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Moral Philosophy and the Family in Sidney's *Arcadia*

By ALAN D. ISLER

"THE MORAL PHILOSOPHER," says Sidney in his *Defence of Poesie*, "standeth uppon the naturall vertues, vices, or passions of man: and follow nature saith he therein, and thou shalt not erre."

These men [i.e., moral philosophers] do soberly aske, whether it be possible to find any path so ready to lead a man to vertue, as that which teacheth what vertue is, & teacheth it not only to delivering forth his very being, his causes and effects, but also by making knowne his enimie vice, which must be destroyed, and his combersome servant passion, which must be mastered.

But Sidney, as is well known, argues that the poet is better equipped than the philosopher to instruct men, for the poet is able to feign "notable images of vertues, vices, or what else"; his is a delightful teaching. The philosopher's audience, moreover, is limited: on the one hand, he cannot be easily understood; on the other, "he teacheth them that are already taught." But poetry is enjoyed by all: "the Poet is food for the tendrest stomachs, the Poet is indeed, the right popular Philosopher." Certainly the ends of the moral philosopher and the poet are one: "to lead and draw us to as high a perfection, as our degenerate soules made worse by their clay-lodgings, can be capable of." All the branches of learning are intended to induce knowledge, "& by knowledge to lift up the minde from the dungeon of the bodie, to the enjoying his owne divine essence." But no science, any more than poetry, is an end in itself; each is directed to the *summum bonum*: "so yet are they all directed to the highest end of the mistresse knowledge by the Greeks which stands as I thinke, in the knowledge of a mans selfe, in the Ethicke and Politique consideration, with the end of well doing, and not of well knowing onely."¹ Here Sidney seems to equate Ethicke and well-knowing with Politique and well-doing, and he argues that the truly virtuous man is he who exercises both. In fact, the man who "knows" and who acts in accordance with his knowledge is, as Sidney's age never tired of repeating, the man who exercises "right reason."

"The Ethicke and Politique consideration" was to have been figured

¹*The Prose Works*, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Cambridge, Eng., 1962), III, 7-16. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text within parentheses.

forth in Spenser's "portraict" of Arthur, and had he completed his original plan for his work, Spenser would have done no more than to have "followed all the antique Poets historicall." Fulke Greville, commenting upon the *Arcadia*, emphasizes its "politique" bias. He maintains that his friend's aim was "lively to represent the growth, state, and declination of Princes, change of Government, and lawes: vicissitudes of sedition, faction, succession, confederacies, plantations, with all other errors, or alterations in publike affaires."² Yet Sir William Alexander evidently finds the work to be weighted in favor of "Ethicke":

The *Arcadia* . . . is the most excellent Work that, in my Judgement, hath been written in any Language that I understand, affording many exquisite Types of Perfection for both the sexes . . . wanting no Virtue whereof a Humane Mind could be capable: As for Men, Magnanimity, Carriage, Courtesy, Valour, Judgement, Discretion; and in Women, Modesty, Shamefastness, Constancy, Continency, still accompanied with a tender sense of Honour.³

There is no need to attempt to resolve the dispute between Sir Fulke Greville and Sir William Alexander, for it is more apparent than real. Greville's *Life of Sidney* is colored by political considerations of the reign of James I; Alexander's comments do not *deny* a political aspect to the *Arcadia*. Neither gentleman, I believe, would have questioned the validity of the other's statement. What is important is that both "the Ethicke and the Politique consideration" are to be found in the *Arcadia*.

Moral philosophy and poetry are both concerned with *recta ratio*, that is, virtuous action in accordance with reason; in Sidney's phrase once more, "well doing and not well knowing only." The question (considered by Kenneth Myrick)⁴ of whether the *Arcadia* is to be regarded as a philosophical treatise is largely irrelevant, for the answer must be both *yes* and *no*. In so far as its aim, in common with poetry and moral philosophy, is to inspire the reader to virtuous action, it is a treatise; in so far as it is an expression of the poetic imagination, luring men to virtuous action through the inherent power of poetry to charm and please, it is a poem. The functions of treatise and poem are one; the poet's advantage is his ability to make philosophy palatable.

"Reason is but choosing," wrote Milton, echoing the commonplace whose *locus classicus* is in Aristotle.⁵ Robert Hoopes in his study *Right Reason in the English Renaissance* notes:

²*Life of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Nowell Smith (Oxford, 1907), p. 15.

