

## Shahrazade in Disguise: Traveling Inward and Unveiling the “Cyborg” in the Frame Narrative of Sidney’s *Arcadia*

Dr. Majda Atieh\*

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### □ ABSTRACT □

This paper demonstrates how Book I of Sir Philip Sidney’s *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* revolutionizes the dynamics of travel and contact of different worlds and cultures as represented in the classical frame narratives of world literatures. Arguably, Sidney’s *Arcadia* interrogates the frame narrative tradition that involves the possibility of exerting change in certain ideologies through interaction with conflicting worlds. Revising the classical trappings of the frame narrative, exemplified in the legendary narrative of *Arabian Nights*, Book I of *Arcadia* introduces the genre of the “cyborg” frame narrative that incorporates the aesthetics of composite identity facilitated by the strategy of disguise. Reinforcing the concept of mutable identity, *Arcadia* suggests that the transformation of gender and class ideologies is viable through inward travel and “cyborg” identity’s open sesame, not necessarily through fictional travel or actual movement as demonstrated in *Arabian Nights*.

**Keywords:** Frame narrative, Cyborg, Composite identity, Inward travel

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\* assistant prof., Department of English, Tishreen University, Lattakia, Syria.

## شهرزاد في طور التنكّر: السفر داخل النفس والكشف عن ماهية "السايبورغ" للتأطير القصصي في "أركاديا" للشاعر فيليب سيدني

الدكتورة مجدة عطية\*

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### □ ملخص □

يوضح هذا البحث كيف أن الكتاب الأول من "أركاديا" للشاعر فيليب سيدني قد أحدث ثورة في ديناميكيات السفر والاتصال بين عوالم وثقافات مختلفة ممثلة بالتأطير القصصي الكلاسيكي في الآداب العالمية. يمكن القول أن "أركاديا" تشكل نقداً لتقاليد التأطير القصصي والتي تنطوي على إمكانية إحداث التغيير في بعض الأيديولوجيات من خلال التفاعل مع عوالم متضاربة. يحدث الكتاب الأول من "أركاديا" تحولاً في المقومات الكلاسيكية للتأطير القصصي ممثلة بالسرد الأسطوري في "ألف ليلة وليلة"، مقدماً نوع "السايبورغ" القصصي والذي يتضمن جماليات الهوية المركبة و تيسره استراتيجية التنكّر. تعزّز "أركاديا" مفهوم الهوية التحولية والذي يوحي بأن التغيير الأيديولوجي ممكن من خلال السفر داخل النفس و إلى العوالم التي تفتحها ماهية "السايبورغ"، وليس بالضرورة من خلال الترحال الحقيقي أو التجوال التخيلي عبر سرد الحكايات كما تبين في "ألف ليلة وليلة".

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التأطير القصصي، السايبورغ، الهوية المركبة، السفر داخل النفس.

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\* مدرّسة - قسم اللغة الانكليزية-كلية الآداب- جامعة تشرين - اللاذقية-سوريا .

## Introduction:

Book I of Sir Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (simply known as the *Old Arcadia*) translates the dynamics of interaction between different worlds in literature. This interaction is based on the mechanism of framing that involves a change of ideologies. Sidney's old version of *Arcadia* presents the decision of a superstitious Duke Basilius to confiscate his two daughters, Philoclea and Pamela, in a solitary place so that no suitor can meet them. Basilius' motivations are thwarted by two foreign princes, Pyrocles and Musidorus. The two princes manage to disrupt Basilius' solitariness and win the love of his daughters by disguising themselves as a woman and a shepherd respectively. This paper demonstrates how Book I of *Arcadia* revolutionizes the genre of the frame by presenting a "cyborg" frame narrative based on the mutability of identity.

Sidney's political involvement with Queen Elizabeth's court provides a historical subtext for the presence of the theme of incompatible worlds and ideologies in *Arcadia*. Sidney's problems with Queen Elizabeth are related to her scruples about the Protestant cause and Sidney's attempts at foreign alliances. The Queen's attitude contributed to Sidney's banishment from the court and the denial of his advancement (Lei, 2001: 31). The old version of *Arcadia* was written during Sidney's exile from Elizabeth's court and finished in 1581 (Damrosch, 2003: 968).<sup>1</sup> So, the narrative was composed within the context of Sidney's isolation and the Elizabethan court's withdrawal from foreign alliances. Such historical contextualization invites a critical reading that highlights Sidney's translation of the Elizabethan court's policies of restraint and withdrawal through the mechanism of framing that involves change from within, not necessarily from the influence of opposite and external ideologies.

