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THE GENRE OF THE ARCADIA

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The relationship of Sir Philip Sidney’s New Arcadia to convention continues to challenge critics. Sidney’s specific but indirect plea to his sovereign for more active political involvement may fatally flaw any mere aesthetic quest. Annabel Patterson reasons that “mystification was central to Sidney’s intentions from the start and that the obfuscating textual history of the Arcadia is not unconnected to its genre.” The diversity of Elizabethan critical statements precludes its offering definitive guidelines for later readers. Alan D. Isler would reject precise identification of the work with any particular genre: “We must be prepared to ignore preconceived distinctions between epic and romance, between sub-genres or conflations like pastoral romance and epic-romance. All such categories must be subsumed under the single, inevitably vague term ‘heroic poem’, for the heroic poem was free to draw upon any or all of them.”

Stephen Greenblatt sees the work as an example of “the mixed mode, that strange conjunction of literary kinds which Polonius might have termed ‘tragical-comical-historical-pastoral.’” In any event, readers generally agree that Sidney’s artistry transcends the materials which he received. Despite the extensive revision of the Old Arcadia, the New Arcadia seems to be unified, even if somewhat eclectic.

Since neither the Astrophil and Stella nor the Old Arcadia clearly present a “golden world” of delightful morality, Sidney’s New Arcadia must bear the burden of justifying the lofty claims of The Defence of Poetry. Placing extravagant demands on both the poet and the reader, this critical treatise emphatically links ethics with esthetics. Superficially, no creative work could come close to fulfilling these high standards. Sidney’s theory of “delightful teaching” demands that didactic allegory constantly interact with pleasing ambiguity.

As a literary craftsman, Sidney constantly seeks coherence and symmetry in his imaginative work. Nevertheless, “the centrifugal forces of the imagination that challenge all teleology” constantly disrupt this process. Even if he had been entirely successful, he must still rely on the slothful brazen reader’s proper interpretation of his purposeful golden work.

Explicitly indifferent to purity of genre, Sidney relies on energia to lift the episodes of the New Arcadia into the golden world of true poetry. He does criticize the drama of his contemporaries for its failure
to observe the unities and for its "gross absurdities" in merging comedy
and tragedy (MP 114). Nevertheless, he reasons that tragedy and
comedy, verse and prose, as well as "matters heroical and pastoral" may
legitimately be either severed or conjoined (MP 94). His ethical
linking of the right poet’s *energia* with the responsive reader makes
local discontinuities between genres and episodes integral to the
*Arcadia*. Inherently meritorious, delight—a focus on immediate
physical beauty—bypasses humanity’s natural resistance to moral
improvement. Moreover, this energy helps overcome inappropriate
intellectual fixation on episodes of literature. Intensification of the
speaking pictures, usually of love or physical valor, allows the reader to
see through the surface of each episode of poetical justice to distinguish
virtue from vice consistently. Sidney recognizes that virtue and vice are
often close in the brazen world—the totality of episodes in the *Arcadia.*
Nevertheless, the heightened perceptions of the golden world—the
immediate episode before the reader—invariably offer an unflattering
glass of reason to challenge the reader to identify the poetic justice.

I

Allegory and Didacticism

Both the ethical ideals of the *Defence* and the heroic amplification of
the material of the *Old Arcadia* indicate a didactic purpose in the *New
Arcadia*. Using the *Defence of Poetry* as a guide to Sidney’s artistic
aims leads us to interpret Arcadian characters as instructive images of
vices and virtues. The *New Arcadia* is not just an esthetic revision of
structure and character. Sidney’s new expressive purpose grew out of
his assumptions about social and political responsibility. Although
the *Arcadia* does not explicate any particular value system, “we cannot
deny the didactic component of the work.” Critics might question
the clarity and consistency of Sidney’s value system; the complexity of
his attitude toward authority might suggest “an unconscious preference
for these conditions.” Nevertheless, at least on the surface, Sidney
sees in the universe “perfect order, perfect beauty, perfect constancy,” all
joined in “an unexpressable harmony” (NA 361).

