

## Apologie for poetry

Author- Sir Philip Sidney

### About the author

Born - 1554

Died - 1586

Age - Elizabethan Age

Place - England

Parents - Father – Henry Sidney Mother – Mary Dudley

King Charles IX made Sidney "**Baron de Sidency**" in 1572. He was made **cupbearer at Queen Elizabeth's court**. He was a **special embassy from Queen Elizabeth** to the family of Maximilian II of Austria following the emperor's death.

Spenser wrote a pastoral elegy, **Astrophel** on the death of Sir Philip Sidney

An epitaph of Sir Philip Sidney: "England has his body, for she it fed; Netherlands his blood, in her defence shed; The Heavens have his soul, The Arts have his fame, The soldier his grief, The world his good name."

### Works

**Astrophel and Stella** – long sonnets – written in petrarchan octave

It earned him the title of '**English Petrarch**' and prince among Elizabethan lyric writers and sonnetcers'. This is a **collection of 108 sonnets and eleven songs**.

**Arcadia** – Pastoral romance similar to Mores utopia

Poets of his day followed one of the two method (i) Invention, (ii) Imitation.

**Apologie for poetry**- critical work

### About the work

Sidney states, "Having slipped into the title of a poet, [I] am provoked to say something unto you in the Early in "The Defence of Poesy," defense of that my unelected vocation".

It was **written approximately in 1580** and first published in **1595, after his death** by two separate printers.

**William Ponosby publication** was called The Defence of Poesie and

**Henry Olney** publication was called *An Apologie for Poetrie*.

It is a **reply or response to anti-dramatic book of Gossoon's school of abuse.**

Stephen Gosson dedicated his **attack on the English stage, *The School of Abuse*** in 1579. **The work also offers important comments on Edmund Spenser and the Elizabethan stage.**

**About:** It reflects Sidney's Protestantism.

Sidney sets out to defend "poor poetry" against its attackers and to argue positively, whose "final end of poetry is to lead and draw us to as high perfection as our degenerate souls and the best vehicle for the "purifying of wit."

### **Summary**

Sidney begins with **an exordium, or introduction**, the narratio, the partition, the confirmatio, the refutatio, and the peroration, composition terms as **introduction, narration, partition, arguments, refutation, and conclusion.**

He tells an anecdote about horse-riding. Sidney and Edward Wotton were at the Emperor's court in Vienna in 1574.

They learned horsemanship from **the officer in-charge of the royal stables John Pietro Pugliano, an Italian wit.**

**Horsemanship was primary importance and skill in Government is secondary importance to a prince.**

Pugliano praised the horse as a peerless beautiful, faithful and courageous animal. He said **soldiers were the noblest estate of mankind, and horsemen are the noblest of soldiers.** He said horses were the **masters of war and ornaments of peace, speedy goers and strong abiders, triumphers.**

Sidney says humorously that Pugliano himself wanted to become a horse.

**Sidney learned a lesson from him that a 'man should love his own profession.** He decided to write **in praise of his own profession of a poet.**

Poetry has earned a bad name and disrespected by many of Sidney's contemporaries.

So Sidney sets out to **restore poetry to its rightful place among the arts.** He wanted to defend the profession of a poet and poetry.

Sidney articulates a theory of poetry as a tool for teaching virtue and the poet as a semi-divine figure capable of imagining a more perfect version of nature.

He says that Poetry is the oldest and the earliest form of a composition.

He attempts to raise poetry above the criticism and to establish it as the highest of the arts, best fitted both to please and to instruct as stated by Horace in his 'Ars poetica'.

Sidney weighs the respective merits of philosophy, history and poetry as teachers of virtue in the first part of Defence of Poesie and in the second part, the state of English literature soon after 1580.

Orpheus and Linus have been made pens deliver of their knowledge to their posterity. They may be called their fathers in learning.

Albinus, the governor of his island, in his childhood learned this verse, "Arma menscipio, nec sat rationis in armis", (Angered, I take up arms, but reason does not lie in arms). It was a very vain and godless superstition.

The word charms, derived of *carmina* show the great reverence those wits were held in, and altogether not without ground.

