaux yeux, les miens sont   blouis.
D'esprit ni de raison troubl   je ne jouis,
Et comme ivre d'amour tout le corps me chancelle.
Le c  ur me bat au sein, ma chaleur naturelle
Se refroidit de peur, mes sens   vanouis
Se perdent tout en l'air (l. 1-7).

When in long draughts I drink the loving spark
Coming from your lovely eyes, mine are dazzled.
I don't command my spirit or my troubled reason.
And as if drunk with love my whole body staggers.
My heart pounds in my chest, my natural heat
Becomes cold with fear, my deadened senses
Disappear into thin air.

From this meditation on the power H  l  ne has over Ronsard to make his "heart [pound] in [his] chest" (l. 4) with simply a look, it appears that his initial statements of coolly logical control are being discredited, and that he is as susceptible to intensely passionate sensations as Astrophil. In the second half of this same sonnet, the narration shifts from a conventional depiction of strong physical attraction to become one of violence:

...tu te r  jouis
D'acqu  rir par ma mort le surnom de cruelle.
Tes regards foudroyants me percent de leur rais
Le peau, le corps, le c  ur, comme pointes de traits
Que je sens dedans l'  me, et quand je me veux
plaindre
Ou demander merci du mal que je re  ois,
Si bien ta cruaut   me resserre la voix,
Que je n'ose parler, tant tes yeux me font craindre
(l. 7-14).

...you are delighted
To acquire by my death the nickname of cruel
Your lightening-looks pierce with their rays
My skin, my body, my heart, like points of spears
That I feel in my soul, and when I want to
complain
Or ask for mercy from the pain I receive,
So well your cruelty tightens my voice,
That I don't dare speak, so much your
eyes make me fear.

Instead of the narrator, H  l  ne is in control. He declares that she takes pleasure in "le surnom de cruelle" (l. 8), and wants to gain the title by killing him. Suddenly, the haughty narrator from the first sonnet, who claimed the power of dissolving the relationship at will ("si la vertue me trompe, adieu belle Ma  tresse!" (l. 1)) doesn't even dare speak ("parler" (l. 14)), for fear of incurring H  l  ne's wrath. The feeling of helpless embroilment in this example is similar to what Astrophil experiences in his relations with Stella, but there is an important difference of tone between the two. Astrophil often chastises himself for not having the capacity to woo Stella successfully. Ronsard fails

equally in pursuing the woman, but claims that his defeat is because her “cruauté” [cruelty] (l. 13) intimidates him. Consequently, Ronsard devotes time in his sequence to criticizing the woman, whereas Astrophil does not. In Ronsard, the blame for the relationship’s collapse is placed on the cruelly chaste mistress; Stella is no less virtuous, but Astrophil censures himself rather than her. Sidney’s narrator is again humble where Ronsard’s is defensive.

In recalling the difference between the popular and published works of Ronsard and Sidney’s privately-circulated manuscripts, it is arguable that the tone of the latter’s poetry may be more modest than Ronsard’s due to Sidney’s self-awareness that he is in fact only an amateur author. In this context, we can see how Ronsard’s narrator, having been through the routine of not only composing sonnets, but wooing women as well, would almost inevitably have a more confident air about him than would the beginner’s.

To demonstrate, the following two sonnets (both of which have similar subjects) can be used to reiterate the narrators’ dissimilar opinions of their ladies, and therefore reveal more about the overall tones of the sequences. The narrators bemoan the fact that their respective ladies can pity unrequited lovers they encounter in literature, but have no compassion for either Astrophil or Ronsard:

Nous promenons tous seuls, vous me dites, Maîtresse,

Qu’un chant vous déplaisait, s’il était douxereux;
Que vous aimez les plaints des tristes amoureux,
Toute voix lamentable et pleine de tristesse.
Et pource, disiez-vous, quand je suis loin de presse,

Je choisis vos Sonnets qui sont plus douloureux,
Puis d’un chant qui est propre au sujet langoureux,

Ma nature et Amour veulent que je me paisse.
Vos propos sont trompeurs. Si vous aviez souci
De ceux qui ont un cœur larmoyant et transi,
Je vous ferais pitié par une sympathie;
Mais votre œil cauteleux, trop finement subtil,
Pleure en chantant mes vers, comme le crocodil,

While walking alone together, you told me,
Mistress,

That a song displeases you, if it’s sugary;
That you like the complaints of sad lovers,
Any voice pitiful and full of sadness.
And sometimes, you say, when I’m far from
crowds,

I choose the most sorrowful of your Sonnets,
And then, with a song that is appropriate to
langorous subjects,

