

Detailed Critical Summary of Sidney's Defense of Poetry

Introduction: Praise of One's own Profession Justified

Once in 1574, Sidney and Edward Wotton were both together at the court of the Emperor in Vienna. There, they learned horsemanship from John Pietro Pugliano, the officer in charge of the royal stables. Not only did he show his skill in handling a horse but also talked a lot on the art of horsemanship. He praised horsemanship highly and said that soldiers are the noblest part of mankind, and horseman the noblest of soldiers. They are the masters of War and Ornaments of peace. They triumph both in Camps and Courts. There is no better quality in a prince than horsemanship. A prince should be an expert horseman. Horsemanship for him is of prime importance, skill in Government is only secondary. He praised the horse as a peerless beast, a beast of great beauty, faithfulness and courage. Pugliano praised horsemanship and the horse so much that, says Sidney humorously, he himself wanted to become a horse.

From Pugliano, Sidney learned the valuable lesson that a man should love his own profession. He was provoked to write in praise of his vocation, i.e. that of a poet. He wanted to defend the profession of a poet and also poetry, which had fallen low in his own age. It had become a laughing stock of children. He wanted to save it from scorn. If the art of horsemanship can be so highly praised as was done by Pugliano, poetry surely has better claims for praise and defense.

Antiquity and Universality of Poetry

After this brief introduction, Sidney comes to his main theme, i.e. the defense of poetry against the Puritan attacks on it. Sidney defends poetry on the ground that it is the oldest and the earliest form of composition. In all nations and languages, it has been the first light given to ignorance. It has also been the first nurse to give milk to her children to enable them to feed afterwards on tougher knowledge. It has helped people to learn more difficult languages, ideas and thoughts: It is, therefore, ingratitude on the part of the people to condemn poetry. Sidney names a number of ancient poets, of Greece, Rome and Italy, to show that before these poets nothing good was ever written. In Greece *Musacus*, Homer and Hesiod were great poets. Amphion is said to have moved stones with his poetry to build Thebes,

and it is said Orpheus was listened to even by beasts and stony-hearted people. Lirius Andronicus and Ennius were great Roman poets. In the Italian language Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch are great poets and they preceded other writers and scholars. In English also Gower and Chaucer were the first poets, whom everybody else, in every other kind of learning, has but followed.

Poetry is the earliest of all branches of learning. In Greece for a long time even the philosophers appeared under the mask of poets. Thales, Empedocles and *Permenides* wrote their natural philosophy in verse. Pythagoras and *Phocylides* gave their moral counsels in verse, and *Tyrtacus* sang of war matters and Solon of matters of policy. That Solon was a poet is seen in the fact that he wrote his story of the Atlantic Island in verse. It is a Utopia and Plato followed his method in his Republic. Plato himself was a poet. He penned poetical dialogues to teach his philosophy. Plato's dialogues with the citizens of Athens are the master-pieces of poetry; they are the flowers of poetry.

Poetry is the earliest form of writing. Even the early writers of history used the fashion and manner of poets. The historians succeed most when they use the method of poets, though they deal with truth and reality and poets with fiction. Herodotus was a great historian, but he entitled his history after the name of the Nine Muses. He described, like a poet, the passions of men and the details of battles. He put such passionate speeches in the mouths of great kings and captains as only a poet can write. The philosophers and the historians became popular in ancient times, only if they used the manner and form of poetry.

Poets Honored by All Peoples and Nations

Sidney points out that even in barbarous and uncivilized countries poetry is respected and loved. Turkey is one of the uncivilized nations, but there besides their law giving divines, they have no other writers except the poets. Ireland is another country where learning is not advanced, but there also, poets are honored. Even amongst the Red Indians where writing is unknown, poets are loved and respected. The Indians sing songs in praise of their ancestors' deeds and their gods. According to Sidney, if ever learning comes to them it will be because their dull wits have been softened and sharpened by the sweet delights of poetry. The ancient Britons also had their poets and called them Bards. Such is the antiquity of

poetry. Even in uncivilized countries, poetry enjoyed great popularity. To attack poetry, therefore, is not justified.

The Poets as 'Vates' or 'Prophets'

Having shown the antiquity of poetry, Sidney tells us of the respect the poets enjoyed in ancient times. The Romans had great respect for poetry and the poets. Their name for a poet was 'Vates' which means "a diviner, a foreseer or a prophet." The Romans gave this heavenly title to heart-ravishing poetry. They thought that great poetry could foretell their fortunes. They also believed that spirits were commanded by Verses, as those of Virgil. The oracles of Delphos and Sibylla's prophecies were delivered in Verses. It was believed that poetry has some "divine force".

It was quite reasonable for the Romans to call poets Vates or prophets, for prophets have always been poets. For example, holy David's Psalms are divine poems, David's handling of his prophecy is poetical. There are poetical fictions, as God coming in his majesty, and the joyfulness of the beast and hills at His appearance. Sidney, therefore, says that poetry must not be ridiculed and must find a place in the church of God, as it has been an instrument of religion.

The Poets as 'Makers'

The Greeks also honoured poets. They called a poet 'a maker'. The origin of the word poet is Poiein, which means to make. Englishmen have joined the Greeks, in calling the poet 'a maker'.

Sidney points out that all arts imitate nature. The astronomer imitates nature; he looks at the stars, sees their movements and sets down the order in which they move. The Geometrician and Arithmetician also study the movements and forms of the objects of nature. The musician tells you of natural harmonies. The natural philosopher studies nature and the moral philosopher studies natural Virtues, Vices and passions of men. His advice is follow nature and "thou shalt not err." The Lawyer tells us what men have decided and determined and the historian what men have done. The Grammarian prescribes the rules of speech, the rhetorician and logician give us rules of rhetoric, all based upon nature. The physician tries to find out the nature of a man's body. Metaphysic deals with abstract notions and, therefore, is called supernatural, but he also depends upon nature for his study.

But the poet does not accept any such subjection. The poet creates another nature, by representing things either as better than nature, or quite new. He creates forms such as never were before in nature. His heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies etc. are his own original creations and superior to the forms found in nature. The poet as creator is the equal of nature and never her subordinate. The poet makes more pleasant rivers, more beautiful and more fruitful trees and sweeter-smelling flowers than are found in nature. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich a tapestry as diverse poets have done. The poet makes the beautiful earth more lovely. Nature's world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden. Nature never created such a lover as *Theagenes* or such a constant friend as *Pylades*. Likewise, she never created men so valiant as Orlando, so right a prince as Xenophon's Cyrus, so excellent a man as Virgil's Aeneas.

