An Apology for Poetry

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PHILIP SIDNEY

Sir Philip Sidney was a child of privilege, born to Sir Henry Sidney, Elizabeth I's governor of Ireland, and Lady Mary Dudley. His godfather was King Philip II of Spain; his uncle Robert Dudley was one of Elizabeth's closest advisers. Philip was educated to join his family's tradition of service, first at the Shrewsbury School and then at Oxford. Following a three-year tour of Europe (1572-1575), where he perfected his languages and became familiar with European politics, Sidney returned to Elizabeth's court and embarked on a career as diplomat and parliamentarian. A man of broad interests, he befriended leading artists and scholars of the day (including poet Edmund Spenser and alchemist John Dee), and was the dedicatee of more than 40 books on subjects as diverse as painting, law, poetry, and botany. Despite his education and social background, Sidney struggled to land a job of any real importance (he was knighted in 1583 only so that he could stand in for a nobleman in an important royal ceremony) and so directed his energies into creative work. He finished the 180,000-word heroic prose romance the *Arcadia* in 1580, and in 1582 wrote *Astrophel and Stella*, which is considered the most important English sonnet sequence after Shakespeare's. Around the same time, he wrote *An Apology for Poetry*, introducing Continental ideas about literature to England. Later he started but did not finish an expansion of the *Arcadia* as well as a paraphrase of the Psalms. Sidney was renowned for his gentlemanly manners, and, fitting with his status, none of his works were printed and sold in his lifetime. In 1585, he was appointed joint-administrator of the British ordnance, which oversaw the distribution of arms in the kingdom. In this capacity he volunteered to serve in England's war with the Spanish in the Netherlands, where, in defense of a supply convoy, he was grazed by an enemy bullet, and died from infection soon after. He is buried in St. Paul's cathedral in London.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Philip Sidney wrote during the English Renaissance, a period of extraordinary cultural and social change that lasted from the early 16th century to the mid-17th century. More specifically, he wrote during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603). The Renaissance (which means "rebirth") began in the late 1300s in Italy with the rediscovery of many classical texts and the revival of Latin and Greek language learning. Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press in the 1440s allowed for the mass production of books and the circulation of ideas across the continent and into England. At the same time as antiquity was rediscovered, European explorers sailed to the "New World," the discovery of which challenged traditional narratives of history and started a race to colonize America. Soon after, Martin Luther and others launched the Protestant Reformation, leading to decades of conflict between Christian sects. All of this cultural, political, and technological change led writers and thinkers to re-evaluate contemporary society in relationship to the newly discovered worlds of antiquity and America. Writers like Sidney began to write in modern languages, rather than Latin, allowing for a wider, less elite readership for their work but also fostering new feelings of nationalism. Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry"—with its classical structure and numerous classical references, its references to pan-European literature, and its nationalistic elevation of English over other modern languages—reflects many of the intellectual and cultural currents of its time.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Sidney wrote "An Apology for Poetry" in response to Elizabethan writers like Stephen Gosson, whose pamphlet *Schoole of Abuse* (1579) accused poets and playwrights for problems in English society. "An Apology for Poetry" draws on a number of classical works of literary criticism, most notably Plato's dialogues (particularly the *Republic* and *Ion*), Aristotle's *Poetics*, and Horace's *Art of Poetry*, as well as Renaissance texts like the philologist Joseph Julius Scaliger's *Poetics* (1560). It should be read alongside other Renaissance literary criticism, like George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589). Sidney was not just a literary theorist, he was also a practicing poet, whose sonnet-sequence *Astrophel and Stella* (1582) helped bring Petrarchan sonnet into English literature and was likely a source for Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (1609). "An Apology for Poetry" also influenced later writers, most notably Percy Bysshe Shelley in his "A Defense of Poetry" (written 1821, published 1840).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** An Apology for Poetry
- **When Written:** c. 1580
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1595
- **Literary Period:** Elizabethan Period; English Renaissance
- **Genre:** Essay; Oration
- **Climax:** Although the essay does not have a narrative climax, Sidney writes an emphatic conclusion in which he condemns poetry's critics to oblivion.

- **Antagonist:** The Elizabethan intellectuals who doubted the value of poetry.

EXTRA CREDIT

A Speaking Picture. On a trip to Venice in 1574, Sir Philip Sidney achieved such popularity that he sat for a portrait by the great Venetian painter Paolo Veronese. Unfortunately, the painting has been lost.

Learning Languages. In a letter, Sidney mentioned that while studying at the University of Padua in 1574, he improved his language skills by translating "Cicero into French, then from French into English, and then back into Latin again by an uninterrupted process." He tried to learn German but gave up, writing that "Of the German language I quite despair, for it has a certain harshness about it."

PLOT SUMMARY

In "An Apology for Poetry," Sir Philip Sidney sets out to restore poetry to its rightful place among the arts. Poetry has gotten a bad name in Elizabethan England, disrespected by many of Sidney's contemporaries. But, Sidney contends, critics of poetry do not understand what poetry really is: they have been misled by modern poetry, which is frequently bad. If one understands the true nature of poetry, one will see, as Sidney shows in his essay, that poetry is in fact the "monarch" of the arts. Sidney does so by articulating a theory of poetry, largely drawn from classical sources, as a tool for teaching virtue and the poet as a semi-divine figure capable of imagining a more perfect version of nature. Armed with this definition, Sidney proceeds to address the major criticisms made of the art of poetry and of the poets who practice it, refuting them with brilliant rhetorical skill.

Following the seven-part structure of a classical oration, Sidney begins with an *exordium*, or introduction. He tells an anecdote about horse-riding, noting that, like his riding instructor Giovanni Pietro Pugliano, he will not dwell so much on the writing of poetry as the contemplation and appreciation of it. Since he has become a poet, he feels obliged to say something to restore the reputation of his unelected vocation.

Sidney begins his defense of poetry by noting that poetry was the first of the arts, coming before philosophy and history. Indeed, many of the famous classical philosophers and historians wrote in poetry, and even those who wrote in prose, like Plato and Herodotus, wrote poetically—that is, they used poetic style to come up with philosophical allegories, in the case of Plato, or to supply vivid historical details, in the case of Herodotus. Indeed, without borrowing from poetry, historians and philosophers would never have become popular, Sidney claims. One can get some indication of the respect in which poets were held in the ancient world by examining the names they were given in Latin and Greek, *vates* and *poietes*. *Vates* means "seer" or "prophet," and in the classical world, poetry was considered to convey important knowledge about the future. *Poietes* means *maker*, and this title reflects the fact that poets, like God, create new and more perfect realities using their imaginations.

Sidney then moves to the proposition, where offers a definition of poetry as an art of imitation that teaches its audience through "delight," or pleasure. In its ability to embody ideas in compelling images, poetry is like "**a speaking picture**." Sidney then specifies that the kind of poetry he is interested in is not religious or philosophical, but rather that which is written by "right poets." This ideal form of poetry is not limited in its subject matter by what exists in nature, but instead creates perfect examples of virtue that, while maybe not real, is well-suited to teaching readers about what it means to be good. Poetry is a more effective teacher of virtue than history or philosophy because, instead of being limited to the realm of abstract ideas, like philosophy, or to the realm of what has actually happened, like history, poetry can present perfect examples of virtue in a way best suited to instruct its readers. The poet can embody the philosopher's "wordish descriptions" of virtue in compelling characters or stories, which are more pleasurable to read and easier to understand and remember, like Aesop's *Fables*. The poet should therefore be considered the "right popular philosopher," since with perfect and pleasurable examples of virtue, like Aeneas from Virgil's *Aeneid*, poetry can "move" readers to act virtuously. Reading poetry about virtue, Sidney writes, is like taking a "medicine of cherries."

Following the classical structure from this examination to the refutation, Sidney rebuts the criticisms made of poetry by "poet-haters." Sidney outlines the four most serious charges against poetry: that poetry is a waste of time, that the poet is a liar, that poetry corrupts our morals, and that Plato banished poets from his ideal city in the *Republic*. He highlights that all of these objections rest on the power of poetry to move its audience, which means that they are actually reasons to praise poetry. For if poetry is written well, it has enormous power to move its audience to virtue.

Following a short peroration, or conclusion, in which he summarizes the arguments he has made, Sidney devotes the final portion of his essay to a digression on modern English poetry. There is relatively little modern English poetry of any quality, Sidney admits. However, is not because there is anything wrong with English or with poetry, but rather with the absurd way in which poets write poems and playwrights write plays. Poets must be educated to write more elegantly, borrowing from classical sources without apishly imitating them, as so many poets, orators, and scholars did in Sidney's time. For English is an expressive language with all the

apparatus for good literature, and it is simply waiting for skillful writers to use it. Sidney brings "An Apology for Poetry" to a close on this hopeful note—but not before warning readers that, just as poetry has the power to immortalize people in verse, so too does it have the power to condemn others to be forgotten by ignoring them altogether. The critics of poetry should therefore take Sidney's arguments seriously.

CHARACTERS

Sir Philip Sidney – Sir Philip Sidney is the author of "An Apology for Poetry," as well as its narrator, but the narrator is not necessarily the same as the author. Sidney's persona in "An Apology for Poetry" is largely similar to his historical persona: the refined, horse-riding aristocrat (the name Philip means "lover of horses" in Greek) who is well-educated but not pedantic, and who shows all of the virtues of Baldassare Castiglione's courtier, including that indefinable *sprezzatura*, or nonchalance, that was the ultimate mark of aristocratic sensibility. While Sidney was indeed renowned for his manners, he chose to adopt and perhaps even embellish this persona in "An Apology for Poetry." It is a rhetorical *ethos*, or character, designed to persuade the reader by winning his or her trust. True to aristocratic form, Sidney writes in a passionate but not a scholarly manner, and insists throughout that he is an amateur, a man of leisure: he merely "slipped into the title of a poet." In a gentlemanly fashion, he takes up the task of defending poetry only because he has been so badly "provoked" by critics, which gives his "An Apology for Poetry" an air of authenticity: he speaks not simply as an orator who seeks to impress, but as a man who has been wronged. Sidney repeatedly refers to his "An Apology for Poetry" as a trifle, an "ink-wasting toy," and begs in the indulgence of the reader, despite the fact that he is clearly a master of rhetoric.

The Poet – The Poet is at the center of Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry," the figure whom Sidney defends against the "poet-haters" of the Elizabethan age. The poet writes imaginative literature, often but not necessarily in verse, and uses his or her imagination to create fictions: concrete examples (of the kind one finds in history) of abstract ideas (of the kind one studies in philosophy) perfectly designed to delight and to teach the reader. Sidney cites many examples of ancient poets (Hesiod, Homer, Vergil, among others) and also alludes to his contemporary English poets (such as his friend Edmund Spenser). But he also refers to the ideal poet, defining him or her as a "maker," following the Greek etymology of the word (*poietes*), who resembles and (in the most extreme reading) in some ways even rivals God in his ability (and, indeed, Sidney most likely did have a male writer in mind, given the time and place he was writing) to create people and things even more perfect than what readers can find in nature. The poet combines this capacity for creation with an ability to speak not of what has been but of what should be, and thus resembles what the ancient Romans called a *vates*, a bard or seer. Because of his or her unique abilities, the poet is the ideal teacher of moral truths. Unlike the philosopher, who can only traffic in abstract ideas, and the historian, who is limited by what has actually happened, the poet can invent an example (i.e., a character, such as Virgil's Aeneas in *Aeneid*, or an entire story, like a fable by Aesop) perfectly designed to teach the reader through delighting him or her. The poet resembles God in one final way, alluded to at the very end of "An Apology for Poetry": the poet can immortalize people and things in verse, or, in an act of literary revenge, condemn his or her critics to oblivion by ignoring them.

Edward Wotton – Edward Wotton is a courtier and friend of Sidney's who accompanied him on his European tour. He appears in the very beginning of "An Apology for Poetry" as a fellow student of the Italian riding instructor Giovanni Pietro Pugliano at the court of Maximilian II. The historical Wotton was renowned for his learning and, in addition to his distinguished career as a diplomat for Elizabeth I, was involved in many literary projects. Sidney refers to him as "right virtuous," and his presence in the introduction of "An Apology for Poetry" would only emphasize Sidney's aristocratic connections.