The *Arcadia* does not, of course, need to fulfill perfectly the
expectations of Sidney’s critical statement. As theory, the *Defence*
holds a privileged status as a “golden” work (MP 78), a statement of
“what may be and should be” (MP 81). Sidney’s moral purpose, then,
forms his intellectual “fore-conceit” (MP 79) for the actual *Arcadia.*
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Where parts of the Arcadia fail to rise to golden heights, the fault remains with the poet. Occasional triviality in the Arcadia has the precedent of the otherwise noble Pindar (MP 97). Some unevenness of technique simply causes those parts of an otherwise golden work to remain in the brazen world of nature. Sidney admires More’s partly flawed Utopia: “that way of patterning a commonwealth was most absolute, though he perchance hath not so absolutely performed it” (MP 86-87). Sidney also needs an esthetic ground-plot, a profitable invention, to embody his theory. Although he diminishes the centrality of prophesy and superstition in his revision of the Old Arcadia, the oracle, on one hand, internally generates the main action and, on the other, “it stands outside of this fictive world, summarily recording Sidney’s own fore-conceit of the work.”14 Sidney’s theory of poetic justice depends both on the clarity of an episode and on the subsequent resolution of the action. Complex action forces the reader to look past the often ugly means to the distant end of golden virtue. “If evil men come to the stage, they ever go out (as the tragedy writer answered to one that disliked the show of such persons) so manacled as they little animate folks to follow them” (MP 90). The end, whether in the poet’s mind or in the actual work, justifies the means. Since the inappropriate withdrawal of Basilius has complicated the princes’ wooing of his daughters, the immediate morality must wait on the just conclusion: “for though the ways be foul, the journey’s end is most fair and honourable” (NA 109). Parthenia’s disfigurement (NA 30) eventually finds resolution (NA 43-45); her triumph and the resulting idyllic domesticity (NA 371-374) must serve to diminish the impact of her tragic demise at the hands of Amphialus (NA 395-399). Juxtaposition of the more appropriate ends—the execution of the disguised Artesia (NA 431) or the accidental death of Cecropia (NA 440)—would help mitigate more ambiguous conclusions.

Simpler representations of good and evil have more immediate and direct implications for the reader. Respecting the poet’s “pure simplicitie,”15 the reader need not use “allegorie’s curious frame” (AS 28.1). Just as the divine essence of the soul differs sharply from the dungeon of the body (MP 82), so virtues stand clearly opposed to vice. Sidney does tend to propose rigid moral categories of virtue and vice.16 His Platonic linguistics insures that the reality of these traits does not depend on their verbal realization: Aesop’s fables “make many, more beastly than beasts, begin to hear the sound of virtue from these dumb speakers” (MP 87). The self-denying ardor of such figures as the female Zelmane and Palladius contrasts with the possessive longing of such
figures as Amphialus and Basilius: “The clearly discernable division between the heroic and self-destructive lovers becomes the division within the central figures.”

The appropriately didactic end may appear immediately—Cremes is hanged shortly after his misdeeds (NA 248), Clinias executed later (NA 389-390). Superficiality itself may detach the reader from indignation at Sidney’s relishing the cruel deaths of the rioting commoners (NA 280-282). The stylization of the violence and the ironic caricatures of the participants provide some measure of esthetic distance. Thus the scene may generate intellectual amusement instead of emotional involvement.

The optimistic Sidney asserts in his Defence that the true perception of virtue ravishes the beholder with love of its inherent beauty (MP 98). Deanne Bogdan reasons that Sidney’s concept of poetry’s ability “to instruct in virtue through delight arises from his belief in the intrinsically moral nature of the imagination.” Whereas the random action of Fortune is merely casual, virtue has a concrete authenticity. “Poetry ever sets virtue so out in her best colours, making Fortune her well-waiting handmaid, that one must needs be enamoured of her” (MP 90). Cyrus, Aeneas, and Ulysses are wholly to be admired (MP 88); the tales of Hercules, Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas give the right description of “wisdom, valour, and justice” (MP 92). Whatever the ambiguities associated with the enamoured princes, Euarchus, Pamela, and Philoclea present clear models of Sidney’s concept of noble behavior. Moreover, the initial idyllic setting of Arcadia (NA 10-11) gives a bench mark for subsequent deterioration.

