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Source: *Modern Philology*, Vol. 108, No. 4 (May 2011), pp. 488-506

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/659832>

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# Revolution by Degrees: Philip Sidney and *Gradatio*

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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 childe to speake, and helplesse in my throwes,  
Biting my trewand pen, beating my selfe for spite,  
"Foole," said my Muse to me, "looke in thy heart and write."<sup>1</sup>

The opening poem of Philip Sidney's sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella* (1591) contains some of the most famous and memorable lines of his oeuvre, indeed of sixteenth-century verse generally: much quoted, much excerpted, and anthologized, responded to and alluded to and even parodied well into the next century.<sup>2</sup>

Much of the force of the poem seems to reside in its proleptic modeling of a scenario of readerly success. Astrophil says he hopes that "Pleasure might cause [Stella to] reade, reading might make her know, / Knowledge

I would like to thank the anonymous *Modern Philology* readers for their comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

1. Philip Sidney, "Loving in truth" (*Astrophil and Stella* 1), in *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. William A. Ringler Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 165. Quotations of Sidney's poetry are from this edition and are hereafter given in the text by page number. For Sidney's prose, I refer to *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)*, ed. Jean Robertson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), designated OA; *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The New Arcadia)*, ed. Victor Skretkovicz (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), designated NA; and *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. R. W. Maslen (Manchester University Press, 2002). Further references to these editions are given parenthetically.

2. William Ringler refers to the final line of the sonnet as "the most quoted and least understood line of all Sidney's poetry" (*Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, 13). The most famous response to *Astrophil and Stella* 1 is probably George Herbert's "Jordan (II)" (1633).

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might pitie winne, and pitie grace obtaine.” These lines support dual points of reference. On the one hand, they gesture toward the fate of Astrophil’s poetry within the narrative that the sequence aims to chart, of Astrophil’s love for Stella; as such, the lines are fundamentally ironic, since the relationship is, in the end, a failed one. On the other hand, they can be read as referring to the life of the sequence outside the narrative arc that it describes. In this sense we are presented with a potent marriage of the literary and the amatory in which an account of the poems’ affective power and productivity is developed through their construction of Stella as a reader. Astrophil’s fantasy of the persuasive capacity of his verse stands as a potential surrogate for a far wider range of encounters with the text than the text itself describes.

In *An Apology for Poetry* (1595), Sidney imagines himself into a similar position by way of voicing his reservations about contemporary lyric poems. “If I were a mistress,” he writes, “they would never persuade me they were in love” (113). So too in *Astrophil and Stella*, questions regarding the poem’s literary success are focused through the figure of the female reader. Here, however, the concomitant of this maneuver is the apparent rejection of the author as reader. The solutions to the compositional problems facing Astrophil, the “fit words” he searches for, are not, we are told, to be found within the pages of a book. It seems obvious that the disavowal of authorial reading in the opening poem of *Astrophil and Stella* is, on some level at least, thoroughly—wittily—disingenuous.<sup>3</sup> For all its brilliance of invention, Sidney’s sonnet sequence is nothing if not the product of the intensive study of “others’ leaves.” The metrical “feete” of others are anything but “strangers” to this writer.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary: Sidney’s refashioning of English verse earned him the reputation of being the “English Petrarch.”<sup>5</sup> That is, the significance of the poetic revolution he initiated was always positioned in relation to anterior, exotic models of composition, which Sidney was understood to have domesticated (at whatever estranging cost to his own identity—notably, it is Astrophil himself who may figure in this poem as the black, “sunne-burn’d” racial outsider).

3. See, e.g., Germaine Warkentin’s “Sidney and the Supple Muse: Compositional Procedures in Some Sonnets of *Astrophil and Stella*,” in *Sir Philip Sidney: An Anthology of Modern Criticism*, ed. Dennis Kay (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 171–84, which points out that the poem is a variation on a commonplace theme, also to be found in (for example) the twentieth sonnet of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* (1374).

4. For a dazzling reading of “feete” in relation to the poem’s metrics, see Catherine Bates, *Masculinity, Gender and Identity in the English Renaissance Lyric* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 56–60.

5. On Sidney as “Our English *Petrarche*,” see the entry on Sir John Harington in *Sidney: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Martin Garrett (London: Routledge, 1996), 117. On the validity of this description, see Roger Kuin, *Chamber Music: Elizabethan Sonnet-Sequences and the Pleasure of Criticism* (University of Toronto Press, 1998), 161–62.

Modern accounts of the poem tend to revolve around its closing line, in which Astrophil's muse famously tells him, "Looke in thy heart and write." I mean to explore the question of *Astrophil and Stella* 1's theorization of the origins of the work of art from a slightly different perspective, one provided by the poem's account of the work it hopes to perform. This is the wish expressed in Sidney's opening quatrain and quoted above, that "Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know, / Knowledge might pitie winne, and pitie grace obtaine." In these lines, with their distinctive chainlike grammatical construction, Sidney is not only making use of one of his favorite literary mannerisms; he is also deploying a figure embedded in a complex tradition of use and reception that makes it a particularly apt rhetorical device with which to engage—or avoid—questions of literary authority and innovation. In what follows I want to develop the method of close attention to particular rhetorical figures as practiced in Renaissance rhetorical handbooks and extended by modern studies such as the volume *Renaissance Figures of Speech*.<sup>6</sup> My aim is to discuss Sidney's uses of *gradatio*, and the history that frames that device, in order to argue that Sidney's poem shows its deepest and most inward understanding of this tradition when it converts it into the vehicle for its own displacement, directing our attention away from the question of others' contributions to Sidney's own inventiveness and toward a desired process of readerly seduction.

