Philip Sidney

* *Defense of Poesie* or *Apology of Poetry* (with various spellings)
* Apology = defense or advocacy or argument in favour of (the original legal meaning)
* The book was written to defend poetry against Stephen Gosson’s changes in *The School of Abuse* (1579). Gosson criticized poetry, art and drama in very strong terms. He called poetry ‘mother of lies’ and ‘nurse of abuse’.
* Gosson said:

1. Music damages virtue.
2. Both tragedy and comedy weaken moral character.
3. Poets, pipers and jesters are all enemies of the state etc.

Sidney tried to answer all these changes with the following arguments, drawing upon Plato, Aristotle and Horace as well as classical literature.

* Sidney’s defense of poetry

1. The antiquity of the poetry: Poets brought the first light to remove ignorance. Sidney draws upon the writers of Greece and Rome to prove this point.
2. Universality: There is poetry everywhere, even among barbarians and those who do not write. They make songs about gods, ancestors and heroes.
3. Reverence for poets: All cultures hold their poets in great respect; they were considered as ‘creators’ (in Greece) and as ‘prophets’ or ‘vates’ (in Rome).
4. The poet does not simply imitate. He imitates in a creative manner. Therefore, art is not simply a copy. Here he answers Plato’s charge in an Aristotelian vein.
5. Poetry is superior to both philosophy and history. (Aristotle says that history is only a record of specific events whereas poetry tries to arrive at the universal truths underlying such specificities and that poetry is therefore superior.)
6. Function: To delight and to teach and to move men to goodness.

* Sidney was a classicist. He drew all his ideas from Plato, Aristotle and Horace. He had great admiration for the ancient masters. Sidney’s classicism included also the respect for ancient rules of poetry and drama. He was an advocate of classical meters.
* This is the first work of systematic criticism or literary theorizing by an Englishman.
* The ultimate function of poetry for Sidney is the moralizing effect. Delight and emotion are auxiliaries.

\*\*\*\*\* Biju Joseph’s classnotes; typed by Sr Savitha KJ \*\*\*\*\*