

‘Pictures of every posture in the mind’: Judging Sidney’s Characters

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Abstract: Throughout the long history of its reception, Sidney’s *Arcadia* has been consistently distinguished from other examples of Renaissance prose fiction by claims on behalf of its lifelikeness or proto-novelistic “realism.” Presenting a legal analysis of the *Old Arcadia*, this article suggests that Sidney’s representational methods, however, do not so much anticipate the novelistic mode, as draw heavily on the classical resources of forensic rhetoric and probable argument. Reading both in the trial scene of Book V and beyond, this article shows how forensic *status* theory informs the plotting even of non-legal scenes, and explores the implications of Sidney’s preoccupation with motive and intention for readerly engagement with his fiction. Neoclassical debates concerning poetic unity and representational verisimilitude are also discussed, alongside *Arcadia*’s sources in Roman New Comedy and Greek romance.

In his *Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*, Fulke Greville offers an account of Sidney’s purpose in writing *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*. His friend, the “excellent image-maker,” endeavored to turn “barren philosophy precepts into pregnant images of life” by sketching in fiction the trials of state and subject:

In which traverses I know his purpose was to limn out such exact pictures of every posture in the mind that any man, being forced in the strains of this life to pass through any straits or latitudes of good or ill fortune, might (as in a glass) see how to set a good countenance upon all the discountenances of adversity, and a stay upon the exorbitant smilings of chance.¹

I am indebted to Lorna Hutson for her insightful comments on this article in its early stages, and for her encouragement. I would also like to thank the anonymous readers, for their helpful recommendations.

¹ Fulke Greville, “A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney,” in *The Prose Works of Fulke*

It is well known that Greville's *Dedication* undertakes to fashion a posthumous image of Sidney which foregrounds the politics of *Arcadia* and, as in this passage, promulgates a distinctly stoical philosophy sooner associated with Greville's own thought under Stuart rule than with that of his subject.² His discussion of *Arcadia*, however, and specifically his emphasis on the "pictures of every posture in the mind," highlights at least one aspect of the text keenly noted by others who responded to Sidney's fiction in the decades following his death—that is, *Arcadia*'s characters. In his *Directions for Speech and Style*, John Hoskins celebrates "what personages and affections are set forth in *Arcadia*," recommending to his student Sidney's "notable and lively portraits" as models for imitation, "which may make you eloquent and wise."³ William Scott, like Hoskins, notes Sidney's debt to Theophrastus's *Charaktēres*, and praises the "describing notes or *characters*" of his "persons" as hallmarks of the "agreeableness," or plausibility, of his poetic invention.⁴ As Peter Lindenbaum has suggested, although *Arcadia* was combed for *sententiae* and reprinted in fragments via Fraunce's *Arcadian Rhetorike* and miscellanies such as *Englands Parnassus*, early readers were equally engaged in reading for plot and character; during the seventeenth century in particular, *Arcadia* "is read more and more simply for its story and, in effect, as a novel."⁵ Lindenbaum cites the various paratextual apparatus with which successive editions came supplied, but his claim is likewise supported by the proliferation of texts, beginning with John Dickenson's *Arisbas* in 1594 which, as Gavin Alexander has discussed, self-consciously "write themselves into [Sidney's] fictional world."⁶

Greville, ed. John Gouws (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1986), 3-136, 10-11.

² "Greville uses the *Dedication* to wrest Sidney's image away from the aesthetic and toward the almost purely political": Peter C. Herman, "'Bastard Children of Tyranny': The Ancient Constitution and Fulke Greville's *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 55.3 (Autumn 2002), 969-1004, 972. See also Blair Worden, *The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney's Arcadia and Elizabethan Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 355-369; Gavin Alexander, *Writing After Sidney: The Literary Response to Sir Philip Sidney 1586-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 228-32.

³ John Hoskins, *Directions for Speech and Style*, ed. Hoyt H. Hudson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935), 41-2.

⁴ William Scott, *The Model of Poesy*, ed. Gavin Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 35.

⁵ Peter Lindenbaum, "Sidney's *Arcadia* as Cultural Monument and Proto-Novel" in *Texts and Cultural Change in Early Modern England*, ed. Cedric Brown, Arthur Marotti (London: Macmillan, 1997), 80-94, 87.

⁶ Gavin Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 266.

Inferring from Sidney's incomplete revision of *Arcadia*, printed in 1590, a compelling imaginative world out of which more narratives can be invented or found-out, readers of *Arcadia* readily became writers, engaging in dialogue with Sidney and supplementing his fictions with embellishments of their own making.⁷ Hugh Sanford's dedication, which first appeared in Mary Sidney's 1593 edition of the composite *Arcadia*, but which was to be reprinted throughout the seventeenth century in editions containing additions by William Alexander, indicates how those faced with making Sidney's works fit for print felt compelled to hypothesize what he might have intended for his work before his death:

[T]hough they finde not here what might be expected, they may finde neuerthelesse as much as was intended, the conclusion, not the perfection of *Arcadia*: and that no further then the Authours own writings, or knowen determinations could direct. Whereof who sees not the reason, must consider there may be reason which hee sees not.⁸

While it is clear, then, that initial attempts focused on recovering Sidney's intentions in response to the mid-sentence incompleteness of Greville's 1590 text, it is also the case that later writers proceeded less from the hypothetical reconstruction of Sidney's authentic vision for the text as a whole than from their own imaginative sense of the extramimetic continuity of *Arcadia*'s plot, characters, and setting beyond the events narrated in the five books completed during Sidney's lifetime. Answering the 1593 edition's suggestive closing intimation that the text "may awake some other spirit to exercise his pen," Richard Belling's sequel was published as *A Sixth Booke to the Covntesse of Pembrokes Arcadia*; Anna Weamys likewise responded to *Arcadia*, in 1651, in the form of *A Continuation*.⁹ Gavin Alexander has astutely noted, with reference

⁷ For a textual history, see the "Textual Introduction" to Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The New Arcadia)*, ed. Victor Skretkovicz (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), liv-lxxxii.

⁸ Hugh Sanford, "To the Reader," in Philip Sidney, *The Covntesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* (London: William Ponsonbie, 1593), ¶4r.

