Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* was for almost a century after its publication the only widely read British prose narrative. Once it could no longer be enjoyed, the modern novel began to emerge. Because it owes so much to European models, it will be important to outline developments in France, Spain, and Italy, before coming to Sidney. Of course, prose narratives had been written in France since the 13th century, in the vast prose romances of Lancelot, and of Tristan. Otherwise, in England prose had mostly been the medium for religious and didactic writing that did not pretend to be entertaining. Dante's use of prose narrative to frame the lyric verse in the *Vita Nuova* was inspired by classical models, by Boethius especially.

One great model for Renaissance prose fiction was **Boccaccio's *Decameron*** (c1350). The skill with which these one hundred tales of human endurance are told was never equalled, and they are still widely read simply for their entertainment value. The tales themselves are often drawn from older sources, the *fabliaux* of the French Middle Ages and other narratives. The framework is a story-telling contest between ten Florentine young men and girls escaping from the plague in beautiful rural villas. In many of the tales, Fortune is overcome by human will and wit, often in defiance of morality. There is a fascinating interplay between the fictional and the real that was to influence the development of modern fiction throughout Europe.

The *Decameron* inspired many lesser writers in France as well as Italy. The most notable example in France is **Marguerite de Navarre** (1492 - 1549), the wife of the King of Navarre; at the time of her death she had completed 72 tales in what has come to be known as her *Heptameron* although she had intended to compose a *Decameron* of 100 tales. Almost all the tales in her work claim to be based on true stories, usually about relationships between men and women. A humanist, protestant approach to marriage underlies her work, which idealizes a romantic view of love, and contrasts it with tales of violence and infidelity.

In Italy, the short story came to be known as a *novella*, which stresses the novelty of the tale, just as today "news" is seen as entertainment. For obvious reasons, the short story is usually published in collections, whence the popularity of a story-telling framework giving a kind of unity to stories that may be classical, medieval, or contemporary in origin and setting, dealing with love in comic or tragic terms, with chivalry, or offering satires of the church or of human follies.

The most famous writer of *novelle* was **Matteo Bandello** (1485 - 1561), an Italian who wrote most of his works while living in France after 1541. In his 214 *novelle* Bandello gave vivid descriptions of life in his times, while adapting stories from many sources, including Marguerite de Navarre. His most popular tales were those with tragic endings, the most famous being his adaptation of Luigi da Porto's tale of Romeo and Juliet; this was translated into French before being turned into an English narrative poem by Arthur Brooke in 1562 that served as the main source for Shakespeare's play.

In 1565, **Giambattista Giraldi** published his collection, *Gli Ecatommiti*; these are designed to offer clear moral and religious edification to his readers; the main centre of interest is the contrast between married love and its illicit alternatives. One of the stories told on the third day of the framing narrative is the main source of Shakespeare's *Othello*.

Other kinds of prose writing also flourished, though; in Italy, **Jacopo Sannazaro** (1455 - 1530) published his *Arcadia* in 1504. Here prose narrative alternates with skillful poems in a work inspired by the models of Dante, Boethius, and Petronius. Virgil had given the name of Arcadia (a wild region of Greece) to an idealized fictional world in his pastoral *Eclogues*. In the *Arcadia* there are 12 poems set in a prose narrative describing the simple life

of the shepherds among whom the unhappy Sincero seeks refuge. It was the artificiality of this imaginary landscape, the delicacy of the descriptions, that attracted so many imitators. The pastoral world is contrasted with the harshness of life in the city, but without any element of satire; the landscape remains idyllic, while this harmonious nature, by the "pathetic fallacy," serves to remind the travelling Sincero of his beloved-but-unloving Phyllis.

Sannazaro was the direct inspiration for **Garcilaso de la Vega** (1501-1536) who introduced the poetry of idealized natural beauty to Spain in his *Eclogues*. Garcilaso was again, like Sannazaro, a courtier-poet fascinated by the themes explored in Italian poetry. In 1559, **Jorge de Montemayor** (1520 - 1561) published his incomplete pastoral novel in Spanish *Los siete libros de la Diana* (the seven books of Diana), one of the most influential of early prose fictions. It was soon translated into French, and later into English. Again, there is a mixture of elegant prose with skillful verse. The heroes of the story are shepherds, two of whom love the shepherdess Diana; there are many confusions of identity involving disguises, before magic potions finally make everyone happy with the right partner. Arcadia in this work is located in Spain, and the analysis of the young women's emotions is done with great delicacy in prose whose musicality may be partly explained by the author's position as a professional chapel singer.

Other Spanish writers followed Montemayor, especially **Gaspar Gil Polo**'s *Diana enamorada* (1564) and **Cervantes**'s *La Galatea* (1585); none of these works, oddly enough, was ever finished. Cervantes (1547 - 1616) is most famous for *Don Quixote*, the first part of which was published in 1605, the second in 1615; it was to be a major source for the development of the English novel later in the 17th and in the 18th century. It remains extremely popular today, alone among all these works.