The second and third lines of *Astrophil and Stella* 1 present a characteristically Sidnean combination of two rhetorical figures: *anadiplosis* on the one hand, and *climax* or *gradatio* on the other. *Anadiplosis* is the repetition of the last word or phrase of a line or clause or sentence at the beginning of the next. Taken alone, the figure may be relatively unobtrusive, particularly in texts as ornate as some of Sidney's are. When in the *New Arcadia* (1593) Pyrocles exclaims, "Why lived I, alas? Alas why loved I?" (NA, 432), we may, in context, scarcely notice the repetition. But *anadiplosis* was important to Sidney. In the *Apology for Poetry*, he praises Cicero's use of it: "Tully when he was to drive out Catiline, as it were with a thunderbolt of eloquence, often used that figure of repetition, *Vivit. Vivit? Imo vero etiam in senatum venit, & c.* Indeed, inflamed with a well-grounded rage, he would have his words (as it were) double out of his mouth, and so do that artificially which we see men do in cholera naturally" (114). However, Sidney's most idiosyncratic

6. Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, and Katrin Ettenhuber, eds., *Renaissance Figures of Speech* (Cambridge University Press, 2007). *Gradatio* is discussed on pages 9–10. See also Gavin Alexander's *Writing after Sidney: The Literary Response to Sir Philip Sidney, 1586–1640* (Oxford University Press, 2006) for further examples of this method. Sidney's use of the figure of *gradatio* has previously been discussed by B. J. Sokol ("Figures of Repetition in Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* and in the Scenic Form of *Measure For Measure*," *Rhetorica* 9 [1991]: 131–46). I have drawn on Sokol's discussion in what follows, although our essays are directed to rather different ends. For a general discussion, see Lane Cooper, "The Climax," *Sewanee Review* 32 (1924): 32–43.

and forceful uses of the trope come in combination with that of *gradatio*: the arrangement of words or phrases in order of increasing importance, whether from least to greatest or in order of time.

In principle, the two figures are entirely independent—obviously so in the case of anadiplosis, but also with *gradatio* (as for instance in “veni, vidi, vici”). However, early modern rhetoric manuals often couple the two together or define the second in such a way that it involves the first. Thomas Wilson’s instances of “Gradacion” all in fact involve the knitting of clauses characteristic of anadiplosis. His first reads: “Labour getteth learnyng, learnyng getteth fame, fame getteth honour, honour getteth blesse for euer.”<sup>7</sup> The same is true of George Puttenham’s discussion of “*Clymaxe*, or the Marching Figure.” Puttenham quotes from “one of our Epitaphes shewing how a very meane man by his wisdome and good fortune came to great estate and dignitie”: “His vertue made made him wise, his wisdome brought him wealth, / His wealth wan many friends.”<sup>8</sup> Abraham Fraunce’s *Arcadian Rhetorike* (1588), meanwhile, discusses the figures one directly after the other, opening with the observation that “that which is in diuers sentences is either *Anadiplosis*, or climax.” “*Anadiplosis*, redoubling, or reduplication is when the same sound is repeated at the ende of the sentence goinge before, and in the beginning of the sentence following after.” “*Climax*, gradation, is a reduplication by diuers degrees and steps, as it were, of the same word or sound.”<sup>9</sup> Both are forms of “reduplication,” distinguished by the greater sense of progression in uses of climax, which is defined as much through its use of verbal repetition as by its delineation of sequence. It features, that is, almost as a subcategory of anadiplosis. Linked together, these two figures pinpoint the distinctive concatenating grammatical construction we find in the opening sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella*, describing a process that leads from pleasure to reading, from reading to knowledge, from knowledge to pity, and from pity to grace. We might note that it seems appropriate that a figure that presents a way of folding clauses and sentences into one another should operate most efficiently when it is itself combined with another trope.<sup>10</sup> And we might also note the way in which both Wilson and Puttenham use their account of the figures as an opportunity to embed in their

7. Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique* (London, 1553), Ee1r.

8. George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London, 1589), Aa1r.

9. Abraham Fraunce, *The Arcadian Rhetorike* (London, 1588), C6v–C8v.

10. John Hoskins pursues this self-referentiality even more explicitly. He discusses the two figures of repetition in a sequence and adds a third term to them: *sonites*, by which he means a linked and escalating sequence of logical reasoning. From anadiplosis to climax, and from climax to *sonites*, each containing the last while at the same time superseding it: this is itself an escalating series of the sort Sidney might have enjoyed describing. See John Hoskins, *Directions for Speech and Style*, ed. Hoyt H. Hudson (Princeton University Press, 1935), 12–13. Hoskins’s examples are all from the *Arcadia*.

texts miniature narratives about the genesis of prosperity and the value of learning. Fraunce does something similar, and we will return to *The Arcadian Rhetorike* later in this discussion when we explore some of the potential counternarratives implicit in this tradition. For the moment, though, we can simply observe that *gradatio* was one of Sidney's favorite and most characteristic rhetorical figures.<sup>11</sup>

The *New Arcadia* opens with the two distraught shepherds Strephon and Claius discussing their love for the absent Urania. "Let us," Claius exhorts Strephon, "think with consideration, and consider with acknowledging, and acknowledge with admiration, and admire with love, and love with joy in the midst of all woes" (*NA*, 4). Sidney's use of the figure describes the process whereby Claius is drawn from heartbreak to a bittersweet, even joyful, and certainly more thoughtful psychological state. Once he begins to think, he necessarily considers; having considered, he must then acknowledge the fruits of his reflection to be the case, whereupon he can only admire that this is so—and so love infuses his misery with a sense of wonder that is also rational. Further examples abound in Sidney's text, applied to the widest possible range of circumstances. Basilius's counselor Philanax is a particular devotee. In the concluding trial scene, he attacks Pyrocles: "This man . . . from a man grew a woman, from a woman a ravisher of women, thence a prisoner" (*OA*, 387). Then he attempts to implicate Pyrocles and Musidorus in his prosecution of Gynecia: "Had she . . . no practice to lead her unto it? Or had she a practice without conspiracy? Or could she conspire without somebody to conspire with?" (*OA*, 389).

In his *Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke comments on the sense of inevitability that *gradatio* often produces, and this is one of the principal effects of Sidney's use of the trope.<sup>12</sup> In the *New Arcadia*, Plangus lays eyes on his prisoner Erona for the first time: "Seeing, to like; and liking, to love;

11. Since for Fraunce, as for his fellow rhetoricians, using *gradatio* or *climax* usually involves *anadiplosis* as well, I will henceforth confine myself to just using the last term. I have favored *gradatio* over *climax*, slightly against the preference of sixteenth-century writers, because it is the name for this figure of development and progression that best gestures toward its own future history in artistic practice. *Gradus* was to become the standard term for an instruction manual in the arts: a *Gradus ad Parnassum* was a Latin or Greek dictionary with quantities marked as an aid to verse composition, and the term was also used in musical instruction.

