Kent-Drury

ENG 202

Step by Step Guide to Analyzing Sidney’s Astrophil and Stella, “Sonnet 1”

Step 1. Read a few times just to get familiar with the poem.

Astrophil and Stella

Sir Philip Sidney

Sonnet 1

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 sunburnt brain.

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.”

Step 2. Read for literal meaning.

Astrophil and Stella

Sir Philip Sidney

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Step 3. Identify rhyme scheme.

Step 4. Mark the feet and caesuras.

Astrophil and Stella

Sir Philip Sidney

Sonnet 1

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
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| Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite, |  |
| “Fool,” said my Muse to me, “look in thy heart, and write.” |  |

Astrophil and Stella—Rhyme scheme, feet, and caesuras marked

Sir Philip Sidney

Sonnet 1

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Loving / in truth, // and fain / in verse / my love / to show, | a |  |
| That she / (dear she) / might take / some pleas / ure of / my pain, | b |  |
| Pleasure / might cause / her read, // reading /might make / her know; | a |  |
| Knowledge / might pi / ty win, // and pi / ty grace / obtain; | b |  |
| I sought / fit words / to paint / the black / est face / of woe, | a |  |
| Studying / invent / tions fine, // her wits / to en / tertain; | b | Studying=2syl |
| Oft turn / ing o / thers’ leaves, // to see / if thence / would flow | a |  |
| Some fresh / and fruit / ful showers /upon my sunburnt brain. | b | Showers =1syl |
| But words / came halt / ing forth, // wanting / Invent / ion’s stay; | a(c) |  |
| Invent / ion, Na / ture’s child, // fled step- // dame Stu // dy’s blows; | b(d) |  |
| And o / thers’ feet / still seemed / but strang / ers in / my way. | a(c) |  |
| Thus great / with child / to speak, // and help / less in / my throes, | b(d) |  |
| Biting / my tru / ant pen, // beating / myself / for spite, | c(e) |  |
| “Fool,” said / my Muse / to me, // “look in / thy heart, / and write.” | c(e) |  |

Step 4. Scan the meter. How does it contribute to meaning?

Hints: Having trouble? Consider the following:

1. Start with the 2nd line; the first often breaks the meter.
2. Sometimes syllables can be run together (this is called an *elision*). For instance, “showers” has two syllables, but often an ending “-er” is run together with the previous syllables (that is, pronounced “show’rs”).
3. Try starting with the *end* of the line (i.e. , the last *foot*, then work backwards in the line)

Astrophil and Stella

Sir Philip Sidney

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| Studying / invent / tions fine, // her wits / to en / tertain; | Studying=2syl |
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Astrophil and Stella – Meter scanned

Sir Philip Sidney

Sonnet 1

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| LOVing / in TRUTH, // and FAIN / in VERSE / my LOVE / to SHOW, |  |
| That SHE / (dear SHE) / might TAKE / some PLEAS / ure OF/ my PAIN, |  |
| PLEASure / might CAUSE / her READ, // READing /might MAKE / her KNOW; |  |
| KNOWledge / might PI / ty WIN, // and PI / ty GRACE / obTAIN; |  |
| I SOUGHT / fit WORDS / to PAINT / the BLACK / est FACE / of WOE, |  |
| STUDying / inVENT / tions FINE, // her WITS / to EN / terTAIN; | Studying=2syl |
| Oft TURN / ing O / thers’ LEAVES, // to SEE / if THENCE / would FLOW |  |
| Some FRESH / and FRUIT/ ful SHOWERS /upON / my SUN / burnt BRAIN. | Showers =1syl |
| But WORDS / came HALT / ing FORTH, // WANTing / InVENT / ion’s STAY; |  |
| InVENT / ion, NA / ture’s CHILD, // fled STEP- // dame STU // dy’s BLOWS; |  |
| And O / thers’ FEET / still SEEMED / but STRANG / ers IN / my WAY. |  |
| Thus GREAT / with CHILD / to SPEAK, // and HELP / less IN / my THROES, |  |
| BITing / my TRU / ant PEN, // BEATing / mySELF/ for SPITE, |  |
| “FOOL,” said / my MUSE / to ME, // “LOOK in / thy HEART, / and WRITE.” |  |

Astrophil and Stella

Sir Philip Sidney

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| Some FRESH / and FRUIT/ ful SHOWERS /upON / my SUN / burnt BRAIN. | b | Showers =1syl |
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| “FOOL,” said / my MUSE / to ME, // “LOOK in / thy HEART, / and WRITE.” | c(e) |  |

Astrophil and Stella

Sir Philip Sidney

Sonnet 73