

Sir Philip Sidney's
An Apology for Poetry
and
Astrophil and Stella:
Texts and Contexts

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Introduction

Sidney's Life

It would have surprised and probably disappointed Sir Philip Sidney to learn that his reputation today rests mainly on his literary works. Born to a politically prominent family on November 30, 1554, Sidney was brought up to serve the state, a goal he fully embraced. But Sidney's life—indeed, the life of the Sidney family—is a tale of great expectations and even greater disappointments.

Sidney's father, Sir Henry Sidney (1529-1586) was a gentleman of the privy chamber of Edward VI and received his knighthood in 1550. Although not a member of the aristocracy, Henry was sufficiently promising that he could marry a member of one of the greatest families in the realm, Mary, one of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland's daughters (d. 1586). Even though Henry participated in helping Lady Jane Grey ascend to the throne (she was deposed and executed ten days later), he rapidly changed his loyalties to the Catholic Mary I, thus retaining his place at court. Under Elizabeth, Henry served twice as the Lord Deputy of Ireland (1565-1571, 1575-1578). Yet despite this strong record, he was never adequately remunerated. Consequently, even though Elizabeth did offer him a barony—the lowest level of peerage—Henry could not accept it because he could not afford the honor (something Elizabeth likely knew).¹ Mary, Sir Philip's mother, also suffered from Elizabeth's ingratitude. In 1562, she helped nurse the queen through an attack of smallpox, and although Elizabeth survived the disease unscathed, Mary Sidney was so deeply scarred that she would not thereafter appear at court without a mask. To make matters worse, Elizabeth apparently did not take great care

¹ Sir Henry complained to Walsingham that "I find there is no hope of relief of her Majesty for my decayed estate in her Highness's service" (March 1st, 1583, quoted in Malcolm W. Wallace, *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney*, 292).

for her servant's physical comfort; numerous letters survive in which she asked the Queen for better and warmer accommodations. In sum, despite his family's service to Elizabeth, and despite his mother's Dudley forebears, of which both Henry and his son were inordinately proud,² the Sidneys' experience was not one of loyalty justly and amply rewarded. Indeed, it is clear that Elizabeth never entirely trusted Sir Henry and, though happy to take what he offered and while both retained access to the court (many would-be courtiers did not), nonetheless kept both him and his wife at a distance. Unfortunately, this pattern would repeat itself in their son's career.

Like other male children born to a politically prominent station, Philip Sidney was groomed for state service from the start. When he entered grammar school in 1564, the academy at Shrewsbury offered a solid humanist education, which meant that Sidney learned how to read and write by studying in the original Latin or Greek such authors as Cicero, Virgil, Sallust, Cato, and Xenophon (all of whom would figure prominently in the *Apology*). Of course, he also studied the Bible. The point, however, of this curriculum, or as Sidney would write in the *Apology*, the "ending end of all earthly learning," was not knowledge for its own sake but "virtuous action," which meant serving the commonwealth as a statesman or public servant. Fulke Greville, Sidney's exact contemporary (they entered the Shrewsbury school together), a courtier under both Elizabeth and James and later Sidney's biographer, emphasized the practical nature of Sidney's schooling: "his end was not writing, even while he wrote; nor his knowledge molded for tables, or schools; but both his wit, and understanding bent upon his heart, to make

² In the first letter Sir Henry wrote to Philip while he was at the Shrewsbury school, Henry enjoined his son to remember "the noble blood you are descended from by your mother's side" (quoted in Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet*, 5). Sidney evidently took his father's advice very much to heart. In 1585, in his *Defense of the Earl of Leicester*, Sidney proclaimed, "I am a Dudley in blood, that Duke's daughter's son, and do acknowledge, though in truth I may justly affirm that I am by my father's

himself and others, not in words or opinion, but in life, and action, good and great.”³

To this end, at age 13, Sidney entered Oxford University in 1567-1568, where he stayed for three years and did not earn a degree. He did not have to, and it is important that the year before he went up to Oxford, he enrolled in Gray’s Inn. Nominally, the Inns of Court were, in today’s terms, law schools, but at the time they probably more closely resembled finishing schools for aristocrats and future courtiers as well as providing training for future lawyers.

In 1568, Sir Henry tried to arrange a marriage for his son with Anne Cecil, the daughter of William Cecil, later Lord Burleigh and one of Elizabeth’s closest advisors. Unfortunately, the fate of this arrangement in some ways established the pattern for Sidney’s political life. The problem was that despite Henry’s continuing good service to Elizabeth, and despite Philip’s promise, in terms of both money and class, Anne brought a great deal more to the table than did the Sidneys, and the fact that Sir Henry had to refuse Elizabeth’s offer of a barony because she did not also provide means of supporting the title did not help Philip’s case. Henry went so far as signing a marriage contract with Cecil, but by 1571 the project had clearly lapsed for a variety of reasons, including lack of interest on both Anne’s and Philip’s part. Anne Cecil found herself betrothed to Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford, a wild, possibly psychopathic aristocrat who murdered a servant and, as we will see, would continue to be Sidney’s rival. According to another of Anne’s suitors, the announcement of the marriage “hath caused weeping, wailing and sorrowful cheer of those that hoped to

side of ancient and always well esteemed and well matched gentry, yet I do acknowledge, I say, that my chiefest honor is to be a Dudley, and truly am glad to have cause to set forth the nobility of that blood whereof I am descended . . . (*Miscellaneous Prose*, 134).

³ Sir Fulke Greville, *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*, in *The Prose Works of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke*, 12. See also F. J. Levy, “Philip Sidney Reconsidered,” *Sidney in Retrospect: Selections from “English Literary Renaissance”*, 4-5.

have had that golden day,” and apparently Anne herself was none too happy about her marital fate.⁴ Nonetheless, in Cecil’s eyes, the Earl’s wealth and rank outweighed Sidney’s promise and meager purse. Nor was this to be the last time that Sidney would endure the frustration and disappointment of a great opportunity gone sour.

To complete his education, Sidney set out in 1572 for what would later be called the Grand Tour of the continent. His passport stated that he had permission to travel overseas for two years for the purpose of “his attaining to the knowledge of foreign languages,”⁵ but the reasons went beyond improving his linguistic skills. The Grand Tour gave Sidney, a future courtier, the opportunity to observe the different political arrangements throughout Europe and to make contacts that would be useful in his later diplomatic life. One also suspects that his relatives give Sidney an opportunity to mature somewhat. In a letter to Sir Francis Walsingham, Sidney’s uncle Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, described his nephew as “young and raw” and asked Sir Francis—then the English ambassador in Paris—to look after him, because Leicester worried that Sidney “no doubt shall find those countries and the demeanors of the people somewhat strange unto him.”⁶ Sidney’s elders need not have worried, for he took full advantage of Europe’s offerings, and he blossomed politically, socially, and intellectually. Over the next three years (one more than Elizabeth originally granted him), Sidney visited an extraordinarily wide area of Europe, including such cities as Strasbourg, Paris, Cracow, Heidelberg, Frankfurt, Vienna, Padua, Genoa, and Florence, and he began lifelong friendships

⁴ Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney*, 52-53.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁷ Sidney translated part of Mornay’s *De la vérité de la religion chrétienne* (*A Work Concerning the Trueness of the Christian Religion*), but rather than leaving the work partly done, he asked the Elizabethan translator, Arthur Golding, to complete the task. Mornay is also credited with writing the anonymous *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, a highly influential tract

with such important figures as Philippe Duplessis-Mornay, Michel de l'Hôpital, and Hubert Languet.⁷

At the beginning of his tour, however, Sidney witnessed a horrific event that cannot have failed to make an indelible impression upon him. His first destination after leaving England was Paris, where it seemed that the violent conflict between Protestants and Catholics was on the point of being resolved. After three months of negotiation, an Anglo-French committee produced the Treaty of Blois, which mandated that the French not aid Catholic Spain in any attack on England, and Sidney was attached to an embassy to witness the treaty's ratification. Furthermore, Sidney and his party arrived in time for the celebrations over the marriage of Catherine de Medici's daughter, Marguerite de Valois, to the Protestant Henri de Bourbon, now King, as his mother died on June 9, 1572. This marriage, many hoped, would bring the French Wars of Religion to a close (just as at the end of the fifteenth century in England the Tudor Henry VII's marriage to the Yorkist Elizabeth concluded the decades of dynastic strife known as the War of the Roses). August 9 brought the first of Sidney's diplomatic successes, as the French king created him a "gentleman of the bedchamber" and a baron. Sidney may have regretted this favor later in life (in Sonnet 41 of *Astrophil and Stella* he calls France the "sweet enemy"), and Elizabeth certainly did not appreciate the gesture, but it is likely that at the time these honors gave Sidney tremendous satisfaction. Everything looked extremely hopeful. Then, on August 22, someone attempted to assassinate Admiral de Coligny, the most eminent Protestant in Paris, and on August 24, St. Bartholomew's Day, the massacre of Protestants began

arguing the legitimacy of actively resisting tyranny. The work has also been attributed to Philip's friend and mentor, the Protestant humanist Hubert Languet. On l'Hôpital, see the *Apology*, p. 110, n. 217. Much of Sidney's correspondence with his continental friends is reproduced in James M. Osborn, *Young Philip Sidney 1572-1577*. The letters between Sidney and Languet are reproduced in *The Correspondence of Sir Philip Sidney and Hubert Languet*.

in earnest. Thousands were slaughtered, and it is said that the Seine ran red with blood. Among the murdered were several of Sidney's new friends, including the highly influential logician Peter Ramus. Although Sidney never overtly referred to the St. Bartholomew Massacre, Languet called it a "monstrous massacre of so many innocent men,"⁸ and in all likelihood it deepened Sidney's adherence to militant Protestantism. In 1574, he referred to the latter as "our cause."⁹

The rest of Sidney's Grand Tour unfolded in a much happier fashion, in good part because of the admiration, friendship, and guidance of Hubert Languet, who introduced his protégé to many of Europe's leading Protestant thinkers and politicians as well as guided Sidney's intellectual development. The letters exchanged between the two clearly show that Sidney tended as much to his own intellectual pursuits as to understanding the political situation in Europe. In a letter dated December 19, 1573, for example, Sidney asks Languet to send him "Plutarch's works in French" and to tell him whether Languet has read six "interesting" Italian works on such topics as history, emblems, and examples of letters of great men. Sidney's comments to Languet collectively demonstrate Sidney's fluency in Italian and his taste for exemplary literature.¹⁰ In another letter, Sidney declares that he is giving up (with Languet's approval) the study of astronomy, but "about geometry I hardly know what to determine." Although Sidney concedes that "it is of the greatest service in the art of war," he evidently believed he did not have the time or perhaps the skill to master it, preferring instead to continue perfecting his Greek. His aim, as he writes to Languet, is to "learn only so much as shall suffice for the perfect understanding of Aristotle. For though translations

⁸ Languet to Sidney, April 1, 1574 (*Correspondence*, 43).

⁹ Sidney to Languet, June 1574 (*Correspondence*, 75).

¹⁰ *Correspondence*, 9.

are made almost daily, still I suspect they do not declare the meaning of the author plainly or aptly enough; and besides, I am utterly ashamed to be following the stream, as Cicero says, and not go to the fountainhead.”¹¹ Sidney also found time to have his portrait done by Paolo Veronese, a work now unfortunately lost.

Sidney returned to England in 1575, and although his greatest difficulties at court were still several years off, Sidney must have keenly felt the contrast between his success on the Continent and his family’s political fortunes at home. Henry Sidney remained bitter at Elizabeth’s refusal to grant him money or affordable honors for his Irish service, and Philip spent most of this year waiting on Elizabeth, participating in court festivities intended to display his talents to his monarch.

In 1577, however, Sidney’s apprenticeship seemed finally to have paid off. Elizabeth decided to send Philip to condole the Emperor Rudolph on the death of his father, Maximilian I. But the real purpose of this mission was something much closer to Sidney’s heart: to gauge the state of religious opinion and loyalties on the Continent along with exploring the possibility of forming a Protestant League to combat the incursions and imperial ambitions of Catholic Spain. Following his uncle, the Earl of Leicester, Sidney joined the Protestant activists at court urging a more hawkish foreign policy that would materially aid the cause of Continental Protestantism, and especially support William of Orange’s revolt against Spain in the Netherlands.¹² Significantly, Leicester provided a letter of introduction to the Count Palatine, Prince John Casimir, a firm Calvinist and one of the prime movers behind the idea of a Protestant League. Sidney admired Casimir, writing to Languet that “all [the German princes] except the Palatine have made up their minds to

¹¹ February 4, 1574 (*Correspondence*, 29).

¹² See *Astrophil and Stella* 30.

neglect their people and ruin themselves,”¹³ but unfortunately, as Sidney reported to Walsingham, the prospects of a Protestant League did not appear promising, especially because Rudolph and his court leaned toward Spain. Even so, Sidney continued his diplomacy, but it may have been at precisely this juncture that his political fortunes started to droop.