12. "I recall," Burke writes, "a *gradatio* of political import, much in the news during the 'Berlin crisis' of 1948": "'Who controls Berlin, controls Germany; who controls Germany controls Europe; who controls Europe controls the world.' As a proposition, it may or may not be true. And even if it is true, unless people are thoroughly imperialistic, they may not want to control the world. But regardless of these doubts about it as a proposition, by the time you arrive at the second of its three stages, you feel how it is destined to develop—and on the level of purely formal assent you would collaborate to round out its symmetry by spontaneously willing its completion and perfection as an utterance" (Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* [New York: Prentice-Hall, 1950], 58–59).

and loving, straight to feel the most incident effects of love: to serve and preserve” (NA, 301). And that is that: the jailer becomes the would-be rescuer. The unfortunate Dido explains how Pamphilius has mistreated her, not just breaking off their relationship but also publicly declaring that he found her unattractive. “Was it was not enough for him,” she asks, “to have deceived me, and through the deceit abused me, and after the abuse forsaken me, but that he must now, of all the company, and before all the company, lay want of beauty to my charge?” (NA, 240). Dido answers her own question; in fact, her use of the rhetorical figures musters a sense of inevitability sufficient to make the question appear rhetorical. The abuse materialized through the deceit, and the forsaking seems to follow with similar consequence. So did Pamphilius really have to inflict that final twist of the knife? In a sense, yes. At any rate, the insult emerges perfectly smoothly from his previous derelictions of duty; each contains the next, as with the sections of a folding telescope. Sidney’s use of these figures delineates a sequence of cause and effect: knowledge leads to pity leads to grace; if we consider we must acknowledge, and then we must admire; to deceive is to abuse is eventually to forsake. *Gradatio* is the figure that deals with the “causeful” nature of things. (The word comes from a sestina offered in mourning of the [apparently] dead Basilius, which opens, “Since wailing is a bud of causeful sorrow, / Since sorrow is the follower of ill fortune” [OA, 284].) It deals with processes, and it deals with them in a double way. On the one hand, it divides them into a series of perceptibly separate steps, arranged into distinct clauses. On the other, it articulates the connection between them so powerfully that one sometimes has the sense that they exist simultaneously, because each is continually implicit both in its predecessors and in its successors. The end of the process already exists *in potentia*, contained in its beginning; or, conversely, the beginning is to be understood as the mere prospective echo of its achieved end.

As Patricia Parker notes, *gradatio* is also a figure rich in political potential. Here she is making particular reference to a passage from the *New Arcadia* about the nature of government, singled out by John Hoskins in his *Directions for Speech and Style* (ca. 1599) as an instance of the successful use of climax and anadiplosis that also offers the potential for a *sortes*, a logical argument, about the foundations of an orderly state. The passage Hoskins quotes reads: “There could be no government without a magistrate, and no magistrate without obedience, and no obedience where every one upon his own private passion, may interpret the doings of the rulers” (NA, 286). Parker comments: “*Gradatio* or *concatenatio*—the ‘stepping’ figure whose names already link it both to a ‘ladder’ and to a ‘chain’—is the rhetorical trope of ‘climbing’ illustrated by a political progression of ‘degrees.’ . . . Passages like this last, in which rhetorical gradation also becomes, with the simple addition of an ‘ergo,’ a form of logical progression, demon-

strate how easily a figure adapted to rhetorical sequence and marshalling could become part of a series of things which ‘follow’ from one another in a ‘chain,’ including the ‘chain’ of government, or of being.”<sup>13</sup> Parker views the figure as potentially cognate with sixteenth-century justifications for political authority, hierarchy, and degree of the sort that interested E. M. W. Tillyard, and the connection seems logical enough. Yet it would be overly schematic to suggest that the figure must always develop in the direction of outlining some sort of great chain, particularly in the hands of a writer as politically sophisticated as Sidney.<sup>14</sup> Consider the second sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella*, which constitutes a submerged linguistic-etymological pun on the words *climax* (Greek “ladder”) and *gradatio* (Latin “the making of a series of steps”).<sup>15</sup>

Not at first sight, nor with a dribbed shot,  
*Love* gave the wound, which while I breathe will bleed:  
 But knowne worth did in mine of time proceed,  
 Till by degrees it had full conquest got.  
 I saw and liked, I liked but loved not,  
 I loved, but straight did not what *Love* decreed:  
 At length to *Love*'s decrees, I forc'd, agreed,  
 Yet with repining at so partiall lot.  
 Now even that footstep of lost libertie  
 Is gone, and now like slave-borne *Muscovite*,  
 I call it praise to suffer Tyrannie;  
 And now employ the remnant of my wit,  
 To make my selfe believe, that all is well,  
 While with a feeling skill I paint my hell.

(165–66)

Astrophil looks back at the “footstep[s]” by which he was led into bondage and the “degrees” (from *gradus*) by which he was subjected to love’s “decrees.” What we have here, then, is the superimposition of different lan-

13. Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen, 1987), 99. Hoskins’s example also features in David Norbrook’s “Rhetoric, Ideology and the Elizabethan World Picture,” in *Renaissance Rhetoric*, ed. Peter Mack (Houndmills: St. Martin’s, 1994), 157.

14. Even Ulysses’ classic speech on degree in *Troilus and Cressida* actually deploys *gradatio* to describe the effects of “discord,” not the ascent to order: “Then everything includes itself in power, / Power into will, will into appetite, / And appetite, an universal wolf . . . Must make performe an universal prey” (William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Kenneth Palmer [London: Methuen, 1982], 1.3.119–23).

