

Sir Philip Sidney

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CETERA ENMAS-
-ED



PHILIP SIDNEY

- 1554 – 1586
- First Critic
- Puritan Attack on poetry

SCHOOL OF ABUSE (1579)

- Stephen Gosson (1564 – 1624)
- Dedicated to Philip Sidney
- Poets - pipes and jesters – “caterpillars of the Commonwealth”
- Music – debilitating, undermines virtues.
- Drama is an incitement to common debauchery.
- Plato banished poets from the ideal republic
- Drama – pagan origin.
- Males playing female roles against nature, will make males effeminate.
- Tragedy – packed with cruelty, Comedy evokes foolish laughter.

A P O L O G Y F O R P O E T R Y

- 1595
- Published simultaneously by two printers – Ponsonby and Olney.
- *The Defense of Poesie* and *Apology for Poetry*

SECTION – 1 INTRODUCTION

- Sidney revealing the setting to the story.
- He and another man named Edward Watton were together at the Emperor's court where they met the horseman John Pietro Pugaliano.
- The men talked about horses, with Pugaliano arguing that for princes and noblemen, the skill of horsemanship is more important than even the “skill of government.”
- Pugliano's “strong affection and weak argument” convince Sidney—an aristocrat and former soldier and horseman—that he should make an argument in favor of poetry, as he has “slipped into the title of a poet.”

POETRY AND HORSEMANSHIP

- When one passionately loves an art, it is easy to describe it gorgeously; no “gilding” or exaggeration is needed.
- Compared to horsemanship, Sidney notes that poetry, once viewed as a noble art, is in England now “the laughing-stock of children.”
- The “first light-giver to ignorance and the first nurse.”
- He personifies poetry as a mother, giving the “milk” of knowledge to early civilizations. Rhetorical figures abound as Sidney asks his readers if they will be “hedgehogs,” beings who only know one thing, driving their own hosts out of their den, or “vipers” who “kill their parents.”

P O E T R Y

- Sidney references Musaeus, Homer, and Hesiod, the first writers in “learned Greece.”
- He notes that, in that culture, poets such as Orpheus and Amphion were said to tame beasts and move stones with their poetry.
- Furthermore, poets have beautified their mother tongues, as Gower and Chaucer did for English. The introduction of all these examples can be considered the rhetorical use of logos to persuade his reader.

PHILOSOPHY

- Sidney briefly compares the poet to the historian and the philosopher
- philosophy and history were, in their earliest iterations, presented to the general public as poetry.
- Philosophers appeared “under the mask of poets” writing their philosophy in verse.
- Here, Sidney thinks of poetry as a “skin” on the outside of Plato’s philosophy, decorating and adorning his dialogues.

HISTORY

- Historians likewise “stole or usurped” poetry’s adornments.
- He notes that Romans called their poets “vates,” or prophets.
- He defends the word “vates” as reasonable in a passage on David’s Psalms, noting that these musical, metrical writings “maketh you...see God coming in His majesty”
- Sidney notes that the Greeks called the poet “a maker.”
- While other arts and sciences take nature as their tools, poets create something new.

PART II PROPOSITION

- He asserts that its central function is to teach and inspire.
- Then, Sidney imagines two potential challengers to this elevating of poetry above all other forms of learning: the philosopher and the historian. He seeks to discount their two respective opinions.
- Sidney notes that philosophers teach, but their teaching is too abstract.

HISTORIANS

- As for historians, whereas history also has particular examples, the poet is free to write about events as they should be, whereas historians can only talk about what was, and are thus “captive to the truth of a foolish world.”
- Poetry can draw on history, but poetry make history's lessons even clearer and more delightful.
- Christ used poetry to convey his teachings: his parables provide specific illustrations of moral lessons. The poet is the “popular philosopher,” teaching in ways that are easily digestible. Finally, Sidney concludes the section by noting that poets not only teach readers, but also move them, a harder task than merely teaching.

THREE CATEGORIES

- The different forms of poetry are divided into three categories.
- The first category includes the religious poems and psalms mentioned in the Bible.
- The second category is represented by philosophical poems, and the third are poets who are a bit different than the philosophers.
- While philosophers paint nature accurately, the third class of poets “borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range only...into the divine consideration of what may be, and should be." Through this work, they teach their readers to be good.

HIGHEST KIND OF KNOWLEDGE

- He counts amongst poetry's works or effects as "purifying of wit, enriching of memory, enabling of judgment, and enlarging of conceit"—in a word, enabling learning.
- While poetry has a different focus than astronomy, philosophy, etc., it devotes itself to the highest kind of knowledge: giving man knowledge of himself. He continues with the metaphor of horsemanship, noting that the horseman's purpose is soldiery, and the soldier's purpose is to "perform the practice of the soldier." This anecdote is meant to demonstrate that "the ending of all earthly learning [is] virtuous action."

