The Circulation of Sir Philip Sidney’s Arcadia

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In most cases with writers of the English Renaissance, the problems faced by editors revolve around the relative absence of textual evidence. With Shakespeare, for example, half of his plays survive in only one substantive printed edition, nearly half in two editions, and just one in three. Editors have sought to resolve how these printed editions (mainly quartos and the First Folio) relate to each other and how they might derive from lost authorial and playhouse manuscripts: the lack of firm evidence has produced a mountain of competing textual and editorial theories. In the period, there are only a few authors—Samuel Daniel might be taken to be one—for whom scholars agree that too much material survives, material that overwhelms an editor or someone trying to make sense of a writer’s literary career. This contrasts notably with both earlier and later ages in which scholars wrestle with large quantities of evidence to produce coherent accounts of the relationships between and the evolution of the texts of The Canterbury Tales or of Piers Plowman, of Coleridge’s or of Wordsworth’s poems, of Yeats’s poetical works, of Ulysses, or of The Waste Land. One notable exception to this rough rule from the Renaissance is Philip Sidney’s Arcadia.

In thinking about this work, the reader is faced with at least three versions of the romance: there is the five-book completed Old Arcadia (OA); the incomplete New Arcadia (NA) which comes to an end in mid-sentence in the middle of Book 3; and what is often called the “hybrid” Arcadia, in which the extant part of NA is followed by material drawn from the second part of OA (see Borris ARC 2:6). Many (but not all) readers would accept that these are not versions of the same work—in the way that it is generally thought by those who believe in a theory of authorial revision that the Quarto and Folio King Lear are—but in effect different works, even if they involve similar settings, similar characters, similar plot elements, and some of the same prose and poems.

The three main versions are witnessed by a significant number of manuscripts of OA and one of NA, a printed edition of NA published in 1590, and one of the hybrid Arcadia published in 1593 that was reprinted in 1598 and 1605 and in a slightly revised form in 1613. Some of the poems from the Arcadia also survive in substantive texts in manuscript miscellanies and in printed books from the period. It also needs to be remembered that these witnesses are bulky: OA consists of around 200,000 words, and NA of more than 250,000. Much of this material was made available in an edited form in the edition of Sidney’s writings undertaken by Albert Feuillerat for Cambridge University Press between 1912 and 1926, which included the first publication of a manuscript version of the complete OA. A fuller consideration of the then-known texts of the Arcadias was undertaken by William A. Ringler, Jr. for his edition of Sidney’s poems published by the Clarendon Press in 1962. This was supplemented and modified by Jean Robertson and Victor Skretkowicz in their respective editions of OA and...
NA published in 1973 and 1987. During the half-century or so that has passed since Ringler’s edition of the poems, new approaches to editing and textual histories have developed, not least in the current understanding of scribal publication and the circulation of works in manuscript. Ringler’s brilliant analysis of the evolution of the Arcadias has been modified and challenged by successive editors as well as by scholars and critics.

Three overlapping approaches have been used to try to make sense of all the material that survives relating to the Arcadias. The first was collation, the classical analysis of textual variants between and across the witnesses; this lets the editor create a stemma representing the physical descent or genealogy of texts from an (usually lost) authorial original. Once a stemma allows the textual relations of the different witnesses to be graphically represented, a second approach is to think about the provenance of those witnesses, their scribes, and former owners. The aim of this is to see if, through a sort of archaeology of the book, more light can be shed on the historical relationships of the witnesses that have been established by collation. The third approach seeks to unravel the history of the Arcadias by a minute critical examination of the evolution of the text, especially by looking at Sidney’s revisions of narrative technique and his handling of plot. All these approaches have produced useful and important results—not least in the three principal modern editions of the poems and of the romance—but they do not always produce the same results. In the end it may seem that how Sidney worked and how he created and revised the Arcadias remains elusive. As often happens, what once seemed to be clear and elegant solutions to textual problems appear less certain the more closely the text is interrogated, especially when new witnesses are discovered and surviving material is more closely scrutinized.

Collation and Stemma

In his edition of the poems, Ringler knew of nine extant manuscripts of OA and one of NA. The manuscripts, with their usual sigla, the names by which they are known (when these are not simply of their current owners) and their numbers in Peter Beal’s Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts, 1450–1700, were these (arranged in the order in which he thought they had been produced):

- **Old Arcadia**
  - Je: Bodl. MS Jesus College 150 (SiP 93)
  - Qu: Queen’s College, Oxford, MS 301 (SiP 101)
  - Da: BL Add. MS 41204: the Davies MS (SiP 95)
  - Ph: BL Add. MS 38892: the Phillipps MS (SiP 94)
  - Cl: Folger Library, Washington, DC, MS H.b.1—the Clifford MS (SiP 97)
  - Le: BL Add. MS 41498—the Lee MS (SiP 96)
  - As: Huntington Library, San Marino, California, HM 162—the Ashburnham MS (SiP 99)
  - St: St. John’s College, Cambridge, MS I. 7 (SiP 102)
  - Bo: Bodl. MS e Mus. 37 (SiP 92)
- **New Arcadia**
  - Cm: Cambridge University Library, MS Kk. 1. 5 (2) (SiP 103)

After the edition was in page-proof, another OA manuscript was discovered:

- Hm: BL Add. MS 61821—the Helmingham MS (SiP 98)
This brought the total of known OA manuscripts to ten.