15. Compare *As You Like It*: “For your brother and my sister no sooner met, but they looked; no sooner looked, but they loved; no sooner loved, but they sighed; no sooner sighed, but they asked one another the reason; no sooner knew the reason, but they sought the remedy. And in these degrees they have made a pair of stairs to marriage” (William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Agnes Latham [London: Methuen, 1975], 5.2.31–37).



guages and frames of reference: romantic, courtly, and political. To “call it praise to suffer Tyrannie” is at once the fate of the adoring lover, of the aspiring courtier, and of the political subject deprived of liberty. Astrophil has been incrementally reduced to the state of the “Muscovite” who loves his own subjection but who was born to it, as Astrophil was not. We get a rueful and semiresigned investigation of the psychology of living under “Tyrannie” and the dual consciousness it imposes: a sort of sixteenth-century Doublethink. Astrophil devotes half of what remains of his wit to making his servitude comfortable for himself (“to make my selfe believe, that all is well”), and half of it to opening out the space of self-knowledge within which he can recognize that what he is suffering is indeed a sort of hell. The poem therefore bears the conceptual impress of a neo-Roman political discourse that organizes itself around a fundamental structural opposition between freedom and servitude.<sup>16</sup> Yet it does not develop this interest in a theoretical fashion, decisively for or against any one term in the sixteenth-century political thinker’s grammar of available governmental options, be that monarchy, republic, mixed constitution, or any other kind of state.<sup>17</sup> Instead, the sonnet focuses its attention elsewhere, on the transitions between the fixed points of liberty and slavery. From seeing to liking, and from liking to loving, the poem charts the process by which Astrophil came to celebrate “Tyrannie.” The outcome is a loss of freedom, but was the chain of cause and effect that produced that result itself coercive? We get a peculiar sense of mingled contingency and determinism. The distance between the stages—between seeing and liking, for example—seems individually so small that we might feel that at any point Astrophil might have “stepped” in a quite different direction; into distaste or indifference, for instance. And yet at the same time the end result seems somehow inevitable, or “forc’d.” We are given, at any rate, a lesson in the incremental nature of the political process: the ruin of Astrophil’s liberty is a revolution accomplished by degrees.<sup>18</sup>

16. See Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). Since a certain amount of sixteenth-century political thought existed in a relatively inchoate form, inhering as much in systems of continually circulated topoi and vocabularies as it did in carefully articulated theories of government, Sidney’s deployment of the language of tyranny is therefore not quite as trivial or nonspecific as it might seem.

17. See, e.g., the discussion of forms of government in the opening book of Sir Thomas Smith’s *De republica Anglorum*, ed. Mary Dewar (Cambridge University Press, 1982).

18. Compare Fulke Greville’s account of Sidney’s intentions in writing the *Arcadia*. These were, “on the Monarch’s part, lively to represent the growth, state and declination of Princes, change of Government, and lawes; vicissitudes of sedition, faction, succession, confederacies, plantations, with all other errors, or alterations in publique affairs” (Fulke Greville, *The Life of the Renowned S[i]r Philip Sidney* [London, 1652], C1v). Again, the emphasis is on change and instability. The *Arcadia* seems to point less toward a catalog of fixed types of polity than to an analysis of the processes of self-estrangement by which one type of constitution risks becoming something other than itself.

Looking at Sidney's use of *gradatio* serves to focus our attention on a distinctive facet of his imagination. The ultimate model for his more upwardly mobile uses of the trope may be Plato's *Symposium*, with its description of the lover, "ever climbing aloft, as on the rungs of a ladder, from one to two, and from two to all beautiful bodies; from personal beauty he proceeds to beautiful observances, from observance to beautiful learning, and from learning at last to that particular study which is concerned with the beautiful and that alone."<sup>19</sup> At the same time, though, the destination of these movements is more often than not a "hell" of abjection and despair. But it is the general interest in process and mutability that is as significant as anything else. Attention to Sidney's interest in *gradatio* presents an important corrective to John Carey's account of how the *Arcadia's* rhetoric—particularly its use of figures like *antimetabole*—plays into the representation of individuals torn between irreconcilable extremes.<sup>20</sup> Carey convincingly shows how Sidney's imagination is drawn toward representations of psychological and situational deadlock. But his broader implication is that the text is therefore somehow both agitated and yet fundamentally static. The characteristics Carey describes certainly exist. *Gradatio*, however, points in a rather different direction, toward Sidney's interest in a world of temporality and incessant change. Indeed, there is a sense in which Sidney's entire literary practice is grounded in the interest in dynamism, in processes of modification, to which *gradatio* seems so well adapted.

As we have seen, some of the most striking of Sidney's uses of this figure are those applied to mental and emotional states. The effect gets to the heart of Sidnean psychology as expressed in the *Apology for Poetry*, the poetics of which are underpinned by the belief that individuals can be pointed in one direction or another via a series of intermediate emotional states. If the *Apology* has a crucial verb, it may be "to draw": we are told that the "final end" of poetry is "to lead and draw us to as high a perfection, as our degenerate souls . . . can be capable of" (88); poetry "doth draw the mind more effectually than any other art doth" (96); the likes of Orpheus had the power "to draw with their charming sweetness the wild untamed wits to an admiration of knowledge" (82); the enemies of poetry allege that it acts "with a siren's sweetness drawing the mind to the serpent's tale of sinful fancy" (102); and so on. Just as Urania draws Strephon and Claius toward higher contemplation, so poetry can draw erring humans to the exercise of moral virtue—not directly, but through its vivid representations of those

19. Plato, *Symposium* 211c, in *Lysis; Symposium; Gorgias*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

20. John Carey, "Structure and Rhetoric in Sidney's *Arcadia*," in Kay, *Sir Philip Sidney*, 245–64.

virtues in action. (It seems telling that Sidney's imagined detractors of poetry are basically deploying the same theory, but in reverse.)

