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ALESSANDRA PETRINA

## IACOPO SANNAZARO AND THE CREATION OF A POETIC CANON IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

Iacopo Sannazaro makes one of his earliest and few appearances in English writing in this passage:

“*Chawcer* undoubtedly did excellently in his *Troilus and Creseid*: of whome trulie I knowe not whether to mervaille more, either that hee in that mistie time could see so clearly, or that wee in this cleare age, goe so stumblingly after him. Yet had hee great wants, fit to be forgiven in so reverent an Antiquitie. I account the *Mirroure of Magistrates*, meetly furnished of bewtiful partes. And in the Earle of *Surreis Lirickes*, manie things tasting of a Noble birth, and worthie of a Noble minde. The *Sheepheards Kalender*, hath much *Poetrie* in his *Egloges*, indeed woorthie the reading, if I be not deceived. That same framing of his style to an olde rusticke language, I dare not allow: since neither *Theocritus* in Greeke, *Virgill* in Latine, nor *Sanazara* in Italian, did affect it. Besides these, I doo not remember to have seene but fewe (to speake boldly) printed, that have poeticall sinnewes in them.”<sup>1</sup>

This passage from *The Defence of Poesie* (1595), Sir Philip Sidney’s impassioned treatise on literature, is one of the two explicit references to Iacopo Sannazaro to be found in Sidney’s works, and indeed in early

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Ph. Sidney, *The Defence of Poesie*, in Id., *The Prose Works*, edited by A. Feuillerat, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1968, vol. III, p. 37.

modern English literature as a whole. In the other reference, to be found slightly earlier in the treatise, Sidney associates Sannazaro with a Latin poet and philosopher: “some in the maner have mingled prose and verse, as *Sanazara* and *Boethius*”.<sup>2</sup> This second reference may seem even more surprising, as it suggests an association with one of the leading lights of medieval philosophy, and one of the widely acknowledged *auctoritates* for English medieval and early modern writers. Given the scanty references to Sannazaro in English poetry, and the comparative obscurity into which his work has fallen since the late sixteenth century, Sidney’s praise may seem excessive, but it should be remembered that the appearance of Sannazaro’s works in print in the early sixteenth century sparked immediate interest. The fame of the Neapolitan poet spread in England first thanks to his *Eclogae piscatoriae*, and then, most importantly, with *Arcadia*, a work admired throughout Europe and quickly imitated in Spain and France as well as England;<sup>3</sup> its very imperfections prompting imitation and adaptation.<sup>4</sup>

### 1. *The Tradition of Pastoral Poetry*

Though he was the first writer to use *Arcadia* as a title, Sannazaro obviously moved from a well-established tradition of pastoral poetry; but, as shown by the sequence of names listed in Sidney’s passage, it was also a tradition that had been dormant for a number of centuries. Ernst Curtius

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> For a preliminary account of the early translations and imitations of Sannazaro’s work, see F. Torraca, *Gl’imitatori stranieri di Jacopo Sannazaro*, Roma, Loescher, 1882. Unfortunately, when it comes to discussing Sidney’s *Arcadia* among the most significant imitations of Sannazaro in English literature, Torraca candidly admits: “io non ho potuto leggerla” (cf. *ibidem*, p. 77)

<sup>4</sup> See D. Kalstone, *The Transformation of Arcadia: Sannazaro and Sir Philip Sidney*, in “Comparative Literature”, XV, 1963, p. 234.

rightly noted a fundamental characteristic of classical pastoral: “to write poetry under trees, on the grass, by a spring – in the Hellenistic period, this came to rank as a poetical motif in itself”.<sup>5</sup> As is well known, the poetical motif was developed first in the *Idylls* attributed to the Sicilian poet Theocritus. A few centuries later, Virgil, borrowing from the Sicilian poet’s *Eclogae*, used the Arcadian setting which could transform Theocritus’ motherland by adding a connotation of isolation, distance, and ultimately mystery. Sannazaro created the idea of Arcadia in early modern Europe by transforming the motif into a genre, using Theocritus’ and Virgil’s intuition and endowing it with a wholly new concept, though in European, and especially in Italian, literature the idea of Arcadia, if not the name itself, may have circulated before the appearance of Sannazaro’s work, as part of the complex Virgilian inheritance. The Neapolitan poet, eschewing Virgil’s realistic overtones, offered a new idea of an imperishable Arcadia, a forsaken country of perfect and eternal happiness, lost to the everyday experience of man but re-obtainable through poetic vision. The next step in Italian culture would be the “Accademia dell’Arcadia” created in 1690 in Rome,<sup>6</sup> by writers and nobles who had presumably no experience of the pastoral or agricultural world in experiential or empirical terms, and were therefore fixing the world of Arcadia in a region wholly of the mind.

As we proceed from Theocritus to Sannazaro, we note how in all cases the intended readership was urban and cultivated, thus distant from the setting that was being represented: in fact, the motif of the pastoral setting could spring from actual memory, as in the case of Theocritus, or from cultivated learning, as with Sannazaro. Throughout its long history,

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, Translated from the German by W. R. Trask, London, Routledge & Kegan, 1953, p. 187.

