

**Sidney's Strangers:  
Language, Materiality, and Authenticity in *Astrophil and Stella***

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**Abstract**

This thesis examines the exegetical, intellectual-historical, and theoretical implications of a particular feature of Philip Sidney's late sixteenth-century sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella*: its continual anxiety over authenticity – a term I use to signal the ability of its fictional speaker (Astrophil) to find a language capable of conveying his internal cognitive and affective states. Throughout Sidney's sequence, Astrophil attempts to define an authentic lyrical language by both criticizing other poets and asserting a formal agenda for his own texts. His texts, however, continually contradict in practice what is demanded of them in theory so that the sequence shows an underlying pessimism summed up in Sonnet 35's question: "What may words say, or what may words not say, / Where Truth itself *must* speake like Flatterie?" (my emphasis).

This paradox and the pessimism it produces, I argue, can be understood by situating Sidney's sequence in a rift between two conceptual frameworks for understanding relations between subjectivity, language, and the material world. In one framework (dominant in western medieval Christendom), cognition, language, and material things were seen as ontologically homogenous – part of the same sublunary, postlapsarian material stratum. But in another framework – emerging in the sixteenth century and that would become dominant in western European modernity – human subjects and their languages were seen as detached from the material world. Sidney's sequence, I suggest, is stuck between these two ideological polarities. It wants to enact an authenticity that would become possible under the conceptual regime of modernity,

where language is imbricated in the immaterial cognitive circuitry of sovereign, Cartesian subjects, and where it thus becomes capable of conveying the authenticity attributed to in modern ideologies of the aesthetic. However, Sidney is caught in the conceptual space of an older model of language: one that sees it as something thingly, ontologically homogenous with the material world.

My first chapter introduces – somewhat lengthily – the problem of authenticity in *Astrophil and Stella*. It develops some of the intellectual-historical horizons I want to situate the sequence in and introduces the main textual feature I want to follow: Sidney’s tendency, in attempting to establish the authenticity of his own poetry, to criticize other poets for their lack of authenticity vis-à-vis a resemblance between their poetic practices and commercial and economic practices. My second chapter both turns to the contemporary critical landscape of early modern studies and provides further elaboration of my positioning of Sidney in the ambiguities of early modern concepts of subjectivity, language, and materiality. After this lengthy prefatory, I move on, in my third chapter, to read *Astrophil and Stella*, focusing particularly on Sidney’s use of the word “strange” – a term that particularly points to the rift I want to chart in the sequence. My fourth chapter concludes with a methodological question: how do the points I have made about the difference between modern and early modern ontologies of language, materiality, and subjectivity effect the contemporary critical landscape of early modern literary studies. Particularly, I pursue the question of whether or not a return to formalism and aestheticism (increasingly called for in protest to the dominance of cultural studies in literary interpretation) has a trans-historical exegetical validity. In conclusion, I suggest

that the assumptions on which such a return to the literary would stand become deeply problematic outside of the modern era.

## Note on Abbreviations

All citations to *Astrophil and Stella* refer William Ringler's authoritative edition, *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), hereafter *AS*.

All citations to Renaissance poetic manuals (including Sidney's *Defence*) are to G.

Gregory Smith's *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904), hereafter *ECE*. Following the usual convention, the second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* has been abbreviated *OED*. The *Middle English Dictionary* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984-) has been abbreviated *MED*.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. In Sonnet 92 of his *Astrophil and Stella* (written 1580-84, published 1591), Philip Sidney presents his sequence's speaker, Astrophil, in a memorable, if not entirely earnest, rebuke of a friend who has brought news of his beloved, Stella, but has not said enough. A question commences his reprimand:

Be your words made (good Sir) of *Indian* ware,  
That you allow me them by so small rate?  
Or do you cutted *Spartanes* imitate?<sup>1</sup>

The earliest editions of *Astrophil and Stella* italicize the adjective *Indian*.<sup>2</sup> While italics drop out of these lines altogether in later issues, their application, when applied at all, to the adjective signals something important about how this sentence was meant to be read and understood: that the enquiry's *energia* dwells in the comparison of the friend's words to *Indian* wares rather than, simply, wares.<sup>3</sup> Typographically flagged, the emphasized adjective forms the barb of a question supported on the fundament of the unitalicized

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<sup>1</sup> In this particular text (AS 92) I have modified Ringler in italicizing *Indian* and *Spartanes*. As mentioned above, later editions of Sidney's sequence omit almost all italicization in these lines, and for a variety of reasons Ringler's copy text of the poem is such a later edition, from a 1598 edition of the *Arcadia* (see Ringler pp. 447-57 for an explanation of his editorial rationale). Such italics, however, are present in the early quarto editions of the sequence printed by Thomas Newman (1591) and Matthew Lownes (1597). These quartos were likely piracies, and even when an author participated in conveying his texts into print, italicization and emphasis was established at the press rather than in the written manuscript. But the fact that they were thought in general to be worthy of emphasis – if not particularly by Sidney – signals, as I suggest above, something important in how they were read.

<sup>2</sup> For a good, brief overview of the emergence and significance of emphasis by italics in later sixteenth-century English print culture, see R.J. Fehrenbach, "Typographical Variation in Ford's Texts: Accidentals or Substantiatives," in *"Concord in Discord": The Plays of John Ford, 1586-1986* (New York: AMS Press, 1986) pp. 266-9.

<sup>3</sup> See *OED*, s.v. "ware," n<sup>3</sup>



words and wares, subsumed under an analogous process of material making.<sup>4</sup> A moment of bombast, mocking speaker as much as recipient, is all it comes to here. But issues of an ontological homogeneity between words and wares, language and commodity, poetry and commercial practice, are of substantial significance in the sequence as a whole. As I will try to suggest, they become particularly significant for Sidney's repeated problematization of the relationship between the language his speaker uses and the experience he strives to convey – a problematization that often occurs in a conceptual paradigm where language is thought about in terms not just of the materiality of economic goods but also of their deployment in a geographical space inscribed with cultural and (proto)national terms of identity.

**1.2.** Concepts of an ontological homogeneity between language and the material participants in economic activity have a long historical lineage in the West.<sup>5</sup> As Joel Kaye has suggested, later medieval Europe especially saw a trend of emergent monetization that precipitated a tendency to think about both the natural world and language itself from a perspective that established essence and value through economically influenced parameters.<sup>6</sup> The monetization Kaye points out collided

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<sup>4</sup> It should be kept in mind that Renaissance grammars would have viewed both “wares” and “*Indian*” as types of noun. As William Lily's Latin textbook – ubiquitous in Elizabethan pedagogy – puts it: “Of Nounes, some be Substantiuies, and some be Adiectiuies” (William Lily, *A Shorte Introduction of Grammar* [New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1945]).

<sup>5</sup> Much valuable work in illuminating this genealogy has come out of the critical movement dubbed the “New Economic Criticism.” The strongly historicist studies of one of its main progenitors, Marc Shell, have engaged this topic in a number of historical fields. See Marc Shell, *The Economy of Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1978) and *Money, Language, Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982). See also Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osteen, *The New Economic Criticism: Studies at the Intersection of Literature and Economics* (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Kaye writes that “the everyday use of money as an instrument or tool effects the consciousness of its users” (Joel Kaye, “The impact of Money on the Development of Fourteenth Century Scientific Thought,” *Journal of Medieval History* 14 [1988] p. 251). For Kaye's own considerations of the impact of this monetary mentality on literature, see Joel Kaye, “Monetary and Market Consciousness in Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century Europe,” in *Ancient and Medieval Economic Concepts of Social Justice*, ed. S. Todd Lowry (Leiden: Brill, 1998). These ideas are brought together in Kaye's *Economy and Nature in the*

powerfully in this period with a resurgence of vernacular literatures across the continent. Such resurgence prompted many complex conceptual and poetic negotiations about, in the words of Anne Middleton, “the status and integrity of imaginative literature as an institution” in non Latin languages.<sup>7</sup> This crisis, according to Middleton, compelled authors to appear often in their own literary texts “ruminating on the traditional materials of composition,” meditating through fiction on the problematics of legitimacy produced by a departure from the frameworks of *auctoritas* that sustained both classical and clerical Latinity.<sup>8</sup> Frequently, such rumination took the form of metapoetic considerations about the relationships between the materialities of poetic and economic value.<sup>9</sup>

Take, for instance, Chaucer’s early *House of Fame* (c. 1379-1380), a poem probably written in the wake of the author’s journey to Italy and initial contact with the works of Dante and Boccaccio. The text takes up the questions of vernacular authority and legitimacy these authors’ works had posed in a complex pastiche parodying both classical and vernacular writing, and targeting especially the latter’s engagements with the former.<sup>10</sup> The *House of Fame* opens by mocking the dream vision framing found

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*Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange, and the Emergence of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Anne Middleton, “Narration and the Invention of Experience: Episodic Form in *Piers Plowman*,” in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honor of Morton Bloomfield*, ed. Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Weizel (Kalamazoo, Mich: Western Michigan University Press, 1982) p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>9</sup> See also R.A. Shoaf, *Chaucer, Dante, and the Currency of the Word: Money, Images, and Reference in Late Medieval Poetry* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1983).

<sup>10</sup> *The House of Fame*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1987); cited by book number and line number. For Chaucer’s travels and the circumstances of composition of the *House of Fame*, see Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) pp. 102-18. For a broad discussion of Chaucer’s relationship with these Italian writers – aimed in a somewhat different direction – see Winthrop Wetherbee, *Chaucer and the Poets: An Essay on Troilus and Criseyde* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984) pp. 17-29

frequently in earlier vernacular texts like the thirteenth-century *Roman de la Rose*.<sup>11</sup> Chaucer takes aim, however, not just at these texts in general but also at their contact with classical tradition. The narrative later provides, for instance, a parodic play on vernacular versions of Vergil's *Aeneid* that diminish the poem's powerful tragic energy, rewriting it as a story about the amorous dalliance of Dido and Aeneas, degraded from denizens of *alta tragedia* to fodder for courtly romance.<sup>12</sup> Chaucer's problematization of previous vernacular rescriptings of Vergil, however, is not just thematic: it also appears in a formal concern with such vernacular writers' Latin learning, as in the initial line of the mock Vergilian epic: "I wol now singe, yif I kan."<sup>13</sup> This deliberate degradation of the *Aeneid*'s opening words ("arma virumque cano") takes the invocations of epic voice and authority folded into Vergil's Latin verb "cano" (I sing) and reduces them to ridiculousness by replacing the verb with the homophonic English auxiliary "kan."<sup>14</sup> Such skepticism about the formal and philological capacities of vernacular writers in the face of epic *auctoritas* signals a concern with vernacular legitimation that runs throughout the *House of Fame* and that, as Eugene Vance has argued, intersects with a

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<sup>11</sup> See *The House of Fame* 1.1-110. For a good overview – written for another venue – of medieval dream visions and other gestures of allegorical framing, see Stephen Barney, "Allegorical Visions," in *A Companion to Piers Plowman*, ed. John Alford and Anne Middleton (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> This is Dante's famous description of Vergil from the twentieth canto of the *Inferno*. For a comprehensive overview of Virgil's medieval reception, see Domenico Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, trans. E.F.M. Benecke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> *The House of Fame*, 1.143; my emphasis.

<sup>14</sup> *Cano*'s reduction to *kan* is further bolstered by its subordination to the conditional "yif." Vergil is quoted from *Aeneid: Books I-VI*, ed. R. Deryck Williams (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2004) 1.1. For the implications of the Classical Latin *cano* in terms of an epic context, see the late antique commentator Servius' discussion of the lines Maurus Servius Honoratus, *In Vergilii Carmina Comentarii*, ed. Georgius Thilo and Hermannus Hagen (Leipzig: Teubner, 1881) vol. 1. Servius' text circulated in both medieval and early modern Western Europe. For a survey of scholarship on the implications of this particular moment of rewriting in Chaucer and an interesting argument about it in terms of medieval linguistic theory, see Martin Irvine, "Medieval Grammatical Theory and Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *Speculum* 60, no. 4 (1985) p. 859. I am in debt to Winthrop Wetherbee for pointing this moment out to me, and my brief discussion of this line's significance is deeply indebted to his insights.

prolonged meditation on the relationship between economic and poetic practices.