³*Anachrisis*, in J. E. Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1908), I, 187-188.

⁴*Sir Philip Sidney as a Literary Craftsman* (Cambridge, Mass., 1935), p. 233.

⁵*Areopagitica*; cf. *Paradise Lost* III.108. See also *Nicomachean Ethics* III.ii.

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The function of the human mind as a whole is to know; the function of the faculty of reason is to discriminate between true and false things *to be done*, or between right and wrong. Reason thus simultaneously disposed, so that it presides with equal validity and certainty over the realms of intellect and morality, is what is meant by "right reason."⁶

The dual function of reason is the base upon which the education of Pyrocles and Musidorus is built, "the delight of tales being converted to the knowledge of al the stories of worthy Princes, both to move them to do nobly, & teach them how to do nobly" (I, 190). Musidorus, speaking in the third person of his earlier exploits, admits that "well-doing was at that time his scope, from which no faint pleasure could with-hold him." And Pyrocles says of his cousin, "Hee taught me by word, and best by example" (I, 160, 264). The end of the poetry is not merely to teach virtue but to inspire to virtue.

Sidney did not place absolute reliance upon human reason; post-Fall man is prone to error. In the old *Arcadia* the fourth book opens with the observation that "the Everlasting Justice" uses "oure selves to bee the punishers of oure faultes" and makes "oure owne actions the beginnings of oure Chastisement, that oure shame may bee the more manifest, and oure Repentance followe the sooner" (IV, 247). Here it appears that man's reason, even if used too late, is at least capable of recognizing the logical development of disaster from error. But in the continuation of the revised version of the *Arcadia* "the Everlasting Justice" has been replaced by "the almightie wisdom," who apparently takes pleasure in demonstrating the incapacity of man's reason in the face of (at least from the human viewpoint) the capriciousness of Divine Providence: "The almightie wisdom evermore delights to shewe the worlde, that by unlikeliest meanes greatest matters may come to conclusion: that humane reason may be the more humbled, and more willinglie geve place to divine providence" (II, 83). Yet reason is the best man has. Its imperfection reflects the ambiguous nature of the human condition, the apex of Creation in the sink of the Universe. While there is for Sidney, as Hoopes maintains there is for Spenser, "no such thing as the completely self-sufficient man," for Sidney as for Spenser "it is itself *reasonable* for man to recognize and accept his dependence upon God."⁷ It is the role of philosopher and poet to teach the exercise of *recta ratio*, despite man's innate incapacity.

The *Arcadia* is shot through with moral *exempla*. The troubles which follow upon the overthrow of reason by the passions are illustrated on

⁶Cambridge, Mass., 1962, p. 4.

⁷Hoopes, p. 155.

almost every page; degree is shaken from the microcosm to the macrocosm. Tillyard and others have shown the system of correspondences that informed Elizabethan thinking. That the family or household belongs in the network of correspondences, centrally located between the individual and the body politic, has, it seems to me, received less thorough attention.

The individual-commonwealth analogy is familiar from its use in Plato's *Republic* through its employment by Shakespeare's Menenius Agrippa, and beyond. Pierre de la Primaudaye is one of many who include the middle term: "We see in a mans bodie, head, hands, feet, eyes, nose, eare: in a house, the husband, wife, children, master, servants: in a politicke bodie, Magistrates, common people, artificers." Moreover, the three levels (in each of which reason is to rule) are interlinked; the ruler of men must first know how to rule his house:

The art of ruling a house well, is one of the chiefest partes of policie, which is the art of skilfull governing a great multitude of men. The reason is, bicause a Towne or Citie is nothing else but an assemblie of manie families and houses together, which will be verie harde for one onelie man to order well and justlie, if he knowe not howe to set that order in his familie, which is necessarie and to guide it with sound reason and true prudence.

But to rule his house as it should be ruled, the master must first rule himself: "a good householder must beginne the right government of his house at himself, by letting his household see, that he is prudent, chast, sober, peaceable, but chiefly religious and godly."⁸ Cornelius Agrippa asks, "Howe shall he rule a citie, that hath not lerned to rule a house? howe shall he governe a common welthe, that never knewe his private and familiar busines . . . ? For trewely matrimony gyveth a gret exercise to morall philosophy."⁹ And moral philosophy is indeed concerned with the interrelating parts of government. Lodowick Bryskett, Spenser's friend and Sidney's companion on his first Continental travels, writes of the proper use of the discipline: it is the means "by which a man learneth not onely to know to carry himselfe vertuously in his privat actions, but also to guide and order his family, and moreover, to become meete for the service of his Prince and countrey."¹⁰

To bring the matter a little closer to Sidney, Thomas Moffet wrote of him:

From being a courtier Philip had become, by the power of God and of love, the head of a household; and he took some pains about preserving and aug-

⁸*The French Academie*, trans. T.B. (London, 1586), pp. 523, 525.