⁹ Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)*, ed. Jean Robertson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 417. Unless otherwise noted, all citations of this work are taken from this edition, noted parenthetically in the text. This line, from the manuscript version of the *Old Arcadia*, also brings to a close the composite *Arcadia* of 1593; see *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia. Written by Sir Philip Sidney Knight. Now since the first edition augmented and ended* (London:

to the figure of *aposiopesis*, that the patterns of incompleteness marking Sidney's texts at every stage appear to be an effect of design as well as accidental, serving as provocations to interpretation which crucially reflect their author's understanding of hermeneutics; Sidney's interruptions are "gaps enacted within the text, which describe its status viewed from without."¹⁰ Yet by approaching Sidney's characters as fully-formed individuals, with motives and intentions preceding the text and potential futures extending beyond it, Belling and Weamys attest to a readership for whom such gaps also played a role in effecting Sidney's mimesis of character, requiring readers to supplement *Arcadia* with their own conjectural interpretations by inquiring into the motives of persons described and imagining how they might act when faced with new circumstances.

Such responses have their basis in the reader-based poetics theorized in the *Defence*; one which, I suggest, we find realized in the techniques and composition methods of Sidney's fiction. Outlining a legalistic hermeneutic through which the reader of poetry is able to glean moral instruction by inquiring into the intentions of fictional heroes, Sidney's *Defence* argues for fiction's superiority to history on the grounds that the "speaking picture of poesy" shows "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."¹¹ As Kathy Eden has shown, the *Defence* accordingly positions itself in an Aristotelian tradition which, following the *Poetics*, argues that poetry represents in literature the equivalent to equity in law, as an instrument by which intention and motive can be accounted for:

Sidney's poet can tell not only *what* events occurred, but *why* they occurred as they did. [...] whereas an audience may recognize in the historical Cyrus the particular characteristics of excellence, they can learn from the fictional Cyrus, constructed according to the logical principles of the poet's art, the causes of excellence; they can learn, that is, "how and why that maker made him."¹²

William Ponsonbie, 1593), Ss3v. Richard Belling, *A Sixth Booke to the Covntesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* (Dublin: Society of Stationers, 1624); Anna Weamys, *A Continuation of Sir Philip Sydney's Arcadia* (London: William Bentley, 1651).

¹⁰ Gavin Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 45.

¹¹ Philip Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy," in *Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Gavin Alexander (London: Penguin, 2004), 1-55, 16-17.

¹² Kathy Eden, *Poetic and Legal Fiction in the Aristotelian Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 165. This argument has since been borne out by

While the question of *Arcadia's* relation to the ethical purpose of Sidney's literary theory remains vexed, Sidney's fiction undoubtedly shares the *Defence's* theoretical concerns with equity and interiority. Characters in the *Old Arcadia* are repeatedly engaged in processes of rhetorical inquiry into one another's innermost motives. Beginning with disputations on retirement between Philanax and Basilius, then Musidorus and Pyrocles, the text proceeds, as Arthur Kinney has outlined, from epideictic rhetoric, the most straightforward of the three branches of rhetoric as outlined by Aristotle, to forensic oratory, the most difficult species, in Book V's trial scene.¹³ Kinney's rigorous analysis, however, does not identify the ways in which Sidney's overarching concern with motive and intention means that even *Arcadia's* epideictic episodes take on a quasi-forensic character. Musidorus's speech in reproach of solitariness, for example, appears at first to be a plainly epideictic exercise, taking as its theme the familiar humanist topic of *otium* and arguing its case on behalf of one side. Nevertheless, to go no further than this reading would be to fail to recognize that Musidorus's oration is delivered in view of a more serious end, as part of his inquiry into an issue of fact (*status coniecturalis*); in other words, his investigation into what happened during the princes' visit to Kerxenus's lodge to occasion Pyrocles's change of character.¹⁴ Sidney's blurring of the Aristotelian distinction between epideictic and forensic speech is in some respects anticipated by Quintilian, who notes that, while carefully distinguished from practical rhetoric, the resources of epideictic rhetoric remain available to the judicial orator for use in the courtroom, for example, "to praise or discredit a witness."¹⁵

Yet rather than representing a straightforward migration of epideictic rhetoric from festival to courtroom, Sidney shows how even an oration on a commonplace theme can, in the hands of a skillful orator, serve as an instrument of forensic detection which gradually moves an auditor to "put out the secret" and reveal that

philological analysis, which has shown the passage from the *Defence* which Eden discusses here to be not just a paraphrase, but a close translation from the Greek text of Aristotle's *Poetics*, 1451b4-11; see Micha Lazarus, "Sidney's Greek Poetics," *Studies in Philology*, 112.3 (Summer 2015), 504-536, especially 509-10.

¹³ Arthur F. Kinney, *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 283-4.

¹⁴ For *status* theory, see Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 3.6. Wilson translates the *status coniecturalis* as the issue of fact; see Thomas Wilson, *The Art of Rhetoric*, ed. Peter Medine (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 123.

¹⁵ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 3.7.1-4.

which they have endeavoured to hide.¹⁶ Musidorus's speech mingles praise of Pyrocles's character with reproach of his sudden fall into idleness, with the effect of producing a space for self-reflection which requires Pyrocles to recognize and confess his secret. Indeed, Musidorus's admonition to Pyrocles to "separate yourself a little [...] from yourself," following his friend's confession, is anticipated by his striking deployment of the mirroring figure of *comparatio*, in order to emphasize his friend's slide from duty towards idleness:

[W]hereas you were wont [...] to give yourself vehemently to knowledge of those things which might better your mind; to seek the familiarity of excellent men in learning and soldiery; and lastly, to put all these things in practice both by continual wise proceeding and worthy enterprises, as occasions fell for them; you now leave all these things undone; you let your mind fall asleep, besides your countenance troubled [...]; and lastly, which seemeth strangest unto me, you haunt greatly this place, wherein, besides the disgrace that might fall of it [...], you subject yourself to solitariness, the sly enemy that doth most separate a man from well doing. (19, 13-14)¹⁷

Having heard Musidorus reproach the "alteration" in his behaviour and his "slacking of the main career," Pyrocles ventures a defence of retirement, but soon finds himself moved to admit his love for Philoclea as if on trial, confessing himself "with the very countenance of the poor prisoner at the bar whose answer is nothing but 'guilty'" (13, 17). The forensic scope of Musidorus's speech, however unassuming its theme might first appear, is thus confirmed by the courtroom imagery through which Pyrocles's confession is narrated. Long before *Arcadia* reaches its forensic climax, then, Sidney's fiction makes clear its preoccupation with motive and interiority, and the legal epistemologies by which they can be made subject to inquiry; methods of inquiry which, the *Defence* suggests, align closely with those at the command of the judicious reader of fiction. The pictures of the postures of the mind, therefore, come to show themselves clearly in *Arcadia*, but only emerge in full through the forensic inquiries of Sidney's characters

¹⁶ Philip Sidney, *Old Arcadia*, 16.