POETRY

- Poetry, like other studies, is derived from God, Author of all wisdom.”
- Boccaccio proceeds to define poetry, its origin and functions. He calls poetry a “fervid and exquisite invention,” in speech or writing, that “proceeds from the bosom of God.”
- The functions of poetry are also practical; it can prepare kings for war, portray the various phases of human character, stimulate virtue, and subdue vice. Also modern is Boccaccio’s insistence that poetry be defined primarily according to its effect.

HISTORIAN AND PHILOSOPHER

- Sidney presents counterarguments through the eyes of historians and philosophers.
- First, he imagines philosophers approaching him with their “sullen gravity” and asking how poetry can teach morality better than philosophy when philosophy’s goal is to define virtue and design the best-ordered society.
- Next, he imagines historians, “laden with mouse-eaten records,” countering that philosophy is abstract, failing to account for real-world conditions, whereas history truly shows how one can learn from the past to take correct action.

FOUR PEOPLE

- There are four people concerned with man's goodness: the historian, the philosopher, the lawyer, and the poet.
- The lawyer, however, focuses on preventing ill rather than cultivating good. Therefore, only the poet can serve as a moderator between the historian and the philosopher.
- The philosopher tries to encourage good with "precept," the historian with "example," but neither are able to implement both.
- The poet links and transcends the other two by giving a "perfect picture of...whatsoever the philosopher sayeth should be done."

EXAMPLES

- Sidney brings up a number of examples to support his point:
- “wisdom in temperance in Ulysses and Diomedes, valour in Achilles, friendship in Nisus and Euryalus” all provide specific examples of ideal virtuous actions, instructing man on how to act more effectively than can the philosopher.
- He quotes Horace: “Mediocribus esse poetis Non Di, non homines, non concessere columnae (Neither men, gods, nor lettered columns have admitted mediocrity in poets).”

SECTION – 3 DIVISION

THE POET MONARCH OF ALL HUMAN SCIENCES

- For he doth not only show the way, but gives so sweet a prospect into the way as will entice any man to enter into it. Nay, he doth, as if your journey should lie through a fair vineyard, at the very first give you a cluster of grapes, that full of that taste you may long to pass further.
- He comes to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the well-enchanting skill of music; and with a tale, forsooth, he comes unto you, with a tale which holds children from play, and old men from the chimney-corner, and, pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue;

WORKS AND PARTS

- Sidney extols the beauty of poetry, and its aptitude for teaching.
- Then, Sidney returns to a different idea: the distinction between poetry's works or deeds on the one hand, and its "parts" on the other.
- As his argument progresses, we see that by "parts" he means genres of poetry. Sidney proceeds to praise the pastoral, the lamenting elegy, the iamb, the satire, the comic, the tragedy, the lyric poem, and the heroic poem.

TWO ALLEGORIES

- He notes that verse can make ugly things beautiful, and inspire men to feats: even average men “have found their hearts moved to the exercise of courtesy, liberality, and especially courage.” To prove his point, he mentions two historical uses of allegory that have had a significant effect.
- First, he points to Menenius Agrippa’s parable of a body that starved its belly because it believed it took too much, a parable that healed a divided Rome.
- Second, he states that Nathan the Prophet used the story of a lamb taken from its shepherd to show David the sin in his adultery. This thus constitutes a kind of meta-allegory, where the very success of these allegories is—in and of itself—an allegory for the effectiveness of poetry.

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GENRES

- Using a simile, he notes that comedy is like geometry: “the oblique must be known as well as the right.”
- That is to say, we must witness the evil as well as the good, and comedy helps us to see our own negative nature.
- Sidney reserves particular praise for the heroic, noting that its images “inflameth the mind with desire to be worthy.” He concludes that poetry is an ancient, venerable art that does no evil and has no bad parts.

POET HATERS

- Turning to poet-haters, he speculates that the main source of their humor is “rhyming and versing” (rhyme and meter).
- Sidney defends versification as a kind of music, as well as an aid to memory.
- He notes that most men memorize some couplets, providing as an example “Percontatorem fugito: nam garrulus idem est” (Fly from the inquisitive man, for he is a babbler).

THREE OBJECTIONS

- Sidney lists three common objections to poetry:
- that it is useless,
- that it is "the mother of lies," and
- that it is corrupting.
- Ultimately, he argues that poets are the ones who lie the least, because their aim is not to transmit truths but rather to convey feelings: "the poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth." Against the third objection, the claim that poetry infects us with lust, Sidney argues that if this happens it is the fault of the poet, not his medium. Sidney argues that we should "not say that poetry abuseth man's wit, but that man's wit abuseth poetry."

