

Rice University

Parody and Its Implications in Sydney's Defense of Poesie

Author(s): Arthur F. Kinney

Source: *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 12, No. 1, The English Renaissance (Winter, 1972), pp. 1-19

Published by: [Rice University](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/449970>

Accessed: 22/12/2013 19:48

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Rice University is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Parody and Its Implications in Sidney's Defense of Poesie

ARTHUR F. KINNEY

Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesie* consciously parallels and burlesques Stephen Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse* (1579) in form (the classical oration), issues (listed in Sidney's *reprehensio*), authorities, and even illustrations as well as in style, notably the use of euphuism. This was because Sidney recognized that—although he disagreed with Gosson's apparent position against *all* poetry and the simplicity and crudity of Gosson's work—his disagreement with Gosson was not a substantial one; he resorted to parody to mask the similarity of his own argument in his "*Defense*." Since the comparison of texts demonstrates how clearly this was the case, we must now redate the composition and distribution of Sidney's treatise as late fall or early winter 1579/80.

ALTHOUGH MANY SCHOLARS have commended Sir Philip Sidney for his pleasant *exordium* concerning the horsemaster Jon Pietro Pugliano which opens his distinguished *Defense of Poesie*, no one has advanced any reason why Sidney chose this particular anecdote to begin a carefully constructed and tightly reasoned aesthetic. Innumerable source studies have been unable to uncover classical sources or parallels; we generally assume the incident to be autobiographical and amusing, nothing more. Yet the autobiographical dimension is not a feature elsewhere in the *Defense*; it is more properly viewed as a traditional means of writing an *exordium*. A further hint, however, which sheds light on both Sidney's intention and method, is supplied by Stephen Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse* (1579), the attack on poetry, music, and drama which undoubtedly prompted Sidney's defense.¹

¹Thomas Zouch maintained in 1808 that Gosson influenced Sidney and in 1868 Arber, in his edition of Sidney's *Apologie*, flatly stated Sidney's work was "a carefully prepared answer" to Gosson. Subsequent biographers and editors of Sidney have in the main agreed, leading William B. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks to comment in *Literary Criticism* (New York, 1957) that "Largely from Gosson's dedication and from an allusion to this by Spenser in a letter . . . , but in part also from certain moments in Sidney's argument and certain snatches of parodied Euphuistic style which seem echoes of Gosson, Sidney's *Defense of Poesie*, though written perhaps as late as 1585, has been traditionally considered a retort to Gosson" (p. 169). See Zouch, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Sir Philip Sidney* (York, 1808), p. 197; Edward Arber (London, 1868), p. 7; cf. George E. Woodbury, *Studies of a Litterateur*

Gosson also began with an autobiographical account. Further, he assumed in his pamphlet a number of metaphorical roles as critic,² one of which was that of the soldier who insists men keep up their guard against the subtle evil effects of much poetry. At one point Gosson writes, "make much of Souldiers, that are redy to execute the same with swords . . . the least discontinuance of Martiall exercise give you the foyle" (D8v). Compare this representative remark to Sidney's text in which it is said of Pugliano that

He said souldiers were the noblest estate of mankind, and horsemen the noblest of souldiers. He said they were the maisters of warre, and ornaments of peace, speedie goers, and strong abiders, triumphers both in Camps and Courts: nay to so unbeleeved a point he preceeded, as that no earthly thing bred such wonder to a Prince, as to be a good horseman . . . then would he adde certaine praises by telling what a peerlesse beast the horse was, the onely serviceable Courtier without flattery, the beast of most bewtie, faithfulnessse, courage, and such more, that if I had not bene a peece of a *Logician* before I came to him, I thinke he

(New York, 1921), p. 297. See also Mona Wilson, *Sir Philip Sidney* (London, 1931), p. 156; the biographies of J. Addington Symonds (London and New York, 1886); H. R. Fox Bourne (New York, 1891), p. 205; E. M. Dankinger, (London, 1932), p. 159; C. Henry Warren (London, 1936), pp. 118-119; Alfred H. Bill (New York, 1937), pp. 194-195; Frederick S. Boas (London, 1955), p. 45; Adele Biagi (Napoli, 1958), pp. 131-136; and the editions of Sidney's *Defense*, ed. Albert S. Cook (Boston, 1890), pi. xii; Evelyn S. Shuckburgh (Cambridge, 1891), p. xxxiii; G. Gregory Smith (London, 1904), p. 393 *et passim*; and J. Churton Collins (Oxford, 1907), p. xxiii. See also Joel E. Spingarn, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance* (New York, 1899), p. 273; George Saintsbury, *A History of Criticism II* (Edinburgh and London, 1902), 171-176; and Cornell M. Dowlin, "Sidney's Two Definitions of Poetry," *Modern Language Quarterly*, III (1942), 573-581; J. W. H. Atkins, *English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance* (London, 1951), pp. 113-138. In *The Poet's Defence* (Cambridge, 1939), Jacob Bronowski studies the respective positions of Gosson and Sidney as a running debate (pp. 19-56).