Ringler’s collation of these witnesses allowed him to construct a stemma which suggested the following history of the work’s development. Using a term borrowed from discussions of the manuscripts of Shakespeare’s plays, Ringler deduced that the “foul papers” of Sidney’s original manuscript of OA were first made (either by Sidney himself or by a scribe) into a manuscript (P) for his sister, the Countess of Pembroke. Sidney also then had a scribal transcript (T) made of those “foul papers”: this went through various stages of revisions, with further manuscripts being copied from it at each stage, either directly or through lost intermediaries (X and Y). Each stage (T^1–5) marked a distinct moment in the process of revision, until a final version (T^5) was created. In the meantime, dissatisfied with OA, Sidney recast it to create the NA. The new work’s “foul papers” were quite separate from the OA “foul papers.” The NA “foul papers” were transcribed into a manuscript (G) for Sidney’s friend Fulke Greville. In the preparation of G, T^5 was also consulted, and G, with some material from T^5 and a “direction” outlining “how and why” the work was to be amended that Sidney had left Greville, supplied the text for the edition of NA that Greville and his associates produced and which was printed in 1590. G was also for some reason copied by a scribe to produce Cm.

So much can be said about Greville’s immediate involvement with the work. After 1590 was published, the Countess of Pembroke determined herself to publish an improved edition of her brother’s work. She produced an edited and corrected version of the first part of the work, based on 1590, but she also consulted a manuscript of NA which appears to have been Cm. For the second part of the work she drew on her own scribal manuscript, P, derived from her brother’s “foul papers,” which represented an earlier stage of the work before T was made. The text of the hybrid Arcadia witnessed in 1593 was reprinted in 1598, in an edition produced at Edinburgh in 1599 and 1605. In 1613 an edition was printed that derived from 1598 but, to improve its text, the volume’s unknown editor consulted either 1590 or 1593 and an OA manuscript related to T^5.

Jean Robertson modified Ringler’s account in a few important particulars, but the essential history that he had provided was confirmed. The scribal transcript T in which Sidney’s revisions were made was retained, but the order in which Bo and St, the descendants of T^5, were made was reversed so that St represented the later witness, and hence supplied Robertson with the copy-text for her edition of OA. More significantly in some ways, the NA “foul papers” were directly created out of T^5, instead of being used along with T^5 in the creation of G. Furthermore, although she agreed with Ringler that in creating 1593 the Countess drew on 1590 and P, Robertson modified his account by saying that the Countess used G rather than Cm and that she drew directly on T^5—thus she used both the earliest and latest states of her brother’s revisions of OA.

Within a few years of the publication of Robertson’s edition another new manuscript containing several poems from OA, as well as other pieces by and attributed to Sidney and his note on the writing of verse, was discovered and published (Beal, “Poems”; Robertson):

- Ot: National Library of Wales, Pitchford Hall (Ottley) English Literary MSS (uncatalogued), B B1—the Ottley MS (SiP 100)

Collation showed that the poems and prose in Ot were descendants of T^5.

Just under a decade after this discovery, Victor Skretkowicz produced his edition of NA. This was based on a radical reinterpretation of the evidence that Ringler and Robertson had analyzed. Skretkowicz’s main change was altogether to abolish T, the scribal transcript that Sidney continuously revised, and to reject the idea that P, the transcript made for the
Countess, played any part in the creation of the printed texts. He went on to argue that there was only ever one set of working papers for both OA and NA. He called this A, and sought to show that all the surviving OA manuscripts derived from it, so that the same document supplied the text from which Cm, 1590, and 1593 all derived—G, Greville’s copy, was eliminated. In other words, there was only ever one manuscript from which Sidney worked—it was autograph, not scribal—and it contained every stage of revision from OA to NA and “hybrid” Arcadias. Despite this revolutionary analysis, based on collation, Skretkowicz’s edition did not take its textual arguments to their logical conclusion, and he produced a version of the romance based on 1590 rather than on 1593.

Since the publication of Skretkowicz’s edition, evidence of one more OA manuscript has surfaced—a single discarded leaf containing a complete and a partial poem, as well as some prose (Woudhuysen, “New Manuscript”):

- Hu: Cambridgeshire Record Office, Huddleston Papers 488/M [R92/88]: the Huddleston MS (SiP 102.3)

Collation has not allowed the textual affiliations of this fragment, canceled because of a scribal eye-skip error, to be determined.

Of course, this summary can only provide a very basic outline of the competing theories put forward by the main editors of the Arcadias for the works’ circulation in manuscript and in print. It cannot begin to account for the hours of collating that they undertook in order to produce the detail of the thousands of textual changes—some large and some very small—for which they had to supply a rationale. The issues surrounding this textual history relate not just to how to edit the work, but to seeking to recover Sidney’s changing conceptions of it and to deciding which of the extant versions most accurately represents its author’s incomplete plans for it. In other words, there are questions here concerning which version(s) to edit and which to read.

