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Poetic Conception in Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*

The twentieth century has produced a number of views of Sidney's *Apology*. In the first half of the century two important questions about the work had to do with Sidney's originality — or lack of it — and with the classical and contemporary influences upon his view of poetry. For years he was considered the first English imitator of the Aristotelian critics in Italy, and, further, an imitator 'without any decided novelty of ideas'.[1] But the uniqueness of the *Apology* was, nonetheless, often recognized by critics' arguments that if Sidney's ideas were not new his peculiar blend of commonplaces or his enthusiasm was.[2] In the 1940s critics began to argue that Plato was the major influence on the *Apology* and that Sidney was, indeed, an original thinker.[3] Since that time both views have been generally accepted: critics now, while continuing to speak of critical traditions and influences, deal with the *Apology* as if its arguments were constructed by an intelligent and sensitive critic. The result has been a number of substantial (and usually Platonic) 'readings' of the arguments of the work. These critics show, for example, that Sidney makes poetry 'an image of the possible', or a 'revelation, a vision of the golden world'.[4]

This change in the general view of the *Apology* is a real critical advance, a clearing away of the distortions of the previous views. But the change has brought with it other distortions that are not nearly so obvious to the contemporary eye. Most of the modern readings of the *Apology* single out the poet-as-maker argument for primary emphasis. It is this second part of the *narratio*, this argument that the poet produces 'another nature' which is 'better than Nature bringeth forth', that has come to represent, according to these modern critics, Sidney's whole poetic.[1] This singular emphasis arises perhaps from the pressure of modern critical thought. The neo-Aristotelians of the thirties and forties, the New Critics (who still dominate criticism), and others, all insist in different ways that the work of art is a microcosm or an independent reality; that it parallels the real or actual world. The poet-as-maker argument lends itself to that kind of view, but the assumption that such a view is the final basis of Sidney's thought is a distortion of the *Apology*.

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[1] See, for example, G. Gregory Smith's Introduction to his *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1904), I, lxxxv: 'It is not difficult, for example, to see that Sidney's dramatic theory, though Aristotelian, is derived through the medium of Scaliger, and that his illustrations and his "lists" are reminiscent of the *Poetice*'. (See, also, I, lxxii and lxxiv.) The quotation in the text is from Joel Spingarn, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, second edition (New York, 1908, reprinted 1963), p. 171; Spingarn is more forceful than Smith about the influence on Sidney: '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 was Sir Philip Sidney. His *Defence of Poesy* is a veritable epitome of the literary criticism of the Italian Renaissance' (p. 170).

[2] As cited, Spingarn denies Sidney any 'novelty of ideas', but allows the *Apology* 'distinct originality in its unity of feeling, its ideal and noble temper' (p. 170). Nearly the same attitude occurs in a number of critics: in Kenneth O. Myrick, *Sir Philip Sidney as a Literary Craftsman* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1935), who says that Sidney is a 'persuasive advocate of other men's thought' (p. 216); and in J. W. H. Atkins, *English Literary Criticism: The Renascence* (London, 1947), pp. 113, 116, 135. This view persists in *An Apology for Poetry*, edited by Geoffrey Shepherd (London, 1965): 'The main ideas in the *Apology* are not peculiar to Sidney though the arrangement of the argument is his own. It is a product of his own intelligence, his own intellectual *milieu*, and its critical inheritance' (p. 16).

[3] See Irene Samuel, 'The Influence of Plato on Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*', *MLQ*, I (1940), 383–91; Cornell March Dowlin, 'Sidney and Other Men's Thought', *RES*, 20 (1944), 257–71; F. Michael Krouse, 'Plato and Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*', *Comparative Literature*, 6 (1954), 138–47; and John P. McIntyre, S.J., 'Sidney's "Golden World" ', *CL*, 14 (1962), 356–65.

[4] The latest stage of criticism of the *Apology* begins with A. E. Malloch's ' "Architectonic" Knowledge and Sidney's *Apologie*', *ELH*, 20 (1953), 181–5, and continues with A. C. Hamilton, 'Sidney's Idea of the "Right Poet" ', *CL*, 9 (1957), 51–9, and the same writer's *The Structure of Allegory in 'The Faerie Queene'* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 17–28; Geoffrey Shepherd's Introduction to his edition of the *Apology*; Mark Roberts, 'The Pill and the Cherries: Sidney and the Neo-Classical Tradition', *Essays in Criticism*, 16 (1966), 22–31; and Walter Davis, *Idea and Act in Elizabethan Fiction* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1969), Chapter 2: 'Acting Out Ideas in Sidney's Theory', pp. 28–44. The quotations are from Davis, p. 44, and Hamilton, *The Structure of Allegory*, p. 27.