My nature and Love want that I nourish myself.
Your words mislead. If you had concern
For people with pierced and crying hearts,
I would give you pity and sympathy;
But your wily eye, too finely subtle,
Cries like the crocodile, reading my verse

Hélène admires Ronsard's poetry, but for aesthetic reasons rather than for something that moves her. She says "I choose the most sorrowful of your Sonnets" (l. 6), but reading the outpourings of his heart does not compel her to revoke her virtuous ways. She can appreciate his works for artistic qualities, and recognizes his talent, but he claims she still has no "concern / For those with pierced and crying hearts" (l. 9-10). The narrator represents Hélène to us as having "wily eyes" (l. 12), implying that her appreciation of the sonnets is merely a feint to torment him. His extreme cynicism in the last half of the sonnet contorts the reader's view of the poem, since Hélène is not given an opportunity to speak in her own defense. Rather than being led to admire the lady's adherence to virtue, we are encouraged to commiserate with the embittered narrator.

Sidney provides a sonnet with a nearly identical theme, but the conclusions Astrophil draws exemplify a meaningful difference in the sequence's tones. The slight difference between the following poem and Ronsard's is that here Stella hears a "fable" (l. 5) by an unknown author, whereas Hélène read the narrator's own work:

Stella oft sees the verie face of wo
Painted in my beclouded stormie face:
But cannot skill to pitie my disgrace,
Not though thereof the cause her selfe she know:
Yet hearing late a fable, which did show
Of Lovers never knowne, a grievous case,
Pitie thereof gate in her breast such a place
That, from that sea deriv'd, teares' spring did flow.
Alas, if Fancy drawne by imag'd things,
Though false, yet with free scope more grace doth breed
Than servant's wracke, where new doubts honor brings;
Then thinke my deare, that you in me do reed
Of Lover's ruine some sad Tragedie:
I am not I, pitie the tale of me (45).

It is evident from wording such as “Stella...cannot skill to pitie my disgrace, / Not though thereof the cause her selfe she know” (l. 1-4) that Astrophil is no less distraught by the slow progression of the relationship than is the narrator of *Sonnets pour Hélène*. He is equally bewildered, too, by how she can be sympathetic and shed “teares” (l. 8) for a “false” (l. 10) tale, but not for his real emotion. Unlike Ronsard, Astrophil does not attack Stella for feeling compassion towards someone other than himself. Instead, he ends his sonnet with an appeal to the compassion he now is sure she possesses. Perhaps referring to his own sonnets, he urges her to “reed...some sad Tragedie” (l. 12-13) in his situation, and to take “pity” (l. 14) on the “tale” (l. 14) of him. The logic here is that if a story of “Lovers never knowne” (l. 6) can move her, and if Astrophil can relate his situation to a sympathy-evoking parable, then it should follow that Stella will commiserate with his cause. By saying “I am not I” (l. 14), Astrophil reveals the extremes of humility he is willing to undergo for any morsel of her affection. If she pitied even the traces of him a “tale” would reveal, in lieu of his person, part of his desire would be appeased.

Ronsard is not content with the idea that Hélène can read his sonnets merely for pleasure, without acknowledging the intense desire that inspired him to write them. In Sidney’s sonnet, we feel that Astrophil could content himself with Stella’s distant position if he knew that she was at least sympathetic towards him. The narrator of *Sonnets pour Hélène* wants all of Hélène, and if his wishes are not met, he threatens to end the entire association, as he states in the first sonnet of the sequence. Astrophil would not object to having his desires entirely satisfied, but in contrast to Ronsard, he esteems the lady so highly that any inkling of tenderness from her keeps him enthralled.

Ronsard waits more or less patiently through more than 115 sonnets to see if H  l  ne will be swayed, but finally makes good on his initial warning and leaves. Astrophil, as we shall see presently, can never entirely forget Stella. While the tone in Ronsard's sonnet is harsh, in Sidney's it is pleading.

The tensions explored throughout this essay attempt to show a decisive difference of opinion and temperament in Sidney's and Ronsard's narrators, and how this affects the tone of their sequences. At no stage in the sonnet sequences is this distinction more pronounced than at the end. Each utterly frustrated would-be lover's closing words resonate with the earlier instances where their dispositions are explored. Both narrators retain their original mindsets throughout the sequences, and an examination of each author's final sonnets describe how the respective narrators reconcile the disappointment of admitting that no hope of fulfillment remains.

