

TWO CRITICAL ASPECTS OF *AN APOLOGIE FOR POETRIE*



José Manuel González Fernández de Sevilla

Sir Philip Sidney became a legend in his time as representative of the fulfilment of the humanist ideal. In his brief thirty-two years he was courtier, poet, lover, soldier, politician, patron, scholar and religious devotee¹. He was indeed «the many-sided man»². To fully understand the poet and the critic in Sidney, we must understand the humanist, the courtier and the man of action. We should view him in his own age, when the medieval world was being so swiftly transformed. He stands for a deeper, richer and more imaginative humanism than his predecessors in the English tradition. Personal integrity, lofty patriotism and religious reverence are still the strongest traits of his character, as they are of every true humanist. These aspects of Sidney's life can explain the nature of his poetry and his critical approach, giving us the outline of his political and religious ideas and the contradictions they contain³. He is an innovator, breaking with a tradition where literary criticism appears only incidentally in the writings of earlier courtiers such as Elyot and Lord Bernes. Creative literature, therefore, receives from Sidney a new emphasis manifested in both the example of the *Arcadia* and in the theories of the *Apologie* where he makes the characteristic Renaissance transfer of the traditional threefold function of oratory to poetry: to teach, to delight, to move⁴.

Our critical study of Sidney's apology intends to treat neither those critical aspects which are already very familiar nor those which directly refer to poetry,

¹ Dorothy Connell, *Sir Philip Sidney, The Maker's Mind*. Oxford at the University Press, 1971, p. 1.

² M. C. Bradbrook, *Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Poetry*. Cambridge at the University Press, 1979, p. 22.

³ J. J. Jusserand points out the greatest of all Sidney's antithesis. i.e. the one existing between his critical judgment and his romantic imagination. Cfr. *The English Novel in the Time of Shakespeare*. London: Ernst Benn Ltd. (1890), rpt. 1966, p. 260.

⁴ Cfr. «Sidney» in Ch. Baldwin, *Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice*. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959, pp. 178-180.

since they have received more attention. We aim to present two aspects which are equally interesting but not generally as known: his critical approach to the English language, on the one hand, and his critical remarks about drama, on the other. Sidney was not only a great poet but a brilliant theorist. His sensitivity to contemporary intellectual development in the arts, in religion, in politics and in science gave him the necessary background to write the first serious treatise on literary theory to be written in England, using humanist concepts. Although Sidney himself refers to it as an «inck-wasting toy»⁵, the *Apologie* is an example not only of critical theory but of literary art. Its purpose is to argue in favour of poetry, «to counter its abuse by the ape-poets through whose work... England had come to despise poetry»⁶ as the result of the strong opposition to it. There had been different attacks renewed by the Puritans, but we cannot blame them alone for the prejudice. To a large extent it is an attempt to answer a variety of charges against poetry. As theory it remains fundamentally pragmatic. This is perhaps the reason why the apology is still valid:

Sir Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* is still the best analysis and the most persuasive justification of this peculiar notion —that a sensible and comprehensive control over human affairs can be learnt from splendid poems. To acquire something of this attitude towards life and letters...⁷.

Sometimes the originality of Sidney's criticism has been questioned because it is full of numerous arguments and references derived from classical sources and Renaissance writers such as Minturno and Scaliger. Tradition had an enormous influence on literary works at that time. It is difficult to come across a piece of literary criticism of the period free from allusions to Greek and Latin authors. It was fashionable practice. However we should not regard it as something negative. Puttenham, Sherry, Cox, Wilson, Peacham and many others quote writers time and time again in order to justify their critical positions. Sidney learnt most of his critical principles from the Italians and it can be said without exaggeration that there is not one major principle in the *Apologie* which cannot be traced back to some Italian treatise on the poetic art⁸. We cannot understand his critical principles without considering his classical background⁹. What gives the work its

⁵ Philip Sidney, *Complete Works*, R. Feuillerat (ed.), Cambridge, 1912-1926, III, p. 45.

⁶ A. C. Hamilton, *Sir Philip Sidney*. Cambridge at the University Press, 1977, p. 107.

⁷ Geoffrey Shepherd (ed.), *An Apology for Poetry*. Manchester at the University Press, (1973), rpt. 1984, Introduction, p. 1. References throughout are to this edition.