⁹*The Commendation of Matrimony*, trans. David Clapam (London, 1540), sigs. C7v-C8.

¹⁰*A Discourse of Civill Life* (London, 1606), p. 18.

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menting his domestic state, thinking it scarcely possible that anyone would carry on public affairs with credit who failed to maintain order in his own. Thus he turned out of doors (so far as lay in his power), as though the most dangerous plague of a household, all flatterers and parasites, to whatever faction these might be allied by bonds of food and drink; and in their place he received learned and pious men with a continuous welcome and service at table.¹¹

Shades of Prince Hal and Falstaff! Moffet, the purpose of whose work was to act as a guide for young William Herbert, Sidney's nephew, would no doubt have applauded Henry's rejection of his erstwhile cronies.

It is not inappropriate to mention Shakespeare: he, if anyone, was concerned with "degree" and the maintenance of natural order among the correspondences. Derek Traversi has noted, in *Shakespeare: The Last Phase*, that

throughout the tragedies the first consequence of evil is anarchy and its starting-point is the overthrow of "degree," of natural order in its various forms, by the dominating force of passion. "Degree," in turn, is associated in ever-increasing measure with the human institutions, the family and the body politic. . . . These two institutions, the family and the state, are in turn the foundations of a civilized, moral way of living; and it is only when passion in the individual overcomes reason and aims at their destruction that evil enters society.

Lear's failure as a man is reflected in his inadequacy as a father, and it ultimately comes close to destroying his realm. And finally, Sidney himself in his *Defence of Poesie* speaks of virtue, which "extends it selfe out of the limits of mans owne little world, to the government of families, and maintaining of public societies" (III, 12).

At the center of the main plot of the *Arcadia*, that upon which all else turns, is Basilius' misdirected reason. From this early failure and from the ensuing ascendancy of the lustful passion springs his abysmal inadequacy as the head of a household. His quondam chaste wife tries as best she can to become an adulteress, and his children are forced into defiance of parental authority; indeed, Basilius even places Pamela, the heir to Arcadia's throne, under the governance of a doltish servant. And once degree is thus upset, see what discord follows! The commons rise up, the nobles grumble and plot treason, and it requires the intervention of a foreign prince to restore order.

Basilius' initial mistake was his effort to fathom the meaning of the

¹¹*Nobilis*, ed. and trans. Virgil B. Heltzel and Hoyt H. Hudson (San Marino, Calif., 1940), pp. 84-85.

oracle's prediction. But before condemning out of hand Basilius' attempt to avoid apparent approaching calamity, we should recall that events *do* fall out precisely as the oracle had foretold. In fact, it is hard to see how the oracle might have been justified had not Basilius acted precisely as he did. The king was snared by the paradox of simultaneously operating predestination and free will. "If I foreknew," explains Milton's God the Father, "Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault, / Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown." And Oedipus, seeking to save his father, slew him. But Basilius hungered for forbidden knowledge and initiated the series of events which evolved into the *Arcadia*, for "the Everlasting Justice, using oure selves to bee the punisshers of oure faultes," makes "oure owne actions the beginnings of oure Chastisements."

Philanax had warned Basilius of the folly of looking for meaning in the oracle's words:

Wisdome and vertue be the only destinies appointed to man to follow, whence we ought to seeke al our knowledge, since they be such guydes as cannot faile. . . . The heavenly powers are to be revered, and not searched into; & their mercies rather by prayers to be sought, then their hidden counsels by curiositie. (I, 24)

But Basilius nevertheless placed his government in the hands of Philanax and removed himself and his family from the court to the countryside of *Arcadia*. The irresponsibility of his actions immediately affected the safety of his realm, as Kalendar explains to Musidorus:

For, having lost the sterne of his government, with much amazement to the people, among whom many strange bruits are received for currant, and with some apparance of daunger in respect of the valiant *Amphalus*, his nephew, & much envy in the ambitious number of the nobilitie against *Philanax*, to see *Philanax* so advaunced. . . . (I, 26)

