Introduction

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Abstract

John Barclay's *Argenis* (1621) is a Neo-Latin political romance that tells the story of the chaste passion of the only daughter of the king of Sicily for a foreign nobleman to whom she is secretly betrothed. It was one of the most widely read and imitated novels of the seventeenth century, with numerous prose translations, abridgements, and sequels in all the major languages of Europe. Although a great novel does not necessarily make a great play, Barclay's story also had authentic dramatic potential, and it was adapted for the stage five times, in French (twice), Spanish, German, and Italian, from the 1620s to the end of the century. This essay introduces the main features of Barclay's work, sketches its literary and political context, and suggests reasons why Barclay's stimulating combination of politics and romance was so attractive to the three playwrights discussed in this cluster: Pierre Du Ryer, Pedro Calderón de la Barca, and Christian Weise.

Keywords

John Barclay; romance fiction; theatrical adaptation; Neo-Latin literature

Resumen

De la página a la escena: el atractivo de la novela Argenis *(1621) de John Barclay*
Argenis (1621) de John Barclay es una novela bizantina (o 'romance') neo-latina, de tema político y amoroso, que narra la pasión casta que siente la única hija del rey de Sicilia por un noble extranjero, con el cual se ha desposado en secreto. Era una de las novelas más leídas e imitadas del siglo XVII, con numerosas traducciones, refundiciones y secuelas en todos los idiomas principales de Europa. Aunque una gran novela no hace necesariamente una gran obra de teatro, la historia de Barclay tenía auténticas posibilidades dramáticas, y fue adaptada para el teatro cinco veces, en francés (dos veces), español, alemán e italiano, desde los años veinte hasta el fin del siglo. Este ensayo describe las

características principales de la novela de Barclay, esboza su contexto político y literario, y avanza algunas hipótesis para explicar por qué la combinación apasionante de política y amor era tan atractiva para los tres dramaturgos estudiados en este 'cluster': Pierre Du Ryer, Pedro Calderón de la Barca, y Christian Weise.

Palabras clave
John Barclay; el género 'romance'; adaptación teatral; literatura neo-latina

A great novel does not necessarily make a great play. The different narrative demands of prose fiction and drama can often leave stage adaptations looking flat. This was as true in the seventeenth century —which witnessed both the early development of the modern novel and the "golden age" of drama in Western Europe— as it is now. Even though baroque aesthetics regarded the world as theatre, seventeenth-century playwrights who took on the task of adapting the plots found in extended prose narrations faced, as do playwrights of the twenty-first century, the challenges of recreating the pictorial intensity of the adventures of novelistic characters, of using dramatic techniques to communicate the complex ideas of a plot in visual terms, and of turning the limitations of the stage in expressing interiority of the characters into the advantages of theatrical immediacy.[1] With such difficulties involved, why would a playwright wish to struggle to transform John Barclay's *Argenis* —a novel of more than a thousand pages written in Latin— into a piece for the stage?[2]

1. Adapted from Hemming (2013: 17). See also Miraglia del Giudice (2003: 8-9).
2. In its original printing (Paris, Nicolas Buon, 1621), the text of *Argenis* numbers just over twelve hundred pages. I refer to *Argenis* as a novel, which is customary in the secondary literature of Neo-Latin studies (see Tilg and Walser 2013) although in the criticism of English literature it is commonly defined as a romance. Lack of transparency here stems from the use of the term *roman*, which in French or German can mean either "romance" or "novel", and from the differences in

   Yet, in the case of *Argenis*, the novel crossed over into the theatre not just once, but five times, in plays composed in French, Spanish, German, and Italian, and in a chronological range spanning the seventeenth century: Pierre Du Ryer's *Argénis et Poliarque ou Théocrine* (Paris, 1630) and *L'Argénis, dernière journée* (Paris, 1631); Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *Argenis y Poliarco* (Madrid, 1637);[3] Christian Weise's *Gedichte von der Sicilianischen Argenis* (Leipzig, 1683); and Ottavio Gravina's *L'Argenide* (unpublished).[4] These works prove that, although Barclay's novel appears at first glance too obscure, too long, too complex, too traditional, or to contain too narrow a political message to adapt for the stage, in reality the intense and enduring popularity of the story of the princess Argenis and her beloved Poliarchus as well as the performable qualities of Barclay's text —the tension of its plot, the nobility of its characters, and the dangerous politics and the allegory of virtue that it represented— appealed to playwrights of the seventeenth century.[5] With *Argenis*, John Barclay created a novel with the right type of complexity —a combination of the genres of romance and political essay, where the characters act out their political and moral convictions against the background of a love story— that could enable Du Ryer, Calderón, Weise, and Gravina to employ Barclay's characters, to rework his plot, and to open up his political and moral ideas to such diverse interpretations as they did in their plays. Michael Meere, Julian Weiss, and Anna Linton will demonstrate how the French, Spanish, and German playwrights transformed the plot of *Argenis* and will discuss the nature and implications of their theatrical adaptations, while it is my aim here to introduce the novel and draw attention to the features that would have been attractive to a playwright and that possibly would have provided the impetus for the composition of a drama.

   Argenis brings to life the swash-buckling adventures of a handsome young noble, complete with shipwrecks, pirates, and hand-to-hand combat; it asks whether a charming princess should be forced to marry a man she does not love while the man to whom she has secretly promised herself is absent, pulling together his forces so that he can prove his royal identity to her father; it reflects on the components of good government; and it portrays the darker side of the conduct of political figures, exposing secret surveillance, aborted insurgence,

the national traditions of literary criticism.

3. Calderón's play, although first printed in 1637, had been composed sometime over the previous ten years. For details on the dating of the play, see the essay in this volume by Julian Weiss.

