

knees, "O lady," said he, "which hast only had the power to stir up again those flames which had so long lain dead in me, see in me the power of your beauty, which can make old age come to ask counsel of youth, and a prince unconquered to become a slave to a stranger. And when you see that power of yours, love that at least in me, since it is yours, although of me you see nothing to be loved."

"Worthy prince," answered Zelmane, taking him up from his kneeling, "both your manner and your speech are so strange unto me as I know not how to answer it better than with silence."

"If silence please you," said the king, "it shall never displease me, since my heart is wholly pledged to obey you. Otherwise, if you would vouchsafe mine ears such happiness as to hear you, they shall convey your words to such a mind which is with the humblest degree of reverence to receive them."

"I disdain not to speak to you, mighty prince," said Zelmane, "but I disdain to speak to any matter which may bring my honor into question."

And therewith, with a brave counterfeited scorn she departed from the king, leaving him not so sorry for his short answer as proud in himself that he had broken<sup>2</sup> the matter. And thus did the king, feeding his mind with those thoughts, pass great time in writing verses and making more of himself than he was wont to do, that, with a little help, he would have grown into a pretty kind of dotage.

But Zelmane, being rid of this loving but little loved company, "Alas," said she, "poor Pyrocles, was there ever one but I that had received wrong and could blame nobody, that having more than I desire, am still in want of that I would?<sup>3</sup> Truly, love, I must needs say thus much on thy behalf; thou hast employed my love there where all love is deserved, and for recompense hast sent me more love than ever I desired. But what wilt thou do, Pyrocles? Which way canst thou find to rid thee of thy intricate troubles? To her whom I would be known to, I live in darkness; and to her am revealed from whom I would be most secret. What shift<sup>4</sup> shall I find against the diligent love of Basilius? What shield against the violent passions of Gynecia? And if that be done, yet how am I the nearer to quench the fire that consumes me? Well, well, sweet Philoclea, my whole confidence must be builded in thy divine spirit, which cannot be ignorant of the cruel wound I have received by you."

1578-83

1593

**The Defense of Poesy** In 1579 Sidney found himself the unwilling dedicatee of a small book entitled *The School of Abuse*. Its author, the playwright-turned-moralist Stephen Gosson, attacked poets and actors from a narrowly Puritan perspective that called into question the morality of any fiction-making. Sidney may have shared in the author's militant Protestantism, but he took a very different, more sympathetic and more complex view of the poet's art. He did not specifically answer Gosson's polemic, but he must have had it in mind when he composed, perhaps in the same year, a major piece of critical prose that was published after his death under two titles, *The Defense of Poesy* and *An Apology for Poetry*. Probably written in 1579 though not published until 1595, *The Defense of Poesy* is an eloquent argument

2. Broached.

3. Of the thing I desire.

4. Evasion, stratagem.

for the dignity, social efficacy, and moral value of imaginative literature in verse or prose. Sidney responds to ancient charges against poetic fictions—charges of irresponsibility and unreality—that had been revived in his own time most strenuously by Puritan moralists. In a graceful, if strikingly paradoxical, rhetorical performance, the *Defense* argues both that the poet, liberated from the world, is free to range “within the zodiac of his own wit” and that poetry actively intervenes in the world and transforms it for the better. After a slyly self-deprecating introduction, Sidney points out the antiquity of poetry, its prestige in the biblical and classical worlds, and its universality; also, he cites the names given to poets—*vates*, or “prophet,” by the Romans and *poietai*, or “maker,” by the Greeks—as evidence of their ancient dignity. But he bases his defense essentially on the special status of the poetic imagination. While all arts, from astronomy to music to medicine, depend ultimately on nature as their object, poetry, he claims, is uniquely free: “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.”

This freedom, Sidney argues, enables the poet to present virtues and vices in a livelier and more affecting way than nature does, teaching, delighting, and moving the reader at the same time. The poet is superior to both the philosopher and the historian, because he is more concrete than the one and more universal than the other. The *Defense* also refutes Plato's charge that poets are liars by arguing that the poet “nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth,” and it denies as well the Platonic claim that poetry arouses base desires. Tragedy, for example, “openeth the greatest wounds,” in Sidney's account, “and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue,” thereby making “kings fear to be tyrants.” Surveying the English literary scene of his own century, Sidney finds little to praise except for Surrey's lyrics, the moralizing narratives of *A Mirror for Magistrates*, and Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*; the drama he faults for “mingling kings and clowns” and for unrealistic distortions of time and space. (The great, sprawling plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare, plays that triumphantly violated many of Sidney's cherished principles, lay just ahead.) The *Defense* ends with a mock conjuration and a playful curse, reminders of the magical power of poetry, a power that lurks beneath both Sidney's idealism and his didacticism.

### From The Defense of Poesy

#### [THE LESSONS OF HORSEMANSHIP]

When the right virtuous Edward Wotton and I were at the Emperor's court together,<sup>1</sup> we gave ourselves to learn horsemanship of John Pietro Pugliano, one that with great commendation had the place of an esquire<sup>2</sup> in his stable. And he, according to the fertility 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 laden, than when (either angered with slow payment, or moved with our learner-like admiration) he exercised his speech in the praise of his faculty.<sup>3</sup> 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 pro-

1. Sidney and Edward Wotton (1548–1626), an English courtier and diplomat, became good friends at the court of Maximilian II (the Holy Roman Emperor) in Vienna in 1574–75.