<sup>6</sup> And indeed still existing. The earliest systematic account of the Accademia’s activity can be found in G. M. Crescimbeni, *Storia dell’Accademia degli Arcadi istituita in Roma l’anno 1690*, Roma, Antonio De Rossi, 1711.

the pastoral “exploited a tension between the town by the sea and the mountain country of the shepherd, between people and nature, between retreat and return”;<sup>7</sup> such a tension, in order to be fully understood, presupposes a perfect understanding between narrator and intended reader, since irony is the most common counterpoint to the celebratory mood of pastoral. It is evident that such a trait would have appealed to Sidney, whose literary production is constantly informed by the exploration of pre-existing literary *topoi* and genres and by their ironical treatment, especially significant given the coterie of writers and readers in which he worked; as I aim to show in the following pages, the very name of Arcadia acquired a special connotation within the Sidney circle.

Curtius firmly anchors the idea of pastoral poetry to a sociological setting, by identifying elements of recognisability that help to consider it a truly European motif:

“The shepherd’s life is found everywhere and at all periods. It is a basic form of human existence; and through the story of the Nativity in Luke’s gospel it made its way into the Christian tradition too. It has – and this is very important – a correlative scenery: pastoral Sicily, later Arcadia. But it also has a personnel of its own, which has its own social structure and thus constitutes a social microcosm [...] Arcadia was forever being rediscovered. This was possible because the stock of pastoral motifs was bound to no genre and no poetic form.”<sup>8</sup>

This was true both in antiquity and in the medieval period, though a widespread critical belief is that the very idea of Arcadian poetry disappeared during the Middle Ages. I would contend, however, that by the time Renaissance literature developed in Italy, the idea of Arcadia had become influenced by and contaminated with a wholly medieval *topos*, that of the *locus amoenus*: the idyllic setting of Theocritus and Virgil had

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. T. Gifford, *Pastoral*, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, cit., p. 187.



acquired the courtly connotations of medieval romance, and was ready for Sidney's invasion of mythical kings and princes. Arcadia lost its domesticity and historical relevance, and became a wholly abstract, spiritual site. By giving the title of *Arcadia* to his rambling *prosimetro*, and explicitly setting it in the "pastorale Arcadia", Sannazaro was elevating the setting to the role of protagonist, and, at the same time, reclaiming this specific inheritance from classical tradition as the fundamental element of a new poetic mood, based on *nostalgia*. This Arcadia is "a realm irretrievably lost, seen through a veil of reminiscent melancholy";<sup>9</sup> what is notable is that such melancholic *Gotterdammerung* should become the blueprint for a new mode of literary composition. In this sense, Sannazaro's work was pivotal to the development of an early modern genre which, in poetry as well as in music and painting, enjoyed huge if not long-lasting fame: by the late eighteenth century Arcadia had already petrified into the formal representations of the Roman "Accademia" and of the Versailles village built according to the capricious will of Marie Antoinette. The tension inherent in the form had solidified into mannerism, the nostalgia implicit in the pastoral mood had also articulated in the homage to an established literary tradition. It is this development that Sidney appears to capture in his reworking of Sannazaro's suggestions.

It may be argued, incidentally, that Sannazaro's intuition would not have enjoyed such an echo in Elizabethan England, had it not been for the presence of another text, Arthur Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. First printed in 1565 in a partial version (only the first

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. E. Panofsky, *Et in Arcadia Ego*, in Id., *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1970, p. 349.

four books were translated),<sup>10</sup> then in its entirety in 1567,<sup>11</sup> it enjoyed such fame that it was quickly revised and then reprinted twice in the following twenty years. Among the most enduring images Golding's translation offered to its readers was that of the Golden Age, in which natural law needed no enforcement, and hospitable Nature needed no civilizing improvement:

“The loftie Pynetree was not heauen from mountaines where it stood,  
In seeking strange and forrein landes, too roue upon the flood.  
Men knewe none other countreis yet, then where them selues did keepe,  
There was no towne enclosed yet with walles and dyches deepe.”<sup>12</sup>

The image could be usefully inserted in the Arcadian context, adding a political overtone to the Arcadian musings, and fusing the escapism implicit in Sannazaro's vision with the suggestions of nostalgia, a recurrent *topos* in Elizabethan literature.<sup>13</sup> The classical background to pastoral poetry, therefore, offered an articulate set of images, and, in the same years in which Sidney was composing his *Defence*, the genre was also the object of critical and theoretical reflection on the part of other writers. In his *Art of English Poesy* (published anonymously in 1589),<sup>14</sup> George Puttenham discusses tragic poets before turning to the pastoral, thus still referring exclusively to the classical canon:

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<sup>10</sup> *The fyrst fovver bookes of P. Ouidius Nasos worke, intituled Metamorphosis, translated oute of Latin into Englishe meter by Arthur Golding Gent. A woorke very pleasaunt and delectable*, London, Willyam Seres, 1565.

<sup>11</sup> *The. xv. bookes of P. Ouidius Naso, entytuled Metamorphosis, translated oute of Latin into English meeter, by Arthur Golding Gentleman, a worke very pleasaunt and delectable*, London, Willyam Seres, 1567.

<sup>12</sup> *The fyrst fovver bookes of P. Ouidius Nasos worke, intituled Metamorphosis...*, cit., sig. Aii (I,111-114).

<sup>13</sup> See K. Johanson, *Never a Merry World: the Rhetoric of Nostalgia in Elizabethan England*, in *Representations of Elizabeth I in Early Modern Culture*, ed. by A. Petrina and L. Tosi, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 210-227.

<sup>14</sup> *The arte of English poesie. Contriued into three bookes: the first of poets and poesie, the second of proportion, the third of ornament*, London, Richard Field, 1589.