⁸ The *Apologie* is indeed an epitome of the literary criticism of the Italian Renaissance. Its sources for the general theory of poetry were the critical treatises of the Italian critics. J. E. Spingarn has shown conclusively that Sidney knew Scaliger, Minturno and Castelvetro. He also suggests that he may have known Daniello, Varchi and Trissino but this view appears to be less tenable. Cfr. J. E. Spingarn, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, 2nd edition. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, (1924), rpt. 1976, pp. 257-258; Kenneth Orne Myrick, *Sir Philip Sidney As a Literary Craftsman*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935, p. 87.

⁹ In school and university Sidney could not have escaped the general influence of Cicero and Quintilian. When discussing comedy, he refers several times to Plautus and Terence. He seems to have had scant acquaintance with Greek literature as a whole except in translation. So we can say that Sid-

undoubted value and originality is the skill with which Sidney has drawn on earlier teaching; selecting, adapting and fusing together ideas from many sources in order to arrive at his own conception of poetry. His treatment is of an eclectic kind. His conclusions are the result of personal reflexion as well as wide reading. At the same time he shows a considerable Platonic influence and this played a predominant part in shaping his views. However his critical work was not a mere repetition of principles and ideas. The originality of the *Apologie* is not «confined solely to its subject-matter; in the manner of presentation, too, will be found a freshness and vigour characteristic of Sidney alone»¹⁰.

The apology is not a discursive essay on a selection of critical matters. The term *poetry* is used here in its original Greek sense, denoting not verse alone but all forms of imaginative literature, including drama. The principles it enunciates are not startlingly new but the treatise as a whole served the important function of lending a new dignity to literature. It conforms to a type of oration adapted to the justification of philosophy or art¹¹. Here Sidney clearly shows his indebtedness to tradition. His personal criticism of the English language and literature is found in the *refutation* where he tries to answer the accusations presented in the treatise. *An Apologie* ends with the *peroratio* and with the request that poetry should never be degraded again:

I conjure you all that have had the evil luck to read this inck-wasting toy of mine even in the name of the Nine Muses, no more to scorn the sacred mysteries of Poesy... no more to jest at the reverend title of a rhymer; but to believe with Aristotle that they were the ancient treasurers of the Grecians' divinity¹².

The work's date is somewhat uncertain, though a letter dated October 1580 addressed to his brother Robert contains allusions to the *Apologie* and this suggests that the work was possibly written about that time. The volume was published posthumously in 1595. It has been supposed that it was intended to answer Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuse* (1579). However we believe with J. W. H. Atkins that it was «more certainly inspired by a desire to explain to an age, confused and perplexed, what poetry really was, and what it stood for in the life of the community»¹³. It was dedicated, apparently without permission, to Sidney. Spen-

ney's first-hand knowledge of Greek literature in general was very limited. There is evidence that he read some parts of the *Ethics*, *Politics*, *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* of Aristotle in the original. His intimate knowledge of Plato would lead us to suspect that he had read some of his dialogues. Cfr. Kenneth Orne Myrick, op. cit., p. 108.

¹⁰ J. E. Spingarn, op. cit., pp. 137-138.

¹¹ This kind of oration was familiar to the medieval and Renaissance world of letters as a laudatory form of art. It follows the normal rhetorical patterns and conventions that have their origin in forensic delivery, in spite of being a written text. Division under seven heads is to be found in the systems of many rhetoricians although Quintilian finds only five parts in an oration. We are told by Thomas Wilson that every oration has seven parts. Cfr. Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique*. ed. Mair, 1909, p. 7.

¹² Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*. Geoffrey Shepherd (ed.), Manchester at the University Press, (1973), rpt. 1984, p. 141, lines 27 ff.

¹³ J.W.H. Atkins, *English Literary Criticism: The Renaissance*. London: Methuen, (1947), rpt. 1968, p. 113.

ser recorded that he received the work with scorn but we cannot tell whether the scorn was directed towards the poet, the manner of writing, or the argument. What we know for certain is that the work was dedicated to him without requesting his permission. Our personal opinion is that Gosson's work remains a «Pleasant invective against poets, pipers, players, jesters and such-like caterpillars of a commonwealth»¹⁴. It is above all a warning against the evils of the performances of popular theatre. He expresses the same view but with more forceful arguments in *Playes Confuted in fiue Actions* (1590):

That stage playes are the doctrine and invention of the Devill... because playing is one of those politike hornes which our enemie dosseth against the Gospell; we stand in the way of sinners, because plaies are the proceedings and practices of the Gentils in their Idolatrie...¹⁵.