Giovanni Pietro Pugliano – Giovanni Pietro Pugliano is the esquire, or stablemaster, of Maximilian II's court, and riding instructor to Sidney and Wotton. Sidney praises him not only a master of the technical art of riding, but also a kind of philosopher, who invites his students to contemplate the activity and its purpose, rather than merely master the skill. Like Wotton, Pugliano is not mentioned after the introduction of "An Apology for Poetry," but he is the implicit model for Sidney's own teacherly persona: Pugliano "sought to enrich our minds" and spoke creatively, perhaps even poetically, "according to the fertileness of the Italian wit."

THEMES

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POETRY VS. HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

In response to the disregard for poetry shared by many Elizabethan intellectuals, Sir Philip Sidney insists in "An Apology for Poetry" that the poet and his or her craft should be taken even more seriously than the supposedly more respectable fields of philosophy and history. In "An Apology for Poetry," Sidney mounts a courtroom-style

case (i.e., an *apologia*) for imaginative writing, following a traditional structure according to which, after an introduction, he articulates the qualities that make poetry superior to philosophy and history. Drawing on examples from Greek and Roman classics—which would have given his argument extra authority in the highly traditional world of 16th-century England—Sidney argues that all good writing is poetical, because poetical writing is the most vivid and therefore the most able to teach and delight the reader.

Sidney points out that the 16th-century hierarchy of the arts is a modern (and therefore inferior) invention. In ancient times, there was no real distinction made between philosophy, history, and poetry, and the best ancient writers wrote poetically. Many ancient philosophers wrote poetry, such as Solon (who wrote an early Athenian constitution) and Plato, whose dialogues are decorated with the "flowers of poetry." The best historians, such as Herodotus, "stole, or usurped, of poetry" their descriptions of human feelings, granular historical detail, and the long speeches they report but never could have heard. The Romans communicated their respect for poetry by calling the poet a *vates*, a seer or prophet, suggesting that the content of poetry is important "heart-ravishing knowledge," as important as any other kind of information. Sidney, covering all his bases, notes that even the Bible is a kind of poetry: the Psalms are "a divine poem" that makes the reader "see God coming in His majesty," uniting the poet's skill in description with his or her ability as *vates* to predict the future.

In Sidney's view, poetry is superior to philosophy and history because of its ability to present vivid, compelling examples to the reader not simply of what has been or will be, but what *should* be. The philosopher can only articulate an abstract description of an ethical principle. The poet, however, "giveth a perfect picture of it" because, using his or her imagination "coupleth the general notion with the particular example." The poet concretizes an abstract principle in a perfect example for what the philosopher is only able to give a "wordish description." The historian, on the other hand, does indeed provide many useful examples of human virtue from the past, but these examples are not necessarily more instructive for the reader. Oftentimes, an example from literature is "more doctrinable" (i.e., more instructive) than a true, imperfect historical example—than "his bare WAS." "If the poet do his part aright," Sidney explains, "he will show you in Tantalus, Atreus, and such like, nothing that is not to be shunned; in Cyrus, Aeneas, Ulysses, each thing to be followed; where the historian, bound to tell things as things were, cannot be liberal, without he will be poetical, of a perfect pattern." Poetry therefore synthesizes philosophy's ability to articulate moral principles with history's ability to give concrete examples. This makes the poet "the right popular philosopher" since he or she is able to communicate virtue to everyone, not just the learned, through his or her power to embody abstract ideas in concrete examples.

Finally, poetry is a more effective teaching tool than history or philosophy because it compels the reader to learn virtue through its vivid examples. These vivid examples are able to move the reader in a way that abstract language cannot. Sidney explains that "moving"—that is, delighting the reader in some way—is "well nigh both the cause and effect of teaching," for "who will be taught, if he be not moved with desire to be taught?" Poetry moves the reader to virtue because it "doth not only show the way [to virtue], but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way, as will entice any man to enter into it." Therefore, poetry "doth draw the mind more effectively than any other art doth." Poetry is thus particularly effective for educating children since it sugarcoats moral learning, like a "medicine of cherries." In other words, if moral lessons are couched in pleasant stories, young readers will be educated almost without knowing. As they read for pleasure, they learn almost against their will.

Sidney asserts that poetry is the "monarch" of the arts because of its ability to unite the best parts of philosophy and history in vivid, pleasing, and memorable examples. These examples teach readers about virtue sometimes without them even knowing. All of the best philosophy and history, and even the Bible, draws on poetry to teach the reader through delighting them, just as Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry" makes its compelling case through vivid prose, an effective rhetorical structure, and memorable examples.

POETRY, CREATION, AND IMAGINATION

As part of the case he makes in "An Apology for Poetry," Sir Philip Sidney provides a theory of what poetry is and how it works. This includes a taxonomy of poetic genres, both ancient and modern. Sidney's influential formulation begins with Aristotle's traditional definition of poetry (and imaginative literature more broadly) as the imitation or *mimesis* of reality, but goes even further to suggest that poetry is the creation of new, more perfect realities through the imagination. The poet, Sidney argues, has an almost divine power of creation, and is able to perfect nature through his or her imagination, forming a bridge between original, "golden" nature and the fallen state of contemporary humanity.

At the center of Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry"—again, as part of the traditional rhetorical structure he is following—is Aristotle's definition of poetry as imitation of reality. Sidney writes: "Poesy [...] is an art of imitation; for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis*; that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth." Sidney explains this using a metaphor from Plato, writing that poetry is "**a speaking picture**, with this end to teach and delight." Poetry, then, has a broader definition in "An Apology for Poetry" than it does in

modern English. It does not have to be in verse, which is "no cause to poetry, since there have been many most excellent poets that never versified." Poets, though, do tend to speak in an elevated register "according to the dignity of the subject" they are writing about. According to Sidney, Poetry is a term broad enough to encompass not just Homer, but also Plato, Hesiod alongside Herodotus: it is something closer to imaginative literature (rather than merely the relation of fact) with some didactic end. Not only must one conceive of poetry as a broader literary category, but one must also place it in the context of "sciences" like history and philosophy, "skills" that help one achieve "virtuous action."

Again, following the traditional structure of a courtroom speech, Sidney divides poetry into three kinds—divine, philosophical (what is traditionally classified as "didactic"), and poetry written by "right poets." This last category refers to poets who write the kind of poetry that Sidney describes and praises throughout his essay. They "imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be." That is, they are like the *vates*, for they are not bound by certain knowledge but instead "range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be." Following a classical taxonomy, Sidney further subdivides poetry into "heroic, lyric, tragic, comic, satiric, iambic, elegiac, pastoral," which he will refer to later in his essay. But these specific genres and forms should all be merely instances of the essay's expansive conception of poetry, which is defined less by form (i.e., verse) and more by content.

But Sidney goes beyond classical definitions in suggesting that the poet does not just imitate reality, but can perfect it. The poet is the most excellent example of human superiority to the rest of God's creation. Sidney plays on the etymology of the word *poet*, which in Greek means "maker." The other sciences study nature as God made it, but "Only the poet [...] lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another nature" and makes things "either better than nature bringeth forth, or quite anew; forms such as never were in nature" like monsters or heroes, or simply morally perfect individuals. Through their imagination, the poet can exceed the "the narrow warrant" of God's creation, not bound by natural laws but rather "freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit." The fallenness or imperfection of this world is both a Christian and classical commonplace. Sidney accords the poet-maker the role of restorer, or perfecter, of this imperfect world. For since nature's "world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden" world.

The poet is therefore is not just a special kind of writer or thinker, but a special kind of human being, one who has access to uncorrupted nature. God, "the heavenly Maker of that maker," created people in his likeness. But, Sidney argues, God set the poet "beyond and over all the works" in his creation. This is clear when "with the force of a divine breath he [i.e., the poet] bringeth things forth surpassing her doings." The poet's imagination is an example of "our erected wit" which "maketh us know what perfection is" even if "our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it." All the sciences, and poetry in particular, help to "draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of." Poetry, then, is something holy, and the poet is not just a writer, but something closer to a priest or even a prophet.

Sidney's vision of poetry and the poet's role is much more expansive than one might initially expect. At its heart is Aristotle's notion of poetry as imitation, the creation of "a speaking picture" that represents reality. But the "picture" is less a photograph and more a painting, or a Hollywood film: an embellishment of the reality that is represented. Combining classical theories of poetry as imitation with a Christian worldview, Sidney's poetry does not just teach virtue, but creates it in the form of the more perfect reality of the poet's imagination. Even though Christian theology dictates that humans can never achieve perfection, the poet, in describing "what may or should be," allows humankind to get a glimpse of it.

DEFENDING POETRY

When Philip Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry" was published in 1595, it bore two titles: "The Defence of Poesie" and "An Apologie for Poetrie." These titles alert readers to the fact that "An Apology for Poetry" is in fact a written oration with the explicit goal of defending poetry against the critiques of Elizabethan intellectuals. Upon close inspection, it is clear that "An Apology for Poetry" has all seven parts of a classical courtroom speech. Throughout, Sidney attacks critics of poetry for being uncharitable readers, or confusing low-quality modern verse for true poetry. But the most substantive rebuttal comes in the second half of the defense, where Sidney refutes four traditional critiques made of poetry. "An Apology for Poetry," like the speech of a lawyer in court, seeks to persuade its readers and thereby win a case: here, to exonerate poetry from certain accusations made against it, as well as to restore poetry to its proper standing in the world of arts and letters.

Although written to be read, not spoken, Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry" follows the classical seven-part form of a courtroom speech. It has an *exordium* or introduction (a "hook"), proposition (definition of poetry), division (taxonomy of poetry), examination (in-depth account of each kind), refutation (against four charges), peroration (flashy conclusion), and digression (on modern English poetry). The very structure of the work is meant to be persuasive: "An Apology for Poetry" seeks to change the reader's mind. Furthermore, the forensic speech was a commonplace of Renaissance humanist education, and thus reflects Sidney's social standing, as well as the class of his readership. This book was intended for the highly educated,

and emerges from the culture of the court. "An Apology for Poetry" opens with an anecdote about learning horsemanship—the quintessential activity of the aristocrat—in the court of the Holy Roman Emperor. The instructor taught not only the art of riding, but also "sought to enrich our minds with the contemplation" of the activity. The riding instructor is a figure for Sidney himself, who will not teach the reader to write poetry, but to appreciate its place in the broader scheme of the arts.

If the implied defendant (accused) of "An Apology for Poetry" is poetry itself, and the implied jury is the reader, then the implied plaintiffs (accuser) are Sidney's fellow Elizabethan intellectuals, who through malice or misunderstanding do not accord poetry the respect it deserves. At the very opening of the essay, Sidney calls those who "professing learning, inveigh against poetry" ungrateful, since they insult "the first light-giver to ignorance, and first nurse, whose milk by little and little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledge." In other words, their humanist educations probably consisted largely of reading and analyzing poetry. Later on, Sidney refers to "poet-haters" who simply attack poetry for the sake of getting attention. The arguments of this group are not made in good faith, and so cannot be taken seriously. They also fall apart under logical scrutiny; poet-haters object above all to the *form* of poetry, but Sidney argues that, "being in itself sweet and orderly, and being best for memory," verse is "the only handle of knowledge" and as such is unimpeachable. The virtues of poetry are so clear and self-evident, Sidney suggests, he must only summarize them in order to win.

In the refutation section, Sidney neutralizes the four main criticisms that have been made of poetry in some form or another since antiquity. The first criticism is that poetry is a waste of time. This is an instance, Sidney suggests, of begging the question, for if one accepts Sidney's argument that poetry "teacheth and moveth to virtue" one must necessarily admit that poetry is not a waste of time. Second, critics claim, poetry "is the mother of lies." In response, Sidney claims that "of all writers under the sun, the poet is the least liar." This is because the poet does not claim to describe reality, as an astronomer might, but rather invents his or her own realities, and so cannot lie about them. The poet "nothing affirthmeth, and therefore never lieth." The poet therefore does not tell the reader anything *true*, but also cannot lie. Third, poetry is "the nurse of abuse" and incites the reader to feelings of lust and sinfulness. Sidney grants that poetry can promote questionable values—but "shall the abuse of a thing make the right use odious?" If someone commits a crime with a sword, one would not blame the sword, but the person who used it. In fact, by arguing for the power of poetry to affect people's values, critics "prove the commendation" that poetry, used correctly, can promote good values. For every example of poetry making people lazy or unwarlike, Sidney offers instances in which poetry has made people more active and manly, such as Alexander the Great's love of Homer. The fourth and final criticism Sidney rebuts is the fact that Plato banished poetry from his ideal city in the *Republic*. Sidney describes Plato as the most "poetical" of philosophers, and argues that, like some poets, he has been misunderstood. For Plato meant not to ban poetry altogether, but rather "those wrong opinions of the Deity." Plato "banish[ed] the abuse, not the thing", and thereby gave "due honor to it." Readers should therefore think of Plato not as the poet's "adversary," but as his "patron."