“There were yet others who mounted nothing so high as any of them both [i.e., comic and tragic poets], but in base and humble style by manner of dialogue uttered the private and familiar talk of the meanest sort of men, as shepherds, haywards, and such like; such was among the Greeks Theocritus, and Vergil among the Latins; their poems were named eclogues or shepherdly talk.”<sup>15</sup>

Once again we find the ‘usual suspects’, Theocritus and Virgil, but unlike Sidney, Puttenham does not mention Sannazaro. Indeed, the name of the Neapolitan writer does not appear anywhere in the treatise, although the inventory of the books in Puttenham’s library, reconstructed by modern editors, tells us that he did in fact own a copy of *Arcadia*.<sup>16</sup> Nor does Sannazaro’s name appear in roughly contemporary discussions on poetry, such as Thomas Lodge’s *Reply to Stephen Gosson’s Schoole of Abuse in Defence of Poetry, Musick, and Stage Plays*, privately issued in 1579, or Thomas Campion’s *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*, first published in London in 1602. It might be useful to discuss this reticence to use Sannazaro’s name in connection with Sidney’s own mention of the writer.

Sannazaro’s works had spread fairly quickly throughout Europe, thanks to both authorized and pirated editions, as well as to early translations; the first edition of the Italian text appeared in 1504, with the first French translation (undertaken by Jean Martin) appearing in 1544 and the first Spanish translation published in Toledo in 1547.<sup>17</sup> No translation appears to have been printed in England until 1781, nor do we have knowledge of a manuscript translation. There are mentions or allusions to

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<sup>15</sup> G. Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, A Critical Edition Edited by F. Whigham and W. A. Rebhorn, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2007, pp. 115-116 (I,11).

<sup>16</sup> See F. Whigham and W. A. Rebhorn, *Introduction*, *ibidem*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>17</sup> On the early printing and circulation of Sannazaro’s text, see A. C. Marconi, *La nascita di una vulgata: L’Arcadia del 1504*, Manziana, Vecchiarelli, 1997.

the Neapolitan poet prior to Sidney's *Defence*, with sometimes dubious references to *Arcadia*; which is unsurprising, if one considers the various uses to which the disparate material of the book can be put: "the richness of Sannazaro's *Arcadia* as a poetic source book is in part a function of its eclecticism".<sup>18</sup> Harold Andrew Mason suggests that Sir Thomas Wyatt's phrase "in a net I seek to hold the wind" in his sonnet *Whoso list to hunt, I know where is an hind* may be traced to these lines of *Arcadia*, that would be made famous by Lorenzo Da Ponte<sup>19</sup> in his libretto for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Così fan tutte*:

"Nell'onde solca e nell'arene semina  
e 'l vago vento spera in rete accogliere  
chi sue speranze funda in cor di femina."<sup>20</sup>

More positive is the identification of another sonnet by Wyatt, *Like to these unmeasurable mountains*, with a translation from Sannazaro's *Simile a questi smisurati monti*.<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note that in this case Puttenham seems to have deliberately side-tracked the readers by associating this specific translation with Wyatt's imitations from Petrarch, and using a deliberately vague phrasing that would avoid the indication of a specific original.<sup>22</sup> It would appear that imitation is justified in the case of a

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. D. Kalstone, *The Transformation of Arcadia: Sannazaro and Sir Philip Sidney*, cit., p. 243.

<sup>19</sup> See L. Da Ponte, *Così fan tutte o sia La scuola degli amanti*, in *Tutti i libretti di Mozart*, a cura di M. Beghelli, Prefazione di G. Raboni, Milano, Garzanti, 1990, p. 568 (I, 7).

<sup>20</sup> I. Sannazaro, *Arcadia*, A cura di F. Erspamer, Milano, Mursia, 1990, p. 140 (VIII<sup>e</sup>, 10-12). Cf. H. A. Mason, *Sir Thomas Wyatt, a Literary Portrait: Selected Poems*, Bristol, Bristol Classical Press, 1986, p. 136 (the critic himself acknowledges that Wyatt's phrase may be an adaptation of *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, CCXII, 4: "solco onde, e 'n rena fondo, et scrivo in vento").

<sup>21</sup> See I. Sannazaro, *Rime disperse*, in Id., *Opere volgari*, a cura di A. Mauro, Bari, Laterza, 1961, pp. 226-227 (IV, 1-1 bis) and J. M. Berdan, *The Migration of a Sonnet*, in "Modern Language Notes", XXIII, 1908, pp. 33-36.

<sup>22</sup> See G. Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, cit., pp. 214-215 (II, 17).

classic, or of a vernacular work already raised to the status of a classic, as in the case of Petrarch. Sannazaro therefore falls between two stools, too late to be considered part of the Italian canon of poetry, and too early to enter the fashionable realm of contemporary Italian poetry. But Puttenham's omission can also be explained in different terms, as will be seen below.

After the publication of *Arcadia*, there were other instances of imitations of Sannazaro's poetry: for instance, between 1600 and 1604, a minor sixteenth-century poet such as Phineas Fletcher, composed four 'piscatory' eclogues obviously deriving from Sannazaro's own *Eclogae piscatoriae*, even if there was no acknowledgement of the source; Fletcher's imitation has been shown to include the occasional borrowing. 1611 saw the publication of *Coryat's Crudities: Hastily gobled up in Five Moneth's Travels*, a travelogue in which Thomas Coryat described his experiences during his travels to France, Germany, Italy and other parts of Europe. The section on Venice opened with two poems dedicated to the city, one by Joseph Justus Scaliger, the other by Sannazaro. Coryat introduces the Italian poet as follows:

"I heard in Venice that a certaine Italian Poet called *Iacobus Sannazarius* had a hundred crownes bestowed upon him by the Senate of Venice for each of these verses following. I would to God my Poeticall friend Mr. *Beniamin Iohnson* were so well rewarded for his Poems here in England, seeing he hath made many as good verses (in my opinion) as these of *Sannazarius*."<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, here Sannazaro is mentioned as "a certaine Italian

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<sup>23</sup> *Coryats crudities hastily gobled vp in five moneths trauells in France, Sauoy, Italy, Rhetia comonly called the Grisons country, Heluetia aliàs Switzerland, some parts of high Germany, and the Netherlands; newly digested in the hungry aire of Odcombe in the county of Somerset, & now dispersed to the nourishment of the trauelling members of this kingdome*, London, Printed by W[illiam] S[tansby for the author], 1611, p. 159.