There is no doubt that Sidney’s diplomatic mission was widely considered a great success. A letter to Sidney’s father by Edward Waterhouse reported that “Mr. Sidney is returned safe into England, with great good acceptance of his service at Her Majesty’s hands; allowed of by all the Lords [of the Privy Council] to have been handled with great judgement and discretion, and hath been honored abroad in all princes’ courts with much extraordinary favor.” Walsingham also reported to Sidney’s father that “There hath not been any gentleman I am sure these many years that hath gone through so honorable a charge with as great commendations as he.”¹⁴ Doubtless Sir Henry glowed at his son’s achievements. One person, however, remained unconvinced: Elizabeth. Perhaps the first sign that his monarch held him in less esteem than did her councilors was her withholding from Sidney a personal title, despite his family connections and his good service. True, Sidney did attain the office of the Royal Cupbearer, but this position was an inherited honor, not a recognition of merit. The sad fact, as Katherine Duncan-Jones puts it, is that “Elizabeth, while acknowledging Sidney’s talent, never did quite trust him.”¹⁵ Consequently, Sidney remained without significant employment after his return, a condition that clearly grated on him. In a letter to Languet dated March 1, 1578, Sidney revealed his unhappiness with both his career and the court in terms that would later echo in the *Apology*:

¹³ Sidney to Languet, May 7, 1574 (*Correspondence*, 59).

¹⁴ Both are letters are quoted by Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney*, 133.

¹⁵ Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney*, 135.

[M]y mind itself, if it was ever active in anything, is now beginning, by reason of my indolent ease, imperceptibly to lose its strength, and to relax without any reluctance. For to what purpose should our thoughts be directed to various kinds of knowledge, unless room be afforded for putting it into practice, so that public advantage may be the result, which in a corrupt age we cannot hope for?¹⁶

There are several possible reasons for Elizabeth's keeping Sidney at a distance. First, he may have exceeded the bounds of his mission by pressing too hard for the establishment of a Protestant League, and he may even have appeared to Elizabeth as a loose cannon. Languet, for example, reports that Sidney so wanted to talk with William of Orange, the leader of the Protestant resistance in the Netherlands, that he planned to do so as a private person. Fortunately, Sidney then received a letter from Elizabeth directing him to meet with William of Orange, and so, Languet writes, "I perceived that by this means without any risk to yourself, your wish might be satisfied." Nonetheless, Sidney's plans suggest that he was not above using his diplomatic station to pursue his own agenda rather than restricting himself to his commission. In the same letter, Languet also reveals that Sidney's reputation must have already been at risk: "I had warned you to be careful not to give anyone occasion of speaking ill of you . . ." ¹⁷ Sidney's enthusiasm for a Protestant League, and his concomitant enthusiasm for sending English troops to fight Spain in the Netherlands, clashed with Elizabeth's distaste for war (which stemmed from a complex mixture of parsimony and policy).

Despite their fervent Protestantism, Sidney and his father were very friendly with a number of Catholics, and that too might have contributed to Elizabeth's distrust. Philip's rela-

¹⁶ *Correspondence*, 143. It should be remembered that the primacy of the public over the private sphere was a conventional sentiment in Sidney's time (in fact, it stretches back to Aristotle and Plato).

¹⁷ Languet to Sidney, June 14, 1577 (*Correspondence*, 106, 107).

tions with Catholics were so warm that Languet felt he had to warn Sidney that his friends had “begun to suspect you on the score of religion, because at Venice you were so intimate with those who profess a different creed from your own.”¹⁸ Languet also wrote to reassure Walsingham of Sidney’s reliability. In particular, Sidney was friendly with Edmund Campion, who had taught rhetoric at Oxford when Sidney attended. Campion had left England, eventually to become a Jesuit, and had taken up residence in Prague, where Sidney met him again. After he returned to England in 1580, he was executed in the most brutal fashion for spying and plotting to overthrow the Queen (it is unlikely that he was guilty of either charge). For obvious reasons, Sidney did not include his conversations with Campion in his official correspondence, but there are several accounts (granted, all later, and all by Catholics) attesting to how Sidney promised Campion that he would never “hurt or injure any Catholic” and how Sidney even, amazingly, considered converting!¹⁹

Events would soon further alienate Sidney from his queen, and the immediate cause would be Elizabeth’s relationship with the Duke of Alençon, François-Hercule, brother and heir to the French king, Henry III, and a Catholic. The Queen had for several years been conducting a low-level, if highly political, flirtation with the Duke, whom she called her “frog” and others called “Monsieur,” for some years, but in 1579 the intensity increased significantly, and the militant Protestants at court, led by Leicester and Walsingham, were seriously alarmed. Doubtless, there were political advantages to the match (which, given Elizabeth’s age, was unlikely to produce children), but the antimarriage faction worried deeply over the effect of this alliance on the Protestant cause in England—not to mention the horrific prospect of England having a French king. There was also considerable popular opposition, and in response

¹⁸ Languet to Sidney, March 10, 1575 (*Correspondence*, 93).

¹⁹ See Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney*, 135, and Roger Howell, *Sir Philip Sidney: The Shepherd Knight*, 38.

to the Duke's visit to England in August 1579, John Stubbs penned an attack called *The Discovery of a Gaping Gulf, wherinto England is like to be Swallowed by Another French Marriage*. Elizabeth on principle did not take kindly to being told how to conduct herself, she certainly did not like being advised on her proposed marriages, and she especially did not like public opposition to her policies, as Stubbs discovered. According to the contemporary historian William Camden, Elizabeth was "much incensed at [this book's] smart and stinging style," and Camden's account is worth quoting at length because of its importance to Sidney's career and its depiction of the extent and limits of popular resistance to Elizabeth:

From this time forward she [Elizabeth] began to be a little more incensed against the Puritans, or innovators, from whom she easily believed these kinds of things proceeded. And indeed within a few days after, John Stubbs, of Lincoln's Inn, a fervent hot-headed professor of religion . . . , [and] the author of this book, William Page, who dispersed the copies, and [Hugh] Singleton, the printer, were apprehended. Against whom sentence was given that their right hands should be cut off, according to an act of [King] Philip [of Spain] and [his wife] Mary [Tudor, or Mary I], *Against the Authors and Publishers of Seditious Writings*.²⁰ Though some lawyers muttered that the sentence was erroneous and void by reason of the false noting of the time wherein the law was made, and that the act was only temporary, and died with Queen Mary Hereupon Stubbs and Page had their right hands cut off with a cleaver, driven through the wrist by the force of a mallet, upon a scaffold in the marketplace in Westminster. The printer was pardoned. I remember (being there present) that when Stubbs, after his right hand was cut off, put off his hat with

²⁰ Camden's readers would have immediately recognized the irony of this act, promulgated by two Catholic monarchs, being used to punish a radical Protestant screed against Elizabeth marrying a Catholic.

his left, and said with a loud voice, "God save the queen," the multitude standing about was deeply silent, either out of an horror at this new and unwonted kind of punishment, or else out of commiseration towards the man, as being of an honest and unblamable repute, or else out of hatred of the marriage, which most men presaged would be the overthrow of religion.²¹

Sidney also would write against the French marriage. In August, Leicester convened a meeting of the antimarriage faction in which both Sidneys participated,²² and the result was Philip's *Letter to Queen Elizabeth touching her marriage to Monsieur*.

Scholars remain divided as to whether Sidney's rustication was voluntary or enforced. The evidence for Sidney's withdrawing from the court on his own is as follows: First, Fulke Greville asserted in his biographical sketch of Sidney that after the *Letter* he "kept his access to her Majesty as before,"²³ and as we have seen, Sidney was also starting to have his doubts about the probity of the court. Furthermore, in another letter, sent a year before prospects for the Alençon match heated up, Languet writes that he is "especially sorry you say that you are weary of the life to which I have no doubt God has called you, and desire to fly from the light of your court and betake yourself to the privacy of secluded places to escape the tempest of affairs by which statesmen are generally harassed"²⁴ Clearly, Sidney was thinking seriously about retirement long before he wrote the *Letter*.

²¹ William Camden, *The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess, Elizabeth*, 270, sig. Nn3v. I have modernized the spelling and the punctuation.

²² The Spanish ambassador, Bernardino de Mendoza—who, it must be stressed, is far from a reliable witness—reported, "A meeting was held on the same night at the Earl of Pembroke's house, there being present Lord Sidney [sic] and other friends and relatives. They no doubt discussed the matter, and some of them afterwards remarked that Parliament would have something to say as to whether the Queen married or not. The people in general seem to threaten revolution about it" (quoted in Wallace, *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney*, 213).

On the other hand, although Sidney—unlike the unfortunately named John Stubbs—avoided public mutilation, Elizabeth did not take kindly to unsolicited criticism. One also must remember that Greville's purpose was not biographical accuracy but constructing Sidney as a political and moral ideal. Generally speaking, in this genre, exemplarity trumped factual accuracy, and stating that Sidney had gotten himself thrown out of court (if that is indeed what happened) hardly fits with this purpose.²⁵ Finally, whatever Sidney may have written to Languet in 1578, his dedication to a life of action and service makes an extended voluntary retreat from the court unlikely, though not impossible.

After he left, Sidney told Languet that he had no choice but to write the *Letter*, which conviction Languet uses to excuse Sidney for producing a document that clearly did his career no good:

I suspected that you had been urged to write by persons who either did not know into what peril they were thrusting you, or did not care for your danger, provided they effected their own object. Since, however, you were ordered to write as you did by those whom you were bound to obey, no fair-judging man can blame you for putting forward freely what you thought good for your country, nor even exaggerating some circumstances in order to convince them of what you judged expedient.²⁶

Was Sidney set up to take the fall? Did Leicester and the other grandees protect their position by using Sidney, whose career was already shaky,²⁷ as their mouthpiece, thereby making

²³ Greville, *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*, 38.

²⁴ October 22, 1578 (*Correspondence*, 155).

²⁵ In another example, Sidney's first biographer and the family physician, Thomas Moffett, altered the dates when Sidney wrote verse. See below, pp.47-48.

²⁶ *Correspondence*, 187.

²⁷ Languet also noted that when he visited England in 1578-1579, he "found a sort of cloud over [Sidney's] fortunes" (September 24, 1580 [*Correspondence*, 185]).

the weakest among them the object of Elizabeth's anger? Or did Sidney, perhaps to salvage his reputation with his mentor, make others responsible for his lack of political tact?

A few days before the Leicester meeting that produced the *Letter*, an incident occurred that further diminished Sidney's already low standing at court. As Greville reports, while Sidney was²⁸

one day at tennis, a peer of this realm, born great, greater by alliance, and superlative in the prince's favor [the Earl of Oxford], came abruptly into the tennis-court, and speaking out of these three paramount authorities he forgot to entreat that which he could not legally command. When, by the encounter of a steady object, finding unrespectiveness in himself (though a great lord) not respected by this princely spirit, he grew to expostulate more roughly. The returns of which style coming still from an understanding heart that knew what was due to itself, and what it ought to others, seemed (through the mists of my lord's passion swollen with the wind of his faction then reigning) to provoke in yielding; whereby the less amazement or confusion of thoughts he stirred up in Sir Philip, the more shadows this great lord's own mind was possessed with, till at least with rage—which is ever ill-disciplined—he commands them to depart the court. To this Sir Philip temperately answers that if his lordship had been pleased to express his desire in milder characters, perchance he might have led out those that he should now find would not be driven out with any scourge of fury. This answer—like a bellows blowing up the sparks of excess already kindled—made my lord scornfully call Sir Philip by the name of puppy.

Matters continued to spiral out of control. Sidney repeated himself even louder; Oxford repeated his insult; Sidney responded that “all the world knows puppies are gotten by dogs and children by men”; Alençon's ambassadors, attracted by the

²⁸ Greville, *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*, 38-39.

²⁹ Wallace, *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney*, 214.

tumult, observed everything; Sidney stormed out and the next day demanded satisfaction from Oxford. This man, described by an earlier biographer of Sidney as “unhampered by any principles except that of self-advancement,”²⁹ belonged to the pro-marriage faction and vastly out-distanced Sidney in terms of rank. Thus the Queen ultimately had to step in to prevent the duel, explaining to Sidney “the difference in degree between earls and gentlemen,”³⁰ which, given Sidney’s pride in his Dudley heritage, must have particularly rankled. Nobody comes out very well from this incident, but Sidney had much more to lose than Oxford, and his behavior surely did not enhance his credibility or his career.

Whether Elizabeth finally had enough and ordered Sidney gone, or Sidney decided that he was fed up with the constant political frustration and personal humiliation, or some combination of the two we will never know, but whatever the cause, six months later Sidney embarked on a year-long retreat from the court. Although Sidney had started writing verse in 1578 (the probable date for his pastoral drama, *The Lady of May*), this period marks his full immersion in literary matters: he wrote the first complete version of his prose romance, the *Arcadia*, as well as the letters to his younger brother Robert and to Edward Denny, both of which are invaluable in assessing the complexity of Sidney’s attitudes toward fiction. Sidney, along with his friends Edward Dyer and Fulke Greville, also began experimenting with trying to write English verse using Latin quantitative prosody (based on the length of syllables) rather than accentual stress, and Sidney included the results in the *Arcadia*.³¹

³⁰ Greville, *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*, 40.

³¹ In his published correspondence with Gabriel Harvey, Edmund Spenser claimed that Dyer and Sidney had formed an “Areopagus” in which they “prescribed certain laws and rules of quantities of English syllables for English verse,” and that he was intimate with both of them (see the excerpt from the *Two . . . Letters*, p. 273). Scholars generally agree that Spenser made this claim to boost his own prestige, and that no such formal entity existed.