There is in fact more "apparance of daunger" in Basilius' abrogation of responsibility than is evident even to the wise Kalendar. Basilius is deserting his people at a time when strong government is essential not only to *Arcadia* but to Greek civilization entire. Euarchus sees Basilius' actions against the background of world politics; "hee sawe the *Asiatickes* of the one syde the *Latines* of the other gaping for any occasyon to devoure *Greece*, which was no way to bee prevented but by theyre united strength and strengthe the moste to bee meyntayned by meynteyning theyre Principall Instrumentes" (IV, 332). But more immediately, it is the Commons who are uneasy and who revolt, "emboldened with the Dukes absented manner of Living." Euarchus has nothing but pity for

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the Arcadians, "who were in worse Case then yf death had taken away theyre Prince, for so yet theyre necessity woulde have placed some one to the helme" (IV, 120, 332). In the old *Arcadia* (as in the continuation of the new), the duke's apparent death brings to a head the festering discontent among the nobles, and they split into factions. Only the arbitration of a strong, just, and universally acknowledged impartial foreign prince prevents the nation from rending itself apart. In the new *Arcadia*, Basilius' "absented manner of Living" provides Cecropia with the opportunity for her attempt to seize power, an attempt which results in the imprisonment of the two princesses and of Pyrocles.

Basilius' refusal "to leave reasoning to things above reason" affects each stratum of Arcadian society. The misdirection of the sovereign creates chaos in the state; the misdirection of sovereign reason plays havoc with the man. For from ill-applied reason, Basilius descends to the surrender of reason to base passion. "The Mightiest Prince of *Greece* next to *Euarchus*" becomes a foolish figure of fun. Reduced to the absurd condition of being in love with a man disguised as a woman, he leaves Pyrocles "even choaked with his tediousnes."

You never saw fourscore yeares daunce up and downe more lively in a young Lover: now, as fine in his apparrell, as if he would make me in love with a cloake; and verse for verse with the sharpest-witted Lover in *Arcadia*. (I, 93)

He is, like the cross-gartered Malvolio, ridiculous, and we are invited to laugh at him. At one point, having just recited a sonnet on the advantages of an aged lover, "he looked verie curiously upon himselfe, sometimes fetching a little skippe, as if he had said, his strength had not yet forsaken him"; at another, "now being come within Compass of discerning" Zelmane, "hee began to frame the loveliest countenance hee could, stroking upp his Legges, setting his Beard in due order & standing bolt upright" (I, 149; IV, 166). But he is not merely ridiculous: his ill-conceived passion is capable of alarming depths, for he is quite prepared to use his own daughter to plead his cause.

If Basilius offends against himself and against his state, he also offends against his family. Kenneth Thorpe Rowe notes that *Euarchus* "defined the family as the basis of society, a little state":¹²

Marriage being the most holy conjunction that falls to mankinde, out of which all families and so consequently all societies doe proceede, which not onely by communitie goods, but communitie children, is to knit the mindes in a most perfect union, which who so breakes dissolves al humanitie. (II, 175)

¹²"Romantic Love and Parental Authority in Sidney's *Arcadia*," *University of Michigan Contributions in Modern Philology*, IV (1947), 24.

"When families are well governed," remarks La Primaudaye, "no doubt but it goeth well with the Common-wealth, as we see, that the whole bodie is in good health, when every several member doth his dutie."¹³

It is easy, with the modern's almost reflexive rejection of the didactic in literature, to underestimate the importance of the issues involved in the *Arcadia*. "What in our time has been labelled 'the didactic heresy,'" notes Douglas Bush, "was the basic theory of literature for some twenty-two centuries."¹⁴ We are intended to laugh at the love antics of Basilius but not to forget "that all the ends of the Comicall part, bee not upon such scornfull matters as stirre laughter onelie, but mixe with it, that delightfull teaching whiche is the ende of Poesie" (III, 40-41). The enormity of Basilius' fault can best be seen against the backdrop of the countless Renaissance works on matrimony and the family.¹⁵ The chaos in self and state which results from the duke's fall is inevitably reflected in his household.

