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# SIDNEY'S DEFENSE OF PLATO

Michael Raiger

When Plato banished the poets from his fictional republic, a quarrel was taken up between philosophy and poetry that has continued to the present. Plato has been defended, attacked, and reinterpreted on this point, depending upon the particular aesthetic interests of those who have come after. Regardless of the full force of Plato's censure of poetry it is clear that for Plato, poetry and all the arts are to be directed to the inculcation of virtue. Among those who follow in the Platonic tradition is Sir Philip Sidney, whose appropriation of Plato, what William Temple called "an argument from differences" (Temple 145), attenuates the force of the Platonic critique of poetic imitation by arguing that Plato was concerned with abolishing the abuse of poetry, not poetry as such. Sidney's argument achieves a synthesis of poetry and philosophy, overcoming the antagonism which Plato, at least in the *Ion* and the *Republic*, seems especially concerned to maintain.[1]Iris Murdoch has pushed Plato to an extreme position in his censure of poetry:

> Yet although Plato gives to beauty a crucial role in his philosophy, he practically defines it so as to exclude art, and constantly and emphatically accuses artists of moral weakness or even baseness. One is tempted to look for deeper reasons for such an attitude; and in doing so to try (like Plotinus and Schopenhauer) to uncover, in spite of Plato, some more exalted Platonic aesthetic in the dialogues. (Murdoch 2)

While Murdoch's concern is to rehabilitate Plato in the context of modern philosophy and aesthetic theory, the question she raises—"why Plato banished the artists"—also illustrates the difficulties involved in understanding Plato's influence upon Renaissance poetic theory. Like Iris Murdoch, Sidney attempts in the *Defense of Poetry* to discover an aesthetic

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theory in Plato which will secure a place for poets without offending the dictates of morality.[2] As we shall see, although Sidney mentions only the first two of Plato's charges against the poets (the moral argument and the religious argument against poetry) in his *Defence of Poetry*, implicit in Sidney's definition of poetry as imitation overturns the charge in Book X of the *Republic* that art, as an imitation of an imitation, is three removes from reality (*Republic* 602c). Sidney is primarily concerned with overturning Stephen Gosson's appropriation of Plato in attacking the moral abuses of poetry in *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579),[3] but his definition of mimesis also answers Plato's epistemological/metaphysical critique of poetry. Against this critique, what traditionally has been regarded as the most important of Plato's various criticisms of art, Sidney advances the idea of the poet as maker, the imitative poet who does not simply copy nature, but "doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature" (78.24-26), in imitation not of what is, but "of what may be and should be" (81.6). It is a mimetic theory of art that follows Plotinus, who uses Aristotle to correct Plato, while maintaining the Platonic distinction between the material and Ideal realms.

> Still the arts are not to be slighted on the ground that they create by imitation of natural objects; for, to begin with, these natural objects are themselves imitations; then we must recognize that they give no bare reproduction of the thing seen but go back to the Reason-Principles from which Nature itself derives, and furthermore, that much of their work is all their own; they are holders of beauty and add where nature is lacking. (*Enneads* V, 8, 1)[4]

Plotinus' argument links the artifice of the artist with the leading idea which informs the work, thereby raising the formal principle of the thing produced by art from the natural to the Ideal through the introduction of beauty; the work of art is beautiful not as material object, "but in virtue of the Form or Idea introduced by the art" (Plotinus 422). Clearly Sidney follows in this Neoplatonic tradition when he says of the imitative poet: "for any understanding knoweth the skill of the artificer standeth in that *idea* or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself" (79.6-8).

The contention of this essay is that Sidney's position on Plato's critique of the poets in Book III of the *Republic* lies at the center of Sidney's poetic theory. More precisely, the *Defence of Poetry* secures a proper place for poetry in the worship of the Reformed Church,[5] based upon a Platonic aesthetic. That Sidney's *Defence of Poetry* is marked by Neoplatonic influences and allusions has been firmly established.[6] But no serious attempt has been made to link Sidney's explicit discussions of Plato with other Platonic

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elements in the work. Consequently, the religious significance of Sidney's appropriation of Plato has gone entirely unnoticed. The argument advanced by Plato in Book III of the *Republic* makes two charges against poetry: that poetry corrupts the morals of the youth, and that poetry represents God in a false and blasphemous manner. Sidney's ingenious defense of Plato's censure of the poets rescues poetry by dismissing Plato's claim concerning the divine the inspiration of poetry while maintaining the full force of Plato's critique of the religious abuses of poetry:

> Plato therefore (whose authority I had much rather justly construe than unjustly resist) meant not in general of poets...but only meant to drive out those wrong opinions of the Deity (whereof now, without further law, Christianity hath taken away all the hurtful belief), perchance (as he thought) nourished by the then esteemed poets. And a man need go no further than to Plato himself to know his meaning: who, in his dialogue called *Ion*, giveth high and rightly divine commendation unto poetry. So as Plato, banishing the abuse, not the thing, not banishing it, but giving due honour unto it, shall be our patron, and not our adversary. For indeed I had much rather (since truly I may do it) show their mistaking of Plato (under whose lion's skin they would make an ass-like braying against poesy) than go about to overthrow his authority; whom, the wiser a man is, the more just cause he shall find to have in admiration; especially since he attributeth unto poesy more than myself do, namely, to be a very inspiring of a divine force, far above man's wit, as in the fore-named dialogue is apparent. (108.22-109.5)[7]

The interpretive problem this passage raises centers upon the place of religious poetry in Sidney's poetic theory. Sidney gives high praise to Plato for recognizing that poetry ought not to be employed against the interests of religion, while at the same time distancing himself from Plato's (perhaps ironic) position in the *Ion* that poetry is composed "by dispensation from above and by divine possession" (536c). Sidney's defense of Plato casts the relation between poetry and religion in negative terms: Poetry is *not* to be employed in a false representation of God, and poetry is *not* a divine power. It is perhaps easy to see why scholars have not taken Sidney's defense of Plato seriously, for he rejects the claim for poetry of divine inspiration upon which Plato bases his critique of the poets.[8]

Sidney does not reject the idea of divine poetic inspiration simply because of the false depiction of deity by the pagan poets. For since a proper idea of God has removed the religious grounds for Plato's censure of the poets (their depiction of the gods as passion-driven, anthropomorphic agents led Plato to conclude that the poets fostered irrational and immoral behavior, in imitation of the gods), "the hurtful belief" which links poetic inspiration and the representation of divine nature has been removed. By dislocating poetic inspiration from a pagan context, Sidney here argues against Plato's

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attribution of a divine power in poetry on grounds that free it from the considerations concerning the nature of deity which concerned Plato. Sidney's disagreement with Plato then is not simply that the poets depict the gods erroneously, but that the very idea of divine poetic inspiration is in some way objectionable on grounds that are specific to Christianity. This disagreement conceals a deeper, more fundamental agreement between Plato and Sidney—that the nature of God (identified with the Good by Plato) is beyond adequate representation. As we shall see, it is the very impossibility of representing a God beyond the order of creation which is at the heart of Sidney's problem with poetry as divine fury.

Sidney's disagreement with Plato on the divine inspiration of poetry seems to conflict with the claims concerning poetry as a form of divine vision at the beginning of the *Defence of Poetry*. Indeed, this has been the major source of difficulty for scholars, along with the related problem of reconciling Sidney's idea of the poet as divine seer ("*vates*") with his definition of the poet as maker. In their commentary upon Sidney's *Defence*, Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan Van Dorsten state the difficulty:

> Though Sidney follows his predecessors in stressing the Latin association of poet-prophet, he consistently avoids the common corollary: 'divine fury'.... Logically, his second example of the *vates* theme, *David's Psalms* (77.9 ff.), is disconnected. It derives from an 'inspired' literary tradition, which he rejects.... On the one hand, he admits the Psalms and other 'poetical parts' of the Scripture as divinely inspired musical poetry (see 80.3-11), and introduces David's Psalms in this paragraph as one instance of prophetic verse. But on the other hand, he leaves out an appropriate comment on the speculative problem of *number and measure*—the supposedly powerful harmonies which some prominent men of his age sought to rediscover in quantitative and musical experiments with, in the first place, the Psalms...—and instead proceeds to treat David's poetry firstly on formal grounds (philological authority, etymology, metrics, rhetorical figures), and finally (77.21-4) according to Sidney's later criterion (78. 22-79.27 n.) that poetry is the representation of 'ideas'.[9]

The difficulty here also links with Sidney's argument concerning Plato's censure of poetry, for as the commentators rightly point out, it is there that Sidney rejects the "'inspired' literary tradition" of which the Psalms is the best example. Indeed, it is only by recognizing *vates* poetry as a different type of poetry from that produced by "right poets" that the apparent contradiction between Sidney's invocation of the Psalms as a praiseworthy example of divine poetry and his later rejection of poetry as divine inspiration can be reconciled.