Another Spanish prose form important in this same context is the **picaresque novel** which began with the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* of 1554, to be followed by Mateo Aleman's *Guzman de Alfarache* (1599/1604) which was known as *El Picaro*, and Quevedo's *Vida del Buscon* (1626). These are three of the greatest prose works in Spanish literature. In the picaresque novel, a fictional person relates his or her birth to poor and disreputable parents, the hardships of childhood and the subterfuges by which survival was ensured. The character's adult life continues to be full of risks and adventures, and these works are often disconcerting by their ironic portrayal of moral degradation as a successful life.

Meanwhile, it is essential to recall that the most popular work of prose fiction written in France in this period does not fit any of these categories. **Francois Rabelais** (1492 - 1553) was one of France's most remarkable Renaissance figures, and one of the greatest comic writers of all time. He began to write when he was forty, respected as a medical doctor and classical scholar. His work consists of five Books, all centered on the same characters, the giant Pantagruel, and his father Gargantua.

The earliest portion, *Pantagruel* (1532), is mostly dominated by stories of the cruel and distasteful antics of the prankster Panurge. In *Gargantua* (1534), the main story involves a war fought by the giants in the countryside around Rabelais's home in the Loire valley; towards the end, the lusty Brother Jean founds the Abbey of Thélème, with its motto "Do as you will."

The *Third Book* (1546) is almost all in the form of learned discussions about many topics, especially marriage, and the way to acquire knowledge. It is very difficult reading because of its encyclopedic material and unequalled linguistic mix of Latinate, local French dialect, and newly-invented vocabulary, but it is the richest part of Rabelais's whole work. In the *Fourth Book* (1552), the giants set out on a journey where we find an unparalleled combination of mythology, fantasy, allegory, and philosophy, all in the most tremendous language. The *Fifth Book* was published in 1564, after Rabelais's death, and contains a huge confusion of texts not finally brought into shape by the author.

The humanistic and liberal protestant mind of Rabelais has always deeply impressed many readers; in the 18th century he helped the early English novelists venture into the realms of fantasy, and he was a favourite of James Joyce. Rabelais is not easy to read, but his work remains among the finest comic writing ever done.

The most important influences of all these writings in the 16th century on English writing were either direct, as in the case of Sidney's use of *Diana*, or by way of translations. **William Painter** (1525 - 1595) published translations of Italian and French *novelle* and of classical tales in his *Palace of Pleasure* (1566) which was the source used by several dramatists, including Shakespeare (*All's Well That Ends Well*). Other classical love tales were translated in *A petite Pallace of Pettie his pleasure* (1576) by **George Pettie**. On the whole, though, English prose fiction was only later to find inspiration from the works that were written in 16th century Europe.

Further Reading

The Continental Renaissance: 1500 - 1600, edited by A. J. Krailsheimer. The Pelican Guides to European Literature. 1971.

Sir Philip Sidney

Two years younger than Spenser, **Philip Sidney** (1554 - 1586) was a far more romantic figure, in life and death. His father Sir Henry Sidney was three times governor of Ireland, his father's sister Frances was the wife of the Earl of Sussex who was in charge of the royal household. The Sidney family, though, was only gentry, not as highly ranked as that of Philip's mother, Mary Dudley. Her brother Guilford Dudley had married the unfortunate 9-day queen Lady Jane Grey. Their father John Dudley, duke of Northumberland, was executed at the beginning of Mary Tudor's reign for having led resistance to her accession. For the Dudleys, and for many protestants, this was martyrdom. Philip Sidney was mainly honored in his youth because he was the only surviving descendant of John Dudley. Sidney's mother's brother Robert Dudley became the **earl of Leicester** in 1564, and he was the leader of the more militant protestant faction in national politics until his death in 1588.

When only fifteen, Philip Sidney was engaged to the daughter of Sir William Cecil, the most powerful man at court; in the end, Cecil decided that the Sidneys were too poor for her. She married the earl of Oxford instead, and this may help explain the violent quarrel that arose between him and Philip Sidney in 1579-80. Three years before he died, Philip Sidney married Frances Walsingham, the daughter of the powerful Sir Francis Walsingham who was allied to Leicester in promoting the protestant cause. After Sidney's death, his widow married Robert Devereux, the earl of Essex whose rebellion in 1601 led to his execution for treason.