²Gosson assigns four roles to the critic; besides that discussed here he treats the critic as a host who welcomes his reader to a nourishing argument, a teacher who instructs in virtue and its abuse, and a doctor who attempts to amputate corruption caused by bad poetry. For a full discussion of these roles and the ways Gosson uses them to develop his argument, see my earlier essay, "Stephen Gosson's Art of Argumentation in *The Schoole of Abuse*," *Studies in English Literature*, VII (1967), 43-54.

would have persuaded me to have wished my selfe a horse.³

Along with a delightful general satire of the Court, Pugliano is made to burlesque Gosson's words by applying them to a horse rather than the rider and this mockery in turn allows Sidney to satirize the credibility of the foolish readers of Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse*. Implications in Sidney's *exordium* emerge: Gosson proceeds from scattered observations on London theaters to a theory "so unbeleaved"; his praise and condemnation are characterized by extreme language; "a peece of a *Logician*" is able to respond to Gosson's argument but, since no one has, the need for a "defense" against Gosson's "attack" is now apparent.

Of course this is not instantly clear, and it may even seem forced. Sidney's *Defense* is generally sweet, subtle, and comic: a work of good humor. But if we add to this a line of parody on the hypothesis that the work is throughout a sophisticated response to Gosson, then the *exordium* logically and stylistically coheres. Further we can trace conscious parallels and burlesque: in Sidney's use of the form of a judicial oration; in the massive array of classical authority (where Sidney frequently chooses Gosson's authorities and even his sources); in the satire of (and parody of) euphuism, the style in which Gosson wrote *The Schoole of Abuse*. The parallel presentations, in fact, continue to the point where, in his *reprehensio*, Sidney answers precisely those charges which Gosson alone had listed against poetry, and it is part of my purpose to examine some of those parallels here. But I am also interested in the reason Sidney used parody: I think he did so because he was in many ways in agreement with Gosson's position and so could not directly oppose it. If this hypothesis is true, however, we need

³B1-B1v; I, 150. I have been aided in this study by William Elwood who furnished me with an IBM printout of Robert Sidney's ms., the Ponsonby quarto, and the Olney 1914 edition of the *Defense* as parallel texts. Quotations are from the Ponsonby quarto as collated with the text in G. Gregory Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, I, (Oxford, 1904), 150-207, but these have also been collated with the Olney quarto and the ms. I have chosen Ponsonby for the reasons advanced by Feuillerat in his edition of Sidney's *Prose Works*, III, (Cambridge, 1912-1926), v-vi, a choice supported by William Ringer who, in reading both quartos against the Penshurst ms. recently discovered, tells me that the Olney is a later text with sophisticated interpolations in all likelihood not in Sidney's original text.

to redate Sidney's *Defense* to the winter of 1580, while the object of the parody was still fresh in his readers' minds. I shall conclude, therefore, with some additional evidence suggesting a date of composition for the *Defense* considerably earlier than the one we have been persuaded to give it.

I

Stephen Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse* was entered in the Stationer's Register on 22 July 1579; the pamphlet was dedicated to "the right noble Gentleman, Master Philip Sidney *Esquier.*" On 5 and 16 October, 1579, in a letter to Gabriel Harvey dated from Leicester House, the London home of Sidney's uncle, Edmund Spenser wrote "Newe Books I heare of none, but only of one, that writing a certaine Booke, called *The School of Abuse*, and dedicating it to Maister *Sidney*, was for hys labor scorned: if at least it be in the goodnesse of that nature to scorne. Suche follie is it, not to regard aforehande the inclination and qualitie of him, to whome wee dedicate oure Bookes."⁴ Yet the book Sidney "scorned" was not as offensive as we have thought.

Briefly Gosson argues that good art instructs men in virtue by presenting models of virtuous action (C6v-C7) while poor art corrupts man by suggesting such evil tendencies as immoderation (B7ff.) Art is always enjoyable because it appeals to the emotions. But this is dangerous: "Poets, eyther with fables to shew theyr abuses, or with plaine tearmes to unfold theyr mischiefe, . . . disperse their poyson through all the worlde" (A1v).⁵ Poetry in alluring men as it does (A2) awakens pleasure and subjects reason. Thus it corrupts man's special nature (D2): "Man is enriched with reason and knowledge: with knowledge to serve his maker and governe him-

⁴*Two Other, very commendable Letters*, printed with *Three Proper, and wittie, familiar Letters* (1580), fol. G3v. In *Stephen Gosson: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Princeton, 1942, rpt. New York, 1971), William Ringler has justified the dedication: "The kind of book that Sidney's contemporaries in general thought would attract him can be seen in the three works that had been dedicated to him before the *Schoole of Abuse* [three moral treatises, one an edition of the New Testament in Greek]. It is obvious that anyone who knew Sidney only by reputation in 1579 had every reason to expect that he would find a work like the *Schoole of Abuse* highly acceptable" (pp. 36-37).

