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UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

THE PLATONIC LOVER OF ELIZABETHAN POETRY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

Of the Graduate School of the University of Louisville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of Master of Arts

Department of English

By

Dorcas Douglass Ray

1930

THE PLATONIC LOVER OF ELIZABETHAN POETRY

23 FEB 30

TO
MY MOTHER

19291

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CHAPTER I

THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF PLATONIC LOVE

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THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF PLATONIC LOVE

Just what is the meaning of Platonic love? It is a term that has caught the attention of scholars, poets, and plain men, in many countries and during many centuries. Perhaps its wide appeal accounts for the varied and tortuous shapes its meaning has assumed as it has passed through the inquisitive and often callous fingers of the multitudes. It is a term applied popularly today to a kind of abstract, passionless friendship, which, to the practical-minded American, can exist only in theory. Few who use the term Platonic love or Platonic friendship have paused first to read the pages of the Symposium, where its significance is carefully explained to Socrates by the remarkable Mantinean woman, Diotima.

One would expect to find Plato, of all persons, a Platonic lover, and is for the moment startled by Walter Pater's assertion that "Plato himself had not been always a mere Platonic lover; was rather, naturally, as he makes Socrates say of himself, subject to the influence of fair persons" and knew "all the ways of lovers in the literal sense."¹

¹
Pater, Walter. Plato and Platonism. p. 121

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A Platonic lover is the product of many stages of growth; and so, Plato, though always potentially a Platonic lover, did not know the fullness of spiritual love until he had experienced the varying emotions which led naturally up to it. The first impulse of the Platonic lover is a consciousness within himself of incompleteness. Without this self-dissatisfaction there can be no mental or spiritual progress, for "the man who does not feel himself defective has no desire for that whereof he feels no defect."¹ There must be a human longing for something not within himself, a "continual aspiration and advance towards a goal never attained."² It is "all that desire of good things and of being happy."³ Since this reaching out after the good awakens in man the hope of ultimately finding permanent satisfaction, it necessarily follows that "love is of immortality."⁴ The fact that love is constantly in want of that which it does not possess leads Plato to conceive of it as being the offspring of Poverty. First then of the essential characteristics of the

¹ Plato. With an Eng. Translation by W.R.M. Lamb. vol. 5, p. 183.

² Grote, George. Plato. vol. 3, p. 10.

³ Plato. vol. 5, p. 187

⁴ Ibid. p. 193

THE ORIGINAL MEANING OF PLATONIC LOVE

Platonic lover is that he be restless, dissatisfied, unhappy with things as they are.

Next, he must assay to remedy the matter, for love is not alone the child of hapless Poverty but of zealous Resource. The lover at once begins his task of achieving happiness. If he seeks it along the avenues of wealth or fame or music or philosophy,¹ he at once ceases to be the Platonic lover, who can find satisfaction in but one way and that is by means of both the body and the soul.² It is birth in beauty that distinguishes the Platonic lover from all others. Where then is he to look for this beauty which is so essential to the gratification of his desire? It is everywhere about him, for he is living in a world of beautiful living substances, since "for some reason the eternal idea of beauty has left visible copies of itself, shadows, antitypes."³ These beautiful forms recall distant memories; they arouse strong emotions and impulses toward generation and self-perpetuation. "Hence springs the love of beauty - or rather of procreation in the beautiful - whereby satisfaction is obtained for this

¹ Grote. vol. 3, p. 6.

² Plato. vol. 5, p. 191.

³ Pater. p. 153.

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restless and impatient agitation."¹ The first instinctive effort to obtain happiness and thereby immortality is to beget children whose new bodies will live to perpetuate the aging bodies of their parents. Here we do not find a Plato so abstract in his principles that he will not countenance the normal relationship between man and woman, for says Diotima, "Such is the right approach and induction to love matters."² But mark! She said "the right approach", for the Platonic lover must go on. "Beginning from obvious beauties he must for the sake of that highest beauty be ever climbing aloft."³ The Greek philosopher considers the beauty of a youth more inspirational than that of a maid, for he desires a beauty of mind and soul, which, in his opinion, woman, for all her physical charm, does not possess. The devotion to a beautiful and accomplished youth fires the lover with an incentive to recognize and promote in him all manifestations of mental beauty which are in harmony with the physical, so as to raise him to⁴ the greatest attainable perfection of human nature.

¹
Grote. vol.3, p. 6.

²
Plato. vol. 5, p. 207.

³
Ibid.

⁴
Grote. vol. 3, p. 4.

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In such endeavors the mind of the lover, concentrated upon a noble purpose, brings forth virtuous thoughts which provide his questing soul with a more complete satisfaction than the pleasing presence of a son. The Platonic lovers, then, in the real sense, are those "persons who in their souls still more than in their bodies conceive and bring forth prudence and virtue in general, and of these the begetters are all the poets and those craftsmen who are styled invent-¹ors." They are those who, conscious first of a great mental and spiritual poverty, have the determination and resourcefulness to secure sustenance through replenishing themselves in beauty. "It is a divine affair, this engendering and bringing to birth, an im-²mortal element in the creature that is mortal."

The Platonic lover has now reached the stage in his development when he no longer need look to some youth to point him to the citadels of beauty. He need no longer depend upon the eye, which in its circumscribed area can detect only "obvious beauties". For he "is become a lover of the invisible, but still a lover, and therefore, literally, a seer of it, carrying an elaborate cultivation of the bodily senses,

¹ Plato. vol. 5, p. 199.

² Ibid. p. 191.

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of eye and ear -- into the world of intellectual ab-
 stractions."¹ Pater emphasizes the fact that the Pla-
 tonic lover does not coldly contemplate abstractions,
 but he loves them with the same intensity with which
 he once adored a noble youth or a mistress. "Abstract
 ideas themselves become animated, living persons, al-
 most corporeal, as if with hands and eyes."² At this
 point in the lover's development one must be careful
 not to confuse love or Eros, begotten of Poverty and
 Resource, with the object loved or Idea, "which is
 absolute, independent of time, place, circumstance,
 and all variable elements."³ Love, no matter how far
 the lover may ascend in his spiritual ecstasies, is
 still a hungry desire, tearing at his being; the
 greater his vision of beauty, the more insatiable
 his longing for an increased revelation. Grote
 thus marks the apex of the lover's struggle and re-
 sourcefulness: "If any man's vision be once sharpened
 so that he can see beauty pure and absolute, he will
 have no eyes for the individual manifestations of it
 in fine gold, fine raiment, brilliant colours, or
 beautiful youths. Herein we have the climax" of Pla-
 tonic love."⁴

¹
 Pater. p. 125.

²
 Ibid. p. 152

³
 Grote. vol. 3, p. 10.

⁴
 Ibid. p. 8.

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Does the reward of such a lover justify his painful straining after a remote and inaccessible ideal? Let us turn to Diotima for our answer: "Do you call it a pitiful life for a man to lead -- looking that way, observing that vision by the proper means, and having it ever before him? -- In the end he comes to know the very essence of beauty. In that state of life above all others -- a man finds it truly worth while to live as he contemplates essential beauty.-- So when he has begotten a true virtue and has reared it up, he is destined to win the friendship of Heaven; he above all men is immortal."¹

May we not then define Platonic love as a starving, straining, and finally a triumphing desire to know God?

¹

Plato. vol. 5, pp. 207-209.

CHAPTER II

RENAISSANCE PLATONISM

CHAPTER II

RENAISSANCE PLATONISM

Plato's theory of love passed through many generations of thought before it touched the versatile genius of the Elizabethan lyrists. After its inception in the academy of Plato at Athens, it passed first through the Neo-Platonic schools of Syria, Constantinople, and Alexandria, which were making a last attempt to save pagan philosophy from dissolution. Plotinus was the first to give a written exposition of the Neo-Platonic philosophy, which "is an elaborate attempt to bring the transcendent spiritual element of religion into harmony with the philosophy of Plato"¹

Greek thought had little influence upon the western world so long as Constantinople remained the headquarters of classical learning. In 1453 the Turks captured Constantinople and many of her scholars fled to Italy, taking with them their treasures of Greek manuscripts. The revived interest in classical literature that subsequently permeated western Europe gave new impetus to the vast intellectual

¹

Turner, Wm. History of Philosophy. p. 209.

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awakening which had begun in Italy about the middle of the fourteenth century. Philosophical controversy was rife. A Platonic academy was formed at Florence by Cosmo de' Medici, and bitter opposition arose between the followers of Plato and of Aristotle. Among the Italian humanists who championed the Platonic cause were Lorenzo Valla, Marcilio Ficino, and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.

Englishmen, traveling in Italy during the Renaissance period, did not return home untouched by the spirit of philosophical reasoning and debate centered in the Academy of Florence. Europe was steeped in Platonism, and the Elizabethans' introduction to Plato was through the medium of Italian interpreters, whose Neo-Platonic doctrines set forth the teachings of Plotinus rather than of Plato. Therefore the so-called Platonic tendencies of many sixteenth century English lyrists have a decided Neo-Platonic cast.

With the advent of Christian philosophy, pagan teachings were doomed. Neo-Platonists attempted a compromise which proved futile, and those elements of pagan philosophy which were applicable to Christian doctrine ultimately became absorbed by the new religion. Renaissance Platonism, which so pervaded Elizabethan England, assayed a middle ground between

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pagan and Christian attitudes. Many Platonic enthusiasts, so-called, were more interested in squeezing Plato through the portals of their religious edifices than they were in striving to understand the original significance of his pagan philosophy. "By a brave if odd synthesis, the humanists of the Renaissance sought to reconcile through Plotinus and other Neo-Platonists, as well as some of the more sympathetic church Fathers, the flower of Greek thought with the doctrines of Christianity. The three ultimate Neo-Platonic principles -- Good, Intellect, and Soul, were identified with the three persons of the Trinity."¹ The fact that the two philosophies could be so harmonized accounted for the general popularity of Plato. "The infusion of Platonism into the thought of Christian men could do no harm, for there was no possibility of competition and no possible place for paganism."²

Renaissance Platonism, however, became the vehicle, not only of religious ecstasy but also of sensual gratification. On the one hand the clay of Platonic beauty was molded into the image of God, while on the other hand it was molded into the image of the world, for "the Florentines, much as they might spec-

¹ Cory, H. E. Edmund Spenser. pp. 346, 347.

² Renwick, W. L. Edmund Spenser. p. 165.

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ulate upon the supremacy of abstract beauty, the beauty visible only to the mind's eye, actually responded how much more sincerely, passionately to concrete beauty, beauty visible to the eye of sense, -- The Italian of the Renaissance was an exceedingly concrete person. He meant by Beauty, for all Plato, sensuous beauty, the beauty he could touch, see, hear, smell, taste.¹ Such Platonism became synonymous with sensualism, with materialism. Fletcher thus quotes Ruskin, who deplored such a gross distortion of Platonic idealism: "All the Renaissance principles of art tended to the setting Beauty above Truth and seeking for it always at the expense of Truth."² This worship of beautiful substances rather than of beautiful ideas set at naught the teachings of Plato. Harrison points to the essential discrepancy between the Platonic and Neo-Platonic conceptions of beauty. "The great weakness of the theory (of Renaissance Platonism) lay in the fact that it had no moral significance, and just here lay the great strength of Plato's ethics. Although preaching that beauty was a spiritual thing, this phase of Platonic aesthetics never blended with the conception of the beauty of

¹ Fletcher, J. B. The Religion of Beauty in Woman. pp. 2, 7.

² Ibid. p. 14.

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moral goodness. And it failed to do this because it is a theory not of Plato but of Plotinus, who throughout the period of the Renaissance was understood to expound the true meaning of Plato's thought."¹

It is true that Plato believed that a lover first needed the stimulus of personal beauty to actuate him to pursue abstract beauty. But he sent him to a beautiful youth for his inspiration. Now "the Renaissance religion of beauty started wrong."² It started with the worship of a beautiful woman, and was loathe to leave such charming company for a realm of somewhat chilly ideas. Far different from the obscure Athenian maid or matron was the accomplished Italian lady of the Renaissance. "Tales of precocious maids becoming, while still in their teens, accomplished orators, poets, scholars in Latin, even in Greek, go the rounds of Italy", for "in the Renaissance the priestess of Platonic love was the fine lady."³ She was to be worshipped from a discreet distance in accordance with Plotinus, who "without exactly condemning marriage, yet commends as the higher love that which rests in passion-

¹ Harrison, J. S. Platonism in English Poetry. p. 139.