In 1581 Sidney returned to the court, and he signaled his submission by presenting Elizabeth with a New Year's gift of a jewel-encrusted riding whip.³² But returning to the court did not mean returning to Elizabeth's favor, and Sidney's position suffered yet another blow when his uncle, the Earl of Leicester, and his uncle's second wife, Walter Devereux's widow Lettice, née Knollys, produced a son, Robert.³³ This event, however happy in the short run (the child would die in 1584), devastated Sidney's chances at advancement because he was no longer the heir to his uncle's estates and title. Given Elizabeth's habit of generally preferring inherited title over talent, Sidney's disinheritance meant that Sidney had lost not only the prospect of a fortune, but also a means of recovering his lost prestige. At a tilt held sometime thereafter, Sidney made his disappointment explicit. According to William Camden, "Sir Philip Sidney, who was a long time heir apparent to the Earl of Leicester, after the said Earl had a son born to him, used at the next tilt-day following SPERAVI [I have hoped] thus dashed through, to show his hope therein was dashed."³⁴

The end of 1581 and the beginning of 1582 must have been a miserable time for Sidney. He lost the prospect of the Leicester estates, the Duke of Alençon returned to England to continue his "courtship" of Elizabeth, and Sidney's mentor, Hubert Languet, died at the end of September 1581. Making matters even worse, the Earl made Sidney's disinheritance official in January 1582, when he rewrote his will, and, adding political insult to financial injury, Sidney continued to remain without enough meaningful employment at court.

To be sure, Sidney was not completely shut out of either

³² See *AS* 41.

³³ Lettice and her first husband had two daughters, Dorothy and Penelope, and the latter would become the subject of Sidney's Petrarchan attentions in *Astrophil and Stella*. One has to wonder at Sidney's attitudes toward the woman whose progeny had such profound effects on his life.

³⁴ Quoted in Duncan-Jones, 194.

the court or politics. He secured a seat in the House of Commons in 1581, and Elizabeth included Sidney among the party escorting Alençon to Holland in 1582. Yet even when Elizabeth appeared to grant Sidney favor, the largesse came in ways seemingly designed to rankle. In 1581, she finally consented to his plea for a grant of three thousand pounds, but the money came from the property confiscated from English Catholics. While Sidney accepted the cash—he really had no choice—he remained deeply uneasy about its source: “Truly, I like not their persons and much less their religion, but I think my fortune very hard that my fortune must be built upon other men’s punishments.”³⁵ Sidney’s uncle, the Earl of Warwick, tried for about two and a half years to have his nephew join him in that office, but Elizabeth would only allow Sidney a subordinate appointment (although he would be appointed joint master with Warwick in 1585). Finally, while Elizabeth granted Sidney a knighthood in 1583, this honor, like his appointment as Royal Cupbearer, was ceremonial, not due to any recognition of worth or service. Count Casimir was to be installed as Knight of the Garter, and he named Sidney as his proxy. To serve in this capacity, one must be at least a knight, and so Philip Sidney became Sir Philip Sidney. At the same time, rumors circulated that he would receive the captancy of the Isle of Wight, but that opportunity, like many others, disappeared.³⁶ Essentially, Elizabeth used Sidney as a courtly ornament—helpful in entertaining foreign diplomats, handy with a phrase or a poem, impressive in a joust and charming in witty conversation, but unsuitable for a position of genuine influence.³⁷ It is likely that Sidney started writing both *An Apology for Poetry* and *Astrophil*

³⁵ Quoted in Wallace, *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney*, 272.

³⁶ Wallace, 288-90.

³⁷ As Wallace puts it, “In the case of Sidney we have a man of high purpose, of fine gifts of nature, and of scholarly attainments, a man eminently fitted to do worthy work for his country and filled with a burning desire to be allowed to do such work, but continually

and *Stella* during this period of political frustration and relative idleness (more on this below), and he embarked on a revision of the *Arcadia*.³⁸ Probably the only bright moment during this period was Sidney's marriage in 1583 to Frances Walsingham, the daughter of Elizabeth's secretary of state.

In 1584, it seemed that the Queen's opinion of Sidney's diplomatic utility had finally begun to change.³⁹ On May 31, the Duke of Alençon, who improbably had taken up the Protestant cause in the Netherlands and had badly mismanaged his campaign against the Spaniards, died of typhoid fever in June, and Elizabeth decided to send Sidney on another mission of condolence. Like the first, this mission had a covert political purpose: to sound out French intentions on the Netherlands, information that became especially important in the wake of William of Orange's assassination. One can only speculate whether Sidney and his queen perceived the irony (or perceived the same irony, since the two may have had very different perspectives on this event) of his being sent to condole Henry III and his mother on the death of a man Sidney had demonized in his widely circulated *Letter to Queen Elizabeth Touching Her Marriage to Monsieur*, but Elizabeth certainly did not make her choice lightly, given the political stakes involved. Unfortunately, like so many other opportunities, this one fizzled as well, for the French king, Henry III, had given up mourning for his brother after only six weeks and had departed, along with his court, to Lyons to enjoy some hunting. The Queen Mother suggested

checked and thwarted, and forced to recognize the sad fact that his energies were largely dissipated in the performance of tasks merely formal" (*The Life of Sir Philip Sidney*, 276).

³⁸ To distinguish between the two, scholars refer to the complete version as the *Old Arcadia* and the incomplete revision as the *New Arcadia*. In 1593, Sidney's sister, the Countess of Pembroke, sponsored a conflated version. Separate, modernized editions of all three are available (see "Suggestions for Further Reading" at the back of this volume).

³⁹ Sidney's personal fortunes also improved in 1584 with the sad death of his uncle's three-year-old son. This misfortune meant that Sidney was once again Leicester's heir.

that Sidney's party should return after the King came back, but Elizabeth, according to the Calendar of State Papers, tartly "answered that she had sent [Sidney] to do the King honor, 'but since he did not like to have him go over, she was for her part well content to stay him, and that for sending of him hereafter, she saw no cause thereof.'"⁴⁰

Henry's seeming indifference to his brother's death and to the English embassy may have stemmed from reasons other than frivolity or a lack of proper fraternal regard, for he had finally decided not to back the Protestant revolt against Spain in the Netherlands. The ascendancy of a pro-Catholic, pro-Spanish policy in France gave new impetus to the creation of a Continental Protestant League and to supporting the Protestant rebels with money and English troops. In addition, the prince of Parma, the Spanish king, Philip II's best general, reconquered many towns in the Netherlands, making Spanish domination of the entire country a very real possibility which seriously alarmed Elizabeth.⁴¹ Elizabeth and the Dutch quickly entered into negotiations which eventually led to her committing English troops and money to the Dutch cause, but not before the negotiations bogged down.

At this point, Sidney, driven to utter distraction by the temporizing of both the English and the Dutch, decided that he would join Sir Francis Drake's fleet—without telling Elizabeth—and sail to the New World. As soon as the Queen found out about Sidney's secret plans (Drake informed her), she sent a messenger who carried, as Greville writes, "in the one hand grace, the other thunder."⁴² In the latter, the Queen refused permission for the fleet to leave so long as Sidney remained with them, and in the former, she offered Sidney what he had been

⁴⁰ Quoted in Duncan-Jones, 258.

⁴¹ Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (London: Allen Lane, 1977), 208-13.

⁴² Greville, *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*, 45.

aching for all his life: a chance at military glory—in this case, “instant employment,” as Greville records it, under Leicester, who was now Governor of Flushing. But the Dutch campaign did not go well because Elizabeth allowed the garrison barely enough money to scrape by (she finally signed the Treaty of Nonsuch, which officially committed her to the defense of the Netherlands, on August 20), and, to add yet more personal tragedy to political frustration, Sidney’s father, Sir Henry, died in the winter of 1585, and his mother died in 1586.

On September 23, 1586, Sidney and his uncle participated in an ambush of Spanish troops near Zutphen.⁴³ It is not clear why exactly Sidney took off his leg armor. According to Greville, Sidney initially donned the appropriate amount of protective armor, “but, meeting the marshal of the camp lightly armed . . ., the unspotted emulation of his heart to venture without any inequality made him cast off his cuisses [leg armor].”⁴⁴ Another writer, Sir John Smythe, in his 1590 book on weaponry, asserted that Sidney followed a new Continental fashion of dispensing with heavy armor to increase mobility. Thomas Moffett provides a third possibility—that Sidney hurried to the defense of a colleague and so never had time to put on his armor.⁴⁵ Alas, none of these sources actually witnessed the event, and so the truth will never be known. Whatever his reasons, Sidney entered the fray with an unprotected leg and a bullet struck his thigh. Greville reports the following legend:

[B]eing thirsty with excess of bleeding, he called for drink, which was presently brought him; but as he was putting the bottle to his mouth he saw a poor soldier carried along, who

⁴³ While many recent critics have characterized this event as an unimportant skirmish, Zutphen was the site of a small yet very real and not insignificant battle. The English force—300 foot and 250 horse—went up against 4,500 Spanish soldiers, one third of whom were cavalry (Roger Kuin, *Chamber Music*, 133 n.4).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁵ John Buxton, “The Mourning for Sidney,” *Renaissance Studies* 3 (1989), 46.

had eaten his last at the same feast, ghastly casting up his eyes at the bottle; which Sir Philip perceiving, took it from his head before he drank, and delivered it to the poor man with these words: “Thy necessity is yet greater than mine.”⁴⁶

In all likelihood, this incident never happened (none of the earlier biographies mention it), and it is an example of the kind of mythologizing one often finds in Renaissance biography. What followed, however, is indisputable: the wound developed gangrene, and Sidney died on October 17.

When Sidney’s father-in-law, Sir Francis Walsingham, heard the news, he wrote, “her Majesty hath lost a rare servant, and the realm a worthy member.”⁴⁷ Walsingham then gave his late son-in-law funeral more lavish than anything before bestowed on a non-aristocrat (the cost would ruin him financially) and the degree of public mourning would not be rivaled until, according to Osborn, the death of Sir Winston Churchill.⁴⁸ Over 700 mourners crowded St. Paul’s on February 16, 1587, and several books of elegies were published in Sidney’s honor (including one that included a poem on Sidney by the future king of England, King James VI of Scotland).⁴⁹ Walsingham hired Thomas Lant to create a roll engraving of Sidney’s funeral procession, an unprecedented honor for a person of Sidney’s relatively low rank, and for months it was “accounted a sin” for gentlemen to wear festive or colorful clothing.⁵⁰ The grief was also ecumenical. Perhaps recalling Sidney’s friendliness with

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Osborn, *Young Philip Sidney*, 516.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 516.

⁴⁹ See Dominic Baker-Smith, “Great Expectations: Sidney’s Death and the Poets,” 83–103. On James’s elegy for Sidney and its connections to James’s scheming to be named Elizabeth’s heir, see Peter C. Herman, “Best of Poets, Best of Kings: King James VI/I and the Scene of Monarchical Verse,” in *Royal Subjects: Essays on the Writings of James VIII*, ed. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, (forthcoming, Wayne State University Press). The books of verse mourning Sidney are reproduced in *Elegies for Sir Philip Sidney (1587)*, ed. A. J. Colaianne and W. L. Godshalk.

those following Rome, including Campion, the Catholic composer William Byrd wrote three laments for Sidney.

Yet Elizabeth remained unimpressed. In all likelihood, she contributed nothing to help with the funeral's costs, and no high-ranking members of the clergy or the government attended the proceedings.⁵¹ Furthermore, it seems that the manner of Sidney's demise confirmed her opinion of him as unworthy of higher office. When she recalled Lord Mountjoy from Brittany—who had also gone to war without first asking permission—she is reported to have said: "Serve me so (quoth she) once more and I will lay you fast enough for running; you will never leave it till you are knocked over the head as that inconsiderate [rash, not considering the consequences] fellow Sidney was."⁵²

Sidney's record of failure makes this outpouring of grief hard to fully explain. True, by the time of his death Sidney had earned a reputation for patronage (explaining perhaps the number of published elegies), but that does not account for the widespread nature of the grief. One possibility is that Sidney was one of only a handful of notable men from his generation to die in action, a fact which would automatically count tremendously in a culture that in many ways still revered chivalric glory. Another view, frequently reiterated, is that Sidney's death represented the death of an ideal. As John Buxton puts it, "[Sidney] seemed to his contemporaries to exhibit to perfection those qualities which went to make up the ideal courtier of Castiglione's description"⁵³ Perhaps, but Sidney's contemporaries would have also known that the Queen consistently denied him favor and rank, which hardly comports with Sidney's exemplifying

⁵⁰ J. F. R. Day, "Death Be Very Proud: Sidney, Subversion, and Elizabethan Heraldic Funerals," *Tudor Political Culture*, ed. Dale Hoak, 181.

⁵¹ Sander Bos et al., "Sidney's Funeral Portrayed," 49-50.

⁵² Buxton, "The Mourning for Sidney," 47.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 47.

the ideal courtier (unless one assumes that the ideal courtier is synonymous with the politically frustrated courtier).

Another explanation might be that Sidney's popularity stemmed from his dying a martyr to the cause of militant Protestantism, and he died fighting against the hated national enemy, Spain. The crowds at his funeral and the subsequent development of the Sidney legend thus registers a degree of implicit criticism of the Queen, since Elizabeth embraced this cause belatedly, reluctantly and half-heartedly. The crowd, one might recall, stayed remarkably silent at the state's mutilation of John Stubbs for protesting Elizabeth's potential marriage to the Catholic Duke of Alençon, and this in a time when executions served as public entertainment.