*Gradatio*, then, is the literary trope with which Philip Sidney addresses questions of mediation, of process, and of change, whether these exist in the psychological or the public sphere. But Sidney would also have encountered *gradatio* framed in ways that encouraged him to view it as a literary device capable of registering process and change in the literary field itself—that is, as encoding the kind of complex cultural self-consciousness that *Astrophil and Stella* 1 both gestures toward and denies. Consider a passage that a humanistically trained sixteenth-century writer like Sidney would certainly have been familiar with, from the ninth book of the Roman rhetorician Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* (ca. 95 CE), a discussion that needs to be quoted in full:

*Climax:*

Gradation, called in Greek climax, has a more obvious and conscious art about it, and accordingly should be used less often. It too is a figure of Addition [like *asyndeton* and *polysyndeton*], since it repeats what has already been said, and pauses on each earlier step before it proceeds to the next. Let me translate a very famous Greek original: "I did not say this, and then not make a proposal; I did not make a proposal, and then not undertake the embassy; I did not undertake the embassy, and then not persuade the Thebans." There are traditional Latin instances as well: "Africanus' energy gave him his excellence, his excellence gave him his glory, his glory gave him his rivals." So Calvus: "So this no more means the end of extortion trials than it does of treason trials, nor of treason trials than of trials under the Lex Plautia, nor of the trials under the Lex Plautia than of trials for electoral bribery, nor of trials for electoral bribery than of trials under any of our laws." It is to be found in the poets too, as in Homer's passage about the sceptre, which he traces from Jupiter down to Agamemnon, and in our own tragic poet:

From Jove, or so they say, came Tantalus,  
from Tantalus sprang Pelops, and from Pelops  
Atreus, who fathered all our family.<sup>21</sup>

Although it may not be immediately obvious, this is a highly self-conscious and self-reflexive passage; it is much more than just the mere enumeration of examples of a rhetorical trope, although its hidden complexity has entirely to do with the resonance of the examples. The verses from Homer that Quintilian so casually alludes to come in book 2 of the *Iliad*

21. Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 4:131–33, hereafter cited parenthetically. I have removed some editorial markings from the quotation.

and are a description of Agamemnon's scepter, the visible emblem of his authority. In George Chapman's translation:

In his hand, he did the Sceptre beare  
That *Vulcan* curiously made, and gaue to *Iupiter*:  
*Ioue* gave it to his messenger, that slew *Saturnias* spies  
And he to *Pelops* rendred it, renounde for cheualrie;  
*Pelops*, to great king *Atreus*; And that king at his death  
Gaued it to *Thyestes*, rich in heards: *Thyestes* did bequeath  
The high successiue use thereof, to *Agamemmons* hands,  
To rule great *Argos*, and the powers of many sea-sieg'de lands.<sup>22</sup>

The Latin quotation "from our own tragic poet" that immediately follows the allusion to Homer traces exactly the same line of descent, from Jove to Tantalus, from Tantalus to Pelops, and from Pelops to Atreus. So if we know the *Iliad* well enough to be able to identify the passage about the scepter, our sense of the discussion might be transformed by our awareness of the covert parallel. The Latin lines are from a lost play, possibly by Naevius, on the theme of Iphigenia and are based on the opening of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*.<sup>23</sup> Quintilian's deployment of them makes Homer the most significant literary context. The effect is to superimpose the themes of genealogy, authority, and literary relations in establishing a grid of tacit analogies. Implicitly, Atreus stands to Pelops as "our own tragic poet" might stand in relation to Homer—and as the Latin language might to the Greek. It is surely no coincidence that the *Institutio oratoria* is fascinated throughout by the relationship between the Greek and Latin cultural achievements. Right at the outset, Quintilian declares, "I prefer a boy to begin by speaking Greek, because he will imbibe Latin, which more people speak, whether he will or no; and also because he will need to be taught Greek learning first, it being the source of ours too" (1:71). And in book 12, we have an extended and openly rivalrous comparison between the two languages: "The less help we get from the [Latin as opposed to Greek] language, the more we have to fight our battles with Invention. Let us unearth lofty and varied thoughts; we shall need to stir every emotion, and illuminate our style by the brilliance of our Metaphors. They beat us at subtlety; let us prevail by weight. They have a surer means of being precise; let us outdo them in fullness" (5:301).

Quintilian's text is pervaded throughout by the force of this comparison, even when it remains unspoken. Hence his emphasis on "us," on "our" lan-

22. George Chapman, *Homer Prince of Poets* (London, 1609), D2v. Compare Homer, *Iliad*, *Books 1–12*, trans. A. T. Murray, rev. William F. Wyatt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 2:100–108.

23. E. H. Warmington, ed., *Remains of Old Latin*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979–88), 2:608.

guage, and “our poet” in the extracts we have looked at; hence also the way he foregrounds the process of mediating between two cultures in the first quotation: *transferatur*, he writes—“Let me translate.” In context, then, the juxtaposition of Homer with the Roman play of Iphigenia elicits the question, Can the Latin language be the legitimate inheritor of the Greek literary achievement? The “very famous” extract, from Demosthenes’ oration “On the Crown,” also resonates with this theme, not just because it consists of translated words from the keynote speech of the most famous of Greek orators, reframed within the context of a manual of Latin eloquence, but also perhaps because—if we again fill in the contextual detail that Quintilian omits—it is a product of the moment of the eclipse of Athenian power by that of Macedon, the moment after which Athens could be a center only of cultural, not political, power. Rome, we infer, has the option of both, if only her literati can successfully follow the advice outlined in the *Institutio oratoria*.

Of Quintilian’s other quotations, his third, from Calvus, may be relatively innocuous (although the Lex Plautia it refers to instituted changes in jury selection in 89 BCE that were to the disadvantage of the *equites*, so that even here we see the outline of a subtextual narrative of dispossession).<sup>24</sup> By referencing Scipio Africanus, however, his second quotation clearly alludes to Rome’s ascent to Mediterranean dominance at the expense of her national rivals. And although it is identified only as a “traditional Latin instance,” Quintilian’s source for the quotation is the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, which uses it to illustrate the figure of *gradatio*. And in the context evoked by Quintilian’s play of allusions, the example that immediately follows this in the *Rhetorica* may seem particularly striking: “The empire of Greece belonged to the Athenians; the Athenians were overpowered by the Spartans; the Spartans were overcome by the Thebans; the Thebans were conquered by the Macedonians; and in Macedonians in short time subdued Asia in war and joined her to the empire of Greece.”<sup>25</sup> Slyer and more covert than this, Quintilian’s discussion of *gradatio* nevertheless also implicitly views the progress of civilization as the product of a chain of appropriations or conquests, each one of which, rather than simply obliterating its predecessor, instead contains it, reframed and transformed within a new context of literary-cultural authority.