² Fletcher. p. 22.

³ Ibid. pp. 9, 16, 17.

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less contemplation of womanly beauty."¹ The only relationship existing between the lover and his lady should be of a spiritual nature. "Under Renaissance Neo-Platonism the only duty of woman is to be beautiful, to awaken desire, and then to disappear, leaving the desire to be nursed into an ecstasy in which she has no place."²

This new conception of Platonic love is set forth by Cardinal Bembo in Castiglione's Fourth Book of the Courtier. Plato's doctrines are seen anew in the light of Plotinus, of Ficino, of Dante and his circle. "These side influences tended to make paramount the element of Platonism which finds chief utterance in the Symposium: that love is the supreme force, cosmic, moral, religious; that there are two loves, heavenly and earthly, the one a desire of the beauty of the sense, the other a desire of the beauty above sense; and that, as sensuous beauty is the shadow of supersensuous or spiritual beauty, therefore by following the shadow we may ultimately attain to the reality behind the shadow, and in an ecstasy possess divine beauty itself."³

Bembo holds physical loveliness to be an un-

¹ Fletcher. p. 19.

² Renwick. p. 167.

³ Fletcher. p. 7.

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reality, a mere shadowing of that ultimate beauty, which exists only in the abstract. He goes farther, believing that there exists an incompatibility between flesh and spirit, and that the ecstasy of spiritual experience can come only with the subordination and ultimate effacement of the flesh. The pleasure of the senses then is to be counted as naught in comparison with the rapture of the soul. Those instincts in man which excite in him passionate human attachments should be disciplined through consistent habits of restraint until they create in him that loftiest of all emotions, an insatiable longing for God. Thus only when the desire of sense leads to the ultimate gratification of the soul, are flesh and spirit reconciled. Herein lies the Platonic conception that, first enamoured of earthly beauty, man is led gently, step by step, to behold the unspeakable glories of divine perfection.

Not only do the two philosophies agree in their conception of the relative importance of flesh and spirit, but also in their creation of the trinity of beauty, virtue, and love, which being three, nevertheless are one. For true beauty cannot be other than virtuous, and virtue must needs be beautiful, since each is a prototype of perfection. A man's

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being responds pleurably to beauty, because it exudes the essence of virtue, as lovely flowers breathe out rare perfumes. That there exist in life discrepancies between the good and the beautiful, that noble men sometimes lack comeliness, and evil men come masked in handsome faces, is not to be denied. The original blight of sin upon the earth has marred but not destroyed that perfect union of beauty and virtue, conceived of in the consciousness of God, or love.

In their estimate of human life and of man's purpose on earth, the two philosophies also coincide. Man has come from God, and not until he returns to Him will he be complete. Such then should be his aim, to seek for a supreme emotional experience, counting all human loves but humble stepping stones to that celestial love, which yearns to take unto itself his questing soul. Then only, in the consummate rapture of a heavenly wedlock, will man have completed the cycle of his human life, and be prepared to enter into the sublime experience of eternity.

There seem to be three fundamental similarities between these two philosophies: first, a conviction that all physical forms are but the shadowings of spiritual realities; second, a belief that the es-

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sences of beauty, virtue, and love are ultimately the same; third, a sublime faith that all sincere and holy human love is born of God and will lift man on wings of spiritual fervor up to the grandeur of immortality. These three ideas pervade the discussions of Cardinal Bembo.

Consider first, his views concerning the relative importance of flesh and spirit. He belittles those "beauties, which we dayly see with these our dimme eyes in bodies subject to corruption, that neverthelesse be nothing els but dreames and most thinne shadowes of beautie."¹ He believes that "the body, where that beautie shineth, is not the fountaine from whence beautie springeth", but rather the soul which "seeth in her selfe a shining beame of that light, which is the true image of the Angelike beautie partened with (communicated to) her, whereof she also partneth with the bodie a feeble shadow." How inferior to the soul is this body, "a most diverse thing from beautie", which "is bodillesse -- an heavenly shining beame" and seen only "with the eyes of the minde." Therefore "who so thinketh in

¹ All subsequent quotations appear in The Fourth Book of the Courtier, by Count Baldassare Castiglione, "Done into English by Sir Thomas Hoby, Anno 1561". Everyman's Library.

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possessing the bodie to enjoy Beautie, he is farre deceived", for he must "beholde it in it selfe simple and pure, and frame it within his imagination sundered from all matter". Then "he shall evermore carrie his precious treasure about with him shutte fast within his hart." It is only when one has "waxed blinde about earthly matters" that he "is made quicke of sight about heavenly." When he has achieved this new vision he is beholding "the true monument -- of the victory of the soule." He has seen the light which "overcommeth the darknesse of the bodie", which "destroyeth and consumeth whatsoever there is mortall, and relieveth and maketh beautifull the heavenly part, which at the first by reason of the sense was deade and buried." Fervent, suppliant, rises the prayer of the Cardinal: "(Lord), Purge with the shining beames of thy light our eyes from mistie ignorance, that they may no more set by mortall beautie."

None the less Platonic in spirit are Bembo's words concerning the origin and meaning of beauty, virtue, and love. He reiterates his belief in the unity of beauty and virtue. "Good and beautifull be after a sorte one selfe thing." Again, "beautie is good, and consequently the true love of it is most good and

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holy." And again, "whatsoever is good and profitable hath also evermore the comelinesse of beautie." Is not this evidenced in "the beautie of the buddes (which) giveth a testimonie of the goodnesse of the fruit?" Love also is closely associated with beauty, since "Love is nothing else but a certaine coveting to enjoy beautie." And of necessity must love be one with virtue since it is "the beginning and end of all goodness." As for the origin of beauty, it "commeth of God." Man's delight then in beholding its physical manifestation can readily be explained in the light of its divine origin. "What sweete incense may a man believe that to be, which ariseth of the fountaine of the soveraigne and right beautie?" Man is in reality contemplating a form of "heavenly beautie (which is) the originall of all other beautie, which never encreaseth nor diminisheth."

Cardinal Bembo does not fall short of Platonic heights in his impassioned declaration of the gospel of immortality. Man's emotional life upon earth, if kept pure, will culminate in a heavenly ecstasy. It is the instinct of love forever springing up within the heart of man that is "a meane betwixt heavenly and earthly thinges." It "is the fiery bush of Moses", the flame which having issued from the heart of God,

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kindles the fuel of the human soul. This first stirring of warmth within the human heart is usually prompted by physical beauty, since holy love "delightest to dwell in the floure of beautifull bodies and beautifull soules." In this presence of physical beauty the soul "feelethe the feare and reverence that men accustomably have towardes holy matters, and thinketh her selfe to be in Paradise", for man "through the vertue of imagination, shall fashion with himselfe that beautie much more faire than it is in deede." Man must take care, however, that in his admiration he "love no lesse -- the beautie of minde, than of the bodie" and in his tenderest caressings he lose not sight of "Plato, the divine lover, (who) saith, that in kissing, his soule came as farre as his lippes to depart out of the bodie." The lover must always remember that "a kisse may be saide to be rather a coupling together of the soule, than of the body." If a man shall achieve love's full experience then, he will keep "aloofe from sensuall coveting as fro the lowest step of the stayres, by the which (he) may ascend to true love." He will "shunne throughly al filthinesse of common love, and so enter into the holy way of love, with the guide of reason", for it is by "understanding (that) man may be partner with Angels."

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Then "the lover shall find another (love) yet farre greater, in case hee will take this love for a stayre (as it were) to climbe up to another farre higher than it." Mounting a stairway of emotional experience, the lover "shall beholde no more the particular beautie of one woman, but an universal, that decketh out all bodies." And "like as through the particular beautie of one bodie hee (love) guideth her (the soule) to the universall beautie of all bodies: Even so in the least degree of perfection through particular understanding hee (love) guideth her to the universal understanding." Fervently Cardinal Bembo reiterates the theory of the soul's glorious ascension as "burning in this most happie flame, she ariseth to the noblest part of her which is the understanding, and there no more shadowed with the darke night of earthly matters, seeth the heavenly beautie." How supreme is the achievement of this human lover who has overcome fleshly desires "that his soule may be ravished through heavenly love to the beholding of heavenly beautie" where "having founde -- the footsteps of God -- she seeketh to settle her selfe" and remaine eternally "coupledst with God". Earnestly Cardinal Bembo exhorts his listeners to strive for this spiritual union, "putting off the

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affections we were clad at our coming downe let us climbe up the staires, which at the lowermost steppe have the shadow of sensuall beautie, to the high mansion place where the heavenly, amiable and right beautie dwelleth, which lyeth hidden in the innermost secreties of God." Reaching a majestic crescendo of emotional fervor, he invokes the assistance of God: "Burne them (our soules) -- that after they be cleane sundred from the bodie, they may bee coupled with an everlasting and most sweet bond to the heavenly beautie."

In attempting to trace the influence of Plato upon Elizabethan poetry, one cannot ignore this new Platonism which became so inter-mixed with the old. "In all likelihood Spenser's Hymns of Heavenly Love and Heavenly Beauty are derived from Bembo's oration in this Book of the Courtier. Shakespeare's Sonnets show something of the same influence",¹

¹
Henderson, W. B. D. A Note of Castiglione and English Literature. The Courtier. p. XIII.

CHAPTER III

EDMUND SPENSER

CHAPTER III
EDMUND SPENSER

"In no poet did the mystical interpretation of the Platonic idea come more beautifully and clearly to make its avatar than in Spenser."¹ He is generally accepted to be the outstanding Platonic poet of the Elizabethan age. His Fowre Hymnes repeatedly confirm in the minds of his critics the fact that he was a student and a follower of Plato's theory of love and beauty. "Spenser's Hymnes are the most comprehensive exposition of love in the light of Platonic theory in English."² And yet there are some who hold that Plato's influence upon Spenser has been over-emphasized and that the philosophical bent of his mind bespeaks a variety of sources rather than one. "A fragment of -- Plato may be borrowed, not only for its beauty, but because it expressed more or less clearly some feeling which Spenser was trying to make explicit -- The use of quotations may be proof of study, but is not necessarily proof of intellectual discipleship, still less of complete acceptance of a system of thought. -- Plato contributed

¹ Cory, H. E. Edmund Spenser. p. 353.

² Harrison, J. S. Platonism in English Poetry. p. 122.

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largely to Spenser's thought, but he was not the only source of principle, nor was he the final authority.¹ With no intention then of exaggerating Spenser's indebtedness to Plato, I shall merely point to those passages in his Fowre Hymnes, which seem most obviously to be the sincere utterances of a Platonic lover.

In An Hymne in Honour of Love Spenser explains the parentage of love as does Diotima to Socrates in the Symposium.

"----who alive can perfectly declare,
The wondrous cradle of thine infancie?
When thy great mother Venus first thee bore,
Begot of Plentie and of Penurie" (ll.50-53)

In subsequent lines he develops the idea that love's heritage of Penurie has given it a starving need which can not be supplied. And though, through Plentie's ingenuity the lover does receive the image of that which he craves, yet Penurie keeps him forever dissatisfied.

"He thereon feeds his hungrie fantasy
Still full, yet never satisfyde with it." (ll.198, 199)

The poignancy of his longing incites in him a frenzy akin to Platonic "madness" experienced by all such lovers, who

"---- playne and make ful piteous mone
Unto the author of their baleful bane;
The daies they waste, the nights they grieve and grone,
Their lives they loath, and heavens light disdaine,

¹

Renwick, W. L. Edmund Spenser. pp. 154, 167.

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No light but that, whose lampe doth yet remaine
Fresh burning in the image of their eye,
They deigne to see, and seeing it still dye."
(ll. 127-133)

Since love is born of Resource, it goads the agitated lover to perform any task, encounter any peril, in order to appease his unutterable longing.