The position of the father as head of the household was analogous, as we have seen, to that of the governor in the commonwealth and that of reason in the individual. And, as in commonwealth and individual, the ordering of the household was strictly hierarchical: father, wife, children, servants. It was the father's duty to govern his family, to instruct both by example and precept not only his children but also his wife and servants. The accounts of the governing of the household of Sir Thomas More testify to the ideal of the benign paternal despot. But Basilius is no ideal parent: he is a would-be adulterer. His lustful pursuit of Zelmane (Pyrocles) although amusing in that circumstances make the consummation of the duke's desires an impossibility, is intrinsically evil. And if the husband falls, it is not surprising that the wife falls too. Tigurinus Chelidonius notes: "The most part of women that are become vitious, are commonly infected and made naughtie by the wanton lives and evill examples of their husbands, who ought to be as lampes that should shine unto them by the well ordring their manners."¹⁶ Basilius' infatuation does not precede Gynecia's: they both fall in love with Pyrocles at the same time. But the peculiarity of the circumstances under which both parents deviate from their marriage vows was set in motion by the father's initial error. The road to Gynecia's ruin was made smooth by Basilius' fault.

¹³*The French Academie*, p. 523.

¹⁴"The Isolation of the Renaissance Hero," in *Reason and the Imagination*, ed. J. A. Mazzeo (New York, 1962), p. 59.

¹⁵See Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1935), pp. 201-207; Lu Emily Pearson, *Elizabethans at Home* (Stanford, 1957).

¹⁶In the treatise on marriage appended to his *Of the Institution and Firste Beginning of Christian Princes, and the Originall of Kingdomes*, trans. James Chillester (London, 1571), pp. 193-194.

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Basilius' infidelity is compounded by his lack of attention to parental duties. Euarchus, prevented by the wars in which he was engaged from properly rearing Pyrocles, "recommended the care of his only son to his sister." "Almost before they could perfectly speake," the two princes, Pyrocles and Musidorus,

began to receive conceits not unworthy of the best speakers: excellent devises being used, to make even their sports profitable; images of battailes, & fortifications being then delivered to their memory, which after, their stronger judgements might dispens . . . , the beautie of vertue still being set before their eyes, & that taught them with far more diligent care, then Grammatical rules, their bodies exercised in all abilities, both of doing and suffering, & their mindes acquainted by degrees with daungers; & in sum, all bent to the making up of princely minds. (I, 190-191)

Basilius, retiring with his family to the countryside, places his daughters under the tutelage of ignorant clowns. Pamela, "whose minde goes beyond the governing of many thousands such," is put in the care of Dame-tas, who styles himself "chiefe governour of all the royall cattell, and also of *Pamela*" (I, 25, 429); Philoclea in the care of rude Miso and foul Mopsa. Pamela at last is driven to disregard her parents: "But since my parents deale so cruelly with me, it is time for me to trust something to my owne judgement" (I, 180).

Basilius fails on all the levels of his responsibility. After the hilarious denouement in the cave and when the duke at last realizes that he has spent his lust not on Zelmane but on his wife, Gynecia (who is shown herself to be no better than she should be) reproves him with the full complement of his errors:

Well, well, my Lord saide shée yt shall well become yow so to govern youre self, as yow may bee fitt rather to direct mee, then to be judged of mee, and rather bee a wyse Master of mee, then an unskillfull pleader before mee: Remember the wronge yow doo to mee, yt ys not onely to mee but to youre Children, whome yow had of mee, to youre Contrey, when they shall fynde they are commaunded by hym that can not commaund his owne undecent appetites. Lastly to youre self, since with these paynes, yow doo but buylde up a howse of shame to dwell in. . . . (IV, 258)

Gynecia, as the many Renaissance books on matrimony could have told her, cannot be excused her conduct merely because her husband blunders. To the contrary, "a wife must be milde, meeke, gentle, obedient, though she be matched with a crooked, perverse, prophane, wicked husband." Thus "her vertue and grace" is the more evident, "even as the

Starres shine forth most brightly in the darkest night.”¹⁷ But in her ill-conceived lust for Pyrocles, Gynecia offends against the two cardinal virtues of wifeness. Vives notes that “amonge al other vertues of a married woman, two there ought to be most speciall and greateste: . . . chastity and great love toward her husband.” A wife, in fact, has more reason to be chaste than an unmarried woman, for “with one wicked deede” the wanton wife offends many: “Fyrste thou offeneste two, which ought to be unto the bothe mooste in price, and moste dere and beste, that is to say, almyghty god . . . and thyne husband.” Moreover, “thou, lyke a cruel mother castest thy children in to suche a necessite, that they can never here speake of their mother, without shame, nor of theyr father, without doutynge.”¹⁸

