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Representations of Counsel in Selected Works of Sir Philip Sidney



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Abstract

This dissertation addresses the historical, political, and literary-rhetorical framing of counsel in selected works of Sir Philip Sidney: his Letter to Queen Elizabeth (1579), The Old Arcadia (1580), the first two books of The New Arcadia (1585), and the strikingly different final book of The New Arcadia. In these works, Sidney makes resourceful and varying use of the topos of the mirror.

First, I show in what ways Sidney serves as the Queen's mirror in advising her against the marriage to the Duke of Alençon. In the Letter, Sidney gathers, shatters, and distorts aspects of Elizabeth's image; he multiplies reflections to discredit arguments of his political opponents and reconstitutes Elizabeth in an imperial, Protestant image. Turning to The Old Arcadia, I argue that, through the presentation of Gynecia, Sidney broadens the conventions of the genre familiarly known as the mirror for princes. Gynecia's complexity and moral ambiguity complicate the traditional generic categories of virtue to be emulated and vice to be avoided. She serves as both an object in, and a reader of, the mirror for princes text and becomes a means for Sidney's commentary on the genre and the moral questions it raises. By inviting the reader into an active experience of the mirror's pedagogical enterprise, Sidney tests and refines the reader's assumptions and moral judgments.

In Books I and II of The New Arcadia, Sidney presents and interrogates poetry as a strategy for overcoming limited human agency and imperfect knowledge, limitations that appear in deployments of the mirror that show stasis and in images of the maze to indicate blocked access and thwarted mobility. By questioning poetry's capacity to uncover and represent truth, Sidney holds the mirror up to himself. Book III of The New Arcadia restores the mirror as the productive mode of counsel in a mirror for princes text that instructs on a central theme of the Renaissance debate on counsel: discerning the flatterer. Sidney's New Arcadia in its entirety offers an exemplary mirror of the self-scrutiny that leads to self-knowledge and the consequent authority to offer counsel of worth.

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e: osc@harvard.edu

t: +1 (617) 495 4089

f: +1 (617) 495 0370

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Sir Philip Sidney, born on November 30, 1554, was the eldest son in the family of Sir Henry Sidney and Lady Mary Dudley. He was born in Penshurst in Kent, England. He grew up in a large aristocratic family and was named after his godfather, Spanish King Philip II. His father served in several high royal envoy capacities throughout Britain. As a member of a highly ranked aristocratic family, Sidney was cut out for a career in politics and statesmanship. When he turned 10 years, Sidney joined Shrewsbury School. Four years later in 1568, he started his advanced studies at Christ Church, a campus The critical tradition positions Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser among the pioneers of the nationalistic movement in Early Modern England. From a historical point of view, this has been the result of the promotion of Britishness by more. My book examines how ekphrasis, the verbal representation of visual representation, illuminates gender, ethnic, and religious identity in Renaissance imitations of ancient Greek romances by Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus. Rather than more. Comparison of extant manuscript copies elucidates the work's authorship by John Hammond, its commission by Sir Philip Sidney, its legal argument, and its textual transmission to those who orchestrated the treason trial of Mary, Queen of Scots, in 1586. This dissertation addresses the historical, political, and literary-rhetorical framing of counsel in selected works of Sir Philip Sidney: his Letter to Queen Elizabeth (1579), The Old Arcadia (1580), the first two books of The New Arcadia (1585), and the strikingly different final book of The New Arcadia. In these works, Sidney makes resourceful and varying use of the topos of the mirror. First, I show in what ways Sidney serves as the Queen's mirror in advising her against the marriage to the Duke of Alençon. In the Letter, Sidney gathers, shatters, and distorts aspects of Elizabeth's image;