"He dreads no danger, nor misfortune feares,
His faith, his fortune, in his breast he beares.
Thou art this god, thou art his mightie gyde,
Thou being blind, letst him not see his feares,
But carliest him to that which he hath eyde,
Through seas, through flames, through thousand
swords and speares:
Ne ought so strong that may his face withstand,
With which thou armest his resistlesse hand."
(11. 223-230)

There is but one thing that can excite in a lover such superlative enthusiasm and that is beauty.

"For sure of all, that in this mortall frame
Contained is, nought more divine doth seeme,
Or that resembleth more th'immortall flame
Of heavenly light, then Beauties glorious beame.
What wonder then, if with such rage extreme
Fraile men, whose eyes seek heavenly things to see,
At sight thereof so much enravisht bee?"
(11. 113-119)

But it is not the mere contemplation of beauty that the Spenserian lover wishes, and herein does he become Platonic; he desires birth in beauty; he desires to beget life, not to gratify a bestial lust but to achieve immortality.

"---- man, that breathes a more immortall mynd,
Not for lusts sake, but for eternitie,
Seekes to enlarge his lasting progenie

Therefore in choice of love, he doth desyre

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That seemes on earth most heavenly, to embrace,
That same is Beautie, borne of heavenly race."
(ll. 103-112)

His desire is an ennobling impulse in no way to be associated with that "Popular" love of which Pausanias speaks with such contempt: "the love we see in the meaner sort of men who are set on the body more than the soul."¹ Such is not Spenser's love,

"For love is Lord of truth and loialtie,
Lifting himselfe out of the lowly dust,
On golden plumes up to the purest skie,
Above the reach of loathly sinfull lust.

Such is the poure of that sweet passion,
That it all sordid basenesse doth expell."
(ll. 176-179; 190,191)

As Plato believed, so does Spenser, that the lover's desire is quickened by the sight of beauty incarnate in some individual; the only point upon which they differ being that, whereas Plato looked for his inspiration to a beautiful youth, Spenser looks to a beautiful woman.

"His harts enshrined saint, his heavens queen,
Fairer then fairest, in his fayning eye,
Whose sole aspect he counts felicitye."
(ll. 215-217)

In Amoretti, Sonnet III, he is inspired to noble purposes by a beautiful woman, whose charms hold his mind in a kind of ecstatic trance.

"The soverayne beauty which I doo admyre,
Witness the world how worthy to be prayzed:
The light wherof hath kindled heavenly fyre,
In my fraile spirit by her from basenesse rayssed.

¹

Plato. Translation by W. R. M. Lamb. vol. 5, p.109.

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That being now with her huge brightnesse dazed
 Base thing I can no more endure to view:
 But looking still on her I stand amazed,
 At wondrous sight of so celestiall hew.
 So when my tounge would speak her praises dew,
 It stopped is with thoughts astonishment:
 And when my pen would write her titles true,
 It ravisht is with fancies wonderment.
 Yet in my hart I then both speake and write
 The wonder that my wit cannot endite."

Furthermore, Spenser believes with Plato that the lover's ability to discriminate between true and false beauty remains as his heritage from a former spiritual existence, when the soul of man beheld in its entirety the vision of eternal beauty.

"For having yet in his deducted spright,
 Some sparks remaining of that heavenly fyre,
 He is enlumined with that goodly light,
 Unto like goodly semblant to aspyre."

(An Hymne in Honour of Love. ll. 106-109)

In An Hymne in Honour of Love Spenser takes the Platonic lover's first step. He goes no farther. His desire, he believes, will be fully appeased when

"----- in her inmost breast,
 He may embosomed bee, and loved best."

Ay me, deare Lord, that ever I might hope,
 For all the paines and woes that endure,
 To come at length unto the wished scope
 Of my desire." (ll. 248,249; 294-297)

For him "love as in the Symposium is as a clarion¹ that calls to heroic questing the ardent lover", but he would seek no farther than a woman's arms.

An Hymne in Honour of Beautie is a natural com-

¹

Cory. p. 337.

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plement to An Hymne in Honour of Love since the poet believes beauty to be the sole inspiration of love.

"That is the thing which giveth pleasant grace
To all things faire, that kindleth lively fyre,
Light of thy lampe, which shynig in the face,
Thence to the soule darts amorous desyre."
(ll. 57-60)

Spenser accepts the theory of Plato concerning the ultimate source of all earth-born beauty, which is a divine Pattern or eternal Idea existing apart as a purely spiritual entity.

"That wondrous Paterne wheresoere it bee,
Whether in earth layd up in secret store
Or else in heaven, that no man may it see
With sinfull eyes, for feare it to deflore
Is perfect Beautie which all men adore,
Whose face and feature doth so much excell
All mortal sence, that none the same may tell."
(ll. 36-42)

He "harmonizes Ficino's notion that beauty is the 'lively grace' of God's light with the brilliant theory of Plato in the Timaeus that beauty is a great unchangeable pattern from which the supreme Artificer¹ modeled the world."

"What time this worlds great workmaister did cast
To make al things, such as we now behold,
It seemes that he before his eyes had plast
A goodly Paterne, to whose perfect mould
He fashioned them as comely as he could."
(ll. 29-33)

According to Taine Spenser considers beauty not "a mere harmony of color and form, but an emanation of unique, heavenly, imperishable beauty, which no mor-

1

Cory. p. 339.

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tal eye can see, and which is the masterpiece of the great Author of the worlds. Bodies only render it visible; it does not live in them; charm and attraction are not in things but in the immortal idea which¹ shines through them."

"For through infusion of celestiall poure;
The duller earth it quickneth with delight,
And life-full spirits privily doth powre
Through all the parts, that to the lookers sight
They seeme to please. That is thy soveraine might
O Cyprian Queene, which flowing from the beame
Of thy bright starre, thou unto them dost streame."
(ll. 50-56)

In Amoretti, Sonnet LXXIX, the lover stresses not the physical charms of his beloved but the true and permanent beauty of her spirit.

"Men call you faire and you doe credit it,
For that your selfe ye dayly such doe see:
But the trew fayre, that is the gentle wit,
And vertuous mind, is much more prayd of me,
For all the rest, however fayre it be,
Shall turne to nought and loose that glorious hew:
But onely that is permanent and free
From frayle corruption, that doth flesh ensew.
That is true beautie: that doth argue you
To be divine and borne of heavenly seed:
Deriv'd from that fayre Spirit, from whom al true
And perfect beauty did at first proceed.
He onely fayre, and what he fayre hath made,
All other fayre lyke flowres untymely fade."

There is a mysterious element in beauty, too subtle to be detected by the eye.

"That Beautie is not, as fond men misdeeme,
An outward show of things that onely seeme."
(An Hymne in Honour of Beauty. ll. 90,91)

The poet accounts for man's innate capacity to appre-

¹
Taine, H. A. History of English Literature.
book 2. p. 132.

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ciate beauty by the Platonic theory of reminiscence, whereby the soul recalls "those pure, true, and beautiful Ideas which it had partially seen during its prior extra-corporeal existence in companionship with the Gods",¹ before it

"----- did pas
Downe from the top of purest heavens hight,
To be embodied here" (ll. 108-110)

Earthly love he conceives of as but a continuation of an affection which once existed between soul and soul.

"For love is a celestiall harmonie,
Of likely harts composed of starres concent,
Which joyne together in sweete sympathie,
To worke each others joy and true content,
Which they have harbourd since their first descent
Out of their heavenly bowres, where they did see
And know ech other here belov'd to bee."
(ll. 197-203)

The tendency then of the earthly lover is to construct about his loved-one a halo of spiritual perfection since "the mind remembers, even though half-numbed, by the flesh, the only half-forgotten beauty it once contemplated in heaven."² He does not in reality admire the woman upon whom he so rapturously gazes, but rather he unwittingly admires the celestial vision which her presence recalls.

"Of that first Sunne, yet sparckling in his sight,
Thereof he fashions in his higher skill,
An heavenly beautie to his fancies will
And it embracing in his mind entyre

¹ Grote, George. Plato. vol. 3, p. 13.

² Cory. p. 343.

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The mirrour of his owne thought doth admyre."
(ll. 220-224)

These lines "carry us into pure Renaissance Platonism."¹

Lovely women are but images of heaven's light.

"-----ye faire Dames, the worlds deare ornaments,
And lively images of heavens light,

Be mindfull still of your first countries sight,
Doe still preserve your first informed grace,
Whose shadow yet shynes in your beauteous face."
(ll. 162-168)

The Platonic theory that the beautiful is also
the good leads the poet disastrously to associate nobility of character with perfection of body.

"Therefore where ever that thou doest behold
A comely corpse, with beautie faire endewed,
Know this for certaine, that the same doth hold
A beauteous soule, with faire conditions thewed,
Fit to receive the seede of vertue straved.
For all that faire is, is by nature good."
(ll. 134-140)

But his own reason cannot deny the apparent discrepancy of such a belief when

"-----oft it falles, that many a gentle mynd
Dwels in deformed tabernacle drownd

And oft it falles (ay me the more to rew)
That goodly beautie, albe heavenly borne,
Is foule abused" (ll. 141,142; 148,-150)

Yet our intrepid Platonist will admit no inconsistencies here, preferring in each instance to deplore the stubborn qualities of an unyielding flesh, rather than to admit the deficiencies in a Platonic theory.

¹
Cory. p. 343.

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At the close of An Hymne in Honour of Beautie, Spenser has ascended no higher the stairway of Platonic love. Beauty for him is still incarnate in one human form and his desire seeks its relief in her,

"-----whose conquering beautie doth captive
My trembling hart in her eternall chaine."
(ll. 275, 276)

And now as we pass from earthly love to heavenly, from sensuous beauty to spiritual, "we touch (with Spenser) the sublime, sharp summit where the world of mind and the world of sense unite; where man, gathering with both hands the loveliest flowers of either, feels himself at the same time a pagan and a Christian."¹ The fact that Spenser's last two hymns were written much later in life confirms the theory of Plato that love is a process of development, marked by the growing intensity of a lover's desire and the quickening of his response to spiritual realities. Love for Spenser is no longer a physical yearning for beauty manifest in feminine cheek and breast, for "his was a soul captivated by sublime and chaste beauty, eminently Platonic; one of those lofty and refined souls, most charming of all, who, born in the lap of nature, draw thence their sustenance, but soar higher, enter the regions of mysticism, and mount instinctively in order to expand on the confines of a

1

Taine. book 2, p. 133.

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loftier world."¹ His desire now is a straining of the soul to be freed from the flesh.

"Love, lift me up upon thy golden wings,
From this base world unto thy heavens hight,
Where I may see those admirable things,
Which there thou workest by thy sovaine might,
Farre above feeble reach of earthly sight,
That I thereof an heavenly Hymne may sing
Unto the god of Love, high heavens king."

(An Hymne of Heavenly Love, ll. 1-7)

This straining at the body's leash can be noted also in Amoretti, Sonnet LXXXVIII. Unable to satisfy his senses, the poet has recourse to a contemplation of the heavenly spirit of her whose physical presence is denied him.

"Since I have lackt the comfort of that light,
The which was wont to lead my thoughts astray:
I wander as in darknesse of the night,
Affrayd of every dangers least dismay.
Ne ought I see, though in the clearest day,
When others gaze upon theyr shadowes vayne:
But th'onely image of that heavenly ray,
Whereof some glance doth in mine eie remayne
Of which beholding the Idea playne,
Through contemplation of my purest part:
With light thereof I doe my selfe sustayne,
And thereon feed my love-affamisht hart.
But with such brightnesse whylest I fill my mind,
I starve my body and mine eyes doe blynd."

Cory observes with a pardonable lack of enthusiasm the passing of our lover away from this earth, whose various forms took on new beauty when touched by the transforming wand of his melodic, sweetly sensuous verse. "One need not be a mere literary man under suspicion of irresponsible hedonism to feel some sense of regret as Spenser passes on to an uncompromising

¹
Taine. book 2, p. 132.