## Methodology:

Identifying the theoretical definition of the frame is crucial to the exploration of the frame trappings in Book I of *Arcadia*. In "'Organic Harps Diversely Framed': a Theory of the Frame and the Frame Narrative," David William Ullrich synthesizes a literary theory that incorporates the "monographs" (1987: 107) that focus on the literary frame, narrative framing, and frame narrative. Most of these critical analyses reveal that the frame narrative has the following "characteristics, usually divided along the matrix of frame versus enframed: (1) two morals; (2) two dissimilar worlds; (3) a 'contact' between text and audience; (4) and metanarrative statements" (Ullrich, 1987: v).

In the frame theory, a demarcation between the framing and the enframed worlds is based on the binary of conventionality and non-conventionality. The aesthetic frame further clarifies this demarcation. The frame around the picture separates the real, typical, and outer world from the imaginative and artistic world. In this context, Ullrich explicates how in applying this particular concept of the frame's conventionality to "the literary frame narrative [. . .] one discovers that the opening frame of the vast majority of frame narratives does, in fact, involve stereotypic and conventional situations" (1987: 36-37). A paradigmatic model of the frame in the classical canon is that of Shahrayar in *Arabian Nights*. Shahrayar's fixed world of revenge is the opening frame whose conventionality will be disrupted by Shahrazade's world of tales that generate change.

<sup>1</sup> See Benjamin Grossberg's elaboration on the tactic of displacement used, in early modern English literature, to comment on English politics "from a distance," p. 64.

The following study of *Arcadia* presents an intertextual reading of the frame theory to demonstrate how Sidney's narrative revises certain classical trappings in the paradigmatic frame narratives by constructing a "cyborg" frame narrative. In particular, *Arcadia* suggests that the disruption of gender and class conventionalities is possible through inward travel and the hybridity of identity. Such proposition articulates an adaptation of the classical frame narratives that envision change through contact with external forces or worlds, as demonstrated in *Arabian Nights*. Arguably, this reading of *Arcadia* suggests that the form of the ubiquitous genre of the frame narrative is identity-contingent.

## Objectives:

The frame structure that features the presence of two morals and two dissimilar worlds (labeled as the framing and the enframed worlds) evolves as a major narrative strategy in Book I of *Arcadia*. The first world is that of Basilius and his family; the other world is that of the two princes, Pyrocles and Musidorus. The moral of Basilius' world seeks virtue through confinement and retreat. The other world of the two princes seeks virtue through acquisition of knowledge, experience, and travel.

Reading the frame taxonomy of conventionality and non-conventionality in *Arcadia* reveals how the world of Pyrocles and Musidorus represents the framing world for it involves conformity. Book I of *Arcadia* begins with a depiction of Arcadia as a utopia that cultivates peaceful openness to other nations. This openness is translated into cultural and literary prosperity as Arcadia becomes a famous site for visitors. Among them are Pyrocles and Musidorus who travel around the world to enrich their knowledge. They believe that traveling will help them exercise their virtue and increase their experience (Sidney, 1581: 1015). So, such description of Arcadia implies that the presence and the ideology of the two princes suggest a predicted and ordinary situation and that their world presents a replica of the Arcadian utopia.

An enframed world is carved from and contradicts the ideology of the framing world of Arcadia and that of the two princes. Basilius' solitariness represents the enframed world that has degenerated into cultivating an extraordinary and unconventional ideology compared to that of the surrounding Arcadia. Basilius' world is fashioned and petrified by the fear of foreignness and openness that may jeopardize virtue. The ideology of this enframed world has been shaped by the oracle of Delphos that predicts adultery and threat to Basilius' state. The Duke's fear from this prophecy has been translated into a fear of heterosexuality (suitors for the daughters) and homosociality (foreign princes). Such fear has generated restraint and retreat as solutions: "[Basilius] was resolved for this final year to retire himself with his wife and daughters into a solitary place [of . . .] two lodges built of purpose" (Sidney, 1581: 1012). The narrative of Book I itself includes a metadiscursive reference to Basilius' world as an enframed one. Pyrocles discovers the Duke's world through looking at a picture: "Pyrocles' either evil or good fortune walking with his host in a fair gallery that he perceived a picture, newly made by an excellent artificer which contained the duke and duchess with their younger daughter Philoclea" (1015). The picture itself demarcates the enframed world and establishes its different ideology that advocates solitariness.