Vice possesses a similar clearly recognizable quality. The destruction which threatens Arcadia finds a precursor in the civil war which devastated Laconia (NA 11). Characters can have a one-dimensional exemplary nature. Figures such as Tantalus and Atreus give us “nothing that is not to be shunned” (MP 88). Anaxius has scarcely any substance besides pride, just as Plexirus represents malevolence, Cremes greed, Antiphilus selfishness, and Dametas stupidity. We should see in poetry “all virtues, vices and passions so in their own natural seats laid to the view, that we seem not to hear of them, but clearly to see through them” (MP 86). In Sidney’s aureate world of “delightful teaching” (MP 81), one reads the dark side of reality allegorically while interpreting the virtuous aspect literally and directly. The controlling poet inserts emphases which automatically evaluate the merits of an episode. The historian, on the other hand, must “show doings, some to be liked, some to be disliked” (MP 88).
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The success of Sidney’s attempt—which Fulke Greville interpreted to be an effort “to turn the barren philosophy precepts into pregnant images of life”—depends on philosophical abstractions finding a local habitation in a series of discontinuous episodes or “speaking pictures.” We are “asked to look within individual pictures (in ‘outward’ setting, dress, armor, or fixed tale) to see their inward significance, and then to move processionally with them and among them.” No mere verbal construct, the golden world of poetry has a “substantial ontology.” The precept of the philosopher, on the other hand, is but “a wordish description” (MP 85). Moreover, the raw data of history may deter virtue by fixing the mind on a partial truth (MP 90). Of course, esthetic merit may conflict with ethical power. Samuel L. Wolff observed that “such marvellous involution and complexity defeat their own artistic ends.” Digressions leave loose ends to be resolved or forgotten. Aristotle’s theory, “which demands unity and necessity only for the central action while allowing great freedom for episodic elaboration, explains in part how a work like the New Arcadia could fulfill Renaissance formal expectations for the epic.” If the poet does “his part aright” (MP 88) by intensifying brazen nature into golden poetry, the reader will respond with immediate delight, not static contemplation. The pastoral shepherds are resolutely apolitical where the Arcadian peasants seethe with rebellion. Life in Arcadia consists of “a series of illogical reversals, coincidence, and sudden revelations.” The forcible juxtaposition of these extremes creates the “divine force” (MP 77) Sidney values in poetry.

By forcing the reader’s attention away from the notable example, the digressions interrupt identification with any particular character. The reader must constantly return to an “inward light” (MP 91) to separate good from bad in the example, to formulate and to apply the poem’s precept voluntarily. Distancing generates a challenging energy in the example. Each momentary perception constantly conveys the reader into a world of benign improvement. “For as the image of each action stirreth and instructeth the mind, so the lofty image of such worthies most inflameth the mind with desire to be worthy, and informs with counsel how to be worthy” (MP 98). Love of nation creates powerful emotions in us (MP 86). The golden example has a power to “strike” and “pierce” as it possesses the sight of the soul (MP 85).

Agreeing with Spenser that example has priority over precept, Sidney stresses immediate physical proximity. The presence of beauty contributes to the effect of virtue. Reflecting a common theme of Sidney, Pyrocles declares: “it likes me much better when I find virtue
in a fair lodging than when I am bound to seek it in an ill-favoured creature, like a pearl in a dung-hill” (NA 73; see also AS 25.9-11; 56.5-6). The absence of Erona, Helen, and Basilius encourages rebellion whereas the presence of Euarchus gives “a fatherly example unto his people” (NA 160). The Helots follow Pyrocles “as if their captain had been a root out of which, as into branches, their courage had sprung” (NA 37). A place may focus the powers of the mind. Claius says of the spot from which Urania departed: “as this place served us to think of these things, so those things serve as places to call to memory more excellent matters” (NA 4). Pictures may also stimulate the imagination. Queen Helen gazes at a portrait of Amphialus (NA 58), and the picture of Philoclea rekindles the affection Pyrocles had for Zelmane (NA 97-98).