Poet”, as if Coryat was himself unacquainted with him, or thought his readership would be unaware of the name.

## 2. Sannazaro and Sidney

In short, Sannazaro seems to have enjoyed a very short-lived fame in England, though the genre he reintroduced in European literature found particularly fertile ground in the British Isles. By including the Neapolitan poet in his proposal for a tradition of pastoral poetry in *The Defence of Poesie*, Sidney was conscious of the origin and early development of the genre, and was deliberately offering it to the English reader as part of a new inheritance. It has been observed that the *Defence* should not be confined within the boundaries of literary criticism or literary theory: it rather “conforms to a type of oration well known to the ancients, as a variety of the laudatory oration adapted to the justification of philosophy or an art, and controlled by the conventions of a counsel’s speech for the defence”.<sup>24</sup> Within this rhetorical defence, Sidney also constructed a newly made canon of European poetry into which the literature of his own country could find a place. Thus the *Defence* elegantly articulates a definition of the scope and purpose of poetry, while – at the same time – enriching it with mentions and examples taken from classical, late medieval and contemporary literature.

The company Sannazaro keeps in the Sidney quotation is significant, as it speaks to us of a quick assumption of the Italian poet in a canon of pastoral verse. This was in fact attested immediately after Sannazaro’s death by Pietro Bembo’s epigram, in which the humanist (who had already

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. G. Shepherd, *Introduction*, in Sir Ph. Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry or The Defence of Poesy*, Edited by G. Shepherd, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1973, p. 12.

composed a famous epitaph for Raphael) highlights the appropriateness of the site chosen for Sannazaro's tomb, in Naples:

“De sacro cineri flores : hic ille Maroni  
Syncerus Musa proximus, ut tumulo.”<sup>25</sup>

The Italian poet is therefore symbolically located next to the father of pastoral poetry, Virgil, and authorised by this very proximity to project his model onto future generations of poets. Virgil, of course, is also mentioned in the passage from *The Defence of Poesie*, though here Sidney builds a rather more articulate canon. His construction of such a canon is subtle and suggestive, insofar as it begins with a sequence of English writers that naturally are made to bespeak the evidence of a literary tradition. Significantly, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* opens the series, rather than his *Canterbury Tales*, since what is proposed here is the inheritance of poetry and of advisory literature, rather than of comic tales. By ending his short English sequence with Edmund Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, Sidney achieved a double purpose: on the one hand he 'authorised' Spenser's very recent poem (which had been dedicated to him) by making it conclude a series of what was best in the English tradition; on the other he introduced Spenser's work in another poetic canon, that of pastoral poetry.

In this perspective, it is easy to see that in the Sidney quotation Sannazaro has already achieved the status of a classic, as he is implicitly placed at the same level as both Theocritus and Virgil. This is in itself not surprising: we find a number of instances in late medieval and early modern English writing in which near-contemporary Italian (and

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<sup>25</sup> P. Bembo, *Iacobi Synceri Sannazari Epitaphium*, in Id., *Carmina* [1st ed. 1552], Torino, Edizioni RES, 1990, p. 59 (XL). Syncerus is the alter ego of the writer in Sannazaro's *Arcadia*.

occasionally French) writers are inserted in a list of classical *auctoritates*. What follows – an extract from a poem addressed by Benedict Burgh, a fifteenth-century ecclesiastic, to the poet John Lydgate – is perhaps one of the most striking examples:

“The crafte of speche that some tyme founde was  
of the famous philosophers moste perfite  
Aristotell Gorge and Ormogenes  
nat have I. So I have lerid but a lite  
as for my party thowgh I repent I may go qwite  
of Tullius Frauncis and Quintilian  
fayne wolde I lere. But I not conceyve can,

the noble poete Virgil the mantuan  
Omere the greke and Torqwat sovereyne  
Naso also that sith this worlde first be gan  
the marvelist transformyng all best can devyne  
Terence ye mery and plesant theatryne  
Porcyus Lucan Marcyan and Orace  
Stace Iuvenall and the lauriate Bocase”.<sup>26</sup>

In Burgh’s text, meant as an encomium of Lydgate’s erudition and “innate sapience”,<sup>27</sup> the wide-ranging word *philosophers* introduces a spectacular canon of writers and thinkers of antiquity, from Homer to Aristotle, from Ovid to Quintilian; within this classical canon both Petrarch and Boccaccio find their place, perhaps more as Latin than as Italian writers. As we have seen in the passage from Sidney, and as shall be seen below in a later instance, the list authorizes recent entries through the venerable antiquity of the rest.

