

An Apology for Poetry- Sidney

Sir Philip Sidney wrote *An Apology for Poetry* (or, *The Defence of Poesy*) in approximately 1579, and it was published in 1595, after his death.

It is generally believed that he was at least partly motivated by Stephen Gosson, a former playwright who dedicated his attack on the English stage, *The School of Abuse*, to Sidney in 1579, but Sidney primarily addresses more general objections to poetry, such as those of Plato. In his essay, Sidney integrates a number of classical and Italian precepts on fiction. The essence of his defense is that poetry, by combining the liveliness of history with the ethical focus of philosophy, is more effective than either history or philosophy in rousing its readers to virtue. The work also offers important comments on Edmund Spenser and the Elizabethan stage.

Influence

Sir Philip Sidney's influence can be seen throughout the subsequent history of English literary criticism. One of the most important examples is in the work of the poet and critic, Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley's modern argument for poetry is cast in a Romantic strain in his critical work titled *A Defence of Poetry*. In 1858, William Stigant, a Cambridge-educated translator, poet and essayist, writes in his essay "Sir Philip Sidney"[1] that Shelley's "beautifully written *Defence of Poetry*" is a work which "analyses the very inner essence of poetry and the reason of its existence, - its development from, and operation on, the mind of man" (Garrett 347). Shelley writes in *Defence* that while "ethical science arranges the elements which poetry has created," and 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" (Shelley, Norton 517).

Sidney's influence on future writers could also be analyzed from the standpoint of his handling of the utilitarian viewpoint. The utilitarian view of rhetoric can be traced from Sophists, Joseph Justus Scaliger, Petrus Ramus and humanists to Sidney (Bear 11). For instance, Sidney, following Aristotle, writes that praxis (human action) is tantamount to gnosis (knowledge). Men drawn to music, astronomy, philosophy and so forth all direct themselves to "the highest end of the mistress knowledge, by the Greeks called architectonike" (literally, "of or for a master builder"), "which stands, according to Sidney, "in the knowledge of a man's self, in the ethic and political consideration, with the end of well doing and not of well knowing only" (Leitch "Sidney" 333). Sidney's program of literary reform concerns the connection between art and virtue (Mitsi 6). One of the themes of the *Apology* is the insufficiency of simply presenting virtue as a precept; the poet must move men to virtuous action (Craig 123). Poetry can lead to virtuous action. Action relates to experience. From Sidney, the utilitarian view of rhetoric can be traced to Coleridge's criticism, and for instance, to the reaction to the Enlightenment (Bear 11). Coleridge's brief treatise *On Poesy or Art* sets forth a theory of imitation which bears a remarkable resemblance to that of Sidney (Mack 131).

The contemporary impact of Sidney's *Apology* is largely derivative of the humanistic precepts that inform the work, and its linkage of the rhetorical with the civic virtue of prudence. Prudence offers a middle ground between two extremes. Prudence, as a virtue, places a greater value on praxis than gnosis (Harvey 1). Action is thus more important than abstract knowledge. It deals with the question of how to combine stability with innovation (Jasinski 466).

Sidney's influence on future critics and poets relates more closely to his view of the place of poets in society. Sidney describes poetry as creating a separate reality (Harvey 3). The Romantic notion, as seen in Wordsworth, is that poetry privileges perception, imagination and modes of understanding. Wordsworth seeks to go back to nature for moments recollected in tranquility. Sidney, like Shelley and Wordsworth, sees the poet as being separate from society. To Sidney the poet is not tied to any subjection. He saw art as equivalent to "skill," a profession to be learned or developed, and nature as the objective, empirical world (Kimbrough 44). The poet can invent, and thus in effect grows another nature.

Sidney writes that there "is no art delivered to mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object" (Leitch, Sidney 330). 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. This vision is one that demands the reader's awareness of the art of imitation created through the "maker," the poet (Kimbrough 45). Sidney's notion of "fore-conceit" means that a conception of the work must exist in the poet's mind before it is written (Harvey 3). Free from the limitations of nature, and independent from nature, poetry is capable of "making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in Nature" (Leitch Sidney 330).