Scholars of Sidney's *Defence* have frequently conflated these two types of poetry, drawing no important distinction between divine poetry and what Sidney calls "right" poetry.[10] Most commentators have simply repeated

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John Buxton's claim that "Sidney describes the poet as a combination of vates, divinely inspired seer, and poet, or maker" (Buxton 4). Alan Hager's is the latest interpretation of the *Defence* which, by overlooking the distinction between divine and didactic poetry, follows Wimsatt and Brooks in reading Sidney as a precursor of modern formalism.[11] Hager sees the array of ideas marshaled by Sidney on behalf of poetry as a form of stylistic pastiche for ends contained within the fictions of the text. In this view, Sidney is to be located in a "very special tradition of self-design: purveyors of a rainbow of identities" who employ masks in a game of "conscious role-playing" (Hager 9). Hager's analysis discovers an irreconcilable tension between *vates* and the poet as maker, vacillating between arguments that Sidney juxtaposes the two "in order...to allow us readily to perceive their apparent contradictions" (Hager 124), and that Sidney identifies the two, with the poet as "neither pure imitator of nature nor pure prophet, but both, an inspired maker of likenesses or a mimetic inventor of fictions" (Hager 128). Hager's approach erases the historical milieu of Sidney's work, and marks the latest in a line of scholarship that finds confusion in the text through a critical reading that introduces special interests alien to the concerns of Sidney and his contemporaries. This essay attempts to return the *Defence* to its own peculiar historicity, as a document read in the context of a debate on the use of poetry in the Reformed Church.[12]

Sidney's *Defence of Poetry* is not a logically ordered treatise (as Duncan-Jones and van Dorsten have assumed), but follows the rules of classical and Renaissance rhetoric—it is designed to persuade its readers concerning the positive value of poetry for a Christian culture. As such, the etymological argument in which poetry is first linked with both prophecy (*vates*) and making (from the Greek *poiein*) presents a distinction that Sidney will later apply to his classification of poetry into three types, but which in this section, called by Thomas Wilson in *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1560) "The Narration,"[13] is employed as an argument from authority. The rhetorical groundwork for the *Defence* finds Sidney caught in the horns of a dilemma: That poetry is useless on the one hand, and on the other, that it is harmful and dangerous. Sidney's course is between two extremes, for he must argue against those who have reduced poetry to "the laughing stock of children" (74.2), while also showing that poetry, "being rightly applied, deserveth not to be scourged out of the Church of God" (77.28-30). It also reveals that Sidney's *Defence* has a very specific goal—that of finding a proper place for poetry in the newly reformed Church.

The use of etymology here appeals to the authority of both Sacred Scripture and classical literature, thereby disclosing two types of poetry—the *vates* poet and the poet as maker. The outline and description of these

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two types of poetry briefly sets forth the matter and form of each, in rehearsal for the later performance of arguing a more rigorous and detailed defense. The *vates* poet (from the Roman term for prophet and poet) follows in a tradition of divination, and finds its ultimate sanction in the Psalms of Scripture. It is reasonable to use the term "*vates*," since "the holy David's Psalms are a divine poem" (77.10-11). In arguing for the poetical nature of the Psalms Sidney centers upon the trope of personification, which in this context is a literary form directed to a religious purpose:

> [F]or what else is the awaking his musical instruments, the often and free changing of persons, his notable *prosopopoeias*, when he maketh you, as it were, see God coming in His majesty, his telling of the beasts' joyfulness and hills leaping, but a heavenly poesy, wherein almost he showeth himself a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith? (77.17-24)

The purpose of divine poetry is to give the reader a vision of God's glory, whereby nature is read as revelatory of God's presence. The poetry of personification depends upon the analogy between creature and Creator implied in the use of figural language employed by the Psalmist. On the ground that poetry is the literary form of the Psalms (and the Song of Songs), Sidney argues that *vates* poetry plays a useful role in the worship of the church. Augustine's notion of the freedom to interpret signs in a spiritual manner under the dispensation of Christian liberty marks the tradition of Biblical hermeneutics which influences Sidney:

> He is a slave to a sign who uses or worships a significant thing without knowing what it signifies. But he who uses or venerates a useful sign divinely instituted whose signifying force he understands does not venerate what he sees and what passes away but rather that to which all such things are to be referred. Such a man is spiritual and free, even during that time of servitude in which it is not yet opportune to reveal to carnal minds those signs under whose yoke they are to be tamed. The Patriarchs and the Prophets were spiritual men of this kind, as were also all those among the people of Israel through whom the Holy Spirit ministered to us the help and solace of the Scriptures. (*Doctrine* 87)

The Hebrew Bible is the exemplary form of revelation as a knowledge beyond human discovery, since the very lack of knowledge of the full meaning of the signs (later revealed by the Christian dispensation) ensures their divine inspiration. The import of a Scriptural sign—its spiritual significance—lies in its intentional force as an act of faith, despite the lack of comprehension of the full meaning of the signs by which the revelations appear. As such the poetry of the Hebrew Bible is the form for *vates* poetry, which by definition is a form of knowledge beyond human understanding.

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The brief exposition of the subject matter of the *vates* poet is followed by a turn to the Greek name for poet: "It cometh of this word *poiein*, which is "'to make'...." (77.33-34) The shift in etymological derivation is not simply a verbal move, but indicates an entirely different subject for the poet as maker. In setting forth the various sciences which have "nature for [their] principal object" (78.2), it is poetry alone which goes beyond the natural forms of knowledge of the astronomer, the arithmetician, the grammarian, and even the moral philosopher and metaphysician.

> Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature...: 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. (78.22-30)

The poet as maker, in going beyond nature, improves upon nature or produces original forms not found in nature. And these forms of invention are products of the mind, though not simply fictions with no relation to reality. Rather, the "*idea* or fore-conceit of the work" (79.7-8)—the form according to which the work is made—is tied to nature, as is evidenced by the effect upon the reader in the inculcation of virtue. This practical proof for the 'real' nature of poetry, however, lacks the solid ground of rational proof, which is supplied by a metaphysical argument based upon the analogy between God's creative act and the poet's:

> Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature; but rather give right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature: which in nothing he showeth so much as in poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth far surpassing her doings—with no small arguments to the credulous of that first accursed fall of Adam, since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it. (79.17-29)

This passage, with its allusions to the creation story and the story of the Fall in Genesis, sets up a parallel between the goodness and perfection of creation through God's eternal Word, and the word of the poet. The analogy between God and the poet as maker secures for poetry a ground in reality—the two forms of making create perfect or "golden" worlds (78.34)—but with an essential difference, for the poet does not, like God, create *ex nihilo*, but refers the capacity for poetic creation and the subject matter of poetry itself to God's creative act.[14] Original sin introduces the rift between postlapsarian human nature and the primordial innocence of

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creation, indicating the sense in which the poet is analogous to God: The poet makes according to the idea of creation before original sin.

The argument from etymology has achieved the work of "The Narration" in briefly setting forth the subject matter of poetry while indicating the scope of the inquiry. But even in this rather truncated mode of presentation (dictated by its oratorical form) the major distinction between the *vates* poet and the poet as maker can be discerned. The former represents God, whereas the latter has perfected nature as the object of representation. The etymology of their names establishes the fundamental distinction which Sidney will later take up in full. It is important to note here that the claim that the poet (as maker) makes "with the force of a divine breath" is what has led many scholars to conflate the two forms of poetry introduced in this etymological argument. This issue will be addressed after an analysis of Sidney's explicit division of poetry into types.

The transition from "The Narration" section to the classification of poetry into types is clearly marked: "Now let us go to a more ordinary opening of him [the poet], that the truth may be more palpable: and so I hope, though we get not so unmatched a praise as the etymology of his names will grant, yet his very description, which no man will deny, shall not justly be barred from a principal commendation" (79.30-34). According to Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique*, "The Narration" is followed by "The Proposition," which "is a pithie sentence comprehended in a small roome, the somme of the whole matter" (Wilson 7). Sidney fulfills this requirement with the sentence: "Poesy therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *mimesis*—that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth—to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture—with this end, to teach and delight" (79.35-80. 2).[15] Immediately following this definition of poetry comes what Wilson calls "The Devision or severral parting of things," defined as "an opening of things, wherein we agree and rest upon, and wherein we sticke and stande in travers, shewing what we have to say in our own behalfe" (Wilson 7). Sidney's division of poetry into three types is here immediately announced: "Of this have been three several kinds" (80.3). Wilson's rules for oration establish the rhetorical principles revealing the logic underlying the *Defence*, for "The Proposition" states the definition of poetry, linking "The Narration," which focused on the poet, with "The Division," which will deal with poetry as a completed work, and will serve as a summation by which the types of poetry are to be judged.[16] Sidney will ultimately rest his case for poetry upon this classification into types, based on the division of poetry already introduced, but

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now to be distinguished according the differing formal and final causes of each.

The first type of poetry, which Sidney leaves unnamed, is clearly identified with the *vates* poet of Sidney's etymological argument: "The chief, both in antiquity and excellency, were they that did imitate the unconceivable excellencies of God. Such were David in his Psalms; Solomon in his Song of Songs, in his Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs; Moses and Deborah in their Hymns; and the writer of Job" (80.3-8). This class is expanded to include other canonical works of the Hebrew Bible having the form of poetry with God as its object of representation. The purpose of divine poetry—its final end—is to direct the reader to contemplate God's transcendent glory, whereby nature is read in the light of faith as revelatory of God's presence. The move which Sidney has made is crucial, for in showing the poetical nature of parts of Sacred Scripture, he has effectively argued for a place for poetry in the Church. To argue against religious poetry of this kind is to come close to committing the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit mentioned in Matthew 12:31-32: "Against these none will speak that hath the Holy Ghost in due holy reverence" (80.10-11). The defense of poetry as divine inspiration is thus secured by appeal to the authority of Sacred Scripture, and on that same authority poetry is sanctioned for use in the Church. The particular form that use is to take is clearly prescribed by Sidney: "And this poesy must be used by whosoever will follow St. James's counsel in singing psalms when they are merry, and I know is used with the fruit of comfort by some, when, in sorrowful pangs of their death-bringing sins, they find the consolation of the never-leaving goodness" (80.13-18). The allusion to "St. James's counsel" is a reference to James 5:13-15:

> Is anie among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is anie merie? Let him sing. Is anie sicke amog you? Let him call for the Elders of the Church, and let them praye for him.... (Geneva Bible 108)

The Psalms, the model for *vates* poetry, have two essential characteristics: as songs of praise, directed to God's glory, and as prayers of supplication, directed to God's mercy. As Sidney makes clear, they have the form of prayer, and are thus, properly speaking, addressed to God. And in imitation of the Psalms, prayer when properly performed is, like the word of Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul writes in Romans 8:26, in the context of a discussion of salvation by faith and hope, not through direct sight of God: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we

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knowe not what to praie as we oght: but the Spirit itself maketh request for us with sighs, which cannot be expressed" (Geneva Bible 73).