What Sidney does is therefore to follow a well-established practice, and at the same time to draw upon the sixteenth-century heightened interest

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<sup>26</sup> B. Burgh, *Letter to John Lydgate*, in *English Verse between Chaucer and Surrey : being examples of conventional secular poetry, exclusive of romance, ballad, lyric, and drama, in the period from Henry the Fourth to Henry the Eighth*, Edited with introductions and notes by E. P. Hammond Durham, Duke University Press, 1927, p. 189 (8-21). The spelling and punctuation have been lightly modernised.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *ibidem* (22).



in *Übersetzungskultur*.<sup>28</sup> It has long been a staple of early modern studies that translation is at the basis of Tudor literature, ever since Francis Otto Matthiessen famously wrote of translation as an act of patriotism, of special importance in a nation, such as England, which “had grown conscious of its cultural inferiority to the Continent, and suddenly burned with the desire to excel its rivals in letters, as well as in ships and gold”.<sup>29</sup> I would contend that what Sidney (together with many other Elizabethan writers) does is not straightforward translation but rather an act of transcreation. He does not offer a rendering of a foreign masterpiece to a readership that was incapable of appreciating it in the original, but a free re-proposal meant for a restricted audience that would indeed appreciate changes and innovations upon the original text, which was in any case known. Sidney’s readership could include friends and protégés such as Edmund Spenser, Edward Dyer, Gabriel Harvey: “a select and sympathetic audience”,<sup>30</sup> a small and sophisticated circle that shared the experience of reading and writing, and formed in fact a literate community including the supplier of the text, the copyist, and the recipient, a group which tends “to coincide with pre-existing communities – the court, the diocese, the college, the county, the circle of friends [...] neighbours or colleagues, the extended family, the sect or faction”.<sup>31</sup> Within this circle Sidney could explore foreign texts in his search for new forms for English writing, and, at the same time, employ

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<sup>28</sup> See A. P. Frank, “*Translation as System*” and *Übersetzungskultur: On Histories and Systems in the Study of Literary Translation*, in “New Comparison”, VIII, 1989, pp. 85-98 and J. D. McClure, *Translation and Transcreation in the Castalian Period*, in “Studies in Scottish Literature”, XXVI, 1991, pp. 185-198.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. F. O. Matthiessen, *Translation: An Elizabethan Art*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1931, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. J. Scott-Warren, *Early Modern English Literature*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2005, p. 69.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. H. Love, *The Culture and Commerce of Texts. Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1993, pp. 179-180.

a mocking and self-mocking freedom that was part of his poetic and courtly persona, of his constant striving towards *sprezzatura*. His freedom with his sources would have been ideally appreciated by his audience, and he could count on intelligent response in his idiosyncratic ‘republic of letters’. The reaction to his use of Sannazaro’s *Arcadia* highlights the prominent role Sidney played in his own circle.

### 3. *The Sidney Circle*

A derivative of the word *Arcadia* appears for the first time in the title of a book printed in England not with the appearance of Sidney’s own romance (first published as *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* in 1590), but slightly earlier, with a much less known work composed by a protégé of the Sidney circle, Abraham Fraunce.<sup>32</sup> A Cambridge scholar and a lawyer, Fraunce dedicated all his numerous works “to members of Sir Philip Sidney’s circle: Sidney himself, his sister Mary and brother Robert, Mary’s husband the earl of Pembroke, or their friend Edward Dyer”.<sup>33</sup> His *Arcadian rhetorike*, printed in 1588, included quotations from Spenser’s as yet unpublished *Faerie Queene*, as well as from a number of classical and contemporary sources, but was indebted above all to the poetry of Philip Sidney. The full title of Fraunce’s work reads *The Arcadian rhetorike: or The praecepts of rhetorike made plaine by examples Greeke, Latin,*

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<sup>32</sup> The following year, George Peele also published a very short work which contained the word *Arcadia* in the title, though within a widely different context: *An eglogue. gratulatorie. Entituled: To the right honorable, and renowned Shepheard of Albions Arcadia: Robert Earle of Essex and Ewe, for his vvelcome into England from Portugall. Done by George Peele. Maister of arts in Oxon.*, London, Richard Jones, 1589.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. W. Barker, *Fraunce, Abraham (1559?-1592/3?)*, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: from the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and B. Harrison, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, vol. 20, pp. 888-889.

*English, Italian, French, Spanish, out of Homers Ilias, and Odissea, Virgils Aeglogs, Georgikes and Aeneis, Songs and Sonets, Torquato Tassoës Goffredo, Aminta, Torrismondo, Salust his Iudith, and both his Semaines, Boscan and Garcilassoës Sonets and Aeglogs.*<sup>34</sup> In the same years, Fraunce also composed a Ramist treatise on dialectic, *The shepheardes logike*,<sup>35</sup> using literary examples from Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*. He would also compose, in later years, pastoral poems, for which he was best remembered by the poets of the following generation. Like *The shepheardes logike*, Fraunce's *Arcadian rhetorike* is also indebted to Peter Ramus, whose re-definition of rhetoric and dialectic found particular favour in the Cambridge circle to which both Sidney and Fraunce belonged.<sup>36</sup> Fraunce's rhetorical manual is, in fact, little more than a summary of Ramist principles,<sup>37</sup> and would present little of interest to modern readers, were it not for the examples he chooses in order to illustrate his various points. His work is, in reality, of interest insofar as its original trait is "the idea of an illustrative poetic anthology".<sup>38</sup> For each point taken from Ramus' division Fraunce inserts a number of examples in Greek, Latin, Italian, French and Spanish, all with their sources carefully noted: interestingly, his range of poets, though impressive, is severely limited, far from the all-embracing inclusiveness evident in Sidney's *Defence*. Rather than a 'house of fame' hosting a crowd of witnesses to the

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<sup>34</sup> London, Thomas Orwin, 1588.