Further, the poet's creations are not wholly imaginative. He does not build Castles in the air, so to say. He does not only imitate nature in creating his friends, lovers, kings, princes etc., but also shows the way in which the world can acquire such qualities by following the examples of virtue the poet has set before it. The poet with the force of a divine breath brings things forth far surpassing the creations of nature. Nature can by no art produce a better man than a poet and it is, therefore, right to say that the poets are makers, divinely inspired.

The Definition of Poetry

After considering the antiquity of poets and poetry, Sidney comes to the definition of poetry. He says "Poesy therefore is an art of imitation." Aristotle also called poetry "Mimesis". Mimesis means "a representing, counterfeiting or figuring forth." Metaphorically speaking, it means a speaking picture, with this end to teach and delight. Thus according to Sidney, poetry is an imitation of nature, and its function is to teach and delight

Poetry: Its Three Broad Divisions

Sidney now takes up the question of the kinds of poetry. There are three broad divisions of poetry. First is religious poetry, both in excellence and antiquity. The poets imitate the incomparable virtues of God. Such are David's Psalms, Solomon's Song of Songs and Proverbs; the hymns of Moses and Deborah are examples of religious poetry. To this list some would (though wrongly) add the names of Orpheus, Amphion, Homer and many other Greek and Roman poets. Psalms are

sung when the people are merry or bring comfort and consolation to the dying persons suffering their last agony.

The second broad kind of poetry is philosophical or moral poetry. It may deal with matters philosophical or moral or natural or astronomical or historical. *Tyrtæus*, *Phocylides* and *Cato* were moral poets. Lucretius and Virgil taught natural philosophy through verses. *Manilius* and *Pontanus* were astronomical poets and Lucan was a historical poet. Poetry of this kind imparts knowledge in a sweet, pleasant manner.

The third broad division of poetry is poetry in the real sense. This right kind of poetry is an imaginative treatment of Life and nature. Sidney suggests that the difference between the right poets and the philosophical or informative poets is the kind of difference we find between the meaner sort of painters and the really good painters. The right kind of poets enjoy full freedom of invention. They imitate to teach and delight. They imitate and borrow nothing of what is, hath been or shall be, but what may be and should "be is always under their consideration. Sidney remarks, "These be they that, as the first and most noble sort may justly be termed 'vates'. They are poets or makers in the real sense. They imitate both to delight and teach, and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand from which, without delight, they would fly as from something dangerous. The poets move people to make them know what goodness is, and this is the aim of all learning. Still there are idle tongues that bark at them, i.e. criticise them.

Right Kind of Poetry: Rhyming and Versing Not Essential to It

Sidney has sub-divided the right kind of poetry into Heroic, Lyric, Tragic, Comic, Satiric, Iambic, Elegiac, Pastoral, etc. The greatest part of poets have clothed their poetical inventions in Verse. But Verse (or metre) is an ornament of poetry and no cause to it. Verse makes Poetry more beautiful and more sweet, but it is not an essential part of poetry. 'There have been many most excellent poets that never versified, and now swarm many versifiers that need never answer to the name of poets.' Both Xenophon who made a perfect Heroical Poem or epic, and Heliodorus who has given us sweet pictures of love, wrote in prose. These examples show that it is not rhyming and versing that makes a poet...no more than a long gown makes an advocate, who though he may plead in armour would still be an advocate and not a soldier. The Poet in fact makes notable images of Virtues and Vices with that

delightful teaching which is the quality which distinguishes him from others. Most of the poets have chosen to write in verse, but verse is not necessary to poetry.

Poetry Superior to other Branches of Learning

The aim of poetry is knowledge which means purifying of our wit, enriching of our memory, the ennobling of our judgment, and the enlarging of our conceit. Learning raises our degenerate souls to loftier heights. Poetry is superior to other branches of learning. Astronomy studies the stars and other heavenly bodies, philosophy studies the causes of things natural and supernatural. Music delights and Mathematics demonstrates. All the sciences have an objective to know, and by knowledge to uplift and elevate the human mind and soul. All the Sciences have a sub-ordinate place. They are secondary to poetry which is the highest kind of knowledge. They are sub-ordinate to poetry whose aim is self-knowledge, knowledge which can be used for well-doing and not for well-knowing only. For example, the horseman's end is soldiery and the soldier must not only have the skill of soldiery but must also show that skill in actual practice. The ultimate end of all earthly learning is virtuous action. The learning which performs this end in the best way must be regarded as the highest kind of learning. The poet is supreme because he delights us and moves us to virtuous action. He is not only a giver of knowledge but also an improver and reformer of men and manners. He is the prince over all the rest.

Philosophy and History

The historian and moral philosopher are the chief opponents who challenge the supremacy of poetry. The philosophers claim that they impart the knowledge of virtue, its manifold causes and effects. In order to make one know what virtue is, they also tell him of the vices and passions which must be controlled and destroyed. Their claim is that when a man understands-what- virtue is, he would become virtuous in his actions. They lay down general principles to make men virtuous.

The historian claims superiority 'both over poetry and philosophy. He is laden with mouse-eaten records and depends upon other histories, which are all based on hearsay. "He is better acquainted with a thousand years ago than with the present age." He has better knowledge of the world than of his own wit. "He is curious of antiquities and inquisitive of novelties." He is a wonder to young folks

and a tyrant in table talk. He claims that no man, as far as teaching of virtue and virtuous actions is concerned, is comparable to him. He claims superiority over the philosopher. He points out that a philosopher teaches a disputative virtue, while he himself teaches an active one. The philosopher's theoretical virtue is excellent in the dangerless academy of Plato but the historian's practical virtue is useful in battles like those of Marathon, Pharsalia, Poitiers and Agincourt. The philosopher teaches virtue by certain abstract considerations, but he himself teaches virtue through noble examples of those who lived in the past. Old-aged experience is more useful than the fine witted philosopher, but the historian claims that he gives the experience of many ages. The philosopher may make the song-book but he, the historian, puts the learner's hand to the lute. If the philosopher is the guide, then he, the historian, is the light. In short, the philosopher teaches by precept; the historian teaches by examples. The philosopher is abstract while the historian is concrete. The philosopher aims at the ideal; the historian at the practical.