Sidney's sister had their mother's name, Mary, and like the mother, she was an intelligent and lively person; the Dudley family was educated in the highest humanist tradition, the women like the men, so that his sister was Philip Sidney's main audience and partner in literary dialogue. In 1577, aged only fifteen, she married Henry Herbert, the earl of Pembroke, who was almost 40 years old, and went to live in his fine house at Wilton as Mary Herbert, countess of Pembroke. The medieval Sidney family home at Penshurst and Mary's new home at Wilton were both to become significant literary references. **Mary Herbert** (1561 - 1621) became a great literary patroness, encouraging many younger writers as well as

publishing her brother's works and completing the English version of the Psalms which he had begun.

Philip Sidney was educated at Shrewsbury School, then went to Oxford for some three years from 1568. In May 1572, he set off for France and was welcomed at the French court in Paris. During the summer, all over France, tensions grew between the Catholics and Huguenots (protestants), culminating in the terrible Massacre of St Bartholomew's Day, August 24, 1572, when many of Sidney's protestant acquaintances were among the thousands murdered. Sidney probably took refuge in the English Embassy under the protection of Sir Francis Walsingham (his future father-in-law) who was the English ambassador at that time.

Leaving Paris for ever, he went to Germany, on to Vienna, down to Venice, back to Vienna, and returned to England in June 1575. From these centres, Sidney made journeys as far south as Florence, and as far east as Cracow in Poland; he returned via Prague, Dresden, Frankfurt and Cologne.

During his journey, he met a number of remarkable protestant humanists from France, with whom he maintained relations later and whose courage in the face of violent persecution must have impressed him deeply. He probably also obtained a copy of Sannazaro's *Arcadia* while he was in Venice, illustrated with woodcuts, and this book seems to have suggested to Spenser the format of the *Shepheardes Calendar*, as well as giving the title and structure of Sidney's own *Arcadia*.

One month after his return, in July 1575, Philip was present when his uncle Leicester entertained the Queen at Kenilworth Castle; part of the shows presented during those days were scripted by George Gascoigne in a rather rustic style. Then he had to wait until 1577 before the Queen sent him on an official mission to Europe to visit the new Emperor and offer condolences on the death of his father, also to meet Protestant princes to get information on the possibility of a league against the Catholic powers in the south. During this journey, in Prague, Sidney seems to have met the English Jesuit priest Edmund Campion to discuss religious questions. On the way back to England, he visited William of Orange, who was the leader of the revolt against Spain in the Netherlands. The Protestant leader was very impressed by Sidney and even hoped to see him marry his daughter, something that Elizabeth would never have allowed. For Sidney, this was one of the happiest times in his whole life.

In 1577 Gascoigne suddenly died, and in the years that followed Sidney quite often composed verses and pageants for his family, as well as for Leicester, and began to perform at court tournaments. In November 1577 the Queen's Accession Day (the anniversary of her becoming Queen) was celebrated by a tournament at which Sidney rode for the first time. He appeared dressed as Philisides the shepherd and spoke verses written in a pastoral mode, in praise of his beloved Mira and of the Queen. This name is used in some of the poems in the *Arcadia*.

More important, when Elizabeth visited Leicester's home in Wanstead, Essex, in May 1578, she was entertained in the garden by a pastoral play or masque, *The Lady of May*, written by Sidney and acted by boy actors from the Chapel Royal with the famous comedian Richard Tarlton. The Queen is asked to judge between two suitors who are wooing the pastoral May Queen, the mild shepherd Espilus and the violent forester Therion. This play combines comic horseplay, artistic song, and pastoral elements in a quite new way; Espilus perhaps represents Leicester and his policies at a time when he had many rivals for the Queen's ear.

In 1579, Elizabeth seemed to be ready to marry the French dauphin, the Duke of Alencon, who came to London himself in the summer to woo her. The Protestant faction, led by Leicester and Walsingham, were horrified; but Elizabeth did not like criticism. A writer, John Stubbs, and his publisher had their right hands cut off for producing a book in which Alencon was attacked. Sidney also wrote a letter of protest to the Queen, for which he was

not punished. A little later, though, he was involved in a public dispute with the earl of Oxford over the use of a tennis court. Oxford was a vicious man, as well as the highest Earl in England, and Sidney had a fierce temper combined with a deep sense of social inferiority. In addition, they were on opposite sides over the French marriage. Sidney withdrew from court and went to stay at Wilton House with his sister, who was pregnant. During the summer of 1580, and probably until at least 1581, Sidney worked on the first version of his *Arcadia*, the "Old" *Arcadia*, the first pastoral prose romance in English, with his sister and her companions as his intended audience.

The *Old Arcadia*

Although nine manuscripts of this first *Arcadia* survive, it was not printed until the 20th century. Instead, a combination of Sidney's incomplete revised *Arcadia* with the second half of the Old was published and read until the 18th century. The first version of the *Arcadia* is far lighter than the second, and intriguing in its passage from comedy to near-tragic seriousness. It is divided into five books, perhaps related to the acts of classical drama, with a long section of eclogues (pastoral poems) between each. There is a general correspondence between the content of the prose narrative and the concerns of the poems; the first three books and sets of eclogues are concerned with varieties of love; books 4-5 with their set of eclogues are devoted to a study of what happens in a leaderless state, and show the consequences of human folly although the worst is avoided by a last-minute twist to the plot.