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Platonic mysticism" in the last two hymns where "the ascetic side and the antinaturalism of Plato dominate."¹ Spenser's renouncing of the world, however, is not a solely Platonic inspiration, for "the Bible of all books was his principal source, as it was the foundation of his faith."² The charm of Platonism for Spenser lies in its easy adaptability to Christian themes. He effects "a perfect tempering of Christian and pagan symbols."³ Plato's theory that love is a desire for birth in beauty is deftly used Spenser to explain the mystic relationship existing between a heavenly Father and a divine Son. Diotima defines love as an "engendering and begetting upon the beautiful", and "hence it is that when the pregnant approaches the beautiful it becomes not only gracious but so exhilarate, that it flows over with begetting and bringing forth."⁴ It was this elemental desire, this divine love or Christian God that brought forth the Messiah of the New Testament.

"It lov'd it selfe, because it selfe was faire;
(For faire is lov'd) and of it selfe begot
Like to it selfe his eldest sonne and heire,
Eternall, pure, and voide of sinfull blot,
The firstling of his joy, in whom not jot

¹ Cory. pp. 344, 345.

² Renwick. p. 162.

³ Cory. p. 252.

⁴ Plato. vol. 5, pp. 191, 192.

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Of loves dislike or pride was to be found,
Whom he therefore with equall honour crownd."
(ll. 29-35)

Following the same conceit, Spenser accounts for the origin of the angels.

"Yet being pregnant still with powrefull grace,
And full of fruitfull love, that loves to get
Things like himselfe, and to enlarge his race,
His second brood though not in powre so great,
Yet full of beautie, next he did beget
An infinite increase of Angels bright,
All glistring glorious in their Makers light."
(ll. 49-56)

It is the breath of God which first quickened dull clay into human life, and gave to man a beauteous countenance, peculiarly divine.

"Therefore of clay, base, vile, and next to nought,
Yet form'd by wondrous skill, and by his might:
According to an heavenly patterne wrought,
Which he had fashioned in his wise foresight,
He man did make, and breathed a living spright
Into his face most beautifull and fayre
Endewed with wisdomes riches, heavenly, rare.
Such he him made, that he resemble might
Himselfe, as mortall thing immortall could."
(ll. 108-114)

At the close of the third hymn Spenser has ascended far up the ladder of Platonic love, albeit on the rounds of Christian belief. His desire now cleaves to the divine personality of the Son; the pangs of spiritual poverty stab through his starving, yet ascendent soul.

"Then shalt thou feelee thy spirit so possest,
And ravisht with devouring great desire
Of his deare selfe, that shall thy feeble brest
Inflame with love, and set thee all on fire

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With burning zeale, through every part entire,
That in no earthly thing thou shalt delight,
But in his sweet and amiable sight."
(ll. 267-273)

He is freed from the bondage of the obvious, for his senses have been quickened to perceive a spiritual body.

"Thenceforth all worlds desire will in thee dye,
And all earthes glorie on which men do gaze,
Seeme durt and drosse in thy pure sighted eye,
Compar'd to that celestiall beauties blaze,
Whose glorious beames all fleshly sense doth daze
With admiration of their passing light,
Blinding the eyes and lumining the spright."
(ll. 274-280)

The climax of Platonic love is reached with the closing lines. With a vision of the Idea of pure glory, desire within the soul reaches its most exquisite need.

"Then shall thy ravisht soule inspired bee
With heavenly thoughts, farre above humane skil,
And thy bright radiant eyes shall plainly see
Th' Idee of his pure glorie, present still
Before thy face, that all thy spirits shall fill
With sweete enragement of celestiall love,
Kindled through sight of those faire things above."
(ll. 281-287)

Heavenly love is inspired by a revelation of heavenly beauty,

"Through contemplation of those goodly sights
Whose wondrous beauty breathing sweet delights
Do kindle love in high conceipted sprights."
(An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie. ll. 2-4)

The opening lines of the last hymn bespeak a Platonic lover whose ravished vision is blurred by his first glimpse

"Of that immortal beautie
Which in my weake distraughted mynd I see."
(ll. 13, 14)

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He has been mounting the rounds of the ladder of love,

"Beginning then below, with th'easie vew
Of this base world, subject to fleshly eye,
From thence to mount aloft by order dew,
To contemplation of th'immortall sky,
Of the soare faulcon so I learne to fly,
That flags awhile her fluttering wings beneath,
Till she her selfe for stronger flight can breath."
(ll. 22-28)

The poet at first does not wholly lose sight of earthly beauty in his glorification of heavenly beauty.

He is too sensitive to its charms for that. For him still "the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork."

"The meanes therefore, which unto us is lent,
Him to behold, is on his workes to looke,
Which he hath made in beauty excellent,
And in the same, as in a brasen booke,
To reade enregistred in every nooke
His goodnesse, which his beautie doth declare,
For all thats good, is beautifull and faire."
(ll. 127-133)

But these outward forms depict to the dulled vision a beauty, which is far surpassed as it

"----- doth upward tend,
And further is from earth, so still more cleare
And faire it growes, till to his perfect end
Of purest beautie, it at last ascend."
(ll. 44-47)

This celestial beauty finally appears in

"----- the glorious face
Of the divine eternall majestie;
More faire is that, where those Ideas on hie,
Enraunged be, which Plato so admyred
And pure Intelligences from God inspyred."
(ll. 80-84)

Spenser never loses sight of the good in his worship

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of the beautiful, for although "sensuous beauty is perfect in both (Spenser and Plato) their main worship is for moral beauty."¹ The beauty of God's very presence is surpassed by the perfection of His moral excellence,

"His truth, his love, his wisdom, and his bliss,
His grace, his doome, his mercy, and his might,
By which he lends us of himselfe a sight."
(ll. 109-111)

Spenser "has succeeded in seizing beauty in its fullness, because he cared for nothing but beauty."²

Of the many who are actuated to take the first halting steps in the mysteries of Platonic love, few achieve "the highest pitch of philosophical love, when the mind has ascended to the contemplation of beauty in genere, not merely in bodies and minds, but in laws, institutions, and sciences."³ Spenser is one of the few who has caught a vision of the divine Intelligence.

"There in God's bosome Sapience doth sit,
The soveraine dearling of the Deity."
(ll. 183, 184)

"According to Spenser -- heavenly love is the love felt in the soul when the sight of wisdom in her beauty dawns upon the inner vision. It is a love gained through speculation."⁴ And he easily blends with Pla-

¹ Taine. book 2, p. 132.

² Ibid. p. 137.

³ Grote. vol. 3, p. 7

⁴ Harrison. p. 75.

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tonism the Calvinistic doctrine of election,¹ for none can behold eternal Wisdom save those to whom she has chosen to reveal herself.

"None thereof worthy be, but those whom shee
Vouchsafeth to her presence to receive,
And letteth them her lovely face to see."
(ll. 253-255)

And now the lover is prepared to receive his reward, a complete provision for the starving needs of his moral and spiritual being. The sight of pure Intelligence has effectually removed what clods of earth may yet have clung to him in his arduous ascent. He is now numbered among those Platonic lovers who are enjoying such

"---- sweete contentment, that it doth bereave
Their soule of sense, through infinite delight,
And them transport from flesh into the spright."
(ll. 257-259)

And here we shall leave him in his triumph, with his pure soul beholding

"----- that soveraine light,
From whose pure beams al perfect beauty springs,
That kindleth love in every godly spright,
Even the love of God." (ll. 295-298)

¹
Fletcher, J. B. The Religion of Beauty in Woman.
P. 119.

CHAPTER IV

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare is a Platonic lover. True, he does not, with methodical zeal, purpose to set forth in his sonnet sequence a lucid interpretation of the Platonic doctrine.¹ It is Spenser who expounds the theory with meticulous care. But Shakespeare is conversant with the philosophy of his time; he has no doubt read Spenser's Fowre Hymnes and Hoby's The Courtier; he possesses a nature sensuous and passionate enough to rejoice in all the multifold forms of natural beauty, and, at the same time, spiritual enough to extract out of this objective beauty an essence of eternal verity. Shakespeare does not go the whole way with Plato, for we do not find him grown to love abstract Idea as fondly as he does the person of that comely Elizabethan youth to whom he addresses his sonnets. And yet to this extent is he a Platonic lover, that "in the impassioned glow of his conceptions, the material and the spiritual are blent and fused together"²

In his infatuation for a youth rather than for

¹ Wyndham, George. Essays in Romantic Literature. p. 362.

² Pater, Walter. Plato and Platonism. p. 121.

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a maid, Shakespeare is peculiarly Platonic, for the Greek philosopher or lover, attached himself to a young man of promise, whose physical perfection and mental alertness, combined to satisfy the clamorous desires of sense as well as of soul. The Greek women were married young; they knew little more than the art of spinning and weaving. That their beauty provide for their husbands a sensual satisfaction was all that was expected or desired of them. The man of intellect as well as passion must look elsewhere for a fully congenial companionship. And he turned to some handsome and aspiring boy of noble birth. "It was the masculine beauty of youth that fired the Hellenic imagination with glowing and impassioned sentiment."¹ Although much that is beautiful in Elizabethan poetry has been inspired by woman, Shakespeare, like a sixteenth century Socrates, becomes enamored of a fair young man. In Sonnet XX he describes him as having all the graces of a woman, yet none of her short-comings; he would reserve for himself the real affection of this youth and, in the event that the young man wed, leave for his wife the remnants of a merely physical attachment.

¹Grote, George. Plato. vol. 3, p. 3.

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"A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted
 Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion;
 A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted
 With shifting change, as is false woman's fashion.
 An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,
 Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
 A man in hue, all 'hues' in his controlling,
 Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.
 And for a woman wert thou first created.

 Mine by thy love, and thy love's use their treasure."

According to Plato, the joy of intimate human association is not an end in itself. The physical, intellectual, and moral beauty of a youth is to provide the philosopher with a stimulus which will ultimately enhance his powers of profound thought and spiritual perception. In the Phaedrus, Eros or love is "mad, irrational, superseding reason and prudence in the individual mind."¹ And before a philosopher can catch a vision, a revelation of divine essences, he must become fired with an enthusiasm which is akin to madness. The sober, right-thinking, decent citizen, no matter how meritorious his life may be, will never develop into a Platonic lover.² "The greatest blessings enjoyed by man arise from madness, when it is imparted by divine inspiration."³ It is important to remember, of course, that a madness sprung from any but divine sources will result in untold evil.

¹ Grote. vol. 3, p. 11.

² Ibid. p. 15

³ Ibid. p. 11.

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In accordance with Plato's theory of reminiscence, "the contemplation of a beautiful youth, and the vehement emotion accompanying it, was the only way of reviving in the soul the Idea of Beauty which it had seen in its antecedent stage of existence."¹

Herein, again, do we see Platonic tendencies in Shakespeare, for he invests his youth with a glamorous wonder that could be seen only through the eyes of a frenzied enthusiast. In fact, Shakespeare may be temporarily termed "mad". His senses respond to beauty in no form save in the person of his beloved youth.

"For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
And, thou away, the very birds are mute;
Or, if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer
That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near."
XCVII.

He ascribes all his literary power to the inspiration of the young man's wondrous eyes, which are the teachers alike of wise and foolish.

"Thine eyes that taught the dumb on high to sing,
And heavy ignorance aloft to fly,
Have added feathers to the learned's wing
And given grace a double majesty.

But thou art all my art and dost advance
As high as learning my rude ignorance." LXXVII.

Conscious that sane readers of his verse will not consider plausible his wild assertions, he bemoans

¹
Grote. vol. 5, p. 4.

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the coming generation's skepticism.

"If I could write the beauty of your eyes
 And in fresh numbers number all your graces,
 The age to come would say 'This poet lies,
 Such heavenly touches ne'er touch'd earthly faces.'" XVII.

The personality of his friend has so invigorated him that in moments of mental depression he has but to think on him for consolation.

"Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising
 Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
 Like to the lark at break of day arising
 From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate." XXIX.

We find this same power residing in the friend in Sonnet XXX.

"-----if the while I think on thee dear friend,
 All losses are restored and sorrows end."

Diotima says to Socrates, "The man who does not feel himself defective has no desire for that whereof he feels no defect."¹ Nowhere is the consciousness of defect more forcibly impressed upon the lover than in the presence of that friend, whom he has invested with a rare perfection. Herein then lies the friend's real service to the lover. A sense of defect is created in the lover's consciousness, out of which rises an absorbing desire to possess that good which resides outside of himself. And so he makes a gesture toward a fond ideal. The intensity of his desire, and its nature, will determine just how far

¹
 Plato. vol.5, p. 183.