In "An Apology for Poetry," Sidney makes several ingenious arguments to defend poetry against the criticisms commonly leveled against it. The essence of Sidney's defense is that poetry, like anything else, can be abused by unskillful or immoral poets, but that the misuse of poetry should be considered the exception and not the rule. If one considers poetry in good faith—and does not simply criticize to get attention, like some of the poet-haters—one sees that the major critiques of poetry are actually commendations, since they rest upon the premise that poetry is a powerful communicator of useful and moving fictions.

POETRY IN THE VERNACULAR

Philip Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry" was written around 1580 and published in 1595, some nine years after Sidney's death. Sidney therefore wrote one of the most important treatises on poetry in English before many of England's greatest Elizabethan poets came on the scene. He writes of Chaucer, Gower, and his contemporary Spenser, but never would read Marlowe, Shakespeare, Donne, and the other great poets of the day. It is perhaps not entirely surprising, then, that throughout "An Apology for Poetry," and particularly in its concluding "digression" on literature in vernacular tongues (i.e., modern European rather than ancient languages), Sidney elevates ancient above modern literature. Indeed, while Sidney defends imaginative literature in its ideal forms, he offers a bracing technical critique of the way modern poetry is (mis)written. But in fitting with the emergence of nationalism in the early modern era, he elevates English above other European languages for its expressive potential.

Sidney argues that, in general, ancient poetry has an originality and scope that is lacking from modern literature, and that England in particular suffers from a drought of good poetry. Sidney admires the poetry of Chaucer, Gower, Sackville, and others, but sees his own time as distinctly lacking in English poetry. While England is "mother of excellent minds," the country, Sidney claims, is a "hard step-mother of poets." England has not produced anything to rival the 16th-century literature of Scotland, France, or Italy. This is the result of a vicious cycle: the very disregard for poetry means that less good poetry is being written. Poetry "find[s] in our time a hard welcome in England," and therefore the very earth "decks our

soil with fewer laurels than it was accustomed." England can only really boast lyric poetry and drama, and according to Sidney, neither is particularly well-written.

Sidney offers concrete criticisms of contemporary English poetry, showing that "An Apology for Poetry" isn't just about praising literature. Indeed, since Sidney has articulated a poetic ideal, he prepares the reader to appreciate the ways in which contemporary vernacular poetry fails to meet it. Though Sidney approves of the tragedies of Buchanan and the pastoral verse of Spenser, few books of poetry "have poetical sinews in them," and dramatists create "gross absurdities" by mixing genres and ignoring the classical unities of time and place. Comic playwrights, furthermore, play into the hand of poetry's critics by "stir[ring] laughter in sinful things" and thereby leading their audiences into immorality. The result is that, "like an unmannerly daughter, showing a bad education," this mediocre and even bad poetry "causeth her mother Poesy's honesty to be called in question." In other words, mediocre modern literature gives poetry in general a bad name.

But, Sidney adds, modern literature does not have to be bad. Modern poets can learn through the creative imitation of ancient poetry: that is, by adapting ancient forms to modern needs, and doing so not in Latin, the language of humanist learning, but rather in the languages they actually speak. In general, poets can be educated to write better. "As the fertilest ground must be manured, so must the highest flying with have a Daedalus to guide him," Sidney writes, alluding to the ancient Greek inventor. Poets should practice imitating ancient authors, and borrow techniques from ancient literature in order to improve their work. Playwrights, for example, should respect classical guidelines for maintaining unity of time and space, and instead of trying to compress large amounts of action into a play, playwrights should consider employing ancient techniques, such as the messenger speech, to summarize action. Similarly, lyric poets lack the *energia* ("vividness") of ancient love poetry. There is no reason that modern authors who have been trained to write well can't write poetry as well as the ancients. Sidney asserts that English, "equally with any other tongue in the world," is capable of "uttering sweetly and properly the conceit of the mind." Even though Renaissance literature was multilingual, and Sidney himself drew much inspiration from poetry written in foreign languages (especially Italian), he argues that English, more than other European languages, is a particularly expressive language, particularly well-suited to imaginative writing. Perhaps English could be the Latin of the modern world.

The problem of English poetry, Sidney suggests, points to the problem of English eloquence. Sidney's critique of English poetry therefore feeds into a wider critique of court culture. English poets have a predilection for fancy words. Scholars share this problem, as they "cast sugar and spice upon every dish that is served at the table." Humanist authors, educated to imitate apishly, try hard to sound like Demosthenes and Cicero and end up sounding like "sophisters." Courtiers also speak in ridiculous ways. Hence Sidney prefers the talk of a poorly educated nobleman who speaks in the manner "fittest to nature, therein (though he know it not) […] according to art, though not by art." Just as slavish imitation does not lead to good poetry, so does it not lead to good rhetoric. Poetry and oratory are clearly linked, not only because "both have such affinity in the wordish considerations" but also because Sidney's essay is itself an instance in which the two work hand in hand. Sidney, functioning as both a poet and an orator, uses vivid imagery and metaphor to persuade the reader of the value poetry.

"An Apology for Poetry" is not only the defense of an abstract ideal of poetry, but also the critique of the contemporary poetry of Sidney's own time. Just as the Elizabethan critics must learn to think of poetry differently, so too must playwrights and lyric poets learn to write differently. Both groups belong to a court culture plagued by sophistic eloquence. Proper respect for, and practice of, writing, will therefore lead to a renovation of a broader intellectual culture.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE SPEAKING PICTURE

Sidney calls poetry a "speaking picture," which represents poetry's ability to imitate reality in language. Drawing on Aristotle's *Poetics*, Sidney defines poetry as "an art of imitation." The poet represents the world, creating a "counterfeit" or copy of reality. Using an ancient metaphor, with roots ultimately in the discussion of poetry in Plato's *Republic*, Sidney compares a poem to a "speaking picture, with this end, to teach and delight." The "picture" that poetry creates is "speaking" because it is made of words, but also because it has the power to communicate something to the reader—unlike history or philosophy, poetry has a unique power to move or "delight" the reader, and thereby to teach him or her. There is also something inherently visual, or experiential, in Sidney's conception of poetry. It is, for one, the product of the poet's imagination, which is literally the faculty of creating images. More importantly, in combining philosophical abstractions with concrete examples, the poet translates the language of thought into the images of experience. Whereas the philosopher is stuck in the realm of abstraction, and the historian cannot always find in his books the perfect example for a moral ideal, the poet "illuminate[s] or figure[s] forth" an idea through the speaking picture of a character or a scene.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the CreateSpace edition of *An Apology for Poetry & Astrophel and Stella* published in 2013.

An Apology for Poetry Quotes

❝ Only the poet [...] up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another nature; in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or quite anew; forms such as never were in nature, as the heroes, demi-gods, Cyclops, chimeras, furies, and such like; so he goeth hand in hand with Nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit.

Related Characters: Sir Philip Sidney (speaker), The Poet

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sidney articulates the creative power of the poet's imagination. It is this power that distinguishes poetry as the best of all the arts, and the poet is a potentially better moral teacher than the historian or the philosopher. The philosopher generally does not traffic in "things," but instead merely in abstract ideas. History does somewhat better by furnishing concrete examples. But unlike the historian, who is limited by what has actually happened in the past, the poet can imagine things that do not exist. In fictions, the poet can imagine monsters or heroes, perfect embodiments of virtue or vice. These may not be real, but are useful for communicating the ideas the poet would like to impart to the reader.

The poet's imagination "goeth hand in hand with Nature," as an equal, rather than a subject, like the rest of God's creation. The poet flies through the "zodiac" of his own imagination, not limited by any natural laws. Unleashed from the "narrow warrant" of nature as it actually is, the poet possesses a creative power that resembles God's own power of bringing new forms into being. This passage is part of Sidney's effort to recast the nature of poetry not as writing but as an act of imagination, something more elevated than merely composing verse.

❝ Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, not whatsoever else may make the too-much-loved earth more lovely; her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.

Related Characters: Sir Philip Sidney (speaker), The Poet

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

Most of the introduction to the Sidney's argument in the *Apology* is concerned with establishing Sidney's novel understanding of poetry as an act of the imagination and the poet as a semi-divine creative mind. As part of his effort to do so, Sidney invokes the ancient trope of the Golden Age—the idea that modern humans live in an age of bronze, while earlier humans and the gods lived in an age of gold. This story is famously recounted in Hesiod's *Theogony* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and is a commonplace in both classical and modern literature. A religious version of this story is the Fall from the Garden of Eden recounted in Genesis.

The poet's representation of the earth as a "rich tapestry" helps restore the "brazen" world to its "golden" state. Using imagination, the poet makes a world that is more pleasant, more fruitful, more sweet-smelling than we normally encounter, and so gives us a taste of lost paradise.

It is important to note that Sidney uses the metaphor of the "tapestry" to describe what the poet creates. This invokes the ancient metaphor of poetry as weaving, but more importantly for the *Apology*, the metaphor of poetry as a visual image, or painting. Sidney suggests throughout the *Apology* that poetry is essentially concerned with images rather than words. Indeed, the poet creates images for what the philosopher can only describe in mere words. Sidney's emphasis on the visual quality of poetry is part of the broader effort mentioned above, to advance an elevated, philosophical conception of poetry as an act of vision, rather than mere writing.

❝ Every understanding knoweth the skill of each artificer standeth in that idea, or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself.

Related Characters: Sir Philip Sidney (speaker), The Poet

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is the crux of Sidney's effort to redefine the act of poetry, which is the main thrust of the argument advanced at the beginning of the *Apology*. Sidney claims, rhetorically, that "every understanding knoweth"—i.e., that it is obvious—that the real skill of a craftsperson lies in the "idea, or fore-conceit" of the thing that is being made, rather than in the actual making of the thing itself.

This point, however, is not as obvious as Sidney suggests. Plenty of people have nice ideas in their heads without being able to actually realize them. In fact, it may seem as if the "skill" of an "artificer" is *precisely* the "work" of bringing the idea into reality. But because Sidney wants above all to cast poetry as a divine activity, he must redefine it as an activity of the mind, since reason and creative imagination are the faculties through which human beings most resemble God. (A major school of Christian theology holds that God never has to make things; he simply thinks them, and they exist.) Therefore, it is crucial for Sidney's argument to shift poetry from the actual composition of verses, or the composition of specific plots, to something that happens in the mind.

Throughout the *Apology*, Sidney claims that critics of poetry confuse the writing of poetry with poetry itself—they read poorly written literature and then go on to question the value of poetry altogether. Sidney is able to make this defense of poetry because of the argument he makes in this passage: poetry is more than just singular poems. Furthermore, in his own critiques of contemporary English poetry, Sidney accuses Elizabethan poets of being too concerned with the superficial aspects of language, rather than the more elevated, philosophical "ideas." This quotation, although short, is therefore central to the argument of the *Apology* that Sidney uses both to praise poetry and the defend it.

> Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation; for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis*; that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth: to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture, with this end, to teach and delight.

Related Characters: Sir Philip Sidney (speaker), The Poet

Related Themes:

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Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

This passage constitutes the proposition of Sidney's Apology, the part of the classical oration (the structure of which Sidney follows throughout the text) when the speaker offers a definition of the matter in question. Sidney's definition is very clear: poetry is the art of imitation. This comes straight from Aristotle's *Poetics*, an ancient manual on writing poetry that was enormously influential in the Renaissance, and which is one of the central sources for Sidney's *Apology*, particularly in his discussion of drama.

Though Sidney does not state it explicitly, the poet can both imitate reality and represent something in his or her imagination. This is clear in Sidney's gloss on the word "imitation," which is a translation of Aristotle's word *mimesis*. In English, this word means not just "imitation," but "representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth"—something much broader than merely representing reality. The poet may create a representation of something, a copy or "[counterfeit]" of it. He or she may also "figure forth" a new reality created in the imagination that has never, and may never, exist in nature.

Sidney describes poetry with the metaphor of the "speaking picture" designed to "teach and delight." The speaking picture immediately recalls the discussion of poetry in Plato's *Republic*, where poetry is compared to painting as an art of representation. The phrase "to teach and delight" derives from Horace's *Art of Poetry*, where the ideal function of poetry is to teach through pleasing the reader. The picture is "speaking" perhaps because it is made of words, or perhaps because it communicates something to the reader, teaching as it delights. In either case, Sidney uses the metaphor of the speaking picture, and other visual metaphors, throughout the *Apology*.

