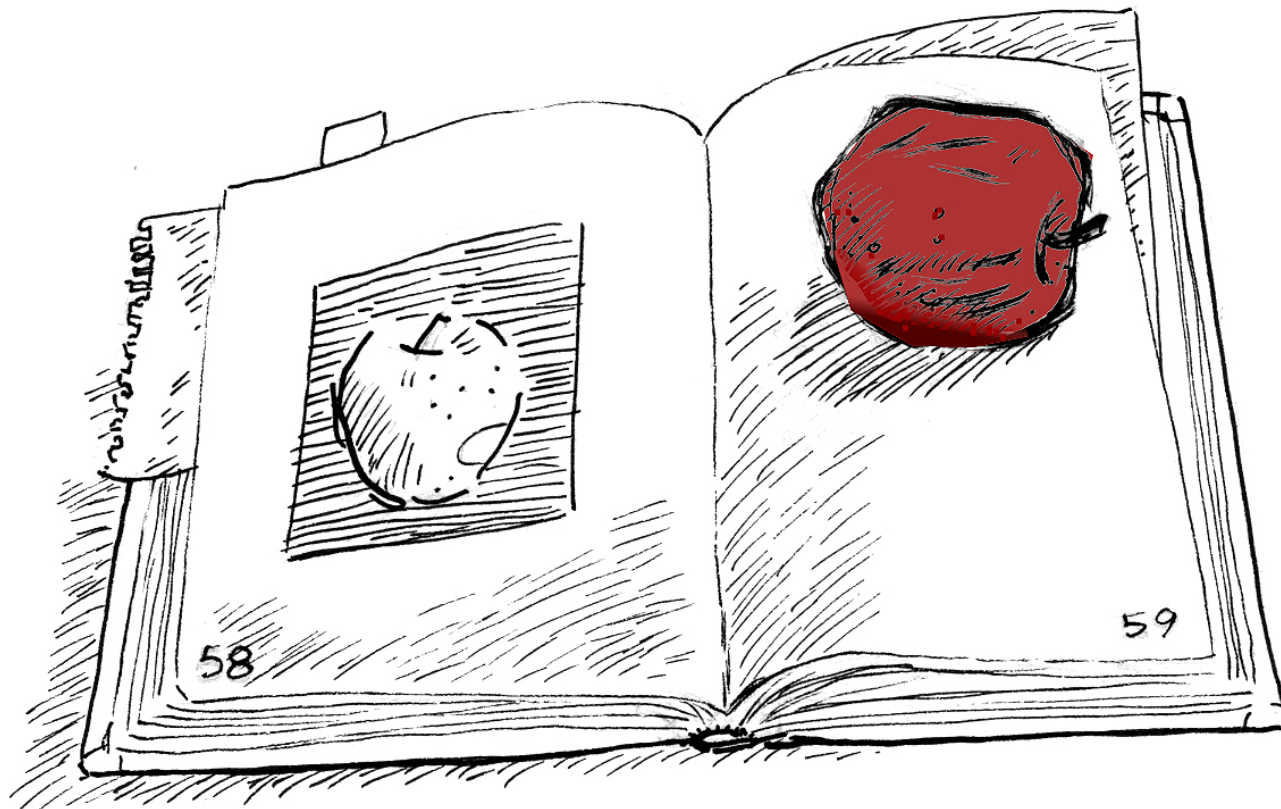


# Sonnets

---



# Sonnets

---

## **Sir Philip Sidney (1554 – 1586) || *Astrophil and Stella***

A contemporary of William Shakespeare, Sidney was known as a major player in the Elizabethan courts as well as a soldier and a poet.

- His sequence *Astrophil and Stella* utilizes various modified forms of the English sonnet; the three on the reading list show a rhyme scheme ABAB, ABAB, CDCD, EE— stressing three quatrains and ending couplet.
- The full collection consists of 119 poems, 108 are sonnets.
- The title is composed of Greek and Latin words: “Stella,” displayed as the female Beloved’s name, means star in Latin; “Astrophil,” on the other hand representing the Poet-speaker, is composed of two Greek words: aster and phil— meaning star lover.
- There is much speculation on the identity of the love interest. In this case, more than likely Stella is a fictional creation and the Poet-Speaker is a persona.