4. In his biography of the Sicilian writer Ottavio Gravina (1652-1732), included in his *Bibliotheca Sicula*, Antonino Mongitore recorded that Gravina's play had not been printed; see Mongitore (1714: 113). The text of *L'Argenide* is presumably that found in ms. S. Gregorio 67 (n. 17, cc. 39) housed in the Biblioteca Nazionale at Rome. A transcription and analysis of this text is presently being prepared by Stephen Parkin (British Library) and Enza De Francisci (University College London). I thank Stephen Parkin (British Library), Livia Martinoli (Biblioteca Nazionale), and Letizia Panizza (Royal Holloway, University of London) for their help with research on Gravina.

5. I agree here with the view expressed by Collignon (1902): 112-113.

and attempted poisoning. The book tells the story of Argenis, the only child of Meleander, the king of Sicily, who has secretly promised herself to the mysterious nobleman Poliarchus, unrecognized as the king of France. She must dissuade her father, who, like her, is ignorant of Poliarchus's true origins and with whom Poliarchus has fallen out of favour, from arranging her marriage —either to the evil Radirobanes, king of Sardinia, or to the good Archombrotus (like Poliarchus, a mysterious nobleman with obscure origins, who will be revealed to be both the prince of Mauritania and Argenis's half-brother)— until Poliarchus can regain her father's good graces, and reveal his true power and authority.

The author of *Argenis*, John Barclay, wrote exclusively in Latin. Barclay was only ever a minor courtier, and it is remarkable that he had the talent to compose such an influential, epic work; for although *Argenis* is little known today, it was recognized as a monumental work when it appeared, and its literary influence was considerable. For example, in England, Barclay's approach to political fiction touched such works as William Sales's *Theophania*, Percy Herbert's *Princess Cloria*, and Richard Brathwaite's *Panthalia*. *Argenis* also provided inspiration for the heroic romance in England, as evidenced by Roger Boyle's *Parthenissa*, and in France, as evidenced by the works of Marin Le Roy de Gomberville, Gautier de Costes de La Calprenède, and Madeleine de Scudéry.[6] In Italy, Barclay's fiction can be said to have afffected the writing of Giovan Francesco Loredano, Gian Francesco Biondi, Anton Giulio Brignole Sale, and Gian Vittorio Rossi, among others.[7]

It was Barclay's classical education and his intense observation of the politics he later experienced that provided him with the skills to compose a sophisticated political romance that would entertain generations of readers and lend itself to multiple translations and adaptations.[8] Barclay was born in 1582 at Pont-à-Mousson in Lorraine, where his Scottish father, William, was a professor of civil law at the Jesuit college. Barclay's education at the college gave him the learning that enabled him to write classically influenced Latin, and his father's opinions gave him an absolutist political stance.[9] From about 1605 to 1615, Barclay was in London,

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6. Salzman (1985: 155-157); Riley and Huber, introduction to Barclay (2004: 35-37). For further details, see Glomski (2016: 62-63).

7. See Miraglia del Giudice (2003) for Barclay's influence on the Italian baroque romance. (I thank an anonymous reviewer of my article for this reference.)

8. On John Barclay's life, see Fleming (1966).

9. In his treatise *De regno et regali potestate adversus … Monarchomachos* (Paris, 1600), William Barclay rejected all forms of state that deviated from the monarchy. For his influence on his son John, see Siegl-Mocavini (1999): 202, 314, 373. See also Desfougères (1984): 333-334. William was a devout Catholic who had chosen to leave Scotland when it became compulsory for all members of Aberdeen College to sign the Scottish Confession of Faith. He went to study at Paris and Bourges; he then taught law at Bourges until 1567, when he took up a post at the Jesuit university at Pont-à-Mousson in Lorraine, where his son John was born. For the biography of William Barclay (1546-1608), see *Oxford DNB* (*Dictionary of National Biography*), 3: 779-781.

connected to the court of James I, but then, most likely because of financial need and for religious reasons, he moved to Rome and entered the service of Pope Paul V. Barclay wrote *Argenis* while living in Rome, and probably commenced the project in 1618, for in October of that year he wrote to the celebrated scholar Nicolas Fabri de Peiresc that he had started a work that was keeping him totally occupied.[10] *Argenis*, with its obviously political slant, was dedicated to the French king, Louis XIII, and seems to have grown out of Barclay's experiences as a courtier observing the blunders of great rulers.[11] Barclay died in August 1621 while his book was being printed; he would never know the success of *Argenis*.

In spite of the instantaneous acclaim and lasting popularity that it won, the text of *Argenis* may appear, at first encounter, to be obscure, long, and overly complex. The accusation of obscurity could stem from the novel being written in Latin. Certainly, in the early seventeenth century, any writing intended for an international, educated audience was done in Latin,[12] but some readers must have found the Latin of *Argenis* demanding, as evidently did Samuel Pepys, who recorded purchasing a copy in Latin in St Paul's Churchyard on 24 August 1660 and who was still reading it three years later.[13] Indeed, the swiftness with with *Argenis* was translated into the vernacular (with a French translation appearing already in 1622, the year after the original Latin publication) and the swiftness with which it was abridged (with a French abridgement coming out in 1624) indicates that those interested in the novel found the Latin difficult or impossible and/or the length offputting.[14] One of the most famous reviewers of *Argenis*, the English poet William Cowper, wrote to Samuel Rose in 1787 that he had

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10. Collignon (1902) : 25–26.

11. The majority of Barclay's earlier works also had a political slant, such as: *Regi Jacobo Primo carmen gratulatorium* (Paris, 1603); *Series patefacti … parricidii …* (*Conspiratio Anglicana*) (London, 1605); *Euphormionis Lusinini satyricon* (Paris, 1605, 1607); *Apologia Euphormionis pro se* (Paris, 1610); *Icon Animorum* (London, 1614). John would prepare his father William's treatise, *De potestate papae*, for publication in 1609.

