THE SONG OF SONGS AND SIR PHILIP SIDNEY'S DEFENSE OF POESY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SACRED AND SECULAR ELEMENTS IN LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict between men and their ideas is a primary motivating factor stimulating artistic creativity, and in the world of letters, conflict is essential to productivity. As men of letters, by virtue of their creations, are attempting to influence the thought of others with the merits of their original ideas, so is conflict expressed in man's essential communicative tool, language. There have been many motivating arguments evidenced in man's literary history, but perhaps the most significant is the controversy between the sacred and the secular--the Holy and the profane.

This dispute is seen evidenced in every century, and it becomes a matter of great concern as man begins to develop patterns of philosophy. As early as the systematizing of Plato's Republic, the concern with the contrast between things sacred and things secular may be seen, and the conflict is still never far in the shadows. From the emerging idea of God and man's relationship to Him and with Him, comes the concept that God is somehow perfect and sacred, and man is somehow imperfect and fallen. There seems to be grave concern with the idea of temperance in relation to man, and many disputes arise over man's attempt to achieve a godlike status and over his inability to do so.

Literary efforts have been especially affected by this conflict, and in literary history there may be seen an emergence of creativity dealing with the subject. However, the works of art that deal with the issue seem rarely to be trying to influence man to one side or the

other; rather the great voices of each age urge a delicate balance between things worldly and things heavenly, thereby advocating the development of the well-disciplined, well-tempered, happy man. The violent clashes between the sacred and the secular seem not to exist within the voices which reflect each century, but rather, violent disagreements and collisions are imposed on these men by outside forces. The conflict that is apparent is essentially an external phenomenon, and it may be seen taking two distinct directions, both within the confines of criticism.

The first of these directions is at once the most obvious and the most subtle, and can be most easily defined as an imposition of conflict on a spontaneous work by outside observers. In this instance, the interpretation of a work sparks the controversy, which is between the critics who respond to the work, and is not explicit within the work itself. Secondly, the conflict may take the direction of a response to an external force which is stimulating disagreement and which motivates the writer to reply to it. Even in this second circumstance, the conflict is not within the writer himself, but is within the society in which he lives, a society to which he feels somehow bound to speak.

The first direction cited is easily identifiable in the controversy that arose in the fourth century over the compiling of the Canon of the Holy Scriptures. Two books came into particular question at that time, the book of Esther and the poem known as the Song of Songs, or the Song of Solomon; and the question of the Song remains

unresolved. Scholars are still debating whether the poem is a sacred or a secular creation and whether it does or does not belong in a book so Holy as the Scriptures.

Centuries later, in the writings of Sir Philip Sidney, may be seen a form of the second direction of the dispute. In the discourse entitled The Defense of Poesy, Sidney responds to the Puritan philosophy quite vehement during the Renaissance; and he encourages a blending of the sacred and the secular, rather than defending one side or the other. The Defense is a Defense of Poesy using Renaissance ideals, and it is amazingly similar to ideals stated and restated century after century before it was written.

These two examples, though different in character and in expression, and though centuries apart in their creation, are greatly alike in their philosophies. The former, the Song of Songs, is an example of the Hebrew philosophic tradition; the latter, the Defense is one of the most vibrant statements of the ideas of the Renaissance. The two ideas are amazingly similar, and comparisons between them illuminate the fact that the humanistic desires of Renaissance man have been the desires of man throughout history. As early as the evolving Hebrew tradition, thinking man was concerned with the ideas of Use and Abuse, ideas used by Renaissance thinkers in their literature to express concern with the sacred and the secular.

In both of these centuries, widely divided by time, there was concern with the thought that the sacred and the secular must be somehow so well blended within man as to create an individual at

peace within himself and therefore effectively active in the world. To these two ages, as evidenced by these two works of literature, the world was not an evil place, but was at once of Heaven and of Man, with the two being delicately balanced so that either taken alone was incomplete, inadequate and thus no less "evil" than the other.

The objective of this study is through analysis and comparison of the Song of Songs and The Defense of Poesie and through analysis of responses to them, to demonstrate a recurrent desire on the part of man to evaluate and reconcile the sacred and secular influences active in his life. The wisdom of ancient Hebrew writers and the philosophy of Renaissance humanism prove that the sacred and the secular, rather than being at enmity with one another, compliment one another thus enabling man as an individual to become effectively active in the world.

CHAPTER I

Literature through the ages has been inevitably influenced by the writings of the Hebrew people, compiled in the collection known as the Holy Scriptures. In the Western world this influence has been felt primarily through the strength of the Christian religion, often at the expense of the Hebraic tradition, which is its real beginning. Despite the philosophic processes which have wrought change in the interpretations of the Biblical literature encompassed by the Canon, this body of writing may still be seen as the evolving literature of a historically factual people, and as such it may be considered as creative writing just as the literature of any historical people is considered in its importance.

