Sir Philip Sidney's unfinished romance, The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia, first appeared in print in 1590, four years after the author's death. In 1593, it expanded from quarto to folio, with an ending added from its earlier manuscript version; in 1598 the volume grew to encompass several of Sidney's other works. Ten further editions and multiple issues followed over the course of the seventeenth century, testifying to the Arcadia's appeal. It was quoted as a model of rhetoric, continued a...

In book two of the New Arcadia, the ignorant peasant girl Mopsa tells a story to the royal ladies Philoclea, Pamela and Zelmane: In time past, [...] there was a king (the mightiest man in all his country) that had by his wife the fairest daughter that ever did eat pap. But these texts reveal more about how Sidney was read in the long eighteenth century than the bare fact of his being read at all. As John Simons writes in his edition of Guy of Warwick and other Chapbook Romances, 'it is true that chapbooks do not speak to a world thronged by readers who were conversant with high literary culture', but far from appealing only to the 'reader of low sophistication and intellect', these texts could 'stimulate an internal commentary and debate on the values [they] enshrined'.

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