The 'microcosmic' critics tend to assume or try to prove that Sidney's view of poetry is consistent throughout the *Apology*, even though such consistency usually means lack of divergence from the maker argument.[2] A different kind of view exists in the most substantial discussion of the *Apology* in thirty years by the latest editor of the treatise. Geoffrey Shepherd gives no one idea or argument dominant emphasis; rather, he discusses the *Apology* in terms of a variety of critical conceptions — 'Imitation', 'Nature', 'Utile et Dulce' — and traces the critical tradition standing behind each of them.[3] This, too, distorts the *Apology*: the work tends to dissolve into its supposed elements and loses its coherent structure. I offer the following analysis of the *Apology* because it tries to avoid both of these tendencies toward distortion. I would like to show that the *Apology* is a coherent, theoretically consistent work without giving undue emphasis to the maker argument. Thus I will bring the other arguments of the *narratio* into the discussion but will concentrate on the *confirmatio* argument involving the contest between the poet, moral philosopher, and historian. This contest clearly bears the ultimate burden of proof in the *Apology*, and hence it is the logical place to pursue the investigation of Sidney's critical views. I will also show Sidney's relation to ancient and Renaissance critical traditions, but not to the degree that it will obscure the coherence of the *Apology*.

One important aspect of the *Apology* taken up by Geoffrey Shepherd has to do with Sidney's ideas about language and his conception of the poem as language. It is a typical Renaissance concern, as Shepherd makes clear: 'After all, much of Renaissance thought and most of Reformation theology hammered ferociously at these difficulties in establishing a satisfying relationship between a symbol and what it symbolized' (pp. 55–6). As this passage may suggest, we may be limiting the problem in the Renaissance a great deal if we simply refer to words and their meanings. Certainly in the sixteenth century the problem was a great deal larger because it included a view of all perceived reality. Language served in the Renaissance as a model or metaphor for the whole conception of reality, in the sense that words express 'things' and allow for a communicative process. Sir Thomas Elyot typically expands the language metaphor by making the things of experience (not merely words) the means by which men achieve knowledge: 'we be men and nat aungels, wherfore we knowe nothinge but by outward significations'; a great many of Elyot's contemporaries agree with the gist of his statement.[1] In this general sixteenth-century conception there are two levels of existence, first of the things which are perceived by the senses, and, second, that other level of things known only by means of the former. This distinction of the *res ipsa* from that which gives expression to the *res* is basic to the argument of the *Apology*. It is noticeable in Sidney's penchant for abstractions such as beauty and virtue (they occur when he talks about the function of poetry) and in the means by which he says these things are expressed. When, for example, Sidney defends the heroic poem against 'backbiters' in a rather sprawling sentence, he raises the problem of experiencing virtue in the following clause: 'if the saying of Plato and Tully be true, that who could see virtue would be wonderfully ravished with the love of her beauty . . .' (p. 119). While answering an accusation that poetry teaches 'wanton sinfulness and lustful love', Sidney makes a statement about beauty which again emphasizes the idea of seeing or knowing abstractions: 'But grant love of beauty to be a beastly fault (although it be very hard, since only man, and no beast, hath that gift to discern beauty)' (p. 125). Beauty and virtue are the *res ipsae*, those very real things which Sidney believes men must come to know. The problems of the *Apology* have to do with how men perceive those things and what they do about it; they are problems of how men see virtue and of the ways of experiencing virtue which lead men to be most virtuous themselves. As Sidney indicates in the first passage, once man sees virtue clearly, the effect follows of itself, even naturally; this indicates Sidney's special emphasis on experiencing and, concommitantly, on modes of the expression of virtue.

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[1] *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Shepherd, pp. 99–101. All further references are to this text of the *Apology*. See, for example, how Hamilton identifies the 'right poet' as a 'maker' in *The Structure of Allegory*, p. 23. See also A. E. Malloch, whose conception of the Aquinian 'fulness of being' (actually an Aristotelian conception of the structure of reality as matter informed by essence coupled with a Platonic sense of process, of coming to be) leans toward the conception of poet as maker. Mark Roberts discusses the ambiguities which arise when one asks 'how, precisely, does the poet imitate the Idea, or Ideas?' ('The Pill and the Cherries', p. 24), a question which arises from the maker argument. Walter Davis begins with the maker argument and then shows how the rest of the argument of the *Apology* is a repetition of it (*Idea and Act*, pp. 30 ff.).

[2] See, for example, Walter Davis, p. 32; Hamilton, *The Structure of Allegory*, pp. 23–9; McIntyre, pp. 358–9.

[3] *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Shepherd, pp. 47, 51, 66, and passim. This is, however, the best overall work on the *Apology*.