¹⁷ For *comparatio* and *contentio*, see John Hoskins, *Directions*, 21-2.

and the analogous exercise of interpretation on the part of the reader.

I suggest that it is this aspect of Sidney's fiction which produces the tendency in twentieth-century readers to readily identify *Arcadia* as proto-novelistic—even if, I argue, this association might be not only anachronistic but, indeed, specious. Partly an attempt to rescue *Arcadia* from its low estimation in the previous century, Virginia Woolf's observation that Sidney "could note and observe and record as keenly and exactly as any modern novelist," together with her claim that "[i]n the *Arcadia*, as in some luminous globe, all the seeds of English fiction lie latent," would come to influence critical approaches to Sidney's fiction throughout subsequent decades.¹⁸ C. S. Lewis, despite claiming that "characterisation is not Sidney's main interest," follows Woolf in praising the "lifelike[ness]" of *Arcadia*'s characters, and, as previously mentioned, even relatively recent work by Peter Lindenbaum has proceeded from the assumption that Sidney's fictions to compel us to read "simply for [the] story" because their techniques anticipate those of the novel.¹⁹ Yet despite the fact that the association between Sidney's fiction and novelistic realism constitutes an inevitable response to *Arcadia*'s effective mimesis of character, and although Sidney's importance for historians of the novel is undeniable—as extensive work by Gillian Beer and Natasha Simonova on Samuel Richardson is testament—it is nevertheless clear that the techniques by which Sidney's fiction produces such an effective representation of character and interiority cannot sustainably be identified with those made available by the advent of the novel.²⁰ As Justin Steinberg has recently noted regarding similar attempts to characterize Boccaccio's putative "realism":

¹⁸ Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1965), 46, 49.

¹⁹ C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944), 338. Peter Lindenbaum, "Sidney's *Arcadia*," 87. In a similar vein to Lindenbaum, Roland Greene has invoked the work of Ian Watt and Mikhail Bakhtin to argue that *Arcadia*'s prose resembles that of the novel in its capacity to absorb non-poetic discourses (specifically, political theories of "resistance") and subject them to new scrutiny; see Greene, "Resistance in Process: On the Semantics of Early Modern Prose Fiction," *Prose Studies*, 32.2 (2010), 101-109, 102.

²⁰ Gillian Beer, "Pamela: Rethinking *Arcadia*," in *Samuel Richardson: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody and Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 23-39; Natasha Simonova, *Early Modern Authorship and Prose Continuations: Adaptation and Ownership from Sidney to Richardson* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 124-5.

[S]omething is inevitably lost when we view the *Decameron* from the end point of the modern novel. Our retrospective glance privileges a very specific conception of realism, a conception defined by its rejection of rhetorical notions of appropriateness and fittingness.²¹

By being drawn to what might appear, in Sidney's *Arcadia*, to be proleptic of modernity, we risk neglecting the text's complex ancestry and the pre-histories of its author's rhetorical and compositional methods.

Indeed, even avowedly historicist attempts to examine the vividness, or *enargeia*, produced by Sidney's fiction have sometimes fallen foul of a deterministic tendency to associate *Arcadia*'s techniques with the rejection of neoclassical methods. It is unclear, as Stephen Greenblatt has suggested, that *Arcadia*'s "mixed mode" can be straightforwardly identified with the representational freedoms of the genre of romance understood, according to its definition by Cinthio, as "a new form suited to the age and not subject to classical laws" (of which, *Orlando Furioso* is the finest example).²² Since the 1960s, critics have repeatedly demonstrated the *Old Arcadia*'s indebtedness to Terentian comedy.²³ Sidney's simultaneous embrace of the unified, forensic structure of Heliodorus's *Aethiopika* (a debt noted by Hoskins) over the *entrelacement* favoured by Ariosto likewise, in the context of contemporary debates in Italian poetics surrounding questions of coherence and plausibility—debates in which Cinthio's views are, in fact, highly unconventional—suggests an intention to compose his fiction in accord with the Aristotelian unity of

²¹ Justin Steinberg, "Mimesis on Trial: Legal and Literary Verisimilitude in Boccaccio's *Decameron*," in *Representations* 139 (Summer 2017), 118-45, 119. For further discussion of the problems of reading from a position of modernity, see Terence Cave, "Locating the Early Modern," *Paragraph*, 29.1 (2006), 12-26.

²² Stephen Greenblatt, "Sidney's *Arcadia* and the Mixed Mode," in *Studies in Philology*, 70.3 (July, 1973), 269-78, 270.

²³ The connection was made even earlier by at least one sixteenth-century reader; Gabriel Harvey references *Arcadia* in a marginal note on Gascoigne's Terentian *Supposes* in his copy of *Posies*, now held in the Bodleian: "Dorus y^e shepherd, y^e worthie Musidorus," Bodleian Malone 752, Aijr. For twentieth-century criticism, see Clark Chalifour, "Sir Philip Sidney's *Old Arcadia* as Terentian Comedy," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 16.1 (Winter, 1976), 51-63. Cf. Richard Lanham, "The Old Arcadia," in *Sidney's Arcadia: A Map of Arcadia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 183-406, 200-37.

action.²⁴ No other Elizabethan prose fiction has been so consistently and enduringly praised as *Arcadia* for what can only be described as its “realism.” Accordingly, this essay suggests that the text’s unique achievement comes as a direct result of Sidney’s careful adaptation of techniques, developed for the stage by George Gascoigne and others during previous decades, to the genre of romance, via the mediating influence of Heliodorus’s unified epic. As Lorna Hutson has shown, these dramatists, drawing on the litigious structure of Roman New Comedy, made innovative use of the legalistic arguments found therein with the effect of producing, by the end of the century, a dramaturgy capable of representational verisimilitude far greater than previously possible. With Shakespeare, Hutson writes, circumstantial arguments of proof become so developed as a technique of dramatic mimesis as to stimulate us “to imagine and argue about his ‘characters’ as though they existed autonomously, centrally, and essentially, independent of the composition of the plays,” and “to imagine an extramimetic world which is both vividly concrete and specific and, at the same time, charged with emotion and ethical significance.”²⁵ Developing Hutson’s thesis, I argue that, transferred to classicized romance writing, such techniques retain their potency in Sidney’s fiction of forensic inquiry and disclosure, to “yieldeth to the powers of the mind” true-seeming impressions of place, character, and thought.²⁶

