

- **Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy (An Apology for Poetry)* (1595)**
- Poetry was the first light-giver to ignorance, the first nurse, whose milk by little and little enabled man to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges
- Poetry tamed the wild, untamed wits of man and led him to brighter knowledge
- Even the great early philosophers were themselves all poets who used verse to open knowledge up to the world
- Poetry has influenced all of the great ancient thinkers
- People have always stole or usurped from poetry its passionate descriptions
- The oracles at Delphi and the Sibyl delivered their prophecies in verse
- The Greeks called their storytellers Poets, from the word Poiein (to make)
- Everything in life has nature for its principle object (every profession), except poets who use their skill to make something better than nature ever can
 - Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as diverse poets have done
 - Poets create people stronger and more valiant than nature ever could
- Because god is perfect and created man in his image and nothing else, that is why man is able to create things better than all of gods other creations
- Poetry is an art of imitation with its principle end to teach and delight
- The first attempts at poetry were to imitate the inconceivable excellences of God (as in David's psalms in Proverbs, Solomon's Song of Songs, etc)
- The second attempt at poetry was to deal with philosophical matters (either morality, or the natural world, or history)
- The third attempt at poetry is best and involves not striving to imitate what is or has been or shall be – but to transcend all of that and consider only what may be and what should be
 - They aim to move men to right action, the most noble aim of poetry
 - Thus they make their poetry entertaining in order to ensnare an audience and deliver the message
 - This poetry can be subdivided into: heroic, lyric, comic, satiric, iambic, elegiac, pastoral, and others
- It is not verse or rhymes that make a poet but feigning images of virtues, vices, or what else with delightful teaching
- The poet does not use speaking words as they fall “chanceably” from the mouth, but parsing each syllable of each word by just proposition according to the dignity of the subject
- Poets want to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying of its own divine essence
- In this endeavor to promote virtuous action, the poet has competitors of course
 - But the poet succeeds here because he takes what the philosopher says should be done and gives it a perfect picture in the form of an actor who then goes and does it (thus coupling the general with the specific)
 - And the philosopher can never say what must be said with the soul piercing skill of the poet

- For example, if someone has never seen an elephant or a rhinoceros, who should tell that person most exquisitely all their shapes, color, bigness, and particular marks
 - The same applies to the gorgeous architecture of a palace
 - Only the poet can make the listener feel fully satisfied in seeing and experiencing the thing
- By crafting experience and emotion into tangible people fiction better cements itself in its audience than does any other medium or discipline
- Poetry may also be said to be superior to history because it deals with the universal while history only deals with the particular
- Obviously the true is always preferable to the false – but, if the question is whether what should be is preferable to what is then certainly the Aeneas of Virgil is more preferable than the historical Aeneas
- The history must show what actually is (meaning the good and the bad) and thus how is one to judge which action to pursue
 - A feigned example has more power to move than a true example because a feigned example may be tuned to the highest key of passion
- The historian, being captivated to the truth of a foolish world, is many times a terror from well doing, and an encouragement to unbridled wickedness
 - For example, in history we see Socrates put to death as a traitor and not a martyr
 - We see Caesar exalted in history – his name a high honor
- Poetry is more imaginative than history and does not content itself with earthly plagues but devises new punishments in hell for tyrants
- Aristotle: it is not gnosis but praxis that must be the fruit
- The poet not only shows the way but gives a sweet prospect into the way, as will entice anyone to enter into it
 - He comes with words set in delightful proportions
 - Poetry gives us examples to follow – thus when we see Aeneas performing the heroic act of carrying Anchises on his back, we wish that we could perform that same heroic act
 - The poet with her sleight of hand, doth draw the mind more effectually than any other art doth
 - We see many sides of Aeneas – with strangers, allies, enemies, his own, and his inward self
- The heroical is the best and most accomplished kind of poetry because not only does it teach and move men to a truth, it teaches and moves men to the highest truth: magnanimity and justice
- “Other arts retain themselves within their subjects, 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”
- What objections can be made against poetry?
- Many people simply prefer to dispraise things and are prodigal in their words and never truly evaluate their subject
 - But scoffing comes not of wisdom
- Verse far exceeds prose in the knitting up of memory

- This is because in verse the words are set so that one cannot be lost without the whole work failing
 - Which itself calls attention to the brilliance of the work and renders it unforgettable
- Verse sticks best in our memory
- The main criticism of poetry are
- 1) That there are more fruitful knowledges one could spend her time on
 - This is false because there is no higher aim than to move people to virtue and poetry does the best job of this than the other disciplines
- 2) That poetry is the mother of lies
 - The poet is in fact the least of a liar among writers
 - The poet never demands you believe what she says is true, and cites no references like the historian
 - Furthermore people come to fiction knowing it is fiction
 - The poet doesn't say what is or is not (which would be assertions) but rather what should or should not be
 - So the poet does recount things that aren't true but never makes an initial claim of their truthfulness
 - It cannot be argued that giving characters identities and names is an attempt to make them real people and thus this itself is a form of lying
 - Because the giving of names and identities is merely to make the picture more lively
- 3) That poetry infects us with many pestilent desires, drawing us to sin
 - The argument is that poetry actually teaches people to have aberrant desires
 - It is true that because of poetry's power that it has the ability to move men to do anything
 - Poetry is abused and can be misused – but just as a sword can help you kill someone or let you defend your country
 - People are always delighted with poetry, which is why a Greek flourished (Homer) even before Greece itself flourished
- 4) Plato himself banned poets from his republic
 - Perhaps it isn't fair to use this objection because Plato, as a philosopher, was inherently skeptical of poets
 - And philosophers hate poets for the power poets have – and since they cannot overthrow the influence of these poets they simply banish them
 - Plato found fault that the poets of his time turned men against the gods
 - But poets did not induce these opinions, they merely copied opinions already in existence
 - So Plato did not intend to drive all poets out of society but only those who displayed faulty opinions of the Gods
- On Alexander (from Plutarch): fortune was not his guide but his footstool
 - Alexander's main wish was that Homer had been alive in his lifetime
 - He learned more from the example of Achilles than he did from reading about the definition of war
- Why is England so forbidding for Poets

- It wasn't always like this and poets used to flourish in England – even in very troubled times
- Sidney blames the poor quality of poetry in England on people who only want to publish and not write good works
- Poets should not focus on the honors but on the work
- A poet, even the best, still needs a guide, a Daedalus
 - This is to work on 1) art 2) imitation 3) exercise (experience)
 - These are the three most important things for a poet
- In a story, many things may be told which cannot be showed, if they know the difference betwixt reporting and representing
- Stories should not begin ab ovo (“from the egg”)
 - E.g.: Horace praises Homer for not beginning the Iliad with the egg from which Helen was hatched
- Blending the comic and tragic is often a terrible idea because it will lead to comedy encroaching at inappropriate times on tragic events that should be handled seriously
 - Comedy should be full of delight and tragedy should be maintained in a well raised admiration – they should not meet
 - Delight can come without laughter
 - Delight has a joy in it, either permanent or present; laughter hath only a scornful tickling
 - We laugh at mischances but surely this doesn't bring delight
 - Laughter essentially is cheap and easy to pull off, delight, much harder to engineer
- Repetition should be avoided in terms of diction because similitude will prove nothing to a disputer, but only explain to an already willing hearer
- “[It] is not to take upon me to teach poets how they should do, but only, finding myself sick among the rest, to show some one or two spots of the common infection grown among the most part of writers: that acknowledging ourselves somewhat awry, we may bend to the right use both of matter and manner.”