*Gradatio*, lending itself so readily to the representation of the blending together of successive states, each one containing or contained by its predecessor as if in a series of nested boxes, seems the perfect vehicle for Quintil-

24. See Russell’s note in Quintilian, *Orator’s Education*.

25. *Ad C. Herennium de ratione dicendi*, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 315–17. This example is the very first used to illustrate the uses of climax in Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (London, 1577), Q3r.

ian's vision of literary inheritances and relationships. The trope tends to make the process appear smooth, calm, and fundamentally benign, although it must be clear that this was only rarely the case. Indeed, Quintilian's quotations tacitly confess as much. The genealogical transfer of authority outlined in Homer and the Latin play of Iphigenia, while it may appear placid and unruffled in the local context of the *Institutio oratoria*, in reality describes a notably unhappy lineage of which one might say that the defining image for how the generations relate to each other is one of cannibalism. Quintilian may invert the normal Atrean paradigm by presenting us with the spectacle of children analogically eating their parents. Nonetheless, the invocation of the figures of Pelops and Thyestes literalizes the traditional idea of rhetorical "digestion" in a most disturbing and extreme manner.<sup>26</sup>

As presented by Quintilian, then, *gradatio* seems the natural figure with which to discuss the *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii*, the translation of political and cultural power and legitimacy from one civilization to another.<sup>27</sup> What, after all, is this theme if not a *gradatio* that holds out the promise of the past realized in the present by inviting us to complete the sequence it outlines with our own names? *Gradatio* also points in two quite separate directions. On the one hand, it looks toward the orderly progression of discrete civilizational units and historical periods, whether that be from the Athenian to the Spartan and from the Spartan to the Theban and from the Theban to the Macedonian; or from the Greek to the Roman; or even from the classical to the Renaissance. Each presented as distinct and separate. At the same time, though, each can come into being only by consuming and containing its predecessor. In this tradition the delineation of a cultural heritage, however respectfully phrased, is therefore shot through with intimations of submerged hostility, aggression, and violence. Successfully translating the cultural products of the past into the present necessarily entails disavowing the humiliating dependence—the necessity of a predecessor—that underpins one's own purported authority. And precisely because *gradatio* speaks to the desire for self-transformation, the aspirational

26. On imitation as digestion, see, e.g., Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 35–77. For a modern account of the poetics of literary influence as family romance, see Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 1973).

27. On the topos of *translatio*, see Édouard Jeauneau, *Translatio Studii: The Transmission of Learning; A Gilsonian Theme* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1995); and Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton University Press, 1990), 27–30. As Curtius points out, the theme has its biblical as well as its classical resonances. He cites Ecclesiasticus 10:8: "Because of unrighteous dealings, injuries, and riches got by deceit, the kingdom is translated from one people to another" (28).

trajectory that it charts is also always shadowed by a counternarrative of threatened self-estrangement.<sup>28</sup>

It is a tradition that is itself translated into the cultural environment that produced Philip Sidney. One of the richest of all the sixteenth-century rhetoricians' discussions of the trope, and one that closely echoes Quintilian's presentation, is to be found in Abraham Fraunce's *Arcadian Rhetorike*.<sup>29</sup> Like Quintilian, Fraunce illustrates the figure through a variety of quotations, and Fraunce's quotations begin with the same passage alluded to in the *Institutio*, namely, *Iliad* 2.102–4, on the provenance of Agamemnon's scepter. Fraunce follows up these with an extract from Virgil's second *Eclogue*, in which Corydon bewails his unrequited love for Alexis: "The grim lioness follows the wolf, the wolf himself the goat, the wanton goat the flowering clover." Thus, the speaker adds, in the line immediately following Fraunce's excerpt, "Corydon follows you, Alexis."<sup>30</sup> This is a text that has fascinated both Renaissance readers and modern criticism in its depiction of homoerotic desire.<sup>31</sup> But we should also note that the contextual envelope that packages its striking vision of predation remodeled as helpless pursuit is, once again, one of artistic inheritance. Earlier in the poem, Corydon promises the absent Alexis that "with me in the woods you shall rival Pan in song" (31), reminding himself that he is in possession of a pipe "formed of seven uneven hemlock stems, a gift that Damoetas once gave me and said, as he lay a-dying: 'Now it claims you as its second master'" (36–38). The "master" is, irresistibly, "claimed" by his art.<sup>32</sup> The text seems implicitly to triangulate the three forms of compulsive, abject "following": that of being mastered by an artistic tradition; the predator's pursuit of

28. Compare Tertullian's comments on the toga, addressed to the Carthaginians around 200 CE: "What a circuitous distance it has travelled," he comments, "from Pelasgians to Lydians, from Lydians to Romans, so that the people of Carthage take their covering from more exalted shoulders!" (*De pallio*, quoted in Ahuvia Kahane and Andrew Laird, eds., *A Companion to the Prologue of Apuleius' "Metamorphoses"* [Oxford University Press, 2001], 52–53). This is a satirical parody of more celebratory uses of the figure, substituting the "circuitous" for the direct and nicely bringing out the humiliating subtext that they strive to contain: the Carthaginians are proudly sporting the sign of their own failure.

29. See Fraunce, *Arcadian Rhetorike*, C6v–C8v. Ethel Seaton's edition of Fraunce's *Arcadian Rhetorike* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1950) gives a table of the classical references discussed here.

30. Virgil, *Eclogue* 2.63–64, in *Eclogues; Georgics; Aeneid*, trans. H. Ruston Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000–2001), hereafter cited parenthetically by line number.

31. See, e.g., Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 79–115.

32. This magnificently sinister formulation may owe at least something to the translator's ingenuity. In the Latin, Damoetas's phrase is "te nunc habet ista secundum." Fraunce's own version, from his translation of this poem was "One vsed it onely beefore thee" (Abraham Fraunce, *The Lawiers Logicke* [London, 1588], Kk3r).

its prey; and rustic Corydon's desire for the urbane Alexis. Woven into Fraunce's tapestry of quotations, the first of these senses moves toward the foreground.