We may see the extent of Sidney's concern with kinds of expression simply by moving from his discussion of these abstract *res* to that of, strangely enough, elephants and palaces. In an argument that is part of the contest between the poet, moral philosopher, and historian, Sidney sets up a parallel to the kind of conception of reality we have just been looking at:

> For as in outward things, to a man that had never seen an elephant or a rhinoceros, who should tell him most exquisitely all their shapes, colour, bigness, and particular marks; or of a gorgeous palace, the architecture, with declaring the full beauties might well make the hearer able to repeat, as it were by rote, all he had heard, yet should never satisfy his inward conceits with being witness to itself of a true lively knowledge; but the same man, as soon as he might see those beasts well painted, or the house well in model, should straightways grow, without need of any description, to a judicial comprehending of them. (p. 107)

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[1] *The Boke Named the Governour*, edited by H. H. S. Croft, 2 vols (London, 1883), II, 198–9 (Book III, Chapter 2). Erasmus speaks of knowing things (*res ipsae*) by means of words (*verba* or *vocum notae*) in the beginning of *De ratione studii*. Roger Ascham recommends verbal imitation of Cicero in *The Scholemaster* as a comprehensive method of, or guide to, wisdom and right action.

The elephant and palace parallel the abstractions in the previous discussion because Sidney does not allow the possibility of direct experience of them. The contest is thus between a 'descriptive' expression of the 'beasts' or 'palace', and the same things 'well painted' or 'in model'. These are, according to the example, the only means by which men could come to know what an elephant is. The larger contest argument is, in turn, a parallel to the elephant analogy: the three language arts, poetry, moral philosophy, and history, all express virtue (or provide men with alternate means by which to perceive it), and the best or most effective expresser of virtue is — in terms of the contest — the highest art. Clearly, then, Sidney assumes that perceived reality, verbal or otherwise, is an expression and that the problems of defending poetry entail the recognition that it is one mode of expression among many, but that *how* it expresses and therefore how it affects its readers is the best basis for its defence.[1]

The most extensive argument of the *Apology* is the contest between the poet, the moral philosopher, and the historian. All three 'arts' are verbal modes of expressing virtue that are useful in improving the awareness and the active virtue of their readers. This 'communication of virtue' is the end of art for Sidney, so it is the basis on which he judges the best of the three arts. Within the contest Sidney manages the arguments among the three competitors simultaneously, but we can see the assumptions beneath the arguments more clearly if we break the whole into two distinct parts: the poet versus moral philosopher, and poet versus historian. This abstraction distorts the *Apology* only to the degree that it makes the work appear more deliberately progressive than it actually is, but that is a small sacrifice for clarity.

Sidney's argument that the poet expresses virtue more effectively than the moral philosopher is based on his conception of the relationship between artistic expression — which is primarily verbal — and natural expression.[2] If we may return to the example of the elephant and the palace, this distinction becomes very clear. As an analogy to the contest between philosopher and poet, Sidney sets up this contest between the man who describes elephants and palaces in great detail and the painter or modeller of these things. Both are artists, for they seek to re-express (or 'imitate', as Sidney often says) what could potentially be experienced directly. The direct experience of an actual elephant becomes the standard by which to judge the other modes of expression. This actual elephant is an expression as well, but it is an expression that occurs in nature. It becomes the standard of the pictorial and descriptive modes of expression because it is the basis of these secondary modes; the natural expression must exist before these secondary or artistic modes attempt the re-expression, and then it serves to evaluate the effectiveness of each artistic mode.[1] As Sidney says, the describer

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[1] The elephant of the example is concrete while virtue can be perceived only by means of its expressions; this difference may seem to deny that all perceived reality is an expression. But that material being to which we affix the name of elephant is clearly only *one* expression of the *res ipsa*, the elephant itself, which is expressed in all the variety of material occurrences or 'actual' elephants. This will involve us in Sidney's Platonism, which we will take up shortly.

[2] Painting and modelling are also artistic modes of expression, but Sidney limits the discussion to the three verbal arts in the contest.

> might well make the hearer able to repeat, as it were by rote, all he had heard, yet should never satisfy his inward conceits with being witness to itself of a true lively knowledge; but the same man, as soon as he might see those beasts well painted, or the house well in model, should straightways grow, without need of any description, to a judicial comprehending of them. (p. 107)

When Sidney turns from his analogy back to the competition between the moral philosopher and poet, he argues that the former's 'learned definition[s]' of virtue 'lie dark before the imaginative and judging power, if they be not illuminated or figured forth by the speaking picture of poesy'.