The oracles of Delphos and Sibylla's prophecies were wholly delivered in verses.

Sidney's says poetry was the "first light-giver to ignorance". The first great works of science, philosophy, history, and even law were poems.

The "ethical science arranges the elements which poetry has created". Poetry leads to a moral civil life, poetry acts in a way that "awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought".

Aristotle writes that *praxis*, human action is tantamount to *gnosis*, knowledge. Action relates to experience. Sidney followed Aristotle.

Poet must move men to virtuous action. Poetry can lead to virtuous action.

Poetry is a moral power. Poetry encourages the reader to evaluate virtuous models.

Sidney writes that there "is no art delivered to mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object". The poet then does not depart from

external nature. His works are "imitation" or "fiction" made of the materials of nature, and are shaped by the artist's vision.

His central premise, as was that of Socrates in *Plato's Republic*, is that poetry is an art of imitation, that is, a "representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth" not unlike a "speaking picture". Sidney consciously defends fiction

Sidney's doctrine presents the poet as creator.

In the noblest nations and languages poetry has been the first light-giver to ignorance, and first nurse, whose milk by little and little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges.

Lirius Andronicus and Ennius were great Roman poets.

Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch are great Italian poets.

Gower and Chaucer were were great English poets.

In Greece Musseus, Homer and Hesiod were great poets. Amphion is said to have moved stones with his poetry to build Thebes, Orpheus was listened to buy beasts and stony- hearted people. Homer's Ulysses, Achilles and Ajax personify valour, anger and wisdom respectively.

Thales, Empedocles and Permenides wrote their natural philosophy in verse.

The moral councils of Phythogoras and Phocylides, the war matters of Tyrtacus, the matters of policy of Solomon were all given in verse.

Solomon had given the fables of Atlantic Island in verse.

Plato followed this method in his 'Republic' Plato was also a poet. He used poetry to teach his philosophy. Plato's "Dialogues" are the masterpieces of poetry.

The early writers of history used the fashion and manner of poets. Historians deal with truth and reality, but poets with fiction. Herodotus was a great historian.

Poets are honoured in Ireland. The Red Indians loved and respected Poets. The Indians sing song in praise of their ancestors' deeds and their gods. They call the songs 'Areytos'

The poet can embody the philosopher's "wordish descriptions" of virtue in compelling characters or stories. They are more pleasurable to read and easier to understand and remember, like Aesop's *Fables*. The poet should therefore be considered the "right popular philosopher." Examples of virtue, like Aeneas from Virgil's *Aeneid*. Poetry can "move" readers to act virtuously. Sidney writes, reading poetry about virtue is like taking a "medicine of cherries."

Darius's faithful servant Zopyrus severed his own nose and ears to persuade the Babylonians that he was a traitor, "you shall save your nose by the bargain."

Poets were given in Latin and Greek, *vates* and *poietes*. *Vates* means "seer" or "prophet," and in the classical world, poetry was considered to convey important knowledge about the future.

*Poietes* means *maker*, and this title reflects the fact that poets, like God, create new and more perfect realities using their imaginations.

The Romans called poet 'Vates'. It means 'a diviner, a foreseer or a prophet'. Holy David's Psalms are divine poems.

The Greeks called a poet 'maker'. The origin of the word poet is 'poiein'. It means 'to make'.

Englishmen also called the poet 'a maker'.

All arts imitate nature. The poet makes the beautiful earth lovelier. Sidney says, "Poetry is an art of imitation". Aristotle called poetry "Mimesis." It means "a representing, counterfeiting or figuring forth". Metamorphically speaking it means a speaking picture.

There are three broad divisions of poetry. They are Religious Poetry, Philosophical or Moral Poetry and Right Poetry or Imaginative Poetry

**Religious Poetry:** - In religious poetry the poets imitate the incomparable virtues of god. Examples: David's 'Psalms', Solomon's 'Song of Songs and proverbs', 'the hymns of Moses' and Deborah'

**Philosophical or Moral Poetry:** Philosophical poetry deals with philosophical matters or moral or natural or astronomical or historical. Tyrtaeus, Phocylides, and Cato were moral poets.

