

Sir Philip Sidney on Universality and Antiquity of Poetry: A Study

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Abstract - Sidney has proved that by nature poetry imitates and its function is two fold: to teach and delight. Sidney's view on universality and antiquity of poetry is valid. Through Sidney's 'Apology for Poetry' we can prove that Wordsworth's nature poetry is more delightful and understanding than Rousseau's insightful philosophy of 'natural education.' Poetry is superior to Philosophy and History – this notion of Sidney is quite serious and philosophical in itself. Sidney showed that pastorals poetry treats evils of tyranny and beauty of simple life, the elegiac moves rather pity than blame, the bitter iambic rubs the galled minds, the comic imitates the common error of our lives and want a great foil to perceive the beauty of virtue.

Keywords - Universality, Antiquity, Vates, Prophetic, Digital humanities etc.

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INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that poetry has an universal appeal than any other discourse either it is Philosophy or History. Poets are 'vates', poetry has prophetic nature and poets are prophets. Poetry has more power to remove vices and follies from human nature than any other disciplines. **Wimsatt and Brooks points out that "the source of Sidney's Defence were classical but spirit was not classical. Sidney sends up to the joyous fireworks of Italian Renaissance. His colours are enthusiastic, neoplatonic, the dual purple and gold. The motion is soaring. He is essentially a theorist of exuberant and imagination."** Sidney was like a logician – he had done systematic research on poetry and his 'Apology' was not only against Stephen Gosson rather it is a spirited defence of poetry against all the charges that had been laid at its door since Plato. Sidney created a bridge between imitation and poetic creation and antiquity and universalism. According to Sidney all knowledges aims at teaching of virtues. He admits that 'Philosophy' and 'History' also teach virtue but they are not superior to poetry in playing their parts. The Philosopher teaches disputation virtue. He teaches virtue by certain abstracts consideration.

The Philosopher sets down percept and rules by thorny arguments. His knowledge stands upon abstract and general. But the poet deals with the universal. He produces wisdom and temperance.

For conclusion says Sidney the philosopher teach but he teaches obscurely. So as the learned only can

understand him. But the poet is the food for tenderest stomachs. The poet is indeed the right popular philosopher.

Though William Wordsworth was greatly influenced by Roussue but the poetry of Wordsworth is more delightful and charming than the Roussue's philosophy of nature.

The poet teaches much more and in a better way than history. The historian deals with the fact that 'Were' and 'Are' but he cannot foretell the future. The poet on the other hand has all the time for his gamut. The past, present and the future shines in the verse of poets. He is one step ahead of the historian who writes of the past and the present only.

He represents the lives of those who have gone before and asks his readers to follow their footsteps. Old age experience goes along with him and he gives the experience of many ages. He teaches by example, but the poet is a moderator. He teaches virtue by percept not by example but by both. He goes beyond the historians.

In history virtue is neither rewarded nor is the vice punished. But the poet feigns matters in such a manner that he shows that virtue is rewarded and vice is punished.

The description of World War-II which we find in Rupert Brooks' poems is more realistic than any other history books of World War-II.

Why Sidney wrote “Apology”

Sidney turns to the four charges leveled against it by Gosson. Stephen Gosson published his attack on poetry in 1579. In it he came down heavily on poets and the very practice on the arts. He is a puritan. Gosson draws heavily examples from classical literature of Greece and ancient Rome to argue that it was not without reason that Plato banished the poet from his ideal state. As Stephen Gosson says:

1. There being many other faithful knowledges, a man might better spend his time in them than in poetry.
2. Poetry is the “mother of lies”.
3. Poetry has a wanton or corrupting influence.
4. Stephen Gosson classed poet with the pipers and jesters and called them caterpillars of commonwealth all alike enemies of virtue.

Reaction was needed, and this reaction was clearly visible with the publication of Sidney’s “An Apology for Poetry” (1595). Where he attacks Gosson’s view on Poetry and established a valid identity of poetry as a part of literature and also our existence.

UNIVERSALISM AND ITS POSTMODERN IMPLICATIONS

Digital humanities and digital literature where Sidney acquired a vital space- where spectator is more important than reader. Literature is the mixture of humor and pathos of human mind and film provides a motion in human circumstances , therefore film is more realistic than literature. The film adaption of ‘ Hamlet’ as ‘ Haider’ is more popular than the original English text. Literature can be considered as the written form of communication between the author and the readers, film/films on the other hand is the verbal and visual form communication. Moreover laymen like us considers film as the purest form of entertainment than literature. But we must consider that both film and literature has similar aim to create sublimity in human mind and remove vice and follies of society.

As per my observation film is a genuine source of preservation of literary texts as moving picture. Adaption of films have many sources for e.g. theatre , fiction, music, painting etc. All these sources find more vitality with technique of stage, lighting, direction, movements, gesture, characterization etc. Film adaption of literary text is an old tradition to provide social commentary.

Animation pictures is also one of the purest form of digitalizing literary texts.

For example , animation picture of Jonathan Swift’s ‘ Gulliver Travels’ and Kipling’s ‘ Jungle Book’ was the finest source of entertainment for 90’s kids.

Animation pictures of ‘ Mahabharata’ and ‘ Ramayana’ are examples of digitalization of our old classical texts.

George Bluestone’s phenomenal book “ **Novels into Film**” starts with the basic differences that exist between visual communication and written communication. Bluestone argues that , things that shape film from an work of art have some unavoidable difference but there message is same towards society.

FINDINGS

Sidney is for all ages – that is why he established the notion of universalism in artistic creations.

1. Man’s first disobedience to God- the fall of Adam and Eve, the anecdotes is more vigorous and charming while we read Milton’s ‘ Paradise Lost’ than in the Bible.
2. Nietzsche’s ‘ God is dead and we have killed him’ is little fade in front of the charms of Samuel Backett’s ‘ Waiting for Godot.’
3. The existential crisis of modern men is more threatening in Kafka’s Gragor Samsa and Sartre’s ‘ Nausea’ than any other postmodern philosophical discourses.
4. Chaucer in his prologue to ‘ The Canterbury Tales’ deals with the universal traits of The Knight, The Nun, The Doctor etc. He is therefore read than any dry historian. Shakespeare’s ‘ Hamlet’ and ‘ King Lear’ deals with the universal human emotions and passions and thereby strikes a note in the heart of men of all ages.

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