2. Equerry, an officer in charge of the horses and stables of a noble house.

3. Field of learning.

ceeded, as that no earthly thing bred such wonder to a prince as to be a good horseman. Skill of government was but a *pedanteria*<sup>4</sup> 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<sup>5</sup> before I came to him I think he would have persuaded me to have wished myself a horse.<sup>6</sup> But thus much at least with his no few words he drave into me, that self-love is better than any gilding<sup>7</sup> to make that seem gorgeous wherein ourselves be parties. 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.<sup>8</sup> And yet I must say that, as I have just cause to make a pitiful defense of poor poetry, which from almost the highest estimation of learning is fallen to be the laughingstock of children, so have I need to bring some more available<sup>9</sup> proofs; since the former is by no man barred of his deserved credit, the silly<sup>1</sup> latter hath had even the names of philosophers used to the defacing of it, with great danger of civil war among the Muses.

\* \* \*

[THE POET, POETRY]

\* \* \* Since the authors of most of our sciences<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

Among the Romans a poet was called *vates*, which is as much as a diviner, foreseer, or prophet, as by his conjoined words *vaticinium* and *vaticinari*<sup>4</sup> 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 grew the word of *Sortes Virgilianae*,<sup>5</sup> when by sudden opening Virgil's book they lighted upon any verse of his making, whereof the histories of the emperors' lives are full: as of Albinus,<sup>6</sup> the governor of our island, who in his childhood met with this verse

*Arma amens capio nec sat rationis in armis*<sup>7</sup>

and in his age performed it. Which, although it were a very vain and godless superstition, as also it was to think spirits were commanded by such verses—whereupon this word charms, derived of *carmina*,<sup>8</sup> cometh—so yet serveth it

4. Pedantry, narrow and overly detailed knowledge, of use only to schoolmasters. "Prince": ruler.

5. I.e., if I had not had some skill in logic.

6. With an allusion to the root meaning of Sidney's given name, from Greek *phil* + *hippos*, "horse-lover."

7. With a pun on *gelding*.

8. I.e., Pugliano.

9. Effective. "Pitiful": compassionate.

1. Weak, poor.

2. Branches of knowledge.

3. I.e., poetry.

4. To prophesy. "Vates": poet-prophet. "Vaticinium": a prophecy.

5. Casting of lots out of Virgil; i.e., accepting as prophecy a line of Virgil chosen by random opening of the *Aeneid*.

6. Roman governor of Britain, declared emperor by his troops in 193 C.E. but defeated four years later.

7. Frantic, I take up arms, yet there is little purpose in arms (*Aeneid* 2.314).

8. Songs, poems.

to show the great reverence those wits were held in; and altogether not without ground, since both the oracles of Delphos and Sibylla's prophecies<sup>9</sup> 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.

And may not I presume a little further, to show the reasonableness of this word *vates*, and say that the holy David's<sup>2</sup> Psalms are a divine poem? 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 yet fully found;<sup>3</sup> lastly and principally, his handling his prophecy, which is merely<sup>4</sup> poetical: for what else is the awaking his musical instruments, the often and free changing of persons, his notable *prosopopoeias*,<sup>5</sup> when he maketh you, as it were, see God coming in His majesty, his telling of the beasts' joyfulnes and hills leaping, but a heavenly poesy, wherein almost<sup>6</sup> he showeth himself a passionate lover of that 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. 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 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:<sup>7</sup> which name, how high and incomparable a title it is, I had rather were known by marking the scope of other sciences than by any partial<sup>8</sup> allegation.

There is no art delivered to mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object, without which they<sup>9</sup> 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 diverse sorts of quantities. So doth the musician in time tell you which by nature agree,<sup>1</sup> which not. The natural philosopher thereon hath his name, and the moral philosopher standeth upon<sup>2</sup> 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

9. The Pythia (priestesses) at Delphi in Greece proclaimed Apollo's oracles. The Sibyls were thought to be prophetesses from the east. The Cumaean Sibyl directed Aeneas to the underworld and brought the famous Sibylline Books to Rome.

1. Imaginative conception.

2. The biblical King David, commonly identified in the Renaissance as author of the Book of Psalms in its entirety.

3. Many Renaissance scholars who knew some Hebrew ("hebricians") thought the psalms were written in verse forms approximating classical Greek and Latin meters.

4. Entirely.

5. Personifications. "Changing of persons": shifts in narrative perspective, between first- and third-person expressions.

6. Indeed.

7. A common word for *poet* in 16th-century England. "Met with": agreed with.

8. Biased. "Marking": noting.

9. The several arts.

1. Which rhythms are naturally consonant.  
2. Takes as subject matter. "Natural philosopher": scientist. "Thereon": i.e., from nature.

soonest prove and persuade, thereon give artificial rules, which still are compassed within the circle of a question according to the proposed matter.<sup>3</sup> The physician weigheth<sup>4</sup> the nature of 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, disdainng 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,<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.<sup>7</sup>

But let those things alone, and go to man—for whom as the other things are, so it seemeth in him her uttermost cunning is employed—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,<sup>8</sup> so excellent a man every way as Virgil's Aeneas. Neither let this be jestingly conceived, because the works of the one be essential, the other in imitation or fiction,<sup>9</sup> for any understanding knoweth the skill of each artificer standeth in that *idea* or fore-conceit<sup>1</sup> 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, as we are wont<sup>2</sup> 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, who having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature:<sup>3</sup> 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 arguments to the credulous of that first accursed fall of Adam, since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will<sup>4</sup> keepeth us from reaching unto it. But these arguments will by few be understood, and by fewer granted.

3. The rules of those arts ("artificial rules") are always limited in their application to questions pertaining to the subject at hand.

4. Considers.

5. Avenging deities who punish crimes both in this world and after death. "Heroes": in the Greek sense, part human, part divine. "Cyclops": one-eyed giants (the correct plural is "Cyclopes") in Homer's *Odyssey*. "Chimeras": fire-breathing monsters with lion's head, goat's body, and serpent's tail.