His concern is mainly theatrical. Sidney, for his part, only deals with drama briefly. This type of controversy was the normal way of discussing and contrasting ideas, and it was in such disputes that Elizabethan criticism originated¹⁶. The first critical essays are apologies for poetry directed against Puritanism, though the arguments are not exclusively literary. Social, politic and religious reasons are adduced so as to reinforce their principles. Didacticism is repeatedly argued, since it was the adequate answer to the Puritan moral code¹⁷. As M. Doran says «the poets and lovers of poetry therefore were bound to conduct their defence on the ground chosen by the attackers»¹⁸.

I

During the second half of the sixteenth century the English language had become one of the main topics of discussion by the critics of the period. Although English, along with the vernaculars, had established itself as the language of popular literature, there was still a strong tradition that sanctioned the use of Latin in all fields of knowledge. This tradition was strengthened by the revival of learning. Latin and Greek were not only the key to the world's knowledge, but also the languages in which poetry, oratory and philosophy were to be read. Yet Latin was the linguistic standard most widely accepted, and its excellence was universally recognized. The literary preeminence of Latin reached a level which the vernaculars could never hope to match. In fact, condemnation of the mother tongue

¹⁴ Stephen Gosson, *School of Abuse*, London, 1579.

¹⁵ Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in fiue Actions*, London, 1590.

¹⁶ The incipient Elizabethan criticism was the result of the linguistic and literary disputes of the time. Cfr. G. G. Smith (ed.), *Elizabethan Critical Essays*. Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1904, vol I, Introduction.

¹⁷ Sidney himself was a Puritan. He belonged to the first generation of Puritans, prior to the doctrines of Cartwright. His Puritan background can clearly be seen in his ideas about the fallen state of man and his corrupted will.

¹⁸ Cfr. Dorothy Connell, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

varies according to the value placed upon eloquence or rhetoric. The vernaculars seemed immature, unpolished and limited. This view is clearly seen in some and the images used to describe them. So we can say that «Distrust in the literary qualities of the vernaculars consistently dominated the greater part of sixteenth century»¹⁹. It was felt that they could not express abstract ideas or deep poetical feelings. Some critics thought that the English language was coarse, harsh, uneven and incapable of producing literary, scientific or philosophical works. Roger Ascham in *Toxophilus* (1545) sums up the reservations associated with this position:

...as for the Latin or greke tonge eüery thyng is so excellently done in them, that none can do better: In the Englysh tonge contrary, eüery thyng in a manner so meanly, bothe for the matter and the handelyng that no man can do worse²⁰.

There were many defenders of English who were totally opposed to this tradition. Influential names like Elyot, Wilson, Puttenham and Mulcaster believed that their language had the required perfection and copiousness for creating literature. Of these writers none was more enthusiastic than Richard Mulcaster, who writes in his *Elementarie* (1582):

For it is not in dede a marvellous bondage to becom servants to one tung for learning sake, the most of our time, wiht losse of most time, whereas we maie have the verie same treasur in our tung, with the gain of most time?... I love Rome, but London better, I favor Italie, but England more, I honor the Latin, but I worship the English²¹.

We find the same belief expressed in the second chapter of *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) by George Puttenham, which is entitled: «That there may be an art of our English Poesie as well as there is one of the Latine and Greeke». In no field was the lack of English words so clearly revealed as in the various terms where references to the more or less standardized terminology of all the different kinds of organized learning, such as logic, rhetoric, mathematics and the like existed but the need to supplement the vocabulary of their native language was also strongly felt. The method most frequently adopted was to borrow from other languages in general and from the classical ones in particular. As we approach the end of the century we can see how English has slowly gained recognition with a touch of patriotic feeling as far as many critics were concerned. They seemed to have grown tired of being told that their native tongue was crude and barbarous. These are the words of George Pettie:

There are some others yet who wyll set lyght by my labours, because I write Englysh... the woorst is, they thinke that impossible to be doone in our Tongue: for they count it barren... how little soever you esteeme it, I durst my selfe undertake... to wryte in it as copiouslye for varietie...²²

¹⁹ R. F. Jones, *The Triumph of the English Language*. London: Oxford University Press, 1953, p. 24.