Sidney's closing sonnet, 108, rekindles the theme of the lady as the inspiration for as well as obstacle to love. The "will" and "wit" from earlier poems are still struggling for control over Astrophil's mind, and no decisive closure is possible:

When sorrow (using mine owne fier's might)
 Melts down his lead into my boyling brest,
 Through that darke fornace to my hart opprest,
 There shines a joy from thee my only light;
 But soone as thought of thee breeds my delight,
 And my yong soule flutters to thee his nest,
 Most rude dispaire my daily unbidden guest,
 Clips straight my wings, streight wraps me in his night,
 And makes me then bow downe my head, and say,
 Ah what doth *Phoebus*' gold that wretch avails,
 Whom iron doores do keepe from use of day?
 So strangely (alas) thy works in me prevaile,
 That in my woes for thee thou art my joy,
 And in my joyes for thee my only annoy.

Astrophil is still actively struggling to ease his wounds – he admits that his breast is “boyling” (l. 2), and that “dispaire” (l. 7) is a daily emotion. When a glimmer of hope is kindled in the “dark fornace” (l. 3) that has become his heart, it is immediately doused. As A.C. Hamilton reminds us, there is no chance for Astrophil to cease loving her:

[there is no] place in his sequence for Petrarch’s retrospective understanding which allows him to repent and renounce earthly love: ‘loving in truth’ means that he may never give up loving (86).

The lady’s dual function as both the source and the largest impediment of desire is still acknowledged, and unreconciled, in the final lines of the sequence: “in my woes for thee thou art my joy, / And in my joyes for thee my only annoy” (l. 13-14). Astrophil admits that he is not capable of placating his desires, and humbly “bow[s] downe [his] head” (l. 9) in defeat. Even his last exclamation of “alas” (l. 12) is in parentheses, as though he has internalized all turmoil, and allows it to ferment in the “night” (l. 8) that has replaced his “yong soule” (l. 6). His frustration and distress are confined within his “brest” (l. 2) forever.

To express the end of his associations with Hélène, Ronsard’s narrator parallels the decision to stop pursuing her with the French king’s demise. Comparing a personal relationship to a political event suggests distance between the narrator and Hélène, and the imagery invoked in sonnet 77 of the second book of *Sonnets pour Hélène* strengthens the narrator’s need to estrange himself from her. Ronsard chooses a discussion of death for this sonnet to strengthen its sense of finality:

Je chantais ces Sonnets, amoureux d’une Hélène,
En ce funeste mois que mon Prince mourut:
Son sceptre, tant fût grand, Charles ne secourut,
Qu’il ne payât la dette à la Nature humaine.
La Mort fut d’un côté, et l’Amour, qui me mène,
Était de l’autre part, dont le trait me ferut,

I’ve sung these Sonnets, in love with one Hélène,
In this fatal month when my Prince died:
His scepter, however large, did not save Charles,
From paying his debt to human nature.
Death was on one side, and Love, who leads me
Was on the other, whose arrow wounded me,

Et si bien la poison par les veines courut,
 Que j'oubliai mon maître, atteint d'une autre peine.
 Je sentis dans le coeur deux diverses douleurs:
 La rigueur de ma Dame, et la tristesse enclose
 Du Roi, que j'adorais pour ses rares valeurs.
 La vivante et le mort tout malheur me propose:

L'une aime les regrets, et l'autre aime les pleurs,
 Car l'Amour et la Mort n'est qu'une même chose.

And so well the poison ran in my vains,
 That I forgot my master, affected with other pain.
 I felt in my heart two different sorrows:
 The harshness of my Lady, and the close sadness
 Of the King, whom I adored for his rare worth.
 The living and the dead all propose to me all
 misfortune:
 The one likes regrets, and the other likes tears,
 For Love and Death are but the same thing.

While paying homage to his longtime patron, Charles IX, Ronsard also manages to convey a sense that his affection for Hélène has died along with the king: “La Mort fut d’un côté, et l’Amour...était de l’autre part” (l. 5-6). The termination of the relationship, when aligned with the death of the king, is unmistakable. Sidney used the present tense to convey a sensation of ongoing turmoil, and Ronsard uses the past tense to signify that his emotional attachment is over: “Je sentis” (l. 9). In retrospect, the narrator recalls only one aspect of his beloved lady’s character: her “rigueur” (l. 10), but fondly remembers his king’s “rares valeurs” (l. 11). His unsuccessful attempt at wooing Hélène leaves him with hostile memories.

While Astrophil closes his meditations on love in a modest fashion that recounts his continued inner strife, Ronsard leaves the reader with a conclusive, incontestable proclamation: “l’Amour et la Mort n’est qu’une même chose” (l. 14). This caveat to other lovers is unmistakable, and gives a tone of pessimism and condescension to the preceding sonnets. Ronsard does not wonder at his inability to make the lady reciprocate his desire, but instead declares that love is always doomed. He generalizes his personal experience for all humankind. The closing tone is one of bitterness, rather than disconsolate resignation, as in *Astrophil and Stella*.