6. Intellect.

7. A reference to the classical tradition of "The Four Ages of Man," the idea that the world has declined from the first and perfect Golden Age, through the Silver, Bronze, and Iron ages. "Her":

Nature's.

8. Cyrus the Great of Persia, exemplary hero of Xenophon's prose romance, the *Cyropaedia* (4th century B.C.E.); Theagenes, hero of Heliodorus's Greek romance, *Aethiopica* (3rd century C.E.); Pylades, friend of the Greek hero Orestes; Orlando, hero of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1516).

9. The works of nature are real ("essential"); those of the poet are fiction.

1. Imaginative plan, conception.

2. Accustomed. "Imaginative": fanciful.

3. Physical nature.

4. Will corrupted in the Fall by Original Sin. "The credulous": those disposed to believe (Sidney's arguments).

This 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<sup>5</sup> 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 the word *mimesis*<sup>6</sup>—that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth—to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture—with this end, to teach and delight.<sup>7</sup>

#### [THREE KINDS OF POETS]

Of this have been three general kinds. The chief, both in antiquity and excellency, were they that did imitate the unconceivable excellencies of God. Such were David in his Psalms; Solomon in his Song of Songs, in his Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs; Moses and Deborah in their Hymns; and the writer of Job: which, beside other, the learned Emanuel Tremellius and Franciscus Junius<sup>8</sup> 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 St. James's counsel in singing psalms when they are merry,<sup>9</sup> 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,<sup>1</sup> or natural, as Lucretius and Virgil's *Georgics*; or astronomical, as Manilius and Pontanus; or historical, as Lucan:<sup>2</sup> 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<sup>3</sup> poets, of whom chiefly this question ariseth: betwixt whom and these second is such a kind of difference as betwixt the meaner<sup>4</sup> sort of painters, 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 herself another's fault,<sup>5</sup> wherein he painteth not Lucretia whom he never saw, but painteth the outward beauty of such a virtue. For these third<sup>6</sup>

5. Analysis or explanation.

6. *Poetics* 1.2.

7. The primary authorities for the commonplace notions that a poem is a "speaking picture" and that the end of poetry is "to teach and delight" are, respectively, Plutarch (ca. 46–ca. 120 C.E.), *How to Study Poetry*, 17–18, and Horace (65–8 B.C.E.), *Art of Poetry*, 343.

8. Two scholars who published a Protestant Latin translation of the Bible in 1579. "Moses and Deborah in their Hymns": see Exodus 15.1–18, Deuteronomy 32.1–43; Judges 5.1–31.

9. "Is any merry? Let him sing psalms" (James 5.13).

1. The Roman Marcus Cato was the author of *Dis-*

*ticha de moribus*, an immensely popular collection, in verse and prose, of moral maxims. Tyrtaeus and Phocylides were Greek poets.

2. Lucan wrote *De bello civili* (*Pharsalia*), an epic poem on the struggle between Caesar and Pompey. Lucretius wrote a philosophical poem *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things). Virgil's *Georgics* exalts the life and work of the farmer.

3. Justly entitled to the name.

4. Lower.

5. A notable exemplar of chastity and honor, the Roman matron Lucretia committed suicide after being raped by the son of King Tarquinius Superbus. "Wit": creative imagination.

6. I.e., the right poets.

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. These be they that, as the first and most noble sort may justly be termed *vates*, so these are waited on in the excellentest languages and best understandings with the fore-described name of poets. For these indeed do merely<sup>7</sup> 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.

These be subdivided into sundry more special denominations. The most notable be the heroic,<sup>8</sup> lyric, tragic, comic, satiric, iambic, elegiac, pastoral, and certain others, some of these being termed according to the matter they deal with, some by the sorts of verses they liked best to write in; for indeed the greatest part of poets have appareled their poetical inventions in that numerous<sup>9</sup> kind of writing which is called verse—indeed but appareled, verse 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 iusti imperii*, the portraiture of a just empire, under the name of Cyrus (as Cicero saith of him), 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,<sup>1</sup> 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 raiment, meaning, as in matter they passed all in all,<sup>2</sup> 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 peising<sup>3</sup> each syllable of each word by just proportion according to the dignity of the subject.

[POETRY, PHILOSOPHY, HISTORY]

Now therefore it shall not be amiss first to weigh this latter sort of poetry by his works, and then by his parts; and if in neither of these anatomies he be condemnable, I hope we shall obtain a more favorable sentence.<sup>4</sup>

This purifying of wit—this enriching of memory, enabling of judgment, and enlarging of conceit<sup>5</sup>—which commonly we call learning, under what name soever it come forth, or to what immediate end soever it be directed, the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of.

This, according to the inclination of the man, bred many-formed<sup>6</sup> impressions. For some that thought this felicity principally to be gotten by knowledge,

7. Only.  
 8. Epic.  
 9. I.e., in numbers, poetic meters.  
 1. Lawyer.  
 2. All others, in all respects.  
 3. Weighing.  
 4. Judgment. "Works": effects. "Anatomies": analyses.  
 5. Conceptual power. "Wit": intellect.  
 6. Manifold.

and no knowledge to be so high or heavenly as acquaintance with the stars, gave themselves to astronomy; others, persuading themselves to be demigods if they knew the causes of things, became natural and supernatural philosophers; some an admirable delight drew to music; and some the certainty of demonstration to the mathematics. But all, one and other, having this scope: to know, and by knowledge to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying his own divine essence.