The plot of the first version of the Arcadia is a fantastic mixture of pastoral and moralistic elements; central to it is the question of individual responsibility in society. Duke Basileus, with his wife Gynecia and their two daughters Pamela and Philoclea flee a threatening oracle and hide in a pastoral village. Two cousins, Pyrocles and Musidorus, from another country, are in Arcadia. Pyrocles happens to see a portrait of Philoclea and falls in love. He goes to the village disguised as a girl, Cleophila. His cousin follows, sees and falls in love with Pamela, and enters the village disguised as a shepherd, Dorus.

The cross-dressing leads to immense complications, since Gynecia senses that Cleophila must be a man and falls in love with him, while her husband does not have her insight and also falls in love with "her". Finally, Musidorus elopes with Pamela. He is about to be overcome with passion and rape her in her sleep when a band of ruffians captures them. Cleophila meanwhile has arranged for the Duke and his wife to come to a dark cave, each expecting to find "her" there alone. By clever arranging, they make love to each other, the Duke convinced that his partner is the young woman he desires, but Gynecia has recognized his voice. In the morning she reveals the truth to him; he drinks a "love potion" she had brought and drops dead. She surrenders to the regent, who happens to arrive.

Meanwhile, Cleophila has become Pyrocles again and is quite shamelessly making love with the amorous Philoclea. They are detected and captured. Pamela and Musidorus are brought back as prisoners. The king of Macedonia arrives and the entire case is entrusted to him. He sentences Gynecia and the two young men to death. It is suddenly discovered that one of them is his son. He disowns him and insists on the law. Suddenly Basileus wakes up, he was not dead, and there is a happy ending with the marriage of the lovers.

This story leads the reader into several traps: the secret of the potion is kept from us, so that the restoration of Basileus is a complete surprise, while the sympathy we feel for young love invites us to accept uncritically an increasingly strong eroticism and the immorality of their behaviour.

Following the model of Sannazaro, Sidney placed a series of lyric poems, the Eclogues, between each of the Books. Many of these had probably been composed by Sidney in the previous years, but here they are given to competing shepherds, among them the

authorial figure Philisides, as well as the two friends Strephon and Klaius who both love the mysterious Urania, “thought a shepherd’s daughter, but indeed of far greater birth”, who has left Arcadia while ordering them to wait there until they hear from her.

Such poems were especially significant to those who were aware of the need for a New Poetry in English; they could find in them the proof that their tongue, too, could be the medium for such sophisticated formal games as were played in Italian, French, and in the classical works. These poems are splendid examples of craftsmanship, and include several specimens of quantitative metre in imitation of classical meter, where the pattern is given by an alternation of long and short syllables, without concern for stress.

Sidney used a greater variety of line and stanza patterns than any other poet of his time: 143 different patterns occur in his 286 poems, 109 patterns being used only once. This may be compared, as Ringler has noted, to the less than 20 rhythmic patterns represented in all Tottel’s *Songs and Sonnets*. Sidney was famed as an innovator in poetry, and his poems are found in more manuscript copies than any other Tudor poet’s.

After completing the first (Old) version of the *Arcadia*, Sidney continued to look forward to getting a position at court. His family was deeply in debt, and he tried various ways of improving his situation during the years 1581-3 but none worked, while a number of events must have weighed on his mind. In 1578 his uncle Leicester had married Lettice Devereux, the widow of the first earl of Essex, although they may well have been lovers even before the death of Essex in Ireland in 1576. In 1580 she gave birth to a son who thus displaced Sidney as Leicester’s heir.

There had seemingly been some kind of idea that Sidney might marry one of Essex and Lettice Devereux’s two daughters, Penelope Devereux. However, in 1581 it was suddenly decided by powerful friends of the family at court that she should marry Robert Rich, whose father had just died. We do not know what Sidney felt about all this, but clearly *Astrophel and Stella* reflects the question that had existed, since Sidney and the lover Astrophel, as well as Penelope and Stella, have certain points in common.

Penelope Devereux’s second husband, Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy, later claimed that she was forced into her marriage with Rich. Certainly, she had affairs with other men before taking Blount as her lover; she was officially separated from her very puritan spouse, Lord Rich, and subsequently claimed to be Blount’s wife. Her brother was the 2nd earl of Essex who was executed in 1601 following his abortive revolt; with him was executed Sir Christopher Blount, her mother’s third husband. Penelope died in 1607, while her mother survived until 1634!