According to Vance, Chaucer sees in continental poets who exploit the classical high style an economy dependent “upon the poets’ ability to sustain the body of a poem as a serious rival for the feminine object of desire whose absence in the poem is celebrated.”<sup>15</sup>

For Vance, such stylistic gestures and ornamental excesses are seen by Chaucer through “an analogy between censure of those princes who would devalue gold currency for profit and those poets who give themselves over too easily to the high or noble style.”<sup>16</sup>

Chaucer, then, attempts in *The House of Fame* to resist a use of the high style that strips it of its hortatory or ethical powers, seeing such usages as “principally an art of inflation.”<sup>17</sup>

In other words, Chaucer dramatizes the “fetishistic impulses thanks to which a monetary system can function” by imputing them, on formal and thematic levels, to the particular engagement of continental romances with classical – especially Vergilian – tradition.<sup>18</sup>

**1.3.** While such concern with the intersections and imbrications of language and economy emerges for Chaucer in a secular discourse devoted chiefly to issues in the vernacular poetics of the court and classical Latinity, other late medieval writing posits the problematic of the relationships between poetry, language, and economy in more

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<sup>15</sup> Eugene Vance, “Chaucer’s *House of Fame* and the Poetics of Inflation,” *Boundary 2* 7, no. 2 (1979), p. 19. The high style was part of the Classical *tres genera dicendi* – most influentially formulated in the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (ed. Harry Caplan [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954]) 4.7.10 – 4.11.16. For a discussion of the influence of this distinction and the eventual beginning of its breakdown, see Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), chapters 1-2 *passim*, but especially pp. 72-3. The notion of a pure emphasis on language, on the experience of language, as a major experience of the emergent continental – namely Italian – vernacular literature has been explored in work by Giorgio Agamben: see *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999) especially chapter 2 (“Corn: From Anatomy to Poetics”) and chapter 3 (“The Dream of Language”).

<sup>16</sup> Vance, *ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28 and pp. 30-1.

explicitly theological terms.<sup>19</sup> William Langland's late fourteenth-century *Piers Plowman* provides a particularly enlightening example of this alternate discourse: through the poem's various versions, Langland lingers over language, particularly over the possible relationship between linguistic and economic usage or, in Augustinian terms, *usus*. In his *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine distinguishes *usus* (use) from *fructus* (enjoyment), identifying them as two ways a Christian can deal with immanent sinfulness of the postlapsarian world.<sup>20</sup> *Usus* is a teleologically transitive, utilitarian usage of material things that bears in mind their constant potential to foster sin. *Fructus*, on the other hand, is a teleologically intransitive enjoyment that should only be directed toward higher horizons, things "quas aeternas atque incommutabiles" ("which [are] eternal and unchangeable").<sup>21</sup> *Fructus*, however, frequently falls into a false *fructu ipso facto* focused on worldly things for their own sake. Augustine's early theological formalization of what Foucault called the Christian "art of existence dominated by self-preoccupation" and what C.S. Lewis identified as Christianity's transformation of psychological life into a moral battleground was, we should remember, developed not in the context of just of an ethics but also a hermeneutics – in the preamble to a text devoted

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<sup>19</sup> The literature on Chaucer's particular courtly and clerkly contexts is immense. For a good discussion, see Paul Strohm, "Chaucer's Audience," *Literature and History* 7 (1976) p. 31. Strohm's points here are expanded and reiterated in several other writings on this topic: see "Chaucer's Audience(s): Fictional, Implied, Intended, Actual," *Chaucer Review* 18:2 (1988) and *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) chp. 3. See also R.T. Lenaghan, "Chaucer's Circle of Gentlemen and Clerks," *Chaucer Review* 18:2 (1988) and, in the same issue, "Chaucer's Audience: Discussion," featuring the views of several scholars, including Richard F. Green, Paul Strohm, Lee Patterson, and Anne Middleton. Chaucer's bureaucratic and clerkly audience overlapped substantially and was imbricated with the royal *curia* (see Richard F. Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* [Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1980]). It is important to keep in mind the complexity of the social field of the "court"; it was not merely those immediately around the King.

<sup>20</sup> See Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1.22, 1.39.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.22.

to Biblical exegesis.<sup>22</sup> This fact points toward a powerful overlap of concerns with language use and the use of worldly things more broadly that becomes pervasive in *Piers Plowman*. In the poem, Langland sees language and money both as worldly goods that should be engaged with by way of appropriately aimed *usus*. The ethically problematic or minatory personages that populate the landscape of Langland's allegory frequently embody negative uses of both economic and linguistic worldly goods. For instance, Lady Mede – the embodiment of teleologically intransitive worldly exchange and acquisitiveness – is also described as “talewis of tonge”: garrulous, excessively inclined to talk, to “spende speche.”<sup>23</sup> This equation of economic and verbal misuse continues throughout *Piers* in other cautionary allegorical apparitions whose shortcomings are often signaled both “in werkes and in wordes.”<sup>24</sup> Likewise, the anxiety over authority and legitimacy that characterizes *Piers*'s nameless narrator is framed in a nexus of economic and linguistic overlap: in his dialogue with the allegorical entity Ymaginitif, he must endure the figure's accusation of the lack of an ultimate *fructus*, a real pedagogical productiveness, in his poem, a text with a putatively spiritual intent that is nevertheless written in the vernacular, that has broken from clerical Latinity: “And thow medlest thee with makynge – and myghtest go seye thi Sauter / and bidde for hem that yveth thee breed; for ther are bokes ynowe / to telle men what Dowel is, Dobet, and Dobest bothe.”<sup>25</sup> Ymaginitif doubts the need for more vernacular texts with spiritual agendas:

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<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume 3: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1988) p. 238; C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (London, 1976) pp. 60-61.

<sup>23</sup> *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt, 2nd ed. (London: Everyman, 1995) 3.131. All further citations of Langland are to this edition, by passus number and line number. See *MED*, s.v. “talewise.”

<sup>24</sup> *Piers Plowman* 2.90. Take, for instance, Mede's father, Fals, who is described as having a “fikel tonge” (2.25). See J.A. Borrow, “Wasting Time and Wasting Words in *Piers Plowman* B and C,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, vol. 17, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> *Piers Plowman* 12.16-18.

the poem, she concludes, is a product of his own “kynde wit,” his own limited human cleverness and imaginative capacity, whose misuse Ymaginitif likens to the abuse of wealth, commercial goods (“catel”), concluding: “So catel and kynde wit acombreth ful manye.”<sup>26</sup>

**1.4.** While their pursuits of legitimacy differ distinctly, Chaucer and Langland find an important common ground in their positing of linguistic problems as ethical issues, as part of an *ethics of use*.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the issue is of the relationship between the *use* of money or goods and the *use* of words: the underlying ontological homogeneity between the two *in general* is never questioned or problematized.

The same ethical outlook toward language’s problems dominates the Petrarchan tradition from which Sidney’s sequence emerged. Recent scholarship has suggested with particular force the dangers inherent in positing a common “Petrarchan” essence, in reducing the multiplicity of Petrarchan poetic production – scattered over several centuries and a diversity of cultural and linguistic locales – to one, common structure or

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<sup>26</sup> *Piers Plowman*, 12.55. See *MED* s.v. “catel,” which equates it with “godes” and more broadly “earthly goods, material possessions.” *Piers Plowman* is a poem perennially concerned with economic issues – particularly, the plight of the urban poor in the wake of enclosure and the other trends we have come to call, in a somewhat Marxian register, “primitive accumulation.” For a general view, see Derek Pearsall, “Poverty and Poor People in *Piers Plowman*,” in *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane*, ed. Donald Edward Kennedy et al. [London: D.S. Brewer, 1988]. David Aers’ work has been particularly helpful for illuminating this from a Marxist perspective: see especially David Aers, “Reflections on the ‘Allegory of the Theologians,’ Ideology, and *Piers Plowman*,” in David Aers ed., *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History* [New York: St. Martin’s, 1986]. For more particular engagements with the problems of economic usage, see James Simpson, “Spirituality and Economics in Passus 1-7 of the B Text,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 1 (1987). For the Mede episode – particularly the conceptual reworkings into Mede and Mercede, good and bad economics exchange economic practices from the B text to the C text – see Robert Adams, “Mede and Mercede: The Evolution of the Economics of Grace in the *Piers Plowman* B and C Versions,” in *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane*.

<sup>27</sup> I am drawing here on the work of Margreta de Grazia, who distinguishes sixteenth-century (and earlier) attitudes toward the problems of language as *ethical* (see “Shakespeare’s View of Language: An Historical Perspective,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 29, no. 3 [1978]). I will come back to de Grazia’s work in greater depth in the next chapter.

tradition.<sup>28</sup> This is particularly pertinent for English Petrarchism, a tradition that shows incredible diversity in the sixteenth century alone. But if we look to even a small sampling of this discursive field, we see a distinctly ethical perspective at play. Take, for instance, Thomas Wyatt, a poet who perhaps provides sixteenth-century England's most eccentric take on Petrarchan lyric, one most certainly on the peripheries of Petrarch's continental afterlife.<sup>29</sup> What distinguishes Wyatt from his sources in Petrarch and under continental poets writing under his influence is a powerful concern with the relationship between language and truth – demonstrated in Wyatt's perennial preoccupation with "trouthe," a general principle of linguistic reliability and social trustworthiness.<sup>30</sup> Wyatt's lyrics – many adaptations of Petrarch's poems – continually iterate trouthe's absence and make the ethics governing linguistic use a central issue. As one critic puts it, Wyatt transforms "the perpetual Petrarchan threat of collapsing reference" folded into many Petrarchan poets' continual invocation of the so-called ineffability topos into a "different semiotic threat": "the collapse of traditional, principled relationships on which a coherent society has depended and in which language has been grounded."<sup>31</sup> For Wyatt,

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<sup>28</sup> See William J. Kennedy, *Authorizing Petrarch* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) for a discussion of the diversity of the Petrarchan tradition through an analysis of commentaries on and responses to the *Canzoniere*.

<sup>29</sup> For helpful commentary on Wyatt's relationship with Petrarch that emphasizes his concern with social convention and with the maintenance of identity in a state of social threat (particularly in terms of masculinity) see Lisa M. Klein, "The Petrarchism of Sir Thomas Wyatt Reconsidered," in *The Work of Dissimilitude: Essays from the Sixth Citadel Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. David G. Allen and Robert A. White (London: Associated University Presses, 1992). For a more formalist account of his departure from the epideictic emphasis in Petrarch, see Reed Way Dasenbrock, "Wyatt's Transformation of Petrarch," *Comparative Literature* 40:2 (1988) pp. 128-9.

<sup>30</sup> See Christopher Z. Hobson, "Country Mouse and Towny Mouse: Truth in Wyatt," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 39.3 (Fall 1997). For the late medieval background of this term, see Richard Firth Green, "Ricardian 'Trouthe': A Legal Perspective," in *Essays in Ricardian Literature in Honour of J.A. Burrow*, ed. A.J. Minnis, Charlotte C. Morse, Thorlac Turville-Petre (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). E.R. Curtius provides an influential discussion of the pervasiveness of the ineffability topos in his *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953) pp. 159-62.



such semiotic threat continually coalesces in a foregrounding of the materiality of language – particularly the material similarity of false words and wind: “Windy words” are equated in one poem with “the eyes’ quaint game,” with amorous deceit; in another, the speaker talks of words that, “though they sparkle in the wind / yet shall they show your falsèd faith.”<sup>32</sup> It is in the conceptual space of an *ethics of use* rather than the conceptual space of ontology that issues of lyric language are framed, and the particular ethical limitations of language are continually expressed in terms of its material nature.

**1.5.** But when these examples are arranged alongside the many moments in *Astrophil and Stella* where economic and poetic practices come into comparison, crucial differences start to surface. While Sidney’s sequence often problematizes poetic language through an ethical likening of poetic and economic practices – in the sort of equation of words and wares we saw earlier - it also frequently points to an ontological problematization of the very capacity of words to be likened to wares or money, of the very common hypostasis – materiality, whose assumption we saw in Wyatt – that provides the potential for comparison. This is foregrounded in *Astrophil and Stella*’s many agonistic moments, where Sidney’s speaker takes aim at other poets, using them as a series of others against whom he establishes his own identity. Throughout these critical gestures, other poets are portrayed in ways that compare their relationships to the language of their poems with the instrumental relationships between subjects and objects characteristic of commercial and mercantile exchange and transaction. This comparison is based on the other poets’ resorts to repetition and cliché, their tendencies to trot out the tired topoi that were common currency in the erotic lyric of the later sixteenth century.

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Wyatt, *Complete Poems*, ed. R.A. Rebholz (New Haven, Yale, 1978). The poems cited here are, in Rebholz’s numbering, numbers 80 and 97.

For Sidney's speaker, it is these gestures that make other poets like merchants, and that make the words of their lyrics like wares.

But Astrophil is continually unable to keep from falling into these tendencies himself. Often, he will criticize a putatively unoriginal or unsatisfactory poetic practice only to partake in it just a few sonnets later. Take Sonnet 6: after criticizing other poets' invocations of ubiquitous Petrarchan commonplaces – the “force of heav'nly beames, infusing hellish paine” and “living deaths, deare wounds, faire stormes and freeing fires” – Astrophil proceeds to berate other poets for their use of mythological ornamentation:

Some one his song in *Jove*, and *Jove's* strange tales attires,  
Broadred with buls and swans, powdred with golden raine:

But only a few poems later (in Sonnet 8) he uses such mythological and allegorical ornament without comment:

*Love* borne in *Greece*, of late fled from his native place,  
Forc'd by a tedious profe, that Turkish hardned hart,  
Is no fit marke to pierce with his fine pointed dart:  
And pleasd withoour soft peace, staid here his flying race.