<sup>35</sup> The text survives in manuscript form (London, British Library, Additional MS 34361).

<sup>36</sup> See W. S. Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1956, pp. 173-281 and T. A. Goeglein, "Wherein hath Ramus been so offensive?": *Poetic Examples in the English Ramist Logic Manuals*, in "Rhetorica", 1996, pp. 73-101.

<sup>37</sup> See A. Petrina, *Polyglottia and the Vindication of English Poetry: Abraham Fraunce's Arcadian Rhetorike*, in "Neophilologus", LXXXIII, 1999, pp. 317-329.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. E. Seaton, *Introduction*, in A. Fraunce, *The Arcadian Rhetorike*, Edited from the Edition of 1588 by E. Seaton, Oxford, Blackwell (Luttrell Society), 1950, p. XVIII.

development of poetry, Fraunce prefers to build a temple, the pinnacle of which is obviously Sir Philip Sidney himself.

What is most interesting in this work, in fact, is the addition of English poets to the examples – English poets who are not mentioned in the title. *Piers Plowman* is quoted once, and two quotations refer to the poetic production of Richard Willes, a very minor figure in Elizabethan letters who was incorporated MA at Cambridge in 1578,<sup>39</sup> a circumstance which could be the means through which he entered in touch with Fraunce and possibly with the Sidney circle. Edmund Spenser is also quoted, and two of the three passages from his poetry used by Fraunce are from the *Shepherdes Calender*, as was to be expected; but one quotation comes from book II of the *Faerie Queene*, at a time in which the poem was still unpublished and Spenser was still in Ireland.<sup>40</sup> This confirms our hypothesis that Fraunce was, at the time, an integral part of the Sidney circle, and had access to manuscripts such as Spenser's. However, by far the largest part of English quotations comes from the works of Philip Sidney, or rather, from one work: *Arcadia*. In actual fact, though none of Sidney's works had obviously been published at the time, Fraunce is able to quote from both *Arcadia* and the poems (the celebrated *Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show*, the sonnet opening *Astrophil and Stella*, makes an appearance); yet, by drawing most of his material from the former (in fact, using especially the *Old Arcadia*, and even quoting long passages in prose), he offers the reader what would be "one of the chief

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<sup>39</sup> See A. Payne, *Willes, Richard (1546–1579?)*, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: from the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, cit., vol. 59, p. 26.

<sup>40</sup> See E. Seaton, *Introduction*, cit., p. XL.

attractions of this book in 1588, brought out while Sidney's memory was still green".<sup>41</sup>

In this context, though it should be noted that Fraunce is careful to omit any mention of Sidney's possible sources for his romance, the absence of Sannazaro is especially striking, especially in view of the fact that Fraunce inserts in the title the explicit allusion to Arcadia. It is also notable that, among Italian poets, he would eschew any mention of Petrarch, the obvious choice at the time, and rather concentrate on Torquato Tasso, whose *Aminta* was fast becoming another and possibly a more influential model for English pastoral poetry. If, therefore, pastoral verse finds a number of illustrious forefathers in this treatise, from Virgil to "Garcilasso",<sup>42</sup> the word Arcadia itself appears to be exclusively linked to Sidney's poetic output. The treatise, with its all-embracing title, constructs an "Arcadian", poetic space, a splendidly multilingual setting in which the poet and patron who had died so tragically and heroically could find his deserved place. It may even be hypothesised that, by dedicating his *Rhetorike* to the Countess of Pembroke, who presumably had in her possession the manuscript of Sidney's romance, Fraunce was responding to the grief of his patroness with a delicate literary gift, evoking "tuum, quem tolse la morte, Philippum",<sup>43</sup> as the poet is called in the extraordinarily polyglot dedication.

It is, I believe, particularly appropriate to examine this phenomenon within the context of a journal dedicated to *purloined letters*. What Fraunce proposes, with the unwitting collaboration of Sidney, is a purloined word

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. XXXV. On Fraunce's access to and use of Sidney's manuscript of *Arcadia*, see H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts 1558-1640*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, pp. 338-340.

<sup>42</sup> Garcilaso de la Vega (1501-36), whose poetry was much influenced by Sannazaro, and whose life as a soldier-poet has interesting similarities with Sidney's.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. A. Fraunce, *The Arcadian Rhetorike*, cit., p. 2.

from Sannazaro's works, and the silence in which the name of Sannazaro is shrouded contributes to the glorification of the English poet. Arcadia is occasionally mentioned in medieval English literature, for instance in the anonymous fifteenth-century translation of Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon*, where we read that "Men of Arcadia [...] be transfigure in deserte in to wulfes",<sup>44</sup> or in Geoffrey Chaucer's translation of Boethius' *De Consolatione philosophiae*, in which Mercury, in a faithful rendering of the original, is called "the bridde of Arcadye".<sup>45</sup> Lydgate also alludes to Arcadia, both in his *Troy Book* and in *The Fall of Princes*, in both cases with reference to the labour of Hercules: in the first case the harpies Hercules fled are called "briddes of Archadye", in the second it is the serpent of Lerna which is said to have "Aryued up off Archadie".<sup>46</sup> On all occasions the allusion is obviously to the wild, even dangerous region that was known to medieval readers; even Lydgate, possibly the greatest reader and collector of classical and contemporary lore, ignored the pastoral connotation Virgil gives to the name of Arcadia, and rather referred to Ovid's description of the wild region, as it appears in the *Fasti*. It may be added that this oblivion is not unique to medieval English poetry; Italian medieval writers also appear to have overlooked Arcadia, with the possible exception of Giovanni Boccaccio in his *Ninfale d'Ameto*.