But when by the balance of experience it was found that the astronomer, looking to the stars, might fall in a ditch, that the inquiring philosopher might be blind in himself, and the mathematician might draw forth a straight line with a crooked heart, then lo, did proof, the overruler of opinions, make manifest that all these are but serving sciences, which, as they have each a private end in themselves, so yet are they all directed to the highest end of the mistress-knowledge, by the Greeks called *architectonike*,<sup>8</sup> which stands (as I think) in the knowledge of a man's self, in the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of well-doing and not of well-knowing only—even as the saddler's next<sup>9</sup> end is to make a good saddle, but his further end to serve a nobler faculty, which is horsemanship, so the horseman's to soldiery, and the soldier not only to have the skill, but to perform the practice of a soldier. So that, the ending end of all earthly learning being virtuous action, those skills that most serve to bring forth that have a most just title to be princes over all the rest.

Wherein, if we can, show we the poet's nobleness, by setting him before his other competitors. Among whom as principal challengers step forth the moral philosophers, whom, methinketh, I see coming towards me with a sullen gravity, as though they could not abide vice by daylight, rudely clothed for to witness outwardly their contempt of outward things, with books in their hands against glory, whereto they set their names, sophisticatedly<sup>1</sup> speaking against subtlety, and angry with any man in whom they see the foul fault of anger. These men casting largess as they go, of definitions, divisions, and distinctions,<sup>2</sup> with a scornful interrogative do soberly ask whether it be possible to find any path so ready to lead a man to virtue as that which teacheth what virtue is; and teach it not only by delivering forth his very being, his causes and effects, but also by making known his enemy, vice, which must be destroyed, and his cumbersome servant, passion, which must be mastered; by showing the generalities that containeth it, and the specialities that are derived from it; lastly, by plain setting down how it extendeth itself out of the limits of a man's own little world to the government of families and maintaining of public societies.

The historian scarcely giveth leisure to the moralist to say so much, but that he, laden with old mouse-eaten records, authorizing himself<sup>3</sup> (for the most part) upon other histories, whose greatest authorities are built upon the notable foundation of hearsay; having much ado to accord differing writers and to pick truth out of their partiality;<sup>4</sup> better acquainted with a thousand years ago than with the present age, and yet better knowing how this world goeth than how his own wit runneth; curious for antiquities and inquisitive of novelties; a wonder to young folks and a tyrant in table talk, denieth, in a great chafe,<sup>5</sup>

7. Aim.

8. The "chief art," to which all others are subordinate. "Private": particular.

9. Nearest.

1. Subtly.

2. I.e., bountiful gifts of scholastic terms and arguments.

3. Basing his authority.

4. Bias.

5. Temper.



that any man for teaching of virtue, and virtuous actions, is comparable to him. "I am *testis temporum, lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis*."<sup>6</sup> "The philosopher," saith he, "teacheth a disputative virtue, but I do an active. His virtue is excellent in the dangerless Academy of Plato, but mine showeth forth her honorable face in the battles of Marathon, Pharsalia, Poitiers, and Agincourt."<sup>7</sup> He teacheth virtue by certain abstract considerations, but I only bid you follow the footing of them that have gone before you. Old-aged experience goeth beyond the fine-witted philosopher, but I give the experience of many ages. Lastly, if he make the songbook, I put the learner's hand to the lute; and if he be the guide, I am the light." Then would he allege you innumerable examples, confirming story by stories, how much the wisest senators and princes have been directed by the credit of history, as Brutus, Alphonsus of Aragon,<sup>8</sup> and who not, if need be? At length the long line of their disputation maketh a point in this, that the one giveth the precept, and the other<sup>9</sup> the example.

\* \* \*

Now, to that which commonly is attributed to the praise of history, in respect of the notable learning is got by marking the success,<sup>1</sup> as though therein a man should see virtue exalted and vice punished—truly that commendation is particular to poetry, and far off from history. For indeed poetry ever sets virtue so out in her best colors, making Fortune her well-waiting handmaid, that one must needs be enamored of her. Well may you see Ulysses in a storm,<sup>2</sup> and in other hard plights; but they are but exercises of patience and magnanimity, to make them shine the more in the near-following prosperity. And of the contrary part, if evil men come to the stage, they ever go out (as the tragedy writer<sup>3</sup> answered to one that disliked the show of such persons) so manacled as they little animate folks to follow them. But the history, being captived to the truth of a foolish world, is many times a terror from well-doing, and an encouragement to unbridled wickedness. For see we not valiant Miltiades rot in his fetters? The just Phocion and the accomplished Socrates put to death like traitors? The cruel Severus live prosperously? The excellent Severus miserably murdered? Sulla and Marius dying in their beds? Pompey and Cicero<sup>4</sup> slain then when they would have thought exile a happiness? See we not virtuous Cato driven to kill himself,<sup>5</sup> and rebel Caesar so advanced that his name yet, after 1600 years, lasteth in the highest honor? And mark but even Caesar's own words of the aforementioned Sulla (who in that only did honestly, to put down his dishonest tyranny), *litteras nescivit*, as if want of learning caused him

6. "I am the witness of times, the light of truth, the life of memory, the teacher of life, the messenger of antiquity" (Cicero, *De oratore* 2.9.36).

7. At Poitiers (1356) and Agincourt (1415), the English defeated the French; at Marathon, the Greeks defeated the Persians (490 B.C.E.); at Pharsalia, Caesar defeated Pompey (48 B.C.E.)

8. Alphonsus V of Aragon (1396–1458) carried the histories of Livy and Caesar into battle with him. Marcus Brutus was inspired to rise up against Caesar by the history of his great republican ancestor, Junius Brutus, who expelled the Tarquin kings.