The metacommunicative element of the frame narrative is prevalent in the narrative of *Arcadia* as well. Ullrich demonstrates how the metacommunicative technique entails that the author of the frame narrative attempts "to comment on the story directly or

indirectly (through a character who is ‘outside’ the enframed narrative)” (1987: 109), and to establish a contact between the text and audience. In *Arcadia*, the metacommunicative aspect involves the use of the medium of the external and omniscient narrator who is not a character, neither in the framing world nor in the enframed one, but privy to all details in the narrative. Also, this metacommunicative characteristic requires the presence of both internal and external audience. Apart from the readers of the text, Sidney addresses the narrative of *Arcadia* to his sister Mary Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke, and the other “fair ladies” (1581: 1009). The external narrator of *Arcadia* employs metacommunicative statements that alert both internal and external audience. These statements are abundant throughout the narrative: “methinks it reason I should tell you what chance brought him to this change. I left him lately, if you remember, fair ladies, in the grove by the two lodges” (1034), and “doubt you not, fair ladies” (1040). These statements establish a contact between the text and audience to accentuate the metacommunicative message of *Arcadia*.

In the frame theory, the most elemental functions provided by the frame narrative are the clarification and separation of its different worlds or realms, which are realized through discourse markers. In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Gregory Bateson contends that “psychological frames are related to what we have called ‘premises’. The picture frame tells the viewer that he is not to use the same sort of thinking in interpreting the picture that he might use in interpreting the wallpaper” (1987: 187). In earlier frame narratives, the “premises”/techniques that the authors have employed signify temporal and spatial difference between the framing and the enframed worlds. For example, in *Arabian Nights*, each introductory frame serves to notify the listeners to Shahrazade’s tales and the readers of both narratives that the conventional norms and specific cultural characteristics peculiar to a historical period may have to be suspended in the story that follows. These frame notifications and markers may indicate temporal disparity, such as “once upon a time.” Also, they may indicate spatial difference, such as “in another land.” By layering these discourse markers one after the other, the narrator alerts the reader that top-level assumptions and broad generalizations about cultural norms and causality may have to be suspended.

In *Arcadia*, Sidney coins frame discourse markers that prepare the audience to realize that the intruding world into the framing or enframed world, as an appropriation or transference of reality, is ideologically different. The omniscient narrator of the narrative uses expressions that predict incongruity and divergence in perspectives between Basilius’ world and that of the two princes. For instance, to facilitate the transference from the utopian *Arcadia* to its degenerated world of solitariness, the narrator uses a temporal reference “some time” (Sidney, 1581: 1010) that may embody change or suspension of certain past events. Likewise, the narrator supplies the narrative with references that signify oddity to prepare for the audience’s transference from the princes’ perspectives of openness to Basilius’ ideology of solitariness. Such signs include “to the strange nature of it” (1015), “they came thither newly after that this strange solitariness had possessed Basilius” (1015), and “but in both these he perceived such strange diversities” (1018). All of these expressions indicate that a suspension of the princes’ perspective will occur. The narrator also uses the word “now” to predict the initiation of alternation in Basilius’ retreat, which is represented by the arrival of the two princes: “Now, newly after the duke had begun this solitary life, there came (following the train their virtues led them) into this country two young princes” (1014).

Sidney revolutionizes the genre of the frame narrative by integrating disguise that facilitates the shift in realities. Like the artistic frame that smoothes the intrusion of the

artistic world, the frame genre exhibits different actions or activities that facilitate the interference of a different reality.<sup>2</sup> Dreaming and traveling in space or time are the major dramatic strategies that facilitate the transference from one reality to another. In several ancient frame narratives, such as *Arabian Nights*, *King Cheops*, *Panchatantra*, *Canterbury Tales*, and *Decameron*, telling a story is one example of travel in time. In these frame narratives, the narration of stories triggers the entrance of the protagonists in the framing world to the enframed world of tales. In Sidney's narrative, traveling prepares for the acquaintance of Pyrocles and Musidorus with Arcadia, but it is not the final step to enter Basilius' world. The two princes have to disguise themselves in order to intrude on Basilius' solitariness. In classical frame narratives, traveling in time (listening to a story) or in space does not necessarily imply or involve a change in the identity of the traveler to suit the ideology or perception of the visited world. In *Arabian Nights*, the narrator, Shahrazade, prepares the sultan, Shahrayar, who represents death and the impossibility of change to have contact with the world of fiction and possibility without changing his identity or perception of the world. Shahrayar, the unjust King who stubbornly believes in women's infidelity and plans to kill all his future wives, has to listen to Shahrazade's tales without adapting to the opposite reality of possible change presented by the characters of these tales. So, the exertion of change in *Arabian Nights* is an outcome of the encounter between different identities, which does not necessarily involve assimilation between these identities. Unlike traveling, disguise promotes a conscious or intentional appropriation of the perspectives of the visited world. In *Arcadia*, Pyrocles' and Musidorus' disguise as a woman and as a shepherd stimulates their assimilation or conformity to Basilius' ideology that taboos heterosexuality and homosociality when it concerns his wife and daughters.