²⁰ Roger Ascham, «Toxophilus» in *English Works of Roger Ascham*. A. W. Wright (ed.), Cambridge at the University Press, 1904, p. XIV.

²¹ Richard Mulcaster, *The First Part of the Elementary*. Menston: Scolar Press, 1970, p. 254.

²² George Pettie, *Ciuile Conversation*, London, 1586.

Although the acceptability of English was taken for granted, the victory was not easily won. Initially its use for scholarly purposes was experimental²³. Until the close of the sixteenth century comments on the English language dealt largely with its eloquent or ineloquent nature, the inadequacy of its vocabulary, the confusion and illogicality of its spelling, and the lack of grammatical regulation. The recognition of the importance of the mother tongue and the desire to see it regulated and stabilized also find clear expression in the different grammars of English which were published during this period.

Sidney's view of the English language takes its place within this dispute. His criticism, however, is not primarily linguistic because it is mainly related to «poesy». He shows himself to have a perfect knowledge of the debate concerning the recognition and acceptance of the English language as a valid instrument for creating a literary art —a fact that is, to say the least, surprising in a man devoted to the practical side of life. From the very beginning of his linguistic exposition he has a positive view of the possibilities of the English language. He considers his native tongue «capable of any excellent exercising», although he is fully aware of the prevailing negative conception of English at that time. In Sidney's opinion there are two major arguments put forward by the linguistic detractors. Firstly they maintain that English is «a mingled language». As far as he is concerned this is something positive because English has taken all the best of other languages. Secondly they say that a language needs to have a grammar. To this claim he replies that «it wanteth no grammar» in order to avoid «those cumbersome differences of cases, genders, moods and tenses»²⁴. For Sidney grammar meant artificiality and was not essential for daily speech because the competence of the language lies above all in its possibility for expressing feelings and ideas. The Elizabethans tried to make their language eloquent rather than grammatical²⁵. This is clearly reflected in Sidney's linguistic position. The fundamental aspect of a language is this: «to utter sweetly and properly the conceits of the mind», which is the purpose of all speech. So it is evident that for him the competence of a language is more important than its grammaticality. The principle of expressibility is the outstanding element of a language. Henry Peacham says in *The Garden of Eloquence* that a language should achieve a twofold aim: to free man from the passions of the heart and to express his thoughts. The purgative effect is not mentioned in the *Apologie*. Sidney considers the meaningful effect to be the basic and exclusive one of any language as such. His defence of the English language does not mean that he had no respect for Greek and Latin. Their perfection and richness are recognized and assumed. This is not, however, an obstacle for establishing a comparison between them and the vernaculars. Thus we can say that English is superior to Latin in its capacity to elaborate compound words.

He then turns to considering English in relation to the two forms of versification: the old and the new. He investigates the possibility of using his native lan-

²³ Cfr. Thomas Elyot, *Doctrinal of Princes*, London, 1534.

²⁴ Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, op. cit., p. 140, lines 12-13.

²⁵ R. F. Jones, op. cit., p. 283.

guage for both forms and concludes trenchantly that «Truly the English, before any other vulgar language I know, is fit for both sorts»²⁶. The reason for the pre-eminence of English lies in its fitness for modern versification. The vernaculars experience difficulties in adapting themselves to the new forms. He goes further and clearly demonstrates that the distrust of poetry was not due to the limitation of the English language but to other external causes since «lastly our tongue is most fit to honour Poesy and to be honoured by Poesy»²⁷. He concludes that there can be no doubt English could be used for writing poetry. At the end of Sidney's consideration of language, we may say that he maintains an Elizabethan linguistic approach. He is not a theorist. He deals with the English language only in the same sense of finding out its capacity and competence for writing literature. His interest is exclusively for practical reasons. He shows a clear positive belief in the literary possibilities of English and his strong conviction of the adaptability of English to all the metrical necessities of poetry undoubtedly constitutes his greatest linguistic contribution.