9. History. "The one": philosophy.

1. Outcome.

2. In *Odyssey* 5.291ff.

3. Euripides (as reported by Plutarch).

4. Great statesman and orator killed at Mark Antony's command. Miltiades, Athenian general and victor at Marathon, later imprisoned by the Athenians. Phocion, Athenian general and statesman executed for treason because he opposed an unjust war. "Cruel Severus": Emperor Lucius Septimius Severus, a plunderer of cities. "Excellent Severus": Emperor Alexander Severus, a reformer slain by his troops. Sulla and Marius, political rivals who brought unrest and destruction to Rome for more than twenty years. Pompey: Pompey the Great, defeated by Caesar at Pharsalia and slain in Egypt.

5. Cato the Younger committed suicide after his party failed to defeat Caesar.

to do well.<sup>6</sup> He meant it not by poetry, which, not content with earthly plagues, deviseth new punishments in hell for tyrants, nor yet by philosophy, which teacheth *occidendos esse*;<sup>7</sup> but no doubt by skill in history, for that indeed can afford you Cypselus, Periander, Phalaris, Dionysius,<sup>8</sup> and I know not how many more of the same kennel, that speed<sup>9</sup> well enough in their abominable injustice of usurpation.

I conclude, therefore, that he<sup>1</sup> excelleth history, not only in furnishing the mind with knowledge, but in setting it forward to that which deserveth to be called and accounted good: which setting forward, and moving to well-doing, indeed setteth the laurel crown upon the poets as victorious, not only of the historian, but over the philosopher, howsoever in teaching it may be questionable.<sup>2</sup>

For suppose it be granted (that which I suppose with great reason may be denied) that the philosopher, in respect of his methodical proceeding, doth teach more perfectly than the poet, yet do I think that no man is so much *philophilosophos*<sup>3</sup> as to compare the philosopher in moving with the poet. And that moving is of a higher degree than teaching, it may by this appear, that it is well nigh both the cause and effect of teaching. For who will be taught, if he be not moved with desire to be taught? And what so much good doth that teaching bring forth (I speak still of moral doctrine) as that it moveth one to do that which it doth teach? For, as Aristotle saith, it is not *gnosis* but *praxis*<sup>4</sup> must be the fruit. And how *praxis* can be, without being moved to practice, it is no hard matter to consider.

The philosopher showeth you the way, he informeth you of the particularities, as well of the tediousness of the way, as of the pleasant lodging you shall have when your journey is ended, as of the many by-turnings that may divert you from your way. But this is to no man but to him that will read him, and read him with attentive studious painfulness;<sup>5</sup> which constant desire whosoever hath in him, hath already passed half the hardness of the way, and therefore is beholding to the philosopher but for the other half. Nay truly, learned men have learnedly thought that where once reason hath so much overmastered passion as that the mind hath a free desire to do well, the inward light each mind hath in itself is as good as a philosopher's book; since in nature<sup>6</sup> we know it is well to do well, and what is well, and what is evil, although not in the words of art which philosophers bestow upon us; for out of natural conceit<sup>7</sup> the philosophers drew it. But to be moved to do that which we know, or to be moved with desire to know, *hoc opus, hic labor est*.<sup>8</sup>

Now therein of all sciences (I speak still of human,<sup>9</sup> and according to the human conceit) is our poet the monarch. For he doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way, as will entice any man to enter into it. Nay, he doth, as if your journey should lie through a fair vineyard, at the first give you a cluster of grapes, that full of that taste, you may long to

6. When Sulla resigned his dictatorship, Caesar joked that he was illiterate (*litteras nescivit*), since he left the *dictatura* (which means both "dictatorship" and "dictation") to others.

7. "They [tyrants] must be killed."

8. Four famous tyrants of the classical world: the first two were from Corinth; Phalaris, Agrigentum; Dionysus the Elder, Syracuse.

9. Succeed.

1. I.e., poetry.

2. Arguable.

3. A lover of philosophers.

4. Not knowing but doing (*Ethics* 1.1).

5. Carefulness.

6. Considering that by nature.

7. Natural understanding, as opposed to the philosophers' special vocabulary ("words of art").

8. This is the task, this is the work to be done (*Virgil, Aeneid* 6.129).

9. As opposed to divine. "Sciences": branches of learning.

pass further. 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 well 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—even as the child is often brought to take most wholesome things by hiding them in such other as have a pleasant taste, which, if one should begin to tell them the nature of *aloes* or *rhabarbarum*<sup>1</sup> they should receive, would sooner take their physic at their ears than at their mouth.<sup>2</sup> So is it in men (most of which are childish in the best of Hercules, Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas; and, hearing them, must needs hear the right description of wisdom, valor, and justice; which, if they had been barely, that is to say philosophically, set out, they would swear they be brought to school again.

[THE POETIC KINDS]

But I am content not only to decipher him<sup>3</sup> by his works (although works, in commendation or dispraise, must ever hold a high authority), but more narrowly will examine his parts; so that (as in a man) though all together may carry a presence full of majesty and beauty, perchance in some one defectuous piece<sup>4</sup> we may find blemish.

Now in his parts, kinds, or species (as you list<sup>5</sup> to term them), it is to be noted that some poesies have coupled together two or three kinds, as the tragical and comical, whereupon is risen the tragi-comical. Some, in the manner, have mingled prose and verse, as Sannazzaro and Boethius.<sup>6</sup> 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. Therefore, perchance forgetting some and leaving some as needless to be remembered, it shall not be amiss in a word to cite the special kinds, to see what faults may be found in the right use of them.