The third in Sidney's division of poetry into types, that of "right poets" (80.28)—the second kind, the subject of which is philosophical, astronomical, or historical (80.19-24), is not admitted as poetry since it is a translation of ideas into verse, not an invention of wit (Plato's notion of imitation as copy lies behind this critique)—is distinguished from divine poetry, for its object is not God but the moral principles of human action, and its end is not in contemplation of God's presence in and above nature but the exercise of virtue. The "right poet" presents clear pictures of human excellence which reveal a moral principle that moves the soul to imitate the example: "For these third be they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be" (81.2-6). The third type of poet goes beyond the human sciences, beyond history, and beyond philosophy, producing pictures of what ought to be done. Though entering into the divine consideration of what is possible, they are not *vates* but poets, not seers, but makers:

> These be they that, as the first and most noble sort may justly be termed *vates*, so these are waited on in the excellentest languages and best understandings with the fore-described name of poets. For these indeed do merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach; and delight, to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger; and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved.... (81.6-14)

The distinction between *vates* and "right" poetry is the distinction between divine poetry and human poetry. Sidney's definition of imitation involves the presentation of a picture which moves the soul to imitate its noble figure. The poet as maker accomplishes this through imitating goodness and representing it in poetical figures. The *vates* does not imitate nature, but the God beyond nature, which establishes the difference between God and creatures through a divine alphabet. The *vates* does not, as does the "right poet," present a picture, but a vision of God beyond sense, "to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith."[17] The *vates* poet marks the separation between creation and God in prayer; the "right poet" presents an image of goodness that is within reach of the human.

The third type of poet is a maker of images of goodness able to move the soul: "But it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know poetry by...." (81.36-82. 1) It is in the Aristotelian sense of the maker,

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who imitates nature not by nature (where its formal cause is immanent) but according to nature (where its formal cause is thought),[18] that Sidney's notion of "feigning notable images" is to be understood. For the poet as maker imitates not what is, but what in nature tends to its own perfection, achieved in its form and directed to its final end, thereby entering "into the divine consideration of what may be and should be" (81.5-6) by following nature in the representation of the human. Sidney hereby establishes the ground for a defense of poetry by defining it as a mimesis which leads the reader to imitate an imitation;[19] it is a defense that advances Sidney's conception of poetry as an activity with both an immanent natural function, and a final end which lies outside the scope of mere nature in the realm of the spiritual and moral, wherein human possibility and divine command converge. In this Sidney corrects Plato's critique of mimesis while maintaining the Platonic dichotomy between the material and spiritual realms. And in this way the "right poet" differs dramatically from the *vates*, for divine poetry, which emphasizes the gap between creature and Creator, does not call upon the hearer to imitate that which is inconceivable, beyond imagining, but of recognizing that God is beyond imitation. The "right poet" is permitted to "feign" images, but the object of divine poetry—God—cannot be the subject of such fictions.

Immediately following this, Sidney embarks upon his defense by analysis of the poem as a finished work: "Now therefore it shall not be amiss first to weigh this latter sort of poetry by his works, and then by his parts; and if in neither of these anatomies he be condemnable, I hope we shall obtain a more favourable sentence" (82.7-10). Sidney makes his case for "right" poetry, characterized as a "purifying of wit" (82.11), by positing that "the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of" (82.14-16). The capacity for rising above the limits of the body is stamped upon human nature by the impress of God's image on the soul, of which learning aids in the achievement, as Sidney points out in summary: "But all [learning], one and other, having this scope: to know, and by knowledge to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying his own divine essence" (82.25-27). According to the hierarchy of knowledge here established, the pinnacle lies not in natural knowledge as such, but in self-knowledge, which converts natural knowledge to the good of the soul, and in Platonic fashion, is "directed to the highest end of the mistress-knowledge, by the Greeks called *architectonike*, which stands (as I think) in the knowledge of a man's self, in the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of doing-well and not of well-knowing only...." (82.35-83. 2) As such,

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"the ending end of all earthly learning being virtuous action" (83.7), knowledge of nature leads to knowledge of the self, which finds its terminus not in self-contemplation, but in action. For Sidney, self-knowledge is determined according to the equivocal senses of 'nature', for as a form of knowledge it goes beyond nature in looking to the soul (the image of God), but in being directed to action, it is an activity grounded in nature. The final end of poetry—moral action—derives not from the particular definition of poetry, but by including poetry as a species under the genus of knowledge, which in turn has action as its general end, and in accord with the highest good. This establishes for poetry a cognitive object, which is self-knowledge, and a final end, which is an activity of virtuous behavior.

Although each is to direct the soul to the spiritual, the formal differences between the types of poetry produce two different human activities: *vates* poetry is reflective, meditative, issuing in *gnosis*; "right" poetry is didactic, moral, issuing in *praxis*. Quoting later from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Sidney draws the distinction explicitly, in the context of a discussion of the moral nature of the poetic image that moves the soul to act: "For, as Aristotle saith, it is not *gnosis* but *praxis* must be the fruit" (91.13-14). Sidney's classification of poetry into types according to their objects and ends establishes a free zone of creativity for the poet, while denying to "right" poetry the divine authority to speak the language of God. This distinction establishes a Protestant poetics founded on a strict dichotomy between the objects of divine poetry and human poetry, derived from the notion of an unbridgeable epistemological gap between creature and Creator.[20] A Protestant hermeneutic, in valuing the literal over the symbolic, reads the Bible according to the model of moral allegory rather than analogy, thus collapsing the spiritual distance between the Hebrews and themselves, while widening the gulf between human nature and God. The tradition of the Reformation held Abraham as the exemplar of the faithful servant, in relying not upon knowledge but faith in the word of God, and in so doing locating Scripture as the sole authority on the nature of God. According to Jaroslav Pelikan:

> Calvin made his own the statement of Lactantius that the only true religion was the one that was joined to the word of God. Its basis, therefore, was not secret revelation, but the ministry of the word of God. Within the limits prescribed by the word, and only there, could the human mind contemplate the "mysteries of heaven." The mysteries of God and his majesty could not be known or honored any other way than "when acknowledged from the word." (Pelikan 188)

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The move from a Medieval to a Reformed hermeneutics of Scripture was the result of an emphasis upon the radical effects of sin. This shift has been summarized by Barbara Lewalski:

> In the Thomistic formula the effects of the Fall chiefly involved the disordering of the faculties and the rebellion of the sense against reason, resulting from the removal of the supernatural perfection and harmony man enjoyed in innocence. For the Protestant however, the Fall meant the depravity of all his natural faculties—the blinding of the intellect and the bondage of the will in Luther's formulation. For Calvin also "nothing remains after the ruin except what is confused, mutilated, and disease-ridden"; "the mind is given over to blindness and the heart to depravity." (Lewalski 15)

For Protestants, the gap effected by sin results not only in the disordering of will, but also in the loss of a knowledge of God. Although good actions are now sporadically performed (with the aid of the Holy Spirit), direct knowledge of God is completely obliterated with the interposition of sin. An implication of this view is that Scripture stands as a special form of poetry whereby God speaks to humans through revelation, granting an approach to God (through faith), the natural attainment of which sin has blotted out.

The focus upon the radical effects of sin inaugurated by Reformation theology has massive implications not only for Biblical hermeneutics, but also for the institution of the Reformed Church, as the revelation of Scripture eclipses reason in the life of faith. The doctrine of *sola Scriptura* fills the gap between natural knowledge and knowledge of God, effectively displacing ecclesiastical authority with Sacred Scripture as the deposit of faith. As such, doctrinal authority finds its locus in the very word of God. As Pelikan has pointed out, quoting from Calvin:

> The primacy of the word of God was fundamental to the doctrine of the Reformation and the "whole substance of the Christian religion".... Like Abraham, "we are to believe every word of God." The church was universal throughout history, but it could be recognized only "in the word of God." Otherwise Christ and his word would be subject to the church, whose regulations were "commandments of men." (Pelikan 187)

Sidney's *Defence of Poetry* is an appeal to the authority of Scripture on the ground of a Reformation hermeneutics. As an epistemological gap is opened between creature and God through the debilitative effects of sin, the efficacy of the image in adequately representing God is radically called into question, thereby severing the link between creature and God established by the Thomistic trope of analogy. Because Scripture is the revealed word, initiated not by the creature but by God, its ground of authority is

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assured. The poetry which discloses God in Scripture must be read rightly—"seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith" (77.23-24), as Sidney would have it—in accord with an Augustinian reading of Scripture:

> Therefore when anyone knows the end of the commandments to be charity 'from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and an unfeigned faith' (1 Cor. 13. 13), and has related all of his understanding of the Divine Scriptures to these three, he may approach the treatment of these books with security. (*Doctrine* 33)

As such, prayer is the sole form of address that approaches God—the imitation of Scripture is confined to this function, so long as it is joined to the life of the Spirit in faith. Caught up in the life of grace, though not in imitation of "that unspeakable and everlasting beauty" (77.22-23) and "the unconceivable excellencies of God" (80.4-5) but advancing "into the divine consideration of what may be and should be" (81.5-6) are the "right poets" who go beyond the works of nature in revealing moral goodness. The poet as maker does not speak the very word of God, does not produce imitations of God, but speaks of the perfection lost by Adam's transgression. The place for "right poets" in the Reformed Church is established not as revelation of God, but of the human ordained at creation to aspire to goodness, but now marred by sin. The "right poet" does not attempt to represent God as He is, but humans as they ought to be, and once were, according to God's command.

With the human content of "right" poetry established, the question of how the soul is moved to imitate the images presented in poetry can be raised. In this context, Plato's hierarchical system, and the role beauty plays in moving the soul to act virtuously, illuminates Sidney's statement concerning the role of the "erected wit" in "right" poetry, and the nature of the "golden" world created by "right poets."[21] What Sidney means by "feigning" in poetry, and how delightful fictions are able to represent truth, can be understood in the context of Sidney's appeal to Plato.[22] According to Sidney, in the works of Plato, "though the inside and strength were philosophy, the skin, as it were, and beauty depended most of poetry" (75.12-14). The fiction of Plato's work lies not in the actual persons of the dialogue, who are real historical figures, but their words which are revelatory of character, "for all standeth upon dialogues, wherein he feigneth many honest burgesses of Athens to speak of such matters, that, if they had been set on the rack, they would never have confessed them" (75.14-17). And Plato employs tales and fables such "as Gyges' Ring" (75.20) within the narrative of certain dialogues, presenting a world of fiction that ranges into the realm of the fantastic. But it is the use to which such fictions are

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put that indicates what kind of a poet Plato was; and for Sidney, the answer to this question determines the nature of the poetic act of "feigning."