> The purifying of wit, this enriching of memory, enabling of judgment, and enlarging of conceit, which commonly we call learning under what name soever it come forth, or to what immediate end soever it be directed; the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clay lodgings, can be capable of.

Related Characters: Sir Philip Sidney (speaker), The Poet

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

Here, in the midst of arguing for poetry's supremacy over the other arts, Sidney provides a definition of learning—the activity he argues that the poet can encourage more effectively than the historian or the philosopher. Sidney has established that poetry is more elevated than its critics may think: the creation of a more perfect nature through the activity of the poet's mind. Now Sidney advances a notion of learning that is more elevated than one may expect. Learning is not simply the process of acquiring a skill or mastering a set of facts. Those are intermediate steps in a process that ultimately ends in the "perfection" of our "degenerate souls." Sidney may base this view of human souls as degenerate on Christian theology, which holds that humans have fallen from grace. Or perhaps they are degenerate simply because we live in an imperfect, "brazen" age, as Sidney states elsewhere. Either way, Sidney argues that humans are by nature imperfect, trapped in their "clay lodgings," or bodies.

The role of learning, then, is to help perfect these souls. The true poet, who is not held back by his or her body, but instead ranges free with the powers of the mind, helps souls perfect themselves as much as they are capable of in this world. Sidney's ideal poet is therefore a kind of mediator between the human and the divine, the imperfect and the perfect.

> Whatsoever the philosopher saith should be done, [the poet] giveth a perfect picture of it, by some one by whom he pre-supposeth it was done, so as he coupleth the general notion with the particular example. A perfect picture, I say; for he yieldeth to the powers of the mind an image of that whereof the philosopher bestoweth but a wordish description, which doth neither strike, pierce, nor possess the sight of the soul, so much as that other doth.

Related Characters: Sir Philip Sidney (speaker), The Poet

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

This passage summarizes Sidney's argument for the superiority of poetry to philosophy as a teacher of virtue. It comes in his discussion of the comparative merits of the arts in the examination portion of his argument, in which Sidney makes a case for why poetry deserves to be respected as the best of the arts. The philosopher can describe what should be done only in abstract terms, giving a "general notion" and "wordish description" of what is morally right. The poet can take the next step and create a "perfect picture" of the moral principle in action, taken by an imaginary character in an imaginary situation.

Once again, Sidney invokes the metaphor of poetry as a picture, something visual that, unlike language, does not work on the mind of the viewer, but rather "strike[s]," "pierce[s]" and "possess[es] the sight of the soul" in a way that words simply cannot. An image is more effectively moving than a verbal description of an abstract moral principle, and therefore more likely to actually result in the viewer understanding and remembering it.

It is interesting to note that the metaphor of poetry as painting—as something essentially visual—serves to elevate poetry to something semi-divine, something that exists in the realm of "ideas," and, at the same time, to make poetry more easily understood by a wide audience.

> The poet is, indeed, the right popular philosopher.

Related Characters: Sir Philip Sidney (speaker), The Poet

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

As Sidney concludes his arguments for why the poet is a better teacher of virtue than the philosopher, he memorably declares that the poet is a "popular philosopher." This sentiment is in keeping with several aspects of his argument thus far: first, the poet is able to communicate abstract ideas to regular people, and second, the activity of the poet is something philosophical, more important than merely writing verse. Although Sidney takes great pains to establish that the poet is a semi-divine mind, who is able to fly in the airy realm of his imagination and, like a kind of God on earth, create a new reality, he also repeatedly insists that the poet is in service of the common people, and not just intellectuals. This has implications for his role as an English

poet in Elizabethan England and his broader interest in the development of poetry in the vernacular: in order for the poet to be a popular philosopher, he or she must write in languages that average people can understand.

This elevation of the poet as the philosopher of the people is something that greatly influenced writers who came after Sidney. Percy Shelley repeats this almost verbatim in *A Defence of Poetry* when he writes that Shakespeare, Milton, and others were "philosophers of the very loftiest power." It is also an idea that is important to Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "The Poet."

❝ Moving [...] is well nigh both the cause and effect of teaching; for who will be taught, if he be not moved with desire to be taught? And what so much good doth that teaching bring forth (I speak still of moral doctrine) as that it moveth one to do that which it doth teach.

Related Characters: Sir Philip Sidney (speaker), The Poet

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

This statement on "moving" comes in the middle of Sidney's argument that the poet is a better teacher of virtue than the historian or the philosopher. The key idea is that no teaching happens through abstract principles alone: a teacher must have some emotionally evocative impact on his or her student in order to instill virtue. The philosopher, limited to the realm of abstract ideas, does not move the student. The historian may, if he or she stumbles upon an effective example, but no example will perfectly embody the values that one wants to teach. It is only the poet who can effectively move someone to learn virtue with a fictional example perfectly designed to communicate virtue and "move" a student to imitate it.

Sidney has defined poetry as a "speaking image" that is created to teach and delight. Here, he explains the essential link between teaching and delighting, which we might also call "moving," or otherwise engaging the emotions of a reader or listener in a way that makes him or her want to keep reading or listening. In the refutation section of his argument, Sidney will address the criticism that poetry corrupts the morals by making this link very clear. He will show that the criticism actually endorses poetry's ability to work on the emotions of an audience is precisely what enables it to teach virtue so effectively.

❝ Now [...] of all sciences [...] is our poet the monarch. For he doth not only show the way, but giveth 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 farther.

Related Characters: Sir Philip Sidney (speaker), The Poet

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Sidney concludes his consideration of the relative merits of poetry, philosophy, and history, by awarding the title of "monarch" to poetry. The reason for poetry's supremacy as an "art," ultimately meant, as Sidney stated earlier, to perfect the souls of those who learn it, is that poetry is uniquely capable of moving its audience to learn. It does so, according to this passage, by making the difficult task of learning virtue more pleasurable through things like imagery and narrative. This is consistent with Sidney's symbolic definition of poetry as a "speaking picture" that teaches and delights.

In keeping with the metaphor of the "speaking picture," Sidney's comparison here is visual: the poet "show[s] the way" to virtue and gives a "prospect" of it that is more pleasurable than that given by moral philosophy. Sidney's comparison of the delights of poetry to the sweet taste of fruit is part of a network of taste imagery throughout the *Apology*, culminating with Sidney's comparison soon after this quotation of poetry to a "medicine of cherries": it sugarcoats difficult truths. This association of poetry with sweetness goes at least as far back as Lucretius (an ancient Roman poet and philosopher), who refers to his own verses as honey that makes difficult ideas more palatable.

❝ Of all writers under the sun, the poet is the least liar; and though he would, as a poet, can scarcely be a liar [...] For the poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth.

Related Characters: Sir Philip Sidney (speaker), The Poet

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

One of the criticisms Sidney rebuts in the refutation section of the *Apology* is the claim that poetry is the "mother of lies" and the poet is essentially dishonest. This passage forms the key counterargument Sidney makes against this criticism. The essence of Sidney's rebuttal is that the poet cannot lie because he or she makes no claim to tell the truth. A lie, Sidney suggests, is the willful misrepresentation of reality: a person claims that something in the case even when he or she knows it not to be so. The poet, however, never "affirmeth"—unlike the historian, or the astronomer or the mathematician, the poet never claims that poetry represents things as they really are in the world. Instead, the poet presents a fictional reality, one that may bear great resemblance to the real world without ever claiming to be a representation of it.

As Sidney has argued throughout the *Apology*, this is the poet's great advantage: when writing fiction, a poet is not limited by a burden to represent things accurately. A poet may instead choose to represent a moral truth—something that really only exists in the realm of ideas—in an imaginary character and setting. This means that the poet can create a compelling example of moral action even when such a perfect example may never have existed. The poet can therefore teach the truth about virtue through a fiction.

> Shall the abuse of a thing make the right use odious? [...] With a sword thou mayest kill thy father, and with a sword thou mayest defend thy prince and country; so that, as in their calling poets fathers of lies, they said nothing, so in this their argument of abuse they prove the commendation.

Related Characters: Sir Philip Sidney (speaker), The Poet

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes in Sidney's response to the claim that poetry corrupts the morals of its audience. Sidney responds by claiming that this criticism is in fact an indirect praise of poetry, since it endorses poetry's ability to move its audience, and moving can be used to encourage someone to act virtuously. Sidney grants that some modern poets may write corrupting literature, but this is an abuse of a powerful tool that, when used correctly, can be used to promote moral behavior.

Sidney draws an analogy to a sword, which can be used to commit crimes or to fight courageously for a noble cause. Poetry is the same: it can be used to promote bad morals or good ones. Poetry may therefore be dangerous, but it does not follow that poetry is a force for corruption. Instead, it is to acknowledge the power of a tool. A sword is also dangerous. But it would be ridiculous to blame a sword for a crime or to praise a sword for defending virtue. Similarly, it is ridiculous to blame poetry itself for the poor morals of some of its practitioners.

This defense of poetry turns on the claim that poetry, as it is was practiced by Sidney's contemporaries, is different than poetry itself. This is in fitting with Sidney's general rhetorical strategy to put the emphasis on poetry in general, rather than the particular instances of poorly written poetry that critics of poetry may have encountered.

> But if (fie of such a but!) you be born so near the dull-making cataract of Nilus, that you cannot hear the planet-like music of poetry; if you have so earth-creeping a mind, that it cannot lift itself up to look at the sky of poetry....thus much curse I must send you in the behalf of all poets; that while you live, you live in love, and never get favour, for lacking skill of a sonnet; and when you die, your memory die from the earth for want of an epitaph.

Related Characters: Sir Philip Sidney (speaker), The Poet

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

This passage brings the entire *Apology* to a close. It acts as a kind of second peroration, or conclusion, coming at the end of a digression on the state of poetry in England. Whereas Sidney largely sticks to argumentation in his praise and defense of poetry, here he permits himself to make a threat to critics of poetry: if they continue their criticisms, poets will not help them woo lovers or enjoy an afterlife in peoples' memory. Sidney may be alluding to the fact that he himself wrote love sonnets. But more importantly, this threat draws upon the idea that poetry is the only way to secure immortality, an ancient commonplace (notably

articulated in Horace's *Odes*) that obsessed Renaissance humanists.

The threat is of course in jest, but its ambiguous tone embodies the playful rhetorical stance of the *Apology* more broadly. Although Sidney makes profound arguments for the value of poetry, and advances a novel theory of what poetry is and what the poet does, he does so in a distinctively playful way, beginning with the anecdote on horse-riding and continuing throughout the text when he refers to himself as an accidental poet and the *Apology* itself as a trifle not really worth the reader's time. Sidney's insistence on his own limitations is part of a rhetorical strategy of capturing the goodwill of the reader (called *captatio benevolentiae* in classical rhetoric), as well as a reflection of his own self-conception as an aristocrat who argues merely for his own personal interests. But it also shows how Sidney participates in broader literary fashions, for it was not unusual for Renaissance humanists to make arguments through humor: Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* is a good example of a profound philosophical document that is meant to be funny. The *Apology* is both humorous and serious at the same time, just as it is simultaneously rhetorical (an exercise in praising something other people feel is worthless) and philosophical (a serious invitation to consider the value in something overlooked).

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

AN APOLOGY FOR POETRY

Sidney tells the reader that he and Edward Wotton once studied horseback riding with Giovanni Pietro Pugliano at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor. Pugliano did not simply teach them about the art of riding horses (*how* to do it) but invited them to reflect on the activity in a philosophical manner (*why* one should do it).

Sidney begins his Apology with an anecdote that acts as the exordium, or introduction, to his essay, which is modeled on a classical oration. The anecdote establishes Sidney's status as an aristocratic gentleman, since horseback riding was a symbol of status. Pugliano's philosophical approach to teaching riding—dwelling not so much on how *as on* why *one should do it mirrors Sidney's own approach in the Apology: it will not be a guide to writing poetry, but a philosophical essay about the value of poetry.*

Pugliano argued that soldiers are the most noble of noblemen, and that "no earthly thing bred such wonder to a prince" as skill on horseback. He also praised the nobility of the horse, and spoke so persuasively that Sidney admits that if he was not a "logician," he might have wished that he could have been a horse. Sidney concludes from this that "self love is better than any gilding."