In the years immediately following his untimely death, the Sidney legend flourished, the memory of Sidney's political misfortunes waned, and his reputation as a poet and as a defender of poetry grew apace. To give some examples, George Puttenham included Sidney among the "courtly makers" of Elizabeth's reign in *The Art of English Poesy*; in 1587 the rhetorician, poet and translator Angel Day published a commemorative poem called *Upon the Life and Death of the Most Worthy, and Thrice Renowned Knight, Sir Philip Sidney*, which began "Sugared Sidney, Sidney sweet it was, / That to thy soil did give the greatest fame, / Whose honeydews that from his quill did pass, / With honey sweets, advanced thy glorious name"; in 1595 Edmund Spenser published "Astrophel: A Pastoral Eley of the Most Noble and Valorous Knight, Sir Philip Sidney"; and in 1598, the same year as the folio edition of Sidney's works, Francis Meres put Sidney at the head of his list of authors who have contributed to the development of English in his *Palladis Tamia*: "[As Greek and Latin authors have made their tongues 'famous and eloquent'] so the English tongue is mightily enriched, and gorgeously invested in rare ornaments and resplendent abiliments [clothes, robes] by Sir Philip Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Warner, Shake-

speare, Marlowe and Chapman.”⁵⁴ Let us now turn Sidney’s poetic works to see why they made such an impact.

An Apology for Poetry and Astrophil and Stella

Sidney intended neither the *Apology* nor *Astrophil and Stella* for a broad reading audience, and although both texts circulated in manuscript,⁵⁵ they were not printed until at least four years after Sidney’s death. In other words, Sidney meant these works, especially the *Astrophil*, for a relatively small, coterie audience of friends and family intimately acquainted with his life and political frustrations.⁵⁶

Astrophil and Stella was first published by Thomas Newman in 1591 (he put out a corrected version later that year) without the permission of the Sidney family, and although authors and their heirs normally had no recourse against the pirating of their works (copyright law would not develop until the eighteenth century), Mary Sidney, the Countess of Pembroke, managed to have the government issue an order for the suppression of this edition.⁵⁷ William Ponsonby included a much better edition of the *Astrophil* in his authorized 1598 folio of Sidney’s works.⁵⁸ The *Apology* enjoyed a similar history. Henry Olney published

⁵⁴ The citations from Puttenham, Day and Meres (who also refers to Shakespeare circulating his “sugared sonnets” among his friends) are from *Sidney: The Critical Heritage*, 96, 111-112, 146; I have quoted the title page of Spenser’s poem from the reproduction in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William A. Oram et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 564.

⁵⁵ On the manuscript circulation of both works, see Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts*.

⁵⁶ Unlike the *Old Arcadia*, *Astrophil and Stella* did not achieve widespread circulation in manuscript, suggesting that Sidney (and his family after his death) wanted to restrict the readership of this sequence (Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts*, 365-66).

⁵⁷ Ringler, *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, 543. See also Kuin, *Chamber Music*, 181-86, and Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts*, 367-69.

⁵⁸ *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia. Written by Sir Philip Sidney Knight. Now the Third Time Published With Sundry New Additions of the Same Author* (1598).

an unauthorized version in 1595 under the title *An Apology for Poetry*, and although Olney escaped official censure (perhaps because a defense of poetry was less damaging to Sidney's posthumous reputation than his sonnet sequence), Ponsonby issued an authorized edition that same year using the title *The Defense of Poesy*.⁵⁹ Ironically, Olney's is actually a much better edition than Ponsonby's authorized text; the printing is cleaner, easier to read (the classical quotations, for example, are set off from the rest of the text), and Olney used higher quality paper.

However they came to public notice, both works constituted major watersheds in the history of English Renaissance literature. *An Apology for Poetry* is not precisely the first major statement of poetics by an Englishman (Richard Willes has that honor, and excerpts from his *Disputation Concerning Poetry* [the original title is *De Re Poetica*] can be found in the "Selected Attacks and Defenses" section of this volume), but Sidney's text is undoubtedly the most important, and it quickly took on the status of a classic. Similarly, the publication of *Astrophil and Stella* exerted enormous influence on English poetic production, as it is often credited with starting the craze for writing sonnets and sonnet sequences that persisted throughout the 1590s.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ I have chosen to use Olney's title, *An Apology for Poetry*, even though the authorized version uses a different title, because that is how the author of the first reference I have found to Sidney's text refers to it. Sir John Harington, in *A Brief Apology for Poetry* (1591) calls this text "Sir Philip Sidney's *Apology*" (*Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, vol. 2, 196). As Harington likely read Sidney's text in manuscript, and as he would have been among the intended coterie audience, he probably knew the preferred title. Today, both are used interchangeably, the determinate factor being the contemporary edition used.

⁶⁰ *Astrophil and Stella* is actually the *second* sonnet sequence written in English. The first, a collection of 21 sonnets that meditate upon the 51st Psalm was written by Anne Lock (or Lok) and appended to her translation of the *Sermons of John Calvin Upon the Song that Ezechias Made After He Had Been Sick . . .* (London, 1560). The modern edition is *The Collected Works of Anne Vaughan Lock*, ed. Susan M. Felch (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1999). Sidney's, however, is the first amatory or Petrarchan sequence. It should be noted that "sonnet" in the 16th and 17th centuries was a looser term than today and that it did not refer exclusively to 14 line poems. For example, not one of John Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* is 14 lines long.

The origin of the *Apology* is widely considered to be Stephen Gosson's dedication of his attack on all forms of fictions, *The School of Abuse* (1579), to Sidney. According to Edmund Spenser, Sidney "scorned" both Gosson and his little screed (see the excerpt from Spenser and Harvey's *Two . . . Letters* in this volume), but more recent critics have noted the close relationships between the two texts. If Sidney scorned Gosson's *School of Abuse*, he nonetheless paid close attention to it.⁶¹ Nor did he communicate his scorn to Gosson, who dedicated another attack on fiction to Sidney the next year.

Sidney's purpose in the *Apology* is to defend poetry against the charges of *mysomousoi*, or poet-haters, as Sidney terms them. Thus, both Sidney and Gosson are participating in a very long tradition that predates Plato, who wrote in the *Republic* that there is "from of old a quarrel between philosophy and poetry." Plato charged that poetry has no place in the ideal republic because it corrupts its consumers by stirring up the irrational part of the soul, and from Plato onward, antipoetic sentiment enjoyed a long and distinguished history in Western thought. The immediate cause for the Elizabethan upsurge in antipoetic sentiment and its close cousin, the antitheatrical prejudice,⁶² can be found in the rise of the public theater in the 1570s, a development which led London's civic authorities to commission Gosson to write *The School of Abuse*. Whatever the differences in style, context, and intellectual heft, the charges leveled by Gosson and Plato are virtually identical: Both assert that poets are liars and that their works incite immorality. Implicit in Plato, but very explicit in Gosson and his brethren, are the

⁶¹ See Arthur F. Kinney, "Parody and Its Implications in Sydney's Defense of Poesie," *Studies in English Literature* 12 (1972): 1-19.

⁶² On the former, see Russell Fraser, *The War Against Poetry* and Peter C. Herman, *Squitter-wits and Muse-haters: Sidney, Spenser, Milton, and Renaissance Antipoetic Sentiment*; on the latter, see Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*.

charges that poetry erodes masculinity and that one cannot serve the Muses and the commonwealth at the same time. As Justice Overdo, a character in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, exclaims concerning a young thief, "I begin shrewdly to suspect their familiarity; and the young man of a terrible taint, poetry! with which idle disease if he be infected, there's no hope of him in a state-course. *Actum est* of him for a commonwealth's-man if he go to't in rhyme once."

To these charges, Sidney replied with a text that takes the form of an eight-part classical oration:⁶³

1. *Exordium* (introduction): the opening anecdote concerning Edward Wotton and the horse-master, John Pietro Pugliano (pp. 56-57)
2. *Narratio* (outline of the subject matter): general facts concerning poetry, (pp. 57-64)
3. *Propositio* (statement of the thesis): the nature of poetry itself, poetry as creation, poetry as imitation (pp. 64-66)
4. *Divisio* (division of the argument into parts for discussion): the three types of poetry, introduction of the Right Poet (pp. 66-69)
5. *Confirmatio* (provides evidence to prove thesis): the competition between poetry, philosophy and history over who best inspires virtuous action, the different kinds of poetry (pp. 70-94).
6. *Refutatio* (consideration and refutation of opposing arguments): charges against poetry, in particular Plato's (pp. 94-108)
7. *Digressio* (digression): the present state of English poetry (pp. 108-24)
8. *Peroratio* (conclusion, pp. 124-26)

⁶³ On Sidney's use of classical oratory, see Myrick, *Sir Philip Sidney as Literary Craftsman*.

Overall, Sidney argues that the charges against poetry are unfounded because, as particularly evidenced in the *confirmatio*, there is no science, or form of knowledge, that inspires the reader to active virtue better than poetry. Historians may have narrative on their side, but they are tied, Sidney writes, to retelling what actually happened, and while philosophers can discuss virtue in the abstract, their works are too obscure, too difficult to understand. Only the poet can combine the virtues of both and come up with a text whose images and conceits will actually get people to *do* virtuous deeds. As Sidney puts it, it is not *gnosis*, or abstract knowledge, that is important, but *praxis*, or practice. Reading poetry is not an act of idleness but a preparation for action:

Truly I have known men that even with reading *Amadis de Gaul*, which, God knoweth, wanteth much of a perfect poesy, have found their hearts moved to the exercise of courtesy, liberality, and especially courage. Who readeth Aeneas carrying old Anchises on his back that wisheth not it were his fortune to perform so excellent an act? (pp. 84-85)

The poet, Sidney explains, has this ability because of the concatenation of two principles. First, poetry, unlike any other science, is *not* tied to nature. Therefore, as he famously writes, the poet,

disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the heroes, demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like. So as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit (p. 64).

Having created this “idea,” which he also calls a “fore-conceit,” the poet then couples it with an image which he delivers “forth in such excellency as he had imagined them.” The result, to use Sidney’s example, is that the poet not only

creates an ideal *image* of virtuous behavior, such as Cyrus, or Aeneas, but the reader transforms the abstract idea into a concrete *act*. Thus the poet “bestows” a Cyrus or an Aeneas “upon the world.” In sum, Sidney rebuts the Muse-haters by arguing that poetry incites the reader to moral rather than immoral acts.

To be sure, Sidney’s ideas are not original. He draws much of what he has to say in poetry’s defense from Italian literary criticism—Julius Caesar Scaliger in particular (see the excerpt in this volume), whose *Poetics* Sidney had read deeply and carefully. Sidney’s contribution, therefore, lies in his injecting these ideas into English literary discourse and in his bringing together an extraordinary mosaic of earlier Renaissance thought about the nature and purpose of poetry.

Recent critics have noted that the *Apology* is far from a unified text,⁶⁴ and perhaps the best place to illustrate how the *Apology* consistently presents multiple perspectives on important issues is the *propositio*, the thesis. On the one hand, Sidney states about as explicitly as one could want that the poet is *independent* of Nature: “So as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit” (p. 64). Even further, it is precisely this independence from Nature that allows the poet his superiority, since “Her world is brazen [brass], the poets only deliver a golden [one]” (p. 65).

Yet two paragraphs later, Sidney brackets these concepts as a kind of thought-experiment—“But these arguments will by few be understood, and by fewer granted”—and he restarts his argument with a definition of poetry that is the *opposite* of what he has just proposed: “Poesy, therefore, is an art of imita-

⁶⁴ O. B. Hardison Jr. was the first to explore fully this aspect of Sidney’s text in “The Two Voices of Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry*.” See also Margaret W. Ferguson, *Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defenses of Poetry*, and Ronald Levaio, *Renaissance Minds and Their Fictions*.

tion, for so Aristotle termeth it in this word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth, to speak metaphorically” (p. 66). To re-present, or to figure forth, or to imitate, means that the poet is no longer “freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit” but is now *subject* to Nature.

Sidney fills the *Apology* with many such contradictions. He praises mixing genres in one passage (“some have mingled matters heroical and pastoral, but that cometh all to one in this question, for if severed they be good, the conjunction cannot be hurtful” [p. 87]) only to condemn this practice in another (“mongrel tragicomedy” [p. 116]). Sidney credits poetry as the original source of knowledge, “the first light giver to ignorance” (p. 57); later on, he exculpates the poets for their “wrong opinions” of the gods because they “did not induce such opinions, but did imitate those opinions already induced” (p. 106), which implies that some “science” predated Musaeus and Amphion. He finds merit in *The Ballad of Chevy Chase*; yet toward the end he becomes the finicky critic, qualifying his positive review of Edmund Spenser’s *The Shepherd’s Calendar* with “that same framing of his style to an old rustic language I dare not allow” (p. 113) because it is without precedent.

The inner conflicts of the *Apology* should also be seen in the context of two letters that Sidney wrote, one to Edward Denny, the other to Sidney’s younger brother, Robert, in which Sidney treats the relative merits of poetry and its place in the reading of young men of action (excerpts from both letters are included in this volume). On May 22, 1580, Sidney responded to Denny’s request for a bibliography to occupy him during his Irish service, and despite his assertion in the *Apology* that “poetry is the companion of the camps” (p. 102), Sidney declines to recommend any poetry at all, restricting himself instead to history and philosophy. On October 15 of the same year, Sidney wrote a letter to his brother in which he gives yet a third assessment of the relationship between poetry and history; this time, it is the *historian* who becomes a poet “for ornament.” History,

the dominant science, uses poetry, not vice versa. Thus, in the Denny letter, poetry loses by default, and in the Robert letter, poetry remains subordinate to history.

