

Joel B. Davis. *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia and the Invention of English Literature*.

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. xx + 252 pp. \$85. ISBN: 978-0-230-11252-0.

Philip Sidney's name does not appear in the title of this excellent book because, as Davis explains, this is not a book about Philip Sidney but rather a book about books. Davis's detailed microhistorical investigation of the early printings of the Sidney canon — from the 1590 quarto *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*

through the 1598 folio of that title that served as the de facto publication of his works — sheds new light not only on these early editions but also on the ways the editorial assumptions behind the New Bibliography continue to underlie synchronic analyses of Sidney's place in a national, English literary system. Through an appreciative engagement with Richard Helgerson's influential *Self-Crowned Laureates* (1983), Davis reads each edition as a semiotic event, engaged in often contentious dialogue with its predecessors — dialogues that are as often about negotiating status, aligning with Continental networks, or promoting an editor's moral philosophy, as establishing a laureate nationalist literature.

In one of the two focal chapters on editions of Sidney's romance itself (chapter 1), Davis convincingly argues that Fulke Greville is the guiding hand behind the 1590 quarto *Arcadia*. He reads its presentation, especially the notorious chapter summaries, in light of Greville's Senecan instruction in *A Letter to an Honorable Lady* (ca. 1590, 1633). For Davis, 1590 is darkened by Greville's own skepticism about the very exemplarity it promotes. His next chapter on the printing and influence of the 1591 quartos of *Astrophil and Stella* (chapter 2) most clearly reveals how modern scholarly editions produced under New Bibliographical assumptions can distort interpretation. By examining the only printed versions of the sequence that would have been available until 1598, Davis brilliantly illuminates the quartos's structure, poetics, and prosody. The successor sonnet sequences of Daniel, Lodge, and Fletcher appear as a dispersed dialogue with the 1590 quartos, ramifying in variously political, moral, and aesthetic registers.

A chapter on the appropriation of Sidney's name in print (chapter 3) effectively demonstrates the many interests the Sidney name served, setting the stage for the book's other focal chapter on the 1593 *Arcadia*, produced by the Countess of Pembroke to reclaim her brother's name within a Sidney family discourse in a mutually beneficial arrangement with the printer William Ponsonby (chapter 4). Setting 1593 in the context of the Countess's translations, Davis argues, reasonably, that it not only depicts the 1590 quarto (and her brother's name) as in need of aristocratic cleansing, but also that the moral emphasis shifts to focus on political corruption contaminating individuals, with aristocratic friendship the salve for social sores. A brief chapter (chapter 5), perhaps the book's loosest, follows with suggestive readings of the 1598 folio. Davis's comments on the authenticating work that the 1598 folio performs are informative, tantalizing, and might have earned tighter consideration.

Davis's book effortlessly traverses ground traditionally occupied by particular subdisciplines: stemmas cross with prosody, editorial concerns mix with Renaissance moral philosophy, contending literary ambitions are grounded in the placement of a factotum. It usefully demonstrates how to read books at once as objects, as events, and as literature not coterminous with authorial vision. Davis is certainly right that there is no New Bibliographic organic unity that we can point to under the name of *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*. His detailed investigation is a refreshing corrective to readings that, however sophisticated, equate value with

an organic unfolding theme. And yet, even Greville's and Mary Sidney Herbert's attempts to corral this unruly text to their own ends often must struggle against the narrative parcels Philip Sidney left. A little more play might have been given to the ways Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* strains against the guiding interpretations of Greville or the Countess of Pembroke, strains that are occasionally evident in Davis's readings.

That minor hesitation aside, Davis has struck new ground in this study. His argument earns the conclusion that, for *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* perhaps more than any other textual artifact of its time, scholarship and criticism would benefit from a digital edition or archive that could provide a clear textual reference point while also mapping the multiple artifacts and paratexts that constitute the diachronic history of its invention.

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