Kalendar’s remark about Gynecia, that she is “of so working a mynde, and so vehement spirits, as a man may say, it was happie shee tooke a good course: for otherwise it would have been terrible” (I, 20), is singularly appropriate. Gynecia in a bad course is terrible indeed:

Yee infernall Furies (for yt ys to late for me to awake my Deade vertue or to please my Comfort in the Angry godes) yee infernall Furies (I say) ayde one that dedicates her self unto yow. Lett my Rage bee satisfied since the affect of yt ys fitt for youre service: Neyther be afrayed to make mee too happy, synce no thing can come to appease the smarte of my guylty Conscience, I desyer but to assuage the sweltering of my hellish Longing. . . . (IV, 172)

Philoclea’s growing unnatural love for (so far as she knows) another woman is greatly strengthened by the example of her mother:

Then her minde (though too late) by the smart was brought to thinke of the disease, and her owne prooffe taught her to know her mothers minde; which (as no error gives so strong assault, as that which comes armed in the authoritie of a parent, so) greatly fortified her desires to see, that her mother had the like desires. And the more jealous her mother was, the more she thought the Jewell precious, which was with so many lookes garded. (I, 171)

Eventually Philoclea is forced to reject her parents (IV, 199), and ultimately (at least in the old *Arcadia*) she submits to Pyrocles’ sexual assault.

It is no doubt fruitless to speculate whether Sidney would have revised the seduction passage had he completed the new *Arcadia*. We can never know if the chaste scene in the continuation of the new is based on Sidney’s notes or on his sister’s offended sensibilities. Certainly as originally presented, it does not seem offensive. And for some Elizabethans, at any

¹⁷William Gouge, *Domesticall Duties*, quoted in William and Malleville Haller, “The Puritan Art of Love,” *HLQ*, V (1942), 248.

¹⁸*The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, trans. Richard Hyrde (London, 1541), fols. 64-65.

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rate, the simple mutual plighting of troths constituted irrevocably binding contracts. Philoclea refers to Pyrocles as her husband when she pleads for his life. But for all that, Pyrocles has committed a serious crime, one punishable by death in Arcadia. I prefer to regard the original version of the scene, innocent though it appears and anticipatory as it is of an eventually happy marriage, as indicative of the complete dissolution of order in Basilius' household. The dissolution spreads from husband to wife to children to servants (which last is illustrated by Dametas' desertion of Pamela while he goes to dig for treasure and by the comic scene that follows in which Dametas, Miso, and Mopsa are at each other's throats). Pamela herself elopes with Musidorus, and but for the intervention of blind chance (or all-seeing Providence) in the persons of the discontented "Clownes," she would have been violated. Unreason in Basilius' person, his household, and state is triumphant.

The troubles in Arcadia are mirrored in the episode of the "Paphlagonian unkinde King," which, of course, is the source of the subplot of *King Lear*. In fact, somewhat as does the dramatic subplot, the Arcadian episode plays variations on the main theme that serve to reinforce and illumine it. In Shakespeare's play (V.iii) Edgar, addressing his bastard half-brother, traces their father's blinding to his adultery:

The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to scourge us.
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes.

The levels of responsibility are interacting: the king of Paphlagonia had abrogated his duties as husband and head of a household; the resulting evils affect not only his household but himself and the country he rules. He had committed adultery with "that base woman," his "concubine." And the fruit of the Paphlagonian king's unlawful union was a bastard son—at least, it is his son, as he says, if he is "bounde to beleve the words of that base woman" (I, 208-209). "It is the common sentence of lawiers," says Cornelius Agrippa, "that the bastard hathe an uncertayne father, and a naughty mother."¹⁹ The bastard, indeed, is frequently an unsympathetic figure in Elizabethan literature.

