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A. G. D. WILES

### Sir William Alexander's Continuation of the Revised Version of Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*

Sir Philip Sidney left off the revised version of his *Arcadia* in the Third Book, in the midst of the fierce combat between Anaxius and Zelmane (the disguised Pyrocles), Anaxius eager to avenge the deaths of his two brothers, and Zelmane eager to defend and to free the captive royal princesses, Philoclea and Pamela, and himself. A generation later the Scotch poet and colonizer Sir William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, took up the revised version where Sidney left off and wrote a conclusion to the exciting captivity episode.<sup>1</sup> First appearing in the Dublin edition of the *Arcadia* in 1621,<sup>2</sup> Alexander's continuation has been included in almost all subsequent editions down to the present day, a mark of favor not in the same degree accorded the rival work by his fellow Scotsman James Johnstoun, which seems first to have appeared in the 1638 edition of the romance.

Critics and commentators have been divided on the quality of Alexander's work. In 1820 an unnamed commentator in *The Retrospective Review* had this to say:

Amongst these [continuator and imitators] Sir William Alexander, afterwards Earl of Sterling, may be mentioned, who had attempted to supply the defect existing in the third book, as an imitator not unworthy of Sidney. This performance, as well as the other continuations, is a proof, from the exactness with which the style of Sidney is copied, how great a portion of attention had been paid to its model, and what labour and care were exerted to rival the excellencies of its original. All these attempts, indeed

<sup>1</sup> Alexander was from Menstrie, Scotland, and lived from 1567 (?) to 1640. He was a favorite of both James I and Charles I. For a concise and adequate account of his life, see the *Dictionary of National Biography*, I, 275 ff.; for a detailed account, see *Memorials of the Earl of Stirling and of the House of Alexander*, by the Reverend Charles Rogers (Edinburgh, 1877), I.

<sup>2</sup> For the date of publication and composition of Alexander's continuation, see the author's article on the subject in *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, Fourth Quarter, 1956, pp. 387-392.

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are, as good imitations, deserving of praise; and, perhaps, that of Johnstoun is the best, but like all other imitations, they want the spirit of originality; and, however closely they resemble their precursor in its outward accompaniments, have little of its peculiar and inward character.<sup>3</sup>

The commentator first pays tribute to Alexander's work as "not unworthy of Sidney," then states that all continuations have tried closely to follow their model as evidenced by their careful copying of the style, and finally states that all deserve praise, maybe Johnstoun's the most, although all fall short of "the spirit of originality" of the model and "have little of its peculiar and inward character."<sup>4</sup>

In the 1867 edition of the *Arcadia*, Hain Friswell, who writes the notes and introductory essay, quotes this commentator in *The Retrospective Review* as saying that Alexander "has attempted to supply the defect existing in the third book, as an imitator not unworthy of Sidney," and that "this performance, as well as the other continuations, is a proof, from the exactness with which the style of Sidney is copied, what attention had been paid to the model." Then Friswell proceeds:

Sir W. A. . . . speaks more modestly and truly of his own work. "If this little essay," he says, "has no perfection, yet shall it serve for a shadow to give lustre to the rest." Truly [continues Friswell] that is all it can serve for. Its style is a most bombastical imitation of Sidney's, constantly overrunning the modesty of nature by such violence as this: "The impetuous storm that transported the spirit of Anaxius *had quickly blown him down the stairs and up the door*, his sword ushering his way, till his eyes were encountered by the beams of the lightning weapons of a small number," . . . . Such seems to be Sir W. A.'s notion of Sidney's curious and often beautiful antithetical style. Nor does the Earl of Sterling succeed better in imitating those wise and proverbial sentences which Sidney has scattered through his works.<sup>5</sup>

Ernest A. Baker pays Alexander's work a brief general compliment in passing:

<sup>3</sup> London, Vol. I, Part I, Article 1, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Other continuators, besides Alexander and Johnstoun, were Gervase Markham, R. B. (generally assumed to be Richard Beling), and Anne Weamys, all of whom wrote sixth-book continuations of the romance as it is presented in the Folio of 1593.

<sup>5</sup> *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1867), pp. 378-379.