The Arcadia that will become a recurring *topos* in English literature from the Renaissance onwards, is therefore Sannazaro's own, but Sidney's

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden monachi cestrensis: together with the English translations of John Trevisa and of an unknown writer of the fifteenth century*, Edited by C. Babington and J. R. Lumby, London, Longman Green and Co., 1869, vol. 2, p. 423.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. G. Chaucer, *Boece*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by L. D. Benson, 3rd edn, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987<sup>3</sup>, p. 446 (IV, m. 3, 18).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. J. Lydgate, *Troy Book*, Edited by H. Bergen, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1906, p. 28 (I, 584) and Id., *Fall of Princes*, Edited by H. Bergen, London, Oxford University Press, 1924, p. 152 (I, 5421).

unwitting theft condemns the Neapolitan poet to comparative obscurity among English writers in the following centuries. As recently noted, readers have often felt uneasy with Sidney's depiction of Arcadia: "a chorus of voices has protested that Sidney's Arcadia is not pastoral enough".<sup>47</sup> It is easy to see that there is a contrast between the common conception of Arcadia as an idyllic setting, and Sidney's tale of conspiracies and betrayals. Earlier scholars have simply seen this as a conflict between the writer and his chosen form, in that "even more obviously than other English poets, Sidney sees the structure of pastoral romance as inherently problematic".<sup>48</sup> V. L. Forsyth argues for a more complex and nuanced situation, analysing the influence on *Arcadia* of Polybius' *Historiae*,<sup>49</sup> an influence contrasting that of Sannazaro, and presenting an Arcadia which is "not just a timeless idyll but a state with a complex economy and social structure".<sup>50</sup> However, it may be a simplification to claim that Sannazaro's work "is only concerned with aesthetic beauty, both in its form and in its subject, although the pastoral genre may originally have expressed more complex themes".<sup>51</sup> Indeed, it has been argued, more convincingly, that the pastoral mode incorporates also a useful strategy for Sannazaro: "it is a hybrid mode that incorporates elements of monologue, dialogue, narrative action, philosophical reflection, satiric commentary, and a host of other forms, it integrates several varieties

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. V. L. Forsyth, *The Two Arcadias of Sidney's Two Arcadias*, in "Studies in English Literature", XLIX, 2009, p 1.

<sup>48</sup> See J. Haber, *Pastoral and the Poetics of Self-contradiction. Theocritus to Marvell*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 53.

<sup>49</sup> See V. L. Forsyth, *Polybius's Histories: An Overlooked Source for Sidney's Arcadia*, in "Sidney Journal", XXI, 2003, pp. 59-65.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. D. Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance*, revised edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 85-86.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. V. L. Forsyth, *The Two Arcadias of Sidney's Two Arcadias*, cit., p. 6.

of genre, style, and mode".<sup>52</sup> Thus, it created thus a useful poetic and narrative laboratory, within which a sophisticated and genre-aware writer such as Sidney could feel free to explore new forms of expression. Sannazaro's influence on Sidney's *Arcadia*, as has been noted, is especially evident in the eclogues,<sup>53</sup> not simply because individual images or passages are used, but because Sidney makes use of Sannazaro's device of stopping any action and devoting his characters to pure contemplation and lament. Inserted in a convoluted and fast-moving romance such as the *Old Arcadia*, this mood creates intervals of lyrical beauty, which appear to be particularly suitable to the game of citation and of literary recognition. Thus the purloined word opened the way to a new genre, but also to an original mode of poetic experimentation, on the part of Sidney but also of some of his contemporaries.

Sidney's work did not inspire only Abraham Fraunce's eulogistic treatise. Pastoral poetry enjoyed a vogue in late sixteenth-century England, with works such as Thomas Watson's *Amyntas*, written in the 1580s and rendered into English by Abraham Fraunce in *The Lamentations for the Death of Phillis*, published in 1587 and then incorporated into *The Countesse of Pembrokes Yuychurch* (1591).<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, Sannazaro's name has only recently become a matter of scholarly interest for critics working on Sidney's poetry, while late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century pastoral in England developed in almost complete forgetfulness of its Italian originator. There is, in the years immediately

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. W. J. Kennedy, *Jacopo Sannazaro and the Uses of Pastoral*, Hanover, University Press of New England, 1983, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> See D. Kalstone, *The Transformation of Arcadia: Sannazaro and Sir Philip Sidney*, cit., p. 244.

<sup>54</sup> See D. F. Sutton, *Introduction*, in Th. Watson, *Amyntas*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Watson (1556-1592)*, Edited by D. F. Sutton, Lewiston, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996, vol. I, pp. 279-284.



following Sidney's death, at least one interesting exception to this generalized indifference. It is Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia* (1598), a moral and critical treatise now best remembered for its painstaking enumeration of English poets. Sannazaro appears in a section titled *A comparatiue discourse of our English Poets, with the Greeke, Latine, and Italian Poets*, which opens with these lines:

“As Greece had three Poets of great antiquity, *Orpheus, Linus* and *Musæus*; and *Italy* other three auncient poets, *Liuius Andronicus, Ennius & Plautus*: so hath England three auncient Poets, *Chaucer, Gower* and *Lydgate*.

As *Homer* is reputed the Prince of Greek Poets; and *Petrarch* of Italian Poets: so *Chaucer* is accounted the God of English Poets.