Imitation teaches best. Pyrocles says of Musidorus: “He taught me by word, and best by example, giving me in him so lively an image of virtue as ignorance could not cast such mist over mine eyes as not to see and to love it” (NA 235). Even the recalcitrant may find improvement. Although Erona is too weak to have a lastingly benign effect on Antiphilus, the presence of the noble princes improves even this despicable character. The princes’ “virtues, while they were present good schoolmasters, suppressed his vanities” (NA 298-299). Military crises likewise demand exemplary leadership. Amphialus succeeds explicitly through instructing by example rather than by precept (NA 328, 339). On the other side, Philanax is the fountain of valor for the troops of Basilius against Amphialus (NA 344).

II

Inherent Ambiguity

Ambiguity arises here from the disparity between theory and practice. Not only does delight often depend on complexity, but Sidney knows that “good lie hid in nearness of the evil” (MP 100). Thus, the religious Sidney agrees with Richard Hooker’s observation that “there is no particular evil which hath not some appearance of goodnes whereby to insinuate itselfe.” Sidney follows Aristotle in exploiting “the idea that specific virtues and vices are potentialities of each other.” Moreover, citing Aristotle, Sidney proposes that art’s distancing transforms ugliness into beauty (MP 92; see also AS 34.4).

Relying heavily on physical attractiveness, Sidney tends to make all beauty meritorious. Sidney feels that man alone has “that gift to discern beauty” (MP 104). Some superficiality of beauty is perhaps
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inevitable in the contrast with internal content. The “inside strength” of Plato’s work is philosophy, but the skin and beauty depends on poetry (MP 75). Andromana is “a woman beautiful enough, if it be possible that the outside only can justly entitle a beauty” (NA 215). Basilius, Gynecia, Artesia, and Cecropia—despite their diverse ages and moral states—possess some degree of beauty. Daniel Traister points out that although Sidney flatters Stella for her beauty, his “anamorphic manipulation” of her figure puts her into the tradition of “the deformed mistress.”

Successful and truly good characters are quantitatively more beautiful than the failures; the triumphant Philoclea has more beauty than the doomed Zelmane (NA 268).

Sidney’s intense appreciation for physical beauty encourages him to prefer innocence over moral authority. He makes the beautiful Philoclea instead of the majestic Pamela central to the Arcadia. Perhaps involuntarily, Sidney exclaims: “and alas, sweet Philoclea, how hath my pen till now forgot thy passions, since to thy memory principally all this long matter is intended? Pardon the slackness to come to those woes, which having caused in others, thou didst feel in thyself” (NA 143). The characters in the New Arcadia exemplify Sidney’s own thematic focus. Besides enchanting Pyrocles and Amphialus, Philoclea has Phebulus (NA 342) and an unnamed knight (NA 371) to serve her. Likewise the martial Pyrocles rather than the politic Musidorus is the masculine center. The appearance of Pyrocles at the house of Kalander eclipses the attention paid to Musidorus (NA 42). Besides beguiling Dido, Andromana, and Zelmane with his masculinity, the transvestite Pyrocles not only attracts Philoclea and Gynecia but also wins almost as many masculine hearts as Philoclea. Basilius, the rebel farmer, and Zoilus fall for his/her charms; Musidorus nearly does so as well (NA 68-69). Thus Mark Rose probably over-states Sidney’s intent for his readers to find the disguised Pyrocles offensive.

Pamela certainly justifies the actions of Musidorus. His intellect, beauty, wealth, and accomplishments make his self-abasement for her sake all the more meritorious. She cannot, therefore, “without the detestable stain of ungratefulness abstain from loving him” (NA 152).