It is hardly surprising that Sidney’s editors sought to defend and to amplify their editorial decisions. Ringler did so, relatively briefly, in a restatement of his procedures and a review of the then-known witnesses to the text (“The Text”). Robertson never published again about the general problems the Arcadias posed to editors or about her own edition. Thirteen years after his edition was published, however, Skretkowicz wrote a long article in which, while defending his procedures for that edition, he argued that 1593 “is the best possible representation of the completest form of Sidney’s entire text” (“Textual Criticism” 38). His argument was that changes made to the OA parts of 1593 were not introduced by the Countess and her assistant Hugh Sanford, but by Sidney himself (41, 47, 50)—a view that he believed was reported on an inserted leaf in the 1613 edition. Thus 1593 “represents in its entirety the nearest text we shall ever get to Sidney’s final concept of his romance … [his] most mature, albeit incomplete, reflections on his text” (69–70). In the article Skretkowicz went to some lengths to report Robertson’s acceptance of the editorial theories that underlay his edition of NA, but he could not say whether she would have accepted his strong advocacy of the integrity of 1593, whose readings, he believed, should be purged from any new edition of OA as belonging to a later stage of the work’s evolution. In a later essay (“From Alpha-text”) Skretkowicz defended his editorial procedures, looked again at some features of 1593, and presented Sidney “as an author who, as a critical reader of his own work, embraced a ‘complete’ meta-textual vision” which is enshrined in what he called the “1593 meta-text version” (25, 27).

1 Personal communication, 5 January 2000.
Provenance

A second way of looking at the Arcadias seeks to build on the textual investigations of all three editors. By closely examining the manuscript and printed versions of the work(s), it is hoped that light can be shed on how these material objects came into being and what they can tell us about their earliest owners and readers. The editors did a certain amount of this sort of investigation, but the growth in interest in manuscript culture and in scribal publication means that these editorial accounts of provenance and ownership can be improved, although the results are not always as revealing and straightforward as one might like.

For the moment, much of this information can be briefly summarized from my book Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts, 1558–1640, published in 1996 (esp. 317–55, 393–406). Again, taking the manuscripts in the corrected order in which they were listed above:

- Je: a now-incomplete MS written in a single hand. It belonged to the Thelwall family, of which there were two branches. One was of Plas-y-ward, Llanynys, near Denbigh in North Wales, the other, also in Denbighshire, was of Bathafarn Park, Llanrhuadd. Both branches were literary, with social and political links in London and at the universities. The Welsh connection may be significant in relation to the Sidney family’s involvement with the area.

- Hm: a MS, written in a single elegant hand, that includes a text of Sidney’s entertainment The Lady of May. It was finely bound for Sir Lionel Tollemache (1562–1612), the first baronet, who lived at Helmingham Hall in Suffolk. The Tollemaches were interested in music and may have entertained Queen Elizabeth in 1578, but no direct contact is known between the family and the Sidneys.

Je and Hm both derive from a lost original (X), but there are no known links between the Thelwalls and the Tollemaches to explain this shared provenance.

- Qu: like Hm from which it was copied, this MS is finely bound, sharing the same center- and corner-pieces as Hm, as well as some of the same or similar paper stocks. Qu can be associated with Henry Berkeley (1534–1613), seventh Lord Berkeley, who had some interest in the Sidney family and may well have known other parts of Sidney’s writing. Although Qu is a copy of Hm, no links can be established between the Tollemaches and the Berkeleys.

- Da: this MS is mainly written in a single hand, and may have an East Anglian provenance, possibly deriving from the Paston family of Oxnead and Appleton in Norfolk. The Pastons were a recusant family, very interested in music, and their associations with Penelope Rich and William Byrd suggest a link to Sidney. At one time Da belonged to Thomas Martin (1697–1771), of Palgrave, Suffolk, who also owned the Norwich manuscript of A Defence of Poetry, for which, see Cm.

- Ph: this MS is written in two hands. One belongs to John Harington’s scribe Thomas Combe; the other is that of John’s brother Francis. Harington added some words and passages to the MS in his own hand. The MS is headed “A treatis made by Sir Phillip Sydney Knght of certeyn accidents in Arcadia. made in the yeer 1580 and emparted to some few of his frends. in his lyfe tyme and to more sense his vnfortunat deceasse,” suggesting a date after 1586. Harington, who had a good collection of Sidney’s works in MS, was evidently on close terms with Robert Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke (Alexander, Writing After Sidney 130–4). Harington also lived close to Philip Sidney’s friend Sir Edward Dyer.
Cl: this MS, which includes *Certain Sonnets*, is written in the hand of Richard Robinson (1544/45–1603), a professional scribe and author. Robinson was patronized by Sir Henry and Philip Sidney. Contemporary signatures in the MS indicate that it might be associated with: the Clifford family, whose members included Anne Clifford (1590–1676), the daughter of George Clifford (1558–1605), the third Earl of Cumberland (Robinson copied accounts of his many voyages); John Lloyd (c. 1558–1603), who worked for the Pembroke family at Wilton; and Arthur Throckmorton (c. 1557–1626), a courtier who knew Robert Sidney while he was on his Continental tour in 1580.