II

In the final pages we come across a partial revision of English Literature which deserves to be mentioned because of its originality and freshness. His role as a constructive critic can perhaps be best seen in those remarks which serve to contribute to a better understanding and appreciation of literary values. His selection provides evidence of discrimination. We find references to some of the outstanding English poets and works. Chaucer is in this view the first English poet. He does not know whether to marvel more at the fact that «he in that misty time could see so clearly, or that we in this clear age walk so stumblingly after him». He praises for example the excellence of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Then, after mentioning the *A Mirror for Magistrates* and Surrey's poems, he refers to the *Shepherd's Calendar*, pointing out the poetical greatness of its eclogues and the benefit and delight experienced in reading it. However he is not too sure about recommending such a rustic style. His vision of the English poets up to his time remains scanty and incomplete. He does not know, for example, «*Tottle's Miscellany* including much of Sir Thomas Wyatt's notable verse and the *Poesies* of George Gascoigne»²⁸ among others. For contemporary readers these comments aimed to bring both illumination and guidance but no significant critical value should be placed upon them.

His remarks about drama are much more interesting and surprising because he was not a theatre man at all. The situation here is different from that concerning the English language. Drama was not included in the literary tradition. He

²⁶ Philip Sidney, op. cit., p. 140, lines 34-35.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 141, lines 26-27.

²⁸ F. S. Boas, *Sir Philip Sidney, Representative Elizabethan. His Life and Writings*. London: Staples Press Ltd., 1955, p. 53.

strongly felt the need to build up a dramatic tradition. Dramatic criticism in England began with him. Casual references to the drama can be found in critical writings anterior to the *Apologie*; but «the credit of having first formulated, in a more or less systematic manner, the general principles of dramatic art»²⁹ belongs to Sidney. These principles are the same ones which for half a century or more had been undergoing discussion in Italy and France, and whose ultimate source was the *Poetics* of Aristotle. He was influenced by the importance attached to dramatic poetry by Italian critics. At this we find a brusque change in this exposition. Suddenly he is ready to express his view on the state of Tudor drama which, according to Sidney's appreciation had already become the most popular of native forms, full of characteristic abuses which had given rise to the Puritan attack. It is difficult to say how well he knew contemporary drama, but he shows a certain predilection for the theatre. Some dramatic elements could be recognized in several of his poetical works. This would be the case of *Astrophel and Stella*. There are evident allusions to drama in «Some what to reade for them that list», the preface that Thomas Nashe wrote for this work. The dominant metaphor is drawn from the theatre, «... so endes the Sceanes of Idiots, and enter Astrophel in pompe»³⁰. He calls this sequence «This Theatre of Pleasure», and it is even suggested that a play is going to be performed. Nashe's interpretation should not be minimized. It is possible to foresee a kind of dramatic action in the interplay between the different characters and their conversation. His description for *Astrophel and Stella* as a tragi-comedy of love makes sense. The character's change of role, their relationship and their conflicts, the rejection of conventions by Astrophel all have dramatic connotations:

Because I breathe not love to everie one,
Nor do not use set colours for to weare,
Nor nourish speciall lockes of vowed hair
Nor give each speech a full point of gron
The courtly Nymphs, acquainted with the mon
Of them, who in their lips Love's stander bear;
«What he?» say they of me, «now I dare swar»
He cannot love; no, no, let him alone³¹.

At the beginning of his dramatic criticism in the *Apologie*, Sidney tells us why he refers to drama. His interest in the theatre derives from the fact it contains poetry. However his critical approach goes beyond poetical considerations. He agrees with the accusations against tragedy and comedy, and offers us his own reasons and arguments -the major one being the non-acceptance of poetical rules, with the single exception of *Gordobuc*. He goes on to criticize the absence of the unities of time and place in contemporary plays, arguing that they constitute «the two necessary companions of all corporal actions»³². In his dramatic consider-

²⁹ J. E. Spingarn, op. cit., p. 282.

³⁰ Cfr. G. G. Smith, op. cit., vol. II, p. 223.

³¹ W. A. Ringler (ed.), *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*. Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1962, p. 191.