There are many ways of approaching the divisions of the *Apology* and the fact that Sidney writes three texts at roughly the same time in which he gives three different assessments of poetry's worth. As Sidney writes in his letter to Denny, he may be constructing a reading program tailored to Denny himself (and by implication for Robert too) rather than articulating a broad principle. Or the differences among all three may be evidence of Sidney trying out different ideas about literature without necessarily committing himself to one in particular. As for the contradictions within the *Apology*, one might invoke Sidney's partial adherence to Protestant antipoetic tendencies, "the pressure of a forensic rhetorical tradition . . . that encouraged the summoning to court of all possible witnesses, the marshaling of all possible arguments, no matter how they might quarrel or clash in the vestibule afterwards," the tradition of the paradoxical encomium, in which a seemingly mundane or morally reprehensible subject is shown, through very clever reasoning, to be the opposite (for example, Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly*), and/or the urbane wit of the *Apology* itself.⁶⁵ The point, however, should not be to emphasize one context to the exclusion of all others or to attempt to resolve differences that are manifestly not resolvable. Better to try to capture the *Apology*'s full complexity through its engagement with multiple, even contradictory discourses, in other words, to see this text as an example of Sidney's—and his culture's—unsettled dialogue over the nature and purpose of poetry.

⁶⁵ Anne Lake Prescott, "King David as a 'Right Poet': Sidney and the Psalmist," 133; on Sidney and the antipoetic strain within English Protestant thought, see Herman, *Squitter-wits*, and on the tradition of the paradoxical encomium, see Rosalie Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

Sidney's sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*, similarly partakes of a variety of intellectual currents. The progenitor of Sidney's sequence is Petrarch's (1304-1374) collection, variously called the *Rime Sparse* ("Scattered Rhymes") and the *Canzoniere* ("Songbook"), a collection of 366 poems in many lengths and verse forms detailing his unfulfilled love for Laura. Petrarch's *Rime Sparse* ranks among the most influential works ever produced, as it gave the West a language for talking about desire that permeated the Renaissance and remains current to this day.

Petrarch's achievement in this sequence is manifold.⁶⁶ First, Petrarch created a coherent sequence made up of several little parts. Although the *Rime Sparse* does not have a plot *per se*, the sequence begins with a retrospective poem and then covers the speaker's constant love for Laura over the course of over twenty years (many of the poems contain chronological markers). At sonnet 267, Laura dies (thus creating a bifold structure of poems dealing with Laura alive, *in vita*, and those dealing with Laura dead, *in morte*). Even Laura's death, the relationship does not end, for her spirit returns to lead the lover to penitence and ultimately to heaven.⁶⁷ Second, at a time when Latin was the language of all intellectual discourse, Petrarch wrote his poems in Italian, the vernacular. While for Petrarch himself the language of the *Rime Sparse* may have indicated his sense that these poems are lesser achievements than, for example, his Latin epic, *Africa*, which concerns the Roman military hero *Scipio Africanus*, but for later writers seeking, as Spenser later put it, "the kingdom

⁶⁶ Petrarch's innovations build on the previous achievements of Provençal poetry and Dante (in particular, the *Vita Nuova*). The sonnet form itself first developed in Sicily. On the history of the sonnet, see Michael R. G. Spiller, *The Development of the Sonnet: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁶⁷ In Petrarch's *The Secretum*, an imaginary dialogue between the author and St. Augustine, Petrarch answers Augustine's charge that his love for Laura is profane, that it has "detached your mind from the love of heavenly things," by asserting that "the love which I feel for her has most certainly led to love God" (*Petrarch's Secret*, trans. William H. Draper [Westport, CT: Hyperion, 1978], 124).

of our own language,” Petrarch provided an important model for the dignity and possibilities of writing in languages other than Latin.

Perhaps more importantly, Petrarch transformed the love lyric by concentrating on interiority and emphasizing how one effect of the lover’s amorous stability is his internal *instability*.⁶⁸ In other words, Petrarch not only made interiority the key subject, but also described interiority as inherently unstable, in flux, and divided against itself. To do this, Petrarch invented a language of oxymoron to talk about his inner state. Sonnet 134, for example, begins “Peace I do not find, and I have no wish to make war; and I fear and hope, and burn and am of ice; and I fly above the heavens and lie on the ground; and I grasp nothing and embrace all the world.”⁶⁹

Petrarch’s sequence also provided a model for using the personal as a vehicle for displaying one’s poetic virtuosity. Although many of the poems consist of fourteen lines, divided structurally between a section of eight lines and a section of six (the form of the Petrarchan sonnet), the *Rime Sparse* contains a variety of verse forms and lengths, and the point, as Petrarch makes explicit in 61 (among other places) is his own glory: “Blessed be the many words I have scattered calling the name of my lady, and the signs and the years and the desire; and blessed be all the pages where I gain fame for her, and my thoughts, which are only of her, so that no other has part in them!” Finally, Petrarch provided a model for combining the personal with the political. Not only does he include several explicitly political poems, but he creates a parallel between the lover’s internally divided state

⁶⁸ See Giuseppe Mazzotta, “The *Canzoniere* and the Language of the Self,” and Barbara Estrin, *Laura: Uncovering Gender and Genre in Wyatt, Donne, and Marvell*, 41-90.

⁶⁹ The standard contemporary translation of Petrarch’s sequence is *Petrarch’s Lyric Poems: The “Rime Sparse” and Other Lyrics*, trans. Robert M. Durling. The Italian originals are on the facing page. All citations are to this edition.

and Italy's civil wars (see, in particular, 128, "Italia mia"). From the inception of the Petrarchan tradition, in other words, love and politics have been closely intertwined.

Strangely, however, although Petrarchan sequences were written in other languages,⁷⁰ and individual poems by Petrarch were translated or imitated in English, in particular by the "courtly makers" of the late Henrician court, Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) and Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey (1516-1547), Sir Philip Sidney is the first in England to write a full sequence of love poems that, like Petrarch's, explores a wide variety of verse forms. The introductory poem presents the reader with a metrical innovation, an English sonnet written in twelve-syllable lines (alexandrines), which are more characteristic of French verse, and the first six sonnets use different rhyme schemes and metrical patterns. In addition, Sidney scatters throughout his sequence poems that are also songs (we know from the Denny Letter that Sidney intended at least some of his verse to be set to music), although the final arrangement arrived only in Ponsonby's 1598 folio edition of Sidney's works, so it is unclear whether the order of the sequence reflects Sidney's intentions.

Like the *Rime Sparse*, *Astrophil and Stella* exhibits a certain dramatic coherence. The first 68 sonnets depict Astrophil continually begging Stella for favor and, in several, an unnamed friend rebuking Astrophil for allowing his passions to dominate his life. Starting with AS 69, Stella seems to warm to Astrophil's blandishments, but in Song 2, which follows four sonnets later, Astrophil steals a kiss from Stella while she is sleeping (there are intimations here of rape as well: "See the hand which waking guardeth, / Sleeping, grants a free resort. / Now will I invade the fort, / Cowards love with loss rewardeth" [ll. 13-16]), which

⁷⁰ Most important for Sidney would be the sequences by Pierre de Ronsard, Joachim Du Bellay, and the five other poets of the "Pléiade." This group intended to enrich the French language and literature by imitating the classical and Italian, Petrarchan poetry.

destroys any chance of a happy, if adulterous, relationship between the two. And unlike Petrarch's narrator, who concludes with a paean to the Virgin, Astrophil spends the rest of the sequence sinking even deeper into solipsistic despair. Finally, like Petrarch, Sidney explores the interior consciousness of his narrator. However, a key difference between the two sequences lies in the degree of biographical content, and this may also help explain the radical differences between the endings of the two sequences.

In all likelihood, Sidney wrote the sequence between November 1, 1581, when Penelope Devereux married Lord Rich, and the end of 1582, a period of tremendous political frustration for Sidney, as we have seen. Ironically, Walter Devereux, the Earl of Essex and Penelope's father, had on his death-bed in 1576 expressed a wish that his daughter marry Philip, but nothing came of the proposed match because at the time Sidney was still Leicester's heir and thus was much sought after by various matchmakers. Even more ironically, Leicester then married the Earl's widow, Lettice, and she gave birth to the child who (temporarily) blighted Sidney's prospects for inherited wealth, a title, and an advantageous marriage. The loss of the Leicester estates made Sidney much less marriagable, and on November 1, 1581, Penelope was married off to Lord Robert Rich, a person generally regarded as a fool—but a fool with a title and estates who certainly could provide for his wife's material comfort much better than Sidney could.

Students today are often enjoined to avoid strictly biographical readings and to concentrate on the tale, not the teller. However, there is little doubt that Sidney intended his sequence to be read autobiographically. At several points, most notably *AS* 24 and 37, Sidney viciously puns on Lord Rich's name; in *AS* 30, Sidney refers to "my father," Sir Henry Sidney, and his service in Ireland; and five of the seven books dedicated to Penelope Rich between 1594 and 1606 connect her with Astrophil, suggesting

that she happily accepted the identification.⁷¹ Consequently, *Astrophil and Stella* presents the reader with the spectacle of Sidney using verse to record his adulterous passion for Penelope Rich, but as we will see, the biographical reading can also lead us into interpretations of considerably greater complexity.

Arthur F. Marotti, in his seminal article, “Love is not Love’: Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order,” describes how the languages of love and politics often became so intertwined in Elizabeth’s court as to be virtually indistinguishable from each other. Sir Christopher Hatton, for example, wrote Elizabeth a note that sounds precisely like a lover pining for his mistress: “Madame, I find the greatest lack that ever poor wretch sustained. No death, no hell, no fear of death shall ever win of my consent so far to wrong myself again as to be absent from you one day . . . to serve you is a heaven, but to lack you is more than hell’s torment . . . Passion overcometh me. I can write no more. Love me; for I love you . . .”⁷² Elizabeth appropriated the position of a Petrarchan mistress in part as a way of controlling the various factions of her court by making a political liability—her sex—a political advantage in that her courtiers adopted the culturally approved subservient stance of a male lover seeking the favor of his lady. At the same time, the language of Petrarchan desire, which, one must always remember, remains the language of *frustrated* desire because the beloved is always aloof and rejecting, quickly took on the added duty of describing frustrated political ambition, the lover’s inability to gain his lady’s love paralleling the courtier’s inability to advance or gain his monarch’s approval.

Clearly, Sidney’s original audience would have known very well that “love” in this period often overlapped with “politics,” and they would have also been perfectly aware that

⁷¹ Howell, 182.

⁷² Quoted in Marotti, 398-99.

the author of *Astrophil and Stella* was a politically, economically, and socially disappointed young man.⁷³ But what to do with these facts remains unsettled. Whereas Marotti suggests that Astrophil's erotic defeat compromises his claim that the political world is well lost for love, Maureen Quilligan posits that Sidney used his poetry as a means of achieving the mastery that eluded him in reality: Astrophil "turns his Petrarchan abasement into authority, manipulating a character, Stella, who allows him to woo, conquer, and be rejected, and, by his manipulation of that rejection, discursively to control his own recent misfortunes in his career."⁷⁴ Anne R. Jones and Peter Stallybrass provide a third perspective, arguing that Astrophil's manipulation of Petrarchan imagery is a strategy of masculine mastery over an unruly woman.⁷⁵

The relationship between *An Apology for Poetry* and *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney's poetic *gnosis* and his *praxis*, is similarly unsettled. In the *Apology*, Sidney argues for poetry's superiority over history and philosophy on the grounds that it inspires virtuous action, and he scornfully denies the charges of the Muse-haters to the contrary. Yet in *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney's protagonist—whom he goes out of his way to identify with himself—continuously tries to seduce a married woman and even, conceivably, attempts to rape her. This is hardly the

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 400.

⁷⁴ Maureen Quilligan, "Sidney and His Queen," 189. Marotti writes that "The central irony of *Astrophil and Stella* is that the heterocosm of love to which the poet-lover has fled from the viciously competitive world of the court is no compensation for sociopolitical defeat. Instead it is the locale of a painful repetition of the experience in another mode" ("Love is not Love," 405).

⁷⁵ Jones and Stallybrass, "The Politics of *Astrophil and Stella*," 55. The work by Marotti, Quilligan, Jones, and Stallybrass is broadly influenced by the New Historicism of the 1980s. While many critics still mine this vein, others have re-emphasized the erotic rather than political aspects of Petrarchism. See, for example, Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and Its Counterdiscourses* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995) and Roger Kuin, *Chamber Music: Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Pleasure of Criticism*.

type of poetry Sidney's Right Poet would produce. In fact, this verse serves to confirm rather than deny the charges of poetry's enemies.⁷⁶

Yet alongside their differences, both *Astrophil and Stella* and the *Apology* contain similar refractions of Sidney's political life. To be sure, courtiers were supposed to include poetry among their many social graces. The perfect courtier, Baldesare Castiglione writes, should be able to turn out a properly constructed sonnet at the appropriate time, and Sidney demonstrated his aptitude for courtly verse in such compositions as his pastoral drama *The Lady of May*, presented before Elizabeth in 1578 or 1579. But it is one thing to churn out competent verse as a means of entertaining the queen while simultaneously making a plea for advancement, and quite another to devote oneself to writing verse exclusively, because that means one is not also engaging in state service. That was Sidney's dilemma in 1581-1583 when, in the absence of meaningful state employment, he devoted his energies to creating and defending literature.