**Right Poetry or Imaginative Poetry:** This Right kind of poetry is an imaginative treatment of Life and nature. Sidney moves up the hierarchy of genres from the lowest to the highest, discussing pastoral, elegy, comedy, lyric, and epic or heroic

Epic is "the best and most accomplished kind of poetry."

The greatest part of poets has clothed their poetical inventions in verse. **Therefore verse (metre) is an ornament of poetry.**

**The philosopher is inferior to poet**

**The Pastoral** shows the misery of the people and the hard lords or greedy soldiers.

**The Elegiac** moves the heart with pity.

**The Iambic** rubs the galled mind, by directly and openly attacking wickedness.

**The Satiric, supportively makes a man laugh at folly.**

**The Lyric** with his well-turned lyre and well accorded voice praises virtuous acts.

The heroic or **epic poetry** portrays the life and actions of such heroes as Achilles, Cyrus, Turnus, Tydeus and Rinaldo.

**Poetry purifies our wit and enriches our memory. The poet is supreme because he delights us and moves us to virtuous action. He is not only a giver of knowledge but also an improver and reformer of men and manners.**

He cites Homer's demonstration of wisdom personified in Ulysses.

**The natural philosopher thereon has his name, and the moral philosopher stands upon the natural virtues, vices, and passions of man; and "follow nature." He says, "therein, and thou shalt not err."**

**The philosopher teacheth, but he teacheth obscurely. Aristotle, in his discourse of Poesy,** says that it is more philosophical and more studiously serious than history.

Aristotle said it is not gnosis (knowing) but praxis (knowing/acting) must be the fruit in Ethics.

**The lawyer says what men have determined, the historian what men have done. The grammarian speaks only of the rules of speech, and the rhetorician and logician, considering what in nature will soonest prove and persuade,**

thereon give artificial rules. **The lawyer lies under the names of John of the Stile, and John of the Nokes.**

**The astronomer, with his cousin the geometrician, can hardly escape when they take upon them to measure the height of the stars.** The **physicians lie, when they aver things good for sicknesses,** which afterwards send Charon a great number of souls drowned in a potion before they come to his ferry.

**Painting men cannot leave men nameless. We see we cannot play at chess but that we must give names to our chess-men.**

**The physician weighs the nature of man.**

**The metaphysicis counted supernatural, build upon the depth of nature.**

**The historian is superior to a moral philosopher.** The philosopher **teaches by precepts; the historian teaches by examples. The poet is a moderator. He is superior to the historian and to the moral philosopher and much more superior to the other survey sciences.** The Historian, philosopher, Poet and lawyer deal with men's manners. **The lawyer cannot equal the other three.** Therefore the other three alone are to be judged and compared.

Aristotle has said In 'Poetics' that **Poetry gives the reason and says, "Poetry deals with Universal.**

The historian does not present poetic justice but the poet does. The poet "excelleth History"

God has given us hands to write and wits to conceive." Poets were the keepers of the Greek divinities; with Pietro Bembo that poets first brought civility to mankind; with Joseph Justus Scaliger that poetry will sooner make an honest man than philosophy; with the German Conrad Clauser that in fables poets communicated "all knowledge, logic, rhetoric, and philosophy natural and moral.

Nature never set forth the earth in 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 lovelier; her world is brazen; **the poets only deliver a golden.**

Nature has brought forth so true a lover as Theagenes; so **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 Æneas**? The works of the one be essential, the other in imitation or fiction.

It is not wholly imaginative, as we are wont to say by them that build castles in the air; but so far substantially it works, 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.

**Poesy is an art of imitation. Aristotle terms it *mimēsis*** that is a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth; to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture, with this end,—to teach and delight.

Some critics call poetry “rhyming and versing” They ridicule poetry for this reason. **Sidney says that Rhyming and versing are an admirable and praise-worthy part of it.**

**Versifying helps memory and makes reading profitable.** It is the best **medium for storing knowledge in the mind.**

**There are two sorts of versifying, the one ancient, and the other modern.** The ancient marked **the quantity of each syllable, and according to that framed his verse**; the modern observing only number, with some regard of **the accent**, the chief life of it standeth in that like sounding of the words, which we call rime.