³² Philip Sidney, op. cit., p. 134, line 8.

ations he is faithful to tradition, maintaining that all the action should occur in a single place and should not last for more than one day. He complains about the non-observance of the unities of place:

where you shall have Asia of the one side and Afric of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the player, when he cometh in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived. Now ye shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers and then we must believe the stage to be a garden...³³

and time:

Now of time they are much more liberal, for ordinary it is that two young princes fall in love. After many traversers, she is got with a child, delivered of a fair boy, he is lost groweth a man, falls in love, and is ready to get another child, and all this in two hour's space...³⁴

Castelvetro was the first to formulate the unities of time and place in their definitive form, insisting upon them as inviolable laws of drama. The first mention of the unities in England is to be found in Sidney's apology. He took them directly from Castelvetro. The Renaissance formulated the unity of time, and deduced from it the unity of place, to which there is no reference either in Aristotle or any other ancient writer. In Aristotle we only find clearly exposed the unity of action. In his definition of tragedy he says that the play must be complete or perfect, that is, must have unity. This is the origin of the unity of action. However in the *Poetics* there is not a single reference to the unities of time and place. To this respect Aristotle only says that the tragic action is confined to a single revolution of the sun. It is not a dramatic precept or rule in principle, «This passage is the incidental statement of an historical fact; it is merely a tentative deduction from the usual practice of Greek tragedy, and Aristotle never conceived of it as an inviolable law of drama»³⁵. Thus if the unity of action is the Aristotelian unity, the unities of time and place are the Italian unities. However it was not until 1636 that they became fixed in modern dramatic literature. Sidney's criticism of these unities seems to be highly inflexible and conservative. He tried to impose a set of rules which were out of place. Elizabethan performances only acknowledged one inviolable and unique rule: dramatic freedom. There is no reason to be surprised at the liberty with which Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists continued to treat place, time and action. It is worth remembering that these unities did not get complete recognition in any country. Unity for the Elizabethans was hard to come by. Few were willing to sacrifice variety to get it. It would have been better to suggest the term of «multiple unity»³⁶ as a means of referring to the basic English Renaissance rule. It could be stated by saying that everything

³³ Philip Sidney, op. cit., p. 134, lines 14-19.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 134, lines 26-30.

³⁵ J. E. Spingarn, op. cit., p. 90.

³⁶ M. Doran, *Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama*. Madison, Milwaukee and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, (1954), rpt. 1972, p. 294.

could possibly be fitted in somewhere. One of the reasons for Shakespeare's superiority over his fellow playwrights lay in his uncommon ability for finding a way to bring all this variety into harmonious relationship. Sidney failed to notice it. He is wrong to judge the state of contemporary drama according to stale principles. The result was an excessively narrow view of Tudor drama. For him the unities were not the means but the end for making a play providing a more realistic and understandable performance. Thus we can say that at first his dramatic criticism is not as useful as might be expected. His critical position with regard to this aspect may be the obvious result of his Puritan background and his profound rootedness in Renaissance and classical drama. Sidney believes that the unities should have been taken into account by the Elizabethan dramatists because they have been universally observed in antiquity, though Plautus and Terence had occasionally broken them. His censure is stated in a picturesque, ironical, and archaic style. He clearly meant to remain faithful to classical rules and principles. These must never die because that is the moment when tradition will lose its power of creativity and originality. However, we consider that there is something more creative and new in Sidney's critical approach to the dramatic unities than the above mentioned, and it is his demand for verosimilitude, for dramatic realism. This principle may have a twofold effect. On the one hand it can block later dramatic theory. On the other it is a warning for bringing plays closer to everyday life which will be one of the outstanding characteristics of the Elizabethan popular theatre. We also find a veiled reference to the unity of action. He considers that the plot should be taken from the story which is most theatrical in order to achieve a meaningful performance. That is why it is so important to distinguish between *reporting* and *representing*: «I may speak (though I am here) of Peru, and in speech digress from that to the description of Calicut; but in action I cannot represent it without Pacolet's horse...»³⁷. *Representing* is the very essence of drama, and although this distinction is made so as to achieve understanding of the unities of time and place, it is a very valuable observation within Elizabethan dramatic criticism.