Pugliano relates the activity of horseback riding to the aristocratic ideals it embodies. His humorous aside about wanting to be a horse indicates that Sidney does not take Pugliano in total seriousness, and that Sidney understands the slightly ridiculous nature of praising horses and horseback riding. He attributes Pugliano's high-flying rhetoric with self-love: because Pugliano is proud of himself, he must also be proud of what he teaches.

Sidney turns to poetry as another example of this phenomenon: how "strong examples and weak arguments" can nonetheless be convincing. He says that he has "slipped into the title of the poet" and so has been provoked to defend his "unelected vocation" because poetry has fallen from its privileged position among the arts to be the "laughing-stock of children." He jokes that there is danger of "civil war among the Muses."

Sidney claims that his praise of poetry will be a "weak argument" either as part of a rhetorical strategy to capture the goodwill of the reader (formally called a captatio benevolentiae*) or because he is being slightly ironic. In either case, he claims that, like a good aristocrat, he writes his defense only because his own honor is at stake.*

Sidney argues that the critics of poetry are ungrateful. In most cultures, poetry is the means by which the young are educated, the "first nurse" who introduces children to learning.

In the Renaissance, elite education involved the memorization of many poems and the composition of verse in several languages. Sidney probably also has nursery rhymes in mind.

The earliest Greek writers (Musaeus, Homer, and Hesiod) were poets, and helped to "draw with their charming sweetness the wild untamed wits to an admiration of knowledge." Archaic poets, like Livius and Ennius in the Latin tradition, inspired people to become more civilized. The same could be said of Dante, Boccace (Boccaccio), and Petrarch, in Italian, and Gower and Chaucer in English, who "encouraged and delighted" later poets "to beautify our mother tongue."

Poetry has priority not only in the education of children, but also in literary and intellectual history more broadly. Indeed, poetry does not only introduce individuals to learning, but can be seen to be the be the first form of literature and instruction for Western culture on the whole.

In the ancient world, Sidney explains, there was no real distinction between poetry and the other arts: poetry was the language of all learning. The earliest Greek scientists, like Thales, Empedocles, and Parmenides, "sang their philosophy in verses." The same could be said for moral philosophy (Pythagoras, Phocylides), the art of war (Tyrtaeus), and politics (Solon). Even Plato, who was famous for his critiques of poetry, wrote in a poetic manner: his dialogues are fictions, complete "poetical describing" of circumstance and named symbols (Gyges's ring, for example). The great historians, such as Herodotus, "either stole or usurped" from poetry their description of human emotions, the details of historical events that they never could have seen themselves, and the orations they never could have heard.

The distinct separation of literature from philosophy and history and science is a modern phenomenon. The Ancients—who, to a Renaissance reader, had great wisdom and authority—did not distinguish between imaginative literature and other kinds of writing. Sidney suggests that the best classical authors, regardless of topic, used poetic techniques in their writing.

These great writers would never have become popular, Sidney suggests, if they hadn't written poetically. As is clear across world cultures (Sidney cites Turkey, Ireland, and Wales), poets are widely respected by the people, however uneducated the general populace may be. Even where there have been attempts to eradicate learning, such as in the conquests of Wales, poetry survives.

Sidney himself had traveled across Europe and may speak from personal experience. It is remarkable that an aristocrat, who benefited from an elite education, brings forward mass popularity as evidence for the virtues of poetry.

Because most of the examples considered thus far have been Greek and Roman, Sidney now considers what names these ancient cultures gave "this now scorned skill." At Rome, a poet was referred to by the Latin noun *vates*, which means a seer or prophet. Sidney takes this as evidence of a great respect for the activity of the poet. He mentions the various cultural practices that linked poetry and prophecy, such as the *sortes Virgilianae*, whereby one turned to a random line in Virgil and read it as a kind of prophetic statement about one's life, such as the ancient English king Albinus did. Sidney notes, too, that the English word *charm* derives from the Latin word *carmen*, which means "poem" or "song," and that the prophecies of the oracle at Delphi and the Sibyl were delivered in verse.

Sidney, like other Renaissance authors, puts a great value on etymology: the words the ancients contain some kernel of truth about what they name. Indeed, this information seems to us to have little logical force in Sidney's argument. Yet he incorporates it as a given without offering justification, since its value to a Renaissance reader would be self-evident. It is interesting to note that, although the Roman Sibyl and the Oracle at Delphi were roles always occupied by women, Sidney presents the poet throughout the Apology as male. The Apology is not explicitly misogynistic and does not preclude the possibility of a female poet, and indeed there were female poets in the Renaissance. But Sidney does seem to have a male poet in mind.

It wasn't just the Romans who thought of the poet as prophet, Sidney claims. For the prophet David wrote the Psalms—"a divine poem," Sidney writes—in verse. Sidney notes that not only the form but also the style of the Psalms is poetic, with its metaphors and similes. Although Sidney says that he runs the risk of "profan[ing]" the Psalms by referring to them with the modern word *poetry*, he suggests that the comparison points to the fact that, if the name be "rightly applied," it's clear that poetry "deserveth not to be scourged out of the church of God."

Sidney is a Christian writing to a Christian audience, so it makes his argument more effective to show that the classical pagan ideas about poetry were shared by religious writers. Also, because one of the major early modern critiques of poetry was that it corrupts the morals of its audience (as Sidney addresses later on in the "refutation"), it is important for Sidney to link poetry with religious virtue.

Turning to the Greeks, Sidney notes that in Greek a poet is called *poietes*, which literally means "maker." (The English word derives from the Greek.) Sidney feels that this is a very good name, because, while all other arts have to do with "the works of nature"—that is, what has been made by God—the poet alone, "disdaining to be tied by any subjection," uses his "invention" to create a new nature, better than the one in which we live. He is not subject to nature, but rather "goeth hand in hand" with nature, free to invent fictional characters and events. The poet creates a perfect, "golden" world.

Again, we see Sidney's faith in etymology. Here, translating the Greek word poietes *literally allows Sidney to make a connection to the Judeo-Christian God, who was also a* poietes *when He made the universe. Sidney's poet is not a traditionally pious person, however: he "disdain[s]" to be "tied" to nature as it currently exists, and instead uses his own powers of "invention" to make a nature that replaces the one God created. Sidney makes the extremely bold claim that the poet "goeth hand in hand" with nature as an equal—and so that the poet in a way rivals God on earth. This is a kind of Renaissance egoism notably shared by the Italian humanist Pico Della Mirandola in his famous* Oration on the Dignity of Man, *in which he claims that humans are the best of God's creation because they most resemble God in their ability to participate in everything in nature. Finally, Sidney echoes ancient creation myths (notably in Hesiod and Ovid) as well as the Christian story of the Fall, when referring to a "golden" age. The poet restores greatness that has been lost through human sinfulness. Later on, Sidney will say that poets teach virtue in such a way as to make humans beings as good as they can possibly be in their "clay lodgings."*

The poet also creates perfect people with perfect virtue, creating a paradigmatic lover as Theagenes (in Heliodorus's ancient novel), an exemplary friend in Pylades (in Euripides's *Orestes*), an extraordinary hero in Orlando (in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*), a perfect prince in Cyrus (in Xenophon's *Anabasis*), and a most generally excellent man in Aeneas (in Virgil's *Aeneid*).

The poet does not simply resemble God in making a second and more perfect nature. The poet is most like God in being able to make perfect people— according to traditional Christian theology, humankind is the highest and most perfect of God's creatures, because humans (who can think and create) resemble God more than any other animals.

The virtue of every "artificer," Sidney writes, consists not in the actual creation of a work of art, but in the "idea, or fore-conceit of the work." This means that the genius of the poet resides in coming up with the idea of the perfect Cyrus or Aeneas. It is in this capacity of imagination that the poet most resembles God, "the heavenly Maker of that maker," whose elevation of humankind is nowhere more visible than in humankind's ability to perfect God's nature through poetry.

Sidney isolates the work of the poet not in the writing of verse, but in the imagination. Sidney abstracts the act of poetry from writing and instead puts it in the realm of the mind. Since this activity does not occur in language, and is not bound by any material limitations, it is therefore even more divine. In choosing God's creation as the model for the poet's creative activity, Sidney implicitly genders this activity as male, as the creation of forms of "ideas" rather than the matter, which, in the Aristotelian models of reproduction current in the Renaissance, was gendered female.

But in order to make the truth of the matter more "palpable," Sidney now will depart from etymology and go for a precise description of poetry.

Here Sidney moves into the second formal section of a classical oration, called the Proposition, in which a definition is proposed.

Sidney's definition is simple: poetry is "an art of imitation," or, as Aristotle called it, *mimesis*. This is a representation or "counterfeiting" of reality. Sidney uses the metaphor of a "**speaking picture**," the end of which is "to teach and delight."

Sidney's definition is uncontroversial, since it would have been familiar to many of his readers. Yet the emphasis on realism seems slightly out of keeping with the earlier insistence that the act of the poet is essentially creative, rather than bound by nature as it currently exists.

Sidney subdivides the definition he has just offered, claiming that there are three major categories of poetry. The central kind, "CHIEF, both in antiquity and excellency," is poetry that imitates "the inconceivable excellencies of God." Namely, David's poetry in the Psalms, Solomon's in the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs, Moses and Deborah and Job, and so on. Although they were not Christians, pagan poets like Orpheus and Amphion (both mythical) and Homer did the same.

Here, Sidney moves into the next section of the classical oration, the Division, in which he complicates his definition of poetry. Once again he lumps classical pagan poetry in with Judeo-Christian scripture. He is careful to make clear that the oldest form of poetry is religious and therefore cannot be criticized. Note that Sidney bases these distinctions on the content or theme of the poetry in question, rather than the structural form.

The second kind of poetry is philosophical. This includes poetry about moral philosophy, such as the work of Tyrtaeus, Phocylides, and Cato, or about natural philosophy, such as Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things*, or Virgil's *Georgics*. This can also be about astronomy, as in Manilius and Pontanus, or about history, as in Lucan. Those who don't enjoy these poets, Sidney writes, can only blame themselves for not savoring "the sweet food of sweetly uttered knowledge." This poetry is in some way limited by its subject.

Although philosophical poetry may now seem unusual, classical authors did indeed write philosophical treatises in poetic verse. One of the goals of doing so was to make difficult ideas more palatable, as Lucretius famously states in On the Nature of Things *when he compares his verses to honey that coats difficult ideas about Epicurean philosophy. Sidney probably alludes to this metaphor when he speaks of "sweetly uttered knowledge." No matter how sweet this poetry may be, it is still essentially bounded by nature; philosophical poetry attempts to communicate the truth of things as they actually are.*

The third and final category of poetry does not have any such limitation. This is the poetry written by "right poets." If philosophical poets are like painters who paint the people in front of them, "right poets" are like painters who use their imagination to paint in colors "fittest for the eye to see." Hence a good painter does not paint the Roman heroine Lucretia, whom the painter never saw, but rather uses Lucretia as the "outward beauty" of the virtue she represents. These "right poets," like the best painters, create in order to "teach and delight." They are not limited by what is or has been in the world, as the historian or philosopher might be, but rather enter into "divine consideration of what may be, and should be." These "right poets" deserve the title of *vates*, and teach their readers to be virtuous.

Sidney once again uses the metaphor of the painting as a figure for "right" poetry. Instead of simply giving a picture of reality, a good painter adds something distinct, painting in a style that is particularly attractive for the reader. Sidney also suggests that good painting is not so much the depiction of reality—realism—as a vehicle for communicating ideas through allegories.

Sidney notes further subdivisions of poetry, naming heroic, lyric, tragic, comic, satirical, iambic, elegiac, and pastoral poetry. Although these differ in form and content, most are written in verse. But Sidney makes the important point that verse is merely one way in which poetry can appear, and is not the "cause" of poetry. Indeed, some of the best poets never wrote in verse, such as Xenophon in his descriptions of Cyrus, or Heliodorus in his narration of the love of Theagenes and Chariclea. Poetrs generally do write in verse, however, because they do not write in a "table-talk fashion" and want to exercise care in writing "according to the dignity of the subject."

Whereas Sidney made the three broad categories above (religious, philosophical, and "right" poetry) based largely on the themes of this poetry, here he addresses smaller categories based on content (heroic poetry, satire, comedy) as well as form (elegiac, iambic, tragic). Although Sidney does not make it explicitly clear, "right" poetry could appear in any of these categories, because true poetry is not "cause[d]" by verse or any other formal property.