Le: a MS of some of the poems and of a prose passage from Book 2 in a single hand. The MS clearly belonged to Queen Elizabeth’s Champion, Sir Henry Lee (1533–1611). Lee and Sidney would have known each other at court, since both were involved in tilts and other such chivalric entertainments.

As: a MS written mainly in two hands, with the signature of Robert Walker, who was Sir Henry Sidney’s treasurer from 1575 until c. 1583. The MS may have originated from Penshurst.

Ot: a MS containing twenty-four poems and the “Nota” on writing verse, along with other poems by and attributed to Sidney. It belonged to the Ottley family, who came from Shropshire and lived at Pitchford Hall. The MS may be in the hand of Arthur Ottley (d. 1586), who entered Shrewsbury School before Sidney did; Arthur’s older brother Thomas was also there, as were their two nephews, who overlapped with Sidney’s youngest brother Thomas.

Bo: this MS is written in two hands, and also contains a text of *Certain Sonnets*, at the end of which the scribe has added what are presumably his initials, “IB.” His identity and the early history of the MS are otherwise unknown.

St: like Cl, this MS, written in a single hand, includes some of *Certain Sonnets*. Collation establishes that it was used by Abraham Fraunce for his quotations from *OA* in *The Arcadian Rhetorike* [1588]. Fraunce (1559?–1592/93?) had first met Sidney in 1580 or 1581, and St may have belonged to the Countess of Pembroke, who gave it to him in 1588, before he went to Ludlow.

Hu: a discarded fragment of a lost MS, written in the hand of John Paxton, steward to Sir Edmund Huddleston (c. 1536–1606), of Sawston Hall, Cambridgeshire. Huddleston was a prominent recusant with property in Cambridgeshire and London. The leaf was later used in the binding of a MS terrier, dated 10 May 1580, of Huddleston’s lands.

Cm: an incomplete manuscript of *NA* with blank spaces left for some poems, written in a distinctive italic hand and quite elaborately decorated. The same scribe wrote the Norwich manuscript of *A Defence of Poetry* (Norfolk Record Office, MS 10837 P138B [SIP 176]) which, like Da, was at one time owned by Thomas Martin (1697–1771), of Palgrave, Suffolk.

At least one further, untraced manuscript that may be related to *OA* is known once to have existed:

Untraced I: a copy, “neatly written and apparently prepared for the press,” in three octavo volumes, offered for sale by Thomas Thorpe in his *Catalogue of
Manuscripts upon Papyrus, Vellum and Paper (1843), item 582, and in subsequent sale catalogues until 1850 (SiP 102.8)

All these manuscript witnesses to the Arcadias should be supplemented by what is known about the production of the early printed editions:

- 1590: edited by Greville, Matthew Gwinne (1558–1627), and John Florio (1553–1625), printed by John Windet for William Ponsonby. In November 1586 Ponsonby approached Greville with the news that “ther was one in hand to print” OA. Greville then wrote to Sir Francis Walsingham, Sidney’s father-in-law, asking him to stay its printing (Woudhuysen, Sir Philip Sidney 416). The appeal was evidently successful. It seems likely that a note on sig. A4v about the division of the work into chapters and the arrangement of the eclogues was added at some stage during the book’s production.
- 1593: edited by the Countess of Pembroke and Hugh Sanford (d. 1607), printed by John Windet for William Ponsonby. The book’s bibliographical history remains largely unexplored.
- 1613: possibly edited by the Countess of Pembroke, and printed by Humphrey Lownes for Simon Waterson and in another issue for Matthew Lownes. The book’s bibliographical history remains largely unexplored.

There is still much that needs to be discovered about the histories of these witnesses. The online cataloguing of archives and libraries, as well as the ability to search digitized copies of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century printed books, will assist in this process. A full collation of copies of the early prints would also help in the reconstruction of their printing histories.

Textual Evolution

The third way of looking at the evolution of the Arcadias is to examine how Sidney reused some of the OA’s prose passages in NA and in the “hybrid” version of 1593. Anyone who has attempted to mark up a printed copy of OA with the sorts of changes that were made to its text to produce NA will quickly realize that such a task was enormously complicated. Research into the order in which he undertook this work and how he carried it out can be dated back to Zandvoort’s 1929 comparison between OA and NA. More recently, several scholars have paid attention to various aspects of the subject.

Sukanta Chaudhuri has argued that the prose surrounding the first two sets of eclogues in 1590 shows that they were probably arranged by Sidney himself, and not by the “ouer-seer,” as the volume’s preliminary note claimed (“The Eclogues”; Woudhuysen, Sir Philip Sidney 313). Chaudhuri’s article had important implications for Skretkowicz’s edition, since he relegated the eclogues to an appendix, arguing that they were an editorial artifact. Unfortunately, Skretkowicz did not refer to Chaudhuri’s article in his edition of NA nor in his long defense of 1593 (“Textual Criticism”) nor in his later account of 1593 (“From Alpha-text”).