This is hardly an isolated instance.<sup>33</sup> Such moments run throughout *Astrophil and Stella* and signal, I think, a powerful and perpetual contradiction that haunts the sequence. I want to suggest that this is because Astrophil's ethical critiques establish an aim – a final enactment in praxis of what they gesture toward in theory –that requires not an *ethical*

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<sup>33</sup> For other examples of such mythological ornaments, see especially Sonnets 9, 11, 12, 13, 17, 19, 25, 32, 37, 43, and 52. *Astrophil and Stella* periodically provides deliberate parodies of the gaps theoretical statement and formal praxis. In Sonnet 15, for instance, we witness a subtly humorous instance of this in a criticism of alliterative poetic technique cast in an alliterative line: “You that do Dictionaries methode bring / Into your *rimes*, *running in ratling rowes*” (my emphasis). Such local irony, however, is distinct from the broader contradictions the sequence contains – contradictions like the one mentioned above or (to cite another example) the rejection of musal inspiration in Sonnet 55 that is repeatedly defied in later poems in the sequence (see Sonnet 70).

but an *ontological* modification of how language is perceived in the sequence and how language was generally perceived in the sixteenth century: as something thingly, material, part of the physical world.

**1.6.** The theoretical aims of Sidney's speaker are at odds with the epistemology of language his sonnets evidence. This disjunction forms a rift running through the sequence – a rift that generates the sonnets' continual alienation from their own language as well as their speaker's perennial attempts – always unsuccessful – to glimpse, through both the negative gestures of critique and comparison and the positive moves of theoretical assertion, an authentic language. The term “authentic” is difficult to detach from its imbrication in the idiom of Romantic aesthetics, but I use it here in the sense suggested by its etymological derivation (through a long developmental descent) from the Latin *authenticus*, which signals a reflexive relationship of etiological grounding, of a produced thing being the producer's own.<sup>34</sup> Authenticity in this sense identifies the condition opposite the alienation we see in *Astrophil and Stella*. It identifies a condition where *an ontological homogeneity exists between a speaker and the language he uses, a homogeneity that allows for language to be perceived as capable of capturing his internal cognitive and affective states.* (

**1.7.** Such an authenticity was possible in much medieval and early modern thinking about literature and “aesthetics,” and the possibility was grounded in a perceived ontological homogeneity between human subjects, their languages, and the material world that surrounded them. Understanding the particular historical structure of this grid of ontological homogeneity requires understanding, in broad relief, the worldview that

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<sup>34</sup> *OED*, s.v. “authentic.” See also Charlton Lewis and Charles Short, *Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966) s.v. “authenticus.”

dominated medieval - and to a lesser extent, early modern - Europe. Although it is, of course, dangerous to assume the kind of synchronic ideological stasis we get in characterizations of the medieval *weltanschauung* by writers like D.W. Robertson, C.S. Lewis, or A.O. Lovejoy, recognizing the broad contours of a given culture's view of its surroundings are helpful both exegetically and as a point of departure for further qualification and critique.<sup>35</sup> For our argument, then, it will be useful to venture the assertion that roughly between the replacement of Roman with Ecclesiastical *Imperium* in late antiquity and the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, we witness a worldview where human beings, their languages, and the material objects that surround them, are all viewed as being ontological homogenous, as existing on the same level of being - a level of being defined by its fundamental fallenness.<sup>36</sup> From such a perspective, the material world - its denizens, its languages, its inanimate objects - were all seen as part of the same mutable sublunary sphere, irrefragably and immanently suffused with sin in the wake of the fall, redeemable only on account of the Incarnation's gift of messianic mercy.<sup>37</sup>

Within this medieval Christian pessimism was contained the potential for the ontological homogeneity the sort of authenticity we are trying to delineate requires. We

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<sup>35</sup> Robertson is perhaps the most guilty of this emphasis on ideological stasis: see D.W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962). For a Marxist critique of this feature of Robertson's view, see Aers, "Reflections on the 'Allegory of the Theologians,' Ideology, and *Piers Plowman*." For Lewis, see *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971). For Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936).

<sup>36</sup> For a lucid account of the emergence of Christian doctrine and its dominance in Western Europe, see J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965). For its anticipations in late antique culture, see E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951) p. 245 and Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

<sup>37</sup> For a brilliant account of the ideological implications of the Incarnation, see Alexandre Leupin, *Fiction and Incarnation: Rhetoric, Theology, and Literature in the Middle Ages*, trans. David Laatsch (Minneapolis, 2003)

see this authenticity if we turn toward the period's models of "aesthetics" – defining the term in the broadest sense as the pursuit of beauty through formal praxis. From a worldview like the one sketched above, the obvious first task of any pursuit of beauty was compensating for the fact that all the forms available to the artist were seen as imperfect, fallen, and sinful. Consequently, medieval aesthetic praxis was pursued through a conceptual framework lent to medieval aesthetics by late antique philosophy – particularly Platonic philosophy: a doctrine of correspondence, the possibility for lower things to reflect higher things vis-à-vis their common unity in the inter-connectedness of the cosmos.<sup>38</sup> In this system, the higher immaterial values of the superlunary world were accessible from the sublunary by way of worldly objects' ability to harmoniously reflect higher and more perfected parts of reality.<sup>39</sup>

The potential for methexis this aesthetic ideology provided emerged along the axes of harmony and proportion: through them, the artist had to strive to bring his worldly materials into the greatest possible harmony with higher spheres. Due to the inherent fallenness of all matter, complete fulfillment of this goal was impossible. We might think of this conceptual given in terms of the constant iteration that forms a major structural component of medieval and early modern allegorical poetics. This iteration is

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<sup>38</sup> In the first book of his commentary on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* Macrobius provides a synoptic snapshot of this particular viewpoint in his description of the creation of the universe: "He, in a bounteous outpouring of his greatness, created from himself Mind. This Mind ... as long as it fixed its gaze upon the Father, retains a complete likeness of its Creator, but when it looks away at things below creates from itself. Soul, in turn, as long as it contemplates the Father, assumes his part, but by diverting its attention more and more, though itself incorporeal, degenerates into a fabric of bodies" (Macrobius, *Commentarii In Somnium Scipionis* 1.14.6-7; translation from William Harris Stahl, *Macrobius: Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* [New York, 1990]; Latin consulted in the Teubner edition, ed. J. Willis [Leipzig, 1963]).

<sup>39</sup> For the Neoplatonic background of this notion, see the helpful excerpts from Plotinus in *Readings in Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics*, ed. Milton C. Nahm (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975). This anthology also provides excerpts from Augustine's writings on beauty: see 232-242. See also Edgar de Bruyne, *The Esthetics of the Middle Ages*, trans. Eileen B. Hennessy (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1969) p. 9. For the survival of this in Renaissance thinking about meter and poetics, see S.K. Henniger, *The Subtext of Form in the English Renaissance: Proportion Poetical* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994) pp. 33-68.

hinted at by Paul de Man's description of the "allegorical sign" in terms of a continual repetition of "a previous sign with which it can never coincide," an admission or unveiling of a "distance in relation to its own origin."<sup>40</sup> It is also signaled in Walter Benjamin's identification of the formal and conceptual *Ursprung* of the Baroque German *Trauerspiel* as the need to amass copias of textual fragments in trying to transcend (always unsuccessfully) the mires of the post-lapsarian materiality of the worldly word; to attempt, through endless iteration, an always impossible return to *reine Sprache*.<sup>41</sup> Even within these pessimistic frameworks, however, we still see a certain possibility for an identification between cognitive or aesthetic agency and the materials at hand for its fulfillment: the iteration suggested by Benjamin, for instance, is a result of the common, fallen, postlapsarian materiality of both human subjects and their languages. Such ontological homogeneity is summed up well by Giorgio Agamben: "in these epochs," he writes, "the subjectivity of the artist was identified so immediately with his material – which constituted, not only for him but also for his fellow men, the innermost truth of consciousness – that it would have appeared inconceivable to speak about art as having value in itself, and in front of the finished work of art it was impossible to speak of

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<sup>40</sup> See Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) p. 207. De Man opposes this to the Romantic model of the symbol, characterized by the postulation of "the possibility of an identity or identification" and a coincidence with its own origin (*ibid*).

<sup>41</sup> For the materiality of language in the German *Trauerspiel*, see Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998) p. 200. For *reine Sprache* and Benjamin's post-lapsarian conceptualization of language, see Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," and "The Task of the Translator," in *Selected Writings Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); in "On Language as Such," see pp. 70-1 especially. Benjamin's conception of the postlapsarian inadequacy of language can only be understood in the context of the broader messianic features of his thinking. For a discussion of this, see Giorgio Agamben, "Language and History: Linguistic and Historical Categories in Benjamin's Thought," in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

aesthetic participation.”<sup>42</sup> Art works were not autonomous things that had to be cognitively appreciated: their power derived from their presence and their interconnectedness to the rest of the cosmos. When a medieval person, Agamben speculates, looked at a work of art: “he had the aesthetic impression not that he was observing a work of art but rather that he was measuring, more concretely for him, the borders of his world.”<sup>43</sup>

Such commonality, such interconnectedness, and such ontological homogeneity, however, would be shattered in the epistemological ruptures that would establish modernity.<sup>44</sup> As Luc Ferry points out, the emergence of modern aesthetics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would occur in a shift from a worldview where truth and beauty were located in a divine perspective, in the higher, immaterial realms of inaccessible ideas, to a worldview where truth was established from the perspective of man, “where the sensible world was seen to have *no existence except for man*,” to be, “in the strictest sense” man’s own.<sup>45</sup> Modern aesthetics, for Ferry, is structured on this shift “in that it establishes the beautiful on human faculties, reason, sentiment, or imagination.”<sup>46</sup> As both Ferry and Agamben realize, this leads to a gap between viewing the work of art as objective manifestation of the artist’s perspective and as something whose value is established according to the perspectives of its viewers.<sup>47</sup> In this shift, according to Ferry, harmony does not “disappear” but nevertheless undergoes a

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<sup>42</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999) pp. 33-5.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>44</sup> See Heninger, *The Subtext of Form in the English Renaissance*, p. 62.

<sup>45</sup> Luc Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus: The Invention of Taste in the Democratic Age*, trans. Robert de Loazia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) p. 20.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* See Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, pp. 98-9. For a brilliant Marxist reading of the development of this ideological field, see Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

substantial shift: it is “no longer thought of, and this is the real break with antiquity, as the reflection of an order external to man: it is no longer because the object is intrinsically beautiful that it pleases but, rather, we can go so far as to say it is because it provides a certain type of pleasure that we call it beautiful.”<sup>48</sup> The work of art, in other words, shifts with the emergence of modernity from having an existence in the material world – a material world seen as ontological homogenous with subjects as well as objects – to having an existence primarily in the minds of its producers and its viewers.

**1.8.** It is in this disjunction of aesthetic production from the material world that I want to situate *Astrophil and Stella*. Particularly, I want to look at it in terms of how the movement of subjectivity out of the material world involved a concordant shift in language, a tendency to view language as something immaterial, as a part, primarily, of cognition. Through understanding the fissured conceptual context of *Astrophil and Stella*, I think we can move toward a fuller reading of the sequence’s vexed pursuit of authenticity, its continual concern with the inability of its own language to indicate accurately the cognitive and affective states of its fictional speaker. I also think we can productively consider some of our own underlying assumptions about language, materiality, and cognition.

My reading will focus on how the term “strange” and its derivative “strangers” are used in *Astrophil and Stella*. The term is capable, in the later sixteenth century, of signaling both a cognitive dissonance, solely subjective, and an actual location in geographical-cultural space. Reading its split semantics in Sidney’s sequence, I want to consider how *Astrophil and Stella* both moves toward a theoretical goal that requires

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<sup>48</sup> Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus*, p. 9.



detaching language from the material space of the world and still dwells within a conceptual framework that locates language in the world.

## Chapter 2: Authenticity and Language, Materiality and Subjectivity

2.1. Before moving on to the further intellectual-historical or exegetical components of my argument, however, it seems helpful to turn for a moment to the critical landscape that has dominated the interpretation of Sidney's sequence – a critical landscape particularly averse to the invocation of a category like *authenticity*. Invoking the term in anything other than a negative sense is a definitively dubious maneuver in a contemporary critical landscape largely devoted to historicisms and versions of cultural studies that take texts less as the formal accomplishments of authors' aesthetic agency and more as symptomatic documents of particular ideological or discursive localities.<sup>49</sup> For early modern literary studies, this agenda has asserted itself largely in the form of New Historicism – a movement whose demise is declared constantly but whose spirit, like that of Shakespeare's Caesar, seems to walk abroad among us, "mighty yet." As far back as Rosemond Tuve, we can see recognition of the difficulty of detaching authenticity from the aesthetic argot of Romantic and post-Romantic theories of poetry.<sup>50</sup> But contemporary resistances to the Romantic idea of lyric as the aestheticization of

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<sup>49</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989) pp. 11-54 for an analysis of the logic of symptom in the understanding of culture, tracing it particularly to the work of Marx and Freud. For the relationship between Marxian ideology and Foucauldian discourse, see Michèle Barrett, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

<sup>50</sup> See Rosemond Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery: Renaissance Poetic and Twentieth-Century Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947) pp. 3-26. Since Romantic theories of poetry, authenticity has tended to overlap with the conceptualization of poetry – particularly lyric – as being charged with the expression of experience. For a study of tendency, particularly in terms of its intersection with the tendency to view lyric from the perspective of dramatic monologue, see Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (New York: Random House, 1957). See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. Andrew Tarnowski (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999) for a stunning critique of the equation of poetry with the expression of experience. Lacoue-Labarthe focuses particularly on the challenges to poetry's potential for conveying experience posed by the work of Paul Celan.

selfhood have taken less from Tuve's attempts to fashion a formalism focused on the rhetorical and logical theories dominating the period's pedagogy and poetics and more from the post-structuralist critiques of the liberal enlightenment subject found in thinkers like Foucault and Althusser.