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he will go into the realm of mystic philosophy, but he is to some degree a Platonist as soon as his love becomes "a state of conscious want, and of aspiration or endeavor to satisfy that want, by striving after good or happiness."¹ Shakespeare is acutely aware of his own unworthiness in Sonnet LXXII.

"O, lest the world should task you to recite
 What merit lived in me, that you should love,
 After my death, dear love, forget me quite,
 For you in me can nothing worthy prove;
 Unless you would devise some virtuous lie,
 To do more for me than mine own desert,
 And hang more praise upon deceased I
 Than niggard truth would willingly impart."

This Platonic "madness" which has tipped the poet's wings with strong desire and sweet humility leads him quite naturally into another region of Platonic thought. His prolonged contemplation of his friend's perfections has resulted in the merging of his own personality into that of his friend. He becomes identified with his friend; they have become one. "The conceit of Identity with the person addressed is but a part of the machinery of Renaissance Platonics, derived, at many removes, from discussions in the Platonic Academy at Florence."²

Pausanias in the Symposium says that "the lover of a nature that is worthy abides throughout life, as being fused into one with the abiding."³ Grote ex-

¹ Grote. vol. 3, p. 10.

² Wyndham. pp. 357, 358.

³ Plato. vol. 5, p. 117.

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plains that "the lover did not merely admire the person, but also contracted the strongest sympathy with the feelings and character of the beloved youth."¹ Shakespeare expresses this idea in various degrees of fanciful conceits throughout a number of his sonnets.

"But here's the joy; my friend and I are one."
XLII.

"----- thou art all the better part of me."
XXXIV.

"As easy might I from myself depart
As from my soul, which in thy breast doth lie."
CIX.

In sonnet XXII he conceives of himself as being no older than his young friend because of his identity with him.

"My glass shall not persuade me I am old,
So long as youth and thou are of one date;
But when in thee time's furrows I behold,
Then look I death my days should expiate.
For all that beauty that doth cover thee
Is but the seemly raiment of my heart,
Which in thy breast doth live, as thine in me.
How can I then be older than thou art?"

He knows no physical blemish, no poverty, no unpopularity so long as he may find beauty, wealth, and honor in the possession of his friend.

"----- whether beauty, birth, or wealth, or wit,
Or any of these all, or all, or more
Entitled in thy parts do crowned sit,
I make my love engrafted to this store;
So then I am not lame, poor, nor despised,
Whilst that this shadow doth such substance give

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Grote. vol. 3, p. 4.

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That I in thy abundance am sufficed
And by a part of all thy glory live."

XXXVII.

He becomes guilty of self-love, since to love his friend of whom he is a part, means that he is in effect loving himself.

"Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye
And all my soul and all my every part;
And for this sin there is no remedy,
It is so grounded inward in my heart.
Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,
No shape so true, no truth of such account;
And for myself mine own worth do define,
As I all other in all worths surmount.
But when my glass shows me myself indeed,
Beated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity,
Mine own self-love quite contrary I read;
Self so self-loving were iniquity.
'Tis thee, myself, that for myself I praise,
Painting my age with beauty of thy days."

LXII.

Even in death the lover remains identified with his friend through the spirit which has produced his verses. The body's decay cannot destroy the spiritual union which has made them one, and which is reestablished each time the friend rereads the poet's lines.

"But be contented. When that fell arrest
Without all bail shall carry me away,
My life hath in this line some interest,
Which for memorial still with thee shall stay.
When thou reviewest this, thou dost review
The very part was consecrate to thee:
The earth can have but earth which is his due;
My spirit is thine, the better part of me:
So then thou hast but lost the dregs of life,
The prey of worms, my body being dead,
The coward conquest of a wretch's knife.
Too base of thee to be remembered.
The worth of that is that which it contains
And that is this, and this with thee remains."

LXXIV.

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A popular form of Renaissance Platonism dealt with the theme of ideal beauty. Plato's theory of beauty had passed through many intermediaries before reaching Shakespeare: from Byzantium it had come to Florence, and from thence to England and France.¹ Plato conceived of visible beauty as a representative of an invisible beauty, which existed in the realm of universal ideas. "If any man's vision be once sharpened so that he can see beauty pure and absolute, he will have no eyes for the individual manifestations of it in gold, fine raiment, brilliant colours, or beautiful youths. Herein we have the climax"² of Platonic love. Renaissance Platonism often inverts this theory, as does Shakespeare in his sonnet sequence. Instead of beholding in his friend the medium through which he can catch a superb vision of ideal beauty, he sees no farther than this human form,³ which, in itself is beauty's complete revelation. His friend is not patterned after the eternal idea of beauty; but rather embodies in himself that pattern which Nature, in each new and exquisite aspect, imitates.

¹ Wyndham. pp. 358, 361.

² Grote. vol. 3, p. 8.

³ Wyndham. p. 362.

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"Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
 Nor praise the deep vermillion of the rose;
 They were but sweet, but figures of delight,
 Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.
 Yet seem'd it winter still, and you away,
 As with your shadow I with these did play."
 XCVIII.

Again

"More flowers I noted, yet none I could see
 But sweet or colour it had stol'n from thee."
 XCIX.

As the flower draws its coloring from the youth's
 fair countenance, so does the poet find in him the
 virtue and beauty which inspires his verse.

"I grant, sweet love, thy lovely argument
 Deserves the travail of a worthier pen,
 Yet what of thee thy poet doth invent
 He robs thee of and pays it thee again.
 He lends thee virtue, and he stole that word
 From thy behaviour; beauty doth he give
 And found it in thy cheek."
 LXXIX.

"The mystical confusion with and in the Friend of all
 that is beautiful or lovable in the Poet and others
 is a development from the Platonic theory of the
 Idea of Beauty: the eternal type of which all beau-
 tiful things on earth are but shadows." ¹ In Sonnet
 LIII even the beautiful faces of centuries gone by
 are but poor counterparts of him the poet worships.

"What is your substance whereof are you made,
 That millions of strange shadows on you tend?
 Since every one hath, every one, one shade,
 And you, but one, can every shadow lend.
 Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit

¹
 Wyndham. p. 358.

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Is poorly imitated after you;
 On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
 And you in Grecian tires are painted new;
 Speak of the spring and foison of the year,
 The one doth shadow of your beauty show,
 The other as your bounty doth appear,
 And you in every blessed shape we know."

The beautiful persons of ages past have been the
 unwitting prophets of his friend's era.

"When in the chronicle of wasted time
 I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
 And beauty making beautiful old rhyme
 In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights,
 Then in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,
 Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
 I see their antique pen would have express'd
 Even such a beauty as you master now.
 So all their praises are but prophecies
 Of this our time, all you prefiguring."

CVI.

Shakespeare, with a protesting gesture, seeks to stay
 the advance of Time, which would destroy beauty's
 sole prototype.

"O(Time) carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,
 Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen;
 Him in thy course untainted do allow
 For beauty's pattern to succeeding men."

XIX.

He decries false art which strives for beauty by art-
 ificial means, presenting in bold contrast, the friend
 whose beauty bears no taint of unreality.

"In him those holy antique hours are seen,
 Without all ornament, itself and true,
 Making no summer of another's green,
 Robbing no old to dress his beauty new,
 And him as for a map doth Nature store,
 To show false Art what beauty was of yore."

LXVIII.

Sonnet LXVII expresses the idea that in no other hu-
 man being does Nature display such perfect artistry.

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"Why should poor beauty indirectly seek
Roses of shadow, since his rose is true?"

For she (Nature) hath no exchequer now but his,
And, proud of many, lives upon his gains.
O, him she stores, to show what wealth she had
In days long since, before these last so bad."

Although there are others whom the poet has once loved
and whose deaths he has at one time mourned, he sees
them all now living in the likeness of his friend.

"Thy bosom is endeared with all hearts,
Which I by lacking have supposed dead

Their images I loved I view in thee,
And thou, all they, hast all the all of me."
XXXI.

His conceits have carried him far from the original
Platonic concept of an abstract and eternal beauty,
for when he centers all beauty within one boy, that
quality becomes temporal and must cease to exist at
his friend's death. Such a conviction is expressed
in Sonnet XIV.

"Thy end is truth's and beauty's doom and date."
And again in Sonnet CIV.

"-----Hear this, thou age unbred,
Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead."

The poet extends this conceit beyond the realm of
beauty when his friend assumes the dimensions of the
world.

"You are so strongly in my purpose bred
That all the world besides methinks are dead."
CXII.

Nay more, the universe!

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"For nothing this wide universe I call,
 Save thou, my rose, in it thou art my all."
 CIX.

Some evidence that the poet all but accepts the
 Platonic theory of reminiscence appears in Sonnet LIX.

"O, that record could with backward look,
 Even of five hundred courses of the sun,
 Show me your image in some antique book,
 Since mind at first in character was done!"

Here is expressed a belief in the preexistence of his
 friend.¹ According to the theory set forth in the Pla-
 tonic account, the capacity of a mortal to recognize
 true beauty rests upon his ability to recall that di-
 vine beauty, which he has once beheld in a former
 spiritual existence.²

The Platonic lover is one who desires more than
 mere physical beauty in the object of his devotion.
 He seeks for the intangible qualities of virtue, truth
 wisdom; and "when, along with this beauty of person,
 there is found the additional charm of a susceptible,
 generous, intelligent mind --- the bodily sympathy
 (becomes) spiritualized and absorbed by the mental."³
 Then the lover has taken one step upward on that Pla-
 tonic ladder, which, if courageously climbed, will
 lead him into a realm of glorified abstractions.
 Shakespeare does not reach the ladder's top as does

¹ Wyndham. p. 367.

² Grote. vol. 3, p. 13.

³ Ibid. p. 7.

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Spenser, but he is not content to remain upon the lowest round of sensual desire, nor yet upon that higher round of the aesthetic appreciation of a beauty which the eye alone detects. This obvious beauty according to the Platonic theory, was necessary to awaken in him sublime memories, which would, in turn fire him with intense desires. Once material beauty has performed its task, has startled the apathetic lover out of his prolonged sleep, it should give way to the more subtle inroads of an invisible beauty that the most discerning eye cannot detect. Shakespeare mounts a higher round of Platonic mysticism when he perceives the eye's inadequacy.

"Yet eyes this cunning want to grace their art;
They draw but what they see, know not the heart."
XXIV.

In Sonnet XLVI Shakespeare writes of the opposing demands made upon him by his eye and heart, and he bestows on each its special privilege.

"Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war
How to divide the conquest of thy sight,
Mine eye my heart thy pictures sight would bar,
My heart mine eye the freedom of that right.
My heart doth plead that thou in him must lie,
A closet never pierced with crystal eyes--
But the defendant doth that plea deny
And says in him thy fair appearance lies.
To 'cide this title is impanneled
A quest of thoughts, all tenants to the heart,
The clear eye's moiety and the dear heart's part:
As thus, mine eye's due is thy outward part,
And my heart's right thy inward love of heart."

The Platonic significance of this sonnet is that it

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shows the trend of the poet's mind away from the mere sensuous delight in outward perfection toward a desire for some unseen reality. We mark here a growth in the nature of his desire, which is becoming more Platonic in scope, "the desire of good things and of being happy."¹ Beauty of form alone does not satisfy him, but it must be accompanied by truth.

"O, how much more doth beauty beauteous seem
By that sweet ornament which truth doth give!"
LIV.

"Shakespeare, when he handles the Truth of Beauty, does so almost always with but a secondary allusion or with no allusion at all, to his Friend's constancy."² We find some inconsistency here between the poet's lines and his friend's behavior. Desiring to find truth where beauty dwells, in accordance with the Platonic concept, yet meeting with disillusionment because of his friend's conduct, the poet deliberately practices a self-deception, that truth and beauty may be reconciled.

"So shall I live, supposing thou art true,
Like a deceived husband, so love's face
May still seem love to me, though alter'd new;
Thy looks with me, thy heart in other place:
For there can live no hatred in thine eye,
Therefore in that I cannot know thy change.
In many's looks the false heart's history

¹ Plato. vol. 5, p. 187.

² Wyndham. p. 364.