⁵Quotations are from the second edition (1579b) of Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse*.

self; with reason to distinguish good and ill" (D1v). Without reason men turn into beasts. When reason is subjected to passion, man's actions become immoderate (C6) and immoral (C1ff.) Just as there is a right use of all arts so there is a right use of poetry (A7v). But until that use of teaching virtue is restored it is best for men (D3-D3v) and women (F4) to remain at home, avoiding temptation. Gosson's pamphlet is corrective and educative; he offers in appended letters two recommendations: until plays specifically begin to teach virtue the Lord Mayor should refuse all letters patent (E8) and women especially should refrain from playhouses (F2).

Thus Gosson argues that poetry (by which he means all art) is by nature good; it is evil when it is abused (literally, wrongly used) or made unnatural as judged by the ends to which it is put or the ends which somehow result.⁶

And as some of the Players are farre from abuse: so are some of their Playes are without rebuke: which are as easily remembered as quickly reckoned. The two prose Bookes plaied at the Belsavage, where you shall finde never a woorde without wit, never a line without pith, never a letter placed in vaine. The *Jew* and *Ptolome*, showne at the Bull, the one representing the greedinesse of worldly chusers, and bloody mindes of Usurers: The other very lively discribng howe seditious estates, with their owne devises, false friendes, with their owne swoordes, and rebellious commons in their owne snares are overthrowne: neither with Amorous gesture wounding the eye: nor with slovenly talke hurting the eares of the chast hearers. (C6v)

He concludes by insisting that he would not banish art (D3-D3v).

Gosson lists five ways in which poetry is abused. (a) Poetry is frivolous; when it does not teach virtue but entertains only, it serves no function in the commonwealth and is therefore useless (A1v). (b) Poets are liars, and seduce their readers to believe in falsehoods which deliberately teach evil through (c) arousing emotion and demoting reason (A2). (d) The wrong use of poetry threatens good government by appealing especially to youth (A6). (e) Poetry and drama likewise when abused endanger social and economic life since they

⁶Cf. Bronowski, pp. 33-34.

encourage participation in frivolity and detract men, especially apprentices, from jobs (C8v).

In the face of such abuses Gosson's own reaction is cautious. He favors tradition: men should "walk in the pathes of their predecessors" (B1v). He urges moderation: "He that holds not him self contented with the light of the Sun but liftes up his eyes to measure the bignesse, is made blinde" (E4v). His reasoning is grounded in such assumptions as a corporate polity, the chain of being, and the ideal standards of art and conduct practiced by the men of ancient Greece and Rome. Because he holds to virtue in poetry and the ultimately good nature of well-meaning men, he defends the right use of art; his pamphlet teaches what is wrong, serves as a "schoole of abuse." That abuse can be corrected he makes clear with a medical metaphor:

A good Phisition when the disease cannot bee cured within, thrusteth the corruption out in the face, and delivereth his Patient to the Chirurgion: Though my skill in Phisicke bee small, I have some experience in these maladyes, which I thrust out with my penne too every mans views, yeelding the ranke fleshe to the Chirurgions knife, and so ridde my handes of the cure, for it passeth my cunning too heale them privily. (II5)

Recalling Sidney's *Defense* we can see that he and Gosson agree at several points. For both men (1) poetry is functional as it is educative; its right end is to teach virtue (though for Sidney it must also move men into action); (2) poetry helps man keep his humanity (for Gosson, poetry allows man to fulfill his responsibility on a secular chain of being; for Sidney poetry is divinely inspired and makes man aware of himself and God); (3) history illuminates the discrepancy between what man has been and what he is; what poetry was (and should be) and its current state of abuse. Sidney, scorning Gosson's presumptuous plea for patronage and perhaps annoyed by his frequent hyperbole and crude generalizations, the simplicity of his argument, may also have realized that at many junctures they held common consent. Unable, therefore, to attack Gosson directly he proceeded to laugh Gosson's energetic attack out of court. He proceeded to respond (as both gentleman and critic) through parody and burlesque.