Following Plato, Sidney emphatically yokes virtue with beauty. Turner says the central motif in the Arcadia is “that beauty is a reflection of virtue and the ‘divine sparke’ descended from heaven.” Sight of virtue inspires “strange flames of Love” (AS 25.4); Amphialus proposes that looking “through love upon the majesty of virtue shining through beauty” captivates one (NA 401). An example
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like Stella may combine Nature and the infinite (AS 35.3-4) or virtue and beauty (AS 56.6; 25.13; 71.2). She throws reason on the desires of Astrophil (AS 25.4; 42.4). Similarly, the beauty of Urania teaches the beholders chastity (NA 5). Glorification of beauty may result in essentially shallow relationships. Musidorus falls hopelessly in love with Pamela before knowing of her values or even hearing her speak (NA 107); Amphialus obviously has no mutual relationship with Philoclea.

The presence of inherently ambiguous characters tests the limits of Sidney’s theory. Where even the ridiculous Basilius is “a comely old man” (NA 15) who possesses courtly behavior (NA 81), the dedicated and clever Amphialus can be neither scorned nor admired. His voyeurism finds an immediate parallel in that of Pyrocles/Zelmane (NA 195), and Philoclea’s rejection of him in favor of Pyrocles rests on no demonstrable difference of merit. A far more skillful political leader than Basilius, Amphialus not only orders his defence with Machiavellian skill but can also fight Musidorus to a stand-still. Nevertheless, Amphialus fails to reconcile his political responsibilities with his passion for Philoclea. His misfortunes in love over-ride his inherent nobility; ultimately his internal conflicts lead to self-destruction.32

The personal and political destruction attending this character through his participation in the schemes of his mother, Cecropia, helps justify the intense but limited focus of Pyrocles and Musidorus. Despite a residue of ironic scorn in the Old Arcadia adhering to their actions in the New Arcadia, the innocence of the princes towards love contrasts with depravity (Pamphilus, Plexirtus, Antiphilus) elsewhere in the work. “If in the comedy of the central love plot Pyrocles and Musidorus abandon themselves to the ambiguous despairs and griefs of a love at once lustful and heavenly, they also have their moments of recovery in which they regain that internal balance which gives ‘a majestic to adversitie.’”33 Sidney’s heroic heightening of his ironic Old Arcadia sanctions the Countess of Pembroke’s deletion of Musidorus’s proposed rape of Pamela and Pyrocles’s premarital intercourse with Philoclea. Indeed, the intimacy between the talented brother and sister may even have encouraged Sir Philip to provide his sibling with explicit instructions for such revisions. The simple ignoble and degrading disguise of Pyrocles in the Old Arcadia finds some psychological justification and depth in the prior sentimental actions of the female Zelmane. The unfinished state of the New Arcadia will leave unanswered the extent to which Sidney intended to move his heroes towards a redemptive ending. Their behavior during the captivity
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episode of the New Arcadia has certainly elevated the princes far beyond their status as the frustrated Petrarchan heroes of the Old Arcadia. Nevertheless, the great trial in the last book has a dignity of its own, and the awakening of Basilius may be seen as representing "the triumph of equity over law, the accomodation of justice to the actual circumstances of the world."35

III

Fixation and Transformation

The dangers and glories of emotional fixation pervade Sidney's work. The theme probably arises in his own tendency towards melancholy. Not only was Sidney's father melancholic,36 but Languet warns Sidney himself constantly about his over-seriousness. Sidney responds: "I readily allow that I am often more serious than either my age or my pursuits demand: yet this I have learned by experience that I am never less a prey to melancholy than when I am earnestly applying the feeble powers of my mind to some high and difficult object."37 Passion constantly interferes with the moral sense of duty. Although both the inward light (MP 91) and a natural inclination towards poetry (MP 75) constantly push and challenge the will, the pull of some external stimulus gives a necessary direction. Ficino had revived the Aristotelian concept of heroic melancholy.38 Not surprisingly, then, two of Sidney's Arcadian heroes, Argalus (NA 27) and Amphialus (NA 92, 403) must fight against depression to achieve their military exploits. Sidney expresses only a mild disapproval of the trivial and aimless Philantus. This placid individual, "not given greatly to struggle with his own disposition, followed the gentle current of it" (NA 91). He even loves casually, "if that may be called love which he rather did take into himself willingly than by which he was taken forcibly" (NA 215).