The *Defence of Poesy*

Sidney had early become known as a patron of letters, and many writers dedicated their works to him, including Spenser who dedicated his *Shepheardes Calender* “To him that is the president/Of noblesse and of chevalree” in 1579. Earlier that year an Oxford scholar and former dramatist, Stephen Gosson, had dedicated to Sidney his new book: *The Schoole of Abuse, conteining a pleasaunt invective against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Jesters, and such like Caterpillers of a Commonwealth*. This book represents a radical protestant attack on all the literary arts, following the line of Plato’s *Republic*, claiming that fiction, drama, and all poetry are lies and therefore unedifying. Also in 1579, an old friend of Sidney, the great French scholar Henri Estienne, published his very important *Projet du Livre intitule De la precellence du Langage Francais* (Project for a book entitled Of the pre-excellence of the French Language). Sidney was thus able to appropriate French models (he used other of Estienne’s works too) at the time of the Alencon marriage affair, in order to assert strongly

the superiority of the English language and to promote the creation of a specifically English literary tradition. His *Defence of Poesy* (printed in 1595 with the title *An Apology for Poetry*) was written rapidly, probably in 1582. It may partly have been designed to support the growing idea that he should marry Frances Walsingham, whose father would be impressed by such a serious piece of writing.

In addition, Sidney still had no position in court, no title, but was known to be a poet; he therefore sets out to affirm the high value of this activity, and the nobility of the title of poet that Gosson and others had attacked in the name of Christianity.

He therefore starts by referring to the ancient roles of the poet:

> Among the Romans a poet was called *vates*, which is as much as a diviner, foreseer, or prophet. . . so heavenly a title did that excellent people bestow upon this heart-ravishing knowledge.

One of Sidney's main ideas is that the lives created (or re-created) by the literary author make such a deep impression on the readers that they find themselves impelled to try to live like the characters they read about. This teaching is done by example, not by precept, and here Sidney is confronted with a problem. How is it that people can create imaginary characters far more virtuous than the ordinary run of mortals in real life? He has to suggest that the poet is inspired from above.

> Poesy therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis*--that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth--to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture--with this end, to teach and delight.

Sidney goes on to propose various categories of poet, the religious first, with David's Psalms as the highest example; then philosophical and historical poems where the subject-matter is not in itself poetical although the prosody is verse. The third group covers those whom he terms "right poets":

> . . . they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be.

The other very significant section of the *Defence* comes when Sidney later turns to the poor state of poetry in England and indirectly wonders why he has so few worthy companions

> But I that, before ever I durst aspire unto the dignity, am admitted into the company of the paper-blurrers, do find the very true cause of our wanting (*lacking*) estimation is want of desert--taking upon us to be poets in despite of Pallas (*Wisdom*).

He offers an interesting evaluation, focussing on Chaucer, Surrey, and Wyatt as notable poets in English. This is followed by a surprisingly long discussion of English drama, of which Sidney had no very high opinion. He concludes by demanding a new standard of truth in the love lyric:

> ...many of such writings as come under the banner of unresistible love, if I were a mistress, would never persuade me they were in love: so coldly they apply fiery speeches, as men that had rather read lovers' writings (...) than that in truth they feel

> those passions, which easily (as I think) may be bewrayed by that same forcibleness or *energia* (as the Greeks call it) of the writer.

The final paragraph of the work sums up its main arguments and at the same time highlights in a particularly witty manner the polemic that it is designed to sustain, ending with a curse on bad poets:

> ...thus much curse I must send you, in the behalf of all poets, that while you live, you live in love, and never get favour for lacking skill of a sonnet; and, when you die, your memory die from the earth for want of an epitaph.

Astrophel and Stella

In recent years the spelling “Astrophil” has been widely adopted at the suggestion of Sidney’s 20th century editor William Ringler; in this spelling the link with Sidney’s own name Philip is made clear, as well as the sense “star-lover” from the Greek, (*Stella* is Latin for “star”) but at the expense of the parallel with other traditional pastoral names ending in -el. The old editions (an unauthorized one made in 1591 and the official one of 1598) both use the form Astrophel, as did Spenser in his poem on Sidney’s death.

The dating of the sonnet-cycle is not certain, but in its present form it seems to form a single unit with the *Defense*, since the original complete title of the cycle was “*Astrophel and Stella: wherein is illustrated the perfection of poesy*” and it is possible to read the work as forming an illustration of the ideas about love-poetry and *energia* that Sidney formulates in the *Defence*.

Certain features in the cycle suggest an identification of Stella with Penelope Devereux/Lady Rich, but the precise significance of this is far from clear. It would certainly not be helpful to read the cycle as the proof that Philip Sidney loved Penelope Rich. In view of her reputation, it is hard to recognize her in the paragon that Stella seems to be. It may be that Sidney intended her to be the first recipient of it, and perhaps hoped to help her gain a clearer view of the demands of virtue by this entertaining portrait of an unvirtuous wooer.

