Love Poetry

The evolution of romance and the sonnet
The reverence a thane showed his lord became a model for courtly love.

Beloved women became a new kind of idealized figure; the lover often imagined the beloved as lord-like, as a force above him to which he must submit.
The notion of loyal submission to an idealized female figure also found parallels in religious feeling toward the Virgin Mary.
Artemis (Diana): Sister of Apollo, goddess of the moon, of the hunt, and of the forest, associated with light and virginity. When Actaeon, hunting with his dogs, came across Diana bathing in the woods, she turned him into a stag (deer) and his dogs tore him to pieces.
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Petrarch’s Sonnets:

Petrarch popularized a model for expressing love for an idealized woman in a way no one had done before. In his poems, he imitated the kind of reverence one might show one’s lord or to the Virgin Mary, and he modeled his lover after Classic models, most notably Apollo. Petrarch never obtains his beloved—Laura—but does end up with Laurel leaves.
Queen Elizabeth I was known as the Virgin Queen. Courtiers and poets revered her. Ralegh, Wyatt, Spenser, and Sidney were all part of her circle. Spenser’s *Fairie Queene* celebrated her as Queen Gloriana, and in other poetry she was likened to Diana, the pure, powerful, and allusive goddess of the hunt.

*Non sine sole iris* (‘No rainbow without the sun’).
To understand Sidney’s sonnets, it helps to keep the tradition just outlined in mind.

It’s from that particular context that his sonnet sequence emerges.

His sonnet sequence gets its title from Classic (Greek and Roman) language and divine imagery.
The name Astrophil is Greek, combining “Astro” (star) + “Phil” (lover).

“Phil” is also in the word “philosophy” – lover of Sophia, or lover of wisdom.

“Phil” is also part of Philip Sidney’s name—so the title is pretty clever in its word play.

“Stella” is Latin for star. It can be seen in the word “constellation.”
Stella is a metaphor. It’s likely she is based on a real person, but Stella is also a figure. Like the Virgin Mary, Diana, Daphne, Laura, and the Virgin Queen, she is represents an unobtainable ideal. She is a star. Nothing says unobtainable quite like a star. Sidney is a poet. Poets find clever ways of expressing things in fitting ways. Like a star, Stella appears far above the star-lover. At times she seems cold and aloof, but the star-lover is drawn to her radiance.