There is clearly a difference between the mode of expression of the painter and the describer. One uses words and the other uses the materials of graphic art. The experience of one — the painting — moves man closer to the direct experience; its materials of expression most closely resemble those of natural expression. If Sidney sets up natural response to natural expressions as the standard for effective expression, then painting is a far better mode of 'expressing' an elephant than a 'wordish description'.

The problem arises in making the transition from painting to poetry, for poetry is a mode of expression that uses words, not pictures. To justify Sidney's analogy we must bring in the historian, whose activity closely resembles that of the poet on this level. Sidney allows the historian at one point to argue his own case against the philosopher. The historian contends that the virtue he expresses 'showeth forth her honourable face in the battles of Marathon, Pharsalia, Poitiers, and Agincourt. He [the moral philosopher] teacheth virtue by certain abstract considerations' (p. 105). Any man present at Agincourt, for example, would experience the actions which the historian reports in language; that is, he would experience actions that were the natural expression of virtue — courage and so on — and consequently he would 'see' these virtues. The historian re-expresses those actions in language and communicates the same virtue, for he, and the poet like him, creates an image of actions. Sidney's discussion of the best expression of anger could at this point include the historian with the poet; both present actions through language, or images of action: 'Anger, the Stoics say, was a short madness: let but Sophocles bring you Ajax on a stage, killing and whipping sheep and oxen, thinking them the army of Greeks . . . and tell me if you have not a more familiar insight into anger than finding in the schoolmen his genus and difference' (p. 108). Sidney's use of dramatic poetry merely makes explicit what he elsewhere insists is the mode of expression of all poetry, the imaging of actions.[2]

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[1] It will be evident in the discussion of the contest between poet and historian why Sidney disregards the direct experience of virtuous action as a means to improve men, just as he does not take into account the possibility of experiencing a 'real' elephant here. This idea is not at all typical of the Renaissance and humanism in general. See, for example, Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (1570), Sig.H1^{v}. See also A. C. Hamilton, *The Structure of Allegory*, p. 25: 'to imitate Nature only confines man in the fallen world'.

[2] In the past few years there has been a great deal of discussion of the term 'image' in Sidney. A. C. Hamilton uses the *Apology* in his approach to *The Faerie Queene* in order to prove that the anti-allegorical poetic tradition of the day included a better view of allegory (*The Structure of Allegory*, p. 17). Hence the image includes all meaning within itself. Walter Davis (pp. 37 ff.), speaks of the importance of the image in Sidney's theory, but is somewhat vague about its nature and function. Emphasis on the image to the neglect of all other aspects of the *Apology* derives from over-emphasis on the 'maker' argument.

All artistic expressions, then, are based on natural expression and the natural ability of man to perceive what is expressed in nature. That is the 'given' of Sidney's systematic approach to art. Poetry is an expression that is close to nature; in poetry, for example, are 'all virtues, vices, and passions so in their own natural seats laid to the view, that we seem not to hear of them, but clearly to see through them' (p. 108). Poetry thus draws men to the communicative relation and communicates virtue to them easily because it uses human actions — the material of the natural expression of virtue — as its own mode of expression. (This is true of history as well.) The mode of expression of moral philosophy, however, is much more removed from the standard of natural expression and response. Philosophical language communicates 'definitions, divisions, and distinctions', not actions. Hence Sidney's statements against the philosopher are all of a kind: his act is so far removed from nature that he cannot depend on a response from his audience.

> For the philosopher, setting down with thorny argument the bare rule, is so hard of utterance, and so misty to be conceived, that one that hath no other guide but him shall wade in him till he be old before he shall find sufficient cause to be honest. For his knowledge standeth so upon the abstract and general, that happy is that man who may understand him, and more happy that can apply what he doth understand. (pp. 106–7)

> I say the philosopher teacheth, but he teacheth obscurely, so as the learned only can understand him; that is to say, he teacheth them that are already taught. (p. 109)

Although ultimately derived from nature, the philosopher's mode of expression is far removed from that basis. The 'abstract and general' materials of communication of virtue are valueless to the man who is not specially trained to make the relation between virtue expressed in action and its verbal 'definition'. The trained men are the 'learned' of the second passage; they understand the moral philosopher and can 'apply' his statements toward the realization of virtue in their own lives. Yet the man who does not have this special training — this 'art' of response — cannot see the relation between the maxims and generalizations and the natural mode of expression of virtue, particular or concrete action. The poet is thus, in contrast, 'the right popular philosopher', for he depends on a response that is natural and universal, even in the man trained beyond his own nature.