Poetry: Superior to Philosophy

The poet is superior both to the historian and to the moral philosopher, and much more superior to the other serving sciences. If by comparing the poet with the philosopher and historian, we find that he surpasses them both, we may safely conclude that no other human skill can match him. The Divine is to be excepted, for his scope is as far beyond any of the other branches of learning, as eternity exceeds a moment. The lawyer endeavours to make others right and not good. He teaches merely that man should not hurt others. He should be a good citizen even if he continues to be bad man. Therefore, he cannot be the equal of those who try to take away wickedness and make men good. Thus all these four-Historian, Philosopher, Poet and Lawyers-deal with men's manners. The lawyer as shown above cannot equal the other three. Therefore, the other three alone are to be judged and compared.

The philosopher teaches by precept; the historian by example. But both do not have both. Both, are, therefore, defective. The poet has both he gives the precept and also presents an example. The philosopher sets down a bare rule and gives arguments in support of it. His knowledge is based upon abstract and the general. It is difficult to understand him and use his knowledge in practical life. The historian is found wanting in precept. He is tied down to what is and he does not

tell us what should be. He studies particular examples, and not the general cause of things. The poet not only aims at what is but also at what should be. He, therefore, presents the precept which the historian does not do; and also sets out the examples which are beyond the scope of a philosopher. He is a happy amalgam of the philosopher and the historian; hence he is superior to each one of them.

The poet is peerless and performs the functions of both the philosopher and the historian. He gives a perfect picture of someone who is supposed to have done what the philosopher says should be done and therefore, he influences the mind more than the philosopher. He combines general principles with particular examples. He presents to the mind an image of that whereof the philosopher bestows but a wordish description. The philosopher's abstract description does not strike or possess the soul so much as poetry does. The philosopher deals with the intellect; the poet moves the heart and soul.

The philosopher with his learned definitions of virtue, vices, matters of public policy or private government, fills the mind with many definite grounds of wisdom. But this knowledge remains unused, till the poet illumines it and makes it understood by the speaking pictures of Poetry. He paints the picture of man or beast or a house in such a way that as from the picture of a painter, we can form a vivid clear idea of the object so painted. The ideal picture or image of virtue or vice painted by a poet comes before our mind's eye and at once strikes our heart and transports our soul. The force of the various passions, virtues and vices over the human heart and soul is better understood by the examples given by poets. For example, the force of patriotism can be better understood by the examples of old Anchises and Ulysses presented by Homer.

The force of anger can better be understood through the example of Ajax than through the description of the philosophers who call it a sort of madness. There is wisdom and temperance in Ulysses and Diomedes, valour in Achilles, friendship in Nisus, remorse of conscience in Oedipus, repenting pride in Agamemnon, self-devouring cruelty in his father Atreus, the sour sweetness of revenge in Medea. All these virtues, vices and passions are presented by poets so very vividly and forcefully that we seem not to hear of them, but clearly to see through them. Each vice or virtue is presented through some forceful example which moves our heart and soul, as Philosophy can never do. A philosopher certainly, may talk of goodness

in the abstract, but he cannot present a better man than the Cyrus imagined by Xenophon; or a more virtuous man than Aeneas in Virgil. Philosophy certainly does not have that force in teaching which the feigned images of poetry have. No doubt, the poets have not acted so well as the philosophers, but this is the fault of the poets, and not of poetry. That poetry is the best medium of teaching becomes clear from the fact that Christ himself gave feigned or poetic examples of Dives and Lazarus to warn against uncharitableness and teach the virtue of unbleness.

The philosopher teaches, but he teaches obscurely; the learned alone can understand him, he only teaches them that are already taught. But the poet can be understood even by those who are not learned; the poet is indeed the right popular philosopher. Aesop's Tales give good proof of it. These Fables make many, more beastly than beasts, hear the sound of virtue from their dumb speakers.

Poetry and History

Sidney now compares poetry and history. The poet imagines and so does the historian. But the poet imagines things that never were, the historian writes of things that were really done, and not of such as have been falsely imagined to have been done. Aristotle also in his Poetics has said that Poetry is more philosophical and more studiously serious than history. He gives the reason and says that "Poetry is superior because it deals with Universal considerations, and history deals with the particular. The Universal (which poetry studies) weighs what is fit to be said or done, either in likelihood or necessity, and the particular (which history studies) only marks whether Alcibiades did, or suffered, this or that." Universal is that which is true for all times and all regions under the same conditions and circumstances, the particular is that which takes place with a certain person at a certain time in a certain region. Therefore, the truth of poetry is of universal application, as that of History is not. The historian deals with facts as they are; the poet deals with facts as they ought to be. The feigned Cyrus in Xenophon is better and more pleasing than the true Cyrus, and feigned Aeneas in Virgil is much better than the real Aeneas in the historian Dares *Phrygius*. It would be more pleasing to paint a *Canidia* with a beautiful face, than to paint the *Canidia* of history who had an ugly face. The poet's pictures are not entirely false. They are based on truth coloured by the poet's imagination. The historian's picture is nothing but truth, often ugly and unpleasant, based on facts gathered from histories and antiquities.

The contrast between the historian and the poet fully brings out the poet's superiority. The poet is liberal; the historian is rigid. The poet shows some persons who are to be liked and some others who are to be disliked. He shows in Tantalus and Atreus nothing that is not to be shunned; in Cyrus, Aeneas, and Ulysses nothing that is not to be loved and followed. The historian, on the other hand, is bound to tell of things as they were. For example, in Alexander he shows qualities, some of which are to be liked, and some to be disliked. It is left for the reader of history to use his discretion as to which quality of Alexander is to be followed and which not. This requires discretion, and one who has discretion will not need the historian. The poet makes no such demands on the reader. By presenting the Universal, the poet leaves nothing for discretion. The historian deals with what was. To argue that what was done would also be done today is to argue that because it rained yesterday, it should rain today also. But the poet presents only a conjectured likelihood, things which did not actually happen, but which can happen. He works on the law of probability and possibility. The historian in his bare 'was' tells many times of events which were merely the results of chance and fortune, and not of human prudence. Many times he must tell of events of which he can give no Cause. But if he gives imaginary reasons, he becomes poetical.