Sidney's account of Plato's poetic practice in the service of philosophical truth can be understood in the context of Sidney's discussion of the relation between the poetic work and the informing principle of the work, a principle which must be understood rightly by the reader of poetry, "for any understanding knoweth the skill of the artificer standeth in that *idea* or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself" (79.6-8). Sidney's poet is modeled upon the method of Plato, in which poetry is used to present an idea which will serve as an exemplar of moral action, "to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made them" (79. 14-16). These two passages, concerned with the work as a finished product, present a schema of idea, image, and movement of the will abstracted from the dynamics of the activity of producing poetry. The manner in which the poetic image calls to mind the idea which in turn moves the soul—encompassing both the form and matter of the poetic work—is here left unsaid. In short, the precise meaning of "right" poetry and reading "aright"—Sidney's hermeneutic of poetry—remains to be drawn.

Sidney's conception of "right" poetry, like the reading of Scripture, assumes an interpretive approach that orients the reader in regard to the proper use of poetry—in this the prescriptive "right" of "right" poetry is both cognitive and moral. Poetry does not have its end in itself, but in the idea which it presents. Sidney's "right poet" makes images of moral goodness which are desirable, leading the soul into the realm of perfection much as Plato's beloved brings to mind the celestial vision of Beauty recalled from the spiritual realm. In this dynamic which builds on natural desire in order to direct the soul beyond nature, we see the cognitive (phenomenological) elements which take Sidney's notion of mimesis beyond that of Aristotle. In the *Poetics*, the portrayal of character is tied to a notion of possibility grounded in nature, to "what is either necessary or probable, so as to have a given agent speak or *act* either necessarily or probably, and [hence] to have one event occur after another either necessarily or probably" (*Poetics* 1454a35-38). But for Sidney, poetry advances into "the divine consideration of what may be and should be," in imitation of that beautiful form of perfection which for Aristotle is purely formal.[23] Sidney's notion of the moving power of poetry operates not according to the Aristotelian idea of the noble in tragedy which engenders a catharsis mingling respect and wonder, but in accord with the Platonic notion of *Eros* which results in a desire to imitate the beautiful ideal of perfection.

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This is why Sidney's "right poet" is a Platonist and not an Aristotelian in regard to the role of beauty in poetry, for the noble ideal in Aristotle's *Poetics* remains admirable but inimitable, thereby thwarting desire as a moving principle of the soul, whereas for Plato, moral perfection is held out as an ideal to be imitated.

According to Sidney, human knowledge does not end in contemplation but exercises the will in the desire of goodness. Sidney makes this point in terms that bear the stamp of Platonism: All learning has as its end "to know, and by knowledge to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying his own divine essence" (82.25-27). From a cognitive standpoint, it is difficult to see, as Kathy Eden has recently argued, how the Aristotelian notion of the image as universal form is capable of achieving the efficacy of Sidney's image in moving the will to desire the good.[24] The universal in Aristotelian thought lacks the perfected form of Sidney's ideal in poetry, for Aristotle's universal is simply the intelligible form of a particular expressing the nature of the thing, whereas Sidney's "peerless poet" (85.22) does not merely present the general, but a perfected ideal. It is not the universal as the form of a particular (which for Aristotle comprises the definition of the thing) that moves the soul in poetry, but the concrete embodying the form of goodness:

> [S]o no doubt the philosopher with his learned definitions—be it of virtue, vices, matters of public policy or private government—replenisheth the memory with many infallible grounds of wisdom, which, notwithstanding, lie dark before the imaginative and judging power, if they be not illuminated or figured forth by the speaking picture of poesy. (86.3-8)

And it is not the action that the poet sets forth in imitation, but the ideal itself—"whatsoever the philosopher saith should be done" (85.22-23)—represented in the exemplary character—"in some one by whom he presupposeth it was done" (85.24). Sidney later restates the relation between the exemplary character and the virtue represented in poetry in clearly cognitive terms: Poetry presents "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" (86.28-30). Whereas Aristotle's mimetic theory is concerned with the representation of action, Sidney's mimetic theory uses character (Sidney never claims the representation of action as the subject-matter of mimesis) in order to represent virtue as an ideal, seen through to the end of virtue, which is in desire of the good. As such, Sidney's poetic representation of the human is iconic in the sense that the human is pictured in an idealized, perfected form (though divested of the icon's eschatological and devotional purposes), allied with the Pla-

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tonic in presenting an exemplary picture of virtue, rather than with the Aristotelian in the imitation of action.[25] But it is nevertheless a dynamic iconography, showing the relation between the human person and the good which is desired. Sidney's aesthetic theory is, in Lawrence C. Wolfley's felicitous phrase, one of "transcendent allegory" in which "Aristotle's pervasive realism is simply lacking...." (Wolfley 221) For Sidney, mimesis is not simply an imitation of human action, but a "speaking picture" (86.8) representing the virtuous activity of soul which is to be imitated by the reader. The full scope of what Sidney means by imitation is here disclosed, for his poetic image, while mediated by the imitation of the poet, is finally a poetics of imitation by the reader who is moved to love and then to imitate the example of virtue and carry it forth into action.

Here we are at the heart of Sidney's poetics, and herein is a fundamental insight in regard to Sidney's Platonism. In the *Phaedrus* the beholding of the beloved in rapturous devotion, in desire of the beautiful, leads to virtue by the example of the loveliness of the beloved, through sublimation of bodily desires in the desire for the good of the beloved. In the recognition of beauty and the desire for its possession, the example of the beautiful soul leads the unwitting lover to act virtuously. The dynamic which leads the soul to the Good is an interpersonal one for Plato, one which requires the impetus of love.[26] As Plato puts it in Socrates' retelling of Diotima's discourse on the nature of love in the *Symposium*:

> And remember, she said, that it is only when he discerns beauty itself through what makes it visible that a man will be quickened with the true, and not the seeming, virtue—for it is virtue's true self that quickens him, not virtue's semblance. (*Symposium* 212a)

For Sidney, the poet presents examples of virtue so that the reader is led to imitate them, just as the beloved leads the lover to imitate the beautiful soul. The task of the "right poet" is to present virtue in its unalloyed luster, for "if the saying of Plato and Tully be true, that who could see virtue would be wonderfully ravished with the love of her beauty" (98.5-7).[27]

Sidney borrows the interpersonal dynamic and the hierarchical structure (the distinction between the corporal and the spiritual) of Platonic *Eros*, but in translating it into Christian terms, entirely alters its anthropological significance. For Plato, the metaphysical distinction between the body and the Forms, between temporality and the Eternal, marks the separation of the soul from possession of the Good. The epistemological problem of knowledge of the Good arises from this metaphysical separation, thereby presenting a moral problem for the soul—that of turning

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from the body and returning to the Good. The problem, given Plato's account of soul, is fundamentally a problem of knowledge, for the will naturally moves toward the good it seeks, once goodness is apprehended.[28] This leads to a paradox: The exercise of virtue by the soul in conjunction with the body is required for attainment of the Good, but knowledge of the Good, which is obscured by the bodily senses, is required for the exercise of virtue. As such, according to the Platonic theory of moral action in which knowledge secures for the will its sufficient principle of action, the epistemological gap between the soul and the Good effects a split between the will and its desired end. The *tertium quid* between the soul and the Good is Beauty, which as an aspect of the Good discloses an object of desire which will move the soul to possess it, and in moving toward the beautiful, the soul attains to the Good. However, the Christian understanding of the effects of sin upon human nature marks a departure from Plato's notion of ignorance as the impediment in the movement of the soul toward the good; Sidney rejects the Platonic account of human vice in favor of the Pauline doctrine which locates the origin of sin primarily in the will, "since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it" (79.24-26). Sidney translates the Platonic account of reality into a Christian anthropology of sin in which the Platonic distinction between the corporal and the spiritual is transposed into the split between fallen and unfallen nature.[29] In this way, the Platonic critique of art, characterized in the *Republic* as a falling away from reality, is translated in Sidney's mimetic theory into an aesthetic which discovers the true object of poetry beyond nature, not, as for Plato, in the realm of Ideas, but in the unfallen nature revealed by the "right poet."

The postlapsarian condition of human nature, rather than a cosmological fall into the body as in Platonism, marks the divide that must be overcome in a Christian poetics. For Sidney then, beauty as a cognitive principle is not a sufficient cause for bringing the soul to act on the good. Rather, what is required is an object that can effectively move the will to desire the good, "which without delight they would fly as from a stranger...." (81.12) In this way the "erected wit," led "into the divine consideration of what may be and should be" (81.5-6), operates in poetry "with the force of a divine breath," for it is the delight in virtue which, in overcoming "our infected will," leads the soul to the attainment of the good. The work of the poet, divinely informed both in intellect and will, refers to the operations of the Holy Spirit, which through poetic speech moves the soul to delight in the good that is before it. "Right" poetry overcomes "the infected will" only through grace, which is required in assuming the natural state of

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innocence, and the recovery of the image of God in the soul. This is the theological significance of the dynamic relation established between delight and virtue in "right" poetry. The imitative poet employs the energeiac power of "delight, to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger" (81.11-12). It is the release from the bondage of sin, which leads humans away from the goodness present to them, that the poet effects, allowing the soul to enter into the life of freedom in the spirit, into the enjoyment of virtue which sin has blotted out, through the overcoming of cupidity by charity. For Sidney, the "right poet" does make things anew, through the aid of the Holy Spirit who, in Calvin's words, "bestows upon us according to his own good will a new heart in order that we may will, and a new power, whereby we may be enabled to carry out his commandments" (Calvin 17). Sidney's claim that the "right poet" is engaged in "the imitation of what may be and should be" is a prescription for poets to imitate the divine command in Scripture, for it is only in Scripture that divine command is revealed with authority. The "right poet" reads Scripture rightly, and with the aid of the Holy Spirit, translates divine command into poetic form, leading the soul to virtue by the delightfulness of its appearance. Human possibility (freedom) and divine command (grace) here find a meeting place in the intersection of Scripture (text) and Spirit (will).

