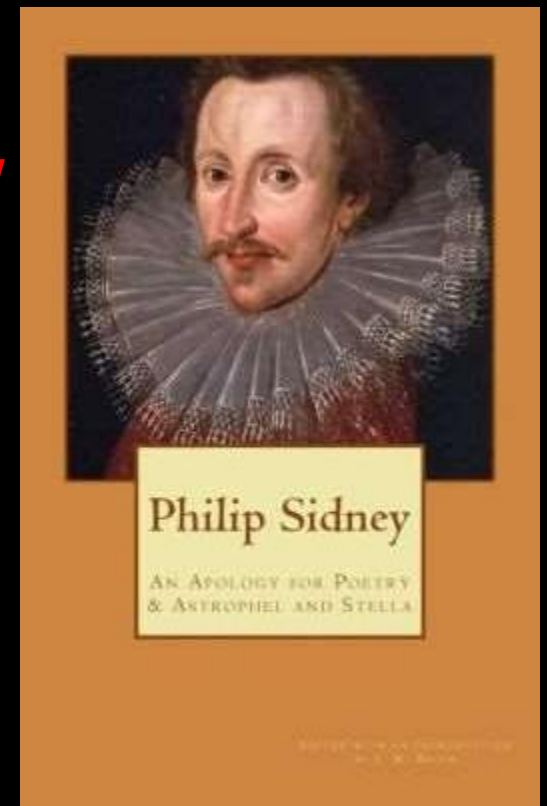
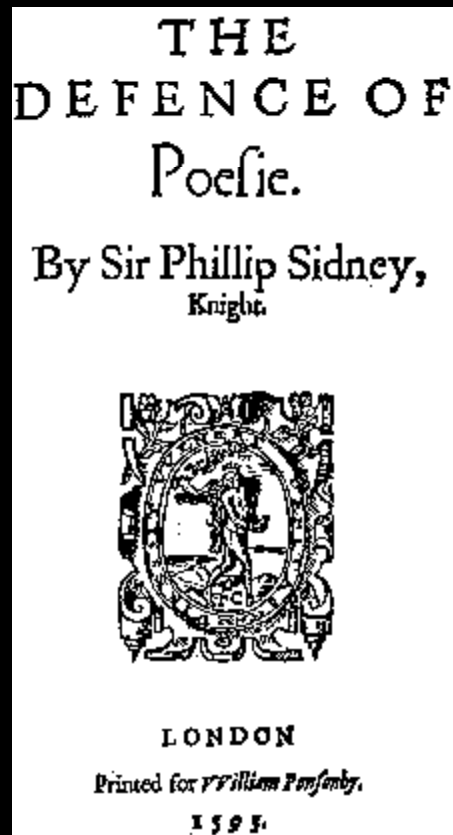


# Defence of Poesie / *An Apology for Poetry*

(1595)

Sir Philip Sidney



- Genre: the first work of literary criticism in English.
- Form: prose, with some portions of verse cited as examples.

- In 1579, Stephen Gosson published a pamphlet titled The Schoole of Abuse describing and decrying the immorality of English playhouses and English poetry. Although Gosson dedicated his tract to "the right noble / Gentleman, Master Philip Sidney," the pamphlet appears to have irritated rather than flattered its intended patron, for was around this time that Sidney almost certainly began working on his *Apologie for Poetrie*.

- 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.**
- 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.

- "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, 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.
- 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"** .

- "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"

- "[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"



- "[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. [ . . . ]

- "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"

- "poetry is the companion of camps"
- "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" [ . . . ] Delight hath a joy in it, either permanent or present. Laughter hath only a scornful tickling"

Sidney responds in *Apology* to an emerging antipathy to poetry that is displayed in works like Stephen Gosson's *The Schoole of Abuse* - puritan attack on imaginative literature.

- *An Apology for Poetry* is the most important contribution to Renaissance literary theory. Sidney advocates a place for poetry within the framework of an aristocratic state, while showing concern for both literary and national identity.
- 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 .
- True poets must teach and delight. (end)

Thank you!