The sequence contains 108 sonnets and 11 songs and has a clear underlying narrative structure, unlike any other English cycle. The male speaker, who never names himself, offers an analysis of his very one-sided passion for Stella in a step-by-step series of poems that culminate in the Second Song placed after sonnet 72. Stella is for a long time unaware of his feelings, and once she knows she is cautious in her responses since she is already married. Finally she seems to have accepted her admirer’s devotion, but only on condition that his love remain platonic and virtuous. In the Second Song, however, he finds her asleep in a chair and kisses her without permission. This makes him very happy, and Stella very angry. The rest of the sequence shows how their relationship breaks down into hostile indifference on Stella’s part, and despair for the unreasoning male lover.

The first sonnet indicates the literary tension that the cycle sets out to explore, the way in which a poem has to seem to be the spoken reflexion of genuine personal feelings while it cannot avoid being a written text, part of an artificial literary tradition:

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,
That the Dear She might take some pleasure of my pain,
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know,
Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe...

These poems, we learn, are designed to be read by Stella herself, and the writer's first aim in writing is to "persuade her he is in love" (*Defence*). It is only much later that the reader is able to evaluate fully the oddness and correctness of the "Fool" applied to the poem's speaker in this last line.

The second sonnet summarizes the whole story of the cycle from a point in time lying after the completion of the last poem:

.... now like slave-born Muscovite,
I call it praise to suffer tyranny;
And now employ the remnant of my wit
To make myself believe, that all is well,
While with a feeling skill I paint my hell.

The story thus outlined is so allusive that the reader can scarcely guess at the complexities involved. The speaker uses the conventional language familiar from Petrarch and his imitators, but deriving from classical antiquity, by which the heart of the man in love is wounded by Cupid's arrows. The word tyranny in most such poems implies an exercise of power by the loved woman that is usually understood to mean that she rejects the man's hope of a mutual relationship. It is only when we have read the last poems on the theme of frustration and despair that the full implications of the word hell become clear.

One of the main attractions of the cycle is the way it dramatizes the contradiction between ideal and real love, as in these lines from Sonnet 5:

It is most true that eyes are formed to serve
The inward light, and that the heavenly part
Ought to be king (...)
True, that on earth we are but pilgrims made
And should in soul up to our country move;
True, and yet true that I must Stella love.

This is only the first of a number of sonnets constructed in the form of philosophical or moral debates, in which the lover admits all the arguments of traditional theory, only to contradict them in the last line by reference to his own reality. This fifth sonnet is interesting in that it states one of Shakespeare's fundamental themes in such a play as *King Lear* (that owes so much to Sidney's new *Arcadia*) where characters such as Goneril and Regan become rebels against nature and in the end destroy themselves.

A major theme of the *Defence* and of the first sonnet is the problem of writing creatively under the constraints of a strongly conventional literary tradition. Sonnet 15 expresses this in mocking tones, at the same time as it proposes a solution:

(...)
You that poor Petrarch's long-deceased woes
With new-born sighs and denizened wit do sing;
You take wrong ways, those far-fet helps be such
As do bewray a want of inward touch,
And sure at length stolen goods do come to light;
But if (both for your love and skill) your name
You seek to nurse at fullest breasts of Fame,
Stella behold, and then begin to endite. (*write*)

The earlier sonnets suggest that the lover is content to gaze at Stella and admire her without her being aware of his feelings. At last, though, his desire for a more complete physical expression is awakened by the thought that Stella is married; this is jokingly expressed in a riddling sonnet (Sonnet 37) that can only be understood by making an identification between Stella and Lady Rich:

(...)
Who though most rich in these and every part,
Which make the patents of true worldly bliss,
Hath no misfortune, but that Rich she is.

Slowly the tone becomes more complex; the lover is no longer satisfied with merely looking at Stella and longs, apparently in vain, for recognition and a mutual relationship. As a result he finds himself at the threshold of unrequited love. The parallel between his situation and so many conventional love tragedies strikes him painfully when he sees Stella moved by a romance, while she continues to ignore his torments.

One of the main attractions of Sidney's sonnets is their dramatic energy, the way they seem to represent spontaneous emotion's overflow while casually respecting all the demands of the sonnet form. No sonnet does this more powerfully than the inner monologue of sonnet 47. The impression that Stella is deliberately ignoring him provokes feelings of revolt, feelings that die as soon as he sees her coming:

Soft! But here she comes! Go to:
'Unkind, I love you not!' O me! That eye
Doth make my heart give to my tongue the lie. (*contradict*)

There is in fact no indication that the lover speaking these poems has had long conversations with Stella; most of what is said springs from a one-sided fascination that becomes increasingly obsessive. Already in sonnet 52, we find him cynically making a distinction between Stella's soul, which is Virtue's own, and her physical body that he says Love (Cupid/Eros) claims:

Let Virtue have that Stella's self; yet thus,
That Virtue but that body grant to us.