The tradition in which art grows out of nature and in which the 'best' art is that closest to its natural origins is a long and continuous one. The father of this mode of thought is Democritus, just as Plato is the father of ideal philosophy and Aristotle the father of scientific inquiry. For Democritus 'atoms and Void (*alone*) exist in reality', that is, they alone constitute Nature.[1] According to the best recent historian of ancient philosophy, Richard McKeon, Democritus claims that 'art is natural, since all things, natural as well as artificial, are the result of the motion of bodies, and nature and instruction are similar in their operation . . . For Democritus, sensation and even knowledge are results of images, while only atoms and the void are truly, and art is natural in its occurrence, although it depends on images'.[2] According to Democritus, literary art is natural because, however unconscious we are of the fact, aesthetic effect depends on the motion of atoms. Poetics would investigate the kinds of effect arising from different atomic movements — that is, it would relate the apparent aesthetic effect to its underlying causes — and the best kind of art would be that which could concentrate within the poem the maximum effect. Art would remain 'natural' because it is based on an effect arising from the nature of things; but it would be artistic as well because it is a deliberate concentration of natural effects.

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[1] Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Oxford, 1952), p. 93. See, also, Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, translated by R. D. Hicks, Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols (London and New York, 1925), II, 453–5, for Democritean doctrines about existence and change.

[2] 'Imitation and Poetry', in *Thought, Action, and Passion* (Chicago, 1954), pp. 114–15. Images are the effect on the mind of atomic bombardment or 'motion of bodies'.

This Democritean conception of art (though not necessarily atomism specifically) has been relatively strong in Western thought from Greek times to the present, but its influence has not been as great as that of Plato or Aristotle, or even Cicero.[1] The tradition is rarely noted by critics of the Renaissance, either in Sidney or in other writers; the failure to note its function in the *Apology* leaves a certain residue not explained by Sidney's Platonism. Of all the Italian critics who have been said to have influenced Sidney, Julius Caesar Scaliger alone belongs to this Democritean tradition.[2] For Scaliger art is verbal, and words are based on what exists in nature (the *res ipsae*):

> universam negotium nostrum in Res & Verba quum dividatur, verba ipsa & partes sunt & materia orationis, quae iam à nobis explicata est: verborum autem dispositio atque apparatus quasi forma quaedam, de qua postea dicemus. Res autem ipsae finis sunt orationis, quarum verba notae sunt. Quamobrem ab ipsis rebus formam illam accipiunt, qua hoc ipsum sunt, quod sunt.[3]

Art therefore imitates nature or creates a secondary image of it, and consequently the structure and the value of poetry depend on what it images. Weinberg says that for Scaliger, 'genres are distinguished by the kinds of things they represent and are arranged into a hierarchy of excellence according to the excellence of their subjects' (II, 745). Sidney apparently knew Scaliger's *Poetices* and may indeed have been influenced by the latter's conception of the relation between art and nature. At any rate Sidney's conception is similar, though not identical. We have seen the use to which Sidney puts this conception in the contest between the poet and moral philosopher. But the conception also underlies the argument in the *narratio* that poetry was the first learning, as well as certain aspects of Sidney's defence of poetry 'by parts'. In the *narratio* Sidney maintains that in the historical development of Greece the poet was 'the first light-giver to ignorance, and first nurse, whose milk by little and little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges' (p. 96). The occurrence of poetry as the first verbal art is predictable in terms of

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[1] Some of the modern occurrences are: Christopher Caudwell, *Studies in a Dying Culture* (London, 1938), especially in Chapter 1 on Bernard Shaw. Caudwell speaks of the 'unconscious being' (i.e., nature) of society as the submerged reality out of which the 'phosphorescence of consciousness' (i.e., art) should grow;' Simon O. Lesser in *Fiction and the Unconscious* (Boston, 1957), argues that the materials of art derive from natural (although unconscious) processes: 'Although only the unconscious is likely to perceive it, in the last analysis both "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and "I Want to Know Why" are stories of a boy's relationship with his father. Both describe more or less universal phases of the process of growing up, although, as in great fiction generally, the actual events are so altered that they may not be consciously recognizable, and so telescoped and heightened that they arouse even profounder affects than the less dramatic and more gradual experiences they draw upon and evoke' (p. 233). Neither Sidney, Caudwell, nor Lesser is an atomist, of course.

[2] For the assertions of Scaliger's influence on Sidney, see the passages quoted above, page 49, note 1. See, also, Spingarn, pp. 171 ff., where he makes Sidney's debt to Scaliger and others more explicit.

[3] *Poetices libri septem* (1561), p. 80, as quoted in Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols (Chicago, 1961), II, 745. My analysis of Scaliger is indebted to Mr Weinberg's.