Consequently, Sidney's defense of poetry is also a *self*-defense. He sees himself as "in these my not old years and idlest times, having slipped into the title of a poet" (p. 57), the cause of this slippage being Elizabeth's refusal to make use of him. One can hear Sidney's frustration with Elizabeth when he asks, at the beginning of the *digressio*, "why England, the mother of excellent minds, should be grown so hard a stepmother to poets" (p. 108)—why, in other words, Elizabeth has grown so hard to Sidney himself. One also finds throughout the *Astrophil* a sense of wasted career opportunities. In *AS* 18, for example, he exclaims:

. . . my wealth I have most idly spent.
My youth doth waste, my knowledge brings forth toys,

⁷⁶ On the other hand, the eclogues Sidney included in the two versions of the *Arcadia* seem much more along the lines of the kind of poetry Sidney praises in the *Apology*.

My wit doth strive those passions to defend
 Which for reward spoil it with vain annoys.
 I see my course to lose myself doth bend.

When the speaker complains that his wit has done nothing more worthwhile than defend his “passions,” the immediate referent is to his love for Stella, but there is also a sense in which Sidney has in mind defending poetry as well. As Sidney complains to Denny, “the un noble constitution of our time doth keep us from fit employments” (p. 211). Poetry is, in other words, *not* a fit employment—hence (perhaps) its absence from the Denny letter.

Ironically, though poetry represented for Sidney a second choice, an achievement of the left hand, as Milton would say, and though he used verse to reflect and explore the problems caused by his tense relationship with his queen (among other themes), he nonetheless produced a masterpiece that not only perfectly absorbed the continental traditions of poetic practice but also demonstrated that English verse could equal the best Latin and European poetry. Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* paved the way for the other great Elizabethan sonnet sequences, Edmund Spenser’s *Amoretti*, Michael Drayton’s *Idea’s Mirror*, and Samuel Daniel’s *Delia*, as well as for a host of others of much less distinction. Yet even as Sidney’s popular reputation as a poet burgeoned, others who knew Sidney, and perhaps had a more personal stake in tending his legend, evinced considerable anxiety about his poetic doings.

In 1594, for example, Sir Thomas Moffett, the Sidney family’s physician, wrote a biography of Sidney for the edification of Sir Philip’s young nephew. But Moffett, who knew Sidney well, alters the chronology of Sidney’s writing. Instead of having his subject write verse during the period of his political languishing, he resituates Sidney’s involvement with verse to his adolescence, and he includes poetry among the “clogs upon the mind” Sidney gave up when he “had begun to enter into the deliberations of

the commonwealth.”⁷⁷ The truth, of course, is the opposite, but evidently Moffett believed that writing the *Astrophil* could not be reconciled with his transforming Sidney into a model Protestant hero.

Sir Philip’s friend and later biographer, Fulke Greville, went one step further by avoiding all mention of Sidney’s poetic works in his combination life of Sidney and introduction to Greville’s own works, *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*. Greville does talk about Sidney’s “Arcadian Romances,” but only because he can turn them into fictional vehicles for political philosophy, warning “sovereign princes” against various crimes that will entail “the ruin of states and princes.”⁷⁸ While many after Sidney’s death praised his verse and considered him a paragon of courtly virtue, that fact needs to be balanced against the clear discomfort others evinced at Sidney’s poetic accomplishments.

The Quarrel Over Poetry: Selected Attacks and Defenses

Sidney’s *An Apology for Poetry* and *Astrophil and Stella* also intervene in the quarrel over poetry that has its origins in the mists of antiquity and continues unabated to this day. In 1904, G. Gregory Smith, the editor of the still essential collection of Elizabethan writings on and about fiction, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, began his introduction by noting that “Elizabethan criticism arose in controversy.”⁷⁹ That is to say, Elizabethan criticism in general and Sir Philip Sidney’s *Apology* answered the charges circulating throughout early modern England that poetry is lewd and—as a seventeenth-century Muse-hater memorably put it, “the mushroom conception of idle brains.”⁸⁰ Elizabeth-

⁷⁷ Thomas Moffett, *Nobilis or A View of the Life and Death of a Sidney*, 73-74, 80-81.

⁷⁸ Greville, *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*, 8.

⁷⁹ G. Gregory Smith, “Introduction,” *Elizabethan Critical Essays* vol. 1, xiv.

⁸⁰ John Melton, *A Six-Fold Politician* (1609), quoted in Russell Fraser, *The War Against Poetry*, 6.

than attacks and defenses of poetry, however, constitute but one chapter in the argument over the utility and morality of verse that for our purposes begins with Plato, although Plato himself says that the quarrel long predates him.

In order to help contextualize the *Apology's* argument and to gauge properly the nature of poetry's opposition, I have chosen a selection of attacks and defenses of poetry that collectively illustrate the chronological range and cultural centrality of musophobia. This section begins with excerpts from Plato's *Republic* and the *Laws*. In Book 2, Socrates begins his description of the ideal state by noting the importance of education in making sure that the state's inhabitants hold the "correct" ideas. This, Socrates, quickly says, means censorship, and the tales that ought to be censored are those found in Hesiod and Homer. In Book 10, Socrates returns to the matter of poetry (the control of poetry thus bracketing all the other aspects of the ideal state), only now Socrates moves from censoring the poets to banning them altogether. Plato returns to the matter of poetry in the *Laws*. Significantly, in the *Republic* Plato leaves open the possibility of poetry's defense, but in the *Laws* (a text much better known in the Renaissance than today), he forecloses this possibility altogether, suggesting that as time progressed, Plato's attitudes toward poetry hardened.

After Plato, we move to the Italian Renaissance of the fourteenth century and an excerpt from Boccaccio's influential essay on poetics, which constitutes a model for Sidney's *Apology* in that Boccaccio testifies to the existence and power of antipoetic sentiment in his era and provides some of the stock answers to their charges. While Boccaccio dismisses poetry's enemies as mere fools and antipoetic sentiment as intellectually vacuous, one also finds a distrust of fiction in such impeccable sixteenth-century humanists as Juan Luis Vives and Sir Thomas Elyot. The former, in his dialogue *Truth Dressed Up, or of Poetic License: To What Extent Poets May be Permitted to Vary from the Truth*, tries

to rein in precisely the freedom Sidney initially grants the poet's imagination; and the latter, in *The Defense of Good Women*, puts an attack on verse in the mouth of women's *defender*, making it highly unlikely that he intended these sentiments to redound to the speaker's discredit. Attacks on poetry cannot, therefore, be said to emanate exclusively from the fringe element of Renaissance culture.

While the presence of antipoetic sentiment in humanist discourse demonstrates musophobia's intellectual respectability, its appropriation by Protestant theologians made it impossible for Sidney (or any other Elizabethan who thought deeply about poetry) to ignore. The earliest Protestants attacked the Catholic Church adhering to concepts that have no Biblical warrant (such as purgatory), and therefore, according to these early Protestant polemicists, they must emanate from the imagination. In other words, the early Protestants attacked Catholic dogma as essential *fictional*. William Tyndale,⁸¹ for example, charged that Catholics "gave themselves only unto poetry, and shut up the Scripture."⁸² But if Tyndale's primary target in this quote is the Catholic valuation of tradition as at least equal to Scripture, before long before poetry itself became highly suspect. For example, a marginal note to Tyndale's translation of Genesis 47:22 glosses the Pharaoh's priests as ivy trees that "creep up little and little to compass the great trees of the world with hypocrisy, and to thrust the roots of idolatrous superstition in to them and to suck out the juice of them with their poetry."⁸³ The early re-

⁸¹ William Tyndale (1494?-1536), among the most important of the earliest English Reformers, and translator of the first English printed Bible. In his theological works, Tyndale emphasized the primacy of Scripture in deciding doctrinal matters. If something cannot be found in the Bible, Tyndale argued, then it has no value, no matter what tradition says. Tyndale and Sir Thomas More engaged in a fierce polemical battle in which More linked Tyndale with Luther as a leader of the Reformation. Tyndale's works remained influential throughout the English Renaissance, and his translation of the Bible served as a foundation for the King James Version.

⁸² Quoted in Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), 112.

formers were so identified with antipoetic sentiment that John Skelton included it among the “odious, orgolious [proud], and fly-blown opinions” refuted in “A Replication Against Certain Young Scholers Abjured of Late” (1528?):

Why have ye then disdain
 At poets, and complain
 How poets do but feign?⁸⁴

The Protestant aspect of antipoetic sentiment is represented in this volume by two excerpts from Theodore Beza, Jean Calvin’s associate and successor. The first is an amusing poem against poetry, “A Sportful Comparison between Poets and Papists,” in which Beza continues lightly brings out the parallels between the over-active imagination and Catholicism; the second is from the more serious prefatory letter to the reader for his verse drama, *The Sacrifice of Abraham*, in which Beza explicitly condemns his earlier attempts at erotic verse.

Yet alongside the attacks, the Renaissance also produced a significant body of literature defending and investigating the nature of poetry. In addition to Boccaccio’s text, the most significant statement of poetics before Sidney is Julius Caesar Scaliger’s influential *Poetics*. He is followed by Richard Willes, the first Englishman to write a treatise on poetry and whose *De Re Poetica* takes its argument almost verbatim from Scaliger, and George Puttenham, whose *Art of English Poesy* also includes a version of Queen Elizabeth’s poem, “The Doubt of Future Foes.”

This edition attempts to situate Sidney’s *Apology* and *Astrophil and Stella* within their various cultural discourses. Clearly, Sidney’s *gnosis* and *praxis*, his theory and his practice,

⁸³ William Tyndale’s *Five Books of Moses Called the Pentateuch*, ed. J. I. Mombert (Carbondale: Southern Illinois State University Press, 1967), 143.

⁸⁴ John Skelton, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. John Scattergood (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), ll. 351-353.

draw on the traditions of Petrarchism and on the poetics developed in the Italian Renaissance, but they also engage the parallel tradition of Renaissance *antipoetics*. Similarly, while Sidney's works can be read in splendid isolation of history and each other, they also draw on the specific circumstances of Sidney's life for their meaning, and they beg to be seen in dialogue with each other.

Sidney's works, in sum, embody rather than transcend their age. Although many readers from the Renaissance onward have idealized Sidney, holding him up as an exemplar of Protestant chivalry, the balance has been redressed by such literary critics as Arthur Marotti, who view Sidney's works as arising from the conditions of his political life while also engaging and representing the literary and even theological conflicts of Elizabethan England. Just as the *Apology* is no longer exclusively seen as a meditation on the themes of Italian Renaissance literary criticism, but also as a political *apologia*, so is *Astrophil and Stella* seen as drawing on the Petrarchan politics of the Elizabethan court as well as Petrarch's depictions of desire and interiority. These approaches have not reduced the texts, but rather have opened up new vistas of interpretation and previously unsuspected depths.

A Note on the Text and the Annotations

For this edition of *An Apology for Poetry*, I have collated Olney's and Ponsonby's printed versions with the Norwich manuscript, and I have consulted the list of variants in the De Lisle MS. No. 1226 in *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan Van Dorsten (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973). Significant variants, or places where Olney, Ponsonby and Norwich disagree,⁸⁵ are indicated in the

⁸⁵ Although Robert Sidney owned the De L'Isle MS. of the *Apology*, it seems to be the least reliable of the four as it contains many readings and variants not shared by the other three texts.

notes. For *Astrophil and Stella*, I have followed the order of the poems and songs established in the 1598 folio edition of Sidney's works. An accent grave marks when the reader should pronounce every syllable (e.g., "dribbèd") and apostrophes show when a syllable has been dropped (e.g., "glist'ring") in order to make the line scan. When in doing so the word is not immediately recognizable, I have given it in a note. When a three-syllable word is normally pronounced with two syllables, I have not made any marks (e.g., "ransacked"). The modernizations and the notes for Sidney's works and the Renaissance texts in "The Quarrel Over Poetry: Selected Attacks and Defenses," unless noted otherwise, are my own. For ease of reference, again unless noted otherwise, all references to Greek and Roman sources are to the Loeb Classical Library. Excerpts from Plato's *Republic* and the *Laws* are from *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New York: Pantheon, 1961). Full references to important primary and secondary sources cited in the notes can be found in the "Suggestions for Further Reading" section at the back of this volume.

THE
DEFENCE OF
Poésie.

By Sir Phillip Sidney,
Knight.



LONDON

Printed for *W*illiam Ponsonby.

1595.

A N
A P O L O G I E
for Poetrie.

Written by the right noble, vertuous, and learned, Sir Phillip Sidney, Knight.

Odi profanum vulgus, et arceo.



AT LONDON,
Printed for Henry Olney, and are to be sold at
his shop in Paules Church-yard, at the signe
of the George, neere to Cheap-gate.

Anno, 1595.

