"My Prospect Lies Upon That Coast": The Feminine Conquered in Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*

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In early modern England, the notion of the feminine shaped language regarding the environment, more specifically treatises concerning land and exploration. Explorers commodified these lands through treatises and journals, which were later published in England and widely reproduced for public consumption. The expansion of global interaction led to the spreading of European conceptions of gender and sexuality. These widely disseminated texts provided insight into what was deemed the “New World”: lands untouched by Western nations with an abundance of natural resources and indigenous people. Much of the language regarding this “new” land and those inhabiting it evoked qualities associated with masculine ideas of the feminine. In employing language denoting the feminine, the explorer construes the land as a space to be utilized and subjected to the masculine. What’s more, the treatises described the
feminine in sexual terms, eroticizing the land and its inhabitants. Every aspect of colonization was described with sexualized metaphors, allowing for European explorers to take the role of the virile and masculine aggressors.\(^1\) Famously, in Sir Walter Raleigh's 1596 account of The *Discovery of Guiana*, the English explorer fashions the land of Guiana as a “country that hath yet her maidenhead, never sacked, turned, nor wrought,” associating the foreign land not only with virgin imagery, but also implying that this virginity can be “sacked, turned” and “wrought,” providing the reader with an image akin to the rape of a maiden.\(^2\)\(^3\) The trope of fashioning a conquered land into a beloved, was present as well as inverted in the English Petrarchan tradition, but instead of fashioning a land as feminine, the poets often fashioned their female beloveds as conquered lands. Like the European explorers of their time, these poet-lovers sought to prove themselves as virile and masculine within their own realm; though their beloveds were often unattainable in life, within these poetic narratives the poets fashioned these women as lands


to be conquered. An analysis of this trope, circumscribing the beloved as a conquered land, provides an understanding of early modern ideologies of gender, specifically femininity and its instrumental use in the project of colonial expansion. The relationship between the construction of colonized lands as feminine and the female beloveds as instrumentalized, colonized lands shows that the feminine had been categorized as a part of nature that lies outside of masculine rationality and instrumental logic. The identification of this relationship, also, unmasks commonly held early modern perceptions of "savage lands" as easily conquered, much like their feminine counterparts.

Though Raleigh's *Discoverie* (1596) was published 13 years after *Astrophil and Stella* was written, the language employed within exploration letters and treatises marking new world discoveries parallels the poetry of English sonneteer Sir Philip Sidney, who aspired to be an explorer like his friend and peer Richard Hakluyt. Richard Hakluyt's treatise on his own explorations, *Divers Voyages Touching the Discoverie of America* (1582), was dedicated to "the right worshipfull and most vertuous Gentlemen master Philip Sydney Esquire." The *Divers Voyages* emphasized the importance of English settlement in North America, a topic that was

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4 Hakluyt, Richard. *Divers voyages touching the discoverie of America and the llands adjacent unto the same made first of all by our Englishmen and afterward by the Frenchmen and Britons: and certaine notes of advertisements for observations.* London: T. Woodcocke, 1582.
extremely relevant to Sidney’s current aspirations. Hackluyt’s *Divers* was inspired by the accounts described in Peter Martyr of Angleria’s treatise *Decades of Newe Worlde*, which were translated into English by Richard Eden in 1555, and became a popular text on exploration of the Americas. Martyr gendered the New World in terms associated with the feminine, often relying on classical mythology to emphasize the exotic and erotic inhabitants that lied waiting in these new lands. In regards to indigenous populations, Martyr describes local stories of a group of men who come upon “a great multitude of beast in shape somewhat like unto women” and attempt to “use them for women,” which corresponds with the eroticizing of the land and its elements as well as the notion of taking these inhabitants by means of rape.\(^5\) This exploitation of the perceived exotic nature of the New World and its natives encapsulates the perceptions of these lands as submissive and savage. Sidney made a serious attempt to go to North America in 1585, but his plans never came to fruition due to lack of funding and a political rivalry with Sir Francis Drake, who was forbidden to receive Sidney into his fleet. Sidney’s attempt to leave to the New World, a voyage that was viewed as an escape to freedom, was viewed to Queen Elizabeth as an escape from her control. Though Sidney’s visions of New World exploration fell

through, the exploration treatises continued to influence the language he employed in his writing. To compensate for his failed travels, Sidney brought themes of exploration to his sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella*, mapping out an aesthetic representation of his own romantic conquest using such language.