# Sonnets

---

**Sir Philip Sidney** (1554 – 1586)

from *Astrophil and Stella* || 1

(see page 680 in *Longman* for comparison)

*thesis:  
problem  
established  
and  
discussed  
in octave*

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,  
That she, dear she might take some pleasure of my pain,  
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know,  
Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,  
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe:  
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain,  
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow  
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sun-burn'd brain.

*sestet  
shifts  
in tone*

**But** words came halting forth, wanting invention's stay,  
Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame study's blows,  
And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.  
Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,  
Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite,  
"Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart and write!"

*Rhyme scheme* || *Meter*

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| A | 6   |
| B | 6   |
| A | 6   |
| B | 6   |
| A | 6   |
| B | 6.5 |
| A | 6   |
| B | 6.5 |
| C | 6   |
| D | 6   |
| C | 6   |
| D | 6   |
| E | 6   |
| E | 6   |

---

*Sir Philip Sidney: Selected Prose and Poetry*. Robert Kimbrough, ed. Madison: University of WI Press, 1983. Print.

# Sonnets

---

## Sonnet 1:

- introductory poem to the full collection of sonnets
- rhyme scheme is not the typical English sonnet but an experiment
- also, the meter is almost a perfect **iambic hexameter** (six feet per line) rather than iambic pentameter; in this fashion the Poet is establishing the material presented will be not the standard expectation
- overall the theme of the piece is to show frustration of the creative process; like love itself, writing can be challenging for the poet
- likewise, the more frustrating the poetry creation is, the more the poet shows his need for approval from the Beloved *and* his reading audience
  
- ll 1-4: in particular, the poem begins with the establishment of an exposition: Poet wanting to show his Beloved recent works she inspired; he wants her to feel a sense of “pleasure of [his] pain” in developing the work for her eyes, her sense of personal values
- ll 5-8: the Poet acknowledges he is choosing words of pessimistic qualities, to express an atmosphere of gloom; he references other poets, other books available; again, the word “leaves” refers to pages in a book

# Sonnets

---

- ll 9-12: following the traditional views of sonnets, Sidney provides an obvious volta at line 9 with the word “but;” he wants to show the struggle of course to win over the Beloved’s sympathy and passion— the stronger his craft, “Invention,” the stronger his courting of Stella; he also shows a contrast of Instinctual writing, “Nature,” versus Learned Rhetoric, “Study.” The educational process is a strict discipline requiring memorization, recitations, and formulas. He shows step-dame Study as a strict, unrealistic disciplinarian with perhaps too high expectation for casual private poetry.
- l 11 specifically mentions “others’ feet,” referencing other poets’ meters and rhyme schemes which he attempts to mirror— but again notice the poem is not the standard pentameter, but rather a hexameter count.
- l 12: the Poet-Speaker paradoxically shows himself as a pregnant woman wanting to give birth to the poem, a female figure in the middle of the birthing process, feeling the contractions, but nothing is happening, just more frustration and agony.
- l 13-14: finally in the closing couplet, he gains an epiphany while in the act of musing/crafting the work: *he needs to write what he knows*. His female Muse provides the basic answer.

# Sonnets

## Sir Philip Sidney

from *Astrophil and Stella* || 7

(see page 681 in *Longman* for comparison)

thesis:  
problem  
established  
in opening  
couplet

When Nature made her chief work, Stella's eyes,  
In color black why wrapped she beams so bright?  
Would she, in beamy black, like painter wise,  
Frame daintiest luster, mix'd of shades and light?  
Or did she else that sober hue devise  
In object best to knit and strength our sight,  
Lest, if no veil these brave gleams did disguise,  
They, sun-like, should more dazzle than delight?  
Or would she her miraculous power show,  
That, whereas black seems beauty's contrary,  
She, even in black, doth make all beauties flow?  
**Both so, and thus**—she, minding Love should be  
Placed ever there, gave him this mourning weed  
To honor all their deaths, who for her bleed.

the problem  
is discussed  
in the following  
nine lines

the closing  
tercet shifts  
the theme  
and provides  
resolution

Rhyme scheme || Meter

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| A | 5   |
| B | 5   |
| A | 5   |
| B | 5•5 |
| A | 5   |
| B | 5   |
| A | 5   |
| B | 5   |
| C | 5•5 |
| D | 5   |
| C | 5•5 |
| D | 5   |
| E | 5   |
| E | 5   |

---

*Sir Philip Sidney: Selected Prose and Poetry*. Robert Kimbrough, ed. Madison: University of WI Press, 1983. Print.