A feigned example as given by a poet has as much force to teach as a true example given by a historian. But the feigned example has much more power to teach than the true example. Let us take an example from Herodotus, the poet, and Justin, the historian. Herodotus and Justin both testify that *Zopyrus* was the faithful servant of king Darius. When *Zopyrus* saw that his master was unable to overcome the rebellious Babylonians, he pretended that he had fallen in disgrace with his king. He cut off his own nose and ears and went to the Babylonians who received him warmly, supposing that his ears and nose had been cut off by the king. He was easily believed, and so he could find means to deliver the Babylonians to his king Darius. A similar story is narrated by Livy of Tarquinius and his son. Xenophon excellently imagines such another trick played by *Abdages* for the sake of Cyrus. But Xenophon leaves the nose of *Abdages* uncut, but moves us no less than Herodotus and Justin. Thus the best of the historian is inferior to the poet. The historian recites the action or quarrel, counsel, policy or stratagem as it was, but the poet beautifies it with his art, both for further teaching, and more delighting. All nature from heaven to hell is at his command; to be used in the way

he likes. Such is the art of poetry, though particular artists (poets) may not rise to this great height.

People praise history and say that therein virtue is rewarded and vice punished. But this praise is more deserved by poetry than by history. Poetry always presents virtue in her best colours, making Fortune wait upon her, so that one falls in love with her. We may see Ulysses in a storm and other hard and pressing circumstances, but the poet describes his misfortunes in such a way that we feel that they are only the test of his patience and magnanimity, so that his virtues may shine the more in the prosperity soon to come. On the contrary, if evil men are presented they are to punished that none is moved to follow them. But the historian, bound to actual truth, presents examples which frighten men away from virtue and goodness, and encourage uncontrolled wickedness. In history we see valiant Miltiades rot in his fetters; the accomplished Socrates put to death like a traitor; the cruel Severus lives prosperously; the rebel Caesar so advanced that his name is honoured even today. Many more names of those who have prospered in their abominable injustice or usurpation can be cited. In short, the poet "*exceleth History, not only in furnishing the mind with knowledge, but in setting it forward to that which deserveth to be called and accounted good; which setting forward, and moving to well doing, indeed setteth the laurel crown upon the poet as victorious, not only of the historian, but over the philosopher, howsoever in teaching it may be questionable.*"

The 'Moving' or Transport of Poetry

Even if it is granted that the philosopher teaches more perfectly than the poet, yet no Philosopher can equal the poet in moving. The poet moves much more than a philosopher can. And this moving is of a higher degree than teaching. This moving is both the cause and effect of teaching. One who is moved with a desire to be taught can be taught better and so one can be taught unless he is moved with the desire of teaching. If teaching can move a man to do what it teaches, then it is good teaching. If it cannot move to good doing, it is useless. For as Aristotle says it is not knowing but doing, which must be the fruit of knowledge.

The philosopher certainly shows the way. He informs us of the details, as that may divert us from our way. But the philosopher is difficult and must well as of the difficulties of the way, and also of the by-turnings (temptations) be read attentively

and painstakingly. In other words, he does teach only those who are already learned and can read him attentively, with studious painfulness. But such learned people do not require the light of philosophy. Moreover, philosophy does not move. We are not moved to do that which we are taught or be moved with the desire to know what we do not know. This function of moving is performed by the poet alone. The poet, therefore, is superior to the philosopher.

The poet is the monarch of sciences, because he not only shows the way to goodness, but gives so sweet an appearance to the way, that we are moved to follow it. He does not begin with obscure definitions as does a philosopher nor does he load the memory with examples whose truth is doubtful, as does the historian. He comes to us with words arranged in delightful order, so that what he writes can easily be sung. He comes to us with such a sweet tale as keeps away children from play and old men from their sleep-by the chimney- corner. So keen are all to listen to him. His purpose is to win the mind from wickedness to virtue. He gives the people that which is wholesome by dressing it in something that is pleasant and beautiful. So people gladly hear the tales of Hercules, Achilles, Cyrus and Aeneas, and through these tales also hear the right description of wisdom, valour and justice. They would not listen so attentively to the discourse of a philosopher for he teaches directly and so makes men feel that they have been sent to school once again.

Poetry imitates and, as Aristotle says, poetry makes even those things which in themselves are horrible, as crude battles, unnatural monsters, delightful. By reading Amadis de Gaule, people's hearts have been moved to courtesy, liberality and courage, whoever reads in Homer the story of Aeneas carrying on his back his old father Anchises, is moved with a desire to perform a similar noble act. But as the philosopher scorn to delight, they cannot move. They wrangle whether Virtue be the chief or the only good or whether the contemplative or the active life is better. Plato and Boethius well knew the value of moving and, therefore, they made Mistress philosophy very often borrow the masking raiment of Poesy. Even the hard hearted evil men who think virtue a school mame, and who despise the instructions of the philosopher, like to be delighted. The poet promises to delight and gives them good advice in a beautiful attractive form. Even without their knowing it, they are made to see goodness, and one who sees it must love it. The poet is certainly superior to the philosopher.

Countless proofs of the noble effect of poetry can be given but Sidney cites only two. One of the examples is of Menenius Agrippa who talked to the Romans who were quarrelling among themselves, not as a philosopher but as a poet, He told them a fictitious tale that there was a time when all the parts of the body made a mutinous conspiracy against the belly, which they thought devoured the fruits of the labour. They decided that they would let so unprofitable a spender starve. In the end, to be short with punishing the belly they punished themselves. This poetic example wrought wonderful effect upon the people so that upon reasonable conditions a perfect reconciliation took place. The other example is of Nathan, the prophet, who gave a feigned discourse about a lamb which was taken away from its master. This made David, who was guilty of murder and adultery, realise his own wickedness and return to God once again.

Thus it is clear that the poet with the hand of delight moves the mind more effectually than any other artist with his art does. Consequently, as Virtue is the most excellent end of all worldly learning so poetry, being the most easy and delightful in teaching that Virtue, and supreme in moving men towards it, is the most excellent work of the most excellent workman.