In *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney, taking the form of the poet-lover Astrophil, uses these influences to expand on Astrophil's love for Stella, as well as compensate for the love being unrequited. In his poetic golden world, Astrophil is able to fashion Stella to fit his needs, as well as dismember and dehumanize her to gain sovereignty over her in his sonnet sequence. In order to dehumanize Stella, Astrophil relies on early modern perceptions of women and nature, as well as employing language that invokes images of conquered lands both foreign and familiar. Though Astrophil often fashions himself as the submissive, thus more feminine, partner in the relationship, Stella is still presented as a conquered land for other explorers. In perceiving Stella through language that educes such lands, the poet-lover adds a new dynamic, that of the conqueror and conquered. In this paper, I will assess Martyr’s influential discoveries to argue that the Petrarchan language of *Astrophil and Stella* reflects that of exploration and

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colonization metaphors, in order to establish the relationship between the lover and beloved as that of a foreign land and its conqueror. Furthermore, I assert that the gender reversal within *Astrophil and Stella* reflects Elizabeth I’s own gender reversal and usurpation of the masculine in her political rhetoric. In fashioning his counterpart, Astrophil, as feminine throughout the sonnet sequence, Sidney also portrays his place as a courtier in the court of Elizabeth I.

In order to analyze the connection between the feminine and the land, I will employ Ecofeminist theory. Ecofeminism, in literary criticism, combines environmental criticism and feminist literary criticism to explore the relationships among nature, gender, race, class, and sexuality in literature. One of the strongest ideas expressed within ecofeminism is that the masculine domination of the feminine parallels that of western civilizations’ domination over nature. In reading *Astrophil and Stella* through an ecofeminist perspective, I will analyze the use of conquered land and green space metaphors in regards to the beloved. Some scholars, such as Katherine J. Roberts, claim that Astrophil and Stella is a proto-feminist work, as Stella is given significant agency and authority not usually allowed to Petrarchan beloveds. I argue, however,

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that the poetic authority Stella gains is only a reflection of Elizabeth's political authority over Sidney, and as such becomes a façade of authority in the poetic realm. The distinction between poetic authority and political authority is garnered in how the poetic authority Stella gains is granted to her by Astrophil, where as Elizabeth’s rule is that of Divine Right, a monarchy in which Sidney served as a subject. That Stella's authority and agency derive from political circumstances emphasizes that Stella's unique disposition as a Petrarchan beloved is influenced by Elizabeth’s own unique circumstances in feminine rule. Throughout the sonnet sequence, Astrophil consistently feminizes and emasculates himself, rendering himself submissive as well as allowing Stella to gain poetic authority over him. In fashioning himself as the conquered land, he is in turn emphasizing his own femininity. Maria Prendergast posits that “Clearly, in *Astrophil and Stella*, conventional constructions of gender have been inverted...In fact, as Stella is increasingly linked with a sublime "masculine" love; Astrophil associates himself more and more with "feminine" lust.”⁹ Prendergast continues her assessment of the gendered love within *Astrophil and Stella*, tracing Astrophil's femininity throughout the sonnet sequence as a unique motif within Petrarchanism. Astrophil grants Stella agency over his poetry when he claims that

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Stella is the authority on poetics, rendering the audience of the poetry, including Astrophil, feminine. Prendergast asserts that this gender reversal is not an empathetic move but a strategic move on Sidney's part to gain the empathy of the audience. I argue that the gender reversal is a tactic for Sidney to consider his political situation in the court of Elizabeth I, where such authority and rhetorical gender-reversal was taking place in reality. Additionally, I posit that the fashioning of Astrophil as feminine in order to frame the emasculation of the poet-lover enforces the concept of a shared masculine oppression between the feminine and the environment within the sonnet sequence. This feminine portrayal of the poet-lover affirms that the emasculation of Astrophil is a strategic response to the political gender reversals within Elizabeth's rhetoric, and that Sidney's own relationship with Elizabeth is reflected within Astrophil's portrayal of both Stella and himself as a feminine and conquered subject.

