

## Sir Philip Sidney

Adapted from: Kuin, R. (2000). Biography of Sir Philip Sidney. Accessed January 4, 2009, from the Sidney Homepage: [http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/sidney/sidney\\_biography.htm](http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/sidney/sidney_biography.htm).

- Son of Sir Henry Sidney and Lady Mary Dudley. Sidney's mother was the eldest daughter of the Duke of Northumberland and sister of both the Earl of Leicester and the Earl of Warwick; his father was a close companion of King Edward VI, and served under both Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth in his lifetime. Naturally, much of Sidney's public life and reputation, beyond his poetic leanings involved his connections with nobility.
- Attended the Shrewsbury school under Thomas Ashton, a notable educator of the time. Attended Christ Church, Oxford for three years, and then traveled Europe when he was 17 at the insistence of his uncle, the Earl of Leicester. Sidney forged friendships with Hubert Languet, a political observer for the Elector of Saxony, whose "priceless network of friends and correspondents" made Sidney "the Queen's best-informed courtier about international relations" for years.
- Sidney was greatly influenced by Philipp Melanchthon's politico-religious philosophies, who felt that "reformed churches should pursue unity, under the leadership of a Protestant prince, in order to fight the Pope and the King of Spain. Theological differences were secondary, but wise and godly political government was crucial". Sidney came into Queen Elizabeth's favor, first by serving as his father, Sir Henry's representative at Court, and then undertaking special embassy missions on his own merit. His flair for writing was notable even in early memorandums written for the Queen, and letters to Languet about politics.
- Alas, Sidney fell slightly out of favor with the nobility by publicly opposing Queen Elizabeth's plan to forge a marriage with the French Duke of Alencon. "The Protestant faction of Leicester and Walsingham was greatly opposed, and persuaded Sidney ... to write a Letter to the Queen on a folly of such a marriage. It is a highly intelligent as well as heartfelt document, setting out the arguments with clarity while reminding Her Majesty of her suitor's involvement with the worst persecutions of the Huguenots." The letter itself did not seem to draw immediate rebuke, but when a public quarrel with the Earl of Oxford was thwarted only on the Queen's orders (Sidney was ready to duel with him), Sidney was firmly reminded "of the difference in degree between a mere gentleman and the seventeenth Earl of Oxford."
- Sidney left court temporarily in 1580, during which time he penned what are considered his three greatest works: "The prose romance *Arcadia*, the treatise *A Defense of Poesy* (also known as the *Apology for Poetry*), and the sonnet-sequence *Astrophil and Stella*" - based, notably, on Sidney's love for Penelope Devereux, married allegedly against her will to Lord Rich. *Astrophil and Stella* revives elements of Petrarchian sonnets previously unseen for 250 years, and had enormous influences in England.
- Sidney was shot in the thigh during an English siege on a Spanish relief force in the Eastern Netherlands on September 22, 1586. He appeared to be recovering, but the wound developed gangrene, and he died on October 17th, to acclaim by the Queen as "the most accomplished gentleman in Europe".