The hermeneutic of "right" poetry is linked with reading Scripture literally and tropologically (morally), but entirely severed from the two other Thomistic tropes of interpretation—the allegorical (symbolic) and anagogical (referring to the divine life of God and our participation in it). Informed by Scripture, it does not translate into a hermeneutic of reading nature symbolically, since it is Scripture itself which has interpreted nature according to the light of revelation. This follows the restriction by Protestant hermeneutics of the symbolic role of "allegory" to a moral reading, thereby rejecting as foreign to a faithful interpretation of Scripture the employment of analogy which would lead to a tropology of God's nature. In this, simple faith in the acceptation of revelation replaces what is seen as metaphysical speculation upon the Godhead, leading to the total tropological annexation of Scriptural hermeneutics by moral interpretation. As such, Sidney's "right poet," in line with a Reformation approach to reading Scripture, is didactic, going beyond nature, but transcribed by the boundaries drawn by the revelation of Scripture. This is why it is Christ's parabolic method of instruction that establishes for Sidney the literary form of the "right poet," "since the Holy Scripture (wherein there is no uncleanness) hath whole parts in it poetical, and that even our

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Saviour Christ vouchsafed to use the flowers of it" (99.15-18). The "right poet" in following Christ's example of moral teaching presents "not historical acts, but instructing parables" (87.21); as such, it assumes an interpretive stance that privileges the Christian initiate, while confounding those outside the special dispensation of Christ. It is a poetics for the initiate capable of reading Scripture rightly, and capable of reading classical literature in light of Christian revelation, deriving the kernel of truth from the husk of poetic form. Sidney echoes Christ (and perhaps Plato) in this regard at the closing of the *Defence*: "[T]here are many mysteries contained in Poetry, which of purpose were written darkly, lest by profane wits it should be abused...." (121.13-15) In restricting the "right poet" to the use of poetry for didactic purposes, the *Defence* proscribes, on Scriptural grounds informed by a Protestant hermeneutics, the employment of metaphor as a proper vehicle for the symbolic representation of God. Sidney's *Defence* is the major site in which the genealogy of the modern term "allegory" can be uncovered in its reduction from a largely symbolic (speculative) to a wholly didactic (moral) trope.

The account of "right" poetry as a form of poetry invoking the Holy Spirit might seem to conflict with the clear distinction made between the *vates* poet and the poet as maker, leading Sidney into the very contradiction against which I have been arguing—that "right" poetry is to be distinguished from *vates* poetry on the ground that the poet as maker is not, properly speaking, informed by divine inspiration. However, read in light of the Reformation hermeneutic of Scripture, no logical inconsistency obtains here. For the distinction between the *vates* poet and the poet as maker is made with reference to their differing objects of representation and final ends, while Sidney's use of the words "divine force" refer equivocally to the different dispensation under which the "right poet" operates, as distinct from the authors (*vates*) of Sacred Scripture. As such, the "right poet" is not inspired to reveal God, but to translate God's commands into a "speaking picture" (86.8) of virtue. For Sidney, "the erected wit" has the ability to see perfection, but its attainment, from the standpoint of a Reformation anthropology, requires the aid of the Holy Spirit—"the force of a divine breath," which might move the will to attain perfection. It is the "right poet" who reverses the debilitative effects of sin, in the poetic representation of the perfection ordained from creation. Only in this way can the analogy Sidney makes between God as maker and poet as maker be understood: God makes the human soul in its original perfection, while the "right poet" makes in fiction according to, and in imitation of, that perfect form of the human. As such, the "right poet" discloses the human

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poised between nature and supernature, in the state of sin but directed to that perfection which God originally ordained, in a poetic act which overcomes the Fall, "when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth surpassing her [nature's] doings—with no small arguments to the credulous of that first accursed fall of Adam, since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it" (79.22-26). In the activity which raises the intellect to the level of the "erected wit," and in the operation which moves "with the force of a divine breath," Sidney alludes to the work of the Holy Spirit, not as a "divine possession," but as a grace to which the poet responds in freedom, and without which sin remains an obstacle both to the recovery of the image of human perfection ordained from creation, and its attainment in action. The "right poet" does not advance into a realm "far above man's wit" (109.4)—which was the sole characterization of the "divine force" attributed to poetry by Plato and rejected by Sidney—but remains circumscribed within the confines of human thought. The *vates* and "right poet" operate according to different dispensations of divine grace, in accord with the special locus of Scripture as full revelation of God's word. As such, the "right poet" remains an instrument of the Holy Spirit in the Reformed Church, effectively replacing ecclesiastical authority (which in the view of Reformed theology is bound to the letter of the law, not to the spirit of love), as a minister of the word, through fidelity to Scripture.

Although Sacred Scripture is the sole source of revelation authorized by God, nevertheless the operations of grace are not thereby confined to Sacred Scripture alone, but flow out from the revelations contained in Scripture. The lacunae in Luther's thinking on Scripture—that the Church is bound to the (literal) word of God in Scripture, with the efficacy of the word resting in the accurate (oral) preaching of the gospel according to the authoritative command of Christ[30]—would lead to the question of who could claim proper authority to preach the gospel, resulting in the Calvinist proclamation on Scripture, "that man was bound to the word of God but that God was not bound by it" (Pelikan 188). Thus the question is raised concerning how God's grace operates in the tradition of the Church outside of the (material) text of Scripture, a question which Luther's reading of the word of God conceals in the central hermeneutic of the Reformation claim to authority—that Scripture presents no interpretive difficulties requiring a special tropological (symbolic) reading. As such, the symbolism of Scripture is to be taken on faith, not subjected to the inquiry of theological (metaphysical) speculation. The move away from a visible to an invisible Church as the locus of doctrinal authority would lead as well to

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the problem of how divine inspiration of the authors of Scripture differs from the inspiration of preaching the gospel to the people of God.[31]

These difficulties aside, what remains as the thrust of Reformation thought is the move from ecclesiastical authority to an inner, spiritual authority. Such authority, though preached outwardly, comes through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, marking the way the "right poet" makes "with the force of a divine breath," without being, properly speaking, a form of divine inspiration like Scripture, for it is the acceptation of revelation in Scripture, not the actual divine authorship of revelation mediated by humans. Thus, the focus upon the interior life of the soul (sanctioned by Augustine's Neoplatonism) is occasioned by the pressure placed upon the authority of God's revealed word, restricting the role of reason and human authority in order to free the life of the spirit from bondage to the law, which is sin.[32] Sidney's "right poet" finds a field of operation in the space opened by this equivocation between Scripture as the word and preaching according to the word. As such, the "erected wit" remains bound to the word of God, though not identical with it, in revealing the commandments of God through delightful images of virtue. Sidney's "right poet" institutes a new priestly order, ministering the word of God through the aid of the Holy Spirit. It is this high calling that leads Sidney at the very end of the *Defence* to exhort his readers "no more to scorn the sacred mysteries of poesy" (121.2) with the promise that "thus doing, your soul shall be placed with Dante's Beatrice, or Virgil's Anchises" (121.25-26).

The end of the "right poet" in restoring perfection by the aid of grace does not conflict with, but rather, illuminates, Sidney's claim that Plato "attributeth unto poesy more than myself do, namely, to be a very inspiring of a divine force, far above man's wit" (109.3-4), for the qualification—that of placing the divine force "far above man's wit," outside the scope of human knowing—alters the sense of the entire passage. Sidney here is denying to "right" poetry the full cognitive scope of the *vates*, what is beyond the range of human knowledge—that of revealing the nature of the Godhead. As we have seen, Sidney's epistemological problems are not Plato's, for perfection for the Christian is within the scope of human knowing through revelation. According to Sidney, Plato denied that poetry was divine in origin because of the illicit conception of Deity which it advanced. Sidney likens Plato's criticism to St. Paul's admonition against the abuse of philosophy: "So doth Plato upon the abuse, not upon poetry. Plato found fault that the poets of his time filled the world with wrong opinions of the gods, making light tales of that unspotted essence, and therefore would not have the youth depraved with such opinions" (108.6-

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10). Therefore, Plato "only meant to drive out those wrong opinions of the Deity (whereof now, without further law, Christianity hath taken away all the hurtful belief) perchance (as he thought) nourished by the then esteemed poets" (108.26-29). Sidney here dovetails the two charges against the poets made by Plato in the *Republic*—that they corrupt the morals of the state, and that they present a false depiction of the gods—by focusing upon the anthropomorphic attribution of irrational human passions to the gods which Christian revelation has corrected, for God is beyond the order of creation, and beyond human nature. The error of the pagan poets discloses the confusion involved in their notion of divine fury, for their false attribution of human qualities to God indicates their place outside of revelation, while the need for going beyond human knowledge marks their sense of the transcendence of God, and in fact, marks the very need of the revelation of God which would correct their errors. As such, divine fury is for pagan poets the sole means of attaining a knowledge of the deity, of going beyond the bounds of natural theology, which the special dispensation of the Judeo-Christian God in revelation has superseded and rendered unlawful. Plato's argument against the poets is based upon a false notion of inspiration which implies that the path to God (and the Good) is by way of irrationality, which Plato, lacking the grace of revelation, can only oppose by banishing poetry. Sidney's defense of poetry thus appeals to Plato's right (negative) notion of the Deity (as unrepresentable), while recognizing his smaller error, where he "in his dialogue called *Ion*, giveth high and rightly divine commendation unto poetry" (108.31-32). And in employing the Platonic hierarchy in his account of "right poets," Sidney justifies *Eros* as the movement of the will toward perfection, which in the strict sense of the term is not the divine fury of Plato, for "right" poetry leads not to the imitation of God, but the human in a state of perfection. It is in this way that Sidney's *Defence of Poetry* is a defense of Plato, who, although lacking the full knowledge of revelation, remains, like the authors of the Hebrew Bible, faithful to the spiritual sense of the word that is incapable of adequately imaging the being of God, and whose (sublimated) erotic movement of the soul in desire of the Good finds its Christian expression in the delight represented by the "right poet" through the indwelling operations of the Holy Spirit.