The forensic character of *Arcadia*’s narrative, particularly as structured in the *Old Arcadia*, stems from concerns shared by Sidney with contemporary neoclassical dramatists. In his dedication to *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), George Whetstone condemns the poet who “groundes his worke on impossibilities” and makes “their working indiscreete.” The result, he writes, is that “the people laugh, though they laugh them (for theyr follyes) to scorne.”²⁷ Sidney’s critique of Sackville and Norton’s *Gorboduc* for being “very defectious in the circumstances”—for failing to convince him of the coherence of time, place and persons in a probable sequence of events onstage—echoes Whetstone’s

²⁴ John Hoskins, *Directions*, 41. For Italian debates over unity and romance in the wake of Ariosto, see Alban K. Forcione, *Cervantes, Aristotle, and the Persiles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 49-86.

²⁵ Lorna Hutson, *Circumstantial Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1, 171. See also, Lorna Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 147-216.

²⁶ Philip Sidney, *Defence*, 16.

²⁷ George Whetstone, *The Right Excellent and Famous Historie of Promos and Cassandra* (London: Richard Jones, 1578), A2v.

rhetorically-inflected attack on drama “ground[ed] [...] on impossibilities.”²⁸ Whetstone’s concern is that drama which disobeys the poetic unities will fail to appear credible before its audience and be rejected with laughter. The threat of that same laughter, however, poses a more serious problem in Sidney’s poetic theory. As previously outlined, Sidney’s defence of fiction rests on the argument that, by subjecting texts to rational inquiry and uncovering the motives of heroes, readers will find themselves moved to “virtuous action.”²⁹ It is therefore significant that Sidney associates poetry’s usefulness not only with “imaginative” stimulation, but also with the text’s ability to sustain rigorous analysis from the “judging power”; poetry yields not the bare facts surrounding its objects, but offers the well-trained reader “a judicial comprehending of them.”³⁰ Sidney’s “judicial comprehending” implies the kind brought about by the forensic *narratio*, in which, Quintilian writes, “motives and reasons” (*causas ac rationes*) are divulged in tandem with events and are corroborated by “places, times, and the like.”³¹ Circumstances (“places, times”) are made to cohere with—and, gradually, to produce—character, such that the *narratio* offers not merely an account of events, but also insinuates their causes, which must necessarily be outlined in order for the ethical character of the accused to be laid open to judgement.

A close continuity thus emerges between the neoclassical aesthetics and Protestant ethics advocated in the *Defence*. Since Sidney’s legalistic hermeneutics depend upon the ability to read texts as though they represent real life, the narratives which they recount plainly must conform to the laws of probability in order for textual methods of probable inquiry to be effective. As Robert Stillman notes, Sidney’s hermeneutics fundamentally differ in this respect from those of allegory, which embrace moments of representational incoherence as invitations to embark on “the quest to comprehend a form of ‘other speaking’.”³² Whereas poetry in the Aristotelian tradition is directly aligned with the probable fictions of rhetorical invention, allegory rejects verisimilitude in

²⁸ Philip Sidney, *Defence*, 45.

²⁹ Philip Sidney, *Defence*, 13.

³⁰ Philip Sidney, *Defence*, 16.

³¹ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 4.2.52.

³² Robert Stillman, *Philip Sidney and the Poetics of Renaissance Cosmopolitanism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 67. Stillman’s thesis answers claims made by Kenneth Borris for *Arcadia*’s use of psychomachia and allegorical figuration, rather than character and example; see Borris, *Allegory and Epic in English Renaissance Literature: Heroic Form in Sidney, Spenser, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 109-41.

favour of what Spenser, for example, suggestively terms “darke conceit.”³³ *The Faerie Queene*’s opening tableau, where Una’s “palfrey slow” and “milkewhite lambe” ride “faire beside” Redcrosse’s “foaming” courser, or episodes like Britomart’s visit to Isis Church, can be accommodated by allegorical reading, but provoke little more than bafflement if read literally.³⁴ There are no such episodes in the *Old Arcadia*. Modelling his romance on Heliodorus, Sidney embraces a text lauded by humanists for its decorum and relative verisimilitude. In his preface to the French translation, Jacques Amyot complains that chivalric romances are so “removed from any resemblance to truth that they are more similar to the dreams of a sick man”; the *Aethiopika*, on the other hand, is an “ingenious fiction” of “human passions and inclinations painted so true to life and with such propriety that no one will be able to find in it any inspiration for wrong-doing.”³⁵ English writers drew similar conclusions from their readings of Heliodorus. Discussing poetic unity in terms which draw explicitly on the “circumstances” of forensic invention, William Scott writes with reference to the final scene of the *Aethiopika*:

These rules are broken by not observing circumstances of time and place and persons likewise: [...] short conveyances and shuffling up of matters of great consequence, contrary to Chariclea’s excellent conceit when Theagenes would have had her (according to the nature of desire) suddenly acknowledge her self and state that more quickly they might enjoy their long-desired mutual joy—“No, sweetest sir,” saith she, “matters of great consequence must be brought about with much preparation and wrought out through many circumstances.” Our tragedies (nowadays) huddle up matter enough for whole *Iliads* in one hour.³⁶

³³ Edmund Spenser, “Letter” in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, Toshiyuki Suzuki (London: Routledge, 2013), 1.4.

³⁴ *FQ*, I.i.4, 1. See Joe Moshenska, “‘Whence had she all this wealth?’: Dryden’s Note on *The Faerie Queene* V.vii.24 and the Gifts of Literal Reading,” *Spenser Studies* 33 (January 2019), 301-13.

³⁵ Jacques Amyot qtd. in Alban K. Forcione, *Cervantes* 59, 60, 61. Amyot’s 1547 translation was the basis for the English translation of Thomas Underdowne, *An Æthiopian Historie written in Greeke by Heliodorus* (London: Henrie Wykes, 1569). Sidney may have read either translation.

³⁶ William Scott, *The Model of Poesy*, 36.