The Right Kind of Poetry: Its Sub-divisions

Sidney now comes to an examination of the sub-divisions of the right type of true poetry. Some poets, combine two or three kinds as tragedy and comedy, and the combination is called tragicomedy. Some have mingled prose and verse, as Sannazzaro and Boethius. Some have mingled matters heroical and pastoral. On the whole Sidney is against such combinations. Therefore, he would consider each separate kind and show that none has any fault in it.

The Pastoral

The pastoral shows the misery of the people under hard lords or greedy soldiers. It also shows how much good can be done to the poor by the rich and the powerful. Sometimes through the tales of, wolves and sheep the poet considers the questions of right and wrong. At other times it is shown that contention for trifles can get but a petty victory. Obviously, such kind of poetry can do no harm.

The Elegiac, The Iambic and the Satiric

The Elegiac moves the heart with pity. It bewails the weakness of mankind and the wretchedness of the world. It expresses pity for just causes of suffering. The Iambic rubs the galled mind, in making shame the trumpet of villainy, and by directly and openly attacking wickedness. The Satiric ridicules and by ridicule makes a man laugh at folly. At length he realises that he himself has that folly or weakness. Thus he is put to shame, and is thereby cured of that folly. It is clear that these three kinds of poetry can cause no harm. Rather, they are conducive to goodness.

The Comic

The Comic has been made much odious, by wicked playwrights.. In itself it is not bad. It is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which the comic poet represents in the most ridiculous and scornful way possible. The result is that no spectator would ever wish to have those follies or commit those errors.

Just as Geometry and Arithmetic present both the oblique and the right the odds and the even, because one cannot be understood without knowledge of the other, so comedy also imitates human errors and follies because the beauty of virtue and goodness cannot be fully appreciated without a knowledge of evil. It presents a niggardly and miserly Demea, crafty Davus, a flattering *Gnatho*, a vain glorious Thrasonides. It teaches man by showing the absurdities of others. It shows evil in such a ridiculous light that men want to avoid such evil. For nothing can more open a man's eye to the evil within him than to find his own actions contemptibly set forth.

Tragedy

Nobody can, therefore, blame the right use of comedy, nor can the High and excellent Tragedy be blamed. Tragedy opens the greatest wounds and shows forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue. It makes kings fear to be tyrants and tyrants are made to reveal their full tyranny in their actions. This results in their downfall, and thus tragedy arouses hatred for tyranny, admiration and commiseration, and this way tragedy teaches the uncertainty of this world and shows upon how weak foundations rest the power and pelf of this world. By showing the downfall of man in high position it brings tears out of the eyes even of tyrants, like Alexander the Great, who was a hard-hearted man and had murdered infinite numbers, some

of his own blood. It would be absurd to dislike tragedy, which teaches such noble lessons.

The Lyric

The Lyric with his well-tuned lyre and well accorded voice, praises virtuous acts. It sings of moral precepts and natural problems and sometimes sings the praises of immortal God. Sidney ironically says that perhaps he would be considered an uncivilised person if he confesses that old song of Percy and Douglas, i.e. the ballad of Chevy Chase moves his heart more than any trumpet. This ballad is rude and simple. When it can move the heart so much, how much more would it be moved by the gorgeous eloquence of Pindar. He has seen in Hungary at all feasts and meetings people singing the songs of their ancestors' valour. They consider such songs of chief kindlers of courage. The incomparable Lacedomonians do not only carry such patriotic lyrics and songs with them to the field, but even at home, they sing such songs in which the lusty men tell us what they did, the old men of what they had done when they were young and the young men of what they would do when they reach manhood. Some say that Pindar praised highly victories of no importance at all, matters rather of sport than of valour. To this charge Sidney replies that it was the fault of the poet, and not of poetry. The fault lay with the customs of ancient Greece where a victory in a tournament was valued as much as a victory in a battlefield. The Lyric itself is quite capable of arousing men from their lethargy and inspiring them to embrace warlike and noble deeds.

The Heroic or Epic

The heroic or epic poetry cannot be disliked, for it portrays the life and actions of such heroes as *Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas, Turnus, Tydeus and Rinaldo*. It teaches and moves to the most high and excellent truth; it makes magnanimity and justice shine through the darkness of human fears and evil desires. It presents virtue in her most beautiful and most noble form. It is not only a kind, but the best and most accomplished kind of poetry, and all are agreed in its praise. By presenting noble example of virtue and valour it inspires men to noble actions, and also teaches them how to perform such actions. It instructs as well as delights, It moves to virtuous action, and so no fault can be found with it.

In short, the poet-whippers dislike poetry but they cannot say where the fault lies. To them the name of poetry is odious, but neither its cause nor its effects, neither poetry in general nor its separate kinds, give them any cause for their dislike.

Poetry: The Highest Kind of Learning

Sidney concludes: Poetry is of all human learning the most ancient, and of most fatherly antiquity, for other branches of learning are descended from it. It is so universal that no civilised nation despises it. It is also found amongst the uncivilised nations. The Romans called it "propheying"; and the Greek gave it the name of "making". It is rightly called 'making', for while other arts are confined to the objects which they imitate, the poet rises above nature and makes his own objects. Neither the poet's descriptions nor the end of poetry contain any evil, so the thing described cannot be evil. The effects of poetry are so good as to teach goodness and to delight the learners. In moral doctrine, the poet surpasses not only the historian but also the philosopher. The Holy Scripture in which there is nothing evil has whole parts in it which are poetical. Christ himself used poetic language. Poetry as a whole, as well as its different kinds deserve all praise. Poetry is supreme in all the branches of learning, and the highest honour must go to the poet.

Some Superficial Criticism of Poetry

Sidney now proceeds to an examination of the specific charges brought against poetry. According to Sidney, there are certain poet-haters who seek praise by dispraising others. These critics waste their time and energy in using a number of incoherent words, retorts and scoffs, carping and taunting, at poets and poetry. Their criticism of poetry has no substance in it and so is to be ignored. They are like those witty, frivolous people who can praise the discretion of an ass, or the comfortableness of being in debt or the happiness of being sick with plague. Agrippa can show the vanity of science as Erasmus can praise folly. But Agrippa and Erasmus are superior to such scoffing critics, for they are not artificial or superficial. These critics have little knowledge and they laugh at poets out of their own folly. They are good fools, or humorous jesters, for their ridicule of poetry does not arise out of their wisdom. It is best to ignore them.