2.2. We might think about this particular disciplinary movement by turning briefly back to what is, in many ways, its inaugural moment: Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980). Greenblatt's study takes as its point of departure an "increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process" in the sixteenth century.<sup>51</sup> For Greenblatt, this will toward self-fashioning, toward the deliberate production of identity, is counterbalanced by identity's imbrication in the period's increasingly intricate and hegemonic structures of power, or what Greenblatt, following Clifford Geertz, calls "control mechanisms."<sup>52</sup> These mechanisms mediated the sixteenth-century's fashionings of selfhood in "the passage from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment."<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, "literature functions within this system in three interlocking ways: as a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon these codes."<sup>54</sup> Thus, for Greenblatt, it is necessary to forge an understanding of literary texts as parts "of the system of signs that constitutes a given culture." Such an interpretation's "proper goal, however difficult to realize, is a *poetics of culture*."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5. For a further elaboration of this notion, see Stephen Greenblatt, "Towards a Poetics of Culture," in *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (London: Routledge, 1990).

Such a stance toward literature leads to interesting implications in the reading of lyric, implications indicated in Greenblatt's gestures toward the genre in one of the most powerful and influential readings *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* provides: its engagement with the poetry of Thomas Wyatt.<sup>56</sup> In Wyatt, Greenblatt sees a seeming struggle to articulate individual identity – autonomous, free from the constraints of court. This struggle, he acknowledges (along with many other readers of Wyatt), is pursued negatively: through continual critiques of courtly life's inadequacies, its lack of stability, reliability, "trouthe."<sup>57</sup> But Greenblatt departs from these readings in arguing that, while on the surface such negative articulation is the *point* of many Wyatt poems, in reality "there is no privileged sphere of individuality in Wyatt, set off from linguistic convention, from social pressure, from the shaping force of religious and political power."<sup>58</sup> Wyatt "may complain about the abuses of the court"; "he may declare his independence from a corrupting sexual or political entanglement."<sup>59</sup> But he always does so from within a context, a culture, a perspective hegemonically and ineluctably imprinted with "the essential values of domination and submission, the values of a system of power that has an absolute monarch as head of both church and state."<sup>60</sup> In his poetry Wyatt struggles hopelessly against a cultural system he cannot escape. "For all his impulse to negate," Greenblatt writes, "Wyatt cannot fashion himself in opposition to power and the conventions power deploys; on the contrary, those conventions are precisely what

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<sup>56</sup> Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 120. This chapter is devoted especially to Wyatt's renditions of the Penitential Psalms. Greenblatt's comments, however, apply more broadly to Wyatt's work as a whole.

<sup>57</sup> See Greene, *The Light in Troy*, pp. 254-5. For Wyatt's preoccupation with "situational instability," see also A.C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 291.

<sup>58</sup> Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 120.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

constitute Wyatt's self-fashioning"<sup>61</sup> For Wyatt, then, the pursuit of individuality and stability through lyric articulation are eroded as his speaker continually runs up against the constraints of Henrician court life.

**2.3.** Wyatt has only a walk-on part in Greenblatt's rewriting of England's early modern literary history as the story of selves both struggling against, and being constituted by, the cultural codes and power structures suffusing their social situations. But Greenblatt's early gesture toward lyric exerted substantial sway on later New Historicist engagements with the genre and its marks certainly show in scholarship on *Astrophil and Stella* over the last few decades. Take, for instance, the work of Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Sallibrass. They argue that Sidney's sequence shows how Renaissance love poetry could "function as a complex displacement of the ideological pressures of the court."<sup>62</sup> Authenticity, "real" romantic feeling – these, for Jones and Sallibrass, are irrelevant; the erotic parameters of Sidney's text are "never pure."<sup>63</sup> Rather than reflecting upon erotic experience or the private space of sexual affect, Sidney's sonnets forcefully fail to separate the "supposedly 'private' sphere of love" from "its similarities and dissimilarities to the public world of the court."<sup>64</sup> The sequence, then, is powered by play between "the contradictory tyrannies of court life (the need to succeed at any cost versus the ideal pose of the disinterested advisor)" – tyrannies channeled into unrequited eros, finding "their counterparts in the contradictory tyrannies of love," in an

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Sallibrass, "The Politics of *Astrophil and Stella*," *Studies in English Literature* 24, vol. 1 (1984) p. 54.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

eroticized political imaginary that scholars like Louis Adrian Montrose have suggested powerful feature of the Elizabethan court.<sup>65</sup>

Jones and Stallybrass provide an excellent example of the stance scholars have taken toward late sixteenth-century sonnets in the last few decades. But New Historicist-influenced concerns with how early modern literature lacked lucid distinctions between the binaries that often structure our ideations of individuality – private versus public, political versus apolitical, sovereign identity versus cultural determination – have come under attack, in recent years, for their underlying assumptions about Renaissance notions of selfhood. Katharine Eisaman Maus, for example, has pointed to such scholarship’s potential confusion of *philosophical* claims about the instability and ultimate untenability of subjectivity *in general* and historicist claims about the particular ways selfhood and inwardness were grasped in the Renaissance. Many historicist critics, she admits, have been powerfully and productively influenced by post-structuralist critiques of the sovereign, liberal, enlightenment subject. But the confusion of philosophical and historicist claims that seems to follow in the wake of such influence often leads to negations of the very *existence* of the “psychological category of the inward or the private” in Renaissance England.<sup>66</sup> Responding to this tendency, Maus aims to rehabilitate early modern notions of inwardness, individuality, and subjectivity. Her concerns are largely legal and dramatic: she provides interesting discussion of *Othello* as

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* See Louis Adrian Montrose, “The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text,” in *Literary Theory / Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986). Also of interest is Arthur Marotti, “‘Love is Not Love’: Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order,” *ELH* 49 (1982), an influential discussion of the place of sonnet writing in the homosocial structures of power at court under Elizabeth.

<sup>66</sup> Katharine Eisaman Maus, “Proof and Consequences: Inwardness and its Exposure in the English Renaissance,” *Representations* 34 (1991), p. 29. For a more extended version of these arguments, see Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

well as sixteenth-century testimonial procedures. But her critique, I think, has important implications for the literary field more broadly. Citing scholarly instances of the confusion of claims noted above, one of her prime instances is indeed Jones and Stallybrass' reading of Sidney. Their reading rejects "as illusory the possibility of a subjectivity prior to or exempt from social determination."<sup>67</sup> Such an argument, she admits, might very well have philosophical or ontological validity. But in being worked out through reading a Renaissance text, it blends philosophical and historical claims to the point of risking an effacement of the intricate paths on which sixteenth-century poetry pursued its own notions of selfhood, inwardness, individuality outside of political or cultural determinations. "Philosophical claims about the necessary social constitution of *any* subjectivity, Renaissance or modern," she concludes, are confused in readings like that of Jones and Stallybrass "with historicist claims about a specifically early modern form of subjectivity."<sup>68</sup>

Anne Ferry's work has attempted to articulate such specifically early modern subjectivity with admirable historical and philological finesse. According to Ferry, the rhetorics of inwardness and selfhood dominating sixteenth-century discourse were still deeply indebted to medieval notions of selfhood where "the experience of the particular subject is always treated as exemplary ... of general truths."<sup>69</sup> But, Ferry argues, from within the conceptual and linguistic parameters of such discourses, new notions of individuality and subjectivity were emerging in the sixteenth century – particularly in

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<sup>67</sup> Maus, "Proof and Consequences," p. 29.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>69</sup> Anne Ferry, *The 'Inward' Language: Sonnets of Wyatt, Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) p. 39. See Roland Greene, "The Lyric," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism Volume 3: The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) for a similar articulation of this pervasive medieval (and Greene suggests, early modern) model of subjectivity.

lyric poetry. In this period, English lyric pushed, as it developed, against the prevailing linguistic frameworks for cataloguing and describing experience. It struggled to move out of these older models of inwardness and individual cognition and to articulate new notions of a more autonomous, more unique selfhood starkly anticipating modern notions that would emerge, more clearly, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. (She cites especially the philosophical work of Descartes and Locke, which she sees anticipated particularly in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*).<sup>70</sup>

2.4. *Astrophil and Stella* forms a focal point of Ferry's argument. She sees the sequence as centered on a "struggle with the distinction between what is in the heart" and a "language of poetry" that seems, to the speaker, incapable of expressing it.<sup>71</sup> The sequence, she claims, is "the earliest poem in English to make its central concern the relation between what may be felt 'in truth' and what may show 'in verse,' an issue explored and complicated throughout *Astrophil and Stella* in ways which create new uses of language for portraying inward experience in a new kind of poetry."<sup>72</sup> These new uses of language, however, never quite surmount the obstacles they face and Sidney's speaker runs repeatedly up against the problem of authenticity, "the difficulty...of showing in verse his experience in truth has found no solution, as the sonnets which follow demonstrate."<sup>73</sup>

Perhaps Ferry's narrative – teleological to the point of whiggishness – seems somewhat simple and reductive. But – unlike much recent criticism – her reading of *Astrophil and Stella* importantly foregrounds the sequence's preoccupation with its own,

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<sup>70</sup> Ferry, *The 'Inward Language,'* p. 5.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.



never quite resolved formal and aesthetic anxiety. Recent historicist criticism (as indicated above) has tended to think about Sidney's sonnets in cultural contexts ranging from the court to the colonies, but has largely ignored their own, stated formal concerns.<sup>74</sup> Older formalist readings have, conversely, tended to raise up *Astrophil and Stella* as an ideal emblem of the cratylic merger of sound and sense, a brilliant achievement and avatar of the cratylistic aesthetics of the New Critical formal ideal – in spite of the sequence's own very explicit protestations, its own alienation from the language that constitutes it.<sup>75</sup> Though her terms may be outdated, Ferry realizes this central rift, and her analysis affords a good point of departure for thinking more seriously about just what *Astrophil and Stella*'s anxiety about its own language points to.<sup>76</sup>

As stated before, my argument seeks to suggest this central unresolved difficulty over the issue of authenticity in *Astrophil and Stella* can be situated in terms of a tension between two shifting ontologies of the relationships between cognition, language, and materiality. While Ferry tends to see Sidney as significant mainly for his proleptic

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<sup>74</sup> In addition to Jones and Stallybrass and Marotti, see also Edward I. Berry, *The Making of Sir Philip Sidney* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998). For Sidney's colonial commitments, see Roland Greene, *Unrequited Conquests: Love and Empire in the Colonial Americas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) pp. 171-93.

<sup>75</sup> For the classic New Critical engagement with *Astrophil and Stella*, see Theodore Spencer, "The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney," *ELH* 12 (1945) p. 251. Spencer begins his essay by critiquing historical and biographical engagements readings of Sidney's poetry, quipping that it has not hitherto been read "as poetry" (p. 251). This is unfortunate for Spencer since *Astrophil and Stella* stands as a brilliant mediation between "form and content, convention and passion, experiment and accomplishment" (p. 252). Surveying the formal trajectory of Sidney's poetic development, Spencer argues that Sidney had, in earlier works like the poems in the *Old Arcadia*, engaged in a kind of apprenticeship, mastering the rigorous poetic practices and standards of the period. This allowed him, in *Astrophil and Stella*, to "find his own voice, to discover his own poetic idiom, and his own rhythm," what Spencer sees as "the main business of a poet" – poetry relying on an "act of submission" to forms and formal protocols (p. 266). With such mastery attained, in *Astrophil and Stella* "Sidney tries deliberately to put convention aside and speak out for himself," making poetic standards and pre-established formal requirements his own to create something new, original, and authentic (p. 268). For Spencer, it is irrelevant "who Stella was, and whether or not Sidney as a man felt a genuine passion for her...all that matters is that she was a symbol around which he mustered a set of important emotions, emotions which were multiplied and intensified, sometimes perhaps even induced, by Sidney's desire to express them" (p. 270). For the notion of cratylicism as it pertains to poetry and formalistic, aesthetic readings of it, see de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," in *The Resistance to Theory*.