Spoken near the end of the *Aethiopika*—while Chariclea is waiting for all the necessary evidence of her identity to become available before revealing herself as King Hydaspes’s daughter—this “excellent conceit” is understood by William Scott as one which encapsulates the careful plotting and narrative coherence of Heliodorus’s romance itself. The *Aethiopika*’s intermingling of *episodia*—imitated by Sidney—is justified by Scott, following both Aristotle and Scaliger, according to their subordination to the “final issue” (“so much more welcome by how much it is by the difficulties and interruptions hid and held aloof from the longing mind”).³⁷ The poet’s invention therefore conforms to the unity of action if digressions remain relevant, and so long as the main issue (in both texts, whether the lovers will be able to marry) remains always in sight. Both Heliodorus and Sidney ensure this by framing their closing episodes as scenes of forensic inquiry, in which characters are forced to resolve their mistaken circumstances by providing an alternative account which reflects the true course of events and allows them to solemnize their romance by confirming their marriage. Although lacking the specifically litigious character of Terentian drama, the structural parallel between the forensic climax of the Greek romance and the *catastrophe* of Roman New Comedy, which tends to take the form of a dispute over evidence, is clear; and by combining the two genres, Sidney draws on texts in which characters—like Chariclea in the *Aethiopika*, or Lamia and Rosco at the beginning of *Promos and Cassandra*—are constantly preoccupied with constructing cases in their defence, legitimate or otherwise, by which sentences of death might be delayed or avoided.

The reason why Sidney’s characters emerge vividly in *Arcadia*, however, is not only because they simply engage in these processes, but because his fiction is so highly sensitive to the ways in which these processes are liable not to succeed, and the vulnerability faced by his characters regarding their own interiority so easily misconstrued by others. The close attention Sidney’s readers are required to pay towards minute narrative details, which have the capacity to re-emerge later as crucial pieces of evidence—such as when Musidorus sends Menalcas to Thessalia bearing proof of his identity—inculcates a mode of reading based around active inquiry, which becomes urgently engaged once the reader grows aware of Basilius’s apparent poisoning and the “cruelty of the Arcadian laws” which the princes will be required to face (41, 290). Considerable importance, for example, lies in Cleophila’s

³⁷ William Scott, *The Model of Poesy*, 37. See also Alban Forcione, *Cervantes*, 65.

plot to arrange an assignation between Basilius and Gynecia by convincing each independently that (s)he will meet them at a nearby cave; but unexpected significance arises from the practical detail, fundamental to the reader's belief in the plan's credibility, that Gynecia must meet her husband disguised in Cleophila's robe. Arguing the threat to her honor were she discovered, Cleophila convinces Gynecia to travel in disguise: "upon yourself take my upper garment, that if any of Dametas's house see you they may think you to be myself" (223). This results in a comical response from Dametas, having discovered Pyrocles in bed with Philoclea, to the sight of Gynecia fleeing the cave:

Cleophila conquered his capacity, suddenly from a woman grown a man, and from a locked chamber gotten before him into the fields, which he gave the rest quickly to understand. For, instead of doing anything as the exigent required, he began to make circles and all those fantastical defences that he had ever heard were fortifications against devils. (281).

Dametas's credulous bafflement and failure to fulfil his evidence-gathering duties no doubt comprise part of Sidney's broad critique of the failures of English Justices of the Peace, as noted by Blair Worden.³⁸ More importantly than this for *Arcadia's* narrative, however, is the fact that Gynecia's possession of Cleophila's robe is what crucially provides Philanax with a powerful inartificial (*atechnoi*) proof to support his argument in Book V that the princes were responsible for orchestrating Basilius's poisoning alongside Gynecia:

How can you cloak the lending of your cloak unto her? Was that all by chance too? Had the stars sent such an influence unto you as you should be just weary of your lodging and garments when our prince was destinied to the slaughter? (389-90)³⁹

Philanax's sarcastic questioning, wrought with stylishly punning flair, serves to reinforce how persuasively obvious the case against the princes should appear to readers if they were not already aware of what events prior to the trial really had been. Philanax's charges

³⁸ Blair Worden, *Sound of Virtue*, 200.

³⁹ For artificial (*entechnoi*) and inartificial (*atechnoi*) proofs, see Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 5.1-5.

appear irrefutable. Indeed, Quintilian himself points out that the case made with support from inartificial proof requires the highest powers of eloquence to disprove.⁴⁰ As Lorna Hutson suggests, the reason for the trial scene's emotional power is precisely this:

[I]t brings home to us, as readers sympathetic to the princes and princesses, just how persuasive is the case against them, how much more likely it seems that they should have been premeditating the murder of Basilius than that they should be innocent.⁴¹

Various critics have understood the trial scene as *Arcadia's* plea on behalf of equity, or *epieikeia*—that hermeneutic instrument, likened by Aristotle to the soft, ever-adaptable lead rule of the Lesbian builders, used in legal procedure in order to account for the intentions of the accused and correct the course of law.⁴² Indeed, once the court has conducted its investigation into the princes' involvement in Basilius's apparent murder, it moves to determine the case of their clandestine wooing of Philoclea and Pamela, which turns, as Euarchus notes, on an issue of quality (*status qualitatis*), "wherein they do not deny the fact but deny, or at least diminish, the fault" (405). Facing charges of rape, the princes plead their good characters and previous service to Basilius, but their case fails. Euarchus, ruling that "no man, because he hath done well before, should have his present evils spared" (405), sentences them to death. Joel Altman interprets this episode as "a wry indictment of the inadequacy of precept," where the just intentions behind the written law go unheeded along with the extenuating circumstances presented by the princes.⁴³ Similarly, Arthur Kinney charges Euarchus with "limiting himself to law"; by valuing the letter of the law over the intention it represents, he "denies the Greek sense of justice, *dikaioσynēs*, as something more than legal—something also ethical, like our word 'righteousness'."⁴⁴ First theorized in England by Christopher St.

⁴⁰ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 5.1.2-3.

⁴¹ Lorna Hutson, *Invention of Suspicion*, 131-2.

⁴² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 5.10.7. For humanist approaches to equity and its Aristotelian background, see Kathy Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy and Its Humanist Reception* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), esp. 12-19.

⁴³ Joel Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 98-9.

⁴⁴ Arthur Kinney, *Humanist Poetics*, 286.