Sidney's theory of the relation of art to nature. Sidney could argue, for example, that, had philosophers come along before poets in Greece, they would have attempted unsuccessfully to communicate with men, been forgotten, and then would have had to wait until after the poets began art; then they could have imitated the poets, as Sidney asserts they did (p. 97). The basis of the relation of the particular art, poetry, to nature is the image: one is a primary image and the other is secondary. The poets present images, or direct imitations of nature, and are consequently understood by untrained or 'natural' men; the closeness of the relation between any particular art and nature becomes the criterion of its place in the historical process of the development of the arts. Poetry is the first art; men come to understand poetry by making the relation between primary and secondary form. Philosophy occurs at a later time, and depends on this elemental 'training' with respect to poetry in order to be understood. According to Sidney, then, the philosophers make use of the secondary level of expression of the poet, but they will continue to develop that secondary form away from nature — that is, away from images and toward definitions and precepts.

This process of development away from nature is not necessarily a bad one in the *narratio*. Sidney implies that the 'fore-going' of poets allows for the development of the arts. He even emphasizes the idea that poetry is simply the beginning of learning in what he says of Turkey, Ireland, Wales, and 'Indians': 'if ever learning come among them, it must be by having their hard dull wits softened and sharpened with the sweet delights of Poetry' (p. 98). Poetry would simply prepare for the more important kinds of learning. But in the contest argument Sidney reverses the emphasis. The moral philosopher's 'wordish description' is not the result of a salutary process of art. Rather, it is too far from nature because it cannot be applied to action by the untrained man. In fact, in exactly the degree art is removed from nature in the contest argument, it is judged ineffective. The conceptual basis of both the 'first learning' argument and the contest between the poet and the moral philosopher is nonetheless essentially the same. The same conception underlies other arguments of the *Apology*, especially Sidney's discussion about diction, which grows into what is commonly called the digression. Here he attacks the artificiality of poetic diction — the use of 'far-fetched words', the 'coursing of a letter' — which is so far removed from what is natural and effective; and praises: 'the courtier, following that which by practice he findeth fittest to nature, therein (though he know it not) doth according to art, though not by art: where the other, using art to show art, and not to hide art . . . flieth from nature, and indeed abuseth art' (p. 139).

Finally, the section of the *Apology* which examines poetry 'by parts' reveals a more attenuated but perhaps more important use of the relation of art to nature. This section on the kinds of poetry was one of the reasons for the Aristotelian tag which the *Apology* bore for so long; critics today generally ignore Sidney's conception of generic structure altogether.[1] The conception of kinds of poetry in Sidney's treatise is erratic, but this is exactly in line with his conception of art: he would be obligated to look at the existing kinds of poetry (as nature, or 'what is') as the source of the structure of poetic kinds. In the same sense — and even more importantly — the structure of the virtues is the structure of nature. That is, the virtues which exist and the order into which they fall (Sidney does not touch on this explicitly) depend on which virtues occur as natural expressions, and their 'natural' value. Theorists do not invent kinds of poetry just as poets do not invent virtue. Nature is the progenitor: she governs existence and therefore governs the art which is based upon it. Here, of course, Sidney most resembles Scaliger.

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[1] See, however, F. Michael Krouse, 'Plato and Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*', p. 140.

In the previous section we have seen that both poet and historian are more effective than the moral philosopher because their images of virtue are closer to natural expression than precepts and rules. Sidney readily admits this equality between poet and historian during the contest, and at one point even argues for the historian over the poet: 'But now may it be alleged that if this imagining of matters be so fit for the imagination, then must the historian needs surpass, who bringeth you images of true matters, such as indeed were done, and not such as fantastically or falsely may be suggested to have been done' (p. 109). Since it is an historical fact that men have fought at places such as Agincourt and expressed virtue in those actions, the historian need only communicate those actions in the secondary form of language. The reader will, through the actions, see the virtue expressed and be able to express the same virtue in his own actions. Yet Sidney is quick to point out that this is a less than ideal proceeding: 'The historian, bound to tell things as things were, cannot be liberal (without he will be poetical) of a perfect pattern, but, as in Alexander or Scipio himself, show doings, some to be liked, some to be misliked' (p. 110). Sidney obviously ties the historian to *all* past deeds, not only the less-than-good aspects of men like Scipio, but also the deeds of evil men who have sped 'well enough in their abominable injustice and usurpation'. Just before giving a list of good men destroyed and evil men who were happy, Sidney summarizes the point: 'the historian, being captived to the truth of a foolish world, is many times a terror from well-doing, and an encouragement to unbridled wickedness' (p. 111). The consequences of the historian as the promoter of virtue are unappealing. Men can come to know the virtue expressed in action in the past, and may thus actualize that virtue — that is, express it in their own actions. Yet men as a whole become no better because they will continue to actualize the evil along with the good.[1]