Nature itself is personified as feminine within Astrophil and Stella, in relation to perceived notions of Nature as a feminine space. Greta Gaard argues that "feminizing nature and naturalizing or animalizing women has served as justification for the domination of women, animals, and the earth." The gendering of Nature as female is not a new theme to the Petrarchan

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tradition of sonneteers, who also often envisioned their beloveds as being a part of this natural space. In providing a feminine natural space within the poetic world, and further marking the beloved as part of this natural space, the lover gains agency over the beloved, as they are in turn fashioning themselves as conquerors of this poetic Nature. In Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, Stella’s relationship with nature has a creation-creator dynamic. Stella is perceived as a creation of Nature, and not a feminine personification of Nature. Though this relationship between the feminine and Nature is not an old phenomenon, it has shifted from an empathetic image to a construction to be dominated. In *Death of Nature*, Merchant asserts that “between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the image of an organic cosmos with a living female earth at its center gave way to a mechanistic world view in which nature is reconstructed as dead and passive, to be dominated and controlled by humans.”¹¹ This image of “a living female earth” rendered “dead and passive” is akin to the lack of agency expressed in the descriptions of the Petrarchan beloved. Noting the time frame of this shift, from the sixteenth to the beginning of the seventeenth century, the evolving perceptions of nature could correspond with England’s own progression towards imperialism. This shared lack of agency between women and nature within

Petrarchan poetry indicates the poet-lovers colonial stance on the gendered realm of Nature. Sidney plays off of this continued trend, fashioning Stella as a creation of Nature. In Sonnet 11, Stella belongs to “Nature’s cabinet” (9), further emphasizing Stella as an element of the natural world. The use of the word “cabinet”, a human artifact, to describe the elements of Nature is peculiar, in that it implies a shift into the artificial. In placing Stella in “Nature’s Cabinet,” Astrophil gains sovereignty over Stella through this envisioned hierarchy. This application of human influence on the natural can be perceived as similar to colonization, which was perceived as meshing the civilized with the savage.

Stella’s association with the natural world expands within the poetic narrative through her physical representation. The narrative rarely considers Stella in terms that bring attention to human qualities; rather, she is described through imagery that emphasizes her place within the sylvan realm. “Stella’s fair hair” (XIII, 10) and face are compared to a place “[w]here roses gules are borne in silver field” (11), reflecting the common Petrarchan tropes of comparing physical characteristics to floral imagery. This imagery, evocative of heraldry, contributes to Stella’s physical body being used for conquest. In envisioning her as a heraldic battle field, Stella is to be understand as not just a part of the natural world, but as a specific land used for conquest and expansion on political success, which would benefit Astrophil. In regards to the feminine
images that plague heraldic imagery, Nancy Vickers argues that the feminization of heraldry is "a battle between men that is figuratively fought out on fields of women's 'celebrated' body...Here celebratory conceit inscribes woman's body between rivals: she deflects blows, prevents direct hits, and constitutes the field upon which the battle may be fought."\(^\text{12}\) The fashioning of Stella as a field for battle is similar to the frontier metaphors used to describe Stella's body. The metaphor of Stella as creation continues within the sonnet sequence as a device for the poet-lover to express Stella through the poetic form of the blazon, such as the case of Sonnet 7 which calls attention to Nature's "chief work, Stella's eyes" (1). If Stella is also to an extent a creation of Astrophil within his poetry, Astrophil becomes a personification of Nature or a usurper of Nature's position. This usurpation corresponds with Astrophil's own portrayal as feminine. Stella is no longer considered as a whole being within this sonnet, but is defined as a dismembered person. This dismemberment brings attention to her objectification as a creation or artifact of Nature, rather than an individual, which allows Astrophil to gain a form of sovereignty over Stella through the poetic narrative. Nancy Vicker's posits that the dismemberment of the beloved within Petrarchan poetry sets up a tradition of fetishizing and obsessing over female

bodies within the blazon form: “the obsessive insistence on the particular, an insistence that would generate multiple texts on individual fragments on the body or on the beauties of women.”¹³ This fetishizing of the beloved is also present within the representation of Stella, which asserts Stella becoming an object of obsession rather than a whole entity. This parallels with Stella’s place within “Nature’s cabinet,” as Stella is being broken up into elements of the land.

The trope of the beloved as an element of the natural world expands within Sidney’s sonnet sequence, bringing in metaphors of natural commodities from foreign lands to describe Stella’s physical appearance. Similar to Stella’s association with the natural world, this theme emphasizes an influence of colonial exploration. In Sonnet 32, references to the beginning of English imperialism surface when Sidney compares Stella to treasures found in the Eastern trade routes:

Whence hast thou ivory, rubies, pearl and gold,

To show her skin, lips, teeth, and head so well?