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Is writ in moods and frowns and wrinkles strange,
 But heaven in thy creation did decree
 That in thy face sweet love should ever dwell;
 Whate'er thy thoughts or thy heart's workings be,
 Thy looks should nothing thence but sweetness tell.
 How like Eve's apple doth thy beauty grow,
 If thy sweet virtue answer not thy show."
 XCIII.

He again associates the ideas of truth and beauty
 in Sonnet CI.

"Both truth and beauty on my love depends,
 So dost thou (Muse) too, and therein dignified."

In Sonnet CXVII we feel the poignancy of his desire
 for more than an outward beauty.

"---- I did but strive to prove
 The constancy and virtue of your love."

As the Greek philosopher desires in the youth of his
 choice not only a comely person but also a quick in-
 telligence, so Shakespeare seeks through his friend
 some mental refreshment.

"So are you to my thoughts as food to life.
 Or as sweet season'd showers are to the ground."
 LXXV.

And again in Sonnet LXXXII he writes

"Thou art as fair in knowledge as in hue."

Sonnet LXIX opens with a tribute to outward beauty,
 which the world does rightful homage to in the poet's
 friend.

"Those parts of thee that the world's eye doth view
 Want nothing that the thought of hearts can mend;
 All tongues, the voice of souls, give thee that due,
 Uttering bare truth, even so as foes commend.
 Thy outward thus with inward praise is crown'd."

But it closes with a loyal attempt by the poet to

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discredit slanderous comments upon the young man's behavior, which does not bespeak a mind in harmony with his fair countenance. The very fact that Shakespeare refuses to believe his friend's reputed falseness points toward that Platonic attitude which would always associate the beautiful with the good and would point to material loveliness as an index to the soul's perfection.

"They look into the beauty of thy mind,
 And that in guess, they measure by thy deeds.
 Then, churls, their thoughts, although their
 eyes were kind
 To thy fair flower add the rank smell of weeds."
 LXIX.

When Shakespeare emphasizes the importance of the mind, its freedom from any physical restriction, he again is in the realm of Platonic thought.

"If the dull substance of my flesh were thought
 Injurious distance should not stop my way,
 For then, despite of space, I would be brought,
 From limits far remote where thou dost stay

 For nimble thought can jump both sea and land
 As soon as think the place where he would be."
 XLIX.

A similar conceit occurs in Sonnet XXVII.

"----- my thoughts, from far where I abide,
 Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee."

Again in Sonnet XLVII.

"---- either by thy picture or my love,
 Thyself away art present still with me;
 And thou not farther than my thoughts canst move,
 And I am still with them and they with thee."

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A poetical "madness" seizes upon the poet in Sonnet CXIII, when all that he beholds takes on the likeness of his friend. The firm conviction of the mind belies the testimony of the eye, and renders it untrue.

"Since I left you, mine eye is in my mind;

 For if it see the rudest or gentlest sight,
 The most sweet favour or deformed'st creature,
 The mountain or the sea, the day or night,
 The crow or dove, it shapes them to your feature.
 Incapable of more, replete with you,
 My most true mind thus makes mine eye untrue."

The supreme desire in the heart of the Platonic lover is to become immortal; and Platonic love may be defined as "the impulse towards self-perpetuation which agitates both bodies and minds throughout nature."¹ To quote from the Symposium: "the mortal mind ever seeks, as best it can, to be immortal."² According to the doctrine set forth in the Symposium, the soul is immortal only in so far as the body has the power to beget new life; thus the soul of the old body continues to live in the new. When a man longs for an heir, his basic desire is that that personality or being which is himself be preserved in another human being and not be utterly cast away at death. A son is a partial satisfaction to a man's yearning after eternal life. Potentially then, all men may be considered Platonic lovers since they are lovers of immortality. Materialism, however, has ob-

¹ Grote. vol. 3, p. 6

² Plato. vol. 5, p. 195.

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structed their progress. They have taken the initial step in love's fulfillment and rested content, missing the joyous consummation of the soul's glad pilgrimage up to divine Idea. Such an experience is not to be achieved miraculously but through the slow processes of growth and development. Shakespeare takes but the first step in his opening sonnets. He is urging his friend to wed, in order that the beauty of his face and form may be preserved in the succeeding generation.

"Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee
Calls back the lovely April of her prime:
So thou through windows of thine age shalt see
Despite of wrinkles this thy golden time."

III.

The emphasis in these early sonnets is placed on the perpetuation of outward forms of beauty.

"From fairest creatures we desire increase
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
But as the ripener should by time decrease,
His tender heir might bear his memory."

I.

And again

"Be, as thy presence is, gracious and kind,
Or to thyself at least kind-hearted prove.
Make thee another self, for love of me,
That beauty still may live in thine or thee."

X.

Sonnet XI in ruthless words expresses the thought that beautiful bodies, because of their inherent worth, shall be renewed, whereas unlovely forms should perish.

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"Herein lies wisdom, beauty and increase.

 Let those whom Nature hath not made for store,
 Harsh featureless and rude, barrenly perish."

According to the Symposium, "an individual man or animal cannot be immortal: he can only attain a quasi-immortality by generating a new individual to replace himself."¹ Pursuing this theory, Shakespeare urges upon his friend the necessity of marrying.

" --- nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence
 Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence."

XII.

And again

"Then how, when nature calls thee to be gone
 What acceptable audit canst thou leave,
 Thy unused beauty must be tomb'd with thee,
 Which, used, lives th' executor to be."

IV.

What is true in human life and animal life has its parallel in plant life.

"Then, were not summer's distillation left,
 A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,
 Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,
 Nor it nor no remembrance what it was:
 But flowers distill'd, though they with winter meet,
 Leese but their show; their substance still lives
 sweet."

V.

A popular conceit of the sixteenth century poet is that immortality may be enjoyed through the medium of verse. Thus Shakespeare lifts his friend out of death's oblivion.

"But thy eternal summer shall not fade

¹
 Grote. vol. 3, p. 6.

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Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
 Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
 When in eternal lines to time thou growest."
 XVIII.

This thought is frequently found recurring throughout the series. Such a concept points to the Platonic theory that the mind has the capacity to beget ideas which will live after it.

The first series of one hundred and twenty-six sonnets, which Shakespeare addresses to his friend,
 ends with an attack on Time.¹ It seems a logical venture in the theme of immortality, and it marks the apex of Shakespeare's Platonic theorizing.

"Since Ideal Beauty is true, is very Truth, it is independent of Time, and eternal; it, with the love it engenders, is also independent of accident and is unconditioned."² Shakespeare in his use of the word "Love" is departing from the Platonic "Eros" which "like philosophy, represents a continual aspiration and advance toward a goal never attained." The poet does not preserve that nice distinction which Grote points out should be maintained between love or desire, and the object desired.³ In Sonnets CVII and CXVI the term "love" is synonymous,

¹ Wyndham, p. 367.

² Ibid.

³ Grote. vol. 3, p. 10.

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not with "desire", but with "the 'Ideas' of Plato (which) are those universal definitions, those universal conceptions."¹ Although we see little or no evidence that Shakespeare has grown to love abstract truth and beauty with the passion of Plato for whom "abstract ideas themselves became animated, living persons, almost corporeal, as if with hands and eyes",² nevertheless his great soul rises to proclaim the triumphant gospel of a love, which is immortal, and "makes antiquity for aye his page." (CVII.)

"-----Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom."
CXVI.

1.
Pater. p. 146.

2
Ibid. p. 152.

CHAPTER V

OTHER PLATONIC ELIZABETHANS

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Philip Sidney, while far from being a consistent Platonic lover, in certain poetic moods experiences a loftiness of desire, which for the time lifts him into the realms of mysticism. "In Sidney there is a direct reference to the power of Plato's thought to lead the mind from the desire with which he is struggling."¹

"---- mine own writings, like bad servants show
My wits quick in vain thoughts, in virtue lame;
----Plato I read for nought but if he tame
Such coltish years ----"
(Astrophel and Stella, Sonnet XXI)

Although Sonnet XLVIII praises Stella's virtuous soul, the poet's desire reaches out after more substantial nourishment than the contemplation of her irreproachable character. Possessing a capacity for recognizing and honoring virtue, Sidney evinces no Platonic love for it. In fact he conceives of it as a hindrance to his love.

"A strife is grown between Virtue and Love,
While each pretends that Stella must be his;
Her eyes, her lips, her all, saith Love, do thus,
Since they do wear his badge, most firmly prove,
But Virtue thus that doth disprove
That Stella,-- O dear name! that Stella is
That virtuous soul, sure heir of heav'nly bliss,
Not this fair outside, which our heart doth move,

¹

Harrison, J. S. Platonism in English Poetry. p. 137.

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And therefore, though her beauty and her grace
 Be Love's indeed, in Stella's self he may
 By no pretence claim any manner place.
 Well, Love, since this demur our suit doth stay,
 Let Virtue have that Stella's self; yet thus,
 That Virtue but that body grant to us."

Stella proves the truth of the Platonic concept that
 Virtue and Beauty are one, for her physical charms
 accord with her noble behavior. Yet in Sonnet LXXI
 the poet still clings to his earthly love. "Love
 is both of the flesh and of the spirit, and such is
 the love of which Sidney sings."¹

"Who will in fairest book of Nature know
 How virtue may best lodg'd in beauty be,
 Let him but learn of Love to read in thee,
 Stella, those fair lines which true goodness show.
 There shall he find all vices' overthrow,
 Not by rude force, but sweetest sovereignty
 Of reason, from whose light those night-birds fly,
 That inward sun in thine eyes shineth so.
 And, not content to be Perfection's heir
 Thyself, dost strive all minds that way to move,
 Who mark in thee what is in thee most fair:
 So while thy beauty draws the heart to love,
 As fast thy virtue bends that love to good:
 But, ah, Desire still cries, give me some food."

The final sonnet of the Astrophel and Stella series,
 however, marks a glorious triumph of Platonic love.
 It acclaims soul victor over sense and wreaths the
 poet's brow in the laurels of truth and grandeur.
 At last he has cast off his garment of flesh and gird-
 ed his loins with the cloth of spiritual beauty.

"Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust,
 And thou my mind, aspire to higher things;
 Grow rich in that which never taketh rust;

¹
 Drinkwater, John. Critical Introduction to
Sidney's Poems. p. 56.

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Whatever fades, but fading pleasures brings.
 Draw in thy beams and humble all thy might
 To that sweet yoke, where last freedoms be;
 Which breaks the clouds, and opens forth the light
 That doth both shine and give us sight to see.
 O take fast hold; let that light be thy guide
 In this small course which birth draws out to death,
 And think how evil becometh him to slide
 Who seeketh heav'n and comes of heav'nly breath.
 Then farewell, world; thy uttermost I see:
 Eternal Love, maintain thy Life in me." (CX.)

This poem is a striking example of Plato's theory that actuated by "obvious beauties", man can ultimately achieve "that highest beauty". Had Sidney written no other poem, this one sonnet like the single stroke of a cathedral bell would have sounded forth the majesty of his Platonic soul. "Divine love continues the earthly love; he was imprisoned in this and frees himself. --- Spiritual instincts pierce through the dominant paganism and ere they make Christians, make Platonists."¹

William Drummond of Hawthornden possesses many of the characteristics of a Platonic lover. He accepts the theory of reminiscence, believing that in some pre-existence he has seen the beauty of his loved one, and that his earthly passion is but the burning of celestial fire kindled by his divine idea of her before his form or hers took shape in a material world.

"That learned Grecian, who did so excel

¹
 Taine, H. A. A History of English Literature.
 book 2, p. 126.

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In knowledge passing sense, that he is nam'd
 Of all the after-worlds divine, doth tell
 That at the time when first our souls are fram'd,
 Ere in this mansions blind they come to dwell,
 They live bright rays of that eternal light,
 And others see, know, love, in heaven's great height,
 Not toiled with aught to reason doth rebel.
 Most true it is, for straight at the first sight
 My mind me told, that in some other place
 It elsewhere saw the idea of that face,
 And lov'd a love of heavenly pure delight;
 No wonder now I feel so fair a flame
 Sith I her lov'd ere on this earth she came."
Sonnet VII.