In this part of the *confirmatio* Sidney argues that poetry goes beyond history as a promoter of virtue in men in several ways. The poet may become a 'poetical' historian, taking over historical action and 'beautifying it both for further teaching, and more delighting' (p. 111). But Sidney primarily insists that the poet will invent those 'perfect patterns' in which the historian fails: 'If the poet do his part aright, he will show you in Tantalus, Atreus, and such like, nothing that is not to be shunned; in Cyrus, Aeneas, Ulysses, each thing to be followed' (p. 110). In other words the poet invents in secondary or artistic form the perfection of virtue. The life of Scipio as reported by the historian is only a partial expression of virtue, since the real Scipio actualized only a part of man's potential virtue. But Sidney goes further than this. Even the one most virtuous deed of Scipio is an actual expression of virtue and hence it is by definition an expression of 'what is' rather than 'what should be'. It is an incomplete expression of virtue, not a complete or perfect one. The 'perfect pattern' of the poet is, on the other hand, a complete expression of virtue; it is the fulfilling on the secondary level of expression of man's potential for expressing virtue in action.

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[1] An interesting counter to this is Count Ludovico's method of imitation in Book I of Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, edited by Bruno Maier, second edition (Turin, 1964). He 'constructs' an ideal courtier by allowing for the imitation of the best in each of a variety of masters of particular acts and skills (pp. 122–3).

We have seen earlier that men respond to the natural expression of virtue in human action, however incomplete that expression is; they see virtue, but only in part. Men also respond to that secondary level of expression, or art, in terms of the relation of this mode of expression to the natural mode; they in effect respond easily to poetry and history. Sidney also implies that men respond naturally to the virtue they see in the expression: they are moved towards it and are moved to actualize that in their own lives. Thus men respond to the partial expression of virtue in history, but they respond more fully to its complete expression in poetry. While engaged in an argument about the communicative relation set up between man and the poet, Sidney remarks that men 'will be content to be delighted — which is all the good-fellow poet seemeth to promise — and so steal to see the form of goodness (which seen they cannot but love) ere themselves be aware' (p. 114). Men see virtue or goodness completely; they are drawn to it and are moved to actualize it in their own lives. Poetry thus leads to a maximization of virtue in human life far beyond that possible with only the experience of history.

This second argument on behalf of the poet is based on a Platonic distinction between the ideal and the real.[1] But it is a kind of Platonism that is distinctly Renaissance and clearly humanistic. There has been a tendency by historians of philosophic thought to give the previously discussed relation between the *res ipsa* and its phenomenal expressions a Platonic label. Yet this conception of reality is so pervasive in the Renaissance that if we call it Platonic we are calling every writer a follower of Plato.[2] The thought of the much smaller group of Platonic humanists is based on the assumption that man can conceive of perfection in thought, in the first place; then he may attempt to bring the idea into the phenomenal world of word and deed. Baldassar Castiglione in the Epistle to *Il Libro del Cortegiano* expresses the conception in a succinct way:

> Altri dicono che, essendo tanto difficile e quasi impossibile trovar un omo così perfetto come io voglio che sia il cortegiano, è stato superfluo il scriverlo. . . . A questi rispondo che mi contentarò aver errato con Platone, Senofonte e Marco Tullio, lassando il disputare del mondo intelligibile e delle idee; tra le quali, sì come, secondo quella opinione, è la idea della perfetta republica e del perfetto re e del perfetto oratore, così è ancora quella del perfetto cortegiano; alla imagine della quale s'io no ho potuto approssimarmi col stile, tanto minor fatica averanno il cortegiani d'approssimarsi con l'opere al termine e mèta, ch'io col scrivere ho loro proposto.[3]

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[1] This has been the most readily perceived assumption of the *Apology*, from Irene Samuel's article in the early forties onwards. See, especially, A. C. Hamilton's discussion of fallen Nature in *The Structure of Allegory*, pp. 25–7, and Walter Davis's discussion (pp. 42–4) of the relation of the idea of fiction to the actual world.

[2] For a writer such as Roger Ascham in *The Scholemaster* the *res ipsa* is a commonplace: love or virtue or some 'thing' that is perceptible only by means of its concrete expressions (the modern word would be 'theme' instead of 'commonplace'). This is generally the view of the rhetorically oriented Renaissance writers.

[3] *Il Cortegiano*, p. 76. None of the critics who note the Platonism of the *Apology* is very clear about the exact variety of Renaissance Platonism which it represents.