Is it then the Pastoral poem which is misliked? (For perchance where the hedge is lowest<sup>7</sup> they will soonest leap over.) Is the poor pipe<sup>8</sup> disdained, which sometime out of Meliboeus' mouth can show the misery of people under hard lords or ravening soldiers, and again, by Tityrus, what blessedness is derived to them that lie lowest from the goodness of them that sit highest;<sup>9</sup> sometimes, under the pretty tales of wolves and sheep, can include the whole considerations of wrong-doing and patience; sometimes show that contentions for trifles can get but a trifling victory: where perchance a man may see that even Alexander and Darius, when they strave who should be cock of this world's dung-hill, the benefit they got was that the after-livers may say

1. Two bitter purgatives: aloe and rhubarb.

2. That is, would rather have their ears boxed than take the medicine.

3. I.e., poetry.

4. Defective part.

5. May choose.

6. Both Jacopo Sannazzaro's pastoral romance *Arcadia* (1502), which greatly influenced Sidney's own *Arcadia*, and Boethius's *Consolation of Philos-*

*ophy* (524 C.E.) mixed prose and verse.

7. Pastoral was considered the humblest kind of poetry, written in the lowest style.

8. The shepherd's oaten flute, symbol of pastoral poetry.

9. In Virgil's first eclogue, Meliboeus laments the seizure of his land, while Tityrus rejoices that his lands were protected by the emperor.

Haec memini et victum frustra contendere Thyrsin:  
Ex illo Corydon, Corydon est tempore nobis.<sup>1</sup>

Or is it the lamenting Elegiac; which in a kind heart would move rather pity than blame; who bewails with the great philosopher Heraclitus<sup>2</sup> the weakness of mankind and the wretchedness of the world; who surely is to be praised, either for compassionate accompanying just causes of lamentations, or for rightly painting out how weak be the passions of woefulness?<sup>3</sup> Is it the bitter but wholesome Iambic,<sup>4</sup> who rubs the galled mind, in making shame the trumpet of villainy, with bold and open crying out against naughtiness? Or the Satiric, who

Omne vafer vitium ridenti tangit amico;<sup>5</sup>

who sportingly never leaveth till he make a man laugh at folly, and at length ashamed, to laugh at himself, which he cannot avoid without avoiding the folly; who, while

circum praecordia ludit,<sup>6</sup>

giveth us to feel how many headaches a passionate life bringeth us to; how, when all is done,

Est Ulubris, animus si nos non deficit aequus?<sup>7</sup>

No, perchance it is the Comic, whom naughty play-makers and stage-keepers have justly made odious. To the arguments of abuse I will answer after. Only this much now is to be said, that the comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he representeth in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be, so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one. Now, as in geometry the oblique must be known as well as the right, and in arithmetic the odd as well as the even, so in the actions of our life who seeth not the filthiness of evil wanteth<sup>8</sup> a great foil to perceive the beauty of virtue. This doth the comedy handle so in our private and domestical matters as with hearing it we get as it were an experience what is to be looked for of a niggardly Demea, of a crafty Davus, of a flattering Gnatho, of a vainglorious Thraso;<sup>9</sup> and not only to know what effects are to be expected, but to know who be such, by the signifying badge given them by the comedian.<sup>1</sup> And little reason hath any man to say that men learn the evil by seeing it so set out, since, as I said before, there is no man living but, by the force truth hath in nature, no sooner seeth these men play their parts, but wisheth them *in pistrinum*;<sup>2</sup> although perchance the sack of his own faults lie so hidden

1. "This I remember, and how Thyrsis, vanquished, strove in vain. / From that day it is Corydon, Corydon with us" (Virgil, *Eclogue* 7.69-70). I.e., the great victory of Alexander the Great over Darius of Persia comes to the same thing as Corydon's victory over Thyrsis in a singing contest.

2. Ancient Greek philosopher who lamented that everything is subject to mutability. "Who": i.e., which.

3. Sidney restricts the elegiac to lamentations; classical poets used elegiac meter for this purpose but also in poems treating love and other topics.

4. Iambic trimeter was first used by Greek poets for direct attacks (as opposed to the wit and ironic indirection that mark satire).

5. Persius (*Satires* 1.116) on the satire of Horace, who "probes every fault while making his friends

laugh." "Naughtiness": wickedness.

6. "He plays with the very vitals [of his target]" (Persius, *Satires* 1.117).

7. "It is at Ulubrae, if a well-balanced mind does not fail us" (an adaptation of Horace, *Epistles* 1.11.30). Ulubrae was a proverbially uninspiring town surrounded by marshes.

8. Is lacking. "Who": whoever.

9. Type characters in the Roman comedies of Terence (195-159 B.C.E.), respectively, the harsh father, clever servant, parasite, and braggart. Terence and Plautus (251-184 B.C.E.) were the chief classical models for comedy for the Renaissance.

"Niggardly": stingy.

1. Writer of comedies.

2. Mill used for punishment of Roman slaves.

behind his back that he seeth not himself dance the same measure;<sup>3</sup> whereto yet nothing can more open his eyes than to find his own actions contemptibly set forth.

So that the right use of comedy will (I think) by nobody be blamed; and much less of the high and excellent Tragedy, that openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humors; that, with stirring the affects<sup>4</sup> of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded; that maketh us know

Qui sceptrā saevus duro imperio regit  
Timet timentes; metus in auctorem redit.<sup>5</sup>

But how much it can move, Plutarch yieldeth a notable testimony of the abominable tyrant Alexander Pheraeus,<sup>6</sup> from whose eyes a tragedy, well made and represented, drew abundance of tears, who without all pity had murdered infinite numbers, and some of his own blood: so as he, that was not ashamed to make matters for tragedies, yet could not resist the sweet violence of a tragedy. And if it wrought no further good in him, it was that he, in despite of himself, withdrew himself from hearkening to that which might mollify his hardened heart. But it is not the tragedy they do mislike; for it were too absurd to cast out so excellent a representation of whatsoever is most worthy to be learned.