The situation changes in sonnet 69; he has at last had some kind of conversation with Stella about his feelings, and she has accepted his love-service in a conventionally chivalric way, allowing him to consider himself her servant-knight in his heart, but only in the most virtuous way:

(...)
I, I, O I may say that she is mine!
And though she give but thus conditionally
This realm of bliss while virtuous course I take,
No kings be crowned but they some covenants make.

The last line is one of the cycle's challenges to the reader; today it would normally be interpreted as meaning "presidential candidates make all kinds of promises in order to win the election, without any intention of keeping them once they are in power." This lover is not at

all interested in living virtuously, as the dramatic outbursts in the last lines of sonnets 71 and 72 show: 'But ah!' Desire still cries, 'give me some food!' and

But thou, Desire, because thou wouldst have all,
Now banished art: but yet, alas, how shall?

It should be clear by now how far Sidney's lover is from the psychology of the conventional Petrarchan lover. He has become a case-study of male sexual aggressivity, thinking only of his own gratification and unwilling to recognize the rights of a woman, if he finds her physically attractive. Yet with what skill Sidney portrays the gradual development of his impulses. As with Musidorus in the first version of the *Arcadia*, passion leads to sexual harassment and attempted rape. The Second Song, that follows Sonnet 72, is the most important moment in the whole cycle, for without it our evaluation of Astrophel's words will easily be misled by his own too permissive view of his actions and attitudes. The song tells how he kisses Stella while she is asleep in a chair; the last two stanzas relate the climax:

Yet those lips so sweetly swelling,
Do invite a stealing kiss:
Now will I but venture this,
Who will read must first learn spelling.

Oh sweet kiss, but ah she is waking,
Lowring beauty chastens me:
Now will I away hence flee:
Fool, more fool, for no more taking.

Astrophel's act is what in the modern world is called "sexual harassment" for he shows no respect for the woman's autonomy; what he, the male, wants is all he can think of and the moment is one of potential rape. Stella awakes and is naturally deeply insulted. It is characteristic of the blindness and illusion into which Astrophel has fallen that he cannot take Stella's anger seriously, and he produces several sonnets which ask us to believe that Stella had freely kissed him: "My lips are sweet, inspired with Stella's kiss." (Sonnet 74)

The poems usually printed in anthologies are mostly from the earlier part of the cycle, because after this disaster the tone grows dark and the subject-matter is no longer ecstatic love but separation, discord, and despair. Yet some of the poems seem to anticipate John Donne. As in Donne, the male has to try to find excuses for a roaming eye. In the end, the lover of Sidney's cycle is completely caught in the knots he has tied himself in, and the last poem of the series (sonnet 108) shows us a man who will not admit to any mistake, but tries to turn things so that Stella seems to be to blame for his hopeless situation:

So strangely (alas) thy works in me prevail
That in my woes for thee thou art my joy,
And in my joys for thee my only annoy.

It is not easy to know how influential Sidney's sonnets were, but the fact that they were considered worth pirating by Newman in 1591 suggests that they were felt to have popular appeal. On the other hand, the rather immoral tale they tell and the hints that Astrophel is Sidney may explain why the official edition sanctioned by Mary Herbert did not appear until 1598, when the cycle was published together with the *Arcadia*, *The Lady of May*, and *Certain Sonnets*. There are some indications that Sidney did not distribute *Astrophel and*

Stella very widely during his lifetime, probably for similar reasons. Spenser would hardly have been likely to have called the dead Sidney "Astrophel" as he did, if he had read the cycle!

The intensity of Sidney's "negative capability" is seen in the skill with which he creates a portrait of a man overcome with passion. *Astrophel and Stella* is an astonishingly well-felt anatomy of love-gone-wrong and Sidney must have been developing new psychological maturity at this time. We are far removed from the very simple moralizing sonnet included in his "Certain Sonnets" that was probably written earlier and condemns love's passion in clear, unambiguous terms:

Thou blind man's mark, thou fool's self-chosen snare,
Fond fancy's scum, and dregs of scattered thought,
Band of all evils, cradle of causeless care,
Thou web of will, whose end is never wrought--

What Sidney had realized in the meantime was the impossibility of his last line: the human will is powerless to abolish the sexual drives and all their associated elements of aggression and conflict. Astrophel's poems are an illustration of this, offering no easy solution to one of the fundamental questions in a young man's life.