As *Homer* was the first that adorned the Greek tongue with true quantity: so *Piers Plowman* was the first that obserued the true quantitie of our verse without the curiositie of rime.”<sup>55</sup>

Meres' short, staccato sentences underline the prescriptive nature of his treatise, which echoes with far less grace what had already been suggested in Sidney's *Defence*: by examining the great poets of the past we can also find a place for recent and contemporary English poets, and the virtues we associate with classical authors may pass down to their literary inheritors. Sannazaro's name appears much later in the section, though not, as would be expected, as soon as pastoral poetry is mentioned, a passage in which Spenser's immediate and indeed sole predecessors appear to be Theocritus and Virgil:

“As *Theocritus* is famed for his *Idyllia* in Greeke, and *Virgill* for his *Eclogs* in Latine: so *Spencer* their imitatur in his *Shepherd's Calender*, is renowned for the like argument, and honoured for fine Poeticall inuention and most exquisit wit.”<sup>56</sup>

Instead, Sannazaro's name features only (and woefully misspelt)

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<sup>55</sup> F. Meres, *Palladis tamia Wits treasury being the second part of Wits common wealth*, London, P. Short for Cuthbert Burbie, 1598, pp. 279-280.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 280.

towards the end of the section, where the list of names produces an effect of tired *accumulatio*:

“As *Theocritus* in Greek, *Virgil* and *Mantuan* in Latine, *Sonazar* in Italian, and the Authour of *Amintæ Gaudia* and *Walsingham’s Melibæus* are the best for pastorall: so amongst vs the best in this kind are Sir *Philip Sidney*, Master *Challener*, *Spencer*, *Stephen Gosson*, *Abraham Fraunce*, and *Barnefield*.”<sup>57</sup>

Here the names of the two classical initiators of pastoral poetry are repeated in the opening words; Sannazaro is, as it were, buried beneath a host of English poets (including some truly minor ones) that successfully carry off the inheritance and the very name of pastoral.

But the most significant allusion to the Neapolitan poet, apart from Sidney’s own words in the *Defence*, appears in Edmund Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calender*, a work completed shortly before Sidney wrote his first version of *Arcadia*, and, as we have seen, mentioned (if only sporadically) in Fraunce’s homage to his patron. There are several passages in the *Calender* in which Spenser imitates Sannazaro: thus, for instance, it has been noted that Colin Clout’s opening invocation to the Gods of Love closely follows Carino’s prayer to the “*idii del cielo e de la terra*” in *Arcadia*,<sup>58</sup> though in both cases the writers rely on rather worn *topoi*. A number of other imitations from Sannazaro have been noted throughout Spenser’s works, in some cases reworked through the intermediary French versions by Clement Marot.<sup>59</sup> Yet once again Sannazaro is not named in the poem, but he appears, surprisingly, in the dedicatory letter, signed by one E. K. whose identity still remains a mystery. The long dedication is to Gabriel Harvey, called “the most excellent and learned both Orator and

<sup>57</sup> Ibidem, p. 284.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. I. Sannazaro, *Arcadia*, cit., p. 137. See F. Torraca, *Gl’imitatori stranieri di Jacopo Sannazaro*, cit., p. 72.

<sup>59</sup> See ibidem, pp. 72-76.

Poete”.<sup>60</sup> Sannazaro’s name appears in the discussion of Eclogues, explaining Spenser’s choice of this genre as most suitable for a first poetic attempt, before moving to graver matters, as do “young birdes, that be newly crept out of the nest”:

“So flew Theocritus, as you may perceiue he was all ready full fledged. So flew Virgile, as not yet well feeling his winges. So flew Mantuane, as being not full somd. So Petrarque. So Boccace; So Marot, Sanazarus, and also diuers other excellent both Italian and French Poetes, whose foting this Author euery where followeth, yet so as few, but they wel be sented can trace him out.”<sup>61</sup>

It should be noted that Spenser appears, in Sidney’s definition of pastoral, inserted in the *Defense*. In the quotation opening this article, Sidney writes that “The Shepheards Kalender, hath much *Poetrie* in his Egloges, indeed woorthie the reading, if I be not deceived”, though he hastens to add that “That same framing of his style to an olde rusticke language, I dare not allow”, since the classical sources he is obviously taking as models (Theocritus, Virgil, Sannazaro) had not practised it. The two English writers are therefore extremely wary of using the pastoral genre and claiming its canonization; “E. K.” hides his name in an oddly contorted *captatio benevolentiae* that hastens to disclaim any seriousness on the part of the *Calender*; Sidney chastises Spenser for the same fault, that is, an essentially juvenile attempt at experimentation that is an integral part of the development of a fully-fledged poet. Sannazaro therefore was given due recognition only in the *Defense*, but the web of citations surrounding this work appears to underplay his role or indeed, sometimes, his value.

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. E. Spenser, *The Shepheardes Calender*, in Id., *The Poetical Works*, Edited with Critical Notes by J. C. Smith and E. de Selincourt, With an Introduction by E. de Selincourt and a Glossary, London, Oxford University Press, 1912, p. 416 (Epistle).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 418 (Epistle).

“With its evocation of ancient forms, pastoral is a literature of allusion where allusion enables the author and the audience to share their awareness of a common source”.<sup>62</sup> Sidney and his scribal community offer us a fascinating example of a triangulation between the ancient form, the modern writer and the intermediary source – Sannazaro’s *Arcadia* – in a game in which silence is the most evident recognition of a debt.

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. W. J. Kennedy, *Jacopo Sannazaro and the Uses of Pastoral*, cit., p. 7.

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