II

Some years ago Kenneth Orne Myrick demonstrated conclusively that Sidney's *Defense* is organized as a classical judicial oration; in arranging his argument by *exordium*, *narratio*, *propositio*, *partitio*, *confirmatio*, *reprehensio*, and *peroratio* Sidney only paralleled the form of argument which Gosson had used.⁷ Several passages scattered throughout Sidney's *Defense* corroborate the notion that he conceives of his argument as a specific answer (cf. F3, F4; p. 181). Sidney never names his opponents—this would be out of keeping with the art of insinuation and parody that marks his response—but in repeated allusion to Gosson—through turning Gosson's phrasing on him, by turning Gosson's own authorities against him, by burlesquing and even criticizing the euphuistic style in which Gosson writes—his target is clear enough to that courtly circle among whom he circulated his manuscript. Since it would be too tedious to cite all the parallel and parodying passages throughout the *Defense*, let us concentrate on the briefest section, the *exordium*, as a representative example of the way in which Sidney replies to Gosson.

Following the reference to Pugliano which opens the *Defense of Poesie*, Sidney writes,

But thus much at least, with his no few words he drave into me, that selfelove is better than any guilding, to make that seem gorgious wherin our selves be parties. (Blv; p. 150)

Gosson had written

Now if any man aske me why my selfe have penned Comedyes in time paste, and inveigh so egerly against them here, let him knowe that *Semel insanvimus omnes*: I have sinned, and am sorry for my fault: . . . I gave my self to that exercise in hope to thrive but I burnt one candle to seek another, and lost bothe my time and my travell, when I had doone. (C7v)

Afterwittes are ever best, burnt Children dread the fire, I have seene that which you behold, and I shun

⁷Myrick, *Sir Philip Sidney as a Literary Craftsman* (Cambridge, Mass., 1935), pp. 46-83; Kinney, pp. 45-46.

that which you frequent. And that I might the easier pull your mindes from such studyes, drawe your feete from such places; I have sente you a Schoole of those abuses, which I have gathered by observation.
(II6v-II7)

A few lines later Sidney uses the same metaphorical role as Gosson had: "beare with me, since the scholler is to be pardoned that followeth the steps of his maister" (B1v; p. 151). As Gosson had written of poets that nurse abuses, so Sidney, in defending them, writes that poetry "hath bene the first light giver to ignorance, and first nurse whose milke litle and litle enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges" (B2; p. 151), combining Gosson's two metaphors.

Myrick (p. 60) has commended Cook's note (p. 61) in which he points out that Sidney's subsequent animal allusions mock Gosson's use of animals. Sidney continues the *exordium*, "And will you play the Hedge-hogge, that being received into the den, drave out his host? Or rather the Vipers, that with their birth kill their parents?" (B2; p. 151) Cook is thinking of such passages in Gosson as this:

Fencing is growne to such abuse, that I may wel compare the Scholars of this Schoole to them that provide Staves for their owne shoulders; that foster Snakes, in their owne bosoms; that trust Wolves, to garde theyr Sheepe; And to the men of *Hyrkania*, that keepe Mastiffes, to woorrye them selves. (D6)

Cook also notes (p. 61) the similarity of Sidney's second phrase and Gosson's own "The Adders death, is her own broode" (D5v).

Next Sidney links Gosson's central metaphor to a virtue of poetry.

Nay let any Historie bee brought, that can say any writers were there before them, if they were not men of the same skill, as *Orpheus*, *Linus*, and some other are named, who having bene the first of that country that made penes deliverers of their knowledge to the posteritie, [m]ay justly challenge to bee called their Fathers in learning. For not onely in time they had this prioritie, (although in it selfe antiquitie be venerable) but went before them, as causes to draw with their charming sweetnesse the wild untamed wits to an admiration of knowledge. (B2; p. 151)

Sidney is parodying Gosson's remark, quoting Cicero, that certain "Fathers in learning" had become "the fathers of lyes" (A3); Gosson's other citations from the ancients were from Plato and the second-century Neoplatonist Maximus Tyrius (A4-A4v).

Just two pages before this, Gosson had written of Ennius (A3) whom Sidney now turns to his own support along with Gower and Chaucer (B2; p. 152); he goes on to turn other of Gosson's authorities—Pythagoras, Plato—against him while continuing to parody his language. Sidney remarks that "this did so notably shew it self, that the *Philosophers of Greece* durst not a long time appear to the world, but under the mask of poets" (B2; p. 152), echoing Gosson's earlier observation that if "[you] pul off the visard that Poets maske in, you shall disclose their reproch" (A2v). Even more telling is the way in which Sidney's adumbration of the basis for his defense,

And truly even *Plato* whoso ever well considereth, shall finde that in the body of his worke though the inside and strength were Philosophie, the skin as it were and beautie, depended most of Poetrie . . . besides his Poeticall describing the circumstances of their meetings, as the well ordering of a banquet, the delicacie of a walke, with enterlacing meere Tales, as *Gyges Ring* and others, which, who knowes not to bee flowers of Poetrie, did never walke into *Appollos Garden* . . .
(B2v; p. 152)

makes its own ironic comment on Gosson's observation that

The foole that comes into a fayre Garden, likes the beawtie of flowers, and stickes them in his Cap: the Phisition considereth their nature, and puttes them in the potte: in the one they wither without profite; in the other they serve to the health of the bodie: He that readeth good writers, and pickes out their flowers for his owne nose, is lyke a foole; hee that preferreth their vertue before their sweet smel is a good Phisition.
(E2v)

