

Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* (1591)

1

Louing in trueth, and fayne in verse my loue to show,
That she, deare Shee, might take som pleasure of my paine,
Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know,
Knowledge might pittie winne, and pity grace obtaine,
I sought fit wordes to paint the blackest face of woe;
Studying inuentions fine, her wits to entertaine,
Oft turning others leaues, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitfull showers vpon my sun-burnd brain.
But words came halting forth, wanting Inuentions stay;
Inuention, Natures childe, fledde step-dame Studies blowes;
And others feet still seemde but strangers in my way.
Thus, great with childe to speak, and helpesse in my throwes,
Biting my trewand pen, beating myselfe for spite,
Fool, said my Muse to me, looke in thy heart, and write.

2

Not at the first sight, nor with a dribbed shot,
Loue gaued the wound, which, while I breathe, will bleede;
But knowne worth did in tract of time proceed,
Till by degrees, it had full conquest got.
I saw and lik'd; I lik'd but loued not;
I lou'd, but straight did not what Loue decreed:
At length, to Loues decrees I, forc'd, agreed,
Yet with repining at so partiall lot.
Now, euen that footstep of lost libertie
Is gone; and now, like slaue-borne *Muscouite*,
I call it praise to suffer tyrannie;
And nowe employ the remnant of my wit
To make myselfe beleue that all is well,
While, with a feeling skill, I paint my hell.

3

Let dainty wits crie on the Sisters nine,
That, brauely maskt, their fancies may be told;
Or, *Pindars* apes, flaunt they in phrases fine,
Enam'ling with pied flowers their thoughts of gold;
Or else let them in statlier glorie shine,
Ennobling new-found tropes with problemes old;
Or with strange similes enrich each line,
Of herbes or beasts which *Inde* or *Affrick* hold.
For me, in sooth, no Muse but one I know,
Phrases and problems from my reach do grow;
And strange things cost too deare for my poor sprites.
How then? euen thus: in *Stellaes* face I reed
What Loue and Beautie be; then all my deed
But copying is, what in her Nature writes.

4

Vertue, alas, now let me take some rest;
Thou setst a bate betweene my will and wit;
If vaine Loue haue my simple soule opprest,
Leaue what thou lik'st not, deale thou not with it.
Thy scepter vse in some old *Catoes* brest,
Churches or Schooles are for thy seat more fit;
I do confesse (pardon a fault confest)
My mouth too tender is for thy hard bit.
But if that needes thou wilt vsurping be
The little reason that is left in me,
And still th'effect of thy perswasions prooue,
I sweare, my heart such one shall show to thee,
That shrines in flesh so true a deitie,
That, Virtue, thou thyself shalt be in loue.

5

It is most true that eyes are form'd to serue
The inward light, and that the heauenly part
Ought to be King, from whose rules who do swerue,
Rebels to nature, striue for their owne smart.
It is most true, what we call *Cupids* dart
An image is, which for ourselues we carue,
And, foolse, adore in temple of our hart,
Till that good god make church and churchmen starue.
True, that true beautie virtue is indeed,
Whereof this beautie can be but a shade,
Which, elements with mortal mixture breed.
True, that on earth we are but pilgrims made,
And should in soule up to our countrey moue:
True, and yet true that I must *Stella* loue.

6

Some louers speake, when they their Muses entertaine,
Of hopes begot by feare, of wot not what desires,
Of force of heau'nly beames infusing hellish paine,
Of liuing deaths, dere wounds, faire storms, and freeing fires:
Some one his song in *Ioue* and *Ioues* strange tales attires,
Bordred with buls and swans, powdred with golden raine:
Another, humbler wit, to shepherds pipe retires,
Yet hiding royall bloud full oft in rurall vaine.
To some a sweetest plaint a sweetest stile affords:
While teares poure out his inke, and sighes breathe out his words,
His paper pale despaire, and pain his pen doth moue.
I can speake what I feele, and feele as much as they,
But thinke that all the map of my state I display
When trembling voyce brings forth, that I do *Stella* loue.

7

When Nature made her chief worke, *Stellas* eyes,
In colour blacke why wrapt she beames so bright?
Would she in beamy blacke, like Painter wise,
Frame daintiest lustre, mixt of shades and light?
Or did she else that sober hue deuise,
In obiect best to knitt and strength our sight;
Least, if no vaile these braue gleames did disguise,
They, sunlike, should more dazle then delight?
Or would she her miraculous power show,
That, whereas blacke seems Beauties contrary,
She euen in black doth make all beauties flow?
Both so, and thus, she, minding Loue should be
Plac'd euer there, gaue him this mourning weede
To honour all their deaths who for her bleed.

8

Loue, borne in Greece, of late fled from his natiue place,
Forc't, by a tedious proof, that *Turkish* hardned heart
Is not fit mark to pierce with his fine-pointed dart,
And pleas'd with our soft peace, staide here his flying race:
But, finding these north clymes too coldly him embrace,
Not vsde to frozen clips, he straue to find some part
Where with most ease and warmth he might employ his art;
At length he perch'd himself in *Stellaes* ioyful face,
Whose faire skin, beamy eyes, like morning sun on snow,
Deceiu'd the quaking boy, who thought, from so pure light,
Effects of liuely heat must needs in nature grow:
But she, most faire, most cold, made him thence take his flight
To my close heart, where, while some firebrands he did lay,
He burnt vn'wares his wings, and cannot flie away.

9

Queen Virtues Court, which some call *Stellaes* face,
Prepar'd by Natures choicest furniture,
Hath his front built of alabaster pure;
Gold is the couering of that stately place.
The door, by which sometimes comes forth her grace,
Red porphir is, which locke of pearl makes sure,
Whose porches rich (which name of chekes indure)
Marble, mixt red and white, doe interlace.
The windowes now, through which this heau'nly guest
Looks ouer the world, and can find nothing such,
Which dare claime from those lights the name of best,
Of touch they are, that without touch do touch,
Which *Cupids* self, from Beauties mine did draw:
Of touch they are, and poore I am their straw.

10

Reason, in faith thou art well seru'd that still
Wouldst brabbling be with Sense and Loue in me;
I rather wisht thee clime the Muses hill;
Or reach the fruite of Natures choycest tree;
Or seek heau'ns course or heau'ns inside to see:
Why shouldst thou toil our thorny soile to till?
Leaue Sense, and those which Senses obiects be;
Deale thou with powers of thoughts, leaue Loue to Will.
But thou wouldst needs fight with both Loue and Sence,
With sword of wit giuing wounds of dispraise,
Till downe-right blowes did foyle thy cunning fence;
For, soone as they strake thee with *Stellas* rayes,
Reason, thou kneeld'st, and offred'st straight to proue,
By reason good, good reason her to loue.

15

You that do search for euery purling spring
Which from the ribs of old *Parnassus* flowes,
And euery flower, not sweet perhaps, which growes
Neere thereabouts, into your poesie wring;
Ye that do dictionaries methode bring
Into your rimes, running in rattling rowes;
You that poore *Petrarchs* long deceased woes
With new-borne sighes and denisen'd wit do sing;
You take wrong wayes; those far-fet helps be such
As do bewray a want of inward tuch,
And sure, at length stol'n goods doe come to light:
But if, both for your loue and skill, your name
You seek to nurse at fullest breasts of Fame,
Stella behold, and then begin to indite.