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. . . in the next edition [of the *Arcadia*], described on the title-page as the fourth (1613), we get some new "additions," but of small importance compared with those in the seventh . . . , which included a "Supplement of a defect in the third part of this History, by Sir W. Alexander," . . . .<sup>6</sup>

E. G. Harman has this to say:

The style of the 'W. A.' addition, however, is interesting as an unconscious parody of the original, and showing the impossibility of imitating the performance of genius.<sup>7</sup>

These then seem to be the main comments down the years on Alexander's continuation. They are not many, and they are predominantly general. They tend to concentrate on the style, and to find it lacking in the "peculiar and inward character" of Sidney's. They have nothing specific to say regarding the continuation of plot and characters.

What does a careful study of Alexander's work reveal?

In the first place, it is certainly true that the style is a poor imitation of Sidney's. Beyond a skeletal likeness to the Arcadian style—that is, a likeness to Sidney's involved and leisurely sentence pattern and to the wontedly high adornment of the sentence by the use of figures of sound and of thought—Alexander could not go. The reasons are obvious.

First, Sidney is a poet of high calibre. In the *Arcadia*, which he thought of as a long prose poem, he characteristically uses figures of sound and of thought with naturalness, appropriateness, and, commonly, freshness—that is, with real poetic power. Alexander, though a poet in his own right—and a rather prominent one in his day—usually lacks this ability; he is not a poet of Sidney's stature. For instance, in the use of repetition he is characteristically given to such overstraining as appears in the following example: The enemy, terrified, ran into houses ". . . as if their arms were not sufficient to arm them, unless their arms were armed with walls . . . ." <sup>8</sup> To be sure, examples can be found in Sidney of the overstrained use of repetition, but for

<sup>6</sup> Ernest A. Baker, editor, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd.; introduction dated January, 1907) pp. xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>7</sup> *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1942), p. 118.

<sup>8</sup> Baker, *op. cit.*, p. 440. All references to the continuation are to Baker's reprint of it in his edition of the romance. The reprint is found on pp. 428-451.

each one there are numerous examples of a milder use which lends brilliance and point to the thought. Alexander's metaphors are also likely to be overbearingly extravagant. This one, for example, would have made Sidney, who is not afraid of using metaphors boldly, blush: "The fire of rage then burning contempt out of his [Anaxius's] breast, did burst forth in flames through his eyes, and in smoke from his mouth . . ." <sup>9</sup> His similes lack freshness and originality, as can be seen in the following: ". . . like a lioness lately enraged, that had been long famished in prison, she [Zelmane] ranged over all for her prey. . ." <sup>10</sup>

A second reason why Alexander's imitation of the style falls short is the even more obvious one, noted by the *Retrospective Review* commentator and E. G. Harman, that Sidney's style is deeply impregnated with his own warm, serious, and complex personality. This impregnation—the peculiar, the unique essence of his style—no man can imitate with any real degree of success. Thus it is that beside the truly impassioned speeches of the romance the speeches in the continuation sound bombastical. Passages drawn from both works will serve to illustrate. In the romance there is live desperation in Gynecia's outcry when she contemplates the evil of her guilty love for Pyrocles:

O Sunne (said she) whose unspotted light directs the steps of mortall mankind, art thou not ashamed to impart the clearnesse of thy presence to such a dust-creeeping worme as I am? O you heavens (which continually keepe the course allotted unto you) can none of your influences prevaile so much upon the miserable Gynecia, as to make her preserve a course so lōg embraced by her? . . . O Vertue, where doost thou hide thy selfe? . . . O imperfect proportiō of reason, which cā too much forsee, & too little prevent. Alas, alas, (said she) if there were but one hope for all my paines, or but one excuse for all my faultinesse.<sup>11</sup>

Beside that speech there is emptiness in Musidorus's outcry in the continuation when he fears that Pyrocles's wounds have proved fatal:

O what a monster of misery am I! even when most fortunate, most unfortunate, who never had a lightning of comfort, but that it was suddenly followed with a thunder of confusion. Twice

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 430.

<sup>11</sup> *The Complete Works of Sir Philip Sidney*, edited by Albert Feuillerat ("Cambridge English Classics," Cambridge: at the University Press, 1912-1926), I, 145-146. In this paper all references to the romance are to the Cambridge edition.

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was my felicity by land (that it might be washed for ever away) made a prey to the inexorable waves, whilst the relenting destinies pitying the rigour of their own decrees, to prevent their threatened effects, would have drowned me in (respecting the ocean of sorrow prepared to swallow me) that little drop of the sea. And, O thrice happy I, if I had perished whilst I was altogether unhappy . . . . O would to God that I had died obscurely . . . .<sup>12</sup>

All of the critics seem to overlook the fact that among a continuator's foremost objectives must be successful continuations of plot and character. It is precisely here—that is, with plot and character—that Alexander has succeeded admirably. Let us look first at his handling of plot.