Conversely, Gosson's premise that "Poets are the whetstones of wit" (A2) suffers the same reversal from Sidney who comments next that poets are "lawgiving Divines . . . held in a devout reverence" (B3; p. 153); as for the barbarous, Sidney argues, "if ever learning come among them, it

must be by having their hard dull wittes softened and sharpened with the sweete delights of Poetrie, for untill they finde a pleasure in the exercise of the minde, great promises of much knowledge, wil little persuade them that know not the frutes of knowledge" (B3; p. 153). Thus in both his own premise and in Gosson's Sidney is able to burlesque language and subtilely satirize *The Schoole of Abuse*.

Sidney next acknowledges the early Welsh bards whose lessons alone still survive the Roman and Norman conquests (B3-B3v; pp. 153-154) and illustrates the wisdom and virtue of the early writers by turning to an etymological definition of *Poet* in support of poetry. But Gosson too had noted the position which poets held among the ancients; in one place, he remarks,

They whome *Caesar* upheld, were driven out by *Octavian*: whom *Caligula* reclaimed, were cast of by *Nero*: whom *Nervä* exalted, were throwne down by *Trajan*; whom *Anthony* admitted, were expelled againe, pestred in Gallies and sent into *Hellespont* by by *Marcus Aurelius*. But when the whole rabble of Poets, Pipers, Players, Jugglers, Jesters, and dauncers were received againe, *Rome* was reported to bee fuller of fooles then of wise men. (B7)

Sidney continues his praise of the Roman *Vates*, "a diviner, foreseer, or Prophet," with an example.

As of *Albinus* the Governour of our Iland, who in his childhood met with this verse *Arma amens capio, nec sat rationis in armis*: and in his age performed it, although it were a verie vaine and godlesse superstition, as also it was, to thinke spirits were commaunded by such verses, whereupon this word *Charmes* derived of *Carmina*, cometh: so yet serveth it to shew the great reverence those wittes were held in. . . . (B3v; p. 154)

Sidney's objectivity is transformed to apparent agreement with Gosson concerning the "verie vaine and godlesse superstition," but this is in turn countered by a second shift to accounting for the "great reverence" by "wittes" which turns on the implications of "*Charmes*." Sidney thus uses Gosson's argument against him, and this tactic is more sharply realized when we recall that he has Albinus quote a phrase from Cicero which Gosson had labelled "a vain brag and a false allarme" (D8).

What is at issue here is more than rhetoric and parody, however. Sidney is unwilling to admit an abuse of poetry by classical writers nor the inherent dangers in a poetry which portrays both good and evil. On these points Gosson is clear:

Sappho was skilfull in Poetrie and sung wel, but she was whorish. I set not this downe too condemne the giftes of versifying, daunsing, or singyng in women, so they bee used with meane, and exercise in due time. But to shew you that as by *Anacharsis* report the *Scythians* did it without offence: so one Swalowe bringes not Sommer; nor one particular example sufficient prooffe for a generall precept. (A5)

Gosson insists poetry is a two-edged sword that could encourage both virtue and vice. He proposes examples to follow among classical writers for the fallen state of poetry may yet be redeemed. But he proposes no particular safeguards against the evil effects of poetry. Neither does Sidney. Confronted with the real possibility of abuse Sidney turns his discussion to the ideal basis of poetry in the Idea or Platonic form which moves the poet to write. Sidney provides two routes for the poet: to create men of perfection and virtue who as part of the golden world act as corrective models for our brazen world, or to create for instruction and delight those creatures never seen—demigods, cyclops, chimeras, furies (B4v-C1; pp. 155-156). Sidney asks that otherworldly images serve worldly ends. When this position falters in the analysis of current abuses, Sidney's parody also falters and he turns instead to an extended digression (H2ff.; p. 191ff.). I think we are here at a basic cause for Sidney's parody: at heart the issue he takes with Gosson is more one of emphasis than one of substance. Parody effectually hides that recognition.