"Fool," answers he, “no Indies such treasures hold” (10-12)

Here, Stella’s physical being is compared to “ivory, rubies, pearl and gold,” commodities coveted as a result of the colonization of a foreign land enriched by these natural resources. In comparing Stella to these exotic, precious earthly deposits the poet is also considering Stella an exotic commodity as well. If Stella’s physical being holds “such treasures,” she, in turn, is being likened to commodities of the “Indies.” The commodification of women is also present in New World treatises, such as Martyr’s, echo Columbus when describing the native people of the Caribbean as giving the Spaniards virgins as gifts, “signifyinge unto them that they might take them away if they pleased.”

Sidney brings his dashed hopes of New World exploration to the pages of Astrophil and Stella, paralleling his unrequited love for Stella with the conquering of foreign lands. In Sonnet 29, Stella emerges as a foreign land that is being conquered by a new lover:

So Stella’s heart finding what power Love brings,  
To keep itself in life and liberty,  
Doth willing grant, that in the frontiers he
Use all to help his other conquerings (5-8)

Stella, in an attempt to liberate herself internally, gives her physical being up for conquest. To establish Stella’s submissiveness towards the conqueror “Love” the narrative asserts that though Stella’s heart is free, her material self supplies “heralds,” “tents,” “food,” and “armour” (10-12). Here, the sonnet shifts to a blazon; rather than comparing Stella’s parts to traditional imagery that flatters the beloved, the poet-lover shows the dismemberment of Stella’s eyes, lips, breasts, and legs, turning each into products of conquest and war. The use of the word “frontier” to describe Stella’s position within the sonnet emphasizes Stella’s portrayal as not just a green space, but as land for settling. Stella is now stripped of resources physically, yet internally is not taken over. This is similar to the trope of the beloved as a fortress and the lover as a besieger, which is borrowed from Petrarch, as seen in Sonnet 12:

Cry, "Victory, this fair day all is ours."

O No, her heart is such a citadel,

So fortified with wit, stored with disdain

That to win it is all the skill and pain. (11-14)
In fashioning Stella as the “citadel,” Sidney is reinstating her as another object to be conquered. Though Stella’s heart is represented as something that is “fortified” and under protection, the sonnet also implies that it still can be conquered through “skill and pain.” This imagery, reflective of conquering motifs, causes Stella to be portrayed through a dual lens; on the one hand, Stella is shown as having the capability of protecting herself, but on the other, the fortress is still permeable, thus able to be besieged by the poet-lover. Moreover, through “skill and pain” Stella is rendered submissive to her conqueror and has her agency stripped along with her “wit” and “disdain.” Both sonnets paint Stella as a conquerable commodity, whether it be a foreign land or a war-torn citadel, yet in the sonnets she gains agency to protect herself from love’s conquering.

Astrophil’s position within the theme of conquest is not as the conqueror of these “frontiers” but as the citizen taken as a slave, implying that Astrophil’s position as submissive to female sovereign. In the conclusion of Sonnet 25, Astrophil himself is not fashioned as the conqueror of Stella, but a citizen whose “prospect lies / Upon that coast” (13-14). The word “prospect” can be traced back to Martyr’s exploration treatise Decades of Newe Worlde: “Within
the prospecte of the begynnynge of Cuba he founde a commodious hauen."14 This idea of "prospect" in colonial terms suggests the commoditization of lands for mercantile use. This distinction might parallel Sidney's own political life, in which his prospect lies within Elizabeth's Court. As Stella's last resource, Astrophil is uprooted from his position as the former usurper of the nation of Stella, and is "giv'n up for a slave" (14). Here, Astrophil takes the submissive role of the slave, whom Stella has the license to give up to procure her own freedom. Astrophil, as the native slave, loses sovereignty of his land to the foreign conqueror. In taking the submissive role rather than the role of the conqueror, Astrophil is rendered feminine, blurring the line between the agency of the beloved and the agency of the poet-lover. Astrophil often imagines himself as a slave within the sonnet cycle, such as in Sonnet 2, when Astrophil compares himself to a "slave-born muscovite" (10), yet his subjection is usually defined within the terms of traditional Petrarchan tropes, specifically the subject of the cruel mistress, one of the many facets perceived of the beloved. Though Astrophil perceives himself as a slave, he never loses his agency over the narrative. Moreover, in taking the role of the slave, the poet allows the reader of his narrative to perceive his despair through colonial language. In regards to Sidney's

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relationship with Elizabeth I, the slave imagery resembles anxieties regarding a lack of agency in Sidney’s political career.