An Apology for Poetry

When the right virtuous Edward Wotton¹ and I were at the Emperor's court together, we gave ourselves to learn horsemanship of John Pietro Pugliano, one that with great commendation had the place of an esquire² in his stable. And he, according to the fertileness of the Italian wit, did not only afford us the demonstration of his practice, but sought to enrich our minds with the contemplations therein, which he thought most precious. But with none I remember mine ears were at any time more loaden,³ than when (either angered with slow payment, or moved with our learner-like admiration) he exercised his speech in the praise of his faculty. He said soldiers were the noblest estate of mankind, and horsemen the noblest of soldiers. He said they were the masters of war, and ornaments of peace, speedy goers, and strong abiders, triumphers both in camps and courts. Nay, to so unbelieved a point he proceeded as that no earthly thing bred such wonder to a prince as to be a good horseman. Skill of government was but a *pedanterid*⁴ in comparison. Then would he add certain praises by telling what a peerless beast the horse was, the only serviceable courtier without flattery, the beast of most beauty, faithfulness, courage, and such more, that if I had not been a piece of a logician before I came to him, I think he would have persuaded me to have wished myself a horse.⁵

But thus much at least, with his no few words he drove into me, that self-love is better than any gilding to make that seem

¹ Edward Wotton (1548-1626) was an English courtier and statesman. Sidney passed the winter of 1574-1575 at the court of Emperor Maximilian II in Vienna. In *AS* 30, Maximilian's rival to the elected Polish crown is called the "right king."

² An esquire or equerry is an office in charge of a nobleperson's horses and stables.

³ Loaded, or laden.

⁴ Italian for "pedantry."

⁵ The urbane joke is that Philip means "horse-lover" in Greek.

gorgeous wherein ourselves be parties.⁶ Wherein, if Pugliano's strong affection and weak arguments will not satisfy you, I will give you a nearer example of myself, who, I know not by what mischance in these my not old years and idlest times, having slipped into the title of a poet, am provoked to say something unto you in the defense of that my unelected vocation, which if I handle with more good will than good reasons, bear with me, since the scholar is to be pardoned that followeth the steps of his master.⁷

And yet I must say, that as I have just cause⁸ to make a pitiful defense of poor poetry, which from almost the highest estimation of learning is fallen to be the laughing stock of children, so have I need to bring some more available proofs, since the former is by no man barred of his deserved credit, the silly latter had even the names of philosophers used to the defacing it with great danger of civil war among the Muses. And first, truly, to all them that, professing learning, inveigh against poetry, may be justly objected that they go very near to ungratefulness to seek to deface that which in the noblest nations and languages that are known, hath been the first light-giver to ignorance and first nurse, whose whole milk little and little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges. And will they now play

⁶ Ironically, Sidney warns his reader to beware of his defense's rhetoric. On the *Apology* as a self-consuming artifact, see Margaret W. Ferguson, *Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defenses of Poetry* and Ronald Levaio, *Renaissance Minds and Their Fictions*.

⁷ Most critics and historians think that at the time Sidney wrote the *Apology* and *Astrophil and Stella*, he had probably been banished from the court by Elizabeth on account of his overly blunt disapproval of her possible marriage to the Duke of Alençon, who was not only French, but Catholic as well. Sidney's friend and mentor, Hubert Languet, wrote that Sidney withdrew from the court under "a sort of cloud." But Sidney's close friend and later biographer, Fulke Greville, claimed that Sidney did not suffer any royal disfavor or banishment. For two views of the matter, see Katherine Duncan-Jones (*Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet*, 164), who thinks it likely that Sidney left voluntarily, and Maureen Quilligan ("Sidney and his Queen," *The Historical Renaissance*, 171-96), who argues that Sidney in all likelihood was banished. See also the introduction, pp.18-24.

⁸ Ponsonby: "more just cause"; Norwich: "A just cause."

the hedgehog, that, being received into the den, drove out his host? Or rather the vipers, that with their birth kill their parents.

Let learned Greece in any of his manifold sciences be able to show me one book before Musaeus, Homer, and Hesiod,⁹ all three nothing else but poets. Nay, let any history be brought that can say any writers were there before them, if they were not men of the same skill, as Orpheus, Linus,¹⁰ and some other are named, who, having been the first of that country that made pens deliverers of their knowledge to the posterity, nay, justly challenge to be called their fathers in learning. For not only in time they had this priority (although in itself antiquity be venerable), but went before them, as causes to draw with their charming sweetness the wild untamed wits to an admiration of knowledge.

So as Amphion was said to move stones with his poetry, to build Thebes,¹¹ and Orpheus to be listened to by beasts, indeed stony and beastly people. So among the Romans were Livius, Andronicus and Ennius,¹² so in the Italian language, the first that made it aspire to be a treasure-house of science,¹³ were the

⁹ Musaeus, a mythical poet, was supposedly a pupil of Orpheus. Plato, in the *Republic*, writing on the deleterious effects poetry has on morality, asserts that both are the offspring of the moon and the Muses (bk. 2, 364e). Homer is the name traditionally given to the “author” of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (in all probability, the works were originally oral compositions, and different versions of them circulated in antiquity). Hesiod (c. 8th century B. C.) wrote the *Theogony*, a poetic treatment of the universe’s origins, as well as *Works and Days*. These three poets were commonly regarded as the first pagan theologians.

¹⁰ Orpheus, according to Greek myth and the mythographers of the Renaissance, represented poetry’s highest powers. His songs were so powerful that they even convinced Pluto, god of the underworld, to allow Orpheus to bring his beloved wife, Eurydice, back from the dead. His failure, however, to bring back his wife also signaled the limits of poetry’s powers. Linus, another legendary poet, was supposed to be Orpheus’s teacher.

¹¹ Amphion, the son of Zeus and Antiope, was credited with inventing music, which was supposed to be so powerful that it could make stones move. The legend is that he raised the walls of Thebes through his melodies.

¹² Livius Andronicus (3rd century B. C.), composed the first Latin tragedy and comedy; Ennius (239-169 B. C.), the most influential of early Latin poets, also known as the father of Roman poetry.

¹³ Knowledge.

poets Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch.¹⁴ So in our English, were Gower and Chaucer,¹⁵ after whom, encouraged and delighted with their excellent foregoing, others have followed to beautify our mother tongue, as well in the same kind as others arts. This did so notably show itself that the philosophers of Greece durst not a long time appear to the world, but under the masks of poets. So Thales, Empedocles and Parmenides sang their natural philosophy in verses.¹⁶ So did Pythagoras and Phocylides, their moral counsels.¹⁷ So did Tyrtaeus in war matters, and Solon in matters of policy,¹⁸ or rather, they being poets, did exercise their delightful vein in those points of highest knowledge which before them lay hidden to the world. For that wise Solon was directly a poet, it is manifest, having written in verse the notable fable of the Atlantic Island, which was continued by Plato.¹⁹ And truly even Plato, whosoever well considereth, shall find that in the body of his work, though the inside and strength were philosophy, the skin, as it were, and beauty depended most of

¹⁴ Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), author of *La Vita Nuova*, a series of love sonnets to Beatrice separated by prose interludes, and the *Divine Comedy*; Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) is today best known for the *Decameron*, a prose collection of 100 tales, but also the author of many other poems and prose works; Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca, 1304-1374), author of the *Rime Sparse*, an extremely influential sequence of 366 poems frequently, at times slavishly, imitated by later writers. Petrarch's lyrics are marked by their concentration upon the speaker's inner state and the use of paradox and oxymoron (e.g., freezing fire, sweet enemy). Petrarch's verse is an important model for Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* (see the introduction, pp.40-42). While all three writers also wrote in Latin, Sidney cites them here for their contributions to vernacular literature.

¹⁵ John Gower (1330-1408), author of the Latin *Vox Clamantis*, a satire dealing with the Peasant's Rebellion. His major English poem, *Confessio Amantis*, is a collection of verse stories. Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400), best known for the *Canterbury Tales*, was for Sidney's generation the most important English writer.

¹⁶ Thales (c. 6th century B. C.), wrote such "scientific" versified works as *Nautical Astronomy* and *On First Causes*; Empedocles (c. 5th century B. C.) wrote *On Nature and Purifications*, although only fragments of his works survive; Parmenides (also c. 5th century B. C.) founded the Eleatic school of philosophy and is also famous for his participation in Plato's dialogue *Parmenides*.

¹⁷ Pythagoras (c. 5th century B. C.) discovered the intervals of the musical scale and is associated with Orphic poetry; Phocylides (c. 6th century B. C.), a Greek poet whose works survive only in fragments.

¹⁸ Tyrtaeus (c. 7th century B. C.), a poet whose verse (which also survives only in fragments) supposedly so raised the morale of the Spartan forces that they won the Second

poetry. For all standeth upon dialogues wherein he feigns many honest burgesses of Athens to speak of such matters that if they had been set on the rack they would never have confessed them. Besides his poetical describing the circumstances of their meetings, as the well ordering of a banquet, the delicacy of a walk, with the interlacing mere tales, as Gyges' ring and others, which who knoweth not to be flowers of poetry, did never walk into Apollo's garden.²⁰

And even historiographers, although their lips found of things done, and verity be written in their foreheads, have been glad to borrow both fashion and perchance weight of the poets. So Herodotus entituled his history by the name of the nine Muses, and both he and all the rest that followed him either stale²¹ or usurped of poetry their passionate describing of passions, the many particularities of battles which no man could affirm. Or if that be denied me, long orations put in the mouths of great kings and captains which it is certain they never pronounced.

So that truly neither philosopher nor historiographer could at the first have entered into the gates of popular judgments if they had not taken a great passport of poetry, which in all nations at this day where learning flourisheth not is plain to be seen, in all which they have some feeling of poetry.

Messenian War. Compare Scaliger's and Gosson's positive citation of Tyrtaeus as representative of the "right use of ancient poetry" (pp. 243, 271); Solon (c. 600 B. C.), Athenian statesman and legislator who ostensibly wrote a lost epic on Atlantis.

¹⁹ See Plato, *Timaeus*, 20e ff.

²⁰ Plato recounts this legend in the *Republic*, 360b-c, and it is also found in Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.8-15 (trans. David Grene). The details of the story differ considerably. In Plato, Gyges is a shepherd who finds a magic ring that renders the bearer invisible after an earthquake. He then seduces the king's wife, murders the king, and possesses his kingdom. In Herodotus, the king makes Gyges view his wife naked. But the queen catches Gyges, and then forces him to kill her husband and take over the kingdom. He does so and rules successfully. For both writers Gyges represents the archetypal tyrant whose crimes go unpunished, so Sidney's example detracts from rather than supports his brief in poetry's favor. The speaker's allusion to the Tale of Gyges thus proves how self-interest leads to "strong affection and weak arguments."

²¹ Stole.

In Turkey, besides their law-giving divines, they have no other writers but poets. In our neighbor country, Ireland, where truly, learning goes very bare,²² yet are their poets held in a devout reverence. Even among the most barbarous and simple Indians where no writing is, yet have they their poets who make and sing songs, which they call “areytos,” both of their ancestors’ deeds and praises of their gods.²³ A sufficient probability that if ever learning come among them, it must be by having their hard dull wits softened and sharpened with the sweet delights of poetry, for until they find a pleasure in the exercises of the mind, great promises of much knowledge will little persuade them that know not the fruits of knowledge. In Wales, the true remnant of the ancient Britons, as there are good authorities to show the long time they had poets, which they called “bards,” so through all the conquests of Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans, some of whom did seek to ruin all memory of learning from them, yet do their poets even to this day last. So as it is not more notable in soon beginning than in long continuing. But since the authors of most of our sciences²⁴ were the Romans, and before them the Greeks, let us a little stand upon their authorities, but even so far as to see what names they have given unto this now-scorned skill.

Among the Romans a poet was called *vates*, which is as much as a diviner, a foreseer or prophet, as by his conjoined words *vaticinium* and *vaticinari* is manifest, so heavenly a title did that excellent people bestow upon this heart-ravishing knowledge, and so far were they carried into the admiration thereof, that they thought in the chanceable hitting upon any such verses great foretokens of their following fortunes were placed. Whereupon

²² The English usually viewed the Irish as uncivilized barbarians. Henry Sidney, Sir Philip’s father, was the viceroy in Ireland (see *AS* 30, “How Ulster likes of that same golden bit, / Wherewith my father once made it half tame”). Sidney also wrote his letter to Edward Denny on the occasion of his friend’s going to Ireland to help subdue it.

²³ This information comes from Peter Martyr’s *Decades*, which appeared as part of Richard Eden’s *History of the West Indies* (1555).

²⁴ Branches of knowledge.

grew the word of *sortes Virgilianae*, when by sudden opening Virgil's book they lighted upon some verse of his, whereof the histories of the emperors are full: as of Albinus, the governor of our island, who in his childhood met this verse,

*Arma amens capio, nec sat rationis in armis,*²⁵

and in his age performed it.²⁶ Which although it were a very vain and godless superstition,²⁷ as also it was to think spirits were commanded by such verse, whereupon this word, "charms," derived of *carmina*, cometh, so yet serveth it to show the great reverence those wits were held in. And altogether not without ground, since both the oracles of Delphos and Sybilla's prophecies were wholly delivered in verses, for that same exquisite observing of number and measure in the words, and that high flying liberty of conceit proper to the poet did seem to have some divine force in it.²⁸

And may not I presume a little farther to show the reasonableness of this word, *vates*, and say that the holy David's Psalms are a divine poem?²⁹ If I do, I shall not do it without the testimony of great learned men both ancient and modern. But even the name of Psalms will speak for me, which, being interpreted, is nothing but songs, then that it is fully written in meter, as all learned Hebricians agree, although the rules be not

²⁵ "Madly I seized my arms, although there was little reason in arms" (*Aeneid*, 2.314). The quotation is from Aeneas's description of Troy's fall. Virgil (70-19 B. C.), considered the greatest Roman poet, and author of the *Eclogues*, the *Georgics*, and the *Aeneid*, an epic concerning the founding of Lavinium (parent town of Rome) by Aeneas, a Trojan who, under divine guidance, fled Troy's burning ruins on this epic quest. The importance and influence of the *Aeneid* in the early modern period cannot be overstated.