German's *Dialogue between a Doctor and Student*, equity draws from the written text of law the intentions of the original lawmaker, such that its rulings are able to accommodate the particular, exceptional case which might otherwise be judged "against the law of God or law of reason."⁴⁵ The topic is surely of crucial importance for Sidney. Since the jury that participate in English cases is substituted by an audience and Euarchus's powerful role resembles that of the judge in Romano-canon trials, the trial cannot be said to follow English legal procedure. Even so, the extensive borrowings of the common law from Romano-canon systems suggest that the scene can nevertheless be understood as Sidney's fictive means for negotiating English common law concerns—in particular, the topic of equity, which found itself placed under new scrutiny by Plowden's modification of St. German in his *Reports*.⁴⁶ Sidney could hardly have avoided acquiring at least some knowledge of these debates. As Katherine Duncan-Jones notes, he was acquainted with the Inns of Court from the age of eleven, possibly being present at the first performance of Gascoigne's *Supposes* in 1566; and during his time at court, Thomas Moffett records that Sidney would frequently withdraw from company that he "might read and dispute somewhere in an inn with a few University men."⁴⁷ Furthermore, if John Hoskins's claim is to be believed, Sidney's translation of the first two books of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* would have brought him into the closest contact with some of the most important Aristotelian discussions of equity outside of the *Nichomachean Ethics*.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Christopher St. German, *The Doctor and Student* (Union, New Jersey: Lawbook Exchange, 1998), 45.

⁴⁶ "[Plowden] defended judgements modifying the letter of the law as expressions of 'equity' which some call *epichaia* which often puts an exception to the generality of the text for reasonable cause." Unlike St German, Plowden believed that *epichaia* was "no part of the law, but a moral virtue that reforms the law." See Alan Cromartie, "Epieikeia and Conscience," in *The Oxford Handbook of English Law and Literature, 1500-1700*, ed. Lorna Hutson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 321-36, 335. For institutional migration, see Barbara Shapiro, "*Beyond Reasonable Doubt*" and "*Probable Cause*": *Historical Perspectives on the Anglo-American Law of Evidence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 53.

⁴⁷ Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 48; Thomas Moffett, *Nobilis: or, A View of the Life and Death of a Sidney, and Lesser Lugubris*, ed. Virgil B. Heltzel, Hoyt H. Hudson (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1940), 83.

⁴⁸ John Hoskins, *Directions*, 41. See Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. J. H. Freese (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 1.13.16-19: "And it is equitable to pardon human weaknesses, and to look, not to the law but to the legislator; not to the letter of the law but to the intention of the legislator; not to the action itself, but to the moral purpose; not to the part, but to the whole; not to what a man is now, but to

Readings which focus principally on Euarchus and Philanax as unequitable interpreters of law and deed, however, miss another important aspect of the trial scene: the way in which Book V positions itself in a troublesome relation to the text as a whole, by requiring the reader to interrogate the very processes by which they themselves have come to know the things which they believe to be true. Philanax does grow increasingly incensed as the trial proceeds, but Sidney nevertheless problematizes interpretations which characterize him as motivated primarily by revenge. Crucially, Philanax is remembered as Basilius's dearest friend, praised for his "judgement" and "rare temper," who counsels his king against retirement in *Arcadia's* opening scene (5). Furthermore, the virtuous concern for matters of state which motivates his counsel in Book I has only grown more pressing by the time of the trial. Facing "the ruinous renting of all estates" at the hands of the Helots, Philanax is "equally distracted betwixt desire of his master's revenge and care of the state's establishment" (351). Considering the backdrop of popular rebellion against which the trial takes place, Sidney requires that any assessment of Philanax resist reductively attributing his motivations, which are clearly pragmatic as well as personal, to any one influence. Indeed, his first encounter with Pyrocles is marked not by an impulse for revenge, but instead ("remembering the notable act he had done") by an embattled desire to resolve contraries resembling that of the equitable interpreter: "a strange medley betwixt pity and revenge, betwixt liking and abhorring" is, at first, the feeling that comes over him (300-01). Euarchus, similarly, is invited to serve as judge due to "excellent trials of his equity" for which he is renowned (351). Thus, although Philanax later disregards his duties by suppressing the letters sent by Philoclea and Pamela, the first half of the trial narrates not so much a collapse of equity, as the failure of probabilistic inquiry to adequately determine the truth. This failure of the methods of rational investigation in the hands of Philanax and Euarchus to uncover the true pattern of events, I propose, is disturbing to us precisely because theirs are methods which are near-indistinguishable from the interpretative techniques which we feel, as readers, have served us so reliably in our own efforts to make sense of *Arcadia*.

As I have suggested, Sidney's text presupposes a certain mode of reading, specifically, that of the "longing mind," as noted by William Scott, which hangs off every word and attends scrupulously to the fleeting or minor detail, in anticipation of the

what he has been, always or generally..." See also Kathy Eden, *Hermeneutics*, 19.

plot's resolution.⁴⁹ Plot and sub-plot in the *Old Arcadia* are driven repeatedly by evidence. Musidorus's plan to elope with Pamela, for example, depends upon the material proof of "certain medals of gold" shown to Dametas, before he is convinced to embark in search for Aristomenes's fictive hoard (187). Sidney's own narration, however, is likewise driven by similar disclosures of evidence, often of uncertain importance, which the reader is required to evaluate and interpret. C. S. Lewis, for example, celebrates the ostensible realism produced by Sidney's detailed descriptions of Pamela and Philoclea, "down to the difference of their toilets in prison" which, he writes, "helps to save them from abstraction."⁵⁰ Apparently extraneous details of these sort abound elsewhere in *Arcadia*. Just as Musidorus's invention of the fictitious Aristomenes contributes to the plausibility of his lie, Sidney's own inclusion of a solitary reference to the verses of the imaginary poet Alethes ("an honest man of that time" [30]) during his introduction of Mopsa contributes significantly to what might be called *Arcadia*'s "reality effect." For Barthes, the impression of the real, which he associates with the modern novel, is produced by the inclusion of "object[s] neither incongruous or significant, and therefore not participating, at first glance, in the order of the notable."⁵¹ The insignificant detail, which at first appearance might resemble extraneous clutter, serves instead as the opening for a textual gap, providing a point of reference and imaginative stimulus for readerly inquiry into the nature of the text's fictional world. *Arcadia*'s fictional history is, ultimately, unwritten and unknowable; nevertheless, moments such as Sidney's reference to the shrewdly-named Alethes (*alētheia*, in Greek, means 'truth') serve as prompts which enable readers to populate and enliven *Arcadia* with a backstory, however provisional, of their own imaginative making. Details of this kind—which are singular and apparently superfluous—recur frequently, deployed by Sidney in order to intimate a fully-realized and self-sustaining world existing outside of and beyond the events of his main plot.