12. Adhering to classical standards when writing in Latin was important at the time, and Barclay's Latin was actually faulted for grammatical errors and Gallicisms. Probably the most vociferous critic in this respect was the French novelist Charles Sorel, who censured Barclay's Latin in both his *Remarques sur le Berger extravagant* (Paris, 1628) and his *Bibliothèque française* (Paris, 1664); see Collignon (1902: 110-112). Sorel, in his *Histoire comique de Francion*, also claimed that he could write a better novel than *Argenis*; Sorel (1996: 549). For German criticisms of *Argenis*, see Anna Linton's article that follows.

13. In his diary entry for Sunday, 8 November 1663, he wrote that he had spent most of the evening reading Fuller's *Church History of Britain* and Barclay's *Argenis*. Pepys (1993: 73-74, 318).

14. The first abridgement of *Argenis* was done in French by Nicolas Coeffeteau (1574-1623), an important Catholic theologian and preacher, and the bishop of Marseille. His writings were mostly religious in nature, but he maintained an interest in literature and history. Coeffeteau's abridged translation of *Argenis* was published by Samuel Thiboust and Jacques Villery at Paris in 1624; it was reprinted at Paris in 1626, 1628, and 1662, and at Rouen in 1641. See Riley and Huber, introduction to Barclay (2004: 56). The 1628 printing of Coeffeteau's abridgement numbers only 188 pages as compared with the twelve hundred of the original Latin.

"attacked" *Argenis* "more than once" before finally finishing reading it. Yet, in comparison to other older romances, Cowper stated that it was the only one he "had ever had the patience to go through with". In spite of its length, he did not find the plot of *Argenis* overly complex. Echoing the sentiments of generations of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century readers, he praised the book, noting that it was "richer in incident [than] can be imagined, full of surprises, which the reader never forestalls, and yet free from all entanglement and confusion".[15]

Barclay's *Argenis* appeared at a time when the authors of long works of prose fiction were beginning to throw off the chains of chivalric romance and to experiment with new forms (satire and the pastoral, for example) and to treat the preoccupations of the moment, such as religious issues, the expression of refined sentiments and emotions, and politics.[16] Cervantes's *Don Quixote* had come out in 1605 and 1615, and his *Trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda* in 1617. D'Urfé had published the first three parts of *Astrée* in 1607, 1610, and 1619. Mary Wroth's *Urania* would be printed in the same year as *Argenis*. In comparison to these vernacular works, though, *Argenis* could look traditional, relying on the classics for its language and its genre. Indeed, Barclay infused his work with motifs from and allusions to the classical epic (hand-to-hand combat, for instance), and the very title of his book, *Argenis*, recalls the titles of old, epic romances, such as *Aeneis*, *Thebais*, etc.[17] Furthermore, Barclay took as his primary model for *Argenis* the *Aethiopica* of Heliodorus, a late-antique Greek romance in which a princess who is to inherit a kingdom must fend off other suitors to marry the man to whom she is secretly betrothed, and his secondary inspiration came from Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, a didactic, fictionalized biography of the great Persian general dating from the early fourth century BC that includes extended discussions of generalship and statecraft. Both *Aethiopica* and *Cyropaedia* were widely known, having been revived in the mid-sixteenth century through humanist editions of the original Greek and translations into Latin (in the case of *Cyropaedia*, with a Latin version appearing already in the fifteenth century), French, Spanish, Italian, English, and German. *Aethiopica* had provided inspiration for Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581), Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590), d'Urfé's *Astrée*, and Cervantes's *Trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*; while traces of *Cyropaedia* were present in the most famous political treatises of the sixteenth century —those of Machiavelli, Erasmus, More, and Elyot— and in James I's *Basilikon Doron* (1599), a manual of instruction on the arts of kingship.[18] Certainly, flex-

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15. Cowper (1982: 18), as cited by Riley and Huber, introduction to Barclay (2004: 38). Curiously, Collignon (1902: 114), remarks that readers of the epoch were not put off by lengthy works of fiction, even ones with extended digressions inserted; novels such as *Astrée* had already exhibited such tendencies.
16. On the expression of polite sociability in seventeenth-century fiction, see Méchoulan (2007).
17. Collignon (1902: 114-115); IJsewijn (1983: 7, 17).
18. For details on the early translations of *Aethiopica* and *Cyropaedia* and on the popularity

ible boundaries between classical historiography and romance had existed since the late Middle Ages,[19] but with Barclay, it was the mixing of a variety of classical elements with the modern that gave *Argenis* its freshness: Barclay was the first to combine romance and forthright politics in a work of extended prose fiction. *Argenis* was not just a love story with a nod to the epic tradition; it showcased contemporary persons and political events.[20]

   Still, one could argue that the political issues treated in *Argenis* are too specific to be interesting to a wide audience, or over an extended period of time, and even that the story is weighed down by the political discussions that crop up in the text. Admittedly, the political message of *Argenis* centres on one notion, that an absolute, hereditary monarchy is the most desirable form of government. But, Barclay, as an early absolutist, was in step with the times; although he portrays the ideal ruler as absolute and sovereign, he does not present the ruler as possessing limitless power; rather, he subjects him to the "reason of state" (understood to be the precedence of the interests of the state over private, individual interests, even those of the ruler himself) and bound to the precepts of Christian faith and virtue.[21] Barclay reaffirms ideas found in the late sixteenth-century treatises of Jean Bodin and Giovanni Botero, ideas that would continue to be discussed and debated during Barclay's own era.[22] So, Barclay deals with the preoccupations of his times: the advantages of a hereditary monarchy, the right of kings to raise taxes without the consent of the deputies of the people; the question of a permanent versus a standing army; methods for remedying the slowness of the judicial process; the dangers of religious dissent; the possibility of reconciling free will with divine prescience.[23]

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of these two works in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, see Bardino (1939: 5-16); Marsh (1992: 75-196); González Rovira (1996: 13-44, 227-247, 249-252); Mentz (2006: 47-72); Grogan (2007); Skretkowicz (2010: 111-165, 168-224); Grogan (2014: 32-69). Although Barclay never claimed *Aethiopica* as a starting point, he was most likely reading it while he was composing *Argenis* (Collignon 1902: 113).