2 SiP 102.5, Beal’s Untraced, [Arcadia MS (1)], formerly owned by Thomas Martin, can now be identified with Yale, Osborn b 107, a continuation of the Arcadia in the form of a political allegory and dating from c. 1650; see Potter 93–4. This corrects the speculations in Woudhuysen, Sir Philip Sidney 350–51.
A wider-ranging examination of how Sidney turned OA into NA has been attempted by Regina Schneider (Sidney’s [Re]Writing esp. 1–35). Her arguments suggest that Sidney began OA by writing self-contained scenes which were eventually incorporated in parts of the Eclogues. He then worked on the creation of a five-book or act narrative which was interspersed by those eclogues. It was while writing the final book of OA, with the trial of the main characters, that he reconceived the work, paying particular attention to beginning in medias res and to putting retrospective narratives into the mouths of the protagonists. Instead of starting at the beginning of Book 1, Schneider suggests he initiated this process by revising the ending of OA’s Book 3 and the beginning of Book 5, which subsequently appear in the “hybrid” Arcadia of 1593. Next, Sidney revised sections of Book 2 which were originally part of the Eclogues, before writing the new material which was incorporated in NA Books 1 and 2 and the entirely new Book 3.

One of Schneider’s techniques is to look for flaws in the narrative where the interweaving of OA and NA material leaves loose ends, inconsistencies, or contradictions in the story, in its narrative technique or in its tone. In effect, she finds Sidney to have been a less systematic reviser than some critics have imagined him to have been, although she argues that he did not work in an unmethodical way. Schneider is inclined to endorse Skretkowicz’s arguments about the textual history of Sidney’s working copy (A) of the Arcadia and to see that what was essentially one manuscript was subject to a process of continuous revision. In this view, OA and NA as represented by 1590 constitute “a single, organic text,” while 1593 “embodies intermediate stages of the revision which are—paradoxically—older than” 1590 (34).

One other possible approach to the layers of revision behind NA has been touched on by Joel Davis in an article that pays some attention to the chapter headings in 1590. He observes that the summaries for chapters that present entirely new material in NA are “more obviously didactic, and more extensive” than for those that adapt material from OA. Furthermore, Greville seems to have “paid closer attention to the summaries for the chapters unique to the New Arcadia than to the summaries reworked from material from the Old Arcadia” (“Multiple Arcadias” 419–20). The implications of this for Greville’s thinking about the relationship between OA and NA material, as well as for the actual editorial process, are perhaps worth further consideration.

Revisiting the Manuscripts

Although Timothy Crowley has found Schneider’s “arguments for Sidney’s creative method and for ‘the order of the composition of the text’ … unconvincing” (“From Old Arcadia” 85), in the course of her account she draws attention to an interesting feature. She argues that Sidney started his revision of OA with what became in NA Musidorus’ retrospective narratives in Book 2, Chapters 2 and 3. Schneider points out (17–18) that the part of this episode relating to Plangus is not present in Cm, where there is a blank half-page. More significantly, these are the passages of prose that are transcribed in Le along with all but ten of the OA poems. She goes on to suggest that rather than having to revise from his working copy or having to make a whole new transcript, Sidney commissioned “a copy of only those parts he wanted to work on,” and that the Lee MS represents “the descendant of just such a copy” (19–20). This ingenious explanation makes a certain amount of good sense and provides a convincing solution to what is otherwise a puzzling phenomenon—although there may still be a degree of circularity in Schneider’s larger argument about where Sidney began revising.

However, the effect of such an explanation as to why Le has this passage of prose rather than any other is unsettling, whether the (original) Ringler-Robertson textual analysis of OA
is preferred or Skretkowicz’s. For in both sets of textual accounts Le descends directly from the third stage (T^3 or A^3) of Sidney’s revisions to OA, not from a later stage of working on the romance to turn it into NA. Rather than coming at this place in the stemmas, it should come either after T^4 or as part of T^5, or between A^4 and A^5. One explanation for its anomalous position on the stemmas might be that its current place is the result of faulty collation—that is, collation has failed in this instance to assign it to the correct place.

A further possible explanation is even more unsettling; Schneider is aware of it (19). It is strange that of the group of T^3 manuscripts (Cl, Le, As, Ot), Cl and As frequently agree with readings in 1590 and 1593, and that the editor of 1613 also seems to have drawn on a (lost) manuscript that can be associated with this group. The possibility that, from within this group, Le is actually closer than has been supposed to the version of the work represented in the early printed editions suggests a potential problem with the stemmas—that they are wrong.

The significance of Sir Henry Lee’s having owned a manuscript which may represent one of the earliest stages in Sidney’s revising OA into the work that would eventually be published in 1590 is not clear. By drawing attention to the status of the prose in Le, Schneider has placed the received stemma under some pressure. More pressure can be applied in relation to the Clifford MS. John Gouws has also drawn attention to problems with the generally accepted view of the Phillipps MS (“Sidney’s ‘Old’ Arcadia”). In a powerful article, Gouws argues that the extant collation evidence relating to OA is incomplete and that it misrepresents the true relations of the texts. In particular, the decision (taken by Ringler and followed by Robertson) not generally to record unique manuscript variant readings or variant readings shared by manuscripts in a direct relationship to a lost original (Je and Hm, which both descend from X) means that there is “little or no information which an outsider can use to assess the justness of Robertson’s stemma” (96).

