

Subject: **Linguistics (English)**

Title: **Sir Philip Sidney: 'An Apology for Poetry'**

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Abstract:

Sir Philip Sidney's Apology for Poetry is a seminal work in Renaissance literary criticism, synthesizing classical and contemporary theories to defend poetry against Puritan critiques. Sidney counters objections to poetry, such as its alleged frivolity, mendacity, and corrupting influence, by emphasizing its moral, educational, and imaginative merits. Drawing on influences like Plato and Aristotle, Sidney redefines poetry as an art form capable of inspiring virtue and enhancing understanding. His work reflects a balance between classical reverence and Renaissance innovation, affirming poetry's enduring cultural significance and its role as a medium for truth and beauty.

Keywords: Philip Sidney, Apology for Poetry, Renaissance criticism, poetry defence, Puritan critique

Introduction:

As a critic Sir Philip Sidney got a marvellous success in the field of literary criticism. An Apology for Poetry is the most important document of the 16th century. As a matter of fact, Sidney's Apology for Poetry is a synthesis of the critical doctrines of Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Scaliger-Minturn and other Indian theorist. It is he who for the first time, introduced Aristotelianism, into England. According to Spingarn,

“The introduction of Aristotelianism into England was the direct result of the influence of the Italian critics and the agent in bringing this new influence into English letters by Sir Philip Sidney.

Sidney's Originality- One noticeable feature of Sidney as a critic is his originality with all his zest for classics there is a romantic side of Sidney as well. Sidney's love of beauty, his idealism, his liberal outlook, and his spirited style are all indicative of the romantic traits that characterised his Apology. WinSAT and Brooks rightly points out:

“The sources of Sidney's Defence of Poetry ' was classical but the spirit was not very sternly classical. Sidney sends up the joyous fireworks of the Italian Renaissance. His colours are enthusiastic, neo-Platonic ideal, purple and gold. The motion is soaring. He is essentially a theorist of exuberant imagination.

“Stephen Gosson a puritan published a pamphlet entitled” The School of Abuse” in 1579 with a dedication to Sir Philip Sidney. The book “The School of Abuse contained all the charges put forward by puritans against poetry. Gosson classified the poets with pipers, gestures and call them Caterpillar of the Commonwealth. In this Apology for Poetry Sidney considered objections that were brought against poetry by Stephen Gosson and other puritans like him.

Philip Sidney finds that objections raised by the philistines against poetry are captions and trifling. But if they are left unanswered. Some persons maybe led to consider them as weighty, hence he felt compelled to answer them.

Objection Against Poetry – Sir Philip Sidney finds that objection raised by the philistines against poetry are captures and trifling but if they are left unanswered. Some persons may be led to consider them as weighty. Hence he felt compelled to answer them. At the outset there is preliminary objection directed against 'rhyming' and versing. 'Sidney refuses to accept verse as essential part of poetry.

“One may be a poet without versing and versifier without poetry”.

However, he is conscious of the significance of verse of the pleasure it brings and though he does not consider it as “essence of poetry “. His pronouncement shows that he regards it as an inseparable part of poetry. It gives delight and it is an aid to memory. he writes:

“It is not rhyming and versing that makes a poetbut 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.”

Poetry is a waste of Time - poetry is useless and so is a waste of time. In words of Gossoon: “There are other than fruitful branches of knowledge a man may better spend his time in them than in poetry.” According to Gossoon, poetry, music and fine arts are like the caterpillars of Commonwealth it is through that there has been a deterioration of human values.

Extra Ordinary Power of Poetry: Sir Philip Sidney reflects this indictment. He quotes the extraordinary musical power of poetry for it had to draw even wild untamed wits to an admiration of knowledge. Sidney gives the example of great musician who through poetry played a tremendous role in the construction of society and the advance Civilization. Sidney writes:” So as amphionment was said to move stone with the poetry to build Thebes and Orpheus to be listened to by beasts. Indeed, stony and beastly people.”

So among the Romans were Livia’s Andronicus and Ennui’s, so in the Italian language the first that made it aspire to be a treasure house of science were the poets”. It was a tradition with the armies to have musicians who inspired the heroes in the battle. Even poets accompanied the armies to uplift moral of the armies. Thus it is obvious that music had an elating effect. It could infuse valour and enthusiasm. Evidently the contribution of poetry has been tremendous. So instead of being the caterpillars of the Commonwealth the poets have been friends of virtue.