III

How minimal the differences are which are cloaked in Sidney's parody are made evident in Sidney's *reprehensio*. Here he lists exactly those charges which Gosson had levied:

First, that there beeing manie other more fruteful knowledges, a man might better spend his time in them, then in this. Secondly, that it is the mother of lyes. Thirdly, that it is the nurse of abuse, infecting

us with many pestilent desires, with a *Sirens* sweetness, drawing the minde to the Serpents taile of sinfull fansies; and herein especially *Comedies* give the largest field to eare, as *Chawcer* 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 libertie, and not lulled to sleepe in shadie idlenes, with *Poets* pastimes. And lastly and chiefly, they cry out with open mouth as if they had overshot *Robinhood*, that *Plato* banished them out of his Commonwealth. Truly this is much, if there be much truth in it. (F4-F4v; pp. 183-184)

In responding to these basic points of the controversy, Sidney's argument grows remarkably thin.

First Sidney takes issue with a point Gosson reiterates, that poets often deal with the sensuous image (A1v-A2). Sidney's reply is not so much counterargument as counter-statement, an insistent assertion of his own:

If it be, as I affirme, that no learning is so good, as that which teacheth and moveth to vertue, and that none can both teach and move thereto so much as *Poesie*, then is the conclusion manifest; that incke and paper cannot be to a more profitable purpose employed. And certainly though a man should graunt their first assumption, it should follow (mee thinks) 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 fruitfull knowledge. (F4v; p. 184)

Gosson had required some guarantee—or at the very least a sign—of virtuous poetry; his own test was that of ends. In Gosson's terms, Sidney offers no defense.

Bronowski has demonstrated that Sidney likewise refuses to meet Gosson's second issue.

Gosson does not say [poetry is 'the mother of lyes.'] He does call poets 'fathers of lyes'. He says how they lie, and to what end.

Many good sentences are spoken by *Davus*, to shadowe his knavery: and written by Poets, as ornamentes to beautifye their woorkes, and sette theyr trumperie too sale without suspect.

Pul off the visard that Poets maske in, you shall disclose their reproch, bewray their vanities, loth their wantonnesse, lament their follie, and

perceive their sharpe sayings to be placed as Pearles in Dunghils, fresh pictures on rotten walles, chaste Matrons apparel on common Curtesans. These are the Cuppes of *Circes*, that turne reasonable Creatures into brute Beastes.

When Sidney comes to answer the charge that poetry 'is the mother of lyes', he reads it quite unlike this. He reads it as a charge that the stories told by poets are lies; and answers easily that they are not lies but fables. Gosson had not said that poets tell lying stories. He had said how poets lie, and why. Sidney's sleight of hand with the happy phrase, 'the mother of lyes', does not answer his charge.⁸

Sidney finds further difficulty: on the one hand he supports an aesthetic distance (G1; p.184) and on the other asks his reader to emulate what he reads, for the end of poetry is well-doing, not well-knowing only. Bronowski points out (p. 43) that if the ideal is made real it is no longer ideal; if the poetic Idea is acted out in a brazen world, it is no longer Idea. We now see the necessity of poetry as part history (the cloak of fact) and part philosophy (the basis in Idea): perhaps we are at the genesis of Sidney's response. Still we find no answer to Gosson's objection.

On the third issue Sidney retreats once more to parody. Perhaps he does so because his opening remarks come dangerously close to the position Gosson holds; Sidney writes,

For I will not denie, but that mans wit may make *Poesie*, which should be *ειχαστιχη* [figurative] which some learned have defined figuring foorth good things to be *φανταστιχη* [fantastic] which doth contrariwise infect the fancie with unwoorthie objects, as the Painter should give to the eye either some excellent perspective, or some fine Picture fit for building or fortification, or . . . please an ill pleased eye with wanton shewes of beter hidden matters.

(G2; pp. 186-187)

Sidney succeeds this with outright satire, commenting on Gosson's praise of old classical discipline before poetry (B8-B8v) as a time when "I think scarcely *Spinx* can tell" (G2v; 187-188). Gosson appeals to Aristotle (D2) as the source of natural history which illustrates a necessity for caution. Sidney parodies Aristotle by citing Alexander's choice of

Homer (whom Gosson had parodied on A3) over Aristotle (Sidney, G3v; p. 189). Sidney likewise turns Gosson's other authorities, Achilles (Gosson, B8; Sidney, G3v; p. 189) and Ennius (Gosson, A3; Sidney, G3v; p. 189), on him.

Sidney admits the fourth issue gives him considerable difficulty. His response is again counterattack, this time alluding to Gosson's pamphlet.

First truly a man might maliciously object, that *Plato* being a *Philosopher*, was a naturall enemy of *Poets*. For indeede after the *Philosophers* had picked out of the sweete misteries of *Poetrie*, the right discerning true points of knowledge: they foorthwith putting it in methode, and making a Schoole Art of that which the *Poets* did onely teach by a divine delightfulness, beginning to spurne at their guides, like ungratefull Prentices, were not content to set up shop for themselves, but sought by all meanes to discredit their maisters, which by the force of delight being barred them, the lesse they could overthrow them, the more they hated them. (G4; p. 190)

Sidney's counterassertion lapses into what now seems sophistic. "And a man need go no further than to *Plato* himselfe to knowe his meaning: who in his Dialogue called *Ion*, giveth high, and rightly, divine commendation unto *Poetrie*. So as *Plato* banishing the abuse, not the thing, not banishing it, but giving due honour to it, shall be our Patron, and not our adversarie" (H1; p. 192). Gosson had referred to Plato's action concerning poets in the *Republic*, not the *Ion* (an early work) and in refusing to confront Plato's opinion in the later dialogue, Sidney manipulates Gosson's attack, but does not meet it directly.

