
Relation of Clothing to Identity:disguise,costume

'The roote of my desire Was vertue cladde in constant louse attire.' (Arcadia, III)

Attire and appearance lie at the heart of Sir Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, (or simply *Arcadia*) with the plot hinging on ideas of costume, shifting identity, and deceit; hardly surprising considering Sidney's part in the humanist tradition of the Renaissance era, in which writers revived ideas from classical antiquity. Greek literature and mythology relied heavily on ideas about disguise and costume, with the title of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for instance translating to 'books of transformations.' 'Transformations' here seems a term particularly relevant to *Arcadia*, in which a change of costume or clothing equates to a transformation of identity rather than a simple adoption of one; attire and appearance are important therefore in the sense that they are the primary deciding factor as to how each character is approached and treated by others.

In book I, both of the princes adopt different identities as means to woo Pamela and Philoclea, bypassing the Duke's refusal to allow noblemen near his daughters. Musidorus remains male but dons the clothes of a shepherd and becomes 'Dorus,' whilst Pyrocles dons 'womanish apparel' and becomes 'Cleophila.' Sidney describes at length the different parts of Pyrocles' costume, and declares once he has finished dressing: 'and thus did Pyrocles become Cleophila.' This statement is boldly declarative, and uses 'become' rather than an alternative such as 'assumed the appearance of,' making emphatic the link between appearance and identity. In this case, Pyrocles donning the clothes of a woman makes him a woman, and the sense of this is continued by Sidney throughout where he uses the female pronouns 'she' and 'her' for the duration of Pyrocles' disguisement. Winfried Schleiner notes in his essay on transvestism in Renaissance romance that 'cross-dressing [...] highlights, possibly in all literary periods, male-female differences and cultural gender stereotypes,' and that this is most evident 'when such garments are put on and when they are removed.' Indeed, the dressing of Pyrocles in 'womanish apparel' is significant in the attitudes it projects about the female identity. Once Pyrocles has 'become' Cleophila, Musidorus 'could not satisfy himself with looking upon him, so did he find his excellent beauty set out with this new change, like a diamond set in a more advantageous sort.' Sidney's 'diamond' simile suggests that whilst Pyrocles possessed good qualities as a male, his beauty is only realised fully in his adopting of a female identity. However,

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even more revealing is Musidorus being unable to 'satisfy himself with looking upon [Pyrocles/Cleophila.]' 'Satisfy' carries an overtly sexual connotation, and paired with 'looking,' objectifies Cleophila. Pyrocles has been decorated with finery in order to become a woman, 'velvet buskins,' 'a very rich jewel,' and has become a kind of decoration in doing so; Musidorus instantaneously objectifies Cleophila where he would not have Pyrocles. The importance of costume here is not, therefore, only in its ability to completely alter identity, but also in its revealing of cultural attitudes towards gender.

Furthermore, the appearances and attire of Pamela and Philoclea are the fore-frontal features ascribed to them by Sidney, with very little aside from this revealed about them. Most importantly, Pyrocles and Musidorus fall in love with the mere images of the two women before having actually encountered or met them: 'she [Philoclea] drawn as well as it was possible art should counterfeit so perfect a workmanship of nature.' Even after the princes have met the women, Philoclea is described as Pyrocles's 'beloved image,' 'image' contributing to the impression that Philoclea is decorative and to be enjoyed visually, rather than existing in her own right. Throughout *Arcadia*, these two women are praised mostly on their physical appearance, telling us not, perhaps about the importance of this in the story, but again showing us a reflection of the importance and emphasis placed on the appearance of women in Sidney's own era, in which the appearance of women was considered the most important part of their identity.