Now that he has specified the kind of poet and poetry he is interested in surveying, Sidney enters into an examination of the activity of the poet in order to secure "a more favourable sentence."

With his terms defined, and categories drawn, Sidney enters into the next part of the classical oration, called the Examination, in which he investigates the poet and poetry in greater detail.

The final end of learning, Sidney states, is to make imperfect humans—trapped in "their clay lodgings," or bodies—as good as possible. Some have thought that this tendency toward virtue could best be cultivated through astronomy and natural philosophy, others through music and mathematics, but all of these revealed themselves to be imperfect, since study of these subjects does not compel one to be virtuous. They are mere "serving sciences"—means to the end of some kind of immediate knowledge that only indirectly relates to the ultimate end of "the mistress knowledge," the Greek *sophia*, which Sidney suggests is ultimately self-knowledge. Hence the saddle-maker makes a saddle in order to facilitate horsemanship; the horseman seeks to ride well in order to participate in some ideal of "soldiery," and so on. The arts that do the most to serve some ultimate, rather than proximate, end deserve to be considered "princes over all the rest." Sidney feels that poetry is such an art.

Unlike our modern conception of poetry as belonging to the realm of literature, Sidney thinks of poetry as a branch of learning, that, like any other science, attempts to make human beings better. The arts are means to some end, and Sidney argues that the better the end—that is, the closer that end is to divine wisdom—the better the art. Astronomy, for example, has the relatively limited end of knowing the positions of the stars and thereby improving navigation, agriculture, etc. Astronomy, and related branches of learning like mathematics, have nothing to do with improving the person who studies them. But poetry has the end of teaching virtue, the best possible end. Therefore, according to Sidney's logic, it is the best of the arts.

Among the primary challengers for the title of prince of the arts is moral philosophy. Sidney imagines moral philosophers confronting him "with a sullen gravity," speaking to him "sophistically against subtlety" and in general full of moral paradoxes. Sidney describes how philosophers try to use logic to come up with a way of teaching virtue, and try to master the passions "by showing the generalities that contain it, and the specialities [*sic*] that are derived from it."

Sidney uses poetic language to caricature moral philosophers as over-serious and hypocritical in the way they speak "sophistically" against the use of subtle, or sophistic, language. Although they take themselves very seriously, Sidney believes that their logical approach to virtue—which involves making scholastic distinctions about virtue in the abstract—is unhelpful for teaching actual people.

The historian, on the other hand, "laden with old mouse-eaten records," is similarly bound by the discourse of history. He knows more about the past than the present. He claims to know more about virtue than the philosopher because, while the philosopher teaches "by certain abstract considerations," the historian teaches "active" virtue as embodied in historical events such as the battles of Marathon, Pharsalia, Poitiers, and Agincourt. According to this schematization, Sidney explains, the philosopher gives the "precept" and the historian gives the example.

Again, Sidney uses his skills as a creative writer to give a negative caricature of the historian, whose "mouse-eaten" records are of interest only to other historians and are of little help in the teaching of virtue. Although each is an imperfect teacher of virtue independently, together they make a good team: the historian complements the philosopher in that history provides a wealth of concrete examples with which to illustrate the abstract ideas of philosophy.

But it is poetry, Sidney claims, that deserves to be considered the most elevated of the arts. Sidney compares the poet with the historian and the philosopher—he ignores the lawyer who, though concerned with peoples' manners, is not interested in improving people—and observes that neither philosophy nor history can teach virtue on its own. One gives the moral principle, the other the historical example, but one or the other can not teach virtue independently. The moral principle is too abstract, the historical example not abstract enough.

Again, the historian and the philosopher are imperfect teachers, and lack the autonomy enjoyed by the poet. Each is trapped by the nature of the discourse in which he or she writes.

The poet, however, can give both abstract principles and compelling moral examples. In fact, the poet can give "a perfect picture" of what the philosopher says should be done. The poet makes an image out of what to the philosopher was merely "wordish description," which would otherwise "lie dark before the imaginative and judging power." The "**speaking picture** of poesy" thus illuminates abstract truths using these compelling examples. Examples from literature, such as Anchises speaking about patriotism as Troy falls, teach readers much more about virtue than the philosopher's description of it. Sidney lists other examples, and notes how in common language the names of characters or mythical figures have become synonymous with certain emotions or types of people (i.e., Oedipus is synonymous with remorse, Medea with bittersweet revenge).

Unlike the historian or the philosopher, the poet can teach virtue independently. Sidney again invokes the metaphor of the speaking picture by claiming that the poet, instead of having to search through history for an example that may not exist, can come up with a "perfect picture" of a philosophical ideal. Sidney also associates poetry with the bright light of enlightenment, since poetry can illuminate what may otherwise "lie dark" to the mind of a reader. Once again, Sidney conveys interest in etymologies, and the origins of common phrases. The use of literary character names as synonyms for common character traits is evidence, for Sidney, of the effectiveness and memorability of these poetic creations.

Sidney concludes that the "feigned image" of poetry does more to teach readers about virtue than the "regular instruction" of philosophy. He cites the most famous example of moral teaching in Western culture, Christ's preaching in the Gospels, and notes that, while Christ could have advocated the general importance of charity and goodness, he instead spoke in concrete, "instructing" parables. The philosopher may teach but does so "obscurely," for those who already know enough to understand him or her. The poet, on the other hand, is "the right popular philosopher," teaching virtue in a way that everyone can understand.

Once again, Sidney makes an argument of association: poetry must teach virtue if Christ, the greatest of all moral teachers, used it in his preaching. Sidney here alludes to Christ's parables of the Sower, the Reaper, the Two Roads, and others immortalized in the Gospels. Christ could have spoken like a philosopher, speaking in abstract terms, but instead, like a poet, he chose to embody his principles of virtue in compelling miniature narratives, stories that could be remembered and discussed by all.

But what of history, which should have a monopoly on compelling examples? Here Sidney once again draws on Aristotle, who wrote in the *Poetics* that poetry is more philosophical and, in Sidney's translation, "ingenious" than history because it deals with the universal (*katholou*) rather than the particular (*kathekaston*). Of course, it is good to record what actually happened. But poetry isn't limited by that: the poet can write about what *should* have happened: of a great hero, such as Cyrus, not as he was, but as he should have been. The "feigned" Cyrus or Aeneas is "more doctrinable" than the true Cyrus or Aeneas, more capable of instructing readers about virtue because he is more clearly an embodiment thereof. Sidney gives other examples before concluding that the historian is limited by "his bare WAS," whereas the poet can create an example to suit precisely what he or she is trying to communicate.

Sidney continues to consider arguments that claim history or philosophy to be a better teacher of virtue than poetry, and hence prince of the arts. Here he addresses history's rich store of examples. Although history does indeed deal in the concrete, it can never embody the universal, or ideal, in the concrete, because such people or things have never actually existed. A perfect king, for example, simply cannot exist in created nature—humans are imperfect. Hence, the historian cannot offer a perfect example for instruction. But the poet can come up with a morally perfect example that is more "doctrinable," or didactic, exactly because it is "feigned," or fictionalized to suit the occasion. Like the painter Sidney mentions above, the historian can only write about what is in front of him or her, a "bare" picture of what was, while the poet can present something much more vivid.

Sidney takes pains to emphasize that a "feigned" example—although technically not historically true, or historical at all—is as useful for teaching as a real example. He cites examples from Herodotus, Livy, and Xenophon, all of whom tell fictional stories about noblemen trying to deceive kings, and getting punished for it in the end. These stories will surely be as compelling as factual narratives to one who is considering how to deceive in a similar way, Sidney reasons.

This passage foreshadows an argument Sidney will make more explicitly in the Refutation section of the text. Sidney is careful to emphasize that there is nothing wrong with poetry because it is fictional, or "feigned." Even great ancient historians invented stories, or at least embellished them with fictional details, but that doesn't make them any less useful for teaching virtue. Indeed, Sidney's argument thus far suggests that it would make them more useful.

The poet, then, is indeed prince of the arts, because he can come up with compelling examples about any subject under the sun. Unlike history, which is "captive to the truth of a foolish world," poetry can present perfect examples in the most compelling and instructive way, eliminating moral ambiguities and contradictions, of which Sidney cites several examples. Indeed, it is possible that, as Caesar said of Sulla, history could do more harm than good to one trying to learn virtue.

Sidney concludes that, not only is poetry worthy of our respect as a potential teaching tool, but it is the best of the teaching tools. He may verge on hyperbole when he refers to history as prisoner of "the truth of a foolish world," but in drawing such clear distinctions between disciplines that obviously have a lot in common, Sidney he exemplifies the cut-and-dried moral clarity he praises in poetry. At the very least, Sidney cleverly inverts arguments made against poetry—namely, that it is fictional, and is therefore inferior, and that it corrupts morals, and is therefore harmful. These are precisely the faults that Sidney finds with history: it is truthful and therefore limited, and it could corrupt morals because plenty of historical figures did bad things.

Continuing the metaphor of competition among the arts for the title of prince, Sidney concludes the comparison with history and philosophy by remarking that the poet triumphs by "setting forward" examples and "moving to well-doing" through the compelling way in which he or she does so. Not even the greatest lover of philosophy would say that the philosopher moves a listener or reader more effectively than the poet, and moving is the most important part of teaching. Indeed, it is both its cause and effect, for in order to be taught, one must have a desire to be taught, and good teaching moves one to do what is taught.

Sidney here continues to invert criticisms of poetry, turning them into arguments for its power. As will be stated later in the Refutation, the affective part of poetry—its ability to affect the emotions of its audience—is at the center of traditional criticisms of poetry, notably Plato's. But Sidney claims that it is precisely that ability to move, to affect us in a way that isn't rational, that makes poetry an effective tool for teaching. Sidney subtly but importantly reformulates teaching as something that is not simply about the mind and reason, but rather operates on an affective foundation of desire: we must want to learn, and then want to apply what we learn. Being moved to do what is right is substantially different from knowing what is right. Sidney claims that poetry is able to tap into the affective system that underlies moral behavior.

Sidney again cites Aristotle, who said that the goal of teaching is not knowledge (*gnosis*) but action (*praxis*). The philosopher may show someone the way, and describe the end one strives to reach, but in his or her complex analysis may divert one from the path of virtue. Philosophers think that, once one has mastered the passions enough to concentrate and understand what they teach, "the inward light of each mind" will light the way to virtue. But Sidney claims that actually being moved to act virtuously is another problem altogether, and requires more than just understanding abstract philosophical ideas.

Sidney bolsters his argument by invoking the hallowed name of Aristotle, this time invoking not his poetic theory, but his ethics. Philosophy has a tendency to believe that thinking and understanding is enough to lead to virtuous behavior. But this not only fails to acknowledge the affective basis of moral action discussed above, but also runs the risk of overestimating the "inward light" of the reader, who may not have the training or intelligence to understand the difficult and abstract arguments made by philosophy. The imagery of light recalls Sidney's earlier claim that the "speaking picture" of poetry can illuminate the obscure philosophy that may otherwise "lie dark before the imaginative and judging power" of the reader.

If philosophy gives one a clear sense of the complexity of an issue, poetry entices one to learn it by giving a "sweet prospect into the way." It is as if, at the beginning of a journey through a vineyard, the poet gives the reader a cluster of grapes, a taste of the reward at the end. Just as adults teach children to take medicine by hiding it in something sweet, so does poetry hide virtue in the appealing stories of heroes like Hercules, Achilles, Cyrus, and Aeneas. If the morals of these tales were told directly to the listener—as philosophy does—they would be rejected. Even things which are inherently repulsive, like suffering or monsters, give readers some kind of pleasure when they read them in a story, as Aristotle noticed. Therefore, poetry is a kind of "medicine of cherries," giving pleasure while also delivering the medicine of virtue.

Sidney provides a metaphor for the teaching activity of the poet through the journey through a vineyard. This metaphor implies that the path to virtue takes time, and that pleasure must be provided in order to motivate one to undertake the journey. Sidney draws upon the language of sweetness used earlier (i.e. when he describes philosophical poetry as "sweetly uttered knowledge") to figure the poet as one who gives one a foretaste of the benefits of virtue through the pleasurable stories of virtuous characters and actions.