Indeed, what develops now in Sidney's *Defense* seems a curious and unexpected thing unless we have come to anticipate the pattern of parody when argument fails. Sidney turns from the substantial matter of defending the act of poetry to examining its art and he spends considerable time on the high rhetoric of euphuism, the style Gosson had employed in *The Schoole of Abuse*. Sidney comments, "Now for the outside of it, which is words, or (as I may tearme it) *Diction*, it is even well worse: so is it that hony-flowing Matrone *Eloquence*, apparrelled, or rather disguised, in a Courtisanlike painted affection" (I3; pp. 201-202). The remark is telling, since

Gosson had argued early (A1v-A2) that poetry attracted men to evil because of its pleasing surfaces.

To be clear, however, Sidney spells out the techniques found in Gosson.

Now for similitudes in certain Printed discourses, I thinke all Herberists, all stories of beasts, foules, and fishes, are rifled up, that may come in multitudes to wait upon any of our conceits, which certainly is as absurd a surfet to the eares as is possible. For the force of a similitude not being to prove any thing to a contrary disputer, but onely to explaine to a willing hearer, when that is done, the rest is a moste tedious pratling. . . . (I3v-I4; pp. 202-203)

The use of analogies drawn especially from Pliny's unnatural history was one of Gosson's chief methods of persuasion. We might further anticipate a detailed stylistic parody of Gosson at this point, and we are not disappointed.

Undoubtedly (at least to my opinion undoubtedly) I have found in divers smal learned Courtiers, a more sound stile, then in some professors of learning, of which I can gesse no other cause, but that the Courtier following that which by practise he findeth fittest to nature, therein (though he know it not) doth according to art, thogh not by art: where the other using art to shew art and not hide art (as in these cases he shuld do) flieth from nature, and indeed abuseth art.
(I4; p. 203)

This passage may in fact contain a veiled reference, for Sidney concludes in part, "But what? me thinks, I deserve to be pounded for straying from *Poetrie*, to *Oratory*: but both have such an affinitie in the wordish consideration, that I think this digression will make my meaning receive the fuller understanding . . ." (I4-I4v; p. 203).

IV

The foregoing evidence demonstrates that Gosson helped to instigate Sidney's *Defense* and that, further, he was instrumental in determining its form (the classical oration), its issues (listed in the *reprehensio*), and its authorities and illustrations as well as style as mirrored in Sidney's parody. I have argued that this was because Sidney disagreed with

Gosson's apparent position against *all* poetry and the simplicity and crudity (despite the euphuism) of his work. But I have argued further that Sidney resorted to parody to disguise the fact that his disagreement with Gosson was not a substantial one.

We can test this premise by comparing Sidney's statements in his fourfold *propositio* with respective statements by Gosson in *The Schoole of Abuse*. Sidney argues first that poets create a golden world through erected wit to respond to and counter the brazen world of the infected will (C1v; p. 157); and this is ultimately congruent with Gosson's position that virtuous poetry is the best teacher. With his second issue taken from Aristotle—that poetry is the art of imitation (C1v; p. 158)—Sidney is on thinner ground. All rests on the intention of the poet and the object created, as Gosson had pointed out (A2; B6-B6v). Sidney does not respond to this problem. Sidney's third issue is his best "defense": "For these third be they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight: and to imitate, borrow nothing of what is, hath bin, or shall be, but range onely reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be" (C2v; p. 159). Gosson is of too literal a turn of mind to address himself to such an issue.

Perhaps with Gosson in mind Sidney acknowledges that "I speake of the Art and not of the Artificer" (D4; p. 169). With that final point—that art alone moves men (E1ff.; p. 170ff.)—he and Gosson agree although Sidney fails to distinguish Gosson's crucial point, that art may move men to good or evil. When an angel and devil appear on stage, who is to say which is more appealing to the playgoer? Ultimately, Sidney begs this question (possibly by assuming a greater inherent goodness in man). All in all, the *Defense* read in light of Gosson's "attack" is neither convincing nor especially satisfying.