19. On sixteenth-century humanist culture and the distinguishing between historiography and romance, see Dionisotti (1997). In this context, it is interesting to note that in the preface to his translation of Xenophon's works (Salamanca, 1552), Diego Gracián views the stories embedded in Xenophon's text as useful entertainment and concludes that Xenophon's works constitute a valid alternative to chivalric romance. (I thank one of the anonymous reviewers of my article for this information.)

20. Collignon (1902: 118), referring to Koerting (1891: I, 133).

21. Desfougères (1984: 331); Siegl-Mocavini (1999: 178-179, 314, 327-331, 334).

22. Jean Bodin, *Les six livres de la république* (Paris, 1576) was translated into Latin in 1586, into Italian in 1588, into Spanish in 1590, into German in 1592, and into English in 1606. See Siegl-Mocavini (1999: 188-199) for a summary of the issues found in Bodin's work that were essential for Barclay. Giovanni Botero's *Della ragion di Stato* (Venice, 1589), crucial for its formulation of the doctrine of "the reason of state", was translated into French in 1599, Latin in 1602, and English in 1606. On its importance for Barclay, see Siegl-Mocavini (1999: 329-330) and Bouchet (1992: 176).

23. Collignon (1902: 117).

Furthermore, the allusions to contemporary politics and real personages in *Argenis* piqued the curiosity of readers to such an extent that within six years of the original publication, a key to persons and events was appended to the text.[24] The key linked the chief characters of *Argenis* to the crowned heads of Europe: Poliarchus was to be Henry IV of France, while Argenis's father, Meleander, king of Sicily in the book, was identified as Henry III. Hyanisbe, the queen of Mauritania, was equated with Queen Elizabeth I of England, and Radirobanes, the king of Sardinia (who invades Mauritania in the story) was interpreted as Philip II of Spain. Argenis herself was seen as a symbol of France. Barclay also provoked interest by inserting his Roman associates and even himself as characters. Among the advisors to King Meleander are Ibburranes, whose name is an anagram for Barberinus (Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, the future Pope Urban VIII) and Dunalbius, whose name is an anagram for Ubaldinus (Cardinal Roberto Ubaldini, a cousin of Leo XI). The poets Antonius Querengus (Antonio Querengi) and Hieronymus Aleander (Girolamo Aleandro) appear, respectively, as Antenorius, priest of the Sicilian temple of Apollo, and Hieroleander, secretary to Argenis. Barclay incorporated himself into the story as Nicopompus, the court poet. And, Barclay mentioned famous and infamous persons, such as the reformer John Calvin (Usinulca) and his French followers, the Huguenots (Hyperephanii), and two pairs of French and English royal favourites who came into conflict with their monarchs, Concino Concini and his wife at the court of Louis XIII (Lydi coniuges), and Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset and his wife at the court of James I (coniuges ex Phrygia).[25]

Barclay does present his views on kingship and good government in long, drawn-out dialogues, which do tend to slow down the action. However, Barclay integrates these conversations into his story so that the characters express the author's political ideas not merely by telling but also by showing: the characters act out the convictions that they express in the political discussions so that their actions embody politics in a performative way and furnish *Argenis* with a dramatic quality. For example, in book 1, at a dinner party hosted by one of King Meleander's advisors, Nicopompus enters a debate over elected versus hereditary monarchs and defends the latter (1.18.3-5); then, in book 3, when Poliarchus, Barclay's symbol of the ideal ruler, returns to Sicily in disguise so that he can meet secretly with Argenis, Nicopompus comes to his aid by hiding him in his house (3.13.2).

In sum, it was the combination of Barclay's talent —his aptitude for keen

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24. Starting with the Elzevier edition of 1627. See Riley and Huber, introduction to Barclay (2004: 45-48).
25. Riley and Huber, introduction to Barclay (2004: 24-26). Interestingly, Concini was the subject of a play by Christian Weise, *Der gestürtzte Marggraff von Ancre* (Dresden, 1679). (I thank Anna Linton for this reference.)

portrayal of court life and his ability to write an exciting story— and the novelty of his book —a combination of romance and politics, but one where both the romance and the political aspects of the book are modernized— that made *Argenis* successful. Barclay was using romance to ease his political lessons, but his version of romance detached itself from traditionalism by referring to contemporary issues and by not admitting scenes of magic or the pastoral into the plot. As a result, *Argenis* is more than just an allegorical romance: it is, rather, as Helen Moore has recently claimed, "a flexible and historically self-aware mode of fiction that references and recasts contemporaneous events, personality types, gossip, and scandal as part of its capacious receptivity".[26] *Argenis* contains dramatic and performative elements that appealed to a general literate audience and that would be attractive to playwrights. The book's popularity, the classical structure of its plot with its resulting tension, the nobility and amiability of its protagonists, the intrigue of its politics, and the durability of its themes are all qualities that could engage a playwright.