It is not surprising that the Paphlagonian king's bastard should be evil, but that he should succeed in ousting Leonatus, the legitimate son, from his father's good graces must be ascribed not only to the bastard's cunning, but also to the father's moral blindness. "The vices of children," writes La Primaudaye, "are swordes which passe through the hartes of their Fathers, who are for the moste parte the cause of them through

¹⁹Agrippa, sigs. B7v-B8.

their negligence in correcting them. . . .”²⁰ But the Paphlagonian king is more than negligent. He listens to the “poysounous hypocrisie, desperate fraude, smoothe malice, hidden ambition, & smiling envie” of his bastard and plans the death of Leonatus. Little by little the king hands over his authority to his unkind, “natural” son, Plexirtus, and before long Plexirtus begins to take from his father all that he has left, including the name of king. Finally, the bastard puts out his father’s eyes. Like Gloucester, with the loss of sight the king begins to see. But the upsetting of degree plays havoc with the innocent as well as the guilty. The blind, repentant king relates to Pyrocles and Musidorus the evils which have befallen his country: And as he [Plexirtus] came to the Crowne by so unjust meanes, as unjustlie he kept it, by force of stranger souldiers in Cittadels, the nestes of tyranny, & murderers of liberty; discerning all his own countrymen, that no man durst shew himself a wel-wisher of mine” (I, 209).

There is no need here to stress the horror with which Elizabethans regarded the rebellious child; their reaction is familiar to every reader of sixteenth-century literature. So unnatural a rebellion shook the harmony of nature itself. Pyrocles and Musidorus learn the unhappy story of the Paphlagonian king while sheltering from a violent storm that seems to reflect the disharmony on earth. “Never any Winter,” says Sidney, “brought foorth a fowler child” (I, 206-207). Disobedience and ingratitude constituted rejection of reason, and they were therefore the most egregious crimes of which children were capable. “There is no signe of an Atheiste more certaine,” says La Primaudaye, “than for a man to set light by, and to offend his parents. The father is the true image of the great and soveraigne God, the universall father of all things” (p. 537). It is in the light of such estimates of the father’s role in society, and against the background of biblical injunctions to honor one’s father and mother, that the wickedness of Plexirtus can most clearly be seen.

Leonatus, on the other hand, was all that a good child should be. Almost too late does the father recognize his son’s worthiness, “so as I need envie no father for the chiefe comfort of mortalitie, to leave an other ones-selfe after me” (I, 208). It is a mark of Leonatus’ dutiful humility to his father that he never complains of the injustice done him. La Primaudaye says,

And if they be offended with us when we thinke there is no cause why, yet we must not lay us down to rest before we have by all kind of honest submission appeased them. Humilitie is always commendable, but especially towards our parents. The more we abase ourselves before them, the more we encrease in glory and honor before God and men. (p. 540)

²⁰*The French Academie*, p. 532.

THE FAMILY IN SIDNEY'S *ARCADIA*

“Even in a good cause,” Pierre Ayrault tells us, “a sonnes speech towards his parents should be humble and reverent.”²¹ Sir Philip Sidney writes to his brother Robert: “They are but passions in my father, which wee must beare with reverence” (III, 130). The image of Leonatus leading his blind father by the hand brings to mind that of Aeneas bearing the aged Anchises on his back. Any who read that passage in Virgil must wish “it were his fortune to perform so excellent an Act” (III, 20).

It is not intended here to suggest that in the *Arcadia* the theme of family harmony (and disharmony) dominates the themes of order (and disorder) in the individual and the state. If I have emphasized the household at the expense of the other two levels with which it interacts, it is because the household as a unit among the “correspondences” has not received the attention it deserves. Myrick has written on the “reciprocal duties of parents and children” in the *Arcadia*, but the closest he comes to a recognition of the household among the correspondences is to observe that “the individual must have an assurance of happiness in marriage, but must recognize, especially if he is an aristocrat, the interest which his family, his social class, and his country have in his choice” (p. 283). Kenneth Thorpe Rowe notes that “only in the *Arcadia* is the concept of parental authority, identified with the function of the governor, given embodiment as an ideal” (p. 14), but he is concerned more with the conflict of parents’ and their children’s desires in marriage and the clash of notions of romantic love with the Protestant ideal of married chastity than with the interaction of the correspondences. But the theme of the dependence of harmony in each of the three levels of responsibility—individual, household, state—on each of the others is, I believe, central to the doctrine of the *Arcadia*. Responsibility means simply the dominance of reason over the passions, and to responsibility on all three levels can be attached the manifold contributory themes of the *Arcadia*, love, marriage, religion, war, peace, the varieties of government among men, and so on. For in all relationships man must exercise reason, by which God has raised him above the level of the beasts. If Sidney ever doubts the efficacy of human reason (and he does), he never doubts that to ignore the dictates of reason is to invite chaos.

²¹*A Discourse for Parents Honour and Authoritie*, trans. John Budden (London, 1614), p. 26.