Fraunce therefore locates Sidney—three of whose uses of *gradatio* follow, beginning with *Astrophil and Stella* 1—as the significant heir of the great poets of classical antiquity. Sidney is shown to use the same linguistic trope as his literary forbears do, while the trope itself offers tacit instructions for reading Sidney's verse in relation to theirs. Sidney's "footstep[s]" follow in their footsteps, just as the lioness follows the wolf, or Corydon pursues Alexis; he is in possession of a provenance, a noble descent, just as much as Agamemnon's scepter and Corydon's pipe. And *Astrophil and Stella* 1 establishes exactly the same connection between poetry and sexual desire that we seem to find in Virgil's second *Eclogue*, so again the extracts are selected in such a way as to bind them into a mutually reinforcing network of affinity and similitude. Notably, Fraunce quotes only from Sidney's verse in this section. As we have seen, Sidney certainly uses *gradatio* in his prose, and Fraunce cites the prose sections of the *Arcadia* elsewhere. But here the discussion seems to want to locate Sidney within a specifically poetic tradition of artistic production.<sup>33</sup>

Fraunce then provides quotations from Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581) and *Aminta* (1573) and Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas's *La sepmaine* (1585) and *La Judit* (1573). Following the classical examples, these position Sidney's writing within the context of a "vernacular humanism" of the kind evoked by Warren Boutcher.<sup>34</sup> For Boutcher, "the Elizabethan vernacular Renaissance" needs to be understood not simply as the attempt to reconnect with the cultural forms of the classical past, but also as a response to Italian, French, and Spanish attempts to do that. "The moment that saw the emergence of a 'national' literary culture," he argues, "was a self-conscious response from the margins to the power-politics driv-

33. On poetic "footsteps," compare Sidney on Chaucer: "I know not whether to marvel more, either that he in that misty time could see so clearly, or that we in this clear age walk so stumbingly after him" (*Apology for Poetry*, 110). Chaucer's own *Troilus and Criseyde* ends by urging his "bok" to "kis the steppes where as thou seest pace / Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace" (5.1791–92, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson [Oxford University Press, 1987]). But the image is again self-consciously derivative. Statius's epic concludes by hoping to "follow [the] footsteps" of the *Aeneid* (Statius, *Thebaid* 12.816–17, in *Thebaid, Books 8–12; Achel-leid*, trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003]).

34. See Warren Boutcher, "Vernacular Humanism in the Sixteenth Century," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 189–202, "'Who taught thee Rhetoricke to deceive a maid?' Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, Juan Boscán's *Leandro*, and Renaissance Vernacular Humanism," *Comparative Literature* 52 (2000): 11–52, and Boutcher's reflections on the composition of this second essay contained in "The Analysis of Culture Revisited: Pure Texts, Applied Texts, Literary Historicisms, Cultural Histories," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64 (2003): 489–510.



ing continental European vernacular cultural production.”<sup>35</sup> Fraunce’s text, then, imagines Philip Sidney not simply as the heir of antiquity but as first among modern poets, preceding his literary predecessors. It is the distinctive product of a polyglot European environment in which English was competing for recognition as a medium of cultivated expression just as England was seeking to exert its political influence on the Continent. This is precisely the combination outlined in Sidney’s own *Apology*, which notes, “Heretofore Poets have in England also flourished, and, which is to be noted, even in those times when the trumpet of Mars did sound loudest” (109)—a belligerent coupling of the literary and the military that implicitly links the project of literary revival to Sidney’s desire for a more hawkish foreign policy.

Fraunce’s final quotation underlines the connection between *gradatio* and this project of national self-assertion. It consists of two lines from the Spaniard Juan Boscán’s “Ottava rima” (1543). This is a long (roughly thousand-line) poem amplifying and developing verses by Pietro Bembo into a sort of poetic history and a celebration of the Spanish language. It describes the land of Love, a paradise located in the East, and Love’s decision to send two ambassadors to two hard-hearted ladies of Barcelona. The ambassadors cross the Nile and travel through Greece and Venice and through France until they reach Spain. Already, then, we have the outlines of a narrative of *translatio*. On arrival, the ambassadors present their case to the ladies. Among other arguments, they recount how Love inspired poets such as Sappho, Tibullus, and Propertius. Then we move on to modern writers such as Petrarch. Among these, we read of the “Bachelor of the Tower,” to whom Fraunce’s fragmentary quotation alludes:

Tanto que d’ella fama tira y corre,  
D’el Istro al Tago, y d’el Tago hasta al Nilo.<sup>36</sup>

The reference is to one Alfonso de la Torre, author of the *Visión delectable* (ca. 1430–40), who, we read, developed his style to such a pitch that his fame “extends and spreads / From the Ister [the Danube] to the Tagus, and from the Tagus to the Nile”—a reputational itinerary that recapitu-

35. Boucher, “Who taught thee Rhetoricke,” 12.

36. Fraunce, *Arcadian Rhetorike*, C8v, checked against Juan Boscán, *Las obras de Boscan y algunas de Garcilasso de la Vega* (Antwerp, 1569), S11r. Seaton’s edition indicates that Fraunce must be quoting from a midcentury Antwerp edition and gives a range of possible sources (xxxiv). This poem in its entirety seems to be untranslated in English, although an abbreviated version appears as “Loves Embassy” in Thomas Stanley, *Poems* (London, 1651), O2v. I am indebted to the discussion in David H. Darst, *Juan Boscán* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), 109–14. Luis M. Girón-Negrón discusses the misidentification, first made by Quevedo in 1631, of the “Bachelor” as Francisco de la Torre (*Alfonso de la Torre’s “Visión delaytable”* [Leiden: Brill, 2001], 16).

lates in disordered form the journey undertaken by Love's ambassadors at the start of the poem and also describes a fantasized arc of Hapsburg dominance, stretching from the Danube in the North to Egypt in the South via Charles V's Spanish possessions.<sup>37</sup> The literary and the military combine to frame Fraunce's sense of what Sidney's literary achievement, his digestion of the writing of others and the effect produced by others' reading of his writing, might mean in the context of late sixteenth-century European culture.<sup>38</sup>

In Samuel Shaw's *Words Made Visible* (1679), "Increment" says, "I am that *Figure*, Sir, whereby men rise from lesser and lower degrees still higher and higher. By me men rise from *Fresh-men* to *Sophisters*, thence to *Curates*, from thence to *Parsons*, from thence to *Dignitaries*."<sup>39</sup> Shaw's book is a manual designed to teach the language arts through exchanges between personified figures of speech. In this late seventeenth-century guise, "Increment" features as a simple-minded careerist, an enjoyably crass reimagination of the narrative imperatives and cultural aspirations encoded within the tradition we have been examining. It is an amusing vulgarization, but not, for all that, a total travesty. We might recall Puttenham's example: "His vertue made him wise, his wisdom brought him wealth, / His wealth wan many friends." Shaw's "Increment" genuinely speaks to the worldly ambitions of the "Sophisters" of the previous century, yet it does not tell the whole story about them.