Poetry is the mother of lies: To this replies that “the poet nothing affirms and therefore he never Leith.” The historian can lie for he does not deal with what is, but with what should we or what should not be . He offers not fact but fiction, yet fiction embodying truths of an ideal kind. Sidney dismisses this charge outright by stating, “f all writers under the sun, the poet is the least liar.” It is the astronomers, physician, historians and others who is inevitable make falls statement. He Emphatically says that poetry is superior to history and philosophy. In history there are dry dates, in Philosophy there are precepts without examples. He gives the example of Cicero and tell us that he could communicate his remarkable ideas through poetry.

Romans Called the Poet Vate or Seer- Romans called the poet ‘vates’ or ‘sear’ because the poet had the gift of clear- sighted vision. In this sense, he is most truly a prophet to whom everything is revealed. On the other hand, the Greek word ‘Poeta’ draws attention to the other aspect of the poet’s function that of a ‘maker’. In other words, the poet makes or builds with words what he sees. Sidney mentions three kinds of poet who write poetry the sacred poet, the didactic poet and the right poet. Sidney asserts:

“Poetry is the most excellent work of the most excellent workman.”

The fourth objection is that the poetry is the muse of abuse and it makes men effeminate. The Sonnets are passionate and the elegies makes us sentimental. Sidney rejects this objection and says that poetry promotes the love of beauty but if love is presented in the poem in an Immoral manner, the fault is not that of poetry but of the poet. If the physician kills his patient, it is not the fault of medicine but of the doctor Who prescribed it so men misuses his poetry gift. Poetry kept company with warriors. For example, Alexander carried the poems of Homer with him to the battlefield. The first plea advanced by Sidney for the recognition of poetry is based on its antiquity it’s universality and the high esteem in which it had been held from the

earliest times. Poetry according to Sidney, “poetry is the noblest notions and languages that are known hath been the first light give us to ignorance, and first nurse whose milk by little and little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledge.”

Infancy and daydreaming as regards its debilitating influence that poetry fosters in men a desire to indulge in infancy and day-dreaming and a disinclination to act. Sidney replies that poets have been companion to camps. Since times immemorial and martially men have always admired them.

“Plato had banished poets from his ideal Commonwealth”.

The last charge that Bhushan labelled against poetry was that Plato had banished poets from his ideal Commonwealth. This charge is very judiciously reputed by Sir Philip Sidney. Plato actually condemned the abuse of poetry, not the proper use of poetry, Sidney writes, “Plato found fault that the poets of his time filled the world with wrong opinions of the Gods making light Tales of that unspotted essence and therefore would not have the youth deprived with such opinions.” Legouis and Cazamian write, “it(poetry) has been a chief awakener of the bar like spirit and the virtue of slavery.”

So Plato did not banish poetry but he banished the abuse of poetry. Moreover, Plato was himself a born poet and large part of his dialogues is poetry. In his ' Ion' “he gives highly and rightly divine commendation unto poetry.” Sydney has great difficulty in replying to this objection. Sidney has given us many new points about a poet for instance he is saying that the bird invented are created by the poet is a better world then the real one should need give the example of great musician School through poetry played tremendous role in the construction of society and the advancement of Civilization.

“So as amphiarch said to move story with his poetry to build thieves and RCS to be listened to y by beasts indeed story and beastly people so among the Romans were leaves andronicles and unions show in the Italian language the first that's that Aspire to wear Treasure house of science were the poets”. Sydney's defence of poetry is the earliest attempt to deal with the poetry art partially and not theoretically his judgements are based on contemporary literature and show ample of good sense and sound scholarship his ultimate test is of a practical kind, I. E. The power of poetry to move to Virtuous.

“poetry is so Universal fit for him”.

Sydney says that rhyme words are not essential to poetry but is an ornament and no Cause to poetry he writes.“It is not rhyming or versing that make it a poet one may be a poet without versing and a versifier without poetry. “Sydney was both a classic and romantic by training. He was a classic by temperament, a romantic, call critic “he had all reverence for the Ancients but he also breathes the spirit of the renaissance he had studied classical and Italian literature in emphasizing upon the teaching functions of poetry he followed Plato, “whom of all philosophers I have ever as steamed worthiest of reverence.”