Sidney and Ronsard work within the conventions of the petrarchan sonnet sequence to examine the nuances of a suitor’s mind as it proceeds through vacillating

periods of hopefulness and despondency. Neither poet, however, is satisfied with the platonic conclusion of Petrarch. They each deviate from the traditional progression to explore their own poetic impulses. Sidney changes this precedent by emphasizing throughout the sequence, and until the very end, that Astrophil can never be satisfied with the pursuit of an intangible Stella. The representation of the aloof and unsympathetic lady in *Astrophil and Stella* gives the sequence a tone of humility, as the narrator focuses on his shortcomings as an admirer. Ronsard concentrates on projecting an assurance of control, and consequently berates the lady for not responding to his calculated advances. As *Sonnets pour Hélène* advances, the degree of contempt and bitterness the narrator directs towards the unreceptive lady intensifies, leaving the reader with a final tone of disdain and even contempt. The ends that each poet arrives at while working within the same stylistically rigid setting attest to their creativity and talent, for the development of each tone is carefully constructed in the text of the sonnets so that at the conclusion, the respective endings serve as logical culminations of each narrator's experiences and temperament.

V. CONCLUSION – THE TONE OF DISSOLUTION

Sidney and Ronsard both work within the same Petrarchan sonnet sequence convention in *Sonnets pour Hélène* and *Astrophil and Stella*, and their narrators are both similarly discouraged by the lady at the cycle's end. Though much of the relationship's progression follows similar paths, what remains most distinct in each work is the narrator's tone as he gradually becomes aware that he must somehow reconcile himself to what will necessarily be his failed attempt at courtship.

Ronsard's narrator retains Ronsard's own name, thereby lessening the inherent distance an author usually retains from his own work. As discussed above, perhaps this is due to his station as poet laureate, and he is responding to the demand for publicity that accompanies such a profession. Regardless, the narrative voice from the outset proclaims total control over the sequence's proceedings, and reiterates this throughout the text. As Hélène continues to reject the narrator's advances, however, it becomes apparent to the reader that Ronsard cannot have command over the lady. His response to frustration, then, is to criticize the lady for not acknowledging his superior talents at poetic love-making, and therefore for not sympathizing with his desire for her. As the sequence progresses and his rebuffs continue, the narrator and tone become increasingly embittered. The sequence ends with an ultimatum about the futility of all love affairs.

In *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney deliberately creates a fictional narrative persona who cannot be misconstrued to be the author's voice. His reluctance to align himself

with his art stems possibly from his self-consciousness as an amateur poet. Unlike Ronsard, he is unaccustomed to being recognized in the court for his poetic talents, but rather for his political ones. This initial self-consciousness pervades the poems. Consequently, Astrophil takes the opposite approach to courtship from Ronsard.

Where Ronsard censures Hélène for her neglect of his attentions, Astrophil chastises only himself for not having the poetic capacity to woo Stella successfully. While *Sonnets pour Hélène* focuses mainly on the outward attempts and statements that the narrator makes, *Astrophil and Stella* investigates his inner psychology. The subsequent tone is self-abasing rather than vaunting, and the sequence ends with a despondent resolution rather than a brash declaration.

Ronsard and Sidney each achieve their desired narrative ends by subtly varying the established Petrarchan conventions to reflect their individual conceptions of the sonnet sequence's possibilities. That each author can use the same poetically strict form to achieve such different ends attests to their creativity, talent, and genius.

APPENDIX

This appendix is provided for the reader who is not acquainted with the main characteristics of Petrarch's writings, particularly his sonnets in the *Canzoniere* (or *Rime Sparse*). As the term Petrarchism is mentioned in the text of this thesis, but never defined, the author provides an excerpt from *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature* to provide background and elucidate the reasons why Petrarch is mentioned in context with Pierre de Ronsard and Sir Philip Sidney, and especially with their sonnet sequences. Laura is the 'beloved lady' of Petrarch's sonnets, just as Hélène is Ronsard's, and Stella is Sidney's. Petrarch's sonnet sequence served in varying degrees as the model for all European sonnet sequences composed during the Renaissance.