He next examines some of the dramatic genres. He comes across the inherited tradition of mixing in the medieval drama the serious and the ludicrous, the pitiful and the farcical, that so contrasted with the rigorous selectivity and economy of classical forms. There was no distinct definition of the Elizabethan dramatic genres. We can say that not even writers had clear distinctions in mind. Any attempt to describe these dramatic forms is likely to fail. This explains Sidney's objection to the «plays be neither right tragedies, nor right comedie, mingling kings and clowns»³⁸. The second of his censures is, then, the incongruous mixing of comic and tragic material. This abuse was real enough on the Elizabethan stage. The practice of mingling the comic and the serious went back to the Middle Ages in England, when the Expositor in the Scriptural plays informed the spectators that «only to make sport», some things would be included that were «not war-

³⁷ Philip Sidney, *op. cit.*, p. 135, lines 7-10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 135, lines 30-32.

ranted by any writ»³⁹. What Sidney objects to is the indecorous mixing of comic and tragic elements, something frequently done at that time. He is strongly against the eclectic character of plays and the mixture of genres. In spite of the fact that there are examples of tragi-comedy in the classical-world, he does not favourably upon this so called genre, and maintains a rigid separation of dramatic genres as the classics did, «we shall find that they never, or very daintly, match hornpipes and funerals»⁴⁰. He has nothing against the genres as long as they achieve their proper function. In Webbe's *Discourse of English Poesie* (1586) we find those general distinctions between tragedy and comedy which had been common throughout the Middle Ages. These are the only two dramatic genres Sidney deals with. For him both participate in the traditional didactic function of English drama from its very beginnings. Drama came into being as an effective method of teaching people. In England the didactic function of drama was given a great stimulus by the Puritan attack. The usefulness of tragedy and comedy is repeated over and over again by people like Lodge, Nashe and Webbe. The general didactic principle becomes the moral principle in the *Apologie*. Plays should be full of morality which is the other inviolable dramatic precept. It might be explained by his Puritan background. The ethical aspect of a play is shown in the representation of punished wickedness and rewarded virtue. His criticism in this point follows Scaliger's ideas very closely. He complains about the non-observance of this principle, and explains the growing opposition to public performances and the development of drama. Sidney has no explicit theory of tragedy. When he considers his conception of tragedy, we find it to be rather indeterminate, made up of medieval ideas, together with fragments drawn from Aristotle and the Italian critics. Thus medieval doctrine still persists in his statement that tragedy deals mainly with the falls of tyrants and the uncertainty of life. Tragedy, he says, is subject, not to the laws of history, but to the laws of poetry. He affirms that Senecan drama and Aristotelian precepts are the sources of his theory of tragedy. In the *Apologie* there are elements which later will constitute the core of neo-classic conception of tragedy⁴¹.

Sidney devotes a longer and more explicit discussion to comedy which was more popular than tragedy and history. Comedies outnumbered tragedies on the Elizabethan stage by nearly three to one. The medieval definition of comedy was seen entirely as an antithesis to tragedy, comedy being considered everything that tragedy was not. Comedy aimed at giving «an imitation of life, a mirror of manners and an image of truth»⁴². It was designed to promote the pursuit of virtue. The Elizabethan theory of comedy was based on the body of rules and observations which the Italian critics had deduced from Aristotle and on the practice

³⁹ Cfr. David Klein, *The Elizabethan Dramatists as Critics*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1963, p. 198.

⁴⁰ Philip Sidney, op. cit., p. 136, lines 1-2.

⁴¹ J. E. Spingarn, op. cit., p. 286.

⁴² This is Cicero's definition as recorded by Donatus. It is not found in the works of Cicero, but it was a commonplace of the sixteenth century.

of Plautus and Terence. Sidney defines comedy as «an imitation of the common errors of our life» which are represented «in the most ridiculous and scornful manner». Comedy, therefore, shows «the filthiness of evil», but in «our private and domestic matters». The end of comedy is not only to provoke laughter but also to teach and delight⁴³. Here we can see how the didactic function of drama is coupled with entertainment. The union of the two probably represented the most popularly accepted comic principle. It derived from Horace's dictum «Aut prodesse solent, aut delectare». Comic delight is not only a consequence of the capacity of comedy for provoking laughter, but it is also found in things that are of concern to ourselves or to nature itself. Laughter is almost always at the expense of things that have lost all measure of proportion to ourselves and nature. He distinguishes clearly between laughter and delight which he sees as the ultimate end of all true art. Delight implies a joy that is permanent and present, arising from a sense of harmony and convenience. By delight Sidney seems to mean «a complete surrender to sympathy, in which the spectator utterly loses himself in the joy of what he contemplates»⁴⁴. Laughter is «a scornful tickling», momentary and superficial. However he holds that both could be combined in a highly productive fashion. His desire is to produce a more intellectual kind of comedy that satisfies and provides lasting delight in order to avoid the prevailing tendency to make comedy little more than a rough and empty farce. The great fault of English comedy was that it provoked laughter concerning things that were sinful. He points out, following Aristotle's teaching, that comedy should have nothing to do with the evil or vicious. Nor painful human deformities should be treated as comic material. The proper material for comedy is to be found in human weaknesses and defects of a harmless kind. The appropriate characters are those which we play naturally. They are actually drawn from the ordinary life of the time. In spite of his warnings against the tendency of comedy to make us laugh at sinful things, usually more execrable than ridiculous, he still recommends it for its role in ridiculing the pompous and the pretentious.