Sidney's doctrine presents the poet as creator. The poet's mediating role between two worlds – transcendent forms and historical actuality – corresponds to the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation. A complement to this doctrine is the concept of return or catharsis, which finds a parallel in Sidney's contemplation of virtue, based on man's rational desire (Craig 117). *Apology* contains only elements of Neoplatonism without adhering to the full doctrine.

Thirdly, Sidney implies a theory of metaphoric language in his work. A recurring motif in *Apology* is painting or "portraiture" (Leitch 333). *Apology* applies language use in a way suggestive of what is known in modern literary theory as semiotics. His central premise, as was that of Socrates in Plato's *The Republic*, is that poetry is an art of imitation, that is a "representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth" not unlike a "speaking picture" (Leitch, Sidney 331). Sidney pays his homage to Aristotle also. Yet he develops his own idea of metaphoric language, one that it is based on an analogy through universal correspondences. Sidney's humanist poetics and his tendency to harmonize disparate extremes – to seek mediation – find expression in poetic works by John Donne (Knauss 1).

The life and writings of Sir Philip Sidney remain a legacy. In 1819, Thomas Campbell concludes that Sidney's life was "poetry in action," and then in 1858 William Stigant wrote that "Sidney's real poem was his life, and his teaching was his example" (quoted in Garrett, Sidney 55). Sidney, the man, is apparent everywhere in his works: a study of Sidney's works is a study of the man (Kimbrough, "Preface" 1).

Significance

An *Apology for Poetry* is one of the most important contributions to literary theory written in English during the Renaissance. Sidney advocates a place for poetry within the framework of an aristocratic state, while showing concern for both literary and national identity (Griffiths 5). Sidney responds in *Apology* to an emerging antipathy to poetry as expressed in Stephen Gosson's *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579). Gosson offers what is in essence a puritan attack on imaginative literature (Griffiths 5). What is at stake in Sidney's argument is a defense of poetry's nobility. The significance of the nobility of poetry is its power to move readers to virtuous action

(Robertson 657). True poets must teach and delight – a view that dates back to Horace. In an era of antipathy to poetry and puritanical belief in the corruption engendered by literature, Sidney's defense was a significant contribution to the genre of literary criticism. It was England's first philosophical defense in which he describes poetry's ancient and indispensable place in society, its mimetic nature, and its ethical function (Harvey 2). Among Sidney's gifts to his contemporaries were his respect for tradition and willingness to experiment (Robertson 656). An example of the latter is his approach to Plato. He reconfigures Plato's argument against poets by saying poets are "the least liar" (Leitch 348). Poets never claim to know the truth, nor "make circles around your imagination," nor rely on authority (Leitch 349). As an expression of a cultural attitude descending from Aristotle, Sidney, when stating that the poet "never affirmeth," makes the claim that all statements in literature are hypothetical or pseudo-statements (Frye 35). Sidney, as a traditionalist, however, gives attention to drama in contradistinction to poetry. Drama, writes Sidney, is "observing neither rules of honest civility nor of skillful poetry" and thus cannot do justice to this genre (Leitch 356).

In Sidney's day anti-theatricality, an aesthetic and ideological concern, flourished among Sidney's circle at court (Acheson 11). Theatre became a contentious issue in part because of the culmination of a growing contempt for the values of the emergent consumer culture. An expanding money economy encouraged social mobility. Europe, at this time, had its first encounter with inflation (Davies 517). London's theatres at that time grew in popularity so much that by 1605, despite the introduction of charges, London commercial theatres could accommodate up to eight thousand men and women (Hale 278). Sidney had his own views on drama. In *Apology*, he shows opposition to the current of his day that pays little attention to unity of place in drama (Bear 11), but more specifically, his concern is with the "manner" that the "matter" is conveyed (Leitch Sidney 357). He explains that tragedy is not bound to history or the narrative but to "laws of poesy," having "liberty, either to feign a quite new matter, or to frame the history to the most tragical conveniency" (357).