I have further argued that along with a lack of substantive differences (save for Sidney's theoretical discussion of the imagination) both Gosson and Sidney share a number of convictions. We are now in a position to determine more of these commonly held attitudes:

(1) Art mirrors man's behavior and motivates him to better actions. Gosson writes, "[With plays] are the abuses of

the worlde revealed, every man in a play may see his owne faultes, and learne by this glasse, to amende his manners" (B5); Sidney notes, "Poetrie ever sets vertue so out in her best cullours, making fortune her well-wayting handmayd, that one must needs be enamoured of her" (D4v; p. 170).

(2) Good art must appeal ultimately to man's soul. Thus Gosson: "[A]re not they accursed thinke you by the mouth of God, which having the government of young Princes, with Poetical fantasies draw them to the schooles of their owne abuses" (A6) and Sidney:

This purifying of wit, this enriching of memorie, enabling of judgement, and enlarging of conceit which commonly we cal learning, under what name so ever it come forth [and poetry is here Sidney's concern], or to what immediate end soever it be directed, the finall end is, to lead and draw us to as high a perfection, as our degenerate soules made worse by their clay-lodgings, can be capable of. (C3; p. 160)

(3) The end of art is not well-knowing but well-doing. Here is Gosson:

If it be the dutie of every man in a common wealth, one way or other to bestirre his stumpes, I cannot but blame those lither contemplators very much, which sit concluding of Sillogismes in a corner, which in a close study in the University coope themselves up fortie yeres together studying all thinges, and professe nothing. . . . To continue so long without moving, . . . what differeth it from a dumbe Picture, or a deade body? (E2-E2v)

Here is Sidney:

But when by the ballance 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 him self, and the *Mathematician*, might draw forth a straight line with a crooked hart. Then so did prooffe, the overruler of opinions make manifest, that all these are but serving sciences; which as they have a private end in themselves, so yet are they all directed to the highest end of the mistresse knowledge by the Greeks which stands as I thinke, in the knowledge of a mans selfe, in the Ethike and Politique consideration, with the end of well doing, and not of well knowing onely. (C3v; p. 161)

From opposing routes and through the opposing styles of directness and parody, both Gosson and Sidney come to the same resting place: both wish to defend and make impregnable the possibilities inherent in good art rightly used.

V

There remains the matter of dating Sidney's *Defense*. Cook (pp. xii-xiii) dated the essay 1583, after Sidney's trip to Flanders in the early spring of 1582 for which he had put aside his early work on the *Arcadia* accomplished in 1581. Cook's argument like Fox Bourne's (p. 407) is a stylistic one; since the prose romance is highly elaborate and artificial in its diction, as the serious passages in the *Defense* are not, Cook infers that the critical treatise comes from a later and more mature period. But Cook wishes to advocate 1583 for another reason—in that year Sidney met Giordano Bruno, the poet and mystic who, Cook is certain, influenced some of the theory in the *Defense*.

It has long been accepted that much of Sidney's platonic thought in the *Defense* was a part of the intellectual current of the late sixteenth century in England and that there is no substantial need nor proof that Bruno played any decisive role. Indeed, I have suggested that Sidney was highly eclectic even in style (from serious theory to satire to parody); and this would suggest a young writer, fresh from the university where students were accustomed to the form of a disputation composed of a patchwork of other men's statements and tones often roughly stitched together.⁹

There is considerable textual evidence that Sidney made a number of major and minor references to Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse* published in the summer of 1579 and read by Sidney, at Spenser's word, by the fall of that year. The large number of passages in the *Defense*—of which I have cited perhaps ten per cent—which parody Gosson, at times rather closely,

⁹Bronowski, pp. 21-22. Sidney had written, "Now for the *Poet*, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth: for as I take it, to lie, is to affirme that to be true, which is false" (G1; p. 184).

⁹I should note that Sidney responds only to the issues Gosson raised in his *Schoole of Abuse* and not to the additional issues Gosson raises later in *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (1582)—an additional reason for the earlier dating of the *Defense*.

suggests that Sidney had a copy of Gosson's pamphlet beside him while he composed his sophisticated and subtle reply. If so, Sidney probably composed his work shortly after publication of *The Schoole of Abuse*. Conversely, no man like Sidney would have felt it necessary at a later date to go to the trouble of answering Gosson since a number of other writers had already taken up that task.¹⁰ Indeed, at a much later date the references for Sidney's parody would be lost, their influence no longer so keenly felt. With the evidence now before us linking the two texts, therefore, it seems reasonable to conjecture that Sidney wrote the *Defense* during late fall or early winter 1579/1580.¹¹

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS,
AMHERST

¹⁰Such as Thomas Lodge in [*Honest Excuses*], also the fall of 1579.

¹¹Another piece of corroboration is Sidney's letter to his brother Robert (Letter XXXVIII in Feuillerat's edition, III, 124-127), in which he cites Homer as exemplary in teaching lessons of conduct and notes the importance of the teacher (pp. 126, 127).