To begin with, he deduces that he must draw the captivity episode fairly rapidly to its conclusion, and thus he completes the intricate work of untangling in twenty-three pages.<sup>13</sup> The last sixty-five pages of the revision leave little doubt about the correctness of his deduction. For, with the serious wounding of Amphialus, unwilling jailer of the princesses; with the death of Cecropia, Amphialus's mother and the main jailer of the princesses; with Helen of Corinth's taking the wounded Amphialus away, thus leaving the castle to be commanded by a proud and boastful foreigner, Anaxius; with the Black Knight's (Musidorus's) bringing a force against the castle; with the oracle's assurance that Basilius shall soon receive home his daughters in safety; and with Zelmane's slaying the two brothers of Anaxius and engaging in combat with Anaxius himself, it seems clear that Sidney has drawn the captivity episode to a head and has set the stage and placed the characters for its final scene.

In his prefatory words to the last three books of the original version of the romance, which he appended as a conclusion to the revised version, the editor of the Folio of 1593 has given a good guide to the more specific problems of plot which face a continuator of the revised version. He says:

How this combate ended, how the Ladies by the comming of the discovered forces were delivered, and restored to *Basilius*, and how *Dorus* againe returned to his old master *Damaetas*, is altogether unknowne. What afterward chaunced, out of the Authors owne writings and conceits hath bene supplied, as foloweth.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Baker, *op. cit.*, pp. 434-435.

<sup>13</sup> Baker, *op. cit.*, pp. 428-451.

<sup>14</sup> *Complete Works*, II, 350.

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The problem of "how this combat [between the disguised Pyrocles and Anaxius] ended" is certainly not a difficult one for a continuator who knows the revised version, and Alexander did know it thoroughly. In the romance, Pyrocles is one of the heroes, an unsurpassable knight, and an almost spotless character; and Anaxius is a boastful, proud, lustful character who has, at an earlier time, falsely maligned Pyrocles. These are all good reasons why Pyrocles should send his adversary to oblivion. But Sidney has also made Anaxius a far-famed fighter, and accordingly has started the combat as anything but one-sided. Recognizing all these factors, Alexander prolongs the struggle, increases the desperateness of it, but concludes it with Pyrocles's slaying his adversary.

"How the ladies by the comming of the discovered forces [the disguised Musidorus's forces] were delivered" represents a more complex problem for the continuator; for it must be remembered that these are not Sidney's words, but an early editor's, and that Musidorus had failed in all of his earlier attempts to free the captives. Yet, the revised version, before it breaks off, does state that the Black Knight [Musidorus] is again approaching the castle with an assaulting force, and does clearly imply that the captivity episode is drawing to a conclusion. In view of this latter fact especially, it is most natural for a continuator to deduce, as Alexander has done, that Musidorus should play a major part in the delivery of the princesses. It is most natural not necessarily because Musidorus has an invading force before the castle, but mainly because it is poetic justice, to the demands of which Sidney is ever alive in the revision, that Musidorus, who has sacrificed so much for his beloved Pamela and fought so furiously to deliver her, should have a hand in her release from captivity.

"How *Dorus* [Musidorus in his shepherd's disguise] againe returned to his old master *Damaetas*," involving as it does a reconciliation between Pamela and Musidorus, represents the most difficult problem for a continuator, because the revision contains no clue to Sidney's intention. In his choosing a simple and natural way of solution Alexander displays good judgment. He makes Musidorus's delivery of the proud princess from captivity the basis for their reconciliation. When she is told that he is her deliverer, she cannot really deny him her presence, though she does (quite in conformity with Sidney's Pamela) hesitate to grant it. When thereupon he humbly requests that she dispose of his future life, the least that she can do is bid him return to his master *Dametas*, and promise to restore him to the position which his forwardness had lost him — to the right, at least, to come into her presence.