Sidney employs a number of strategies to assert the proper place of poetry. For instance, he argues against the way in which poetry was misaligned with youth, the effeminate and the timorous. He does so by introducing the idea that "poetry is the companion of camps" and by invoking the heroes of ages past (Leitch 351). Sidney's reverence for the poet as soldier is significant because he himself was a soldier at one time. Poetry, in *Apology*, becomes an art that requires the noble stirring of courage (Pask 7).

Sidney writes *An Apology for Poetry* in the form of a judicial oration for the defense, and thus it is like a trial in structure. Crucial to his defense is the descriptive discourse and the idea that poetry creates a separate reality (Harvey 2). Sidney employs forensic rhetoric as a tool to make the argument that poetry not only conveys a separate reality, but that it has a long and venerable history, and it does not lie. It is defensible in its own right as a means to move readers to virtuous action.

Sidney's method

Censorship is one issue Sidney had to overcome through his use of rhetorical devices in the *Apology*. Sidney was also versed in the phenomenon of courtiership. As part of his strategy against the threat of censorship, Sidney uses the structure of classical oration with its conventional divisions such as exordium and peroratio. Sidney's use of classical oration stems from his humanist education (Harvey 1). He uses this method to build his argument, by making

use of the rhetorical methods in such guides as Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553) (Harvey 2). Sidney also uses metaphor and allegory, to conceal and reveal his position. For instance, his use of horsemanship as imagery and analogy substantiates his vision of the transformational power of poetry. Sidney, as author, enters his work undetected in that the etymology of his name "Philip" is "horse-lover" (Pask 7). From the opening discourse on horsemanship, Sidney expands on the horse and saddle metaphor throughout his work by the "enlarging of a conceit" (Leitch 333). It is Sidney who then guards against a falling out with the "poet-whippers" (Leitch 346). Sidney also attends to the rhetorical concept of memory. Poetry, apart from its ability to delight, has an affinity with memory (Leitch 347).

Method and style are thus key components of the *Apology* to overcome the problem of censorship. For this reason, Sidney consciously defends fiction, and he attacks the privilege that is accorded to "fact." He argues that the poet makes no literal claims of truth, is under no illusions, and thus creates statements that are in a sense "fictional" and as true as any others (Bear 5). What is at stake then is not only the value of poetry in the sense of its utility, but also its place in a world replete with strife, the contingent and the provisional.

Sir Philip Sidney, *Defense of Poesy* (ca. 1579 in MS / 1595 ed. prin.)

Genre: the first work of literary criticism in English.

Form: prose, with some portions of verse cited as examples.

Characters: Sidney, in his historical persona as Sir Philip Sidney, poet and courtier [both carefully constructed "roles," so don't treat him as a politically naive truth-teller!]; Edward Wotton, a courtier and friend to Sidney who shared his Continental tour; John Pietro Pugliano, Italian riding master to the Emperor; and all the poets who ever had been.

Summary: Sidney clearly had been contemplating the problem of the poet's role in society for a long time, perhaps since his earliest education in which he would have encountered Plato's famous banishment of poets from the ideal Republic on the grounds that they could lead the Guardians and citizens to immorality. It long has been argued that he may have been responding to Stephen Gosson, a Puritan pamphleteer whose "School of Abuse" blamed playwrights and the theatre, in particular, and poets in general, for leading English society astray. Gosson dedicated the pamphlet to Sidney without asking permission, and some poets at the time suspected Sidney would reply in some fashion. In the "Defense," Sidney argues that poets were the first philosophers, that they first brought learning to humanity, and that they have the power to conceive new worlds of being and to populate them with new creatures. According to Sidney, their "golden" world of possibility is superior to the "brazen" one of historians who must be content with the mere truth of happenstance. He then defines what he believes to be the essential formal characteristics of the various genres of poetry, and defends poetry against the charge that it is composed of lies and leads one to sin.

Famous "Sidneyisms" you should be able to explain:

"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 persuade, thereon give artificial rules. . . 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. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done. . . Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden" (956-7).