Sidney examines the four specific charges against by puritan critics like Stephen Gossoons

- 1. Poetry is the waste of time.**
- 2. Poetry is mother of lies.**
- 3. It is nurse of abuse.**
- 4. Plato had rightly banished the poets from his ideal world**

Sidney says that **man's wit abuses poetry**

**Poetry is the waste of time.**

**Poetry is the source of knowledge and a civilizing force. Gossoon attacks that it corrupts the people and it is the waste of time, but Sidney says that no**

**learning is so good as that which teaches and moves to virtue and that** nothing can both teach and amuse so much as poetry does. In essay societies, **poetry was the main source of education.** Ancient Greek society respected poets.

Sidney devotes more of his survey of English literature to drama than to poetry. He possessed an instinctive sense of dramatic structure, as *The Lady of May* demonstrates.

Thomas Nashe has been impressed by the dramatic character of *Astrophil and Stella*, and the first version of *Arcadia* is divided into acts. In a passage rife with implications for *Astrophil and Stella*, he complains of the wooden language of so many love poets who, "if I were a mistress, would never persuade me they were in love."

Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton's *Gorboduc*, the first English tragedy in blank verse, endorses with qualifications, and the tragedies of his friend George Buchanan.

**Sackville's Gorboduc is noted for its stately speeches and notable morality"**

Sidney dismisses the rest of English drama for "observing rules neither of honest civility nor skillful poetry." He criticizes English playwrights for failing to observe the rigid program of unities (time, place, and action

He praises ancient exemplars such as Terence (*Eunuchus*), Plautus (*Captivi* and *Amphitruo*), and Euripides (*Hecuba*). So, poetry is not waste of time.

The second charge, **Poetry is mother of lies.**

Sidney answers that **poet does not lie because he never arms that his fiction is true and can never lie.** The **poetic truths are ideal and universal.** Therefore, poetry cannot be a mother of lies.

**But no pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the Vantage ground of truth and to see the errors and wanderings ..... in the vale below"**.

**The third charge -It is nurse of abuse**

**Sidney rejects that poetry is the source of abuses.** It is **people who abuses poetry**, not the vice- versa. Abuses are more nursed by philosophy and **history than by poetry, by describing battles, bloodshed, violence** etc. On the contrary, poetry **helps to maintain morality and peace** by avoiding such violence and bloodsheds. **Moreover it brings light to knowledge.**

**The poet “doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet prospect into the way as will entice any man to enter into it.”**

**The pastoral can arouse sympathy** for the wretchedness of the poor or illustrate civil wrongs in fables about sheep and wolves; **satire makes one laugh at folly and thus reform. Comedy has been disgraced by “naughty play-makers and stage-keepers,”** Satire is valuable for the ridicule it casts upon people’s faults, which people scorn as they laugh. Tragedy is stirring up feelings of wonder and pity, it “teacheth.

**Sidney is against tragic-comedy.** The plays are neither right tragedies nor right comedies. He remarks, is guilty of promiscuously "mingling kings and clowns" and "hornpipes and funerals."

**The fourth charge-Plato had rightly banished the poets from his ideal world**

**Plato found fault with the poets of his time because they filled the world with wrong opinions of the gods.**

The three wings of poetry are **Art, imitation and Exercise.**

Sidney’s Advocacy of the **three Unities are Place, Time and Action.** Sidney wants **tragedy to be tied down to the laws of Poesy not of History.**

Sidney appeals to his readers not to laugh at the name of ‘poets and poetry.’ **Poets are beloved of Gods.**

It was found that the astronomer, looking to the stars, might fall into a ditch, that the inquiring philosopher might be blind in himself, and the mathematician might draw forth a straight line with a crooked heart; sciences, have each a private end in themselves, so yet are they all directed to the highest end of the mistress knowledge, The Greeks called architecton like, the poet is worthy to have it before any other competitors.