Is it the Lyric<sup>7</sup> that most displeaseth, who with his tuned lyre and well-accorded voice giveth praise, the reward of virtue, to virtuous acts; who gives moral precepts, and natural problems; who sometimes raiseth up his voice to the height of the heavens, in singing the lauds of the immortal God? Certainly, I must confess my own barbarousness, I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas<sup>8</sup> that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet; and yet is it sung but by some blind crowder,<sup>9</sup> with no rougher voice than rude style; which, being so evil appareled in the dust and cobwebs of that uncivil age, what would it work trimmed in the gorgeous eloquence of Pindar?<sup>1</sup> In Hungary I have seen it the manner at all feasts, and other such meetings, to have songs of their ancestors' valor, which that right soldierlike nation think one of the chiefest kindlers of brave courage. The incomparable Lacedemonians<sup>2</sup> did not only carry that kind of music ever with them to the field, but even at home, as such songs were made, so were they all content to be singers of them—when the lusty men were to tell what they did, the old men what they had done, and the young what they would do. And where a man may say that Pindar many times praiseth highly victories of small moment, matters

3. In a fable of Aesop, a sack filled with one's own faults is carried (out of sight) on the back, while one filled with the faults of others is carried in front.

4. Feelings. "Humors": natures or dispositions, as thought to be influenced by the balance of four chief bodily fluids, or humors—blood, phlegm, choler, and bile.

5. "He who rules his people with a harsh government. / Fears those who fear him; the fear returns upon its author" (Seneca, *Oedipus*, lines 705–06).

6. Plutarch records that this cruel tyrant wept at

the sufferings of Hecuba and Andromache in Euripides' *Trojan Women*. Ashamed to be seen weeping, he abruptly left the theater.

7. Here defined as poetry concerned chiefly with praise, and sung (originally) to musical accompaniment.

8. "The Ballad of Chevy Chase."

9. Fiddler.

1. Pindar's odes, the most exalted lyric poetry of Greece, celebrated victors in athletic games. "That uncivil age": the Middle Ages.

2. Spartans, incomparable in fighting.

rather of sport than virtue; as it may be answered, it was the fault of the poet, and not of the poetry, so indeed the chief fault was in the time and custom of the Greeks, who set those toys at so high a price that Philip of Macedon reckoned a horserace won at Olympus among his three fearful felicities.<sup>3</sup> But as the unimitable Pindar often did, so is that kind most capable and most fit to awake the thoughts from the sleep of idleness to embrace honorable enterprises.

There rests the Heroical<sup>4</sup>—whose very name (I think) should daunt all backbiters: for by what conceit<sup>5</sup> can a tongue be directed to speak evil of that which draweth with him no less champions than Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas, Turnus, but Tydeus, and Rinaldo?<sup>6</sup>—who doth not only teach and move to a truth, but teacheth and moveth to the most high and excellent truth; who maketh magnanimity and justice shine through all misty fearfulness and foggy desires; who, if the saying of Plato and Tully<sup>7</sup> be true, that who could see virtue would be wonderfully ravished with the love of her beauty—this man sets her out to make her more lovely in her holiday apparel, to the eye of any that will deign not to disdain until they understand. But if anything be already said in the defense of sweet poetry, all concurrerth to the maintaining the heroical, which is not only a kind, but the best and most accomplished kind of poetry. For, as the image of each action stirreth and instructeth the mind, so the lofty image of such worthies most inflameth the mind with desire to be worthy, and informs with counsel how to be worthy. Only let Aeneas be worn in the tablet of your memory, how he governeth himself in the ruin of his country; in the preserving his old father, and carrying away his religious ceremonies;<sup>8</sup> in obeying God's commandment to leave Dido, though not only all passionate kindness, but even the human consideration of virtuous gratefulness, would have craved other of him; how in storms, how in sports, how in war, how in peace, how a fugitive, how victorious, how besieged, how besieging, how to strangers, how to allies, how to enemies, how to his own; lastly, how in his inward self, and how in his outward government—and I think, in a mind not prejudiced with a prejudicating humor, he will be found in excellency fruitful, yea, even as Horace saith,

melius Chrysippo et Crantore.<sup>9</sup>

But truly I imagine it falleth out with these poet-whippers, as with some good women, who often are sick, but in faith they cannot tell where; so the name of poetry is odious to them, but neither his cause nor effects, neither the sum that contains him, nor the particularities descending from him, give any fast<sup>1</sup> handle to their carping dispraise.

Since then poetry is of all human learning the most ancient and of most fatherly antiquity, as from whence other learnings have taken their beginnings; since it is so universal that no learned nation doth despise it, nor barbarous

3. Plutarch records that Philip received three awesome tidings in one day: that his general was victorious in battle, that his wife had borne a son, and that his horse had won a race at Olympia (not, as Sidney mistakenly says, Olympus). "Toys": trifles.

4. I.e., epic. "Rests": remains.

5. Conception.

6. In Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*. "Tydeus": in Statius's epic, *Thebaid*. Turnus is Aeneas's great antagonist.

7. Marcus Tullius Cicero.

8. Sacred objects, household gods. After fleeing Troy, Aeneas and his men stayed for a time in Carthage, whose queen, Dido, became Aeneas's lover. She killed herself when Aeneas (at Jupiter's command) sailed away to accomplish his fate, the founding of the Roman empire.

9. In *Epistles* 1.2.4, Horace praises Homer as a "better [teacher] than Chrysippus [a great Stoic philosopher] and Crantor [a commentator on Plato]."