Images of conquest and war are expanded on within the sonnet cycle, emphasizing a role reversal in terms of gender and agency. Within Sonnet 36, Stella is no longer fashioned as a land to be conquered, but gains agency in the form of a conqueror:

Stella, whence doth this new assault arise,

A conquered yelden, ransacked heart to win?

Whereto long since, through my long-battered eyes,

Whole armies of thy beauties entered in. (1-4)

Stella, now taking the role of the aggressor, is described as assaulting her lover, who claims to already be “conquered” and “ransacked.” This language regarding the conquered is similar to Raleigh’s treatise regarding Guiana, as it uses similar metaphors to describe Guiana’s own conquering. This shift between roles is unique in that Stella is now the conqueror, a role she was not granted previously in its entirety, but is hinted at in Astrophil’s use of the word tyrant in describing her. Here, Stella is fully engaged in the role of the tyrannical mistress, yet it is
Astrophil who still has agency through consciousness and voice, blurring his role as the submissive. The imagery of a masculine woman conqueror is evocative of Martyr’s own writings on the women of the New World, which were not just limited to the commodification of women but also the accounts of women described in classical terms as Amazonian, ruled by a female Monarch. This imagery of a single Queen ruler would have resonated with England, and certainly Sidney himself, who was constantly deterred by Elizabeth I in the political realm. The relation between conquering a female rule is similar to The First Three English Books on America. In Martyr’s description of the Island of Hispaniola, he conjures up images of womanhood and female rule, calling Hispaniola the “moother and ladye of the other Ilandes” that the women were “attendyge vppon her as their queene and patronelle.” This relationship between queenship and land would have resonated with Sidney and his familiarity with the rhetoric of Elizabeth I, who also spoke of her queenship in relation to the land of England.

Astrophil, no stranger to being the submissive part, fully takes the role of the conquered, and in doing so feminizes himself. Like Astrophil the slave, Astrophil the conquered is now rendered without agency, completely at the mercy of his tyrant beloved. This role reversal is

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similar to the trope of the tyrant mistress, yet is unique in that Astrophil fully embraces his role as the conquered party. The sonnet continues within this frame, and the poet-lover emphasizes his new role as conquered land: “My forces raz'd, thy banners rais'd within: / Of conquest, do not these effects suffice” (6-7). Sidney capitalizes on colonial language, using images of banner planting to emphasize his role as the oppressed land. This case of frontier imagery differs from Stella being a conquered land as Astrophil does not fight back or hide his heart like Stella does in Sonnet 25. Instead, Astrophil welcomes the conquering, and emphasizes that his “yelden, ransacked heart” is already won by Stella, regardless of her “assault.” The fact that this “assault” still occurs even after Astrophil has yielded to Stella emphasizes Astrophil’s vulnerability in his situation. He is submissive to Stella, and a willing subject to Elizabeth I, yet both women deny him access to themselves, which ultimately prevents his success.

In the reversal of gender throughout the narrative of *Astrophil and Stella*, Stella’s agency parallels the political authority Elizabeth had over her courtiers. Though the extremities used to grant Stella this agency are unique, Prendergast asserts “the dynamics of the work suggests that Sidney has a more self-interested reason for granting Stella the position of authority in the
work." What's more, Pendergast argues that Atrophil narrates most of the sonnet sequence, and solicits sympathy for his case, using the gender shift to his own ends rather than to express empathy for the opposite gender. In applying the notion of Astrophil's femininity being a self-gratifying theme to his representation as a slave or a conquered land for the sake of sympathy over his "great expectations" being short lived, Sidney's gender reversal usurps the feminine. Though the gesture may seem calculated and self-gratifying to elicit sympathy for his romantic endeavors, the representation of Astrophil as feminine is also political strategy. If Astrophil is a poetic model of Sir Philip Sidney, reflecting his "great expectations" lost within the courtly realm, Stella, as a representation of the sovereign Elizabeth I, is portrayed as masculine due to Elizabeth's own association with fashioning herself as a prince within her political rhetoric. Elizabeth's own usurpation of the masculine could cause Sidney to portray himself as feminine and submissive, a passive party to Elizabeth's conquering and deterring of any political hopes Sidney may have had. This trope is reflective of Sidney's own biographical life as a courtier to Elizabeth I. While serving Elizabeth, Sidney's aspirations for political glory were often deterred by the female monarch. Arthur F. Marotti asserts that the fashioning of Stella as a representation