"[T]he skill of each artificer standeth in the idea or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself. And that the poet hath that idea is manifest, by delivering them forth in such excellency as he had imagined them. Which delivering forth also is not wholly imaginative [i.e., fanciful], 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 [poetic character like the Persian conqueror] 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" (957). [This last passage concisely explains why literary criticism needs to be taught, and often why creative writers can learn from constructive literary criticism--usually of other poets' work.]

"Poetry is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word mimesis--that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth--to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture--with this end, to teach and delight" (958).

The first kind of poets, like the psalmist, David, are divinely inspired (958), the second kind is philosophically inspired, and the third sort, "indeed right poets," must be distinguished from those inferior imitators whom Sidney compares to "the meaner sort of painters, who counterfeit only such faces as are set before them" (958). These are inferior to "the more excellent, who having no law but wit, bestow that in colours upon you which is fittest for the eye to see as the constant though lamenting look of Lucretia, when she punished in herself another's fault, wherein he painteth not Lucretia whom he never saw, but painteth the outward beauty of such a virtue" (958).

[Lucretia, a chaste Roman wife, killed herself after the King's son raped her, punishing herself for his crime. According to Roman tradition, her deed led to the overthrow of the Tarquin dynasty and the establishment of the Roman Republic.]

"[I]t is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet [. . .] But it is that feigning of notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by" (959).

"[A]s Aristotle saith, it is not gnosis but praxis must be the fruit [of teaching]. And how praxis can be, without being moved to practice, it is no hard matter to consider. The philosopher showeth you the way . . . But this to no man but to him that will read him, and read him with attentive studious painfulness [. . .] Now therein of all sciences . . . is our poet the monarch. For he doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect to the way, as will entice any man to enter into it. [. . .] He beginneth not with obscure definitions, which must blur the margin with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulness, but he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the sweet enchanting skill of music; and with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner. And, pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue" (962-3).

"The poet he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth. For, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to

be true which is false. So as the other artists, and especially the historian, affirming many things, can, in the cloudy knowledge of mankind, hardly escape from many lies. But the poet (as I said before) never affirmeth. [. . . so wise readers of poetry] will never give the lie to things not affirmatively but allegorically and figuratively written" (968).

"But our comedians think there is no delight without laughter, which is very wrong, for though laughter may come with delight, yet cometh it not of delight [my emphasis]" [. . .] Delight hath a joy in it, either permanent or present. Laughter hath only a scornful tickling" (971).

"I conjure you all that have the evil luck to read this ink-wasting toy of mine, even in the name of the nine Muses, no more to scorn the sacred mysteries of poesy; no more to laugh at the name of poets, as though they were next inheritors to fools; no more to jest at the reverent title of rhymer; but to believe, with Aristotle, that they were the ancient treasurers of the Grecians' divinity; to believe, with Bembo [Pietro Bembo], that they were first bringers-in of all civility, to believe with Scaliger, that no philosopher's precepts can sooner make you an honest man than the reading of Virgil" (974).

N.B.: This work has two titles based on the two printed editions. The first, "Defense of Poesy," uses "poesy" for all literary forms, including lyric, drama, and prose. The second, "Apology for Poetry," uses "apology" in the sense of the Greek word *apologia*, or "an argument in defense" of a client. In both senses, Sidney stands as an advocate for all creative writers at a crucial point in the development of English literature. The Crown censored all publications, and increasingly banned those which were considered "immoral" as well as those which threatened the Tudor dynasty. Puritans, like Gosson, though they may have been motivated by strong moral beliefs, also tended to chill the creative environment in which poets worked, driving them into the questionable freedom offered by the protection of the nobles' courts. (Compare Chaucer's relationship to John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster and father to Bolingbroke [Henry IV]). Poets remained caught in this uneasy relationship between court and religious critics until Samuel Johnson's era (C18) and the rise of a self-sustaining market relationship among poets, printers, booksellers, and the reading public.