<sup>76</sup> Ferry, *The 'Inward Language,'* p. 129 and p. 7.

anticipation of modern modes of cognition and self-reference, I am rather inclined to see the sequence as engaged in a violent and vertiginous struggle with its own linguistic conceptions, with the materiality of language in its own conceptions.

**2.5.** Recent scholarly engagements with English Renaissance literature have tended to foreground such struggle, focusing on the complex and difficult dynamics through which early modern subjects delineated and defined themselves in relation not just to structures of power but also in relation to materiality, objects, things.<sup>77</sup> The emergence of these categories as *idées fixes* has become a major feature of the contemporary intellectual scene across the social sciences and humanities, embracing and energizing pursuits from philosophical and theoretical critique to bibliographical and textual studies.<sup>78</sup> Much of this new methodological movement's energy has derived from a dissatisfaction with an excessive emphasis on questions of subjectivity: as Bill Brown puts it in the introduction to a recent anthology exploring this turn, an emphasis on things and matter "might offer us dry ground above those swirling accounts of the subject, some place of origin unmediated by the sign, some stable alternative to the instabilities and uncertainties, the ambiguities and anxieties, forever fetishized by theory."<sup>79</sup>

Few fields have embraced this emphasis with as much enthusiasm as early modern literary studies, fast becoming a field where, as one scholar puts it: "at the moment ... a declared interest in material culture – objects, things, bodies, places – has

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<sup>77</sup> For discussion of this trend in the field, see Maureen Quilligan, "Introduction: Renaissance Materialities," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32.3 (2002). See also Jean E. Howard, "Material Shakespeare / Materialist Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare Matters: History, Teaching, Performance*, ed. Lloyd David (Newark, DE: Associated University Press, 2003).

<sup>78</sup> For the impact of an emphasis on materiality in textual studies, see Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass, "The Materiality of the Shakespearean Text," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (1993). For an anthology of examples of this new emphasis on materiality, see Bill Brown ed., *Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>79</sup> Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," in *Things*, p. 1.

become synonymous with a claim to theoretical currency, methodological innovation, or even, at its most dramatic, to the promise of disciplinary reinvention.”<sup>80</sup>

What an emphasis on objects has provided for Renaissance studies specifically has been a movement away from the emphasis on subjectivity engendered – as we saw before – by New Historicism and its long and diverse afterlife. Such potential is put forward eloquently in what might be called this movement toward materiality’s most powerful and polemical précis: the introduction to *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* (1996) by Margreta de Grazia, Peter Stallybrass, and Maureen Quilligan. In this essay, the editors explicitly oppose an emphasis on material objects and material culture to a (traditionally New Historicist) concern with subjects and their formation.<sup>81</sup> New Historicism, they charge, has placed its priority persistently on subjects, on their social and political imbrications and emergences, at the cost of dematerializing and stranding subjectivity in the windless linguistic and semiotic abstractions of Foucauldian discourse or Marxian ideology. For de Grazia, Stallybrass, and Quilligan, making such a focus on subjectivity, such an examination of the subject’s enmeshment in the period’s sites of linguistic and ideological power, a primary critical cynosure reaffirms – on a rudimentary level – the narrative of the Renaissance as apparition of the modern that has haunted historians and scholars since the vastly influential work of Jakob Burckhardt. For Burckhardt, the Renaissance encompasses the emergence of individuality, of a subjectivity that learns through science to increasingly throw off the bonds of the natural world, and learns through philosophy to resist the mind-forged manacles of medieval

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<sup>80</sup> Henry S. Turner, “Nashe’s Red Herring: Epistemologies of Commodity in *Lenten Stufte* (1599),” *ELH* 68 (2001) p. 529.

<sup>81</sup> Margreta de Grazia, Peter Stallybrass, and Maureen Quilligan, “Introduction,” *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. de Grazia, Stallybrass, and Quilligan (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp. 2-3.

religion.<sup>82</sup> For Burckhardt and his successors (they cite particularly Ernst Cassirer) the Renaissance is a point where “the subject’s relation to the object was that of mastery or would-be mastery: the mind trained and positioned to understand and overcome the object of its interest.”<sup>83</sup> Their point in the anthology, and the point of much recent scholarship that shares its underlying critical assumptions, is to explore the ways in which *objects* constituted selfhood in the Renaissance in explicit, acknowledged ways.<sup>84</sup>

The effects of this new agenda in early modern literary studies have been diverse. Many scholars have turned their attention toward material objects and their cultural and literary lives. Others, however, have directed their attention toward language itself, which – as we mentioned before – was viewed in the sixteenth century as something resolutely material, thingly, in the world. Margreta de Grazia’s work on the history of perceptions of language in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries provides particularly rigorous guidance for charting some of the implications of this profound difference in linguistic perceptions between the early modern period and our own. In the shift from sixteenth to seventeenth-centuries, she writes, words lose their thingness, cease to be seen as material objects and start to be required “to *represent* things or matter” – forgoing, in the process, “their own thingness.”<sup>85</sup> In this movement, according to de Grazia, we start to see a shift away from an ethical attitude toward language – seeing it as a tool whose shortcomings are the result of the shortcomings of its human users – and a movement toward an ontological concern with language, a belief that its shortcomings are part of its

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> See Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (New York: Doubleday, 1996) for an historical consideration of the enmeshments of identity and material possession. See also Peter Stallybrass, “The Value of Culture and the Disavowal of things,” in *The Culture of Capital*, ed. Henry S. Turner (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>85</sup> Margreta de Grazia, “Words as Things,” *Shakespeare Studies* 28 (2000) p. 231.

own nature.<sup>86</sup> This belief intersects in the seventeenth century with another emerging view: that language structures the relationship between human cognition and the external, material world.<sup>87</sup> It is, indeed, this emerging belief that results in the century's diverse anxieties about its ability to convey truth, from Bacon's warning "that words, as a Tartar's bow, do shoot upon the understanding of the widest, and mightily entangle and pervert the judgment" to Locke's later claim, at the close of the century, that language confuses cognition whenever "*men suppose words to stand also for the reality of things.*"<sup>88</sup>

**2.6.** Language's disjunction from materiality - as previously suggested in somewhat different terms - accompanied a broader realignment in the epistemological and ontological parameters of European thinking. The most convenient intellectual-historical marker of this shift comes in the Cartesian *cogito*, where the subject is defined as a *res cogitans*, a thinking thing at odds with the material corporeality of its body as well as of its surroundings – both grouped into the category of *res extensa*, radically opposed to perception, cognition, and identity. Individuals, however, do not single-handedly shatter epistemes, and as Ernst Cassirer reminds us, Descartes' was not a *cogito ex nihilo*.<sup>89</sup> Descartes' radical skepticism solidified a view that had been gradually emerging in the decades preceding its articulation: a view of the material world whose deep-structures were gradually redefining the realm of things as radically external to

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<sup>86</sup> de Grazia, "Shakespeare's View of Language," pp. 379-82.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 379.

<sup>89</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (Minneola, NY: Dover Publications, 2000) p. 123.

consciousness, radically disjoined from consciousness.<sup>90</sup> And this would eventually lead to an internalization of language to cognition and a consequent dematerialization of language along with cognition.<sup>91</sup> Heidegger saw this as a major moment in the history of what he called the “forgetting of being”: with Descartes, “the sole, genuine access” to the world became a narrowly defined knowing, “*intellectio*, in the sense of the kind of knowledge we get in mathematics and physics.”<sup>92</sup>

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has recently elaborated Heidegger’s critique of Cartesian metaphysics’ modifications of the subject/object binary into a broader and more capacious conception of the epistemological rifts that cut across the early modern period in its mediation of medieval and modern forms of culture. Gumbrecht casts the Renaissance as a moment of transition from what he calls a “presence culture” to what he calls a “meaning culture.”<sup>93</sup> According to Gumbrecht, the most major difference between presence cultures (like that of medieval Europe) and meaning cultures (like that of modern Europe) comes in how they respectively conceive the relationship of consciousness with the body and the material world. Bodies are, in a presence culture, the dominant point of human self-reference. In a meaning culture, however, self-reference becomes centered on a disembodied consciousness, “eccentric to the world” –

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<sup>90</sup> See René Descartes, *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia / Meditations on First Philosophy: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. George Heffernan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990) especially pp. 70-77 for the classic statement of Cartesian doubt.

<sup>91</sup> See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) book 3, chapter 1 .

<sup>92</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996) pp. 88-90.

<sup>93</sup> Qualifications are necessary for such a schematic view, and Gumbrecht gives us quite a few. The terms are, he emphasizes, not reality descriptions but something more like Weber’s *Idealtypen*. “I do not of course think,” he writes, “that either of these *Idealtypen* has ever appeared (or will ever materialize) in its pure – in its ideal – form. Rather, I suppose that all cultures can be analyzed as complex configurations whose levels of self-reference bring together components of meaning culture and presence culture” (Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004] p. 78). The terms are not modes of absolute classification but rather “illustrations of what it takes to imagine a culture fundamentally different from ours” (*ibid.*, p. 79). They are, in other words, not statements of fact but ways to think.

which Gumbrecht (following Heidegger) identifies with the Cartesian *cogito*.<sup>94</sup> This distinction regarding consciousness leads Gumbrecht into another important difference between the two cultural types in how consciousness understands and engages with its surroundings. In a meaning culture, knowledge can “only be legitimate if it has been produced by a subject in an act of world-interpretation ... that is, by penetrating the ‘purely material’ surface of the world in order to find the spiritual truth behind it.”<sup>95</sup> But for a presence culture, knowledge is not produced exclusively, or even most importantly, by human interpretive *agency*; it is more often revealed: “For a presence culture,” Gumbrecht writes, “legitimate knowledge is typically revealed knowledge. It is knowledge revealed by the god(s) or by different varieties of what one might describe as ‘events of self-unconcealment.’”<sup>96</sup>

This shift in the legitimation of knowledge, as Gumbrecht realizes, necessitated detaching of meaning from the materiality, the presence of the material world – a shift whose impact upon conceptions of language he characterizes in terms of the dichotomy between Aristotelian and Saussurean conceptions of the linguistic sign, the Aristotelian sign being the main marker of presence culture’s understandings of language and the Saussurean sign being the main marker of meaning cultures’ understandings of language. In Saussure’s analysis, according to Gumbrecht, the sign is a “coupling of a purely material signifier with a purely spiritual signifier (or ‘meaning.’),” while for Aristotle the sign is a “coupling between substance (something that requires space) and a form (something that makes it possible for substance to be perceived).”<sup>97</sup> Meaning cultures,

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81-2.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

then, tend to think of language as unmoored from the materiality of its voicing and its writing (or, as de Man might have it, “inscription”).<sup>98</sup> They tend to think of language as something that’s significance is located in cognition. By contrast, presence cultures emphasize and incorporate the materiality of language into their linguistic understanding. Particularly, they tend to conceptualize language in terms of its status as spoken voice, as the phonological materiality of sound.<sup>99</sup>

**2.6.** Gumbrecht’s schema provides a good way to think about the context in which I want to locate *Astrophil and Stella*. Sidney’s sequence both signals forward toward the parameters of a meaning culture while remaining moored in the conceptual space of a presence culture. Consequently, it both affirms and struggles with the older ontological homogeneity and authenticity possible in texts more ideologically stable. The existence of such stability in the field of early modern lyric has recently been analyzed by Roland Greene. Greene sees a stable relationship between a materially perceived language and subjectivity as a key part of the Renaissance’s notions of lyric and its “compact with subjectivity.”<sup>100</sup> Greene claims this compact was built on the basis of an Aristotelian view of matter inherited through Horace and other peripatetic poetic theorists.<sup>101</sup> Such a view placed poetry in the conceptual grid of Aristotle’s hylomorphism, locating its inception in the imposition of form on the substance. This survives powerfully into the Renaissance, as Greene notes. Julius Caesar Scaliger, for instance, speaks of language as a “rude and formless body” (*rudi atque inchoato*

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<sup>98</sup> See Paul de Man, “Hypogram and Inscription,” in *The Resistance to Theory*.

<sup>99</sup> Take, for instance, Priscian’s definition of language as “*arem tenuissimum ictum*” (Priscian, *Institutionum Grammaticorum*, 1.1. [*De Voce*], in H. Keill ed., *Grammatici Latini* [Leipzig: Teubner, 1855]).

<sup>100</sup> Roland Greene, “The Lyric,” p. 216.

<sup>101</sup> Greene, pp. 217-18.



