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Apocalyptic History and the Protestant Cause in Sir Philip Sidney's Revised "Arcadia."

Barbara Brumbaugh.

Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 468. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2018. xii + 544 pp. \$84.

In a provocative new study, Barbara Brumbaugh argues that in the revised *Arcadia* (i.e., the *New Arcadia* without the tacked-on ending from the old version) Sidney introduced “an allegorical church history that places contemporary religious controversies in an apocalyptic perspective and that presents the Church of Rome as the Antichristian church of the Apocalypse” (24). That such an apocalyptic view of history informs the first book of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* has long been an established scholarly fact. Brumbaugh now attempts to show that while not present in the *Old Arcadia*, this perspective is dominant in the material added by Sidney in the early 1580s, in particular the new beginning and the retrospective Asia Minor narratives, and that the revised version as a result should be seen not as a torso but as an essentially completed work. The study provides an informative and detailed survey of how Protestant theologians and polemicists such as John Bale, Heinrich Bullinger, John Foxe, or Du Plessis Mornay (the latter a close friend of Sidney’s) interpreted Revelation as the history of the struggle between the true (Protestant) church and the false (papist) church. Brumbaugh shows convincingly that Sidney’s own political and religious views reflect at least the main parts of it, seen, for example, in his final peroration to his troops at Flushing: by engaging the Catholic Spaniards they fought against the “enemies to God and his church: against antichrist” (485).

However, most of the study's five-hundred-plus pages are given to detailed discussions of the alleged allegorical interpretations of characters and events in the *Arcadia*, and here the larger question must be not if Sidney knew the tradition (he clearly did), or even if he subscribed to it (which I think by and large he did), but if he incorporated it into his literary work. Here a comparison with Spenser's allegory proves illuminating: where Duessa proudly rides her seven-headed beast, thus clearly signaling an allegorical identity as the Whore of Babylon, the corresponding allegorical figure in the revised *Arcadia*, according to Brumbaugh, is not single but double: Andromana (389) but also Cecropia (292n7, 298), neither of whom has any clearly marked feature that signals the connection to the Whore of Babylon. Indeed, Brumbaugh concedes that the characters in the *Arcadia* are "generally without the external masquerading" found in Spenser (122), and that "I am not arguing for a one-to-one correspondence" (144). This means that for any allegorical character there is almost always not one but several embodiments in the *Arcadia*, depending on the needs of the overall allegorical interpretation, but also that the characters in the fiction have to put on more than one allegorical hat depending on the circumstances.

For example, the two princes not only "represent Christians from the time of the early church until shortly before the formal outset of the Protestant Reformation" (147), but Musidorus is elsewhere identified as representing "the clergy generally" (257), and more disconcertedly given their earlier connection to Christians, the princes also represent "fallen, unregenerate humans" (168). Of even greater concern is that Brumbaugh does not distinguish between the literal and allegorical levels. Despite the fact that the *Arcadia* is set in pre-Christian Greece, she argues repeatedly that Pyrocles acts as if knowingly part of an apocalyptic Christian drama (88, 90, 418, 443, 453). Indeed, we

are presented with allegories within allegories when “Amphialus’ attempted suicide allegorizes the death of Pyrocles’ ‘old man’” (387). Adding to the difficulty is that most of the details used to show the allegorical connections come not from Revelation itself but from the writings of the Protestant apologists, which means that to get the allegory the reader must be as well read as the author of the study, which might be one reason why no one else in the last 450 years seems to have noticed it.

In short, Brumbaugh has erected an imposing and elaborate allegorical edifice, but to use a biblical analogue, one has to ask oneself if it is built “on a rock” or “on sand” (Matthew 7:24–26).

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