Thus we are brought back to the word of God in Sacred Scripture, which sanctions the *vates* poet in the representation of God, and confines the role of "right poets" to human representation. With the epistemological gap opened by the Reformation understanding of sin and the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, a poetry capable of being employed in the Church must

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establish a new tropology which can find its sanction in Scripture without usurping its authority. This essay has attempted to show that Sidney's *Defence of Poetry* establishes a distinction between *vates* poetry and "right" poetry which splits Medieval tropology into two distinct literary forms, informed by the radical split between Creator and creature. On the one hand, the *vates* is wholly concerned with the representation of God, employing the trope of analogy on the authority of the word of God, for the precise function of prayer. In faith, the contemplation of God is assured through a tropology which carries within itself the mark of the essential difference between Creator and creature; the two forms of address—the prayer of praise and the prayer of supplication—both acknowledge God's profound distance from the human soul. On the other hand, the "right poet" is concerned with representing the human figure in its perfected form in order to move the soul to recover the image of God lost through original sin. The trope of moral allegory is here employed which carries with it the difference between the state of human nature in innocence and the present state of fallen human nature. A lack in the human soul, seen as a gap between the will and its final end, introduces the need for poetry, which *vates* and "right" poetry address according to their different scopes of knowledge. In the prayer of the *vates*, the gap is closed by God's movement, received by faith. In "right" poetry, the soul moves to close the gap in the freedom opened up by the poet, who makes a "golden" world by the "force of a divine breath" that blows where it will.[33] The *vates* poet directs the soul to contemplation of God, issuing in hymns of praise and thanksgiving, supplication and repentance, marking the radical distance between creature and Creator. The "right poet" directs the soul to self-reflection, marking the distance between the present state of sin and the original state of perfection and innocence of the human being. For Sidney, there are only two forms of poetry which are defended for use in the Church: divine poetry and didactic poetry. Informed by the Reformation understanding of Scripture, Sidney's distinction between *vates* and "right" poetry continues in the tradition established by Plato which admits only two kinds of poetry: "hymns to the gods and eulogies of good men" (*Republic* 607a). In this we see the reason why Sidney offers only a defense of "right" poetry and not a sustained defense of *vates*, for the latter need not be defended—their place in the Church is secured by appeal to the authority of Scripture, whereas the former must be established on Scriptural grounds that do not impinge upon the authority of the revealed word, but must remain wedded to that word.

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My study raises a number of questions while it resolves the internal textual tensions and interpretive problems which have been the topic of almost all discussions of Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*. The first arises in regard to the place Sidney occupies in the history of Protestant thought. It is perhaps undeterminable whether Sidney's use of the term "erected wit" entails that reason retains after the Fall an original power for knowing the good, or that the term assumes the operations of the Holy Spirit raising the mind to such knowledge. But in accord with a hermeneutics requiring that Scripture be read in the light of faith, the terms "erected wit" and "purifying wit" are already ensnared within the hermeneutic circle of reading Scripture rightly, and hence, are already bound up with the informing work of the Holy Spirit. What reason has lost in knowledge of the good since the Fall is therefore a moot question in the context of a poetics tied to the word of God, which converts all learning into the work of leading the soul to its perfection in following the commands of God, and in doing so, assumes the presence of grace through the special dispensation of the Holy Spirit. Quite simply, the "erected wit" is purified in reading Scripture with the eyes of faith, and this purification leads to the writing of "right" poetry informed by that faith. Given the special dispensation of Scripture in the life of faith for the Protestant, it is the gap between the will and the good that must be closed, and in this "right" poetry performs its proper service.

But further, my reading also implies that Sidney followed in the iconoclastic movement that characterized the Puritan claim to continuity with Calvin, in alliance with the Hebrew sense of faith which led to the prohibition against idols.[34] This is why Sidney's parabolic method, while gaining sanction from Christ's example, does not entail the use of characters taken from Scripture (which might prompt an idolatrous response), but employs characters from secular and classical literature which are safe from the charge of a cultish form of idol-worship. This follows in the general prohibition against images which extended even to representations of Christ, in agreement with the Second Commandment which proscribed the use of images in the temple.[35] Sidney's distinction between *vates* and "right" poetry can be understood in the context of the Reformed doctrine of idolatry, for the *vates* represents God by the divine authority of Scripture, whereas the "right poet" does not, in the representation of perfection, appeal to the *imago Dei*—to Christ—but to examples which are perfect in a completely human sense. Employing the parabolic method of Christ, Sidney's "right poet" occupies the visual space emptied by the iconoclasm of the Reformed Church, left without access to the image of God as a form of representation.

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Sidney's poetic theory effects a split at the heart of Scriptural tropology, establishing a place for "right poets" in the literary form of allegoresis, thereby replacing the Medieval trope of analogy with the moral tropology of Reformation theology as the dominant literary form for poetry. Moral allegory is hereby established, in the figure of the "right poet," as the dominant trope for a poetics informed by a Reformed hermeneutics that eschews an advance into speculative theology, opened up by the interpretive key of analogical tropes, but rather maintains its confinement to a praxis of the word. Sidney's distinction thus introduces the central questions which will confront a Protestant poetics in England. Sidney stands at the beginning of a tradition in English poetry which sees the principle of analogy, as the relation between creature and Creator which would sanction the poetic troping of God in nature, as beyond the scope of human poetic practice. The "right poet," as has been suggested, is instead limited to the scope of moral action, and follows the example of Christ in creating poetic fictions which present moral examples "which by the learned divines are thought not historical acts, but instructing parables" (87.20.21). Receiving sanction from Christ's own teaching methods, and confirmed by the example of Aesop, "whose pretty allegories, stealing under the formal tales of beasts, make many, more beastly than beasts, begin to hear the sound of virtue from these dumb speakers (87.27-29), the "right poet," rather than employing metaphor as a vehicle for the contemplation of God in creation, instructs through the secularized trope of allegory, by the employment of the didactic forms of fable, satire, and panegyric. This is confirmed by a reading of the "Examination" section of the *Defence*, wherein Sidney list the parts, or kinds of poetry, sanctioned as "right" poetry. All forms—the pastoral, elegiac, comic, tragic, lyric, and heroic—are confirmed by their pedagogic function, by their contribution to the inculcation of virtue (94.16-99.22). This marks a decisive turn from a poetic of symbolism— wedding God and creation through the analogy of being (St. Thomas) and the analogy of the image (St. Bonaventure)—to a poetic of allegory which presents pictures of human action that bear moral significance.

This tropological shift raises the major problems for religious poetry that will be confronted in the later tradition of English poetry: With analogy supplanted by moral allegory as the dominant trope, and didacticism replacing natural symbolism as the form of religious utterance, can poetic narrative find a subject that is capable of sustaining itself? And with the space cleared for "right poets" to imitate the perfection which is known but not desired, can the analogy of the poet as maker hold up under the

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radical critique of analogy, thereby severing the relation to the good which is the domain of didactic poetry? And granted the emphasis upon the authority of the word of God as the sanction for *vates* poetry, is the devotional lyric itself placed beyond the scope of imitation by modern poets? Sidney's misgivings about the shortcomings of the religious lyric in his own day is evidence that he already, however dimly, sensed these problems:

> Other sorts of poetry almost have we none, but that lyrical kind of songs and sonnets: which, Lord, if He gave us so good minds, how well it might be employed, and with how heavenly fruit, both private and public, in singing the praises of the immortal beauty: the immortal goodness of that God who giveth us hands to write and wits to conceive; of which we might well want words, but never matter; of which we could turn our eyes to nothing, but we should ever have new-budding occasions. (116.27-35)[36]

The lack of *energeia* which Sidney sees as the defect of devotional lyric poetry arises not through the failure of particular poets (despite what Sidney seems to suggest), but from the heart of the genre, informed as it is by the lack of an image which can be verbalized and offered in the production of an adequate representation of God. This problem in turn will double back upon the poetry of "right poets," for the epistemological rift occasioned by the eclipse of analogy threatens to leave the poet as maker bereft of an image of God in the human, for it is only by way of analogy with God that the "right poet" is able to reclaim the image of perfection and put it to effective use.[37] And although *vates* poetry has the poetry of Scripture as its exemplar, it remains an example that cannot be imitated, for it is the language of God speaking of Himself—a grammar which by its nature is beyond human utterance except by clear divine sanction.

Sidney's *Defence of Poetry* is not simply a catalogue of classical and Renaissance ideas displaying no logical consistency, but rather is a finely crafted and internally consistent manual for English-speaking poets intended to establish a poetic programme based upon the Reformed understanding of Scripture. Its own special puzzles can only be deciphered intertextually and hermeneutically, as a product of the Reformation debate on the role of Scripture in the worship of the Church. The problems present in the text are not, as scholars have suggested, owing to the combination of philosophical and rhetorical traditions which Sidney failed to see as ill-suited to one another, but are problems inaugurated by the Reformation understanding of Scripture which is the framework for Sidney's hermeneutic of "right" poetry. Sidney's *Defence* can be seen in this light as

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exerting a tremendous influence on the entire tradition of English poetry. Geoffrey Shepherd has remarked that Sidney is better understood when his successors are read as carrying out Sidney's poetic theories: "It is the peculiar character of the *Apology* that it serves for us as the initial manifesto of what persists as the central tradition of English poetry into the late eighteenth century, a manifesto which prognosticates if it does not control the course and temper of this line" (Shepherd 17).