The intense and enduring popularity of *Argenis* would have been the primary factor in attracting the notice of a playwright. Because of the immediate and overwhelming approval of *Argenis* by the (mostly male) educated class, its popularity quickly spread to the more general reading public. Soon after the first printing in the original Latin (1621), a French translation of *Argenis* appeared, in 1622. This was followed by a second French translation in 1623, and then by translations in English (1625), Spanish (1626),[27] and German (1626). For those who did not have the time or patience to plough through the thousand pages of the original edition, abridged vernacular versions, mostly based on the French abridgement of Nicolas Coeffeteau (Paris, 1624), sprang up. Other authors, hoping to cash in on Barclay's success, spun off sequels, both in the vernacular, as did Ancelot-Mathias de Mouchemberg (Paris, 1625) and José Pellicer de Salas y Tobar (Madrid, 1626),[28] and in Latin, as did Gabriel Bugnot (Leiden/Rotterdam, 1669). Indeed, the mania for *Argenis* continued throughout the seventeenth century, the original Latin text being reprinted more than thirty times and with Italian, Dutch, and Polish versions added to the list of its translations. Moreover, with *Argenis*, Barclay had paved the way for early modern romance to be treated as a genre for the expression of serious thought, and his influence seeped into the works of vernacular authors such as Mademoiselle de Scudéry and Sir Percy Herbert.[29] The result was that everyone was familiar with the story

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26. Moore (2013: 69).
27. Two Spanish translations appeared in 1626; for details, see Davis (1983).
28. The Spanish sequel, authored by Pellicer de Salas y Tobar, who also translated the original *Argenis*, is an adaptation of Mouchemberg's work. See Davis (1983: 29) and Riley and Huber, introduction to John Barclay (2004: 59).
29. As discussed by Riley and Huber, introduction to John Barclay (2004: 35). For bibliographical details on the editions, translations, and adaptations of *Argenis*, see Riley and Huber, intro-

of Argenis and her beloved Poliarchus; people were well versed in the plot and the characters of Barclay's novel. And, of course, the translations and vernacular abridgements made the text available to a playwright who did not read Latin.

In addition, the structure of *Argenis* would have been familiar to playwrights, for *Argenis* possesses the format of a classical drama: it is laid out in five books in perfect balance.[30] Book 3 is the dramatic core of the work, where the tension in the plot peaks as Argenis's three suitors are featured in their quest to marry the princess. Radirobanes, the king of Sardinia, comes to the aid of king Meleander, Argenis's father, to help him eradicate the rebellion led by the nobleman Lycogenes. At the same time that Radirobanes is meeting secretly with Argenis's maid, Selenissa, in an attempt to gain Argenis's affections, Poliarchus arrives back in Sicily and in disguise manages to meet with Argenis to plan their future. Archombrotus, in the background, tries to win Argenis's hand through gallant deeds, first saving the life of Meleander by taking his place in the battle against Lycogenes and then, at the end of book 3, saving Argenis from kidnap by Radirobanes. (The Sardinian king, frustrated by Argenis's rebuff, has taken up the advice of Selenissa, who has betrayed her mistress by revealing Argenis's secret love for Poliarchus and by recounting the story of how Poliarchus first came to the Sicilian court.) Not only does book 3 present the turning point in the love story, with Poliarchus promising to return to Sicily in three months' time to meet Argenis and her father openly with signs of his royal status, but also it presents Barclay's chief ideas about the ideal kingdom, the administration of justice, and the role of the court poet.

In this complex and carefully constructed plot line, books 1 and 5 counterbalance each other, as do books 2 and 4, and the two pairs together form brackets around book 3. Books 1 and 5 both focus on the relationship of the "good" suitors, Poliarchus and Archombrotus, as they meet and become friends at the beginning of the novel and then later, after being driven apart as jealous rivals for the hand of Argenis, are reconciled when they meet in Africa (at the command of Archombrotus's (step)mother Hyanisbe before she reveals that Archombrotus is Argenis's half-brother, and so will become Poliarchus's brother-in-law). Books 2 and 4 relate the awakening of Archombrotus's feelings for Argenis and then his acceptance as a future son-in-law by king Meleander. In book 2 Radirobanes has made his first appearance as he comes to assist Meleander in his struggle against Lycogenes; and Radirobanes exits in book 4, leaving Sicily in anger after his plot to carry off Argenis is discovered and then being killed in battle by Poliarchus after coming to Africa to attack the Mauritanians. (Poliarchus has ended up in Mauritania on his way back to his home country of Gaul, when his ship is blown off course by a tempest.) While book 2 narrates the events connected to the

duction to John Barclay (2004: 51-61).
30. I rely on IJsewijn (1983: 13-17), who has provided a very insightful discussion of the plot of *Argenis*.

rebellion of Lycogenes, and Barclay increases the tension through scenes of intrigue that involve plotting against Meleander and the attempted poisoning of Poliarchus, book 4 presents the resolution of Melander's troubles, and his effort to bring peace and stability to his kingdom, having rid himself of Lycogenes and Radirobanes, by resolving to have Argenis be married. Here, Barclay again amplifies the tension, as Meleander gives his daughter two months to come to terms with marriage to Archombrotus. She immediately writes to Poliarchus to inform him of their change in fortune and she begs him to return to Sicily without delay, for she will kill herself rather than marry Archombrotus. But, will her letter reach Poliarchus in time?

In spite of the length of *Argenis* and the complexity of its plot, it was possible to adapt the whole story for the stage. Du Ryer did just this in his second version of the novel, *L'Argénis, dernière journée*, where (as Michael Meere indicates) he may have followed Coeffeteau's abridgement (which contains the narrative written in strict chronological order and stripped of descriptions, lengthy political discussions, reflective thoughts of the characters, poems, and incidental episodes).[31] Christian Weise, in his *Gedichte von der Sicilianischen Argenis*, also followed the whole plot, presumably with the 1626 translation by Martin Opitz at his disposal, although, as Anna Linton comments, he was not able to contain the story in five acts and needed to add a prologue and an epilogue. Linton also points out that, as his play was intended for a school performance, Weise increased the number of characters in order to have sufficient parts for his pupils, and he removed references to pagan religious practices, as the depiction of pagan worship would have been offensive to his audience.