Here Castiglione sets up the ideal of thought ('imagine') as a standard by which to judge the verbal expression ('col stile'); the verbal expression becomes in turn the standard of the actions of courtiers ('con l'opere'). This is a distinct humanistic Platonism in two ways: first, the attempt is to bring the ideal or the perfect down into the actual world of actional and verbal expressions; second, the ideal is internal to man. A Platonism that is much closer to Plato occurs in Book IV of *Il Cortegiano* in Peter Bembo's monologue. Bembo distinguishes two levels of existence, the phenomenal and superphenomenal, and two fundamentally different ways of knowing, by the senses and by intuition. The lover who climbs the stairway of love moves from knowing by means of sensible perception to knowing 'con gli occhi della mente', that is, by a turning inward to perceive the expression of divine beauty within his soul. This process is a transcendent one and opposite in direction to the process from the ideal to word and deed. Bembo's courtier transcends phenomenal reality after beginning on the stairway by means of sensible perception, and comes finally to participate in the Unity of Beauty, Goodness, and Wisdom. But until the final stages of transcendence the supersensible Ideal is distinct from man.

Sidney's Platonism is much more closely related to that of Castiglione's Epistle. He conceives of the ideal as a product of human thought: 'since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it' (p. 101). He also demands that the verbal arts bring the ideal down into human action: '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' (p. 104). Sidney's Platonism is a great deal more developed that Castiglione's, whose main virtue is its concise conceptualization of thought, word, and deed.[1] But Sidney must reconcile his view of the ideal with the Democritean conception of an art determined by nature. Sidney, for example, explicitly embraces nature as the progenitor of art and consequently assumes the existent thing as prior to idealization of it in the poet's mind. This is implied in his comparison of the historian and poet, where the poet may improve history for 'further teaching', and in Sidney's further claim that the poet invents the complete expression of virtue. The poet's experience, in other words, begins in phenomena and ends in art.

The Platonic argument of the contest in the *Apology* is of course paralleled by the maker argument, from which I have already quoted one passage. Here, as in the contest, Sidney establishes the relation of the arts to fact or the 'works of Nature'. All the artists except the poet merely observe what occurs in nature — as does the historian in the contest — and then report the observations in the secondary form of language.

> Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into 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. (p. 100)

The poet is then distinguished from nature, conceived as an 'artist' or producer; the other artists are left far behind.

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[1] Castiglione does not develop this kind of Platonism elsewhere in *Il Cortegiano*.

The basis of this distinction is the same as the implied distinction of actual and ideal expressions in the contest. Nature as a maker produces actual expressions of things: the actual or 'brazen' world, and actual lovers, friends, and princes. The poet produces ideal expressions of the things that are actualized in nature: of love, friendship, justice, and even the world. Sidney goes on to distinguish between the 'essential' product of nature, and the product of the poet 'in imitation or fiction' (p. 101), but also to distinguish the product of the poet as the most effective.

The primary difference between the contest argument and the maker argument lies in the limitation of the poet's activity previous to the contest. In the maker argument Sidney places the poet alongside nature as the maker of fictive things: everything from Cyclops to virtues to whole worlds. But before he gets to the contest proper Sidney limits the things the poet will actualize. He establishes the competition between the poet, moral philosopher, and historian in terms of their ability to promote 'virtuous action' (p. 104). Hence the things that each attempts to express successfully are predominantly the virtues which originally occur in nature. In the maker argument the poet 'bringeth things forth far surpassing her [Nature's] doings' (p. 101); but the exact criteria by which the poet's actualizations are better is not clear except in the statement that the imagined Cyrus produces 'many Cyruses'. In the contest the end of the poet is specified by the established competition; he becomes better because he promotes virtue most effectively by means of ideal images of action.

The argument that centres on the title of *vates* which the Romans gave to the poet is also a manifestation of one of the implications of Sidney's distinction of ideal and actual expressions. Because his images are 'perfections' of what occurs in nature, the poet predicts the end of humanity's progress toward virtue. He predicts, in other words, because he goes from natural human fact toward the utmost of human potential, and gives a 'picture' of that end. This conception of the poet is supported in the *narratio* by the allegation that he is 'a diviner, foreseer, or prophet . . .'; the mention of the *Sortes Virgilianae* and the oracles repeats the support of this concept (p. 98). From this point in the *narratio* it remains only to specify exactly what the poet predicts, and this occurs in the contest.

The *Apology* clearly has a consistent theoretical basis for its arguments. The conceptions of phenomena as expressions, of the relation of art to nature, and of the relation between the ideal and actual give underlying substance to the work, and consistency as well. While Sidney is not a philosopher of art — as is Scaliger — he is certainly original, coherent, and systematically theoretical. And while his Platonism is not new to the Renaissance, his Democriteanism is, to a large degree. In the continuing praise of Sidney's accomplishments we must now include his real mastery of critical theory.

ROBERT M. STROZIER

DETROIT