The shape of that tradition can be seen in clear focus when Sidney's *Defence* is read as effecting a divide in the literary landscape opening the deep fissures between the tropes of analogy (symbolism of God) and moral allegory (didactic narrative),[38] on the ground that gives way bridging God and nature. Bacon's distinction between nature as showing God's power, and revelation showing God's will; Hobbes's radical critique of the use of metaphor in theological speculation; Milton's attempt to reclaim a vision of the original state of innocence in *Paradise Lost*, while God the Father remains unrepresentable in visual imagery; Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, in which allegorical technique is employed as a didactic mode of narrative, not in contemplation of God; Swift's critique of literary conceits and the satirical attacks upon speculative interpretation of Christian revelation as the cause of religious zealotry; Dryden's split career in which religious devotion employing analogy and political and social commentary employing satiric allegory are never fully integrated; Young's *Night Thoughts* as a form of wisdom literature which refuses to entertain the possibility of speculating upon God's nature, but contemplates instead God's commands; Thomson's use of nature in *The Seasons* as allegory for human nature, not as an analogue of God's power and glory; Johnson's distaste for the Baroque conceits of the Metaphysical poets, read by him as a literary form without an object of representation, and an aberration in the history of English poetry; and Coleridge's overturning of allegory in a return to the analogy between the symbolic production of the imagination and the infinite "I AM" of God, can all be seen in the context of the groundbreaking split between analogy and moral allegory effected in Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*.

As a defense, Sidney's work is perhaps the greatest oratorical feat of its kind, employing the arguments of Plato against poetry to defend poetry on Platonic grounds.[39] In effect, Sidney has answered Socrates' challenge in Book X of the *Republic* to lovers of poetry to defend its usefulness in prose:

> [I]f poetry that aims at pleasure and imitation has any argument to bring forward to prove that it must have a place in a well-governed city, [we] should be glad to

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> welcome it, for we are aware of the charm it exercises, but it is impious to betray what one believes to be the truth. (*Republic* 607c)

Sidney has overturned the banishment of poetry in the context of a Platonic dualism and hierarchy of knowledge, and has secured a place for imitative poetry on the basis of a Christianized Platonism. But in achieving an acquittal for poetry, Sidney has so radically altered its form that its career will be forever changed. For by securing separate places for religious and didactic poetry, Sidney has elevated the devotional lyric to a height unattainable by humans. Sidney's defense of poetry has been achieved by evacuating the field of poetic representation of images of God and establishing the human figure on the empty space once occupied by nature as the analogue of the divine. The acquittal of poetry has released it into the confines of the human wit, thereby severing the tenuous thread of analogy connecting nature to God in English poetic practice. Lacking a cognitive object, Sidney's "right poet" circumscribes the empty field which the history of English literature will attempt to populate, bereft of access to a poetic representation of God in whose image the soul is made.

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## NOTES

1. I am indebted to Larry Lockridge, who read the earliest versions of this essay, and to Tony Low, who read it in a later revised form. I am grateful for their encouragement, for their close reading of the manuscript, and for their various comments and suggestions. Their efforts have helped to make this a much better article than it otherwise would have been.

2. "If the 'most important imputations' [against art] are Plato's and the principle of Sidney's eclecticism too is Platonic, we may properly say that his purpose in the *Defense* is to reconcile Platonism, the accuser, with the function and form of poetry, the accused. We may go further and say that Plato's word is the main source of Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*" (Samuel 383).

3. See Kinney. For a more recent discussion of the relation between Gosson's *Schoole* and Sidney's *Defence*, see Richards.

4. Plotinus 422-23.

5. "The *Defence*, I will argue, does not subordinate courtly pleasures to Protestant politics; rather, it defends against Protestant criticisms of courtly pleasure, including the pleasure of poetry" (Matz 133). The argument made by Matz, that Sidney's allegiance to the court makes it necessary for him to offer a defense, on Protestant grounds, of poetry as

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the literary expression of courtly life, and against the Protestant attacks of Stephen Gosson, illustrates in a particularized way the general problem which confronted the Renaissance culture of England in the advance of a poetics founded upon the idea of "delight" as aiding in the inculcation of virtuous action and the advancement of learning.

6. For an account of the direct and indirect references to the Platonic corpus in the *Defence*, see Partee, "Renaissance." Exploring Platonic influences from the standpoint of Neoplatonic cosmological unities, S. K. Heninger, Jr., has argued for Sidney's place in a tradition of "poetry [which] reflects the universal harmony, so that its ontology, its ultimate meaning, resides among the ordered patterns of the cosmos" ("Boethian" 41).

7. All citations to Sidney's *Defence* are from the Duncan-Jones and Van Dorsten edition, and are cited by page and line number.

8. For a discussion of the inconsistencies between Sidney's denial of poetry as divine inspiration and the various Platonic elements in the *Defence*, see Craig. Morriss Henry Partee has also argued that Sidney's critique of the inspired poet of the *Ion* is in tension with elements in Sidney's *Defence* taken from the *Republic*. See "Anti-Platonism."

9. Duncan-Jones 188.

10. For example, in taking the *Defence* as an argument for a Protestant poetics, Andrew D. Weiner sees Sidney's mention of the Psalms as an instance of what the Christian poet may accomplish with eyes "cleared by faith," but goes on to link the *vates* poet with the poet as maker, conflating what Sidney distinguishes as two types of poetry: "Without giving the reader a chance to wonder what the 'end and working' of poetry is which makes it, 'rightly applyed,' useful within the Church of God, Sidney moves to capitalize upon the prophetic and inspirational aspects of poetry which he has already suggested by insisting upon the implications of the Greek and English names for poets, makers... ." ("Moving" 267).

11. See Wimsatt 167-171.

12. The line of argument I shall make has been suggested by S. K. Heninger, Jr., in a discussion concerning Sidney's major aim in writing the *Defence*. In regard to the distinction between religious and secular poetry Heninger writes: "Sidney aimed to resuscitate poetry, not merely to lament a longed-for past. He saw poetry as an instrument of social and political change, so it was too important to be left to the whim of an unpredictable and unapproachable Muse. On the other hand, Sidney felt the need to assign limits for the mortal poet—limits if not of knowledge, at least of aspiration. The mortal maker must not presume upon the godhead" (Heninger 235). However, the distinction between secular and divine poetry here suggested is obfuscated at other points in Heninger's analysis, as divine poetry is made to appear as an exceptional form of "right" poetry, rather than an altogether different type of poetry considered according to its own rules of rhetoric and its own particular subject-matter. While Heninger rightly places the *Defence* in the context of the Reformation debate concerning the place of poetry in the Reformed Church, he loses sight of the distinction between the *vates* and the poet as maker, forcing him to attempt a reconciliation of the two which devalues religious poetry, thereby rendering unintelligible Sidney's claim that the *vates* are "the first and most noble sort" of poet. Alan Sinfield also records Sidney's distinction between *vates* and "right" poetry, but then goes on to argue that Sidney was divided in allegiance to religious and secular poetry, while remaining unable to reconcile the two forms in a consistent poetic theory. Sinfield's (largely psychological) reading fails to apply the distinction between religious and didactic poetry to a rigorous textual analysis: "By far the most probable scenario, therefore, is that when he wrote the *Defence* he was somewhat attracted emotionally and intellectually both to the

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theoretical basis of it and to the religious commitment it implied but he was by no means prepared to abandon secular literature" (Sinfield 12). Sinfield is caught in the conundrum he attempts to argue against, i.e. the claim by Forrest G. Robinson that Sidney devalued religious poetry, paying mere "lip service" to it in the *Defence* and avoiding "explicitly religious themes in his poetry and prose" (Robinson 101).

13. "The Narration" is defined by Wilson as a "plaine and manifest pointing of the matter, and an evident setting forth of all things that belong unto the same, with a breefe rehersall grounded upon some reason" (Wilson 7). For a demonstration of how Wilson's *Rhetorique* influenced Sidney's *Defence*, see Myrick.

14. Virginia Riley Hyman has argued that Sidney's notion of "feigning," while it imitates God's creative act, does not imply "that the poet is, therefore, God-like" (Hyman 61). A. C. Hamilton has made a claim for their identification based upon an argument which stresses the likeness of the poet to God in the act of creation *ex nihilo*. (See *Sidney* 113-117.)

15. S. K. Heninger, Jr. has argued for a reading of the word "imitation" as a widely coined technical literary term in the tradition of Aristotelian poetics which preserves the force of Sidney's notion of a "speaking picture" as an important cognitive element in Sidneian poetic theory. See "Metaphor."

16. Even as perceptive a critic as C. S. Lewis has missed the way the oratorical structure informs Sidney's defense: "The exact relation between Sidney's first account of the poet as maker... and the 'more ordinarie opening of him' as an imitator is not at once apparent. In reality the 'more ordinary opening' is concessive and strategical" (Lewis 344).

17. "When we make inferences about his [Sidney's] concept of poetry, we must remember that he excluded religious poetry from the ordinary opening (608A38-55). Therefore the statements about poetry derived from the arguments on *vates* and psalmist obtain for a species of poetry distinct from that of the fictive. Revelation makes it incumbent upon Sidney as a Christian to see 'God coming in his majesty'. For him, the truth of this vision must differ from that of fictive literature—it portrays that which shall be, not that which should be" (Coogan 270).

18. In this sense art goes beyond nature, in growing, as Sidney puts it, "in effect another nature," while also being in accord with nature. Art, according to Aristotle, is a production of nature understood equivocally, for there are two senses of nature expressed here: "Every art is concerned with bringing something into existence, and to think by art is to investigate how to generate something which may or may not exist and of which the [moving] principle is in the producer and not in the thing produced; for art is not concerned with things which exist or come to be of necessity, nor with things which do so according to their nature, for these have the [moving] principle in themselves. So since production and *action* are different, art must be concerned with production and not with *action*" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1140a12-18). Considered from the standpoint of production, art is a production *of* nature, but not *by* nature; as a production of human nature, art is an imitation of nature with a fundamental anthropological significance. All quotations of Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* are from the translations of Hippocrates G. Apostle.