Disguise generates the concept of the composite identity, which is the essence of *Arcadia*'s dynamics of change. Critics have read Sidney's narrative as a rewriting of Ovidian and Odyssean metamorphoses that "adapted the figures of disguise to new circumstances of cultural and social change" (Olmsted, 1996: 177). However, I contend that Sidney not only adapts Ovidian metamorphosis but also heralds the concept of the "cyborg identity." As introduced and defined by Donna J. Haraway in the twentieth century, the "cyborg" is "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (1985: 150). The "cyborg" develops into a myth "about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work" (1985: 155). Since the publication of Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs" in 1985, the "cyborg" has evolved in various disciplines, including literature, and involved the trope of hybridity. As such, the "cyborg" interrogates or/and collapses differences, and undoes a wide range of binary oppositions and culturally coded distinctions of gender, class, and race (1985: 150-179). In *Arcadia*, Pyrocles' and Musidorus' disguise transforms them into "cyborg" identities by which gender and class boundaries are deconstructed and not reconciled. Both Pyrocles and Musidorus retain their covert identities that are shaped by honor and nobility and their overt identities that project feminine and pastoral discourses and actions.<sup>3</sup> Pyrocles' new identity as an Amazon lady (Sidney, 1581: 1019) or female warrior is a "cyborg" one, which is constructed by yoking two different gendered qualities.

<sup>2</sup> See Katharine Young's "Edgework" and Steven Young's *The Frame Structure in Tudor and Stuart Drama* that focus on the shift in ontological status and modes of discourse in the frame narrative.

<sup>3</sup> Pastoral forms have been introduced as containing "hidden designs." See Julie Crawford's "Sidney's Sapphics," p. 983.

Also, the fight both of these princes have against the bear and the lion exemplifies their “cyborg” identities that do not reconcile their honorable background as princes and warriors with their feminine and pastoral pretension. Another example that reinforces the irreconcilable identities of these two princes is the praise that Pyrocles/Cleophila gives to Musidorus/Dorus after the fight and which hints at Dorus’ noble blood: “she [Cleophila] could not think but that he came of some very noble blood—so noble a countenance he bare, and do worthy an act he had performed”(1042).

### Conclusion:

In Book I of *Arcadia*, the use of the disguise mechanism to establish contact between the two frame worlds and the concept of composite identity communicate political critique of the Elizabethan court by suggesting the possibility of change even through restraint and inwardness. Sidney’s narrative shows that the threat to Basilius’ solitary life does not necessarily stem from heterosexuality or homosociality, as he first determines. The intrusion of the framing world, through the disguise of the two princes, shows that threat may evolve from homosexuality and heterosociality. For instance, Pamela and Philoclea start to develop strange feelings for Cleophila and Dorus because of their womanish and pastoral discourses respectively (Sidney, 1581: 1042). Also, Gynecia suspects that the Amazon woman is a man and feels admiration for him/her, yet she cannot discern whether the disguised man is a prince or a shepherd (1038). So, Gynecia’s feelings of admiration are not necessarily provoked by a foreign prince from another estate. Thus, the change that the characters of the enframed world of *Arcadia* experience does not directly evolve from their encounter with external ideologies. This change may develop from the dynamics of each character’s identity that is liable, as Pyrocles’ and Musidorus’ disguise indicates, to mutability and hybridity. As such, the enframed world of *Arcadia* is complicated by its own ideology, an innovative frame technique that communicates a political message about the futility of inwardness in the Elizabethan court.

Being read in a global context, Book I of *Arcadia* is an early articulation of revised frame strategies to accommodate the postmodern construct of composite identity. In particular, Sidney’s innovative frame narrative compels an exploration of change from within and by internal factors, such as the mutability of the individual identity, not necessarily by external forces or ideologies of conflicting worlds.

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