Gouws draws attention to the many variant readings that cut across groups of manuscripts, and especially to Robertson’s silence about the reversal in three witnesses belonging to different groups (Hm, Ph, Bo) of the letters written by Pamela and Philocelea in the last book of OA. The letters in these manuscripts “must have been copied from a source which had the letters in reverse order” (97). He then questions Skretkowicz’s argument that A was essentially continuous copy in Sidney’s own hand containing all his successive revisions. Gouws does this by looking closely at variants that Skretkowicz accepted as preserving authorial readings rather than scribal errors. Gouws is not convinced that these are in fact from Sidney’s pen, and he also notes instances where evident scribal error in the earlier groups of manuscripts has been corrected by the author.

Although it may seem that Skretkowicz’s textual account is the main target of Gouws’s article, he then turns his attention to the Ringler-Robertson stemma and what he calls “the most problematic witness” of OA, the Phillipps MS (Ph). It is problematic because it contains a large number of additions and substitutions that are not found in any other witness. Robertson attributed these to “scribal inventiveness and lively participation.” When P. J. Croft established that Ph was mainly written by two scribes for John Harington (“Sir John Harington’s”), this theory had to be moderated: in place of a delinquent scribe’s rewriting of Sidney’s words, it was Harington who dictated the new readings to the scribes as he went in and out of their workroom. An examination of the variant readings convinces Gouws that they are in fact by Sidney himself. Since Ph derives from a lost original (Y) which was copied from T^4, Gouws proposes that Sidney had not one, but two working copies of the romance: one that he kept with his sister at Wilton, the other in London. He also raises interesting questions about the roles that the lost manuscripts made for the Countess (P) and for Greville (G) might have played in the process of transmission.
Gouws’s skeptical response to the different stemmas is particularly interesting because he takes on the editors on their own grounds of collation and textual criticism. He insists that the Arcadia stemma is “more complex than Sidney’s editors have realised, or have been prepared to admit … they attempted to simplify matters by retaining an ideal notion of a single archetype” (106). This casting doubt on the Ringler-Robertson and Skretkowicz accounts of the textual histories of the Arcadias through collation can also be supplemented by physical evidence.

The main part of Je and the first twelve gatherings of Cl are written on papers that display different versions of a watermark of the royal coat of arms within a garter (Woudhuysen, Sir Philip Sidney 327, 393, 400). This is not in the standard reference works on watermarks, but they had been noticed by the great filigranologist Allan H. Stevenson as long ago as 1967 (“Tudor Roses” 25n28). Stevenson identified their use in paper made by John Spillman (d. 1627) at Dartford in Kent. Spillman set up his mill c. 1580, and his business was celebrated by Thomas Churchyard in A Sparke of Frendship and Warme Goodwill (1588), as employing six hundred men. The earliest papers he is known to have produced are those used in Churchyard’s volume and, from the same year, in Queen Elizabeth I’s correspondence (Woudhuysen, “The Queen’s Own Hand” 27). It seems unlikely that Spillman was manufacturing white papers (for manuscripts and printing) much before 1588. This does not greatly affect the dating of Je, since it is said to derive from Sidney’s working papers through a lost intermediary (X), although it does suggest that it may well have been made before 1603. Cl is more problematic. If the manuscript did in fact belong to George Clifford, third Earl of Cumberland, and was copied for him by Robinson, then the fact that the scribe did not come into his ambit until the mid-1590s seemed puzzling. I therefore speculated that Robinson “was allowed access to Sidney’s working papers of the romance to make a copy for the author, but he could not resist making a second copy for his own purposes. Robinson kept this and a decade or so later used it in his campaign to win Clifford’s patronage” (Woudhuysen, Sir Philip Sidney 330).

The watermark evidence now suggests that the Clifford MS dates from after Sidney’s death, yet the generally accepted dates for the completion and revision of the Arcadias indicate a period from the end of 1580 at the earliest to the end of 1584 at the latest (Woudhuysen, Sir Philip Sidney 309). If the watermark evidence for Cl is correct, then it cannot derive directly from his working papers. At the very least, it is a copy of a copy, which may help account for the carelessness and tendency to alter the text which Robertson found in the manuscript (Sidney, Old Arcadia lxiv; cf. Woudhuysen, Sir Philip Sidney 203). Worse, its placing in the stemma may be quite wrong or, worst of all, the stemma is simply wrong.

More work still needs to be done on the provenance of the manuscripts and on the identification of their scribes. The growing number of digital facsimiles will help, especially with the second of these areas. The investigation of paper is another fruitful area for further research. Current knowledge about the manufacture and importation of paper at the end of the sixteenth century is quite limited, and careful work needs to be done to establish whether certain types of paper really come from the same sources and what this might suggest. For example, it has been pointed out (Alexander, Writing After Sidney 161n50) that paper used in the binding of the manuscript in which Cm’s text of NA can be found is also used in other Sidney family MSS, including Lady Mary Wroth’s autograph fair copy of Pamphilia to Amphilianthus (see Bell ARC 2:5 and Salzman ARC 2:16), the Penshurst manuscript of her Love’s Victory (see Findlay ARC 2:13), and in four manuscripts of the Sidneys’ versions of the Psalms (Norfolk Record Office, MS 10837 P138B and MSS C, H, K, and N of the Psalms).