Sidney's piety insured a benign universe which offers "new-budding occasions" for poetry in the observation of virtually everything (MP 116). Ordinary individuals have an "inward light" (MP 91; see also AS 5.1-2; 88.10-11) whereas heroic minds have an "inward sunne" (AS 25.8). Musidorus asserts (via Mopsa) that Pamela has "a divine spark" (NA 130). Nevertheless, without some external energy, precepts tend to lie lifeless in the memory (MP 85-86). Our erected wit informs us of perfection, but "our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it" (MP 79). "Unworthy objects" may infect the fancy (MP 104).
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Emotional fixation remains inexplicable. A small annoyance simply confirms the will, and "so perchance of a changeable purpose make an unchangeable resolution." Sometimes passivity is not only inevitable, but appropriate. Sidney writes to Walsingham that one should rely primarily on a higher power: "It is no greater fault to have confidence in man's power than it is too hastily to despair of God's work." Intense personal commitment runs throughout Sidney's works. Despite Stella's final denial of his suit, Astrophil cannot accept alternative feminine consolation (AS 91.97). Argalus rejects even a perfect replica of the Parthenia he thinks deceased. He observes: "it was Parthenia's self I loved, and love, which no likeness can make one, no commandment dissolve, no founlness defile, nor no death finish" (NA 44). Amphialus pursues the unavailable Philoclea instead of the far more appropriate Queen Helen, thus staining his glory with unkindness (NA 66). Musidorus finds active resistance to love counterproductive (NA 108). Eriona has had nude statues of Cupid defaced. Shortly thereafter, she is "stricken with most obstinate love" (NA 205) for the base-born, worthless Antiphilus. King Tiridates feels the same passion for her as does Plangus (NA 301). The noble Tydeus and Telenor blind themselves to the clear treachery of Plexirus. The admirable loyalty of Philanax to Basilius early in the work (NA 20) degenerates into a dangerous persecution of the surviving Arcadian nobility at the supposed death of his king (in the ending supplied by the Old Arcadia, of course).

Some intense commitment is meritorious. History deserves respect, for "in itself antiquity be venerable" (MP 74) Indeed, Chaucer's failures are to be "forgiven in so reverent an antiquity" (MP 112). Moreover, attention to conventions and to observable reality keeps poetry ecastic instead of phastic (MP 104). Astrophil need only to copy Stella (AS 3.14) to express his entire being (AS 6.13-14). The written expression of her name justifies a poem (AS 50). Writing inspired by the sight of Stella will insure fame (AS 15.13-14). Just as the Arcadian princes constantly embrace and evaluate experience as they begin their active careers (NA 163-165), so must the poet respect "art, imitation, and exercise" (MP 112). Although discipline will not make true poets, such diligence may prevent bad poetry.

Despite its fallen, often corrupt, state, reason challenges the lethargic will. Even when his wit strives to defend passion, Astrophil faces the sharp check of "Reason's audite" (AS 18.2). Proud of being "a piece of a logician" (MP 73), Sidney suggests that "an unflattering
glass of reason” (MP 111) may improve the poet’s skills. Lack of discipline results in premature statements. He declares, “where we should exercise to know, we exercise as having known; and so is our brain delivered of much matter which never was begotten of knowledge” (MP 112). Good poetry has a prose foundation anchored in fact. “When he did not otherwise have a compelling satiric or moral point which he thought could be most effectively made by departing from geographical fact, Sidney sought geographical accuracy as part of his overall insistence that every place, even a land called Arcadia, need at all times to be actively governed by a responsible ruler.”42 The counterpart to lethargy and fixation is radical transformation. Although Sidney accepts the Calvinist emphasis on the corruption of the natural will, he agrees with the Neoplatonists that poetry provides a link between fallen humanity and the divine.43 Musidorus and Pyrocles give us examples of heroic humiliation by changing status and sexual appearance. Elizabeth Dipple sees these transformations as noble: “In the New Arcadia it is an infinitely elastic theme which serves the ideas of love, faithfulness, and unity of being, whereas in the Old Arcadia it had served the idea of fragmentation and failure.”44 Strephon and Claius certainly open the New Arcadia with a statement of their benign transformation. As shepherds (disguised gentlemen in the Old Arcadia), they have limits on their growth that the princes will not have.