He is a writer whose deeply religious nature has responded to the mysticism of Plato. He "had in him the making of a Platonic philosopher; but as Sir Thomas Browne would have said, he 'Christianized his notions'".¹ In Song II he relates how in a dream a beautiful virgin, the soul's embodiment of his lost love, appears to solace him, and bids him cast off that frenzied grief which threatens to becloud his spiritual vision. She points him to a new and infinite vitality that makes his brief and circumscribed existence upon earth seem death itself in contrast, and bids him view a beauty, fairer than her own dim shadow of divine perfection.

"If we seem fair, O think how fair is he
 Of whose fair fairness shadows, steps we be.
 No shadow can compare it with the face,
 No step with that dear foot which did it trace;
 Your souls immortal are, then place them hence,
 And do not drown them in the mist of sense:
 Do not, O do not, by false pleasures' might
 Deprive them of that true and sole delight.

¹
 Ward, Wm. C. Introductory Memoir, Poems of William Drummond. p. XLV.

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That happiness ye seek is not below;
 Earth's sweetest joy is but disguised woe."
 (ll. 231-240)

She is the apostle of heavenly love and heavenly
 beauty.

"O leave that love which reacheth but to dust,
 And in that love eternal only trust,
 And beauty, which, when once it is possest,
 Can only fill the soul, and make it blest."
 (ll. 197-200)

She speaks as one whom revelation has inspired; no
 mortal she, but one whom death has deified.

"If once thou on that only Fair couldst gaze,
 What flames of love would he within thee raise!
 In what a mazing maze would it thee bring,
 To hear but once that quire celestial sing!
 The fairest shapes on which thy love did seize,
 Which erst did breed delight, then would displease

 Be but dark pictures of that sovereign Fair."
 (ll. 211-225)

He catches something of her vision.

"----- how foolish he had been
 To think nought be, but what he there had seen!"
 (ll. 169-170)

Love is of the spirit. It should not attach itself
 to corruptible forms but should seek fulfillment in
 an adoration of the divine being.

"Sith it hath pleased that First and only Fair
 To take that beauty to himself again,
 Which in this world of sense not to remain,
 But to amaze, was sent, and home repair;
 The love which to that beauty I did bear
 (Made pure of mortal spots which did it stain,
 And endless, which even death cannot impair)
 I place on Him who will it not disdain.
 No shining eyes, no locks of curling gold,
 No blushing roses on a virgin face,
 No outward show, no, nor no inward grace,
 Shall force hereafter have my thoughts to hold:

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Love here on earth huge storms of care do toss,
But plac'd above, exempted is from loss."
(Sonnet XIII)

Once freed from human limitations the lover experiences a glorious expansion of vision.

"Above this vast and admirable frame,
This temple visible, which World we name

There is a world, a world of perfect bliss,
Pure, immaterial, bright."
(Song II. ll. 111-118)

It is a

"----- happy dwelling-place
Where visibly th' Invisible doth reign!
Blest people, who do see true beauty's face."
(Urania. p. 140. ll. 9-11)

In his capacity for a purely spiritual ecstasy, Drummond achieves the crest of Platonic mysticism. He is a lover who has been led

"With chaste and pure desire
To turn unto the loadstar of all bliss,
On God the mind to rest,
Burnt up with sacred fire,
Possessing him, to be by him possesst."
(An Hymne of True Happiness)

John Donne calls upon Platonism to assist him in thinking through some of the problems that assail his analytical mind, especially in regard to the personality of woman. During the sixteenth century there are two Platonic conceptions of woman: first, she is the source of all virtue; second, her nature is the universal soul.¹ These ideas occur in the poetry of Donne, who attempts to account for the indisputable fact that woman exerts an immeasurable influence upon

¹
Harrison. p. 164.

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the physical, mental, and moral nature of man. He surveys her with meticulous scrutiny in order to determine just wherein lies her undeniable power; and he arrives at the conclusion that virtue, which at one time dwelt with man, exiled by him, has departed to reside with woman. Herein then is the secret of her attraction,-- that virtue has assumed her form. So woman in the capacities of virtuous wife and mother, is become the physical embodiment of heaven.

"If the world's age and death be argued well
By the sun's fall, which now towards earth doth tend,
Then we might fear that virtue, since she fell
So low as woman should be near her end.

But she's not stooped, but raised; exiled by men
She fled to heaven, that's heavenly things, that's you
She was in all men thinly scattered then,
But now a mass contracted in a few.

She gilded us, but you are gold; and she
Informed us, but transubstantiates you.
Soft dispositions, which ductile be,
Elixirlike, she makes not clean but new.

Though you a wife's and mother's name retain
'Tis not as woman, for all are not so;
But virtue, having made you virtue, is fain
To adhere in these names, her and you to show.

Else, being alike pure, we should neither see;
As, water being into air rarefied,
Neither appear, till in one cloud they be,
So, for our sakes, you do low names abide."
(To the Countess of Huntingdon)

It is Donne's impassioned verse to the woman of his heart which presents with greater appeal his Platonic idealism. As is the manner of such lovers, he

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exalts the personal attributes of his loved one to a degree of perfection found only in heavenly beings.

"----- I thought thee
(For thou lovest truth) an angel, at first sight."
(The Dream)

But Donne with his rare aptitude for achieving startling conceits, places the personality of his love even above the sphere of angels. He attempts to place her higher than very heaven.

"----- when I saw thou savest my heart,
And knew'st my thoughts beyond an angel's art

I must confess, it could not choose but be
Profane, to think thee anything but thee."
(The Dream)

His belief in her immortality would of course follow. When she suffers from a fever and he fears for her life, out of his ashen terror lest she die leaps the brave flame of a celestial vision of her.

"Thy beauty and all parts which are thee
Are an unchangeable firmament."
(A Fever)

But more than that, she cannot die, for her soul animates the world.

"But yet thou canst not die, I know;
To leave this world behind is death;
But when thou from this world wilt go,
The whole world vapours with thy breath.

Or if, when thou, the world's soul go'st
It stay, 'tis but thy carcass then."
(A Fever)

There is a strange blending of passion and Platonism in the love of John Donne. He admits that he has

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never aspired to them

"----- which soar no higher
Than virtue or the mind to admire." (The Expiration)

In fact, do we not glimpse a slight gesture of superiority toward those who theorize on love, foregoing actual experience with it?

"Love's not so pure, and abstract as they use
To say, which have no mistress but their Muse."
(Love's Growth)

Yet certainly this love of Donne's is not content to know only a gratification of physical desire, for

"His mind hath found
Affection's ground
Beyond time, place, and mortality."
(Present in Absence)

His happiness does not depend upon the proximity of his loved one, for his heart discounts the human hindrances of space and time.

"Absence, hear thou this protestation
Against thy strength,
Distance, and length;
Do what thou canst for alteration:
For hearts of truest mettle
Absence doth join and Time doth settle."
(Present in Absence)

Yet paradoxically enough, when mind has conquered matter, its very triumph gratifies the flesh.

"By absence this good means I gain
That I can catch her,
Where none can match her,
In some close corner of my brain;
There I embrace and kiss her;
And so I both enjoy and miss her."
(Present in Absence)

Again he refuses to regard a separation as interfering in any way with the satisfaction of a love which is

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the outgrowth of the mind and soul.

"Dull sublunary lover's love
 - Whose soul is sense - cannot admit
 Of absense, 'cause it doth remove
 The thing which elemented it.

But we -----

Inter-assured of the mind,
 Care less eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
 Though I must go, endure not yet
 A breach, but an expansion,
 Like gold to airy thinness beat."

(Valediction Forbidding Mourning)

Donne cannot dissociate his love from a human person-
 ality. He cannot joy, as does Drummond, in a fond
 abstraction, and wonders

"----- by my troth, what thou and I
 Did till we loved -----

 If ever any beauty I did see,
 Which I desired, and got, 'Twas but a dream of thee."
 (The Good-Morrow)

Their meeting brings a spiritual rebirth, a grand ad-
 venture which embraces all experience.

"And now good-morrow to our waking souls
 Which watch not one another out of fear;
 For love all love of other sights controls,
 And makes one little room an everywhere.
 Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone;
 Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,
 Let us possess one world; each hath one, and is one."
 (The Good-Morrow)

He becomes identified with his love.

"My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
 And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
 Where can we find two better hemispheres
 Without sharp north, without declining west?"
 (The Good-Morrow)

Singly their souls knew human blemishes; united, they

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have merged into a pure harmony of being, which breeds the germ of immortality.

"Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or thou and I
Love so alike that none do slacken, none can die."
(The Good-Morrow)

Such union of the spirit reveals the mystery of sex attraction, which culminates in a refinement of the soul.

"
This ecstasy doth unperplex
(We said), and tell us what we love;
We see by this, it was not sex;
We see, we saw not, what did move:

But as all several souls contain
Mixture of things they know not what,
Love these mix'd souls doth mix again,
And makes both one, each this, and that

When love with one another so
Interanimates two souls,
That abler soul, which thence doth flow,
Defects of loneliness controls.

We then, who are this new soul, know,
Of what we are composed and made,
For th'atomies of which we grow
Are souls whom no change can invade."
(The Ecstasy)

So love for Donne remains (Plato to the contrary)
an ecstasy to be enjoyed by two.

"Only our love hath no decay;
This no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday.

But truly keeps his first-last-everlasting day."
(The Anniversary)

In the sonnet series, Ideas Mirrour, Michael Drayton voices an elevated and often purely spiritual desire, which bespeaks a Platonic lover. In Amour I

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he thus addresses Idea.

"Reede heere (sweet mayd)

 My soules oblation to thy sacred name:
 Which name my Muse to highest heaven shall raise
 By chaste desire, true love, and vertues praise."

Again in Amour 2 he professes a chastity of purpose.

"Look thou into my breast, and thou shalt see
 Chaste holy vowes for my soules sacrifice."

The death of passion marks the birth of divine love.

"So in loves death shall loves perfection prove
 That love divine which I have borne to you
 Whose pure Idea never tongue exprest."
 (Amour 39)

The Neo-Platonic exaltation of woman appears in
 Drayton's sonnet sequence. Through Idea the lover
 beholds God himself. She is "My soule-shrinde Saint,
 my faire Idea" (Amour 13), for she is the

"-----purest mirror! Wherein man may see
 The lively Image of Divinitie."
 (Amour 46)

Love for her has revealed to the poet the intricate
 workings of the soul.

"That learned Father which so firmly proves
 The soule of man immortall and divine,
 And doth the severall offices define,
 Gives her that name as shee the body moves,
 Then is she love imbracing Charitie,
 Moving a will in us, it is the mind,
 Retayning knowledge, still the same in kind;
 As intellectuall it is the memorie,
 In judging, Reason onely is her name,
 In speedy apprehension it is sence,
 In right or wrong, they call her conscience.
 These of the soule the severall functions bee,
 Which my hart lightened by thy love doth see."
 (To the Soule)

Harrison gives two interpretations of Neo-Pla-
 tonic love; it "meant either a love devoid of all

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sensual desire, an innocent or hopeless passion, or
it was a form of gallantry used to cloak immorality."¹

The sonnets of Samuel Daniel addressed To Delia relate a "hopeless passion", which can find satisfaction only in contemplation and spiritual fervor.

We find expressed in them the Renaissance concept of a love existing in the soul alone. Desire with

"--- spotles love hoovers with white wings
About the temple of the proudest frame," (XII)

of "her that sits in my thoughts Temple sainted." (XV.)

"Oft have I told her that my soule did love her."
(XVII.)

He bids her

"Reigne in my thoughts, my love and life are thine."
(XXIV.)

His are the pleasures, not of the body but of the
mind.

"Raigne in my thoughts faire hand, sweete eye, rare
Possesse me whole, my harts triumvirat."^{voyce,}
(XXV.)

Beauty and goodness are reconciled in Delia as they
are in Stella.

"A modest maide, deckt with a blush of honour

Sacred on earth, design'd a Saint above.
Chastitie and Beauty, which were deadly foes,
Live reconciled friends within her brow."
(VI.)

Her virtue has made her an immortal.

"That grace, that vertue, all that serv'd t' in
Dooth her unto eternitie assommon."^{woman} (XXXVII.)

¹
Harrison. p. 160.