The *New Arcadia*

In 1582, Sidney married Walsingham's daughter Frances for reasons that almost certainly had little to do with passionate desire. The Sidney family was almost completely ruined by the expenses incurred by Sir Philip's father in the Queen's service in Ireland. During the years before his marriage, Sidney began to rewrite the *Arcadia*. The fundamental plot remains, but it is now given a new beginning and related in a much more serious, almost tragic, tone. The two young princes arrive near Arcadia after nearly dying in a shipwreck. The shepherds Klaius and Strephon guide Musidorus to the home of Kalandar, a wise and good man, who tells him of the retreat of Basileus to the rural hideout with his much younger wife Gynecia and their two lovely daughters, showing him their portraits with the result found in the earlier version.

The first *Arcadia* had many comic and ironic features; these are almost entirely absent from the revised version. By contrast, Sidney introduces far more military conflict, and stresses the dangers of martial heroism by bringing into the story so much armed conflict that it seems impossible for the original ending to be kept. Just how Sidney planned to complete the work is unknown, for in the middle of the third Book it breaks off in mid-sentence. Life took over from literature for Sidney.

The style is if anything more mannered than before, as can be seen from this description of Arcadia:

> There were hills which garnished their proud heights with stately trees; humble valleys whose base estate seemed comforted with refreshing of silver rivers; meadows enamelled with all sorts of eye-pleasing flowers; thickets, which, being lined with most pleasant shade, were witnessed so to by the cheerful deposition of many well-tuned birds; each pasture stored with sheep feeding with sober security, while the pretty lambs with bleating oratory craved the dams' comfort; here a shepherd's boy piping as though he should never be old; there a young shepherdess

> knitting and withal singing, and it seemed that her voice comforted her hands to work and her hands kept time to her voice's music.

More characteristic of the tone and material of the new *Arcadia*, though, is the episode from the tenth chapter of the Second Book, the story of the Paphlagonian king, which gave Shakespeare much of the material for his revision of the story of King Lear:

> ". . . I was carried by a bastard son of mine (if at least I be bound to believe the words of that base woman my concubine, his mother) first to mislike, then to hate, lastly to destroy, this son undeserving destruction."
> (. . .)
> ". . . drunk in my affection to that unlawful and unnatural son of mine I suffered myself so to be governed by him that all favours and punishments passed by him, all offices, and places of importance, distributed to his favourites; so that ere I was aware, I had left myself nothing but the name of a King: which he shortly weary of too, with many indignities threw me out of my seat, and put out my eyes; and then (proud in his tyranny) let me go, neither imprisoning nor killing me, but rather delighting to make me feel my misery."

The main interest of this episode is certainly the way it seems to have impressed Shakespeare, providing much of the horror at human cruelty that marks *King Lear* (not only the Gloucester plot, but also the fundamental theme of the unnatural treatment of fathers by their children and the experience of misery) and even something of the way Prospero was treated by his brother Antonio before the start of *The Tempest*.

Sidney's revision of *Arcadia* remained unfinished and was published as a fragment in 1590. His sister seems, though, to have felt that this was not satisfactory. She took the final parts of the earlier version, had a writer compose a linking passage, and in 1593 published a "complete" *Arcadia* that remained very popular until the 18th century. The near-rape of Pamela has been removed, Pyrocles and Philoclea do not have sexual relations before marriage. The heroine of the first recognized modern novel, Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), may perhaps have received her name from Sidney's work.

In the early 1580s the Queen was under increasing pressure to help the Protestants in the Netherlands in their fight against the Spanish, and she remained determined to keep England out of such an involvement as much as possible. In 1585 Sidney was sent to the Low Countries and became governor of the small town of Zutphen, a very symbolic role that he soon realized was meant to remain symbolic. Perhaps out of a sense of frustration, he took risks in the very limited skirmishes with the Spanish that sometimes happened. One September morning in 1586, he went out riding without having his legs properly armed. Riding through a fog, his people suddenly found themselves close to a group of Spanish soldiers. There was some shooting and Sidney received a bullet in the thigh.

Sidney's childhood friend and admirer, Fulke Greville, later wrote a heroic account of how the wounded Sidney gave up his water bottle to a common soldier he saw dying at the roadside, with the words, "His need is greater than mine," but Greville was not present at the scene. The wound itself was not fatal, but it became infected and after 26 days Sidney died. His death was in fact a rather inglorious affair, a stupid accident, and his friends felt the need to glorify it in order to urge the Queen to intervene in the Netherlands.

Sidney's body was brought back to London and solemnly buried, several months later, in St Paul's Cathedral. The memory of Sidney was promoted by the Protestant party for their own pan-European cause, and by writers who saw the value of what he had done as a writer and patron of letters. His sister did much to ensure his future reputation, by her work in

publishing accurate editions of almost all Sidney's literary writings, continuing and completing his translation of the Psalms, and imitating his patronage of poorer writers at a time when the literary enterprise was beginning to take on some of its modern aspects.

Further Reading on Sidney

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