Alternatively, with such an extended plot to work with, a playwright could, if he found the complexity or length of the whole novel too daunting to take on, choose one episode and develop it, as did Du Ryer in his first adaptaton of Barclay's novel, *Argénis et Poliarque ou Théocrine*. Du Ryer portrayed only the arrival at the Sicilian court of Poliarchus disguised as a woman, Theocrine, to gain access to Argenis, and Theocrine's saving of Argenis and Meleander from an attack by the thugs of Lycogenes. The episode of Theocrine is compact and thus easy for a playwright to excerpt, but it is also important in the plot of the novel because of the atmosphere of danger and threat that it creates, and the use of deceit and disguise that it portrays. In Du Ryer's piece, as Meere points out, the character Poliarque, hyperaware of his role-playing, calls attention to his transvestite disguise, an onstage transformation that, while it disrupts surprise, increases the dramatic irony and maintains the suspense of the play. In Coeffeteau's abridgement, the Theocrine episode appears at the beginning, with Coeffeteau stating outright that Poliarchus has come to Sicily disguised as a young

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31. On Coeffeteau's abridgement, see Collignon (1902: 101-104), and Riley and Huber, introduction to Barclay (2004: 56).

woman.[32] In the novel these events are related as backstory, but they are placed in a central position (i.e., in book 3). The events —recounted by Argenis's maid Selenissa to the Sardinian king Radirobanes— are presented in two segments (chapters 7 through 10, and chapters 16 through 19) punctuated by Poliarchus's secret visit to Argenis, which forms the exact centre of the novel. When Selenissa begins her story, the rebels have been overthrown, with Lycogenes killed and Meleander beginning to take back control of his kingdom. As the troubles of the Sicilian state are quelled for the moment, Radirobanes has come to Meleander to ask him for his daughter's hand in marriage, but when the Sicilian king replies that he will leave the decision up to Argenis, Radirobanes seeks to corrupt the maid Selenissa so that she will help make him more acceptable to Argenis. Selenissa begins the first part of her account by relating how Meleander was keeping Argenis secluded in a castle near Syracuse to protect her from the violence of Lycogenes. One day when Selenissa was at Syracuse, she was introduced to a young foreign woman, Theocrine, who related her misfortunes, stating that she was a royal daughter fleeing a murderous uncle, and who requested shelter. Selenissa believed Theocrine's story, and she was received into the castle, where she was kept close to Argenis. When Lycogenes's men attacked and forced their way into Argenis's chamber, Theocrine rose up to fight them off. In her second instalment, Selenissa tells Radirobanes how Theocrine saved both Argenis and her father from Lycogenes's ruffians and then confessed the truth to Argenis: he was a man, Poliarchus, who had come to the castle because of her renown; he had disguised himself as a woman in order to gain access to her and was now in love with her. Poliarchus then promptly departed, and Meleander, not being able to find Theocrine, believed that he and Argenis had been saved by Pallas and thus instituted sacrifices to the goddess with Argenis consecrated to her as her priestess. Poliarchus then returned to court dressed as a soldier, and he and Argenis promised to marry each other. After she finishes her story, Selenissa takes Radirobanes to speak to Argenis, but only for her to reject him.

For his part, Calderón, in his *Argenis y Poliarco*, reduced the cast of characters and condensed the plot to focus on particular threads. For example, he eliminated Radirobanes in order to concentrate on the rivalry between Poliarchus and Archombrotus. In the novel, the rivalry between the two heroes climaxes

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32. "Toute l'Europe & mesme l'Affrique estoit pleine de bruict de la beauté d'Argenis qu'on mettoit entre les merueilles du monde & de la nature. Mille ieunes courages épris de son amour s'estoient resolus de la seruir, & d'employer toute leur industrie & toute leur valeur pour s'insinuer en ses bonnes graces. Entre les autres Poliarque Prince de France & heritier de la plus belle Couronne du monde, se laissant transporter à ceste passion, rechercha ceste gloire auec plus de succez que de prudence. Mais en faut-il chercher en l'amour, se figurant qu'vne extraordinaire beauté meritoit des poursuites non communes, il quitta son Royaume, & prenant l'habit d'vne fille passa la mer & se rendit en Sicile"(Coeffeteau 1628: 9-11). (The quotation is from the 1628 reprint, the original 1624 imprint being unavailable to me.)

in the fifth book and pushes the narrative towards its final resolution: that Archombrotus is the son of Meleander and cannot, therefore, marry Argenis. The emotion that Barclay keeps escalating —first through soliliquys given to each hero, and then in a face-to-face meeting— could be effortlessly transferred to performance, and, as Julian Weiss shows, Calderón achieves this through stage-craft and verse. In the novel, in the first of the three scenes, Archombrotus is at sea returning to Mauritania at his mother's beckoning when he recalls Argenis's brusqueness towards him as he was taking his leave. The torment of her words swells the anger inside him. He blames his failure to gain her affections on Poliarchus and vows to take revenge if he ever meets up with him again: "Quem, ô … si mihi Fata obvium dabunt, quanto lubentius quam ipsum Radirobanem hac manu, hoc ferro de amore atque vita deiciam! Et vero meretur odio meo oppetere, tot malorum mihi auctor ac virgini, quam nisi carminibus teneret, ego tam claro sanguine, tam opulento regno, tot amoris indiciis, ac etiam (fas sit tacite cogitare) non ignobili fortitudinis exemplo flexissem".[33] Meanwhile, Poliarchus, in Mauritania and lying in bed, wounded after the battle with the Sardinians, receives the letter from Argenis stating that her father has promised her in marriage to Archombrotus. Poliarchus directs his emotions towards Archombrotus and vows to kill him. Defiantly, he says: "Ego me … ego ad tuam perniciem me servabo, atrocissime aemulorum. Sequar fatum Argenidis sed perfunctus tuae mortis solatio. Defuncti quoque pugnabimus. Pacem nec experiar nec concedam".[34] As Archombrotus arrives at his mother's court, the two men see each other and can barely contain their fury:

> Nam ut primum Poliarchus Archombrotum aspexit vicissimque ab illo est cognitus —ô Fatum!— quae procella quodve fulmen celerius destinatos cursus exsequitur, quam tunc rabies et indignatio et avidus sanguinis furor, mutatis utriusque animis, vultus quoque corrupit? Ceu Medusam aspexissent steterunt immoti; mox trucibus oculis necdum tamen omnia impetui indulgentibus a fronte ad vestigia contemplationem deduxêre. Stupebant fremebantque attoniti. … Sensim in utroque exsuperabat insania, nec aliud praeter reverentiam Hyanisbes obstabat quin polluerent

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33. "O if ever it be my fate to meet him withal —how much more willingly should I with this hand and this sword rid him both of love and life than Radirobanes himself? And certainly he deserves to die under my wrath, he who has been the cause of so much mischief both to me and the lady, upon whom if he had not wrought with enchantments, I might have won her, I, a man of so high birth, so rich a kingdom, with so many testimonies of my love and (be it lawful to remember it to myself!) with no mean example of my valour" (5.4.2). I cite book, chapter, and paragraph numbers according to Barclay (2004). The Latin quotations, with English translation, are taken from this edition. (For the Latin text, Riley and Huber have relied on the author's manuscript of *Argenis*, and on the first and second printed editions; for the English version, they have modernized the spelling, punctuation, and grammar of the 1625 translation of Kingesmill Long.)
34. "I will live. I will reserve myself only for your ruin, most hated rival. I will not long outlive Argenis but will first have the comfort of your death. Nay, we will be at enmity even after death; I will never grant nor accept of friendship" (5.7.9).

sanctitatem hospitii et vel nudis manibus nimis lenta arma praeverterent.[35]

If the structure of *Argenis* lent itself to transgeneric adaptation, then so did the political images that it presented. The plot of *Argenis*, although replete with daring exploits and heroic adventures, is grounded in scenes of the court, in which are played out the dangers and uncertainties of court life, and the political intrigue lurking behind them. Such scenes, furnished by Barclay with the chatter of royal advisors and the comings and goings of messengers, could be transferred to the stage, as in the plays of Du Ryer and Weise, as Meere and Linton note. In the novel Barclay first constructs a dramatic space governed by secrecy and dissimulation, and then builds up tension by creating an atmosphere full of duplicity, disguise, and paranoia. Already in book 1 he excites his audience, where, in chapter 6, Archombrotus, who has just arrived in Sicily, falls into conversation with the noble matron Timoclea as they make their way down into the cave where Poliarchus is hiding —Timoclea takes a torch in hand, and Archombrotus draws his sword. Timoclea comments on the rises and falls of court minions; she gives an example of the Lydian couple, "Retulerisne ad exemplum Lydios coniuges … hic ad regium limen in suo sanguine fusus, illa ex carcere ad lictoris ferrum educta".[36] By book 3, after Poliarchus has been banished but then pardoned by the king (and nearly poisoned by the rebel Lycogenes), and has met with shipwreck and pirates but then been received by Queen Hyanisbe in Africa, he comes back to Sicily to meet with Argenis. He does not wish Meleander to see him until he can appear in royal array and so hides at the house of the court poet Nicopompus. In a scene typical of the novel (3.13), Nicopompus, hosting that evening a dinner party for a group of royal courtiers, puts Poliarchus in a neighbouring room so that he may overhear what is being said during the meal. As Poliarchus stands listening, Nicopompus purposely introduces the subject of Poliarchus into the dinner conversation so that Poliarchus may ascertain what the others think of him.[37]

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35. "For as soon as Poliarchus saw Archombrotus and he again knew him (O Fate!), what storm, what thunderbolt did ever shoot so quick and deadly as then their rage, disdain, and thirst for blood changed both their minds and their faces? They stood without motion as if they had seen Medusa, and then with fierce and dreadful eyes they viewed one another from head to foot, though not yet altogether yielding to their anger. They stood fretting, chafing, and musing. … Their fury in both of them by little and little increased, and nothing there was but their respect to the queen to stay them from violating all laws of hospitality and from attacking with their bare hands, not waiting for their weapons, which were entirely too slow" (5.9.4).

36. "[H]e, weltering in his blood at the height of honour; she, brought upon the scaffold to offer her tender neck to the headsman's axe" (1.6.1). Timoclea is referring to the real-life Concino Concini and his wife, who were influential courtiers of Marie de Medici, but who under the reign of her son, Louis XIII, fell out of favour and were killed.