of “a female monarch, whose unmarried state preserved her symbolic and real value in both
domestic and international transactions, specifically encouraged the use of an amorous
vocabulary by her courtiers to express ambition and its vicissitudes.” Moreover, unlike those
that were favorites to the queen, Sidney’s own ambitious political movements were constantly
deterred, paralleling the lost “prospects” of a “frontier” unconquered by Sidney. These dashed
hopes of political glory were translated into *Astrophil and Stella*, and parallel Sidney’s use of
conquering metaphors which compensate for this deterring.

With Elizabeth in mind as an inspiration for Stella, Stella’s masculinity and agency can
seem as a representation of Elizabeth’s authority over Sidney’s political career, mirrored in
Stella’s authority over Astrophil’s poetry. Through these lenses, Astrophil’s gendering does not
seem as much as a usurpation of gender for allotted sympathy, but a strategic metaphor for the
fear of emasculation by a female monarch, such as the anxieties expressed in Knox’s *First Blast
of the Trumpet*. Though that particular treatise was in response to the “monstrous rule” of Mary

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Tudor and Mary Queen of Scots, these male anxieties carried over into Elizabeth’s reign. With these anxieties in mind, Astrophil’s embracing of the feminine role emphasizes Sidney’s own acceptance of his inevitable failure at court. Corresponding with this qualm of emasculation through a female monarch is Sidney’s use of the conquering metaphor, which replaced the conqueror with Stella as if to shift away from the tyrannical mistress trope into a new metaphor about tyrannical rulers. Stella’s relentless “assault” on a completely passive Astrophil parallels Sidney’s political relationship with Elizabeth as an ambassador and courtier for the queen. Moreover, the sonnets presenting Stella as a conquered land also parallel Sidney’s failure to capitalize in his career, as “his prospect lies/ upon that coast” but never truly flourishes into more that dashed hopes.

Through images of Stella being fashioned as a conquered land and through contrasting images of a gender reversal between the beloved and lover that results in Astrophil being the conquered land, the ties between colonization and gender are enforced within the sonnet sequence. Though Sidney borrows from an ongoing trope that was long instilled in the Petrarchan tradition of fashioning the beloved as a part of nature or an exotic land to be “wrought,” he makes a unique turn in reversing the gender of his title persona, allowing Astrophil to not only take the feminized position, but also the position of the conquered and
submissive. Astrophil’s feminization of himself is rooted in Sidney’s own emasculation by his queen, as his masculinity had lost him his authority. Stella, a representation of not only Elizabeth I or Penelope Rich, but also a representation of Sidney’s lost great expectations and prospects, embodies Sidney’s lost authority and unattainable prospects. Even in his sonnet sequence, Sidney does not regain authority, but transitions poetic authority over to Stella. By shaping Astrophil’s femininity around his portrayal as a slave and as a conquered land, the sonnet cycle is an empathetic view of what it means to be conquered in regards to gender and agency. In defending this position as not a usurpation but a legitimate concern for Sidney’s own political aspirations, we are also defending the authority granted to Stella. Through this perception, Stella’s authority over Astrophil’s poetry mirrors the very real authority Elizabeth had over Sidney’s political career. Furthermore, Stella as a conquest or a land for conquering parallels with the struggle for Elizabethan courtiers to gain Elizabeth’s favor.

_Astrophil and Stella_ serves as a platform in which the boundaries between conqueror and the conquered are blurred, providing the audience of the sonnet cycle a unique perception of gender reversal, foreign exploration, and political commentary. Though Sir Philip Sidney’s own political career was built upon a multitude of hopes, expressed in his lamenting of “great expectations” and lost “prospects”, Sidney’s _Astrophil and Stella_ transposes these dashed hopes
into the Petrarchan relationship between the title characters. Both the lover Astrophil and the beloved Stella are portrayed as lands to be conquered, which shatters the ideologies of gendered tropes and sexualized perceptions in colonialism. Instead of embracing the already established gender roles of the poet-lover and beloved, Sidney breaks these boundaries by taking on the role of the feminine and supplying the role of the masculine to his beloved Stella.