Defence of Verse and Rhyme

There are critics of poetry who call poetry "rhyming and versing" and ridicule it for this reason. Sidney holds that, "it is not rhyming and versing that maketh Poesy. One may be a poet without versing, and a versifier without poetry." Even if rhyming and versing were essential to poetry, they would be an admirable and praise-worthy part of it. They are admirable, for they polish up the language. When using verse the poet considers the forcible quality of each word as well as its measured quantity. Each word is selected both with reference to its meaning and its sound. It makes language musical and is most divine striker of the senses. Measure, harmony, proportion are admirable qualities, and poetry cannot be blamed for having these qualities, unless they are regarded odious in the age. Moreover, versifying helps memory and makes reading profitable. In versifying, words are so fitted to each other that one word recalls another. It is the best medium for storing knowledge in the mind. Verse superior to prose in the knitting up of the memory. The reason is that the words are so set that even if one word is lost the whole work loses its sense. In rhymed or measured verse one word begets another. By one word, the reader can guess the following ones. Every word has its natural seat and this makes the words remembered. This is well-known and so further discussion of the point is not necessary. Every scholar carries with him some verses of Virgil, Horace or Cato, which in his youth he had learned and which ever since have been a source of knowledge to him. The rules of arts and sciences are also well remembered when they are expressed in verses. *"So that, verse being in itself sweet and orderly, and being best for memory, the only handle of knowledge, it must be in just that any man can speak against it."*

Four Specific Charges Against Poetry

Sidney next proceeds to examine the four specific charges, brought against poetry by Puritan critics like Stephen Gosson. They are first, that there being many other more fruitful branches of knowledge, a man might better spend his time in them than in poetry. Secondly, that poetry is the mother of lies. Thirdly, that it is the nurse of abuse, infecting us with many pestilent desires, making us effeminate and pleasure-loving by its siren-like sweetness. And lastly, and chiefly, that Plato banished poets out of his commonwealth. These are serious charges, but claims Sidney, there is no truth in them.

(a) Poetry not a Waste of Time

To the first objection that there are many other useful arts in which a man can employ his time, Sidney replies that Poetry teaches us and moves us to virtue much more than any other art or science can. Therefore, it is not correct to say that it is a waste of time and energy to read poetry or to write it. There is no other more fruitful branch of knowledge than poetry.

(b) Poetry Never Lies

To the second objection that the poets are liars, Sidney replies boldly and affirms that of all writers under the sun, the poet is the least liar. Even if he so desires, he cannot lie. The astronomers and geometricians measure and affirm the height of the stars; they may be liars. The physicians may lie when they prescribe certain medicine and affirm that they are good. But the poet affirms nothing, and is, therefore, not a liar. To lie is to affirm that to be true which is false. The historian affirms many things and so cannot avoid being false, one time or the other. But the poet never affirms. He never conjures you to believe as true what he writes. He does not cite authorities in support of what he says. He does not labour to tell you what is but what should or should not be. And, therefore, says Sidney "though he (poet) recount things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true, he lieth not." The poet writes things allegorically and figuratively and not affirmatively. So he does not lie. Even a child would not believe Aesop's Fables to be true.

The critics of poetry point out that the poet gives names to persons he writes of. Since the persons are fictitious, and not true or real, the poet may be said to tell lies. Sidney's answer is that the poet's naming of men is but to make his pictures more lively. Lawyers also use fictitious name, but we do not call them liars for that reason. We play chess and we give names to pieces of wood. But nobody would call us liars for this reason. Thus the poet names Cyrus or Aeneas, only to show what men of their name and fame should do.

(c) Poetry-Not the Mother of Abuse

The third objection to poetry is that poetry abuses men's wit and makes them corrupt and lustful. They say the Comedies rather teach than control the passion of love. They say the lyric is full of passionate songs, the Elegiac poet weeps the want of his mistress and that even in the Heroical, Cupid hath ambitiously entered. Thus

all poetry is lustful and arouses sinful fancies. But says Sidney, no doubt the poets write of love, but love, of beauty is not sinful. But even if it is granted, that love, lust and vanity fill the pages of poets, it merely shows that the poets are at fault, not poetry itself. Poetry does not abuse man's wit but that man's wit abuses Poetry. Fault does not lie with poetry, but with its practitioners. Sidney agrees that Man's wit abuses poetry which should figure forth good things, and not infect the fancy with unworthy objects. Poetry may not only be abused, but that being abused, it can do more harm than any other army of words. But from this it follows that if rightly used, poetry can do more good than any other branch of learning. Every branch of learning can be abused, The skill of a doctor, if abused, can do harm. The abuse of the knowledge of Law can give birth to horrible injuries The abuse of the Holy Scripture, the word of God, breeds heresy. So the abuse of poetry can also cause harm. Poetry in itself is not corrupt or sinful. It is the misuse or abuse of poetry which gives rise to lust and corruption. But the very fact that poetry can cause so much harm, proves its power of doing good.

Poetry Does not Make Men Effeminate

The critics also allege that in the past England set her heart's delight upon action, and not upon imagination. Poetry has made Englishmen passive and effeminate. Now instead of doing things worthy to be done, they write of things fit to be done. Sidney replies that he cannot imagine the times when there was no poetry and peoples led a life of action. No memory is so ancient as has the precedence of poetry. Never were, the English without poetry. The Goths also loved and respected poetry. Moreover, the argument (that poetry makes men passive) applies to all learning or bookishness as it is commonly called. Rather, it would be truer to say that the argument applies to all learning. except poetry. For in wars poetry has always played an important part. Poetry has always been the companion of the camps. Even Turks and Tartars are inspired to war-like deeds by reading poetry. Homer, a poet, flourished in Greece before Greece flourished. From him the learned men took their first light of knowledge, and their active men received their first motions of courage. Even Alexander, left his teacher Aristotle, behind him, but took dead Homer (i.e. the epics of Homer) with him. He put the philosopher Callisthenes to death but wished Homer had been alive. He was inspired to bravery more by the example of Achilles than by reading the definition of fortitude in books of philosophy.