*corpori*):<sup>102</sup> As Greene realizes, this view of matter frequently provided the basis an “early modern conviction that form and meaning can be – must be – adjusted to one another, that they are adaptable by genre and within genres”<sup>103</sup> – conviction evidenced in a passage from George Puttenham’s *Arte of English Poesy* (1589) Greene alludes to, where Puttenham is specifically discussing the sonnet form:

The first founder of all good affections is honest loue, as the mother of all the vicious is hatred. It was not therefore without reason that so commendable, yea honourable a thing as loue well meant, were it in Princely estate or priuate, might in all ciuil common wealths be vttered in good forme and order as other laudable things are. And because loue is of all other humane affections the most puissant and passionate, and most generall to all sortes and ages of men and women, so as whether it be of the yong or old or wise or holy, or high estate or low, none euer could truly bragge of any exemption in that case: it requireth a forme of Poesie variable, inconstant, affected, curious and most witty of any others, whereof the ioyes were to be vttered in one sorte, the sorrowes in an other, and by the many formes of Poesie, the many moodes and panges of louers, throughly to be discovered: the poore soules sometimes praying, beseeching, sometime honouring, auancing, praising: an other while railing, reuiling, and cursing: then sorrowing, weeping, lamenting: in the ende laughing, reioysing & solacing the beloued againe, with a thousand delicate deuises, odes, songs, elegies, ballads, sonets and other ditties, moouing one way and another to great compassion.<sup>104</sup>

Here, the method of amorous lyric is characterized by a proliferation of formal venues whose diversity is demanded by the affective abundance of love, “the first founder of all good affections.” The implied belief, however, is that the formal materiality of language can always capture experience. A similar idea is suggested in Samuel Daniel’s *Defence*

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<sup>102</sup> J.C. Scaliger, *Poetices Libri Septem* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1987). Translation from Frederick Morgan Padelford, *Select Translations from Scaliger’s Poetics*, Yale Studies in English 26 (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1905) p. 1.

<sup>103</sup> Greene, “The Lyric,” p. 220.

<sup>104</sup> *ECE*, vol. 2, pp. 46-7.

of *Rhyme* (1603), where – defending the “multiplicitie of Rymes” used in sonnets – Daniel claims that they have been

...so farre from hindering their inuentions, as it hath begot conceit beyond expectation, and comparable to the best inuentions of the world: for sure in an eminent spirit, whome Nature hath fitted for that mysterie, ryme is no impediment to his conceit, but rather giues him wings to mount, and carries him not out of his course, but as it were beyond his power to a farre happier flight. Al excellencies being sold vs at the hard price of labour, it followes, where we bestow most thereof, we buy the best successe: and Ryme being farre more laborious then loose measures (whatsoever is objected) must needs, meeting with wit and industry, breed greater and worthier effects in our language. So that if our labours haue wrought out a manumission from bondage, and that wee goe at libertie, notwithstanding these ties, wee are no longer the slaues of Ryme, but we make it a most excellent instrument to serue vs. Nor is this certaine limit obserued in Sonnets, any tyrannical bounding of the conceit, but rather a reducing it in *giram*, and a iust forme, neither too long for the shortest proiect, not too short fort the longest, being but onely imployed for a present passion. For the body of our imagination, being as an vnformed *Chaos* without fashion, without day, if by the diuine power of the spirit it be wrought into an Orbe of order and forme, is it not more pleasing to Nature, that desires a certaintie, and comports not with that which is infinite, to haue these clozes, rather than, not to know where to end, or how farre to goe, especially seeing our passions are often without measure?<sup>105</sup>

For Daniel, the “the body of our imagination” to an “vnformed *Chaos* without fashion, without day.” Such chaos can, by the “diuine power of the spirit,” of the poetic act, be “wrought into an Orbe of order and form.” In their application of Aristotelian hylomorphism to a description of poetic production, both these texts evidence an assumption, as much as an assertion, of ontological continuity between language, cognition, and materiality: words and thoughts, words and emotions, are the same *hyle* on which the form of lyric is imprinted. As Greene convincingly argues, and as Puttenham and Daniel suggest, this view held a substantial sway in early modern lyric.

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<sup>105</sup> *ECE*, vol. 2, pp. 365-6.

But, as I have tried to suggest, the later sixteenth century also witnessed the nascence of new conceptual frameworks that would challenge the basic assumptions of such a view – that is, the ontological homogeneity of matter, consciousness, and language. It is such a challenge that powers *Astrophil and Stella*'s vexed relationship with authenticity and the model of language in which it is historically forced to dwell. And it is to the textual manifestations and ramifications of this vexed relationship that we will now turn.

### Chapter 3: Sidney's Strangers

**3.1.** The adjective “strange” and its substantivized form “strangers” provide particularly interesting indices by which to trace both the ontological anxiety discussed above and some of the implications for how it leads Sidney to imagine instrumental linguistic and mercantile practices. Particularly, they allow us to pursue both the ways in which Sidney’s sequence struggles with the materiality of language in its pursuit of authenticity and the ways in which part of the materiality of language it runs up against in attempting to define itself is one in which language is thought about as deployed in the material, geographical, and political space of the world.

**3.2.** That “strange” should serve as a marker of identity, a way for Sidney to situate his relationship to others, is hardly surprising. The word first came into Middle English from Old French, originally signaling people and things culturally or geographically foreign.<sup>106</sup> We see this meaning still very much in use during the sixteenth century (Marlowe’s *Barabas*, for instance, complains that a Maltese tax levied on the Jews tries to tax “strangers”).<sup>107</sup> We also find it prevalent in frequent objections to the use of foreign words, described as “strange” – for instance, in a prefatory letter to

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<sup>106</sup> See *OED* s.v. “strange,” adjective, I, *passim*.

<sup>107</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, 1.2.59; cited from Christopher Marlowe, *The Complete Plays*, ed. Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey (London: Penguin, 2003).

Hoby's translation of Castiglione's *Courtier* (1561), or later on in Samuel Daniel's *Defence of Rhyme* (1603).<sup>108</sup>

But increasingly in the sixteenth century, "strange" starts to be used in another sense, signaling unfamiliarity not in reference to geography or culture but rather in terms of the feelings, perceptions, reactions of an individual. It starts to refer, in other words, to what is unusual and unexpected in terms of a *person* rather than just a *place* or a *people*.<sup>109</sup> Variants of the expression "it is a strange thing" and variants become, for example, common currency in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century prose of Francis Bacon's *Essays*. One of the essays, "Of Great Place," provides an example of the use of this locution, as well as evidence of some of the broader ways the adjective's newer sense was deployed. Bacon uses the word to describe the relationship between subjectivity and material objects that results in an instrumental, materialistic possession. "Men in great places" of wealth (as well as power), he begins, are "thrice servants: servants of the sovereign or state, servants of fame, and servants of business."<sup>110</sup> Such servitude springs from the need to keep what one has, whether in terms of worldly wealth or worldly power. Men in great places must continually rely on the shifting vicissitudes of worldly fortune to keep what they have. For Bacon, this produces an erosion of selfhood through a denigration of self-focused care. "It is a strange desire," he writes, "to seek power and to lose liberty; or to seek power over others and to lose power over a man's self."<sup>111</sup> Such desire is "strange" because it makes men possessed by it eventually

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<sup>108</sup> Balthazar Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, trans. Thomas Hoby, ed. W.H.D. Rouse (London: J.M. Dent, 1928) p. 8. For Daniel, see *ECE*, vol. 2, p. 384.

<sup>109</sup> *OED*, s.v. "strange," adjective, I.10a.

<sup>110</sup> Bacon, "Of Great Place," in *The Essays*, ed. John Pitcher (London: Penguin Books, 1985) p. 90.

<sup>111</sup> Bacon, *ibid.*

“strangers” to themselves: “Certainly men in great fortunes are strangers to themselves”; they have no time “to tend their health, either of body or mind.”<sup>112</sup>

Bacon bolsters this last argument with a Senecan *sententia*: “Death lies heavily on the man who, too well known to others, dies a stranger to himself.”<sup>113</sup> While certainly not counseling withdrawal from the world of public life, Bacon does seem to be advocating a self-sufficiency not dissimilar from Stoic ideas of the behavior necessary for happiness (*eudaimonia*).<sup>114</sup> In this particular moment of Classical engagement, however, we see an important navigation of a Stoic tradition of thought about the implications of the relationship between the self and worldly goods and power. For Stoic thinking, worldly possessions (or *bona*, goods) threaten a stable subjectivity in that a concern with them erodes an internal governance of the passions and resistance to the constant flux of worldly mutability. The conflict between *bona* (goods) and the state of being *bonus* (good) occasions Cicero, in his *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, to puzzle how the two can be derived from the same verbal source (*bona* is a plural form of the neuter substantivization of the adjective *bonus*).<sup>115</sup> In Christian thinking, however, this Latin ambiguity is incorporated into an ideological paradigm where the subject is seen as part of a fallen material world whose value is rendered problematic in general. Augustine asserts that *bona* are dangerous to the subject not because they threaten an integrated and autonomous

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<sup>112</sup> Bacon, *ibid.* Tracing the shifting valences of the word “health” is interesting here. In Middle English, “health” and its equivalents were primarily employed to signal physical well being. When used for the extra-corporeal at all, they signaled spiritual welfare (see *OED*, s.v. “health,” 4). Bacon’s is one of the earliest uses of the term to indicate an immaterial, psychological welfare not mainly referring to one’s *spiritual* state.

<sup>113</sup> Bacon, *ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> For an overview of the tradition of Stoic ethics, see A.A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (London: Duckworth, 1974) pp. 179-205.

<sup>115</sup> Cicero, *Paradoxa Stoicorum* (*Stoic Paradoxes*) in *De Oratore, Book 3, De Fato, Paradoxa Stoicorum, De Partitione Oratoria*, ed. and trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977) pp. 256-267.

selfhood – selfhood being always insufficient in itself, needing the power of divine grace (*gratia*) – but rather because they tempt the sort of relationship he describes with the term *fructus*, a teleologically transitive relationship with the fallen things of the material world, that are ultimately insubstantial because they occupy the lower, material, sublunary rung of the universe.<sup>116</sup>

For Bacon, however, a new mindset on how the dangers of an excessive investment in material things threaten subjectivity emerges – one closer to pre-Christian Stoicism, emphasizing the autonomy and singularity of the subject. In this simultaneously novel and traditional turn, strangeness comes, for Bacon, to identify the dangerous existential issues that an excessive investment in material things provides. For Bacon, “strange” marks the problematic position of a subject enmeshed in the materiality of the world, and thus alienated from his own autonomous selfhood. Such a perspective on the self parts substantially from the medieval view, first articulated in Augustine, where the fallen world’s minatory materiality tempts teleological confusion, exchanging enjoyment for use, forgetting the ultimate aim of human activity is somewhere and something higher and better than the world at hand. Matter threatens instead by calling into question the care of a self now seen as immaterial, beyond things alone.

**3.2.** The shift in priority apparent in Bacon is also evidenced in *Astrophil and Stella*, in a sonnet that does not directly pertain to issues of lyric and language, but nonetheless provides a good segue to the conceptual framework by which Sidney engages them. One of the more well known in the sequence, this text springs from a series of

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<sup>116</sup> For a discussion of the limitations of worldly things that evidences such usages, see Augustine’s discussion of his own *De Libero Arbitrio* in his *Retractationes* §§ 1.9.3-4 (cited from the *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 32). For a collation of the various usages to which *bona* and related words are put throughout Augustine’s *corpus*, see *Concordantiae Augustiniana* (Paris, 1656), s.v. “bonus, bona, bonum,”

paronomasiac plays on the name of Lord Robert Rich, husband of the supposed source for Stella, Penelope Devereux.<sup>117</sup>

Rich fooles there be whose base and filthy heart  
 Lies hatching still the goods wherein they flow,  
 And damning their own selues to *Tantals* smart,  
 Wealth breeding want; more rich, more wretched growe:  
 Yet to those fooles Heau'n doth such wit impart  
 As what their hands do hold, their heads do know,  
 And knowing loue, and louing lay apart  
 As sacred things, far from all dangers show.  
 But that rich foole, who by blind Fortunes lot  
 The richest gemme of loue and life enioys,  
 And can with foule abuse such beauties blot;  
 Let him, depriu'd of sweet but vnfelt ioyes,  
 Exild for ay from those high treasures which  
 He irtu not, grow in only folly rich!<sup>118</sup>

Collapsing Lord Rich into the more capacious category of “Rich fooles,” the speaker excoriates their “base” “filthy” hearts that lie “hatching still the goods wherein they flow, / And damning their owne selues to *Tantals* smart / Wealth breeding want, more blist, more wretched grow.” For Sidney’s speaker, a “rich fool” treats all possessions, including the “richest gemme of Love” signaling Stella, like his “goods.” He cannot, in other words, distinguish the instrumentality of material possession from other kinds of possession and relation, and cannot distinguish a person from a thing, and cannot ultimately distinguish growing more “blist” from growing more “wretched.”<sup>119</sup> This attitude leads to the “foule abuse” the poem hints at and Astrophil concludes: “Let him,

<sup>117</sup> For background on this, see Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney Courtier Poet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) p. 208.

<sup>118</sup> AS 24.

<sup>119</sup> Ringler’s reading of the line on which last claim hinges is “more blist, more wretched grow”; in other versions of *Astrophil and Stella*, the phrase reads “more rich, more wretched grow.” For discussion of the textual history of the poem and a justification of Ringler’s choice of his copy text (a 1598 version of the sequence included with a printing of the *Arcadia*) see Ringler pp. 447-57. The poem’s later mention of “unfelt joyes” provides some degree of internal evidence for this edition’s reading.



deprived of sweet but unfelt joyes / (Exil'd for ay from those high treasures which / He  
virtu not) grow in only folly rich.”