This may simply be a coincidence. Certainly, it seems rash to draw too many conclusions from the fact that paper with the watermark of the Troyes paper-maker Nicolas Lebé can be found in Hm, Qu, and Hu as well as in several manuscripts associated with Sir John
Harington (but not Ph). This does not necessarily indicate the existence of a Roman Catholic “enclave” of Sidney’s admirers, as has been claimed (Kilroy, “Scribal Coincidences” 77–9; Kilroy, Edmund Campion 208–12); rather, it bears witness to the good quality of Lebé’s papers and their widespread use by many authors and scribes for many different types of manuscripts.

If the Lebé watermark in the OA manuscript that belonged to the recusant Huddleston has no special significance, there remains one feature of the text of the discarded leaf that is still unexplained. The two poems that the leaf preserves are OA 18 and part of OA 19, labeled “The seauenth songe:” and “The Eeighte songe,” respectively. The numbering of these poems cannot be made to fit any of the surviving witnesses of the work. The closest that they would come to these positions is in the arrangement of the poems in Cm; but even here, OA 18 and OA 19 would be the ninth and tenth poems in the manuscript.

Revisiting the Early Printed Editions

The printing and publication of the early editions of the Arcadia provide a further area for investigation. Despite Ringler’s, Robertson’s, and Skretkowicz’s editorial labors, surprisingly little bibliographical research has been undertaken into the printing histories of the substantive editions of 1590, 1593, 1598, and 1613. The textual politics underlying the publication in print of the Arcadias, especially Greville’s involvement in 1590 and the Countess of Pembroke’s in the subsequent editions, have been examined at some length (Woudhuysen, Sir Philip Sidney 224–41, 416–21; Hannay; Davis, “The Countesse”). Likewise, the role the stationer William Ponsonby played in the early editions has been investigated, and it has been suggested that the rival publisher of a proposed edition of OA—the individual who prompted Greville’s warning letter to Sir Francis Walsingham—could be identified as the printer Robert Waldegrave (Brink, “William Ponsonby’s”). Waldegrave was responsible for the Edinburgh edition of 1599 that used the text of the Arcadia from 1593, but reprinted Sidney’s other works from 1598. There is some circumstantial evidence that supports the idea that Waldegrave was the man, in Greville’s words, “in hand to print, sr philip sydneys old arcadia” (Woudhuysen, Sir Philip Sidney 416), although Waldegrave’s role as a printer rather than as a stationer makes his putative publication plans seem less certain. Furthermore, it is possible that in the autumn of 1586 when Greville was reporting Ponsonby’s claim, Waldegrave was in fact in prison, although there is no corroborative evidence for this (Mann). When Ponsonby and Waldegrave were in dispute over the 1599 edition, in the surviving documents of the legal case neither man referred to the earlier argument over the proposed edition.

If the identity of the would-be first printer of the Arcadia remains elusive, the details surrounding the production of 1590 require further investigation. In his Oxford edition of the New Arcadia Skretkowicz supplied a tantalizing account of the book’s production in John Windet’s printing office (Sidney, New Arcadia lvii). Three compositors set it: the work of one, “which seems to be a literatim transcript of printer’s copy, is similar in spelling and punctuation” to Cm. The other two can be distinguished by their spelling preferences for “O,” “ô,” and “oh,” and by their treatment of catchwords. “Proof correction,” he adds, “though extensive, was mainly restricted to case and punctuation, and was made without reference to copy.” As an account of the printing of what most people would take to be the most important text of Sidney’s major work, this is a little on the brief side, but Skretkowicz’s analysis can and needs to be taken further. He recorded thirty-three press variants in the 1590 Arcadia, six of which were also recorded by Ringler, who added a further seven. There
are therefore a total of forty press variants, so that twenty formes out of a total of 188 formes of the main text show evidence of press correction. Ringler said that he collated four copies of 1590, but Skretkowicz did not state how many of the twenty-one or so complete copies which survive he examined nor which they were.

A full collation of all the extant copies of the 1590 Arcadia might reveal rather more about its textual and printing history. Those histories would shed light on the nature of the copy from which the compositors set the book. There is good evidence that some careful thought went into the design and appearance of the book. Mark Bland has shown that it was the first book that the printer, John Windet, set in English roman type, which was probably newly bought for the project. The volume was “carefully proof-read” and the “final stop-press corrections … were corrections to a final revise” (“The Appearance” 107–10). It was inevitably going to be a big book, and a decision must have been made at an early stage for it to take the format not of a folio, but of a quarto in eights, each gathering containing two sheets—Windet’s “preferred format for books of this size” (109). The arrangement is not uncommon in quartos, since by placing the second sheet within the first and sewing through the center gutter of the two, it is possible to produce a stout but strongly bound volume: Windet used this format again in the same (or the next) year as the Arcadia for Henry Swinburne’s A Briefe Treatise of Testaments and Last Willes. Setting a quarto in eights is necessarily more complicated than a straightforward quarto, since four sets of formes have to be integrated rather than two. The problem of setting was compounded further by the chapter divisions, but also by poems within the text and by various separately spaced letters and challenges. Every chapter, each set of eclogues, the dedication, and the note to the reader in 1590 begins with a large initial: two different alphabets and four different sets of factotums were used to supply these initial letters, but sixty-two initial letters out of seventy-seven come from one alphabet.