PLATO

- After addressing these three arguments, Sidney turns to a more serious adversary than “poet-haters”: Plato.
- Returning to a familiar argument, Sidney ultimately states that Plato took exception not to poetry, but to poets.
- After listing a number of admired ancient poets, including Socrates, Aristotle, and Plutarch, Sidney writes that he needs “not to defend poesy with the help of his underling historiographer.”

PLATO

- This section ends with Sidney expressing his belief that poetry will continue to exist even if there are people who fight against it.
- He begins by reminding the reader of Plato's own poetry: "if he will defile the fountain out of which his flowing streams have proceeded, let us boldly examine with what reason he did it."

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PLATO

- The first idea Plato raises is that philosophers are jealous of poets, who are in a sense their “ungrateful apprentices,” getting praise for forwarding ideas that stem from philosophy and moreover holding exalted social positions while philosophers were banished from their kingdoms.
- He briefly suggests Plato might have banished poetry for its femininity, but quickly acknowledges that poets were, in fact, allowed in the republic. "Plato found fault that the poets of his time filled the world with wrong opinions of the gods."

P O E T R Y

- Sidney is thus able to argue that, according to Plato, poetry could affect how people felt about the gods—a skill which could also be used for good.
- Using a metaphor, Sidney argues that those who object to poetry under Plato's banner misrepresent him and abuse his authority, as if “under [Plato's] lion's skin they would make an ass-like braying against poesy.”

PART IV EXAMINATION CAUSES OF DEFECT IN ENGLISH POETRY

- Sidney turns to the question of poetry in England.
- He notes that because it is disrespected, the only people who write poetry are “base men with servile wits...who think it enough if they can be rewarded of the printer.”
- He states that he thinks the “very earth laments” the country’s lack of warmth for poetry, “and therefore decks our soil with fewer laurels than it was accustomed.”

HUMILITY

- As he elevates poetry's importance higher and higher, he diminishes his own accomplishments, noting that he did not strive for greatness, but “overmastered by some thoughts...yielded an inky tribute unto them.”
- This deflects possible charges of self-importance, and suggests his humility.

REAL POETRY

- Next, Sidney meditates on the best way to write poetry—real poetry, that is.
- He notes that imitation, exercise, and true inspiration are all necessary components for good verse. Sidney spends time praising poets of yore, including Chaucer and the Earl of Surrey, and then criticizes his contemporary playwrights.
- In a famous line, he again compares poetry to horsemanship: “For poesy must not be drawn by the ears, it must be gently led, or rather it must lead.”

HORSEMANSHIP

- Although the metaphor is subtle, here, he suggests that the poet, like the horseman, must allow his mount to lead the process.
- He continues the metaphor: “the fertilest ground must be manured, so must the highest flying wit have a Daedalus to guide him.” Poetry is both of the earth and the sky.
- Daedalus, the Greek craftsman and father of Icarus, he notes that the Daedalus “hath three wings to bear itself up into the air of due commendation; that is art, imitation, and exercise.”

CONTEMPORARY DRAMA

- Recent plays are quite poor, unfolding over days rather than a single day, and beginning at a strange point in the actions.
- Moreover, comedy and tragedy mingle, creating laughter without delight, and failing to teach through the comic aspects. However, he condemns the part rather than the whole, noting with a simile that these plays are “like an unmannerly daughter, showing a bad education, causeth her mother Poesy’s honesty to be called in question.”
- Again, poetry is personified as a mother.

PART V REFUTATION

CONTEMPORARY LOVE POETRY

- Sidney criticizes contemporary love poetry and its poor articulation of love. He stresses the importance of simplicity and naturalness in verse.
- Sidney criticizes the “over-honeyed” diction of his peers. Using more similes, he describes poetry as an over-salted meal, and to non-Western people: “For now they cast sugar and spice upon every dish that is served at the table: like those Indians, not content to wear ear-rings at the fit and natural place of the ears, but they will thrust jewels through their nose and lips.”

PART VI PERORATION

CAPACITIES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

- Sidney argues that English is especially well-suited for natural, effective poetry.
- Sidney notes that English allows for masculine and feminine rhyme.
- Instead, he entreats readers to “believe” that “no philosopher’s precepts can sooner make you an honest man, than the reading of Virgil...to believe, with me, that there are many mysteries contained in poetry.. to believe [poets] themselves, when they tell you they will make you immortal by their verses.” The long, run-on sentence, including many clauses, has a soaring effect, serving as the rhetorical crescendo of the essay as a whole.

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