Although Hazlett—like many readers today—disliked the rhetoric of the Arcadia, the heightened style is essential to Sidney’s purpose. “The rhetorical dimension of Sidney’s text conveys much of its essential meaning. This meaning for Sidney, and for the reader in the process of reading the Arcadia, is that there is simply no reality that is not verbally, that is rhetorically, structured.”45 Aristotle’s psychological thrust guides Sidney in constructing the formal oratory of his characters; dramatic effectiveness demands that his heroes have some sensitivity to the motives of their audience.46 Nevertheless, Sidney’s overall rhetoric generally detaches us from the action, “so that tragedy is turned into spectacle and admiration aroused in place of pity and fear.”47 The artifice of oratory mutes the effect of such risky human topics as incest, homosexuality, and transvestism which run throughout the Arcadia.

An energy resides within the golden object. The heroic “maketh magnanimity and justice shine through all misty fearfulness and foggy desires” (MP 98). The external example challenges the intellect as well as the emotions; we should see if examples of wisdom and temperance “even to an ignorant man carry not an apparent shining” (MP 86).
Even a child can interpret drama correctly. The brilliant surface entices rather than threatens. Plato and Cicero say that “who could see virtue would be wonderfully ravished with the love of her beauty” (MP 98). Stylistically, “forcibleness or *energia*” (MP 117) joins with the discontinuous plot to move us from one episode to the next, thus shifting the attention from immediate bad deeds. Puttenham defines *energia* as “a sence of such wordes & speaches inwardly working a stirre to the mynde.” The poet’s industry and sincerity have charged the poem with authenticity. Bypassing verbal understanding, this force “confirms the sincerity of the poet’s conceit by persuading the reader of its clarity.”

To conclude, in a bold attempt to elevate romantic love to heroic dignity, the *Arcadia* indirectly unsettles the reader with multiple genres and an episodic plot. Radical disguise obliterates names and identities as love detaches the characters from their political and military duties. Equating contemplation with lethargy, Sidney justifies poetry on the grounds of its ability to move the soul. As a Neoplatonist, he would insist that persons immediately detach themselves from each perception of a particular beauty. Constant striving towards moral virtue helps free the individual from the tyranny of the physical example. The golden world of true poetry—always an original creation—depends on the right poet’s transmitting a divine force to the responsive reader. Ultimately, however, Sidney must rely on the reader’s inward light as well as the poet’s *energia* to detach the focus from the questionable morality of any particular episode.

**NOTES**


3Sidney’s *Arcadia* and the Mixed Mode,” *SP*, 70 (1973), 269.
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7Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan van Dorsten (Oxford, 1973), p. 81. Further references to The Defense of Poetry will be cited in the text as MP.


15"Astrophil and Stella" in The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney. ed. W. A. Ringler, Jr. (Oxford, 1965), 28.12. All further references to this work will be cited in the text as AS.


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21Lawry, p. 162.


25Greenblatt, 271.


28"‘To Portrait That Which in This World is Best’: Stella in Perspective," *SP*, 81 (1984), 422.


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37 Wallace, p. 135.


41 This distinction comes, of course, from Plato’s Sophist. See my “Sir Philip Sidney and the Renaissance Knowledge of Plato,” ES, 51 (1970), 411-424.


44 “Metamorphosis in Sidney’s Arcadias,” PO, 50 (1971), 62.