Issues and Research Sources:

The first edition (*editio princeps*), printed by Olney in 1595, was titled *An Apology for Poetrie*. In that same year, Ponsonby printed the same essay with the title *The Defense of Poesie*. What's the difference? Part of the answer may be detected in the OED's record of "apology"'s shift in meaning between its first recorded use in the works of Sir Thomas More in 1533 and the year before Sidney's essay's publication, when Shakespeare's Richard III used it in what became its Modern English sense. What about "Poetrie" and "Poesie"? Look up both in the OED and pay attention to what happens to "poesie" in later centuries, but that does not seem to be involved in the 1595 printer's decision. Maybe it was a typographer's choice? Which term does Sidney use most often in the essay? Try a concordance.

Regarding Sidney's great boast about the poets' power to create a "second Nature," better than the original, consider this statement: "[Nature's] world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden" (937). Now would be a good time to return to the "Battle of Maldon" (i.e., the poem) and the battle of Maldon (i.e., the event as recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles). What has the poet given to us, and to Byrtnoth and his war-band individualized by name and dialogue and actions, that the chronicler did not have it in his power to give? Those things are poetry. The rest is mere fact.

The defense clearly is intended to address contemporary issues, but what does its historical reference tell you about the changes in English poetic ambitions since Wyatt and Surrey? It might be said that those poets mimicked Virgil's hexameters and David's psalms, but the real challenge in English literature came in its urge to create some new art forms. What new opportunities did new forms (or new versions of old forms) offer to them? It starts slowly, with something as simple as the evolution of the English sonnet from the Petrarchan, and the emergence of anti-petrarchanism as a theme in the new form. Consider the huge jump in dramatic sophistication between *Everyman* and *Dr. Faustus* or *Lear*! A culture is being remade. The prose romance, a genre in which Sidney wrote "*The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*," was already an old form after the French Arthurian cycle and the late Hellenistic pastorals. The sonnet cycle already had been "done" by Petrarch, who reissued his sonnets in manuscript versions with a compelling "life to death" narrative order based on the life of his beloved Laura. Does Sidney break new ground here by taking Montaigne's "essai" into the philosophical domain of art criticism, or is he in any sense imitating Horace's verse epistle which usually is called the "*Ars Poetica*."?

See, especially, the claim that the best poet delights and instructs, which is Horace's advice for his pupil (937 and 939).

Does Sidney's version of this venerable advice suggest any new angles on the genre of the literary critical essay?

What are the dangers to the poet and to the audience if either "delight" or "instruction" overwhelm the poem?

(Compare Harry Bailey's rule for deciding the best tale told by a Canterbury Pilgrim [234: ll. 800].)

Sidney says poetry is a speaking picture (937). What does this suggest about the relation between visual and poetic arts in this period? This is one of Sidney's aphorisms which come directly from Horace (see #3 above)--what might we learn from the uses of visual and verbal arts, perhaps embedded in one another (poetry written to be recited in drama; paintings described in poems, etc.)? Renaissance "emblem books" combined poetry, prose aphorisms, and symbolic drawings which illustrated the often paradoxical relationships among important qualities, values, or common human experiences. For a view of an emblem book in both the original Latin and an English translation, click here. I especially recommend emblem number 23, but always in moderation.

Sidney describes the bards as "vates," from the Latin for Makers or Prophets.

Does the role of prophet-poet bring with it any occupational hazards?

Do prophet-poets sacrifice anything to aesthetics in order to achieve their prophetic mandates?

Might a poet be criticized for "failure of prophesy" if the poem's content turned out to be false, even though the poem's form was beautiful and continued to be repeated for reasons peculiar to the audience's needs?

Once you've done your readerly duty by Sidney and tried to understand what he says poets are good for, how they work, etc., step back from the "*Defense of Poesy*" for a moment and consider his gender. What would he have to defend first if he were a woman writing this essay, before he even could address the defense of poets? What does he take for granted about poets' genders and their relationship to their audiences' genders? Compare Sidney's situation with that of Margery Kempe, especially her confrontation with the Archbishop who tells her not to speak publicly (see

note #3 on the web page), and with the situation of his own sister, Mary Sidney Herbert, with whom he collaborated on a famous and influential translation of the psalms (see note #1 about the dedicatory poem). What must these women first address when defending their right to a public voice, and what effect does this have on their work?