1. Firm.

nation is without it; since both Roman and Greek gave such divine names unto it, the one of prophesying, the other of making, and that indeed that name of making is fit for him, considering that where all other arts retain themselves within their subject, and receive, as it were, their being from it, the poet only bringeth his own stuff, and doth not learn a conceit out of a matter, but maketh matter for a conceit; since neither his description nor end containing any evil, the thing described cannot be evil; since his effects be so good as to teach goodness and to delight the learners; since therein (namely in moral doctrine, the chief of all knowledges) he doth not only far pass the historian, but, for instructing, is well nigh comparable to the philosopher, for moving leaves him behind him; since the Holy Scripture (wherein there is no uncleanness) hath whole parts in it poetical, and that even our Savior Christ vouchsafed to use the flowers of it; since all his kinds are not only in their united forms but in their severed dissections fully commendable; I think (and think I think rightly) the laurel crown appointed for triumphant captains doth worthily (of all other learnings) honor the poet's triumph.

\* \* \*

[ANSWERS TO CHARGES AGAINST POETRY]

Now then go we to the most important imputations laid to the poor poets. For aught I can yet learn, they are these. First, that there being many other more fruitful knowledges, a man might better spend his time in them than in this. Secondly, that it is the mother of lies. Thirdly, that it is the nurse of abuse, infecting us with many pestilent desires; with a siren's sweetness drawing the mind to the serpent's tail of sinful fancies (and herein, especially, comedies give the largest field to ear,<sup>2</sup> as Chaucer saith); how, both in other nations and in ours, before poets did soften us, we were full of courage, given to martial exercises, the pillars of manlike liberty, and not lulled asleep in shady idleness with poets' pastimes. And lastly, and chiefly, they cry out with open mouth as if they had overshot Robin Hood, that Plato banished them out of his commonwealth.<sup>3</sup> Truly, this is much, if there be much truth in it.

First, to the first.<sup>4</sup> That a man might better spend his time, is a reason indeed; but it doth (as they say) but *petere principium*.<sup>5</sup> For if it be as I affirm, that 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: then is the conclusion manifest that ink and paper cannot be to a more profitable purpose employed. And certainly, though a man should grant their first assumption, it should follow (methinks) very unwillingly, that good is not good because better is better. But I still and utterly deny that there is sprung out of earth a more fruitful knowledge.

To the second, therefore, that they should be the principal liars, I will answer paradoxically, but truly, I think truly, that of all writers under the sun the poet is the least liar, and, though he would, as a poet can scarcely be a liar. The astronomer, with his cousin the geometrician, can hardly escape,<sup>6</sup> when they take upon them to measure the height of the stars. How often,

2. To plow ("Knight's Tale," line 28).

3. Plato argued that most sorts of poets would be banished from an ideal commonwealth, because they stir up unworthy emotions and because their imitations are far removed from truth (*Republic* 10.595-608).

4. First objection.

5. Beg the question—i.e., simply *presuppose* a conclusion on the matter in question.

6. I.e., can hardly avoid lying. "Though he would": even if he wished to.

think you, do the physicians lie, when they aver things good for sicknesses which afterwards send Charon<sup>7</sup> a great number of souls drowned in a potio before they come to his ferry? And no less of the rest, which take upon them to affirm. Now, for 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,<sup>8</sup> and especially the historian, affirming many things, can, in the cloud of knowledge of mankind, hardly escape from many lies. But the poet (as I said before) never affirmeth. The poet never maketh any circles<sup>9</sup> about your imagination, to conjure you to believe for true what he writes. He citeth not authorities of other histories, but even for his entry<sup>1</sup> calleth the sweet Muses to inspire into him a good invention; in truth, not laboring to tell you what is or is not, but what should or should not be. And therefore, though he recount things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true, he lieth not—without we will say that Nathan lied in his speech before-alleged to David;<sup>2</sup> which a wicked man durst scarce say, so think I none so simple would say that Aesop lied in the tales of his beasts; for who thinks that Aesop wrote it for actually true were well worthy to have his name chronicled among the beasts he writeth of. What child is there, that, coming to a play, and seeing *Thebes* written in great letters upon an old door, doth believe that it is Thebes? If then a man can arrive to that child's age to know that the poets' persons and doings are but pictures what should be, and not stories what have been, they will never give the lie to<sup>3</sup> things not affirmatively but allegorically and figuratively written.

\* \* \*

So that, since the excellencies of it may be so easily and so justly confirmed, and the low-creeping objections so soon trodden down: it not being an art of lies, but of true doctrine; not of effeminateness, but of notable stirring of courage; not of abusing man's wit, but of strengthening man's wit; not banished, but honored by Plato:<sup>4</sup> let us rather plant more laurels for to engarland the poets' heads (which honor of being laureate, whereas besides them only triumphant captains were, is a sufficient authority to show the price they ought to be held in) than suffer the ill-favored breath of such wrong-speakers once to blow upon the clear springs of poesy.

## [POETRY IN ENGLAND]

But since I have run so long a career<sup>5</sup> in this matter, methinks, before I give my pen a full stop, it shall be but a little more lost time to inquire why England, the mother of excellent minds, should be grown so hard a stepmother to poets, who certainly in wit ought to pass all other, since all only proceedeth from their wit, being indeed makers of themselves, not takers of others.

\* \* \*

\* \* \* But I that, before ever I durst aspire unto the dignity, am admitted into the company of the paper-blurrers, do find the very true cause of our

7. In classical myth, the ferryman who takes the souls of the dead over the river Styx.

8. Practitioners of the liberal arts.

9. As a magician does in conjuring.

1. In his opening lines.

2. Nathan's parable (2 Samuel 12.1–15) of a man robbed of his one ewe lamb by a rich man. "With-

out": unless.

3. Accuse of lying.

4. Plato did no such thing—though Sidney had sophistically argued (in a passage omitted here) that he did. "Doctrine": teaching.

5. Course.