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Platonic tendencies are not confined to a narrow group but are apt to appear at random throughout the galaxy of versatile Elizabethans who can "sing both high and low". Like bright, uncertain butterflies tempted by the sweet of many flowers, they light irresolute upon this fair conceit and that. The fragile bloom of Plato's mysticism holds for them an ephemeral charm. Too palid to satisfy their more vigorous moods, it often solaces their soul's sad languishings. They dwell upon their ladies' virtues then, discounting mere feminine beauty unless it be confirmed by moral excellences of divine origin. In such an exalted mood the Elizabethan lover looks for moral beauty in his loved one, wishes to see

"Heaven pictured in her face."¹

He desires her to be

"More than most fair, full of that heavenly fire,
Kindled above to show the Maker's glory!
Beauty's first-born, in whom all powers conspire 2
To write the Grace's life, and Muses' story."

She is the epitome of all the human virtues.

"Chaste as th' Arabian bird, who all the Ayr denies
And ev'n in Flames expires, when with her self lyes.
Oh! she's as kind as drops of new faln April showers,
That on each gentle breast, spring fresh perfuming
flowers;
She's Constant, Gen'rous, Fixt, she's Calm, she is
the All

1
de Vere, Edw., Earl of Oxford. What cunning can express

2
Greville. Sir Fulke. Lord Brook. More than most fair.

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1

We can of Vertue, Honour, Faith, or Glory Call."
 She so transcends her mortal lover that he can but
 worship her in chaste humility of heart.

"My lady's like no mortal flower
 That hath its birth upon this earth

 She is above my humble love
 That but looks up in still delight
 The stars are high within the sky;
 I reach them not for they are bright."
(Of His Lady. Anon.)

We find Elizabethan poets constantly striving
 to lay hold upon abstractions. Virtue, love, beau-
 ty, soul, mind,-- these beckon them beyond the sen-
 sual charms of bird song, flower fragrance, sunset
 coloring, and woman's tender flesh. They look with-
 in themselves for deeper truth and find a lurking
 deity.

2

"I know the heavenly nature of my mind."
 They hold that
 " ---- the mind, which is divine, runs never to decay."
 For them a mistress's true worth
 "----- shall be seen 4
 In form and beauty of her mind."

They scorn base lovers, blind followers of Cupid, who

-
- 1 Lovelace, Richard. Female Glory.
 2 Davies, Sir John. Man.
 3 Vaux, Thomas, Lord. Of a contented mind.
 4 Wotton, Sir Henry. On his Mistress.

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never glimpse the white peaks of pure, unimpassioned mind.

"Muses, that sing love's sensual emperie,
 And lovers kindling your enraged fires
 At Cupid's bonfires burning in the eye,
 Blown with the empty breath of vain desires;
 You, that prefer the painted cabinet
 Before the wealthy jewels it doth store ye,
 That all your joys in dying figures set,
 And stain the living substance of your glory-
 Abjure those joys, abhor their memory;
 And let my love the honoured subject be
 Of love, and honour's complete history.
 Your eyes were never yet let in to see
 The majesty and riches of the mind,
 But dwell in darkness, for your god is blind."¹

Only chaste, Platonic love, exalting spirit over matter,
 virtue over vice, can ultimately approach the exalted
 state of "pure Intelligence".

"For as you can unto that height refine
 All Loves delights, as while they do incline
 Unto no vice, they so become divine,
 We may as well attain your excellence,
 As, without help of any outward sense²
 Would make us grow a pure Intelligence."

Beauty becomes far more than a bewitching face
 set in a halo of becoming curls.

"Her looks declare her loving mind;
 Her count'nance and her heart agree."³

Again

"May I find a woman true:
 There is beauty's fairest hue!
 There is beauty, love, and wit,-⁴
 Happy he can compass it!"

1

Chapman, George. Muses, that sing.

2

Herbert, Edw., Lord. Platonick Love.

3

Turberville, Geo. That he findeth others as fair.

4

Beaumont, Francis. True Beauty.

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The lover seeks

"Fair beauty mixed with chastity."¹

He holds that

" --- beauty is no beauty without love,"²

for

"Love and beauty live together."³

In its highest sense beauty is a divine essence, producing an eternal harmony.

"Lovely forms do flow
From concent divinely framed;
Heaven is music, and thy beauty's
Birth is heavenly.

Only beauty purely loving
Knows no discord;
But still moves delight
Like clear springs renewed by flowing,
Ever perfect, ever in them
Selves eternal."⁴

Akin to beauty, virtue's self declares "I onely
cannot dye",⁵ for

"Time canhot vade what Virtue made:
Virtue puts back the hand of Time."⁶

So one whose life bespeaks a noble character needs
no uncertain stone to mark her grave. She

¹

Anon. Come, Love, lets walk.

²

Campion, Thomas. Thou art not fair.

³

Breton, Nicholas. Pretty, twinkling, starry eyes.

⁴

Campion, Thomas. Laura.

⁵

Grimald, Nicholas. Description of Virtue.

⁶

Anon. Of His Lady.

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" -- in all things with God's virtue filled"¹
can never pass into oblivion.

"Thus, altho this Marble must,
As all things crumble into dust,
And though you find this faire-built Tombe
Ashes, as what lyes in it's Wombe;
Yet her Saint-like name shall shine,
A living Glory to this Shrine,
And her eternal Fame be read,²
When all, but very Virtue's dead."

The Elizabethan lover in his Platonic moments
is in all respects a soulful one. His yearning is
no physical desire but rather a

" -- thirst that from the soul doth rise."³

His courtship is placed upon a spiritual plain.

"We saw and wooed each other's eyes;
My soul contracted then with thine,
And both burned in one sacrifice,
By which the marriage grew divine."⁴

Such love which traffics not with transient flesh
bows to no tyranny of time.

"Time's ever ours while we despise
The sensual idol of our clay."⁵

It defies the power of outward circumstance.

"
Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage;
If I have freedom in my love,
And in my soul am free,

¹ Barnes, Barnaby. The world's bright comforter.

² Lovelace, Richard. On the Death of Mrs. Filmer.

³ Jonson, Ben. To Celia.

⁴ Habington, Wm. The Reward of Innocent Love.

⁵ Ibid.

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Angels alone, that soar above
Enjoy such liberty." 1

For it the vastness of space presents no handicap.

"Though Seas and Land betwixt us both
Our faith and troth
Like separated soules
All time and space controules
Above the highest sphere wee meet
Unseene, unknowne, and greet as Angels greet." 2

It has projected itself beyond the living body into
the pure realm of spirit.

"So then we doe anticipate
Our after-fate,
And are alive in th' skies
If thus our lips and eyes
Can speake like spirits unconfin'd
In Heav'n their earthly bodies left behind." 3

The Platonic poet would snare love in the meshes of
a definition.

"Love is the blossom where there blows
Everything that lives or grows:
Love doth make the heavens to move
And the sun doth burn in love." 4

Again

" --- true love is a durable fire,
In the mind ever burning,
Never sick, never old, never dead,
From itself never turning," 5

It never suffers change.

-
- 1
Lovelace, Richard. To Althea from Prison.
 - 2
Lovelace, Richard. To Lucasta - Going beyond
the Seas.
 - 3
Ibid.
 - 4
Fletcher, Giles. Wooing Song.
 - 5
Raleigh, Sir Walter. As you came from the holy
land.

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"True love is still the same; the torrid zones,
 And those more frigid ones
 It must not know.
 For love grown cold or hot
 Is lust, or friendship, not
 The thing we have." 1

2
 Such "love can never die."

The lover plights an eternal troth.

"Nay, and after death, in sooth,
 I to thee will keep my truth." 3

He sees in death no hindrance to his love.

"Yea, when the spirit gives up
 And body breathes his last,
 Say naytheless 'my heart is hers'
 When life and all is past." 4

Such constancy is possible because love is immortal.

"Beauty, strength, youth are flowers but fading seen;
 Duty, faith, love, are roots, and ever green." 5

It is religion's best interpreter.

"O holy Love, religious saint!

 Thou art the treasure, treasure of the soul,
 That great celestial powers dost control.

 Love is a holy, holy, holy thing." 6

It purifies a lover's purposes.

"And thou, O love, which in these eyes

-
- 1
 Suckling, Sir John. True Love.
 2
 Lilliat, John. Song.
 3
 Anon. Love me little, love me long.
 4
 Turberville, Geo. To his ring given to his lady.
 5
 Peele, Geo. His golden locks time hath to silver
turned.
 6
 Chester, Sir Robert. Ditty.

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Hast married reason with affection
 And made them saints of beautie's skyes,
 Where joys are shadows of perfection,
 Lend me thy wings that I may rise
 Up, not by worth, but thy election:
 For I have vowed in strangest fashion
 To love, and never seek compassion." 1

It elevates his hopes.

"Love winged my hopes and taught me how to fly
 Far from base earth ---" 2

And since "Love loves truth" ³ it will direct true sons
 of Plato to

" ----- that heavenly quire
 Of Nature's riches in her beauties placed," 4

and bid them

" --- there in contemplation feed desire,

 For those sweet glories, which you do aspire,
 Must, as idea's, only be embraced." 5

1 Greville, Fulke, Lord Brooke. To Her Eyes.

2 Anon. Love winged my hopes.

3 Devereux, Robt., Earl of Essex. Change thy mind
 since she doth change.

4 Lord Brooke. Caelica, Sonnet X.

5 Ibid.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION

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Platonic philosophy had a varied appeal for Elizabethan poets. It appealed to religious natures because its doctrines could be easily blended with Christian teachings. Spenser worshipped a Savior whose countenance partook of Plato's beauty; he found within the bosom of his God eternal wisdom; he applied the Calvinistic doctrine of election to the Platonic conviction that only a select group of philosophers could behold with unclouded vision the Ideas of beauty and virtue and wisdom. Drummond turned to Christ and Plato for comfort in his bereavement, and, reaching beyond an earthly love, clasped to himself the heavenly love of God. When "obvious beauties" became for him mere shadows of diviner things, then death was swallowed up in victory.

Platonic philosophy had not only a Christian appeal but also an aesthetic value, for its theory of love began with a desire for tangible beauty. In the "greener times" of his youth Spenser penned vivid lines depicting the rare loveliness of feminine cheek and lip; while Shakespeare paid immortal homage to

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the fair person of a peerless youth. All lovers of natural beauty felt the appeal of Plato's picturesque philosophy, which saw in a material world the gracious images of a sublime perfection.

Platonic ethics beckoned to rigid moralists, to lovers of chastity, of sobriety, of truth, and virtue. For Plato held no thing to be beautiful unless it was likewise good. The passionate Sidney leaned heavily upon Plato's supporting staff when Stella's charms excited fleshly appetites. Daniel and Drayton in chaste contemplation adored their ladies' virtuous characters. Conscious-stricken Spenser, who found in Plato relief for every mood, was led by him to tune his sensuous string to heavenly airs.

Passionate natures were not chilled upon the atmospheric heights of Platonism. Had they been, the eager hearts of sixteenth century singers would have looked elsewhere than to Plato for one to guide them to their highest notes. They found in him a lover whose intense flame burned whiter than their own. Desire's fierce poignancy permeated his whole theory of love, and suffered no abatement when fixed upon ideas instead of men. Plato remained a lover to the end, embracing spiritual beauty with a far diviner rapture than its enticing earthly counterpart.

CONCLUSION

Reasoning minds were intrigued by Plato to attempt minute analyses of love and woman. John Donne examined both beneath metaphysical lenses to determine the source and extent of their power, often piecing his findings together with Platonic theories.

If for no other reason, many embraced Renaissance Platonics as a fad. Wits of the day, to confirm their erudition, must dabble occasionally in Plato. This popularizing of an ideal led to a miserable subversion of its truth by shallow and licentious persons, whose so-called Platonic love meant no more than base passion.

The real apostles of Plato (and there were very few who grasped the full significance of the philosopher's exalted purpose) were the mystics. Their fine souls buoyantly soared with his into a realm of intellectual ecstasy. Their desires, sharpened to a keen edge, rent in twain the veil of an earthly temple; and their clear eyes beheld a limitless eternity. Only those with superbly spiritual natures such as Edmund Spenser, ever comprehended in its entirety the grandeur and the profundity of Platonic love.

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