37. "Ipse ducente Nicopompo substitit in conclavi ad triclinii latus, unde convivarum sermones excipi possent. … Nicopompus mentionem Poliarchi ex composito iniecit ut ille in proximo

Barclay's novel vividly illustrates abstract political notions —here, absolutism and the reason of state— through the actions of noble characters who themselves develop sympathetically throughout the story. *Argenis* lays the groundwork for dramatic representation of how a state should be ruled wisely, a theory that, as Anna Linton states, was important for the playwright Weise. The novel shows the transformation of a faulty king, Argenis's father, Meleander, into an admirable one. Meleander, who at the outset is described by Poliarchus as overly mild and kindly, and too trusting of his courtiers, develops, during the course of the story, to be a stronger and more decisive leader. He learns through life experiences, as after the defeat of the rebel Lycogenes (3.6), when he takes action to restore his absolute power by bringing the secessionist towns of the kingdom back to obedience. He receives the ambassadors from the penitent towns with clemency, but he turns away the representatives of the splinter religious sect of Hyperephanians. After the treachery of the Sardinian king Radirobanes is uncovered, Meleander calls his counsellors together to decide what steps to take against the Sardinian king. He agrees to proclaim Radirobanes an enemy of Sicily and he prepares his armed forces to repel a possible attack from Sardinia (4.3). In order, finally, to ensure the stability of his kingdom with an undisturbed line of succession, he decides to marry Argenis to Archombrotus (4.4-5). Abstract ideas in *Argenis* are conveyed also by the actions of Archombrotus, who will become the next king of Sicily (not by marrying Argenis but by the revelation that he is Meleander's son from an earlier relationship). So, the novel also depicts Archombrotus's gaining the knowledge and experience to be a virtuous and decisive ruler. His training takes place at Meleander's court, where, like Meleander, he is strengthened by life experiences. He develops both his virtue and his military skills, as shown in book 3, where, clad in Meleander's armour, he enters into battle against the rebel Lycogenes; he plans strategy together with Meleander's commander-in-chief Eurymedes; and he takes it upon himself to rush to Lycogenes, engage him in combat, and kill him off. At the end of book 3, Archombrotus demonstrates tactical skill and virtue as he, through instinct and shrewd investigation, uncovers Radirobanes's plot to carry off Argenis and Meleander, and reveals this treachery to Eurymedes and the king. By the beginning of book 4, Meleander is impressed enough that he decides to give Argenis to Archombrotus in marriage.[38] And yet, Archombrotus goes on to settle the war of succession in Sardinia to stabilize the monarchy there, demonstrating that he has come to act independently and to exhibit true valour.[39]

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latens de sua fama rectissime iudicaret, cum isti de eo simpliciter dicerent quem abesse arbitrabantur" (3.13.4-5).
38. *Argenis* 3.1.4-5, 8, 11 (battle with Lycogenes); 3.24.4-7 and 3.25.1-3 (discovery of Radirobanes's plot); 4.4.14 and 4.5.1 (Meleander decides to offer Argenis's hand to Archombrotus).
39. *Argenis*, 5.11.2-3. On the political justification for Archombrotus's conquest of Sardinia, see Siegl-Mocavini (1999: 205, 293).

Obviously, Barclay's novel provides an allegory of strong leadership, with its main characters all striving either, as in the case of Poliarchus and Argenis, to assert their will and authority, or, as in the case of Meleander and Archombrotus, to gain the qualities of moral courage and decisiveness. In general, though, the noble heroes of the story act out virtues most admired by seventeenth-century society: prudence (and the necessity of dissembling in political life), constancy, loyalty, and temperance. These virtues were continually topical. In *Argenis*, the demand for prudence (but clemency where needed) is conveyed through the resolution of the predicaments of King Meleander —in his actions to regain control of his kingdom, to repel the Sardinians, and to guarantee the stable continuation of his kingdom.[40] Constancy is demonstrated through the story of the romantic couple, Argenis and Poliarchus, who remain faithful to each other to the end, despite lengthy separations and strained means of communication.[41] Loyalty is represented by the actions of Poliarchus and Archombrotus, who remain deferential to King Meleander even when the plot turns against them, that is, when Poliarchus is banished by the king and when Archombrotus feels he is being dismissed by the king in favour of other possible matches for Argenis. Temperance is shown by Argenis, who learns to gain control over her emotions as she awakes to treachery and who invents her own counter-plots to obstruct the advances of undesirable suitors and to facilitate Poliarchus's return to Sicily.[42] The representation of these virtues as accomplished by Barclay in *Argenis* could certainly have furnished inspiration to a playwright. Certainly Christian Weise felt it important to communicate the didactic aspects of Barclay's novel to his pupils and thus to include these notions in his play, as Linton explains.

So, although Barclay's *Argenis* may appear to be too difficult a work to adapt for the stage because of the language in which it was written, because of its length and the complexity of its plot, because of its traditional form, or because of its political message, in actuality it offered a wealth of material as a stimulus. Its well-structured plot, a combination of romance and politics, contained sufficient tension so that a playwright could draw on one segment, if not take up the whole story; its characters were both noble and sympathetic, persons already valiant but who learned to improve themselves during the course of the story; and it discussed familiar politics and allegorized virtues and human qualities that would touch the hearts of seventeenth-century audiences. The popularity of this romance would long make its characters recognizable to any literate audience, and the element of gossip that it contained, with its echoes of contemporary politics and references to real aristocratic persons, would long capture the curiosity of the reading public. Barclay had created a novel with just the

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40. Siegl-Mocavini (1999: 334, 340-341).
41. Siegl-Mocavini (1999: 16-17).
42. Moore (2013: 75).

right amount of complexity, enough to provide inspiration and possibility for transgeneric adaptation but not so much as to make impossible a reinterpretation of its plot. Playwrights would have been attracted by the ready-made plot and characters of an already proven, successful literary work. As Albert Collignon claimed, *Argenis* won over so many people of sophisticated taste and continued to entertain an audience long after its initial appearance because its romance story already depicted most of the situations and episodes upon which novels of the later seventeenth century would be built and which would be transported to the theatre of such authors as Quinault and Corneille.[43]

43. Collignon (1902: 112).

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