(d) Plato did not Condemn Poetry, but the Abuse of Poetry

The critics say that Plato wanted the poets to be banished from his ideal commonwealth. Sidney has great respect for Plato, the greatest of philosophers, because he was the most poetical, of all. It may be replied to the critics that Plato, being a philosopher, was a natural enemy of poets. But Sidney does not consider it a proper reply. The philosophers pick out sweet knowledge from poetry, and they ungratefully scorn the poets who teach by a divine delightfulness. The philosophers should not discredit their masters in this way. Poets have always enjoyed respect and honour. Seven cities struggled among themselves to have blind Homer as one of their citizen, while many of the cities banished philosophers as being unworthy citizens. Many Athenians had their lives saved from the Syracusans, only by repeating certain of Euripides' verses. Simonides and Pindarus so much influenced Hero, the first, that from a tyrant he became a just king. Plato and Plutarch have more filth and lust in their pages, than any poet.

Again, it may be asked out of what commonwealth did Plato banish the poets? It was a commonwealth which allowed community of women. So effeminate wantonness must not have been the cause for which Plato wanted to banish poets, for in his commonwealth all were free to enjoy any woman they liked. St. Paul himself who has honoured poets--has condemned, not philosophy itself, but the abuse of philosophy. So Plato also is not against Poetry but against its abuse. Plato found fault with the poets of his time because they filled the world with wrong opinions of the gods by narrating merry, licentious tales about them and, therefore, Plato would not have the youth depraved by reading the works of such poets. Sidney defends the early Greek poets and says that the poets did not induce such opinions, but merely imitated those opinions which were already prevalent. All the Greek stories can well testify that the very religion of that time was based upon such stories of the gods. Many superstitions prevailed at the time. The poets were not at all responsible for this; they simply followed what was generally accepted. Plato, therefore, was not against the Poets but meant to drive out those wrong opinions of the Deity, which he supposed were nourished by the poets. He himself in his Dialogue, called Ion, gives high praise to Poetry. So Plato banished only the abuse of poetry, and not poetry as such. So Plato is the patron and not the adversary of poets. From the Ion it is clear, that he considered that poetry was the

result of divine inspiration. He, therefore, praised poetry more highly than even the poets can do.

Poets have been honoured at all times in all climes. Alexander, Caesar, Scipious all favoured poets. Laelius, called the Roman Socrates, himself was a poet. Even Greek Socrates spent part of his time in old age in putting Aesop's Fables into verse. Plato's Dialogues are all poetic. Aristotle wrote the Art of Poesy, only because he considered it worth writing. Plutar taught the advantages of poetry and the right way of reading. He did so because he considered poetry worthy of serious study. He has decorated his history and philosophy with poetry. So poetry is not to be dispraised. Its dispraise should be transformed into just commendation.

Thus poetry is not an art of lies, but of truth; not of effeminateness but of notable stirring of courage, not of abusing man's wit, but of strengthening it; Poets were not banished but honoured by Plato. So poets are to be highly honoured rather than to be condemned.

The Decay of Poetry in Contemporary England

Sidney observes that England has always been the mother of poets; why it is, that in his age she has grown so hard a step-mother to poets, who surpass all others in wit. These poets are makers of themselves, they do not learn or take from others. Poesy has always been favoured by Kings, Emperors, 'Senators and Captains, David, Adrian, Sophocles, Germanicus. These and a thousand others not only favoured poets but they, themselves, were poets. Robert, King of Sicily, the great King Francis of France, King James of Scotland were all poets and patrons of poetry. Great Cardinals, as Bembus and Bibbiena, Preachers and teachers, as Beza and Melancthon; philosophers, as Fracastorious and Scaliger, great Orators, as Pontanus, piercing wits, as Buchanan, grave councillors and many others all not only read other's poesies but also tried to poetize for others' reading. Sidney regrets that Poesy thus loved in all ages and countries, should be so neglected and dishonoured in England. Poets flourished in England even in those war- like times when the trumpet of Mars did sound the loudest. Why should they not flourish in peace time?

Reason for It-Lack of Inspiration

Sidney then gives reasons for the contemporary disgrace of poetry and poets. Poetry is now dishonoured because only servile and mean persons follow it. They are satisfied, if what they write is published. They never care for quality. Such men disgrace poetry by their own disgracefulness. Sidney calls them bastards. They have no learning and no skill. They that delight in Poesy itself should try to know what they do, how it should best be done, and should try to understand their own shortcomings. They, should try to find out, if they have the necessary ability. For Poesy must not be drawn by the ears; it must be gently led or rather it must lead. That is why the ancients have said that poetry is a divine gift, and on human skill. A poet cannot be made by hard work only; he can be made a poet, only if he has the genius to be a poet. The highest-flying wit is guided by Deadalus who carries him up on his wings into the air of due praise and fame. The three wings are: Art, Imitation and Exercise. Art that is rules, imitation that is models which are to be imitated the English poets have in abundance, more than is necessary. But exercise they do not do rightly, for they think that they know, what they should make efforts or exercise to know. Continuing his advice to the poets, Sidney says that poetry has two parts-matter to be expressed in words and words to express the matter and in neither of the two do the poets exercise to use art and imitation rightly.

Praise of Old English Masters

Sidney goes on to praise some works of great English masters for their matter as well as their manner of expression, Chaucer is excellent in his Troilus and Cressida. The Mirror of Magistrates is also properly furnished with beautiful parts and in the Earl of Surrey's Lyrics there are many things worthy and noble. The Shepherd's Calender has much poetry in its dialogues. Few other works, besides these have poetry in them. Sidney, then, in order to show that these works are truly poetic, says that put any of them into prose and you will find that it has lost all its charm, weight and force. Their poetry when put into prose becomes a confused mass of words, with a tingling sound of rhyme, with hardly any reason or sense.

Contemporary Comedies and Tragedies-Their Faults

The contemporary tragedies and comedies deserve criticism, for they observe rules neither of civility nor of poetry. But *Gorboduc* is full of stately speeches and well sounding phrases. It is correctly written in the Senecan style. It is full of notable morality which it teaches delightfully and thus achieves the very end of Poesy (ie. to teach and delight). But even *Gorboduc*, according to Sidney, is not a model for other Tragedies. It is faulty in its observance of the unities both of place and time, the two necessary companions of all human actions on this earth. "For where the stage should always represent but one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotle's precept and common reason, but one day, there is both many days, and many places, inartistically imagined."