Stephen Conway
1995

Literature and Virtue in Sidney's "Apology for Poetry"

In "An Apology for Poetry" Sir Philip Sidney attempts to reassert the fundamental importance of literature to society in general as well as to other creative and intellectual endeavors. Though Sidney's work does provide a synthesis (and in some cases an aberration) of much Greek and Roman literary theory, his argument aspires to go beyond an esoteric academic debate. Literature can "teach and delight" in a manner which other methods of communication do not possess (138). The moral/ethical impact any literary text has upon a reader is of paramount importance to Sidney. The argument Sidney presents and develops is built around the assumption that literature has the capacity to teach most effectively and to demonstrate virtue. Perhaps in better understanding how Sidney specifically supports this claim, we can better assess its strength or validity

Sidney places literature in an hierarchical relationship with all other forms of learning; literature inhabits the highest and most influential tier. Literature is "the first light-giver to ignorance", and from it all other sources of knowledge have been nurtured (135). As the first use of language beyond the completely utilitarian, literature stretches and expands language to accommodate broader and more conceptual inquiries. Though an ardent admirer of Platonic philosophy, Sidney, in order to serve his intellectual exercise, rewrites or rehabilitates Plato's harsh stance on the worthlessness of literature. Unlike Plato's poet who perpetuates images far removed from the Truth, Sidney's poet can dip into the world of Forms, the Ideal, and provide us with knowledge of virtue. While the tangible world of appearances "is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden" (137).

Against the established disciplines of history and philosophy, Sidney also uses a revision of Aristotle's Poetics to help demonstrate how literature mediates the interests of both forms of knowledge in order to teach virtue. Where philosophy deals solely with the universal, history is consumed with the particular. Literature is able to deal with the same abstract moral/ethical (universal) concepts with which philosophy grapples by providing examples rooted in concrete, albeit fictionalized, details. History is too concerned with the accurate recording of facts to make any conjectures on such broad, less substantiated concepts. Literature exists between and above history and philosophy because the knowledge it conveys (knowledge of the good) is the best and most useful knowledge that exists. As Sidney states, "no learning is so good as that which teacheth and moveth to virtue, and that none can both teach and move thereto so much as poetry" (149).

Sidney attempts to provide an utterly rational foundation for his claims, however. He develops a systematic analysis of the mechanisms employed by literature to teach virtue. He sorts literature according to its works and its parts. The works of a literary text can be seen in four specific ethical effects which it should seek to elicit in a reader. Sidney defines these four as: the purifying of wit, enriching of memory, enabling of judgement, and enlarging of conceit (139).

In order to purify the wit, literature must engage the intellect in new and different ways. By allowing the reader to view a particular idea, character, or situation from a new or novel vantage point, literature is able to provide a vicarious, condensed education available through no other medium. Memories gathered from these fictional experiences provide a common frame of reference between otherwise disparate individuals. Fictional examples become touchstones which can be understood and experienced more easily by others. Literary memories point toward a more universal experience and invite the reader to find new and possibly profound meaning(s) in personal experiences as well. Sidney implies that a life without such memories would surely be impoverished. Building upon the first two works, literature also provides a reader with ample and necessary practise in making moral/ethical judgments. A literary text provides a safe outlet for such judgments to be made, discussed, and re-examined. Personal and societal codes of behavior are shaped, both strengthened and challenged, by this practise. Literature engages the reader actively with virtue as a part of this decision making process. To enlarge the conceit, literature also expands a reader's knowledge and understanding of language (in terms of style, structure, form) as well. This, in turn, opens new modes of expression, new metaphors, to a reader. The ability to create new and different texts is stamped into the very nature of literature. The ability to articulate and teach virtue effectively is constantly in flux from generation to generation. Literature is constantly in demand of new metaphors in order to remain resilient and relevant. Each narrative, housing the potential to fundamentally redefine and reevaluate itself, represents a metaphor for the world. Thus it is vital that literature possess this self-perpetuating but continually evolving quality.