Sidney illustrates this with two examples, starting with Menenius Agrippa, a Roman politician who reconciled the people of Rome with the Roman senate by telling a moral allegory about mutiny, in which he compared the state to a body that conspires against its stomach, and ends up starving itself. This story led to the reconciliation of the problem, having "such effect in the people as I never read that only words brought forth." The second example is of Nathan, a prophet from the Hebrew Bible, whom God sent to bring David, the Psalmist, back to the faith after having abandoned religion. Nathan told David an allegory about a man whose lamb was stolen from him, of which Sidney says that "the application [was] most true, but the discourse itself feigned." This caused David to reflect on his actions and return to religion.

To show the power of poetry to teach virtue, Sidney cites a classical Roman example and an Old Testament religious example, drawing upon the two most authoritative sources available to him as a Renaissance author. In the first example, Menenius uses a poetic metaphor to communicate the danger of mutiny to a crowd of Romans; just as Christ's parables were able to reach a broader audience than mere abstract ideas, Menenius is able to make a relatively sophisticated argument to a crowd of average people using a metaphor. Poetry, this example shows, can teach virtue in the public sphere. The second example, Nathan's appeal to David, shows that poetry can teach in the entirely different context of private religious matters. In the case of both Menenius and Nathan, the metaphors in question are "feigned"—neither were making arguments about facts. Instead, they came up with evocative metaphors to inspire reflection in their audience, so that their listeners came to a virtuous conclusion independently.

From these stories, Sidney says, it's clear that the poet can "draw the mind" more effectively than the other arts. If the arts and the learning they yield are meant to improve readers in some way, then poetry must be the best of the arts and the poet the best of the artists: "in the most excellent work is the most excellent workman."

Again, Sidney emphasizes that poetry "draws" the minds of its audience through something other than argumentation. Poetry is able to move them, through imagery, to act virtuously, in ways that philosophy and history cannot. Since it teaches virtue most effectively, it must be the best of the arts.

Sidney now turns from the "works" of poetry—what it can do—to the "parts" of poetry, or its various different kinds. Even if readers find poetry on the whole to be virtuous, Sidney wants to be sure that all of its component parts are examined so as to find anything objectionable. Sidney acknowledges that some kinds of poetry are mixtures of genres (e.g., tragicomic) or of forms (e.g., Boethius's mixture of poetry and prose), and will not be able to address them all, but if the component genres are found to be good, these mixtures must be good, too.

Now that Sidney has made his broad claims, and established why poetry in general is a good teacher of virtue, he will go through different kinds of poetry in detail, in order to convince the audience even more thoroughly of the virtues of this art. Because Sidney believes that poetry is something that takes place in the poet's mind, and that real poetry is the "idea" or "fore-conceit," the particular form in which a poet chooses to write is incidental and should not affect one's overall opinion of poetry.

Sidney goes through a number of minor genres of poetry that are "misliked" by critics. The first is the pastoral, which some find trivial or petty, but which can actually communicate profound lessons in what seem to be simple fables. The second is the "lamenting elegiac," which expresses woe or critiques the human tendency to strong feeling. The third is the "bitter, but wholesome iambic," which openly decries moral corruption. The third is satire, which mocks folly in all sorts of people, including the reader.

In the mode of a defense attorney, Sidney notes the subgenres of poetry that have been singled out by critics, and shows that if one simply thinks about what these forms of poetry aim to do, the criticism of each is baseless.

Moving to major genres, Sidney argues that people criticize comedy because bad actors and directors have "made [it] odious." But Sidney says in response to critics that comedy reflects life as it actually is, and people as they actually are, and—just as in geometry we must see the curved as well as the straight lines, and in mathematics we must count the odd as well as the even numbers—so we must examine the "filthiness" of life as a "foil" for virtue. By seeing imperfect characters on stage, we learn to identify them in life. We don't learn to behave badly by watching such characters, but rather learn to identify our own faults, which might otherwise remain invisible to us.

Sidney once again employs his now familiar tactic of distinguishing between poetry as it is practiced in Elizabethan England and the ideal form of poetry he has described in the Apology. In another familiar argumentative move, Sidney shows that what critics perceive to be the problematic aspects of comedy—namely, its presentation of morally questionable characters—is what makes it a useful teaching tool. It is important to note that, although Sidney argues for poetry as an abstract process that occurs within the poet's mind, almost all of his arguments for the value of poetry hinge on its effects in practice. The poet creates a second nature that in some ways is more perfect, or morally clear, than God's nature—but that only matters insofar as it leads people to behave more virtuously.

In a similar way, tragedy, through evoking "admiration and commiseration" with its suffering characters, teaches us about the uncertainty in life. It scares the powerful, warning kings about the dangers of tyranny, and is therefore clearly a useful genre.

Both comedy and tragedy are valuable because they stir their audience to reflection. Just as comedy should make one more attentive to one's own moral flaws, so does tragedy render one more conscious of the historical contingencies that govern one's life. Sidney's comments on drama here may take a subtle shot at the morality of poetry's critics: if one understands drama, Sidney argues, one learns from it. In his view, detractors of poetry clearly don't understand drama, so they haven't learned from it, and therefore have perhaps not realized their own moral faults.

Next Sidney turns to lyric poetry, which praises virtue, offers moral precepts, and is often used to praise God. Sidney states that he is frequently moved by lyric, even in the rustic forms he might hear in rural England. He believes that it can give courage, citing the poetry he heard in Hungary, and the historical example of the Lacedaemonians (Spartans) who sang lyrics about valor at home as well as on the battlefield. Pindar, the great Greek lyric poet, may sometimes praise seemingly small athletic victories, but that can be blamed on a broader Greek tendency to put too high a value on athletic competition, rather than on poetry itself.

Sidney's collection of lyric poetry, the sonnet cycle Astrophel and Stella, *is his most widely-read work after the* Apology. *Therefore, his comments on lyric must have a special resonance for Sidney's own poetry. This section also reflects Sidney's own travels through Europe. It is interesting to note that he lumps his own experience in with classical examples: Sidney uses all the evidence at his disposal to make his arguments.*

The final genre Sidney addresses is heroic verse, whose very name should "daunt all backbiters." How could anyone criticize poetry that tells of Achilles, Cyrus, and Aeneas, among other great heroes? This kind of poetry teaches the highest and best kind of virtue, and is therefore the best kind of poetry, since it makes the reader most eager to be virtuous. It also gives one the best examples to imitate in life, such as Aeneas, who gives a good model for all aspects of behavior.

Once again, Sidney claims that the value of poetry is self-evident. It is impossible to criticize poetry that gives us such unquestionably perfect examples of virtue as ancient heroes.

Sidney concludes this tour of the poetic genres, which has shown all of them to be good in some way, by comparing the "poet-whippers" to "some good women" who always feel ill, but don't know why exactly: these critics don't like poetry in general, but, if they like virtue, they must like what poetry does to its readers.

Since all the poetic forms that Sidney has considered have proven to be self-evidently valuable for teaching virtue, Sidney concludes this section by claiming that critics of poetry complain for no reason. In a slightly misogynistic metaphor, he compares critics of poetry to women who complain of being ill for no identifiable reason. "Poet-whippers"— a name that suggests Sidney does not respect the critics of poetry—are stuck in a contradiction if they simultaneously praise virtue and criticize poetry, because poetry and virtue are closely linked.

Sidney summarizes his arguments thus far: poetry is the oldest form of human learning, found in every culture and given much respect by the Greeks and the Romans. The poet does not "learn a conceit out a matter," the way a philosopher does, but "maketh matter for a conceit," creating a concrete thing in which to express an idea. Furthermore, poetry cannot be evil because it teaches goodness. In this way, the philosopher is a better teacher than the historian, who can never speak of moral absolutes, and surpasses the philosopher in his ability to move his audience. Even the Bible uses poetry in the Psalms, and Christ himself employed parables, which are fictional narratives of a kind.

Before moving into the next section of the classical oration, Sidney briefly refreshes the reader's memory with a summary of the arguments that he has employed so far to prove the excellence of poetry. All of these arguments revolve around poetry's effectiveness for teaching virtue, rather than any intrinsic quality of poetry itself.

Sidney now turns to refuting critiques made of poetry. He begins with the superficial ones. First of all, Sidney notes that "poet-haters" (he uses the Greek term *misomousaioi*) like to criticize poetry because it gets them attention. Critics of this kind don't deserve a substantial response, just ridicule. Some writers, like Erasmus in the *Praise of Folly*, make absurd claims to attract the reader's attention to an important or non-intuitive argument. But generally critics of poetry are merely fools.

Following the structure of the classical oration, Sidney now moves into the Refutation, where instead of arguing a positive case for the value of poetry, he will refute criticisms made against it. Sidney begins by trying to discredit the critics of poetry by once again giving them a ridiculous name that makes them seem foreign and perhaps old-fashioned.

What many of the poet-haters object to is verse. Sidney has already explained that verse is not an essential quality of poetry. But even if verse was an essential part of poetry, to speak carefully and beautifully must be a good thing. What is more, verse is very useful for memory, which is an important part of learning. Indeed, all of the other arts use verse as a tool for memorization. If verse is the best tool for memory, "the only handle of knowledge," a reasonable person can't object to it.

In fitting with their generally superficial approach to poetry, poet-haters object to the (ab)use of verse. But, as Sidney has described in detail, the essence of poetry is something that precedes the actual act of writing and takes place in the poet's imagination. Yet even verse can be defended, since it is a useful tool for memory. This recalls arguments Sidney made earlier for the ingratitude of the critics of poetry, who themselves would have been educated with the help of verse.


Now Sidney moves on to address four more substantial critiques of poetry, critiques that cannot be so easily dismissed. The first is that poetry is a waste of time. Sidney objects that this critique "begs the question": it relies on the principle which is under discussion, namely the value of poetry. If one believes that poetry moves to virtue and is therefore a good thing, then it cannot be a waste of time.

So far, Sidney's strategy has been to show that criticism of poetry is inconsistent, because it ignores the links between poetry and virtue. Sidney's argument here is a perfect example of this rhetorical strategy in miniature: claiming that poetry is a waste of time is a bad argument because it presupposes something about the quality of poetry that Sidney has shown to be self-evidently untrue.

The second major criticism, deriving ultimately from Plato's critique of poetry in the *Republic*, is that poetry is the "mother of lies," and the poet is a great liar. Sidney responds by claiming that the poet is actually the "least liar" of all writers, since it is in fact impossible for a poet to lie. An astronomer or geometer or physician—natural scientists talking about the real world—inevitably get things wrong. But the poet does not claim to talk about reality, so he or she cannot, by definition, lie: "he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth."

As Sidney hinted before, the poet "feigns" but he does not lie. Here, Sidney makes an important distinction between fiction—an invented reality—and dishonesty. In order for something to be a lie, it must make a claim about the state of the world as it actually is. Natural scientists make claims about the state of the world, and therefore run the risk of being dishonest, or just plain wrong. But the poet is not bound by the world as it actually is and does not (usually) claim to represent it accurately. Therefore, no matter how fantastic the contents of a poem, a poet cannot be a liar.

Poetry may contain things that are not true, but these are not lies; they are fictions, and whoever doesn't understand this is being willfully perverse. Whoever thinks that Aesop records true histories should be "chronicled among the beasts he writeth of." For even a child seeing a play understands that the setting is not real. The narration of a poem or a play is not meant to reflect reality as it really was, but rather "an imaginative ground-plot of a profitable invention." Even when a poet uses names that belonged to real people, it is not to make claims about those actual people but rather to signal that the character in question is *like* those people (for instance, a king, if he is called Cyrus).

Sidney appeals to common sense to distinguish poetry from lying. Children are a figure for common sense, since their thinking has not been perverted by ulterior motives or the sophistic subtleties of philosophy. Not even a child would say that a playwright claims to show a real place in a play: it is always only a setting, a "ground-plot" on which the poet of the imagination may work. Any resemblance to reality is to provide a kind of short-hand for the audience, rather than to make claims about how a certain person actually was.

The third major criticism is that poetry corrupts the morals of its audience, inciting lust. Sidney grants that much poetry has to do with love and lust. However, this is not the fault of poetry itself, but rather of the people who write it, and one should not blame poetry for the way certain authors have abused it. Indeed, the power of its "sweet charming force" is actually proof of its power to move its readers—the same power that can move to virtue.

Sidney here combines two familiar rhetorical moves. First, he claims that if some poetry does corrupt its audience, it is the fault of unskilled modern poets. Second, he claims that that arguments for the corrupting influence of poetry should actually be understood as arguments for the affective power of poetry, which can be wielded for good or for ill. Sidney shows that what appears like a critique is actually an indirect praise of poetry.