In this particular poem, the implied materiality of sexual possession, and the abuse it apparently occasions, is contrasted with Astrophil's own relationship to Stella, one that gives her a greater meaning, beyond the mere materiality of sexual possession. This emphasis on immateriality is mirrored in how Sidney conceptualizes the relationship of his speaker with the language of his poetry. The word “goods,” for example, deployed in the sonnet above in its more immediate sense of material possessions, is deployed in Sonnet 15 to describe literary materials and the sort of instrumental relationship with them Sidney sees in other poetry and tries to distance from his own.

You that do search for everie purling spring  
     Which from the ribs of old *Parnassus* flowes,  
     And everie floure, not sweet perhaps, which growes  
 Neare thereabouts, into your Poesie wring;  
 You that do Dictionaries methode bring  
     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 helps be such  
     As do bewray a want of inward tuch,  
 And sure, at length stol'n goods doe come to light:  
     But if (both for your lovee and skill) your name  
     You seek to nurse at fullest breasts of Fame,  
*Stella* behold, and then begin to indite.

Opening with a somewhat confusing combination of a typical term Renaissance rhetoricians used to refer to verbal ornament, “floure,” with the physical place of Parnassus, Sidney generates a fictional scene where the flowers of rhetoric are rendered literal, and other poets are portrayed as pillaging Parnassian springs and grounds,

“wringing” the fancies and figures of the Classical *auctores* into their own verse.<sup>120</sup> This visually striking image, however, fades after the fourth line as he ridicules users of the “Dictionaries method” (alliterative composition, which his approbation formally reflects) and poets who “poore *Petrarchs* long deceased woes / With new-borne sighes and denisend wit do sing.” Such signing and sighing is described, a few lines later, as a theft of literary “goods” (“at length stol’n goods doe come to light”). Not only do these other poets rely on literary theft to produce their texts; they treat the work of other poets like Petrarch instrumentally, like property or “goods.”

This sort of behavior Sidney repeatedly describes as “strange.” Coming back to our focus on this adjective, we see it employed, in various forms, in Sonnet 1:

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 pitie 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 mu throwes,  
     Biting my trewand pen, beating my selfe for spite,  
     ‘Foole,’ said my Muse to me, ‘looke in thy heart and write.’

In verses *dulce et utile*, Astrophil resolves to reveal his feelings to Stella, to delight, instruct, and eventually persuade. Pursuing this, he studies “others leaues” but finds insufficient their “inventions fine.” Eventually, “others feet still seemed but strangers in

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<sup>120</sup> See, for example, the title of Henry Peacham’s 1577 rhetorical manual *The Garden of Eloquence Conteyning the Figures of Grammer and Rhetorik, from whence may bee gathered all manner of flowers, Coulors, Ornaments...* (London, 1577).

my way” and “Invention, Natures childe, fledde step-dame Studie’s blowes.” William Ringler reminds us to read this passage in the context of the Renaissance rhetorical notion of invention (*inventio*) suggesting Sidney makes invention a central principle of his poetics and so opposes himself to other theoretical frameworks where poetry’s origin is located in imitation (*imitatio*), in accumulating and aping others’ work to produce one’s own.<sup>121</sup> Pursuing this point, Ringler signals the famous passage in the *Defence of Poesy* where Sidney censures sonneteers who apply “fiery speeches” so “coldely” that “if I were a Mistres [they] would never perswade mee they were in loue.”<sup>122</sup> Personifying Eloquence, he says that she is appareled,

or rather disguised, in a Curtizan-like painted affectation: one time with so farre fette words, they may seeme Monsters, but must seeme straungers to any poore English man; another tyme, with coursing of a Letter, as if they were bound to followe the method of a Dictionary; an other tyme, with figures and flowers extreamelie winter-sarued. But I would this fault were only peculiar to Versifiers, and had not as large possession among Prose-printers, and (which is to be meruailed) among many Schollers, and (which is to be pittied) among some Prechers. Truly I could wish, if at least I might be so bold to wish in a thing beyond the reach of my capacity, the diligent imtators of *Tullie* and *Demosthenes* (most worthy to be imitated) did not so much keep *Nizolian* Paper-bookes of their figures and phrases, as by attentive translation (as it were) deuoure them whole, and make them wholly theirs. For nowe they cast Sugar and Spice vpon euery dish that is serued t othe table; like those Indians, not content to weare eare-rings at the fit and naturall place of the eares, but they will thrust Ieweles through their nose and lippes, because they will be sure to be fine.<sup>123</sup>

What I would emphasize about this passage is not just its concern with theoretical polarities, but the fact that the register in which issues of imitation and invention are discussed quickly shifts, a few lines later, from concerns of persuasive efficacy and

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<sup>121</sup> Ringler, pp. 458-9.

<sup>122</sup> *ECE*, vol. 1, p. 201.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

rhetorical coherency, to a characterization of this coldly applied fiery language as consisting of “far-fetched” words and tropes, which Sidney claims “must seeme strangers to any poore Englishman.”<sup>124</sup>

Both these critical moments elevate *inventio* over *imitatio*, but also think about the issues they invoke in terms of the *strangeness* of factitious feet and words, in terms of a nexus of valences encompassing the geographical, national, and economic. Sonnet 1 is the first time “strange” and its lexical relatives occur in Sidney’s sequence, but it sums up many of the deployments discussed above. Sidney repeatedly uses the adjective to define his poetic product in relation to other poets, and in doing so frequently invokes both of its senses to characterize other lyric productions as not only unfamiliar, psychologically foreign, but also geographically, socially, and economically alien in their similarity to mercantile instrumentality. Consider Sonnet 3:

Let daintie wits crie on the Sisters nine,  
 That bravely maskt, their fancies may be told:  
 Or *Pindare*’s Apes, flaunt they in phrases fine,  
 Enam’ling with pied flowers their thoughts of gold:  
     Or else let them in statelier glorie shine,  
 Ennobling new found Tropes with problemes old:  
 Or with strange similes enrich each line,  
 Of herbes or beastes, which *Inde* or *Afrike* hold.  
     For me in sooth, no Muse but one I know:  
     Phrases and Problemes from my reach do grow,  
 And Strange things cost too deare for my poore sprites.  
     How then? Even thus: in *Stella*’s face I reed,  
     What Love and Beautie be, then all my deed  
 But Copying is, what in her Nature writes.

Here, other poets, described as “daintie wits,” not only cry out to the Muses and ape ancient authors like Pindar, but also “enrich” their lines with “strange similes” of “herbes

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<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*

or beastes which *Inde* or *Affrick* hold.” Catachrestically compelling an economic term – *enrich* – into the service of literary description (his usage predates the first such use of the term to describe literary language that the *OED* provides),<sup>125</sup> Sidney subtly suggests a homology between the strange similes these other poets produce in representing the contents of India of Africa, and the goods, wares, or commodities merchant traders acquire in their contact with these places.<sup>126</sup> That lyric production and mercantile activity might be compared is not a novel concept in sixteenth century lyric. Take, for instance, Sonnet 15 in Spenser’s *Amoretti*:

Ye tradefull Merchants that with weary toyle  
do seeke most pretious things to make your gaine:  
and both the Indias of their treasures spoile,  
what needeth you to seeke so farre in vaine?  
For loe my love doth in her selfe containe,  
all this worlds riches that may farre be found:  
if Saphyres, loe her eies be Saphyres plaine,  
if Rubies, loe hir lips be Rubies sound:  
If Pearles, hir teeth be pearles both pure and round;  
if Yvorie, her forehead yvory weene;  
if Gold, her locks are finest gold on ground;  
if silver, her faire hands are silver sheene,  
But that which fairest is, but few behold,  
her mind adornd with vertues manifold.<sup>127</sup>

But while Spenser considers the similarity in terms of a playful homology and collapse of modes of emotive, erotic and mercantile investments, Sidney takes the similarity far

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<sup>125</sup> *OED* s.v. “enrich,” 3.b.

<sup>126</sup> For a discussion of the complex position of the merchant in later sixteenth-century English society, see Laura Caroline Stevenson, *Praise and Paradox: Merchants and Craftsmen in Elizabethan Popular Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Stevenson analysis the ambivalence of popular views of merchants, caught between an increasing appreciation of their integral role in supporting the solidarity of the finances of the state and an older, more medieval tendency to view their instrumental practices motivated by material gain as ethically problematic.

<sup>127</sup> Spenser’s *Amoretti* quoted from the text provided in the Yale Edition of Spenser’s *Shorter Poems*, ed. William A. Oram, Einar Bjorvand, Ronald Bond, Thomas H. Cain, Alexander Dunlop and Richard Schell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

more seriously in how he views his own lyric production. Acknowledging in his diction and its valences the imbrication of mercantile activity with cultural and geographical alterity, he appropriates categories of national and cultural solidarity and identity to frame his own production as more authentic. As opposed to these seekers and accumulators of strange similes, Astrophil knows only one muse and “phrases and problems from my reach do grow / And strange things cost too deare for my poore sprites.” Other poets’ words and tropes are imagined in terms of both economic unavailability and geographical and cultural distance, detachment; these other poets seem comparable in their literary practices to merchants who go out and pillage the world, bringing back foreign goods. Astrophil, however, is a homebound lover to whom these things foreign things seem strange, whose verse only flows from Stella herself.

**3.3.** Examining the language of strangeness in *Astrophil and Stella*, we can see throughout the sequence a complex tendency to criticize other poets for literary behaviors Sidney’s speaker himself engages in, but to simultaneously situate this critique in the realm of geographically and culturally inscribed space. This signals the core contradiction of the sequence: its being torn between wanting to articulate a particular mode of authenticity that requires a disjunction of language from the material world and still positioning language in a material continuum, a spatial continuum.

Sidney’s strangers are poets from whom he can never, in the end, formally distinguish himself. In lieu of such distinction, as a way of responding to the impossibility of achieving the authenticity that is sought after, *Astrophil and Stella* criticizes other poets in terms that blend together anxiety about mercantile instrumentality and non-English (as well as non-Occidental) otherness.

## Chapter 4: Lyric, Lexis, and History

4.1. In this concluding chapter, I hope to provide a coda to some of the exegetical, historical, and theoretical assertions made in previous pages. Particularly, I want to suggest some possible implications of these arguments for the contemporary critical scene of literary studies in the United States. Recent years have witnessed complaints - from a number of quarters - about the dominance of professional literary interpretation by cultural studies and politicized varieties of cultural theory and critique.<sup>128</sup> Such complaints came initially (in the 1980s and early 1990s) from the Neoconservative Right, taking the form of a kind of paranoia about villainously politicized and postmodernized “tenured radicals” polluting the pristine minds of impressionable undergraduates. However, more recently, professional literary scholars and theorists have themselves turned toward the issue of literary studies’ definition, trying to delineate just what its disciplinary boundaries must necessarily include and exclude in order to preserve their intellectual, institutional, and – ultimately – financial viabilities. The work of Stanley Fish especially has argued the need for a disciplinary redefinition around the study of texts *qua* texts. In *Professional Correctness* (1995), Fish takes a stand against academic ambitions toward social critique and change. According to Fish, we must ask – in the

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<sup>128</sup> For a good and fairly recent overview of this, see Susan Searls Giroux, “From the ‘Culture Wars’ to the Conservative Campaign for Campus Diversity; or, how inclusion became the new exclusion,” *Policy Futures in Education* 3, no. 4 (2005).

face of such priorities – just what the “kind of thing” is that we, as literary critics, do.<sup>129</sup>

The answer, Fish argues, is simple: we study and teach – along formal and aesthetic lines – canonical literary texts.

Few critical writings over the last decade better embody this argument in both theory and practice than Helen Vendler’s *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (1997). In this fascinating combination of manifesto and commentary, Vendler uses Shakespeare’s Renaissance lyric sequence to assert the disciplinary priority of formalism and aestheticism in our understandings of literature. Further, she argues that lyric poetry especially is a textual realm where “social” readings are, quite simply, not valid.

In what follows, Vendler’s commentary will be my primary point of reference. Taking her claims about the trans-historical validity of aesthetic and formal exegesis as indicative of broader contemporary disciplinary movements, I want to examine how the differences in basic ontologies of language, materiality, and subjectivity we have seen in the early modern period might problematize the historical scope of a return to the literary, the aesthetic, and, most importantly, the formal. Particularly, I will be concerned with the issue of close reading, and how some of its basic, underlying assumptions become difficult to maintain when it is applied to texts outside of the modern, Western notion of the literary and of literature.