Sophocles bring Ajax on a stage, killing and whipping sheep and oxen, thinking them the army of Greeks, with their chieftains Agamemnon and Menelaus.

**Chaucer’s Pandar so expressed that we now use their names to signify their trades.**

**According to the human conceit, our poet is the monarch. Sydney calls the poet who seeks praise by dispraising others, as mysomousoi, poet-haters. They are full of a very idle easiness.**

**Ovid's verse,**

**Ut lateat virtus proximitate mali,**

**“that good lie hid in nearness of the evil,”**

**Agrippa will be as merry in showing the vanity of science, as Erasmus was in commending of folly.**

It is already said that, it is not riming and versing that maketh poesy. One may be a poet without versing, and a versifier without poetry.

**Music is the most divine striker of the senses. Reading be foolish without remembering, memory being the only treasurer of knowledge,** those words which are fittest for memory are likewise most convenient for knowledge.

**Poetry is the freest from this objection, for poetry is the companion of the camps.**

**Orlando Furioso or honest King Arthur** will never displease a soldier.

**Turks and Tartars are delighted with poets.**

**Alexander left his schoolmaster,** living Aristotle behind him.

**In Euripides' verses,** many Athenians had their lives saved of the Syracusans, where the Athenians themselves thought many philosophers unworthy to live.

One should read **Phædrus or Symposium in Plato,** or the **Discourse of Love in Plutarch,** and see whether any poet do authorize abominable filthiness, as they do.

**Alexanders, Cæsars, Scipios, are all favorers of poets; Lælius, called the Roman Socrates,** himself a poet, so as part of Heautontimoroumenos in Terence was supposed to be made by him.

**Aristotle writes the Art of Poesy.** Plutarch teaches with guards of poesy.

**Chaucer did excellently in his Troilus and Cressida. The Mirror for Magistrates is a collection of English poems from the Tudor period** by various authors which retell the lives and the tragic ends of various historical figures.

The **Earl of Surrey's lyrics are many things tasting of a noble birth**, and worthy of a noble mind. "Songs and sonnets," direct toward the Platonic end of "singing the praises of immortal beauty:

**The Shepherd's Calendar hath much poetry** in his eclogues, indeed worthy the reading.

**Horace said, begin abovo, but thee must come to the principal point of that one action which they will represent.**

**The French in his whole language hath not one word that hath his accent in the last syllable saving two, called antepenultima (last but one). The English is subject to none of these defects.**

**French named the last syllable the masculine rime**, but still in **the next to the last, which the French call the female**, or the next before that, which the Italians term **sdruccio**(slide).

**Thomas Campbell concludes that Sidney's life was "poetry in action".**

**William Stigant wrote that "Sidney's real poem was his life, and his teaching was his example".**

### **Important lines**

1. "...the poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth."
2. "...music, I say, the most divine striker of the senses..."
3. "If you have so earth-creeping a mind that it cannot lift itself up to look to the sky of poetry...thus much curse I must send you, in the behalf of all poets, that

while you live, you live in love, and never get favour for lacking skill of a sonnet; and, when you die, your memory die from the earth for want of an epitaph.”

4. “With a sword thou mayest kill thy father, and with a sword thou mayest defend thy prince and country.”
5. “So, then, the best of the historian is subject to the poet; for whatsoever action or faction, whatsoever counsel, policy, or war-stratagem the historian is bound to recite, that may the poet, if he list, with his imitation make his own, beautifying it both for further teaching and more delighting, as it pleaseth him; having all, from Dante’s Heaven to his Hell, under the authority of his pen.”
6. “Anger, the Stoics said, was a short madness.”
7. “For grammar it [poetry] might have, but it needs it not; being so easy in itself, and so void of those cumbersome differences of cases, genders, moods, and tenses, which, I think, was a piece of the Tower of Babylon's curse, that a man should be put to school to learn his mother-tongue.”
8. “But hereto is replied that the poets give names to men they write of, which argueth a conceit of an actual truth, and so, not being true, proveth a falsehood. And doth the lawyer lie then, when, under the names of John of the Stile, and John of the Nokes, he putteth his case? But that is easily answered: their naming of men is but to make their picture the more lively, and not to build any history. Painting men, they cannot leave men nameless. We see we cannot play at chess but that we must give names to our chess-men; and yet, me thinks, he were a very partial champion of truth that would say we lied for giving a piece of wood the reverend title of a bishop.”
9. “Who will be taught, if he be not moved with desire to be taught?”
10. “Over-mastered by some thoughts, I yeilded an inckie tribute unto them.”
11. “Sweet food of sweetly uttered knowledge”