To discuss literature in its various parts, Sidney develops a series of stylistic, structural, and thematic categories: pastoral, elegiac, iambic, satiric, comic, tragic, lyric, and heroic. Each category (part) of literature also attempts to elicit a specific ethical response from the reader. The parts themselves are arranged hierarchically as well, with the heroic being placed at the top. Though an interesting (if historically outdated) method of division, Sidney's categories seem to elaborate more than advance his general argument, however. He places more emphasis on the ethical questions posed by the works of a literary text, rather than its parts.

Sidney concludes his comprehensive defense of literature by attempting to answer various challenges to its merit and continued support. The most serious of these allegations, that literature is "the nurse of abuse, infecting us with pestilent desires", Sidney is forced to acknowledge as true to a greater or lesser extent. This might seem, at first glance, to refute or undermine the argument he has labored so long to create. Sidney, however, has qualified his praise of literature from the onset. Literature can contribute to learning virtue but does not ensure virtuous action. Because he is aware of the fact that literature can and is abused by some, Sidney describes literature as a tool with the greatest potential for good, but not an inherently virtuous invention in and of itself. The destructive qualities evoked by literature are products of the fallible fragile human beings who created it, rather than an indictment of the evil nature of all literature in general. Do not, as Sidney states, "say that poetry abuseth man's wit, but that man's wit abuseth poetry" (150).

Sidney's responses have become the mainstay of the supporters of a liberal arts education. Unfortunately, literature has become sanctified to the extent that knowledge of literature has become practically synonymous with virtuous action. Such modern interpretations of Sidney's defense of literature seem to strike against the very heart of his argument. Sidney seems to understand all too well that human beings house both virtuous and vicious impulses; it is within our power to infuse our creations with both the sinister and the sublime. Because this is true of

any human invention, Sidney counsels that the potential of literature for good or ill should not be easily discounted or dismissed.

Posted 2nd March 2011 by [Shibashish Purkayastha](#)

On the Sublime- Longinus

INTRODUCTION

TREATISE ON THE SUBLIME

Boileau, in his introduction to his version of the ancient Treatise on the Sublime, says that he is making no valueless present to his age.

Poetics- Aristotle

Analytical Overview

Aristotle approaches poetry with the same scientific method with which he treats physics and biology. He begins by collecting and categorizing all the data available to him and then he draws certain conclusions and advances certain theses in accordance with his analysis.

Pygmalion- George Bernard Shaw

Context

Born in Dublin in 1856 to a middle-class Protestant family bearing pretensions to nobility (Shaw's embarrassing alcoholic father claimed to be descended from Macduff, the slayer of Macbeth), George Bernard Shaw grew to become what some consider the second greatest English playwright, behind

Waiting for Godot- Samuel Beckett

Context

Samuel Beckett was born in Dublin in 1906. He befriended the famous Irish novelist James Joyce, and his first published work was an essay on Joyce. In 1951 and 1953, Beckett wrote his most famous novels, the trilogy *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnameable*.

Literary devices

Aside:

An aside is a dramatic device in which a character speaks to the audience. By convention the audience is to realize that the character's speech is unheard by the other characters on stage. It may be addressed to the audience expressly (in character or out) or represent an unspoken thought.

Love and Marriage in Three Restoration Comedies

The Restoration comedies can be a window into a unique period of English history. Following the political and social turmoil of the English Civil War, the Restoration Age was characterized by a sense of loss and cultural disillusion coupled with efforts to restore social stability and cohesion.

Astrology in Shakespeare's Plays

Do we need to understand astrology in order to understand Shakespeare? It would be difficult to fully comprehend today's television shows and movies without some knowledge of our modern world.

The Puritan Age and Restoration

Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour.

England hath need of thee: she is a fen

Of stagnant waters; altar, sword, and pen,

Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,

Have forfeited their ancient English dower

Of inward happiness.