²⁶ The reference is ironic. Albinus, encouraged by supposedly prophetic signs, marched on Rome in a vain attempt to become emperor and was killed in 197 A. D.

²⁷ Sidney's undercutting his argument is characteristic of both the *Apology's* irony and the problematic place of pagan literature within Christian culture.

²⁸ Later in the *Apology* Sidney will say "that it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet ... but it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by" (p. 69). Note also that Sidney says the pagan prophecies *seem* to have divine force in them.

²⁹ On Sidney and the Psalms, see Anne Lake Prescott, "King David as a 'Right Poet': Sidney and the Psalmist."

yet fully found. Lastly and principally, his handling his prophecy, which is merely poetical. For what else is the awaking his musical instruments, the often and free changing of persons, his notable *prosopopoeias*,³⁰ when he maketh you, as it were, see God coming in his majesty, his telling of the beasts' joyfulness, and hills leaping, but a heavenly poesy, wherein almost he showeth himself a passionate lover of the unspeakable and everlasting beauty, to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith? But truly, now having named him, I fear me I seem to profane that holy name, applying it to poetry, which is among us thrown down to so ridiculous an estimation.³¹ But they that with quiet judgments will look a little deeper into it shall find the end and working of it such, as being rightly applied, deserveth not to be scourged out of the church of God.

But now let us see how the Greeks have named it, and how they deemed of it. The Greeks called him a "poet," which name hath, as the most excellent, gone through other languages, it cometh of this word, *poiein*, which is, "to make," wherein I know not whether by luck or wisdom, we Englishmen have met with the Greeks in calling him a "maker." Which name, how high and incomparable a title it is, I had rather were known by marking the scope of other sciences than by my partial allegation.

³⁰ In *The Art of English Poesy* (1589), George Puttenham gives this definition: "But if ye will feign any person with such features, qualities and conditions, or if ye will attribute any human quality, as reason or speech, to dumb creatures or other insensible things, and do study, as one may say, to give them a human person, it is ... *prosopopeia*, because it is by way of fiction, and no prettier examples can be given to you thereof, than in the Romant of the rose translated out of French by Chaucer [Jean de Meun and Guillaume de Lorris's *Roman de la Rose*], describing the persons of avarice, envie, old age, and many others, whereby much morality is taught" (3.246).

³¹ Compare Sidney's description of poetry's dismal situation to the excerpt from Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* describing how poets have "now become contemptible." See also Edmund Spenser's *October Eclogue*, from *The Shepherd's Calender* (1579), in which Piers complains of the decline of poetry's fortunes, as well as the *Tears of the Muses* (1591).

There is no art delivered to mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object,³² without which they could not consist, and on which they so depend as they become actors and players, as it were, of what nature will have set forth. So doth the Astronomer look upon the stars, and by that he seeth, set down what order nature hath taken therein. So doth the geometrician and arithmetician in their divers sorts of quantities. So doth the musician in times tell you which by nature agree, which not. The natural philosopher standeth upon the natural virtues, vices, or passions of man. And follow nature, saith he therein, and thou shalt not err. The lawyer saith what men have determined. The historian, what men have done. The grammarian speaketh only of the rules of speech, and the rhetorician and logician considering what in nature will soonest prove, and persuade, thereon give artificial rules which still are compassed within the circle of a question, according to the proposed manner. The physician weigheth the nature of a man's body and the nature of things helpful or hurtful unto it. And the metaphysic, though it be in the second and abstract notions, and therefore be counted supernatural, yet doth he indeed build upon the depth of nature.

Only the poet, disdainful to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the heroes, demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like. So as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit.³³ Nature never set forth the earth in

³² Throughout this section, Sidney genders nature as feminine and the "arts" as masculine. The relationship between the two reflects the notion (expressed in such official documents as "The Homily on Marriage" [1573]) that men were inherently superior to women. This theory, however, was frequently challenged in both print and reality. On the importance of gender, see Mary Ellen Lamb, "Apologizing for Pleasure in Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*."

³³ Compare *AS* 1, 3 and 6. Sidney's view of poetic freedom contrasts with the excerpt from Vives, *Truth Dressed Up*.

so rich tapestry as divers poets have done, neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too-much-loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen,³⁴ the poets only deliver a golden.

But let those things alone and go to man, for whom as the other things are, so it seemeth in him her uttermost cunning, and know whether she have brought forth so true a lover as Theagenes, so constant a friend as Pylades, so valiant a man as Orlando, so right a prince as Xenophon's Cyrus, so excellent a man every way as Virgil's Aeneas.³⁵ Neither let this be jestingly conceived, because the works of the one be essential, the other in imitation or fiction; for any understanding knoweth the skill of each artificer standeth in that *Idea*, or fore-conceit, of the work, and not in the work itself.³⁶ And that the poet hath that *Idea* is manifest by delivering them forth in such excellency as he hath imagined them, which delivering forth also is not wholly imaginative, as we are wont to say, by them that build castles in the air, but so far substantially it worketh, not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency, as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him.

Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature, but rather give right honor to the heavenly Maker of that maker,

³⁴ Brass.

³⁵ Theagenes is the hero of a Greek prose romance, *Theagenes and Chariclea*, by Heliodorus (c. 4th century, A. D.); Pylades is Orestes' friend, and in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, he helps Orestes avenge the murder of his father, Agamemnon, by his mother, Clytemnestra; Orlando is the hero of Ariosto's epic romance, *Orlando Furioso*, which Sir John Harington was to translate into English in 1591; Xenophon (c. 5th century B. C.), described the education of Cyrus, who founded the Achaemenid Persian Empire, in his *Cyropaedia*. Both Cyrus and Aeneas, the hero of the *Aeneid*, Virgil's epic on Rome's origins, constituted models of virtuous leaders.

³⁶ For help with this very tricky concept, see A. Leigh DeNeef, *Spenser and the Motives of Metaphor*, ch. 1.

who, having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature. Which in nothing he showeth so much as in poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth surpassing her doings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam, since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it.

But these arguments will by few be understood, and by fewer granted. Thus much, I hope, will be given me: that the Greeks with some probability of reason gave him the name above all names of learning.

Now let us go to a more ordinary opening of him, that the truth may be the more palpable, and so I hope, though we get not so unmatched a praise as the etymology of his names will grant, yet his very description, which no man will deny, shall not justly be barred from a principal commendation.

Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in this word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth, to speak metaphorically.³⁷ A speaking picture, with this end—to teach and delight.³⁸

Of this have been three general kinds, the chief both in antiquity and excellency were they that did imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God. Such were David in his Psalms,

³⁷ This definition of poetry as imitating nature differs significantly from Sidney's first view of poetry as independent of and superior to nature. Although this concept is a Renaissance commonplace, it originates in Aristotle's assertion that poetry originated in imitation and is therefore an essentially imitative art (*Poetics* 1448b-1450a). All three sources give different versions of what is modified by "metaphorically: Ponsonby: "or figuring forth to speak metaphorically. A speaking picture . . ."; Olney: "or figuring forth: to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture . . ."; Norwich: "or figuring forth to speak. Metaphorically, a speaking picture . . ." I am grateful to Anne Lake Prescott for alerting me to these variants.

³⁸ Horace (65-8 B. C.), contemporary of Virgil, celebrated Roman poet, author of verse essays (*Satires, Epistles*, and the *Art of Poetry*) and lyric poetry (*Odes and Epodes*). The notion that poetry should "teach and delight" is a Renaissance commonplace; it originates in Horace's *Ars Poetica* (*The Art of Poetry*): "He has won every vote who has blended profit with pleasure" (l.343).

Solomon in his Song of Songs, in his Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs.³⁹ Moses and Deborah, in their hymns, and the writer of Job, which beside other, the learned Emanuel Tremelius, and Franciscus Junius,⁴⁰ do entitle the poetical part of the Scripture, against these none will speak that hath the Holy Ghost in due holy reverence. In this kind, though in a full-wrong divinity, were Orpheus, Amphion, Homer in his hymns, and many other, both Greeks and Romans. And this poesy must be used by whosoever will follow Saint James's counsel in singing Psalms when they are merry,⁴¹ and I know is used with the fruit of comfort by some when, in sorrowful pangs of their death-bringing sins, they find the consolation of the never-leaving goodness.

The second kind is of them that deal with matters philosophical, either moral, as Tyrtaeus, Phocylides, Cato;⁴² or natural, as Lucretius, and Virgil's *Georgics*;⁴³ or astronomical, as Manilius and Pontanus;⁴⁴ or historical, as Lucan.⁴⁵ Which, who mislike, the fault is in their judgment quite out of taste, and not in the sweet food of sweetly uttered knowledge.

But because this second sort is wrapped within the fold of the proposed subject, and takes not the course of his own invention, whether they properly be poets or no, let grammarians dispute, and go to the third, indeed Right Poets, of whom chiefly this question ariseth. Betwixt whom and these second is such a kind of difference as betwixt the meaner sort of paint-

³⁹ Solomon was reputed to be the author of these three books of the Hebrew Bible.

⁴⁰ Tremelius and Junius together produced a Latin translation of the Bible that was printed in Frankfurt in 1575.

⁴¹ "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms" (James 5:13).

⁴² Dionysus Cato (4th century, A. D.), author of the *Distichs*, an important source of moral lore often used in education.

⁴³ Lucretius (c. 99-50 B. C.), author of the scientific poem, *De Rerum Natura* (*On the Nature of Things*); Virgil's *Georgics*, ostensibly about farming, also concern politics.

⁴⁴ Manilius (1st century, A. D.) wrote the *Astronomica*; Giovanni Pontano (1426-1503) also wrote an astronomical poem, *Urania*.

⁴⁵ Lucan (39-65 A. D.), author of the *Pharsalia*, an unfinished republican epic on the Roman civil wars.

ers, who counterfeit only such faces as are set before them, and the more excellent, who, having no law but wit, bestow that in colors upon you which is fittest for the eye to see, as the constant though lamenting look of Lucretia, when she punished in her self another's fault,⁴⁶ wherein he painted not Lucretia, whom he never saw, but painteth the outward beauty of such a virtue.

For these third be they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate, borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be, but range only reined with learned discretion into the divine consideration of what may be and should be.⁴⁷ These be they that as the first and most noble may justly be termed *vates*, so these are waited on in the excellentest languages and best understanding with the fore-described name of poets. For these indeed do merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach, and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand which, without delight, they would fly as from a stranger, and teach to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved. Which being the noblest scope to which ever any learning was directed, yet want there not idle tongues to bark at them.⁴⁸

These be subdivided into sundry more special denominations. The most notable be the heroic, lyric, tragic, comic, satiri-

⁴⁶ Lucretia, a very beautiful Roman wife, was raped by Tarquin, whose father was king of Rome. She committed suicide, even though her husband held her blameless, and her rape led to the expulsion of the ruling Tarquin dynasty and to the Roman hatred of monarchy (Livy, *Early History of Rome*, 1.57-58). Shakespeare versified this story in *The Rape of Lucrece*. On the political importance of this event for Renaissance thought, see Stephanie H. Jed, *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism*.

⁴⁷ The Right Poet charts a middle course between ranging "freely" and imitation, between following nature and being independent of nature.

⁴⁸ Stephen Gosson, whose *School of Abuse* Sidney sets out to rebut in the *Apology*, gives a remarkably similar definition of poetry's proper function: "The right use of ancient poetry was to have the notable exploits of worthy captains, the wholesome counsels of good fathers, and virtuous lives of predecessors set down in numbers, and sung to the instrument at solemn feasts, that the sound of the one might draw the hearers from kissing the cup too often, the sense of the other put them in mind of things past, and chalk out the way to do the like" (pp. 270-71).

cal, iambic, elegiac, pastoral, and certain others, some of these being termed according to the matter they deal with, some by the sorts of verse they liked best to write in, for indeed, the greatest part of poets have appeared their poetical inventions in that numbrous kind of writing which is called “verse.”⁴⁹ Indeed but appeared, being but an ornament and no cause to poetry, since there have been many most excellent poets that never versified, and now swarm many versifiers that need never answer to the name of poets.

For Xenophon, who did imitate so excellently as to give us *effigiem justi imperii*, the portraiture of a just empire, under the name of Cyrus, as Cicero saith of him,⁵⁰ made therein an absolute heroical poem. So did Heliodorus, in his sugared invention of that picture of love in Theagenes and Chariclea. And yet both these wrote in prose, which I speak to show that it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet—no more than a long gown maketh an advocate, who, though he pleaded in armor, should be an advocate and no soldier—but it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by. Although indeed the senate of poets hath chosen verse as their fittest rainment, meaning, as in matter, they passed all in all, so in manner to go beyond them, not speaking table-talk fashion, or like men in a dream, words as they chanceably fall from the mouth, but peising⁵¹ each syllable of each word by just proportion, according to the dignity of the subject.

⁴⁹ The kind of writing that follows meter.

⁵⁰ “Only a really great man, gentle by nature and cultivated to the highest pursuits, can so behave himself in a position of such power that those under his rule desire no other person than him. Such a one was Cyrus, as described by Xenophon, not according to historical truth, but as the pattern of a just ruler; in him the philosopher created a matchless blend of firmness and courtesy” (Cicero, *Epistles to His Brother Quintus*, 1.1.23 ff.; *Cicero’s Letters to His Friends*, trans. B. R. Shackleton Bailey.

⁵¹ Weighing.