#### **Test your understanding/Slip Test**

1. Who wrote An Apologie for Poetry?  
A) Sidney                      B) Shelley                      C) Coleridge                      D) Dryden
2. “Astrophel and Stella” was written by  
A) Spenser                      B) Sidney                      C) Drayton                      D) Wyatt



14. Philip Sidney defended poetry against such descriptions of it as "the mother of lies" and "the nurse of abuse". His main arguments here is \_\_\_\_\_
- A) The poet is no conjuror or illusionist and represents a world.
  - B) The poet cannot lie because he is not claiming to tell us the truth.
  - C) The poet cannot speak the truth because he is not representing the real world.
  - D) The poet is a philosopher for whom truth is a lie, and lie truth, in an imaginary world.
15. In his Defence of Poesy what is the "best and most accomplished kind of poetry" in Sidney's estimation?
- A) Heroical, or epic poetry
  - B) Lyric poetry
  - C) Pastoral poetry
  - D) Elegiac poetry
16. As Sidney argues in A Defence of Poesy which discipline is more useful and praiseworthy history or poetry?
- A) History "being captivated to truth" is more useful than poetry.
  - B) Poetry where man can see "virtue exalted and vice punished" is more useful than history.
  - C) History is more useful for poetry is "an encouragement to unbridled wickedness".
  - D) History and poetry are synonymous and so both are useful.
17. "How all their plays be neither right tragedies, nor right comedies, mingling kings and elowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in the clown by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters".  
What term does Philip Sidney use to characterize such plays and which of the unities of Aristotle do they violate?
- A) mongrel tragicomedy; unity of action
  - B) mixed tragedies; unity of action
  - C) multi-plot drama; unity of time
  - D) mingled yarn; unity of place
18. Who wrote the following lines?  
"Nature never set forth the earth in as rich a tapestry as diverse poets have done"
- A) Sidney, Defence/ An Apology for Poetry
  - B) Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads
  - C) Coleridge, Biographia Literaria
  - D) Arnold, The study of poetry
19. In the Defense of Poesy Sidney says?  
"Now as in geometry the oblique must be known as well as right and in arithmetic, the odd as well as the even, so in the action of our life whoseeth not the filthiness of evil wanteth a great foil to perceive the beauty of virtue". Which of the following forms of poesy offers a foil that helps us perceive the beauty of virtue?
- A) Pastorals
  - B) Parody
  - C) Comedy
  - D) Tragedy

20. In his Defence of Poesy which of the following works does Sidney commend as good examples of English Poesy?

I. The Mirror of Magistrates

II. The Shepherd's Calendar

III. Lament for the Makers

IV. Ballad of Scottish King

The right combination according to the code is ;

A) I and III

B) I and IV

C) I and II

D) II and III

21. What does Philip Sidney call poet-haters in his Defence of Poesie?

A) misogynists

B) misanthropes

C) misnomers

D) mysomousoi

22. Which two writers have written essays on the defence of poetry?

(a) Sir Philip Sidney

(b) P.B. Shelley

(c) Mathew Arnold

(d) T.S. Eliot

Choose the correct option:

(A) (a) and (d)

(B) (a) and (c)

(C) (c) and (d)

(D) (a) and (b)

23. What, in sum, is Sidney's point in the following?

"Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with pleasant rivets, fruitless trees, sweet-smelling flowers, not what so ever else may make the too-much-loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden" (Philip Sidney)

(A) Works of art are superior to the natural world they represent.

(B) Works of art can often compete with the natural world represented by

them

(C) Neither the poets nor the natural world they set forth equal nature's rich

tapestry

(D) The natural world is far superior to the works of art that represent it.