A Short Overview of Japanese Literature

Japanese literature spans a period of almost two millennia. Early works were heavily influenced by cultural contact with China and Chinese literature, often written in Classical Chinese. Indian literature also had an influence through the diffusion of Buddhism in Japan.

Postmodernism in "The Virgin Suicides" by Jeffrey Eugenides

Like we can clearly notice all throughout the novel entitled The Virgin Suicides and written by Jeffrey Eugenides, the basic perspective on religion is that it has lost its power. It can no longer save people from their own decay. This idea is presented to us from the very beginning.

Greatest Novels of All Time

"I learned little save that most of the deeds, good and bad both, incurring opprobrium or plaudits or reward either, within the scope of man's abilities, had already been performed and were to be learned about only from books." ~ William Faulkner (Absalom, Absalom!)

One can continue to read many bo

Romanticism in Literature

The romantic movement or romanticism in literature emerged as a response to the industrial revolution during the second half of the 18th century. Having originated in Europe, the movement quickly spread all over the world.

The Lost Art of the Sonnet

In the technological age, poetry has, in many respects, fallen by the wayside as a respected form of literature. With the advent of rock music, song lyrics replaced poetry as the dominant form of brief, lyrical art.

The Best Books of 2010

It will come as no surprise that different organizations ranked books differently last year. In fact, it is hard to state that any particular books were "best" since it is only fair to compare books in the same genre. Comparing a travel book with a work of fiction makes little sense.

Osama Bin Laden: Strictly Fiction

There is compelling evidence that Osama Bin Laden doesn't exist—and never has.

For writers, this means that the sprinkling of mere words across a page still possess the power to alter the course of history.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner - (S.T Coleridge)

It is an ancient Mariner,

And he stoppeth one of three.

The Canterbury Tales - Geoffrey Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales is the most famous and critically acclaimed work of Geoffrey Chaucer, a late-fourteenth-century English poet. Little is known about Chaucer's personal life, and even less about his education, but a number of existing records document his professional life.

List of Historical Novels (India)

Until recently, most historical novels set in India were written from the perspective of the British colonists of the Raj period. Violent rebellions failed to end British rule, but in 1947, peaceful protests led by Mohandas Gandhi finally won independence.

The White Tiger - Arvind Adiga

The White Tiger by Arvind Adiga is a story of two Indias, Balram's journey from the darkness of village life to the light of entrepreneurial success. A journey that is utterly immoral, brilliantly endearing, and altogether, unforgettable.

Water- A Modern Novel by Bapsi Sidhwa

Bapsi Sidhwa's intense and moving novel Water is set in 1938, when the traditions of colonial India were being threatened by the modern ideas of Mahatma Gandhi. Against the backdrop of Gandhi's rise to power, Water follows the life of eight-year-old Chuyia, betrothed at age 6 and widowed at age 8.

Raja Rao

Indian writer of novels and short stories, whose works are deeply rooted in Brahmanism and Hinduism. Raja Rao's semi-autobiographical novel, The Serpent and the Rope (1960), is a story of a search for spiritual truth in Europe and India. It established him as one of the finest Indian stylists.

R.K Narayan

R. K. Narayan was born in Madras in 1906 and educated there and at Maharajah's College in Mysore. He has lived in India ever since, apart from his travels.

Mulk Raj Anand

Indian novelist, short-story writer, and art critic writing in English. Mulk Raj Anand was among the first writers to render Punjabi and Hindustani idioms into English. Called the Zola or Balzac of India, Anand drew a realistic and sympathetic portrait of the poor of his country.

Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (October 2, 1869 - January 30, 1948), was a major political and spiritual leader of India and the Indian independence movement. In India, he is recognized as the Father of the Nation.

Sarojini Naidu

Sarojini Chattopadhyay was born at Hyderabad on February 13, 1879 the eldest of a large family, all of whom were taught English at an early age. At the age of twelve she passed the Matriculation of the Madras University, and awoke to find herself famous throughout India.

Sri Aurobindo