Yet for all that *Arcadia*'s details might be capable of producing a thoroughly modern-seeming "reality effect," it is nevertheless the case that Sidney's methods are not so much

⁴⁹ William Scott, *Model of Poesy*, 37.

⁵⁰ C.S.Lewis, *English Literature*, 338.

⁵¹ Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," in *The Rustle of Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 141-8, 142. In Barthes' wider thought, attention to such details might be seen to constitute an aspect of "writerly" reading, in which readers supplement textual lacunae with their own conjectures and hypotheses. For Barthes' first discussion of the writerly and the readerly, see Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), 4-5.

proleptic of novelistic techniques, but rather more ancient. Sidney's fictional method draws on specific techniques of classical argument, outlined by Cicero and developed by Quintilian, which allow for minor details of time and place to unobtrusively effect character. When Dametas finds Basilius's lodge locked from the inside, he enters via the unsecured way of the pantry: "Dametas (that ever knew the buttery better than any place) got in that way" (272). This tiny parenthetical detail, in keeping with Dametas's typing as a comical rustic, nevertheless imbues his actions with a sense of past events and personal history, which make his entry into the heavily secured lodge seem not only plausible, but to result from his own interiority, as shown by his implied knowledge of the lodge's hidden entrances and passageways. Causation and character are thus worked into the narrative in tandem by the smallest of asides. In *De Inventione*, Cicero encourages the orator-in-training to appropriate every fragment of evidence that might be made to lend him its support, explaining that the ideal *narratio* should "bend everything to the advantage of his case" (*omnia torquenda sunt ad commodum suae causae*); Quintilian, developing this notion, suggests that narration should "sow some seeds of the Proofs" (*semina quaedam probationum spargere*).⁵² While one hesitates to force Quintilian's suggestive image of the orator's fecund, evidential *semina* into too close a dialogue with the fertile "ground-plot" cultivated by Sidney's ideal poet, *Arcadia* nevertheless provides a test-case for the ways in which forensic rhetoric operates by providing the reader with suggestive proofs, which take root and grow in the mind.⁵³ A comically extraneous detail—apparently suggesting little more than Dametas's appetitive overfamiliarity with the buttery—thus fulfils the role outlined by Quintilian as an effective, seed-like rhetorical proof, helping to demonstrate the plausibility of Sidney's narrative by imbuing events with causation, while simultaneously evoking a sense of Dametas's character pre-existing the events of *Arcadia*.

Yet *Arcadia* is also riddled with more problematic moments. Interpretative gaps of the kind discussed by Gavin Alexander frequently constitute moments *apophasis*, particularly surrounding sexual behaviour, which provoke potentially

⁵² Cicero, *De Inventione*, in *De inventione, De optimo genere oratorum, Topica*, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 1.21.30; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 4.2.54.

⁵³ It is apt to note here that in Sidney's poetics, it is the role of readers to use narration as the basis for their own inventive fiction-making: "and therefore, as in history, looking for truth, they may go away full fraught with falsehood, so in poesy, looking but for fiction, they shall use the narration but as an imaginative ground-plot of a profitable invention": Sidney, *Defence*, 34-5.

scandalous readerly suppositions.⁵⁴ George Puttenham's account of the near-identical figure of *paralepsis* (or "the Passager") strongly associates the gesture with sexual taboo: *paralepsis*, like *apophasis*, occurs when a speaker "will seem not to know a thing, and yet we know it well enough"; it raises the suggestion of scandal while simultaneously avoiding offense—according to his own poetic example—to the sensibilities of "chaste ears."⁵⁵ When Cleophila's wounded body is being tended by Gynecia, Sidney's lewd aside ("In which doing, I know not whether Gynecia took some greater conjectures of Cleophila's sex" [50]) wryly passes over responsibility for the interpretation of the scene's palpable erotic energies to the reader. Similarly, when Dametas discovers Pyrocles and Philoclea together in bed, the text offers an extravagant series of explanations for why the couple might be asleep together before pausing and offering the issue to the reader for judgement, in a textual gesture which implicitly asks the reader to construct a hypothetical case in defence of the lovers, while at the same time provoking them to supplement the erotics of the scene imaginatively: "...or whatsoever other cause may be imagined of it" (273). Moments such as these, by requiring us to infer actions and intentions which have been kept deliberately obscured from view, play a powerful role in making *Arcadia's* characters seem true to life. As Terence Cave has recently observed, the cognitive work that takes place when readers construct from textual details the image of a character is apt to make lively use of such purposefully underspecific descriptions:

[T]he reason that some fictional characters seem 'alive' is that the narrative affords precisely those limited but suggestive indications about the character [...] that would allow us, in the case of a real person, to infer their cognitive profile and anticipate their likely utterances or actions.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Gavin Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 45.

⁵⁵ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy: A Critical Edition*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 317. For a seventeenth-century definition of *apophasis*, see John Smith, *The Myserie of Rhetorique Unveil'd* (London: 1665), L1v: "It is a kind of Irony, whereby we deny that we say or doe that which we principally say or doe."

⁵⁶ Terence Cave, *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 27. It is pertinent to note how many of the primary concerns of modern, cognitive criticism ("mind-reading," intention, our capacity to believe in fictions and their characters) are shared, albeit in different terms, by classical and Renaissance thinkers.

Cave's observation that underspecification can be imaginatively powerful appears never to have gone unnoticed by the classical rhetoricians, concerned as they are with "seeds of the Proofs," and other techniques such as "insinuation" (*insinuatio*), which Cicero describes as "an address which by dissimulation and indirection unobtrusively steals into the mind of the auditor" (*est oratio quadam dissimulatione et circumitione obscure subiens auditoris animum*).⁵⁷ Indeed, a similar understanding also pertains in Sidney's metonymic theory of the poetic image, in which a singular scene of action ought to be made to stand for the virtue or vice constituted in the hero's character as a whole.⁵⁸ The active work of the mind, "stirre[d]" by a singular image of virtuous action, initiates a hermeneutic process which makes intentions visible and actions comprehensible.