Sidney agreed with Greeks and the Roman when they said that the poet was a prophet and a Maker like God the poet was also a creator. By his imagination he sometimes improved upon nature and created a better world with the help of imaginative faculty the poet spreads over nature the light that never was on sea or land but existed only in his mind. Sidney asserts,

“Poetry therefore is the most excellent work of the most excellent work man”.

Sidney 's Apology for Poetry is a work of Genius, a rare and valuable critical document is Apology for Poetry - “is a veritable epitome of Literary Criticism of the Italian Renaissance; and so thoroughly it is it imbued with this spirit that no other work. Italian French or English can be said to give so complete and so noble a conception of the temper and the principles of Renaissance critics.”

Stephen Gosson a puritan published a pamphlet entitled “The School of Abuse” in 1579 with a dedication to sir Philip Sidney. The book “The School of Abuse” contained all the charges put forward by puritans against poetry through Stephen Gosson. Stephen Gosson classified the poets with pipers and jestlers and called them caterpillars of the Common Wealth and Enemies to virtue. In his Apology for Poetry Sidney considered one by one objections that were brought against poetry by Stephen Gosson and others like him. In this connection Legouis and Cazamian remark, “Gosson whose School of Abuse is directed against all secular literature making no distinction between poets, pipers, jestlers and such like caterpillars of a Commonwealth. He dedicated it to Sidney who was known for his nobility and purity of soul. “

Sidney has given us many new points about a poet for instance he is saying that the world invented or created by the poet is a better world than the real one. Sidney gives the example of great musician who through poetry played a tremendous role in the construction of society and the advancement of Civilization. “so as Amphion was said to move story with his poetry to build Thebes, and Orpheus to be listened to by beasts indeed story and beastly people. So among the Romans were Livius, Andronicus and Ennius; so in the Italian language the first that made it aspire to be a treasure- house of science were the poets.”

Sidney's Defence of Poetry is the earliest attempt to deal with the poetry art, practically and not theoretically. His judgements are based on contemporary literature and show ample of good sense and sound scholarship. His ultimate test is of a practical kind. I. e. the power of poetry to move to virtuous action, “*Poetry is so Universal.....fit for him.* “

Sidney says that rhymed verse is not essential to poetry. Verse is an ornament and no cause to poetry. He writes, “it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet, one maybe a poet without versing and a versifier without poetry.”

Sidney was both a classicist and romantic. By training he was a classicist by temperament and romantic critic. He had all reference for the ancient but he also breathed the spirit of the Renaissance. He had studied classical and Italian writers in emphasizing upon the teaching function of poetry. He followed Plato, “whom of all philosophers I have ever esteemed most worthy of reverence.”

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To sum up Sir Philip Sidney is the greatest Renaissance critic in England. His Apology for poetry has taken its place among the great critical essays in English. He is the father of English criticism just Free charge is the father of English Poetry in the words of John Buxton here he summed up the whole renaissance tradition of Criticism more consciously more persuasively with a more Urban Elegance than any similar work in any language.

We may conclude that all the charges were very strongly reflected by Sir Philip Sidney and the Puritans lost the day and the poetry prospered. In his (Sidney) opinion poetry is not the waste of time but it is

the best use of time. The poets are not the father of liars and they are not removed from reality. They are nearer to reality. They always try to understand the object and thus with the colour of their imagination, they create a new thing. He further says that the poetry does not make a says effeminate on the other hand it is a personal source of inspiration to many. It can do what no other art or Science can do. Finally, he says that poetry is as old as breathing so long as man is there in existence, poetry will remain in this world. According to David Duchess, “Sidney was a new Platonist, a humanist and a poet and his Defence of Poetry was a noble attempt to combine all these positions.” Sidney quotes the name of some great poets like Homer, Boccaccio, Petrarch, Gower and Chaucer.

Sir Philip Sidney is the greatest Renaissance critic in England. His 'Apology for Poetry has taken its place among the greatest critical essays in English. He is a father of English Criticism just as Geoffrey Chaucer is the father of English Poetry. In the words of John Buxton.

“Here he summed up the whole Renaissance tradition of Criticism more concisely, more persuasively, with a more Urban elegance than any similar work in any language.” We may write in the words of Sir Philip Sidney regarding poetry, “it is not being an art of lies, but of true Doctrine, not of effeminates, but of notable stirring of courage; not of abusing man's wit but of strengthening man's wit; not banished but honoured by Plato; let our rather plant more laurels for to garland our poet's heads.....”

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