**4.2.** Before pursuing this question, however, I would like to make another observation about the particular ways in which language was conceived in the sixteenth century. We have already seen how an early modern lyric writer like Sidney conceives of language in material terms. But we should also realize that early modern ontologies of

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<sup>129</sup> Stanley Fish, *Professional Correctness: Literary Studies and Political Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 16.



language thought about it in a way that emphasized *word* and *trope* over syntax.<sup>130</sup> This observation is well demonstrated by two passages from Sidney we have already discussed in another context, earlier, and for different reasons: first, Sidney's critique, in the *Defence*, of other writers use of words that are "far-fette" and seem like "monsters" or "straungers" to "any poor Englishman"<sup>131</sup> and the similar sonnet that begins *Astrophil and Stella* and which, for convenience, I reprint below:

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 pitie 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 mu throwes,  
     Biting my trewand pen, beating my selfe for spite,  
     'Foole,' said my Muse to me, 'looke in thy heart and write.'

The previous chapter's argument situated this and other sonnets in terms of the materiality of language in sixteenth-century conceptions and Sidney's struggle to move beyond it while remaining confined within it. What I would like to point out now, however, is that both these passages evidence a critical concern squarely centered on word and trope rather than syntax. The "dainty wits" that form the antecedent subject of the first eight lines of the sonnet are criticized for how they unfold their fancies in

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<sup>130</sup> See Judith Anderson, *Words that Matter: Linguistic Perception in Renaissance English* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996) p. 3.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

“phrases,” tropes,” and “similes.” Their words are “far-fetched,” their similes, “strange,” but Sidney’s agonistic eye never turns to the architecture of their sentences.<sup>132</sup>

Historically, this makes sense: one of the strongest continuities in the traditions of both theoretical linguistics and grammatical pedagogy from classical antiquity to the Renaissance was a resolute “preoccupation with the word” and devaluation of syntax.<sup>133</sup> But what is the significance of this emphasis on word and trope over syntax in terms of how we might formalistically read the poetry of this period?

Modern models of lyric poetry tend to focus on the poem as a whole, and their view of diction, lexis, individual words, subsequently subordinates them to the syntactic structure of the text *in toto*. Take, for instance, Winifred Nowottny, who argues that the best analysis of the diction of poetry “concentrates on the relation between the object and the point of view and promotes sensitivity to the way in which words are used to induce or define attitudes other than those in which everyday language allows us inertly to rest.”<sup>134</sup> Any language, she claims, is diverse; it divides into many idiolects, is imbricated in many different occupations and pursuits. But poetry “has the extreme peculiarity of being able to raid other forms of language at will, taking from them as much or as little as it chooses and doing what it likes with the bits.”<sup>135</sup> *At will* is the operative phrase here. Nowottny emphasizes the power of the poet to master objects, situations, and different lexicons by imposing a central *perspective*.

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<sup>132</sup> It may be worthwhile to note that it very well *could* have: the “prose-printers” he references here are, Ringler conjectures (p. 460), almost certainly John Lyly and his acolytes, who introduced into England in the later sixteenth-century a highly ornate, heavily hypotactic Neo-Ciceronian prose style.

<sup>133</sup> Ian Michael, *English Grammatical Categories and the Tradition to 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) p. 141.

<sup>134</sup> Winifred Nowottny, *The Language Poets Use* (London: Athlone, 1962), p. 46.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39, p. 31, p. 42.

For Nowotny, lexis cannot stand alone; like Aristotelian *hyle*, it must be stamped by the “formal elements” and “poetic structures” she distinguishes from diction.<sup>136</sup> A poem is the mastery of verbal material by poetic perspective, and poetic perspective dwells in syntactic control. Poetry can only shake words that “inertly rest” in their everyday meanings through syntax’s potential for a catachresis of quotidian language.

This particular assertion of syntax’s superiority to lexis in lyric is hardly unique: Nowotny illuminates a broad and pervasive trend in our conceptions of lyric. Borrowing from the terminology of Pierre Bourdieu, we might say that, in the habitus of the contemporary lyric field, syntax is the main distinction through which value is established, on which taste is based, and through which evaluation proceeds.<sup>137</sup> In academic formalism, as well as the formalism that appreciative engagements with poetry cannot avoid, lyric is most often approached, analyzed, evaluated by engaging its relative syntactic complexity. Among contemporary critics, a good example of this is provided by Vendler, whose scholarly work and reviews of contemporary poetry both resolutely value syntactic complexity in “excavating the poem’s aesthetic totality,” in understanding it as a “verbal contraption.”<sup>138</sup> But to speak even more broadly, and engage in the often dubious, though sometimes productive, gesture of evoking a common experience, I would suggest that our typical understandings of lyric, however it is encountered, revert almost automatically to syntactic complexity as a main focus. We may think about a strange word choice (why Ashbery juxtaposes booths and seasons with *chaleur*, or why

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>137</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1986).

<sup>138</sup> The first phrase belongs to Sidney Burris; see “Reviewing Contemporary Poetry: Helen Vendler and the Aesthetic Method,” *Contemporary Literature* 31:2 (1990) p. 243. The second is used by Vendler herself, though she borrows it from W.H. Auden; see Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Ammons rhymes goat and zygote), but we do so in the context of the broader structure of the poem as a whole, a structure that's pursuit seems to invariably drift – however much against our higher theoretical will - toward the seduction of unity, the total syntactic cohesion of the poem as well wrought urn.<sup>139</sup>

But what is the significance of the fact that syntax is not the main category through which early modern poetry is conceived? And what is the significance of this when we couple this realization with the realization of the fact that language is conceived in early modern lyric's own meditations on itself as something material? What we get, I think, is an (historical) problematization of some of the underlying reading practices on which formal and aesthetic engagements with literature are based.

**4.3.** Of all literary genres, lyric seems to lend itself most readily to what has come to be called “close reading”: the interpretation of a given text entirely on its own terms. While the term close reading is often casually employed in academic discussion, recent work by Roland Greene has suggested that it is by no means value-neutral. Rather, Greene claims, in its practical and pedagogical deployment, close reading relies on New Critical claims and assumptions about the ideology of text.<sup>140</sup> What this New Critical textual ideology most importantly insists on is that literary texts - particularly lyric texts - are inherently separate from social, cultural, and historical circumstances; that they are, in other words, autonomous text-objects.<sup>141</sup> For lyric, such separation

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<sup>139</sup> John Ashbery, “Worsening Situation,” in *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (New York: Penguin, 1976); A.R. Ammons, “Distraction,” in *A Coast of Trees* (New York: Norton, 1981).

<sup>140</sup> Roland Greene, “A New Description, A New Translation: Close Reading Reconsidered,” a lecture delivered at a conference called *Tasking the Translator: On the Practice and Theory of Translation in/for Our Times* (Society for the Humanities, Cornell University, March 2005).

<sup>141</sup> I take this term from Douglas Mao, “The New Critics and the Text-Object,” *ELH* 63.1 (1996). However, Mao's work provides an interesting problematization of the commonly held notion that New Critical formalism opposed itself to history and historical reading. Mao's main concerns are with the “classical” canon of New Critical writing (e.g., Brooks, Ransom) rather than more contemporary instances of

springs from its origin as verbal representation of solitary speech or meditation. Lyric, in other words, consists of solitary thought, solitary language, and accordingly, historical and social isolation.

These last two claims about New Critical textual ideology of lyric are derived not from the *critici classici* of the school but rather from its most notable and powerful contemporary crusader: Vendler. These two sentences summarize the theory of lyric Vendler violently and polemically lays out in the introduction to her commentary on the *Sonnets*. Vendler's text is interesting to our current concern for a few reasons. First, it embodies much of the modern mode of thinking about lyric I want to suggest the historical limitations of. Second, it tries to apply this mode of lyrical understanding to an early modern text in a confident assertion of the trans-historical nature of lyric. And third, it fashions itself as an explicit intervention in the cultural politics of literary and lyrical study - an attempt at rescuing the Bard of Avon's sacred, sugared sonnets from the "jaundiced," socially oriented interpretations of feminist, queer, and other critics.<sup>142</sup> I have already pointed to some of the historical limitations of such cognitively and syntactically biased ways of thinking about lyric. Taking a closer look at Vendler will allow us to come to a final point: that the modern subordination of lexis to syntax is the origin of history's exclusion from formalist, or textualist, close reading.

For Vendler, lyric's resistance to historical or social readings dwells precisely in the relationship between the poem as syntactic whole and its lexical units.

"Contemporary emphasis on the participation of literature in a social matrix," she writes,

"balks at acknowledging how lyric, though it may *refer* to the social, remains the genre

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formalism (like Vendler). But his points provide an interesting perspective on some of the claims I make here.

<sup>142</sup> Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, p. 2.

that directs its *mimesis* toward the performance of the mind in solitary speech.”<sup>143</sup> Even though lyric can incorporate many social languages (or sociolects), it is not a “social genre” because “aesthetically speaking, it is what a lyric *does* with its borrowed social languages – i.e., how it casts them into new permutational and combinatorial forms – that is important.”<sup>144</sup> Vendler’s emphasis on this point warrants pondering. For all her belletristic bluster, this particular proclamation seems to mask some anxiety about her ability to quite so easily write off the multitudinous and, often very interesting, scholarship that has focused on, or taken for its point of departure, the “sociolects” Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* contain.

But to keep Shakespeare as a man “subdued to the aesthetic,” and so read his lyrics, accordingly, as self-contained “verbal contraptions” or “aesthetic games,” Vendler is forced to make an assertion about the significance of words that is severely anachronistic.<sup>145</sup> She scorns contemporary historical and social interpreters of Shakespeare for their own “anachronism” in assuming that the *Sonnets*’ use of sociolects demonstrates a concern with anything other than formal art for formal art’s sake. It seems bizarre, then, that she seems ignorant of what is so clearly suggested in the two (fairly canonical) texts from Sidney discussed above: that lexical significance rather than syntactic structure or contraption is seen as the chief constitutive element of lyric poetry in the Renaissance, and that, in this period, lexical items – words, or tropes – are seen not just as similar to, but ontological homogenous with, material things, like monsters or commodities.

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

4.4. The values that Vendler's reading brings to bear on lyric – the above-noted dominance of syntax over lexis, and the conceptualization of the poem as an aesthetic artifact, autonomous from anything other than itself, consisting of a crystallization of sensory or ideational experience, and operating thusly on an immaterial model of language – can be traced back their early stirrings in the intersection of lyric with the philosophical discourse of aesthetics, a term that was, in fact, first coined in a treatise about lyric poetry: Alexander Baumgarten's 1724 *Meditationes Philosophicae de Nonnullis ad Poema Pertinentibus*. In this essay, Baumgarten establishes aesthetics as the science of the sensate faculties of the human mind (as opposed to logic, the science of the rational faculties of the human mind).<sup>146</sup> He hits on the term in the course of constructing what he calls a "philosophical poetics" (*philosophia poetica*), a scientific analysis of the laws governing the construction of good lyric poems. Baumgarten's elementary definitions of both poetry and language show clearly the movement of language from being located in the mind rather than the material world and an concordant emphasis on syntax, the connection between elements, over lexis, the delineation of their inherent characteristics. Poetry, he claims, is a part of discourse (*oratio*). Discourse is comprised of *connected* representations (*repraesentationes connexas*). In poetic discourse, these representations are primarily sensate (*sensitiva*) rather than a rational.<sup>147</sup> The aesthetics of philosophical poetics is thus concerned with laying down rules for bringing these connected sensory representations "to perfection" (*ad perfectionem*). Perfect poetry, Baumgarten writes, is perfect sensate discourse (*oratio sensitiva perfecta*), characterized by a complete coherence, focusing on a single *thema* in its engagement

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<sup>146</sup> Translated as *Reflections on Poetry* by Karl Aschenbrenner and William B. Holther (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954) § 116-17.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, § 3.

with empirical particular(s).<sup>148</sup> Subordinating lexical to structural and syntactic priorities, Baumgarten anticipates the beginning of the dominant elevation of syntax in the lyric hermeneutics of the twentieth-century. Defining discourse in terms of epistemological rather than phonological activity, he anticipates the pervasive later tendency to think of lyric poems as representations of experience or intellection (or as representations of utterances which represent experience or intellection). And in establishing the criteria of unity, self-sufficiency, and self-contained focus for a *perfecta poema*, Baumgarten anticipates the dominant later tendency to think of lyric poems as autonomous aesthetic artifacts.

The historical space between Baumgarten's notion of the poem as a perfected sensate discourse and the verbal icons and well wrought urns of the New Critics is, of course, immense. But even if we survey this trajectory very broadly, we can see in Baumgarten the early nascence of a centripetal lyric hermeneutics, where lyric's claims to intelligibility and beauty are reliant on autonomy, coherence, and the syntactic dominance of the lexical. Though briefly, reductively, and schematically, I have tried in this chapter to signal that such claims are historically local, or contingent, rather than chronologically transcendent in their interpretive potential. This comes through with particular clarity in *Astrophil and Stella*, which – as I have tried to suggest – both evidences a vanished paradigm for thinking about language and poetic production and points forward toward the conceptual structures that would replace it and that continue to dominate our own understandings of, and engagements with, literary texts.

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, § 9, § 66



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