What *Arcadia* dramatizes, however, are the limits of these rational processes, when they take the form of forensic inquiry, to account for the particular case. When readers are confronted with a tantalizing, stimulating fragment of proof, such as the lute in Philoclea's chamber engraved with verses by Gynecia, which seem to imply a family history of Basilius's unfaithfulness (235), they find themselves compelled to question whether their conclusions might not constitute simply yet another misinterpretation, a further instance of the unfortunate suspicions which characterize *Arcadia*'s narrative as a whole—from Philoclea's fear that Pyrocles has transferred his affections to Gynecia, to Philanax's belief in the princes' guilt. I conclude by quoting at length from the episode in Philoclea's chamber:

With that, the sweet lady turning herself upon her weary bed, she haply saw a lute, upon the belly of which Gynecia had written this song what time Basilius imputed her jealous motions to proceed of the doubt she had of his untimely loves. Under which veil she (contented to cover her never ceasing anguish) had made the lute a monument of her mind; which Philoclea had never much marked till now the fear of a competitor more stirred her than before the care of a mother. The verses were these:

⁵⁷ Cicero, *De Inventione*, 1.15.20.

⁵⁸ "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": Philip Sidney, *Defence*, 29.

My lute within thyself thy tunes enclose,
Thy mistress' song is now a sorrow's cry,
Her hand benumbed with fortune's daily blows,
Her mind amazed, can neither's help apply.
Wear these my words as mourning weeds of woe,
Black ink becomes the state wherein I die.
And though my moans be not in music bound,
Of written griefs, yet be the silent ground.

The world doth yield such ill consorted shows
(With circled course, which no wise stay can try)
That childish stuff which knows not friends from foes
(Better despised) bewonder gazing eye.
Thus noble gold down to the bottom goes,
When worthless cork aloft doth floating lie.
This in thyself least strings are loudest found,
And lowest stops do yield the highest sound.
(210-11)

To borrow a term from the *Defence*, determining “aright” the unknown histories of *Arcadia* appears to become near-impossible in the encounter with such ambiguous signs.⁵⁹ Sidney’s fiction is predicated on confidence in the reader’s capacity to make cognitive continuations of precisely the sort described by Cave, where the mind makes productive use of implicature and inference in the active processes of reading and meaning-making. Yet *Arcadia* simultaneously demands that readers reflect—even as they depend upon it—on the reliability of this very hermeneutic. Philoclea’s happenstance sighting of her mother’s melancholy verses engraved on the body of a lute potentially uncover a scandalous history of guilt, suspicion, and private “imput[at]ions” between her and Basilius.⁶⁰ Yet any attempt to determine this history with certainty from the evidence provided would risk implicating the reader in the rampant suspicions by which *Arcadia*’s own characters are consumed.

Requiring readers to sceptically weigh alternative pasts and to repeatedly question their own conclusions, Sidney’s fiction presents a fundamentally forensic mimesis of character and plot which, by stimulating the closest forms of imaginative engagement with suggestive and frequently ambiguous textual details, has

⁵⁹ Philip Sidney, *Defence*, 9.

⁶⁰ “Imputation,” for Sidney, carries strong judicial associations. See Sidney, *Defence*, 33: “Now then go we to the most important imputations laid to the poor poets.”

contributed to *Arcadia* a ‘lifelikeness’ unique in sixteenth-century English prose fiction for centuries of readers. More immediately, however, the influence of *Arcadia*’s innovations might be identified in the context of late sixteenth-century developments in rhetorical and poetic theory, particularly in the responses of two of Sidney’s most astute readers, William Scott and John Hoskins. Scott not only identifies the “longing mind” of *Arcadia*’s reader, but also draws heavily on Quintilian’s analysis of detail in his discussion of the use of “particulars” for amplification: “this latter manner of report doth more pierce the affections than the other, which, as an hasty messenger, delivered the sum in a word and left the particulars to our imagination to work out.”⁶¹ Hoskins’s account goes further still. By defining a new method of amplification, which he coins “Intimation,” Hoskins gives a new position of prominence to the resources of ambiguity and implication, drawing together and joining Ciceronian *insinuatō* with the figures of *paralepsis* and *ironia*:

The fourth way of amplifying is by INTIMATION, that leaves the collection of greatness to our understanding, by expressing some mark of it. It exceedeth speech in silence, and makes our meaning more palpable by a touch than by a direct handling.⁶²

In *Directions for Speech and Style*, the mind of the reader is exercised most vigorously by those things that are denied to it in full; the wry or mischievous touch of narrative detail provides a fleeting but richly-textured glimpse of the author’s invention which, according to Hoskins’s practical scheme, proves far more effective than any exhaustive account. The palpable lifelikeness of Sidney’s characters and their world, felt so keenly by readers from Belling and Weamys to Woolf and Lewis, emerges from Sidney’s carefully-considered oclusions and his cultivation of highly productive sites of ambiguity—sites which, as Hoskins’s text suggests, are not so much proto-novelistic as they are pragmatic, rhetorical instruments of fictional invention, drawn from techniques of Roman oratory. Over the course of this essay, I have

⁶¹ William Scott, *Model of Poesy*, 66. For Scott’s “particulars,” see Quintilian’s *accidentia*: “this same vividness can be obtained by describing the incidental features of a situation” (*contingit eadem claritas etiam ex accidentibus*), 8.3.70.

⁶² John Hoskins, *Directions*, 25. Hoyt Hudson notes Hoskins’s innovation, pointing out that intimation “is not a usual rhetorical term, nor was *intimatio* used in this sense in Latin,” 77.

argued that the exceptional status afforded to *Arcadia* by its twentieth-century readers is well-earned, even if its singularity might not lie in the qualities with which they ascribed it. Perhaps no other sixteenth-century English prose romance aimed to produce a mimesis of plot and character in the Aristotelian tradition. And yet gleanings from William Scott and John Hoskins suggest that Sidney's text and its techniques, as I have discussed them, may well have been influential in shaping their newfound theoretical interest in intimation, suggestion, and indirection; that is, in fiction's capacity to be implied by targeted patterns of indeterminacy and ambiguity. While the consequences of this newly-prominent figure for the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries are clear (we need look no further than *Othello* for a play wrought of carefully-crafted suspicions), it is also the case that Sidney, many years prior, was not only writing with aid of such techniques, but requiring his readers to reflect critically upon their uses in his prose. Reading his *Arcadia* is not simply a process of understanding, but is rather an exercise in probing its gaps, scrutinizing its surface, and in thinking with its text—an exercise which depends, to use Hoskins's term, on the reader's capacity to tell the difference between a true touch and a false one.

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