Medicine can be similarly abused, as can the law, and religious texts, without discrediting those branches of knowledge. If someone uses a sword to kill another person, one does not blame the sword, but the person who used it. Similarly, in claiming that poetry corrupts the sexual morality of its audience, critics are actually endorsing poetry's power, which in the right hands promotes virtue.

To illustrate his claim that the corrupting influence is not poetry itself, but the authors who abuse it, Sidney compares poetry to medicine, law, and theology, each of which are recognized to be good but are very commonly abused by malicious or ignorant practitioners. Poetry, like medicine and the other arts, is a tool that should not be blamed for the faults of its practitioners. The comparison of poetry with a sword infuses Sidney's rhetoric with a military air, subtly linking poetry with "manly" and aristocratic activities like warfare and dueling.

In the same vein, critics say that poetry saps the courage and warlike spirit of a nation, and that the general moral state of England was better before poetry was popular. Sidney rejects the idea that there was ever a time when poetry was not popular in England, and cites several examples of poetry being used to promote courage and military spirit. Sidney cites the example of Alexander the Great, who rejected the teaching of Aristotle in favor of the poetry of Homer. Sidney cites a similar example from Roman history, of the Roman general Fulvius's love for the archaic Latin poet Ennius.

Sidney draws upon historical examples to show that poetry was loved by plenty of notable heroes. Like the comparison of poetry to a sword above, Sidney links poetry with masculine courage on the battlefield.

The fourth and final criticism that Sidney rebuts is the claim that poetry must be bad because Plato banished it from his ideal city in the *Republic*. Sidney claims that Plato was in fact the most poetic of the philosophers. He suggests that one of the reasons Plato might have turned against poetry was that philosophers, after having learned much from poetry, tried to discredit it to establish their own dominance.

Here Sidney addresses the well-spring of poetry hatred in the Western tradition. It is striking that Sidney waits till the end of his refutation to refute Plato's treatment of poetry in the Republic, *which some readers might have expected to come at the very beginning due to its fame and influence. Sidney claims that Plato and his fellow philosophers are not unimpeachable authorities, but themselves were governed by competition and anxiety just like any modern might be. In a clever argument—similar to one Nietzsche would employ three centuries later in his discussion of Plato's moral theory—Sidney suggests that Plato's critique of poetry is an anxious theory designed to suppress poetry.*

Philosophers grew to hate poets because philosophy could not please so well as poetry, and could not capture the affection of the people in the same way, and were even expelled from some communities. It is said that the lyric poets Simonides and Pindar had a positive effect on the tyrant Hiero the First, and helped turn him into a just king, while Plato was made into a slave. Indeed, he invites readers to examine Plato's ideal city: women were shared among men, in what seems to the modern reader like an immoral social practice.

Just as contemporary moral philosophers may feel themselves in competition with poetry, ancient philosophers were conscious of the fact that poetry was more popular than philosophy, and for good reason. Sidney's example of the civilizing influence of Simonides and Pindar on Hiero shows that the idea that philosophers are morally superior to poets wasn't necessarily shared by the ancient Greeks. Indeed, if one considers the moral character of Plato's Republic, *one sees that it would not meet the moral standards that critics of poetry are so anxious to uphold. Sidney suggests that Plato's ideal Republic isn't actually a moral place, so Plato's critique of poetry should not be taken seriously.*


Plato doesn't object to the sexual immortality of poetry, which is what bothers Sidney's contemporaries, but rather to poetry's promotion of seemingly heretical ideas about the gods. But these only reflected commonly held beliefs in Greece, and had nothing to do with poetry itself. Therefore, Plato meant to banish poets only because they very effectively promoted ideas that he didn't like, which means that he actually believed in the power of poetry and thus indirectly praised it when banning poets from his republic.

Sidney has claimed at several points that contemporary critics of poetry confuse poorly written modern verse for poetry itself. Here he claims that Plato did something similar when he banned the poets from his city: he confused the contemporary culture that poets were representing with poetry itself. Sidney repeats the move he made earlier, claiming that Plato's condemnation of poetry is therefore an indirect endorsement of its power.


Sidney invites his readers to consider that, alongside the criticisms that people have made of poetry, many famous people have also praised it. Aristotle would not have written his *Poetics* if he thought poetry shouldn't be written, Sidney reasons. Sidney concludes that we should "plant more laurels" to crown poets with, instead of tolerating the "ill-favoured breath" that some critics want to blow upon the "clear springs of poesy."

Sidney closes the main body of the Apology *with a Peroration, or conclusion. He makes the obvious but compelling point that such great classical authorities like Aristotle would not have wasted their breath on poetry if it did not have some value.*

Sidney decides that, since he has gone on so long, he should consider why there is so little good poetry in England, a country in which the other arts flourish. For many other countries have strong traditions of poetry, like Scotland and France and Italy, and there used to be plenty of good poetry in England, even in times of war. The consequence of this vacuum is that there is a proliferation of bad poetry, giving poetry a bad name. Indeed, most of Sidney's contemporaries don't deserve the title of poet, and he claims that he never sought it.

Continuing to follow the classical structure that he has very carefully observed so far, Sidney enters into a Digression on the state of poetry in England, particularly in the vernacular. Although he has made hints throughout the Apology that he does not approve of modern English poets, here he addresses the subject directly. Sidney is clear that, unlike the striving and (he implies) less gentlemanly writers, he himself writes only as an avocation, rather than professionally. Indeed, in fitting with his aristocratic sense of self, none of Sidney's texts were printed and sold in his lifetime.

For poets cannot simply claim the title of poets without the proper skill. A famous old proverb says that poets must be born poets, but Sidney says that even talented young minds must be educated in order to become good poets. The chief instruments of this education are "imitation" of classical authors and "exercise" through practicing different kinds of writing. If students do these activities properly, they will eventually learn to create their own original poetry inspired or influenced by classical authors but not in slavish imitation of them.

Sidney acknowledges the role of talent and genius in the writing of poetry, but also endorses humanist theories of education in which imitation of the classics forms an essential component of learning how to write. Imitation must not be an end in and of itself, however, otherwise students will never write good poetry.

Sidney then offers some comments on famous English poets. He praises Chaucer, who "in that misty time could see so clearly." He praises the Earl of Surrey, and makes an indirect praise of Spenser by naming his "Shepherds' Kalendar." But in general what Sidney offers are criticisms: modern poets try to sound old, and write inelegant verse.

Sidney praises Chaucer, arguably the most famous early English poet, for his clarity of vision. This indicates once again the inherently visual nature of poetry, hearkening back to the metaphor of poetry as a "speaking picture." Sidney also makes clear that, despite his constant praise for ancient poetry, modern poets must not try to sound like ancient poets; they must write in a way appropriate to the modern era.

Dramatists do not observe the classical unities of space and time, and so present ridiculous plots that take place over many months or years and in different countries, which does not seem at all realistic. Furthermore, dramatists stick too closely to historical details, forgetting that a playwright must adapt history to suit the plot and substance of a tragedy. He suggests that they learn from classical tragedy how to make use of the messenger speech to report action that cannot be represented on stage. Finally, modern playwrights too often tell a story from the beginning, when instead they should start at the place best suited for narration.

Despite his criticism of apishly imitating classical authors, Sidney's main critique of modern dramatists is that they do not abide closely enough by the unities of time and space described in Aristotle's Poetics. He argues, too, that modern dramatists do not write realistically enough: the long timespans and big geographical ranges of modern plays are not plausible. Yet this emphasis on realism is slightly unexpected because throughout the Apology, *Sidney has emphasized the poet's ability to transcend nature and its limitations.*

In addition to these "gross absurdities," by which modern authors fail to meet the standards established by classical literature, they mix genres, and abuse them. They mix kings with clowns, creating "mongrel tragicomedy." Furthermore, they think that comedies must always be funny and provoke laughter. But Sidney points out that laughter is only one kind of delight that comedy provokes, which comes from "disproportion" to the normal human experience and to nature (i.e., deformed creatures and monsters). Sidney advises that comedy shouldn't just be about matters that provoke laughter, but should also provide the kind of "delightful teaching" that is the end of true poetry. Audiences should not be invited to laugh at things that actually should deserve condemnation, like sins, or pity, like an old beggar. Instead, laughter should be reserved for delightful things, like a ridiculously pedantic schoolmaster. Sidney praises George Buchanan for having matched tone with content in his tragedies.

Sidney believes that modern English authors also do not understand that the rules of genre must be observed. Again, despite his insistence on the autonomy and creativity of the poet, Sidney has a strangely strict notion of what is and is not permissible in imaginative literature. Yet his critiques make sense when one remembers that Sidney's praise of poetry is ultimately grounded in its ability to teach virtue. Comedy must be written in order to teach virtue most effectively, so as to educate the audience to feel the appropriate emotional responses to what it sees.

Sidney then apologies for spending so much time on drama, but says that he does so because there is relatively little poetry of other kinds in England, except lyric. Modern lyric, too, is poorly written, as modern lyric poets are generally too cold. They need to portray the passions with more *energia*, a Greek term that means "vigor."

Just because Sidney believes that poetry should teach virtue and morality does not mean that he is a prude, as his critique of the lyric poetry's coldness shows. Sidney's appeal to ancient poetry as a source of energy or vigor is typical of a Renaissance humanist, who would see classical literature as a source for inspiration.

Beyond the poor application of particular genres, modern English writers generally confuse fancy-sounding language for eloquence. The problem occurs not just in poetry, but also in the learned discourses of scholars, who "cast sugar and spice upon very dish that is served at the table," instead of tastefully seasoning their language with fewer classical references and big words. Classical authors might have expressed themselves effectively, but when modern writers imitate them too closely, or cite them too often, it falls flat. Writers also come across as ridiculous or sophistical when they try to use very elaborate comparisons, or similitudes. Classical authors actually used such devices very rarely, and Sidney approves of the less fancy speech of "small-learned courtiers" because it sounds more natural, which is the goal of art.

Just as he has argued that criticisms of poetry are superficial, and ignore the true nature of poetry, Sidney now claims that modern poets, as well as writers of other kinds, have too superficial a relationship to language. They think that fancy language makes for good poetry or prose, when in reality good writing cannot simply be produced by loading prose with classical allusions and big words. Sidney draws upon the metaphors of food and taste that he used above when describing the "sweetness" of poetry when he describes false eloquence as "sugar and spice." Additionally, he alludes to the commonplace that "art conceals art" when he praises the simpler language of the less-educated courtier.

After apologizing for straying from poetry to oratory, Sidney considers the fitness of modern languages, and particularly English, for writing poetry. Sometimes people criticize English for having less grammar than Latin, but Sidney sees this as an advantage, because people do not have to study so much to learn how to express themselves effectively in their mother tongue. English is also capable of achieving both "sweetness" and "majesty" in its meter, unlike Italian, Dutch, or French, and also has more possibilities for rhyme than other modern languages.

Sidney's discussion of oration alongside poetry reminds the reader that Sidney himself is both a poet and an orator, and that the Apology is an oratorical praise of poetry that, like all good writing (according to its own arguments) employs plenty of poetic metaphors and images to make its case. Sidney also writes the Apology and his other poetry in English, thereby endorsing the argument he makes here for the virtues of the English language. Sidney's argument for the superiority of English is simultaneously evidence of his broad reading in many languages and the international transmission of literature in the early modern era, as well as evidence of an emerging sense of nationalism at the time.

Sidney reiterates that poetry has a bad reputation in England because of the bad verse written by "poet-apes," and not because of any intrinsic fault of poetry itself. He invites his readers to respect poets and poetry as teachers of virtue. Sidney warns his readership that poets are also capable of immortalizing people in their verse, so the names of people who respect poetry will "flourish in the printers' shops" and shall "dwell upon superlatives" forever. The critics of poetry, on the other hand, will never succeed in their romantic endeavors because they will get poets to write them sonnets to help woo their beloveds, and will not be remembered after their death for want of a compelling and memorable epitaph.

In this second and final peroration, Sidney gives a distilled version of the argument he has been making throughout the apology: do not confuse bad poetry with poetry itself. Instead of ending here, however, he finishes with a humorous threat. Alluding to the commonplace that poetry has the power of making the poet and his or her subject immortal (famously stated in Horace's Odes, *a text frequently cited in the Renaissance), Sidney reminds the reader that a poet must choose to immortalize him or her. Despite the diverse logical claims he makes in the Apology, Sidney concludes with an appeal to the reader's emotions—seeking to move the reader, just as a poet should.*

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