Sidney's Advocacy of the Three Unities'

These unities are wanting in *Gorboduc* and more so in other plays. The unity of place is most grossly violated. We find Asia on the one side and Africa on the other. The same stage is represented at many places, and an actor when he comes on the stage has to tell the audience what place it is at that particular moment. Sidney makes fun of this fault and says: "Now Ye shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers and then we must believe the stage to be a garden." The next moment we have to imagine it to be a rock, and the very next moment a cave. The violation of the unity of Time is equally gross and violent. Two young princes are first shown in love, they marry, have children, who in turn grow up, fall in love, marry and have children, and all this happens within the space of two hours. How absurd it is can very well be imagined!

It may be asked how drama should represent a story which contains many places and many times. Sidney replies that tragedy should be tied down to the laws of Poesy and not of History. It is not bound to follow the story, having liberty, either to imagine quite a new story, or to modify stories taken from history according to the needs of dramatic art. The unities of time and place, as well as the unity of action, may be easily observed, if many things are reported and not represented on the stage, He gives the example of the story of young Polydorus of which all should not be represented. Only a part which is by itself complete should be staged and set in action, the rest may be reported as has been done by Euripides.

Condemnation of Tragi-Comedy

Sidney is not in favour of Tragi-Comedy. He is against all those plays that are neither right tragedies nor right comedies, but a mixture of the two. He condemns the mingling of kings and clowns, of hornpipes and funerals. The ancients generally did not do so. They wrote either pure tragedies or true comedies. They aroused admiration and commiseration through their tragedies and delight through their comedies. The English tragedies are failures, because the mingling of the comic weakens their effect. Their comedies are mean and worthless. They are full of obscenity and clownage. They produce loud laughter, but not that delight which is the true aim of comedy.

Distinction Between Delight and Laughter

We delight in things that are in harmony with human nature; laughter comes of things most disproportionate or contrary to human nature. Delight momentary. We take delight, for example, in seeing a fair woman but we do not have permanent joy in it; laughter has only a scornful tickling which is not to laugh at her; while we may laugh at a deformed man. Delight and laughter may come together, but it is wrong to suppose that, delight is the cause of laughter. Thus comedy does not aim merely at laughter but at the delight of teaching which is the true end of poetry. Even their laughter is caused by things sinful or things miserable, which are to be eschewed or pitied rather than to be laughed at. A busy loving courtier, a heartless, threatening braggart, a pedantic schoolmaster, or a fashion-loving traveller oddly dressed, are the true objects of that delightful laughter which teaches as well as delights.

Contemporary Lyric

Another kind of poetry which the English have is the lyric. It can be used for singing the praises of the immortal beauty and goodness of God. But it is used merely to express love, and even this expression of love is so cold, that if Sidney were the beloved, he would not at all be moved. Their expression of love is entirely cold, artificial and unnatural.

Diction of Poetry

Just as matter is the inside of Poetry; diction is the outside of poetry. In diction, in their use of words, the English poets are even worse. The versifiers use far-fetched words, which are new and unfamiliar to an Englishman. Sometimes they use

figures and flowers, extremely winter-starved. They are fond of puns, conceits and word-play of all sorts. They are not the true imitators of Tully and Demosthenes but are like Red Indians, who in order to appear beautiful, are not content to wear ear-rings only in the ears, the fit and natural place for ear-rings, but through their noses and lips. A true poet uses words in their right place to express their right meaning to the right minds. The English poets practise art and like good courtiers speak according to art, though not by Art. Others use Art to show art, not to hide art. They, therefore, become inartistic and artificial and fail to move or persuade. Similes should be used to explain and clarify, and not to convince those of contrary opinion. They must not be used excessively, for any superfluity in their use is tedious and fatiguing to the reader.

As regards the English language, it has words of many languages and this increases its expressive range and power. English is not bound down by the rules of Grammar. The purpose of language is the uttering sweetly and properly the conceits of the mind, and English hath this power more than any other tongue in the world.

Versification

Sidney now considers English versification. There are two sorts of versifying the one ancient, the other modern. The ancient marked the quantity of each syllable; the modern observe only the number. The chief feature of their versification is that like sounding of words, which we call rhyme. The ancient versification is more fit for music; but the modern with its rhyme also strikes a certain music to the ear. The English as well as the ancient versification has both sweetness and majesty and so gives delight. English is superior to other languages, for it does not need elision of vowels as does the Italian language; nor is it too full of consonants like the Dutch language. It is superior to the French and Spanish languages also, for it does not have many of their defects.

In rhyme the English do not observe quantity, but they observe the accent very precisely, which the other languages do not do. They are always careful to introduce Caesura or breathing place in the midst of their verse. Lastly, as regards the very rhyme itself, the Italian cannot put in the last syllable, by the French named the "masculine rhyme." They place it in the next to the last, which the French call the "female" or they place it in the next before the last two, which the

Italians call Sdrucchiola. The example for the former is buono: suono, of the Sdrucchiola, femina; Semina. The French have both the male, as bon; son, and the female, as Plaise; taise. It is the English alone who have all three, due, true; father, rather: motion, potion. Thus in matter of rhyme English is superior to other languages.

Conclusion

To conclude, Poetry is full of delightfulness which is conducive to virtue. The charges brought against it are either false or feeble. It is the fault of the poets-not true poet but poet-apes-that it is not esteemed in England. The English language is most fit to honour Poetry, and to be honoured by Poetry. Sidney, therefore, appeals to his readers not to laugh at the name of 'poets and poetry'. The poets, according to Aristotle, were the ancient treasures of the Grecians' Divinity; they were the first bringers-in of all civility, according to *Bembus*. Scaliger thought that poets made men honest sooner than philosophers. It pleased God to give us all knowledge through such poets as *Homer and Hesoid*. There are many mysteries contained in Poetry which were written obscurely so that they may not be misused by irreligious persons. Poets are the beloveds of God, and whatever they write is written under divine inspiration. They can make you immortal by their verses. In this way your name shall ever be remembered; people will write prefaces to you, and you shall be considered to be the most fair, most rich, most wise, of all. Your soul shall be placed with Dante's Beatrix, or Virgil's Anchises. But if you do not like the planet-like music of poetry or if you have such an earth- looking mind that you cannot lift yourself up to look at the sky of Poetry, you will be in love, but will never get the favour of your beloved, because you lack the skill of writing a sonnet, and when you die, you will not be remembered for want of an epitaph.