Although costume and disguise may seem intrinsic to identity, the relationship between appearance and attraction is slightly different. There are hints of attraction between Philoclea and Cleophila upon their first meeting despite Philoclea being under the impression that she is female, where her cheeks blush and is said to have 'already [...] conceived delight in Cleophila's presence.' Because the reader is aware of Cleophila's intent to woo Philoclea, the word 'already' used here allows us to assume that this moment in the book marks the beginnings of Philoclea's attraction towards Cleophila/Pyrocles. Similarly, Gynecia falls in love with Cleophila whilst she is in a woman's attire, though this is in the knowledge that she is in fact Pyrocles disguised: 'take pity of me, O Cleophila, but not as Cleophila, and disguise not with me in words, as I know thou dost in apparel.' Though one might argue that Gynecia's attraction here is to the male Pyrocles and not the female Cleophila, it is fair to appreciate that she fell in love despite Pyrocles's female disguise, suggesting that attire and appearance is not necessarily important in its relation to attraction. However, in most cases, the love or attraction various characters have for one another cannot be truly expressed or realised until true identity is revealed. For instance, in book II, Philoclea states: 'O Cleophila (for so I love to call thee, since in that name my love first began, and in the shade of that name my love shall best lie hidden[.])' Here, whilst Philoclea admits that it was whilst Pyrocles was acting as Cleophila that she fell in love, this realisation comes chronologically after she has discovered that his true identity is that of prince Pyrocles. The effect of this is that Sidney avoids the suggestion of homosexual love between Philoclea

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and Cleophila, a highly controversial subject for the heteronormative climate of the renaissance era.

Because the two princes in the book alter their appearance and identity as means to win over or woo the Duke's daughters, appearance and attire in the book is naturally bound up with deceit. At the very start of book I, the reader is introduced to the princes as virtuous and noble characters with 'all good inward and outward qualities' who defended ladies 'from wrongs' and restored rights to 'disinherited persons,' establishing at the outset the reader's expectations for their behaviour and endeavours to come. Despite this, Blair Worden asserts in *The Sound of Virtue* that '[The Princes] confront a test which confounds the expectation of chivalric adventure which our introduction to the princes has created in us.' Indeed, In the very act of disguising their true identities, the princes are being deceptive. However, the ultimate act of deception appears where Dorus/Musidorus deceives Dametus, Mopsa and Miso almost simultaneously in book III in order to escape with Pamela.

While this appears to be deceptive and therefore contradictory to the apparent virtue of the princes, the reader is encouraged to support their intentions as they are presented as noble and essentially good, whilst Dametus, Mopsa, and Miso are not. Worden comments that 'the relationship of inner thought or feeling to the outward expression of it is a constant subject of [Sidney's] fiction, where disordered ethics and emotions are invariably reflected in disordered countenances.' What this essentially suggests is that in Sidney's writing, outward appearance is important in what it reveals about inner goodness; an idea exemplified in later works of the Renaissance period. In Milton's *Paradise Lost* for example, after Satan and his army are cast out of heaven and therefore are no longer 'good' in the eyes of God, their appearance is altered so that Satan barely recognises his fellow angels: 'but O how fall'n! How changed[.]' In *Arcadia*, Dametus, Mopsa and Miso are all depicted by Sidney as repulsive, Dametus with a 'nose turned up' and 'seven or eight long *black* hairs upon his chin,' and Miso with a 'splay foot.' Whereas the reader is introduced to the princes as goodly and noble, the depiction of these three characters enables us to exclude them from our sympathies as their outward appearance is indicative of their inner evil. Appearance and attire in *Arcadia* are therefore also important as being indicative of inner character or good.

Appearance and attire are essential to the plot and understanding of Sidney's *Arcadia*. Undoubtedly the most important disguises adopted are those of Pyrocles and Musidorus, who become 'Cleophila' and 'Dorus' then 'Timopyrus of Lycia' and 'Palladius of Caria,' these costumes altering their identity and enabling them to first obtain access to the women they desire, then conserving 'the honour of their royal parentage.' Appearance is key to identity, with inner good being externally expressed and inner bad being externally expressed and where Pyrocles, by simply donning women's clothes appears (at least initially) as unquestionably a woman. It is perhaps, as Schleiner tentatively suggests, that *Arcadia belongs to a 'fairy-tale*

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world where anything is possible,' set in Greece and telling the tale of Princes, Princesses, and nobility.

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