# Sonnets

---

## Sonnet 7:

- rhyme scheme is not the typical English sonnet but an experiment
- the meter in this case, unlike Sonnet #1, is almost a perfect **iambic pentameter** in the expected fashion for sonnets
- the conceit of this particular piece centers on the oft-used image of a Beloved's eyes: the catalyst for love in the typical Renaissance fashion
- also of interest to notice, the poem consists of four questions related to the power of her eyes; in this case, the work contrasts with Spenser's Elizabeth and her bright lamp-like pupils by showing Stella with a darkened, black light emitting from her eyes
- overall, this sonnet discusses the feminine, creative power of Nature
  
- ll 1-2: the opening couplet proposes the question why did Nature create such a dark hue for Stella's eyes— what is ironic in this situation is the fact the basic construction of a female Beloved is to cast her in a pale, white coloring, and to avoid darker shades of tones.
- ll 3-4: one answer lies in the form of a question: did Nature, like the painters of the time, mix heavy shades of black shadows to contrast bright lights in an effect termed *chiaroscuro* (think of a basic Carravagio).

# Sonnets

---

- ll 5-8: **or** a second possible answer is supplied in a new question: perhaps Nature intended Stella’s vision to act as a form of protection to strengthen our weaker sight and shield us from their potential brilliance (see fn 5 in the *Longman Anthology*, page 681).
- ll 9-12: **or** perhaps a third alternative, Nature, like a classically trained artist wants to show off her “miraculous power” cast Stella eyes as dark in order to show black seem beautiful.
- Line 12 provides the final answer which closes out the poem with a strong declaration: *all* of the answers are correct. (Note: until modern times, the word “both” could mean a series of two or more elements. Professor Jonathan Smith cites a similar example from English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the closing of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”:  
“He prayeth well who loveth well,  
Both man and bird and beast” (ll. 612-613).
- ll 13-14: Nature wants Love to be placed within Stella’s eyes, to wear funerary clothes, “this mourning weed,” all as a means to honor those in the past who have died for her— Love is in mourning for all the past lovers who have died in his name, all due to the power of Stella’s Medusa-like gaze.

<http://blogs.hanover.edu/astrophil/>



# Sonnets

## Sir Philip Sidney

from *Astrophil and Stella* || 31

(see page 684 in *Longman* for comparison)

*thesis:  
problem  
established  
and  
discussed  
in octave*

With how sad steps, O moon, thou climb'st the skies!

How silently, and with how wan a face!

What, may it be that even in heavenly place

That busy archer his sharp arrows tries?

Sure, if that long-with-love-acquainted eyes

Can judge of love, thou feel'st a lover's case;

I read it in thy looks; thy languisht grace

To me that feel the like, thy state describes.

*sestet  
shifts  
slightly  
in tone*

**Then**, even of fellowship, O moon, tell me,

Is constant love deemed there but want of wit?

Are beauties there as proud as here they be?

Do they above love to be lov'd, and yet

Those lovers scorn whom that love doth possess?

Do they call "virtue" there, ungratefulness?

*Rhyme scheme || Meter*

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| A | 5   |
| B | 5   |
| A | 6   |
| B | 5   |
| A | 5   |
| B | 5   |
| A | 5   |
| B | 5   |
| C | 5•5 |
| D | 5   |
| C | 5   |
| D | 5   |
| E | 5   |
| E | 5   |

---

*Sir Philip Sidney: Selected Prose and Poetry*. Robert Kimbrough, ed. Madison: University of WI Press, 1983. Print.