The whole experience of the *Canzoniere* is circumscribed, in Petrarch's presentation of it, by his first infatuation with Laura on Good Friday, 1327... and by the redirection of spiritual energy represented by his turning to the Virgin in the twilight of his years...Between these two points, and constituting the next most important principle as far as the structure is concerned...comes the division of the collection into before and after her death, with its implications for the substance and psychology of the love song...Petrarch establishes the time, the place and the mood of his first encounter with Laura. In what follows, each aspect of this experience – its joy, pain, hope, and disappointment – is developed in terms of a dialectical relationship with its opposite, pleasure shading off into pain, anticipation into remorse, hope into disillusionment and exultation into guilt. Among the many recurrent themes and psychological motifs to emerge more or less insistently in this part of the collection are those of Petrarch's sense of captivity and yearning for deliverance, his deepening sense of isolation and wretchedness, and an increasingly desperate sense of the passage of time and of his own ebbing, but unfulfilled, mortality, all qualified (at times simultaneously) by intuitions of bliss, by the fluctuations of sensuousness and even, occasionally, by a kind of humorous self-mockery. This, above all, is the poetry of restlessness, of a progressively urgent search for the kind of peace

contingent on the freeing of the soul from its obsessive concern with Laura.

...in Petrarch's celebration of Laura as the historical manifestation of the prototypical Idea, there is a growing sense of the spirit as suffering and as standing in need of redemption. And with this, the psychological analysis becomes ever more searching and acute. Torn as he is between loving and non-loving, between existing for Laura and struggling to be free from her, Petrarch stands somehow over and against himself, in a state of self-estrangement characterised alternately by rebellion and by resignation. Some poems, it is true, maintain the celebratory mood, but the general drift of Petrarch's argument, or rather its deep but progressively explicit state of mind, is that of conflict and self-interrogation.

Other poems...confirm the notion of Laura, in death, as a guide and intercessor for the lost and perplexed spirit, but the problem of Petrarch's love for her – to be interpreted, as we have said, in terms not simply of a conflict between the rational and the sensitive soul, but of a clash of two world views, of the Stoic sense of affirmation in and through self and the Christian sense of affirmation in and through God – is not itself open to solution in terms simply of a redefinition of Laura and her function in the experience of Petrarch as her lover. The situation is too complex for this, and the ambiguities of the Laura theme too stubborn and deeply rooted. The final phase of the *Canzoniere*, therefore, offers an altogether more drastic solution as Petrarch confesses the guilt of his obsession with Laura and turns repentantly, in a mood of specifically Christian piety, to the Virgin. The final poem of the collection...is a plea for compassion on the part of a spirit hopelessly lost in the twisted byways ... of its sorrowful existence.

The *Canzoniere*, for all its final turning of the soul to Mary, is a study in the psychology of obsession, a psychology not so much resolved as confirmed by its closing formula. In both parts of the collection, both before and after the death of Laura, each successive proposition is qualified by its opposite, and each successive emphasis shades off into, or else is starkly countered by, its antithesis (97-101).

LITERARY TERMS MENTIONED

EPITHET: As a term in criticism, epithet denotes an adjective or adjectival phrase used to define a distinctive quality of a person or thing; an example is John Keats' 'silver snarling trumpets'...The term is also applied to an identifying phrase that stands in place of a noun; thus Alexander Pope's 'the glittering forfex' is a heroic epithet for the scissors with which the Baron performs his heinous act in *The Rape of the Lock*.

PETRARCHAN CONCEIT: a type of figure used in love poems which has been novel and effective in the Italian poet Petrarch...the figure consists of detailed, ingenious, and often exaggerated comparisons applied to the disdainful mistress, as cold and cruel as she is beautiful, and to the distresses and despair of the worshipful lover.

SONNET: A lyric poem consisting of a single stanza of fourteen iambic pentameter lines linked by an intricate rhyme scheme. The Italian or Petrarchan sonnet falls into two main parts: an octave (eight lines) rhyming abbaabba followed by a sestet (six lines) rhyming cdecde or some variant . . . the Petrarchan sonnet has on the whole favored a statement of problem, situation, or incident in the octave, with a resolution in the sestet. The English form sometimes uses a similar division of material, but often presents a repetition-with-variation of a statement in each of the three quatrains; in either case, the final couplet usually imposes an epigrammatic turn at the end.

SONNET SEQUENCE OR SONNET CYCLE: Following Petrarch's early example, a number of ... poets wrote sonnet sequences or sonnet cycles, in which a series of sonnets are linked together by exploring the varied aspects of a relationship between lovers, or else by indicating a development in the relationship that constitutes a kind of implicit plot.

SPREZZATURA: [the courtier's] activities and productions are crowned by the grace of sprezzatura – the Italian term for what seems the casual ease with which someone has been schooled to meet the demands of very complex and exacting rules. Leonardo da Vinci and Sir Philip Sidney in England are often represented as embodying the many aspects of the courtly ideal.

*All definitions taken from *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, by M.H. Abrams.

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