*Gradatio* is indeed the figure of literary achievement, but it is also the figure that, in the tradition of its reception, repeatedly suggests that this moment of self-realization is constantly folded into a history of alienation. Both Quintilian and Fraunce's accounts make this clear. Even as they contextualize *gradatio* as a way of speaking of a tradition of cultural dominance, they are persistently shot through with moments of revulsion, anxiety, and doubt: Corydon's helpless infatuation with Alexis, in which he figures at once as predator and victim; an artistic tradition that irresistibly claims its

37. Specifically, the fantasy seems to be that Hapsburg forces should successfully have defeated the Ottomans in North Africa and securely repelled them in Austria. Notably, the poem also positions Spain at the heart of this imperial success. Although Spanish finances increasingly underpinned Charles's rule, his own identity was somewhat less securely anchored there. On the imperial contexts of the "new poetry" and the Charles's North African campaign of 1535, see Richard Helgerson, *A Sonnet from Carthage: Garcilaso de la Vega and the New Poetry of Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). I am grateful to Alexander Samson for his assistance in translating the Boscán lines.

38. It is relevant to note that Fraunce's manual, as a more or less accurate rendering of a *rhetorica* by Audomarus Talaeus (Omer Talon), itself represents an act of cultural translation of the type it ascribes to Sidney.

39. Samuel Shaw, *Words Made Visible* (London, 1679), L8v. Shaw's "Increment" is effectively *gradatio*, stripped of anadiplosis.

new practitioners; the horrific narrative of the line of Atreus. This is a tradition in which epic triumphalism constantly threatens to wage a campaign of internal dissidence against itself; in which a noble descent of a tradition, rather than offering authentication, might instead be reconceptualized simply as a descent; and in which gradation might open out onto degradation. Even the Alfonso de la Torre of Boscán's "Ottava Rima" may be in possession of a reputation that moves forward as well as retards its own impetus. Since the verb *tirar* in the phrase *tira y corre* (translated above as "extends") can signify both a propulsive movement, a throwing outward, and a pulling back, we might read the poem as declaring that Alfonso's *fama* simultaneously pulls and runs forward—or, conceivably, ebbs and flows—from the Ister to the Tagus and from the Tagus to the Nile. It is an ambiguity that again hints at a persistent ideological undertow that clutches and drags at the poem's imperial trajectories. As Richard Helgerson has written of Garcilaso de la Vega's poetry, the "voice of imperial triumph" is always one that also speaks of "frustration, loss, self-alienation, and even self-immolation."<sup>40</sup>

It is this tradition that *Astrophil and Stella* 1 wittily realizes in its very displacement. One need only consider how the poem looks once framed within Fraunce's mediation of Quintilian's discussion of mediation. Fraunce reinserts *Astrophil and Stella* 1 into the context that the poem itself strategically suppresses and denies. Here, in all their supremely detailed interactions, are those "others' leaves" with which Astrophil would have us believe he need have nothing to do. The *Institutio oratoria* and the *Arcadian Rhetorike's* accounts of *gradatio* speak of nothing if not of literature as a rich network of affinity, echo, and connection, and they act to instill reading practices adequate to that complexity. But in so doing these manuals also give voice to the powerful impulses toward disavowal and oblivion contained within such an exquisitely self-aware tradition of reading and writing, and they thereby put us in a position to appreciate just how apt Sidney's use of *gradatio* in *Astrophil and Stella* 1 really is, above and beyond its local effectiveness for the purposes of Astrophil's immediate argument. It is not simply that the figure's signaling of translation and process gestures in miniature toward the fundamental maneuver of sonnet sequence discourse whereby one discursive code is overlaid onto another, just as *Astrophil and Stella* 1 maps the language of literature onto the language of love and *Astrophil and Stella* 2 moves to translate these into the language of politics. Rather, Astrophil's *gradatio*—understood within the history of its use, located in a poem that argues for the irrelevance of previous writing as it smoothly displaces our sense of its own productivity onto the figure of the female reader—serves compactly to signal the extent to which the poem demonstrates a

40. Helgerson, *Sonnet from Carthage*, 13.

mastery of the very tradition it purportedly rejects.<sup>41</sup> In so doing so, the poem both explains that tradition as an inheritance so overweening that it might drive its exponents to pretend that it is nothing of the sort and, at the same time, voices the impulse toward a more authentic dissolution and undoing that is also part of this forgetful legacy.<sup>42</sup>

41. In relation to the arguments set out in Bates's *Masculinity, Gender and Identity*, it might be asked whether this essay does not merely represent yet another way of strategizing (and thereby recuperating) the abjection of the sonnet persona. To an extent I think this must be the case. Sidney features here as infinitely more knowing than the surface of the poems he creates. Nonetheless, there is a genuine destabilization here, something a little like the Kristevan sense of the abject as that which "simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject" (Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez [New York: Columbia University Press, 1982], 5). *Astrophil and Stella* 1 constantly slides between the enjoyable performance of a humiliating dependence, whether that be to Stella or to an anterior tradition of composition, and the sense of that dependence as, on some level at least, all too chaotically real.

42. *Gradatio's* history does not end with the sixteenth century. Consider the following modern instance, amusingly thematizing the historical concerns of the text of which it is a part: "Thus, stealthily and imperceptibly, none marking the exact day or hour of the change, the constitution of England was altered and nobody knew it . . . [and] a change of diet became essential. The muffin was invented and the crumpet. Coffee supplanted the after-dinner port, and as coffee led to a drawing-room in which to drink it, and a drawing-room to glass cases, and glass cases to artificial flowers, and artificial flowers to mantelpieces, and mantelpieces to pianofortes, and pianofortes to drawing-room ballads, and drawing-room ballads (skipping a stage or two) to innumerable little dogs, mats, and china ornaments, the home—which had become extremely important—was completely altered" (Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972], 160–61).