19. The distinction between the poet as maker in a fictive and a real sense—the poet who creates fictional characters and who inculcates virtue in readers—corresponds to the distinction between Mimesis2 and Mimesis3 in Paul Ricoeur's notion of a three-fold

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mimesis developed through a hermeneutic reading of Aristotle's *Poetics*. See Ricoeur 52-94.

20. Andrew D. Weiner has written a full-length study of the role of Protestant elements of thought in Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*. See *Sidney*.

21. See McIntyre for a discussion of how Plato's notion of the icastic image informs the concept of the poet as maker, and a demonstration of how the Platonic distinction between the material world and the realm of Forms underlies Sidney's notion of a "golden world" created by poets. See also Devereaux for the claim that the Platonic idea of *Eros* is the paradigm for understanding how the poetic image moves the soul in Sidney's poetic theory.

22. Ronald Levao has made the claim that "right poets" are distinguished from divine poets by Sidney in order to free the former from the constraints of metaphysical truth, bound only within the limits of human thought. "Where Sidney does mention poets who were truly inspired by God (David, Solomon, et al.), he is careful to set them apart from 'right poets,' his subject" (Levao 224). Levao's argument is an attempt to unmask Sidney's Platonism as a self-consciously performed fiction, enacting in the critical apparatus of the *Defence* the very fictionality which lies at the heart of poetry, itself "only a special instance of the fictionality that pervades all discourse" (228). My argument in this essay subverts Levao's claim that "right" poetry lacks a cognitive object—it is divine poetry which fails to adequately represent its object, while "right" poetry, in dealing with human matters, is able to make manifest the Idea which is the fore-conceit of poetry. Levao's position is an extension and amplification of A. C. Hamilton's earlier argument that "The right poet alone is free from bondage to nature; not 'beeing captived to the trueth of a foolish world,' he may render that golden world whose 'reality' is contained within his own mind" ("Idea" 55).

23. "Since a tragedy is an imitation of men who are better than average, tragic poets should follow the example of good portrait painters; for, in painting men, they represent them more beautifully than they are but still retain the likeness of their visible form" (*Poetics* 1454b9-11).

24. Kathy Eden has argued that when Sidney "claims for poetry the special task of feigning images designed to inspire the will to virtuous action, he echoes the *De Anima* and its tradition" (158). Her argument, drawing upon the role of the *eikon* in activating the *energeia* of the will, is that poetic representation for Sidney unites the general and the particular in an image that moves the will. See Eden 62-111.

25. This does not conflict with my earlier claim that Aristotle's analysis of production stands behind Sidney's notion of the poet as maker. It is the specifically didactic use of the beautiful to which Sidney puts poetry that carries the Sidneian poetics beyond an Aristotelian to a Platonic form of mimesis in the act of reading. That is, Sidney differs from Aristotle on the central role of morality in poetry, while he is in agreement with Aristotle on the notion of mimesis as the principle of poetic production. In the division between mimesis as imitation in poetic production and in the reading of poetry, Sidney is able to establish his own position through a redefinition of mimesis which salvages what is useful in both Aristotle and Plato. By retracing in part the history of the idea of mimesis here, we are able to locate the source of agreement and disagreement between Plato and Aristotle, and to show how Sidney accomplishes a Platonic re-reading of Aristotelian mimetic theory by referring it both to the cognitive function and the moral intention of poetry. As such, Sidney's notion of poetic production uses Aristotle to correct the Platonic critique of

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poetic imitation, while using Plato to correct the Aristotelian elision of morality in the *Poetics*.

26. See *Phaedrus* 244a-257b, for Socrates' famous discourse on love, in which he employs the image of the charioteer commanding two steeds as a metaphor for how the soul is led to virtue through the beauty of the beloved.

27. "In Sidney's thought the delightfulness of poetry is parallel to Plato's beauty, and the truth that poetry teaches is the ideal of virtue or moral goodness" (Devereaux 89).

28. "That is, to know the good is not merely to be in possession of a body of knowledge which may be put to good or bad uses, a knowledge, as A. E. Taylor writes, 'of opposites.' True moral knowledge 'carries along with it the possession of the "good will."' Only those who 'are' virtuous really 'know' virtue" (Hoopes 12).

29. As John Hunt has pointed out, the structure of Sidney's poetic epistemology and the motion of the soul toward the good in poetic representation are "inspired by what the Christian Renaissance called Platonism: an enthusiastic response to the strict dualistic oppositions of Plato's middle dialogues (mind and body, thought and sensation, intelligible and visible objects) colored by various Neoplatonic concepts"(4).

30. See Pelikan: "When he referred to the word of God in the gospel, Luther explained, he was 'not speaking about the written gospel, but about the vocal one'... . Thus while the Latin text of the *Augsburg Confession* made it the condition of church unity 'to agree concerning the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments', the equally authoritative German text declared that 'it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine word'; presumably, one was to understand 'doctrine' in the light of 'preached', and vice versa... . Omnipresent though God unquestionably was, he did not wish to be known or grasped apart from his word. Luther said at the Diet of Worms that his conscience was captive to the word of God" (180-1).

31. "The theology of Martin Luther was a theology of the word of God: the climax of his best-known hymn was the defiant line, 'The word they still shall let remain.' Yet he and his immediate followers seemed to manifest a striking lack of specificity, or even of interest, in some of the most crucial questions involved in the doctrine of the authority of the word" (Pelikan 183).

32. "Luther's inauguration of the Reformation was characteristically the announcement of grace, not works, as the source of justification. Fundamentally similar, though more intellectualized, sixteenth-century Calvinism constructed a definition of conscience with which Sidney marked his Anglicized notion of 'inward light'" (Doherty 258).

33. "The integrity imagined in renaissance literary characters, including the figure of the mistress-knowledge as a species of allegorical *eikastic* personification, is never seen by the writer as a positive achievement of human labor; rather, it is a gift of grace. Protestant poets portray the gap between the content of their rational discoveries of false selves and human malaise and their radical faith and hope that, in the end, the true human self will be reconstituted in its original integrity, its likeness to the only true Icon of God, Jesus the Christ. This apparently contradictory set of convictions—human malaise exposed through history and divine intervention disclosed in it—establishes a major moral-psychological paradox in renaissance texts alien to the modern secular mind" (Doherty 258).

34. "Both Calvinists and Remonstrants pointed out that there had been a decree in the ancient church against the use of images in churches, and they attacked as sophistic

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ingenuity the view that condemned idolatry but sanctioned the worship of images" (Pelikan 216).

35. See Pelikan 217.

36. O. B. Hardison, Jr. recognizes a disjunction between this passage and the major intention of defending poetry against its attackers: "The passage clearly does not contribute to the defense of poetry. Its tone is hostile, and if anything, it undermines the defense by suggesting that English poets are guilty of many—if not most—of the charges that the enemies of poetry have leveled against it" (Hardison 93). Having failed to consider the *Defense* in the context of a Protestant programme for poetry, Hardison overlooks the religious principle which motivates Sidney in writing his *Defence*: That of securing for poetry a useful role in the Church. Hardison's explanation of Sidney's critique of the English poets follows the divisions of classical and modern, turning the text into two irreconcilable voices: "What we have, in fact, is a single document that reflects the tension in the last quarter of the sixteenth century between an older and a newer understanding of poetry, a tension whose elements are not fully defined in England until the seventeenth century" (97). My reading has the further advantage of explaining how this passage is reconcilable with the defense before it, a puzzle which (to my knowledge) only Hardison, and Myrick before him, have attempted to solve. Sidney's critique of his contemporaries—a practical form of criticism which applies his own articulated poetic theory—is not aesthetic but religious, and is reconcilable with his defense of poetry only as an exhortation for poets to take their place in the service of the Church. Sidney is not, as Hardison has claimed, divided in regard to classical and modern poetic practice, but with regard to the problem of how poetry can be imitation and retain an object of representation, given the epistemological rift between nature and God opened by the new Protestant hermeneutic.

37. See Parker for a discussion of how the poetics of analogy has been "eclipsed" by the employment of satire against Baroque culture in Augustan poetry.

38. My use of the term "allegory" perhaps may present some confusion, insofar as it has undergone a shift in meaning in being translated from its Biblical origin into its secular and literary usage. In medieval Scriptural hermeneutics, advanced by St. Thomas Aquinas and repeated by Dante, "allegory" refers to one of four—including the literal, the tropological or moral, and the anagogical—ways of reading Scripture. "Allegory" in this context is broadly conceived as symbolic, e.g. as the Hebrew Bible can be read as symbolic of the New Testament. In the literary analysis of tropes, "allegory" is a figural form of narrative which is frequently employed for a didactic use. I have used the term here in its literary sense, to indicate a didactic mode of narrative which eschews the symbolic representation of God. My essay is an attempt to plot the beginnings of the history of this transition, which originates with the Protestant emphasis upon the moral as the dominant trope in Scriptural interpretation. As such, Sidney's *Defence* is a major site for uncovering the genealogy of the term "allegory" as a didactic mode of narrative, and for understanding how it is that, as D. W. Robertson has claimed, "... medieval allegory, which is a vehicle for the expression of traditional ideas has, with few exceptions, no counterpart in modern poetry" (*Chaucer* 286). As such, Sidney's text, founded upon a Protestant hermeneutics which has annexed to itself the symbolic function of "allegory" as a moral reading comprising the entirety of Scriptural interpretation, instantiates the elision of eschatological and anagogical tropes by raising them to a level both beyond interpretation, as poetic tropes read on faith and not to be subjected to intellectual inquiry, and

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beyond imitation by poets, as the sole possession of the prophetic and revealed word of God.

39. "Sidney is another of a long line of apologists who accepted Plato's invitation to lovers of poetry 'to speak in prose in her behalf' and who in doing so used their opponent's arguments for their own purpose" (Dowlin 581).

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