These initials had a tendency to disrupt the smooth setting of the text, but a variety of evidence shows that the copy for the book was cast off for setting by formes rather than being set seriatim. By 1591 Windet was a fairly experienced printer, and it is clear, even from a cursory examination of the volume, that the compositors experienced few difficulties with casting off and setting the work. One specific example can be used to illustrate this. When compositors found they had to deal with incorrectly cast-off copy, one of their commonest expedients was to make pages shorter or longer according to whether they had too little or too much material to set. The normal page in the 1590 Arcadia contains 32 lines or their equivalent. Many pages are either shorter or longer than this for obvious reasons, such as because they occur at the end of a chapter, book, or eclogue, or because they contain verse, letters, or challenges which the compositor did not want to break up, or because there was a clear attempt to avoid a widow or orphan. There are about 112 pages with variant depths; when these are looked at in context, about thirty-two pages of them display variant depths for which there is no obvious expedient required to solve local typographical problems, such as being within a page or two of new chapters, and so on. In other words, in a book containing 720 pages of text, there are perhaps only just over thirty pages where problems with casting off the copy may have caused the compositors to vary the page depth.

All this would tend to indicate that Windet’s compositors were setting from clean copy which was easy to cast off accurately. Yet according to Skretkowicz’s textual theories, the manuscript from which the 1590 Arcadia was set was identical with Sidney’s working papers of the Old Arcadia, which he revised at least three times before transforming the whole work, using the same papers, into the New Arcadia. It seems unlikely that it would have been feasible to cast off such a heavily used and revised manuscript with sufficient accuracy to produce the high-quality text represented by 1590.
Further detailed bibliographical analysis will undoubtedly add to our understanding of the nature of the manuscripts behind 1590. It seems unlikely that it was or could have been set from the continuous copy for which Skretkowicz has argued (cf. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney* 312; Gouws, “Sidney’s ‘Old’ Arcadia”). More bibliographical work also needs to be done on the whole of Windet’s output during the 1580s and 1590s. A certain amount has already been undertaken in relation to the printing of the fifth book of Hooker’s *Lawses* in 1597, for which the printer’s copy survives. The manuscript for this is remarkably clean and carefully prepared; in several of Windet’s books there are notes referring to the difficulty the printer had in reading the copy—there is no such note in the *Arcadia*. A second direction for research might be taken from Mark Bland’s observations that William Stansby joined Windet’s shop as an apprentice as the *Arcadia* was going through the press; that Windet owned three presses but tended to use only two; and that, at least in 1587, he employed a corrector or proof-reader (“William Stansby” 2–4).

If bibliographical work on 1590 poses questions about the copy behind it, then similar questions can be asked of 1593, which Skretkowicz championed as “the completest form of Sidney’s entire text,” and of 1598. Setting 1593 was made easier in some ways because the chapter divisions were removed and because the first part of the book was a corrected reprint of 1590, although with the complications caused by including new poems. It is in the second part of 1593, where the narrative of *OA* gives way to that of *NA*, that a large quantity of new material was being set in type for the first time. The printer was again John Windet. In the part of the book where *OA* prose was being set for the first time there are about seventy formes. Of these, about six formes show evidence of page-depth variations which were not caused by having to set verse neatly, to end books or chapters, or to avoid widows or orphans. In other words, this part of 1593 suggests that the compositors had few problems with the copy—or part of the copy—which, according to Skretkowicz’s analysis, represented Sidney’s authorial draft of *OA*, revised several times, rewritten as *NA*, passed through the press, and then passed through the press again. The demands that such textual theories place on manuscript copy would have been extraordinary.

**Conclusion**

Anyone who has paid attention to the history of Shakespearean textual studies will be familiar with a cycle of certainty and skepticism. One theory that seems at first solid and irrefutable is sooner or later undermined by a new one which is, in its turn, replaced by another. This is how knowledge advances. With great and characteristic grace, Jean Robertson would refer to W. W. Greg’s saying that the sound of being overtaken by younger footsteps was a pleasing one. In Sidney’s case, William A. Ringler, Jr.’s heroic and brilliant labors advanced the understanding of the creation and dissemination of Sidney’s writings for the first time since 1613 or even 1598. That is no mean achievement. Jean Robertson took Ringler’s approach further, and she was finally willing to endorse the even more radical theories of Victor Skretkowicz.

If what seemed, at one point, a secure and settled understanding of the circulation of the *Arcadias* in manuscript and print now seems less so, it is the result of developments in various areas. During the last fifty or sixty years scholarly understanding of the Renaissance has developed in many fields, including manuscript and bibliographical studies. It is not surprising that the original Ringler-Robertson analysis of the textual histories of the *Arcadias*, which had once looked so fixed and certain, now appears differently. To move from one certainty to another is often acceptable to scholars; to move from certainty to uncertainty is
never happy. There is still much to be found out about the texts and the early circulation of Sidney’s remarkable works in both manuscript and print.

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