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Probably nothing more clearly reveals the seriousness and precision with which Alexander worked than his identifying the unknown knight in green armor as Philisides, the mysterious lovelorn shepherd of the romance. To find evidence in the revision for such a deduction requires detailed, really minute, knowledge of it; but the evidence is there, enough at least to make Philisides the most likely habitant of the green armor. In Book II of the revision it is seen that Philisides is skilled in the use of arms, for he is said to take part with Iberian knights in a tilting contest against the Corinthian knights. On this occasion

His own furniture was drest over with wooll, . . . His Impresa was a sheepe marked with pitch, with this word — *Spotted to be knowne*.<sup>15</sup>

In Book III of the revision Sidney thus describes the unknown knight in green armor:

. . . the one being all in greene, both armour and furniture, it seemed a pleasant garden . . . In his shield was a sheep, feeding in a pleasant field, with this word, *Without feare, or envie*. And therefore was called the Knight of the sheep.<sup>16</sup>

It will be noted, of course, that in the earlier contest Philisides' "furniture was drest over with wooll" and that his *impresa* was a sheep, and that in the later contest the mysterious knight in green armor "was called the Knight of the sheep" since his *impresa* was "a sheep, feeding in a pleasant field." This repetition of the sheep as a device can scarcely be explained as a coincidence; it seems rather to represent Sidney's clue, well-veiled (since the passages are brief and far apart), to the identity of the knight in green. I suspect that very few readers of the romance, besides Alexander, have ever recognized it.

A few inconsistencies of plot exist between the continuation and the last three books of the original version of the romance and somewhat lessen the adequacy of Alexander's work as a connecting link between these books and the fragmentary revised version; but Alexander himself cautions us, in a note attached to his continuation, that he did not seek to conform with the original version, but only with the revised version.<sup>17</sup>

But how has he succeeded as a continuator of the characters of the revised version? It can be said that he has excellently continued Sidney's drawings of the simpler characters, such as Musidorus, Pyrocles, Duke

<sup>15</sup> *Complete Works*, I, 285.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 462.

<sup>17</sup> Baker, *op. cit.*, p. 451.



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Basilius, and Dametas, and that he has shown clear understanding of the more complex characters as well: the princesses Philoclea and Pamela, and Queen Gynecia.

Probably his finest achievement as a continuator of character lies in his maintaining Sidney's contrast between the princesses: a contrast best expressed in Sidney's own felicitous phrasing in Book I, where he speaks of the "noble height" of Pamela, the "sweet lowliness" of Philoclea.<sup>18</sup> This contrast is clearly seen in the continuation in the princesses' reactions to the false news of Zelmane's death: Pamela is

(like a rock amidst the sea . . . immovable) . . . like one, majesty triumphing over misery, who would rather burst strongly within than be disburdened by bursting out in an abject manner.

But, ah me, the confounded Philoclea, who, being the weaker, had received the sharpest assault, . . . she, smothered with so monstrous a weight, did sink down under it to the earth.<sup>19</sup>

The contrast is further reflected — as in the romance — in the different attitudes which they take toward their lovers. Thus, when Musidorus kneels before Pamela after he has freed her from captivity, she, recalling his attempt to caress her and making a show of coldness, says:

How durst you thus presume to present yourself in my presence, being discharged it, when you deserved the uttermost that reason could devise, or fury execute? Hath my dejected state emboldened you to exalt yourself against me?<sup>20</sup>

On the contrary, Philoclea, visited by Pyrocles after the arrival of Basilius's force to take over the castle, "cared not where she went, so it were with him, nor what she did, so it were warranted by his direction . . ."<sup>21</sup>

At one point, however, the continuator may strike a brief un-Sidneian note in his portrayal of the princesses. Philoclea does not seem all "sweet lowliness" when she can "hardly restrain the violence of a just laughter"<sup>22</sup> upon discovering that Pamela is crushed by the news that Zelmane lies in bed with and deeply loves Musidorus; nor is Pamela's "noble height" entirely in evidence when she allows herself to be crushed by the news. But this may be splitting hairs.

<sup>18</sup> *Complete Works*, I, 469.

<sup>19</sup> *Baker, op. cit.*, pp. 436-437.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 439.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 449.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 444.

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The keenness which Alexander brought to the problem of continuing Sidney's characters is possibly best seen in his treatment of Gynecia, the tragic queen who, though obsessed with a guilty passion for Pyrocles, yet often in the romance is torn between the powerful forces of right and wrong. Recognizing that Gynecia's part in the captivity episode—which it was his object to conclude—was a very minor one, played for the most part off the scene of the main action, Alexander continued her passionate interest in Zelmane, but mainly by the report of other characters, and refrained from enlarging on the great struggle going on within her soul.

In conclusion, it might be said that Alexander's continuation has not received its proper due. It lacks, as all must, a successful imitation of Sidney's style, which is basically individual; but it is highly successful in handling plot and character. It justifies its constant inclusion in editions of the *Arcadia*.

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