III

There are two treatises written by Juan de Valdés and Juan de la Cueva which deserve to be compared with Sidney's *Apologie*. The linguistic position of Valdés in his *Diálogo de la lengua* (1535-1536) offers similarities with Sidney's. He firmly believes in the possibilities of vernacular tongues because «Todos los hombres somos más obligados a ilustrar y enriquecer la lengua que nos es natural y que mamamos en las tetas de nuestras madres, que no la que nos es pegadiza y que aprendemos en los libros»⁴⁵. Spanish is, in his opinion, a perfect and eloquent language

⁴³ Philip Sidney, op. cit., p. 136, line 39; p. 137, lines 1-3.

⁴⁴ M. C. Bradbrook, *The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1979, p. 131.

⁴⁵ Juan de Valdés, *Diálogo de la lengua*. J. M. Lope Blanch (ed.), Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1985, p. 44.

but not as elegant as Italian. He does not maintain a patriotic attitude towards his native language as Sidney does. He devotes several pages to grammar although Pacheco, one of the scholars involved in this dialogue, argues that it is not an essential element of language⁴⁶. We also find a critical reference to some of the outstanding works of Spanish Literature which should be read in order to improve one's use and understanding of the Spanish language. Cueva's *Ejemplar poético* (1609) is, in fact, the earliest Spanish imitation of Horace's Epistle. It is composed in tercets, and it is divided into three sections which are called epistles. In the first he deals with general discussions of literature and literary theory. The second treats the origin, technique and superiority of Spanish verse over other foreign forms. The third section is devoted to drama. Cueva's treatise, like Sidney's *Apologie*, can be traced to the Aristotelian doctrines of imitation of nature and verosimilitude⁴⁷. He also distinguishes between the poet and the historian. He considers that grammar can sometimes be an obstacle for writing poetry. This is the reason why he condemns a variety of grammatical usages, such as a noun modified by more than two adjectives or the use of a gerund as an adjective which he finds inadmissible. Juan de la Cueva defends drama in general and the Spanish *comedia* in particular. He is against the dramatic precepts of classical drama. If he had declined to observe these precepts, it was because he realized that they were too restrictive and that Spanish drama needed freedom to achieve maturity. He draws a fine line between tragedy and comedy, advocating the introduction of kings and gods in the comedies.

Sidney's critical approach is to be praised. His detailed apology tries to cover as many aspects as possible and to establish some of the basic principles of literary theory that had been lost sight of. We think that he could, however, have been more explicit in his criticism, although this would have taken him too far away from the aims of the apology. In his appreciation of drama, as F. S. Boas recognizes, «he becomes liable to some of the reproofs that he had addressed to the scornful critics of poetry»⁴⁸. He lacks the necessary familiarity with drama to criticize plays. He exaggerates when he writes about the non-observance of the unities and this underlines the clear influence of the Italian humanists who thought that the unities were the single basic principle of drama. Tudor drama was not as poor as Sidney describes it. Neither we approve of his pessimistic and partial dramatic criticism, which is, to some extent, a consequence of his Puritan background and appears as a very active element within his criticism. His rejection of tragi-comedy and his dislike of the variety of plot and characters are the result of his Puritan upbringing. Yet the most serious charge against him remains that of having deprived the dramatist of his creative freedom. It has not been our intention to diminish the greatness of Sidney's criticism. We have simply tried to praise the wisdom of his critical *corpus* and to expose and analyse its failures; but *An Apologie* certainly remains a landmark in English criticism.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 66.

⁴⁷ Richard F. Glenn, *Juan de la Cueva*. New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1973, p. 132.

⁴⁸ F. S. Boas, op. cit., p. 53.