The Holy Scriptures include examples of almost every type of writing, and perhaps the most important to be considered as literature is the poetry that abounds within its pages. The warmth, spontaniety, triumph, defeat, tragedy, and desire of the Hebrew people are revealed in the poetry of the Old Testament: in the Psalms, in the book of Proverbs, in the story of Job, in the Song of Solomon, and in the many scattered poems found throughout the other books of the Bible, including the Apocrypha. Of these books of poetry, the Song of Solomon has particularly fascinated scholars because of the unique topic with which it deals and because from its beginning it has been the subject of great conflict--conflict which almost prevented its inclusion in the Canon.

The Song of Solomon presents unique problems to the scholar, and

has done so from the first attempts to categorize it. Debate has arisen over its place in Hebrew history, in the Hebrew Canon, and in Hebrew philosophy. Historically, the book is usually assumed to belong to the post-exilic period of Jewish history, an assumption which dates it sometime after the reconstruction of the Temple in 516 B.C.[1] Because of the obvious Aramaic influences on its language, it is even dated by some as late as 200-100 B.C.[2] Others believe that the text is actually folk-poetry, begun and handed down during the pre-exilic period, and finally written down in its obviously later form.[3] This theory is supported particularly by those who look for comparisons in Egyptian literature around 1300-1100 B.C. and the poetry of the Song.[4]

No final conclusion has been reached as to the specific dating of the book, though more seem in agreement as to the later date. The only thing agreed upon is that the title of the book, translated most often as "The Song of Songs which is Solomon's," was added to the book later, after it was actually written. This fact is substantially supported by differences in the language of the book and the language of

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[1]George Arthur Buttrick, commentary editor, The Interpreter's Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), V, 97. Harvey H. Guthrie, God and History in the Old Testament (Greenwich, Connecticut: Seabury Press, 1960), p. 124.

[2]Isidore Singer, managing editor, The Jewish Encyclopedia (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1916), I, 467. Buttrick, p. 97.

[3]Buttrick, p. 97.

[4]D. Winton Thomas, Documents from Old Testament Times (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 187.

the title. The article "which" used in the title as the Hebrew word אשר ('asher) is used in the poetry of the book as the word זי (she).[5] This difference in language indicates that the poetry of the book is pre-exilic, probably from the Northern Kingdom of Israel rather than the Southern, with only the title being post-exilic.[6]

The Song was placed in the third section of the Canon, the division known as the Writings, a collection of miscellaneous documents.[7] The importance of this section of the Canon must be understood historically, as clarification of the fact that the men involved in compiling the scriptures were intent on preserving the literary treasures of a nation; and they carefully included examples of all types of writing, in spite of controversies that arose over the sacredness and suitability of some, such as the Song of Songs.[8] Most of the selections chosen for the Writings were late in origin, but it was the character of the Song rather than the date that placed it in this category.[9]

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[5]Kyle M. Yates, The Essentials of Biblical Hebrew (New York: Harper and Row, 1938), pp. 21-23.

[6]A. Cohen, ed., Soncino Books of the Bible, Vol. III: The Five Megilloth (London: Soncino Press, Ltd., 1946), p. x. Buttrick, p. 97.

[7]Max L. Margolis, The Hebrew Scriptures in the Making (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1922), p. 20. Buttrick, p. 91.

[8]Israel Bettan, The Five Scrolls: Jewish Commentary for Bible Readers (Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1950), I, 10.

[9]Buttrick, p. 91.

Philosophically, though that term is rarely applied to Judiasm, the Song is part of the tradition of the Widsom Literature.[10] The Wisdom tradition is a later development in Judiasm, and it implies not the dating of Scriptures but the understanding of them. The Hebrew word Hokmah (חָכְמָה), Wisdom, implies a peculiar religious structure, defined by W. Baumgartner as having as its main point "what profits man and how he may become satisfied."[11] The word Hokmah was also frequently used to refer to arts such as poetry and Song, for Wisdom was more than simply a branch of literature; it included all the technical arts and practical skills of civilization, thereby making "the architect, the craftsman, the weaver, the goldsmith, the sailor, the magician, the skillfull general and the administrator of the state...all...'wise.'"[12]

Taken within this historical, canonical, and philosophical framework, the controversy that arose over the Song of Songs is easily comprehensible, especially when the unique nature of the book is considered. The subject of the Song is human love, romantic love, the love existing between man and woman; and the language of the poetry is erotic and sensuous, at once praising the virtues of physical

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[10]W. Baumgartner, "The Wisdom Literature," in The Old Testament and Modern Study, ed. by H. H. Rowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), p. 231. Guthrie, p. 131.

[11]Baumgartner, p. 212.

[12]W. O. E. Oesterly, An Introduction to the Books of the Bible (New York: Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 156. Robert Gordis, The Song of Songs (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1961), pp. 13, 14.

attachment, and unabashedly describing the delights of the flesh known by lovers. No other book of the Bible deals with such a topic, and no other of the Scriptures is so completely free of national and religious concerns.[13]

The Song of Songs was a subject of great discussion at the time the Old Testament was being canonized, and the controversy ranged over two particular points: whether the Song was sacred or secular and whether, in reality, it was the work of Solomon. The nature of the poetry is definitely secular (if the idea of things worldly being quite separate from Heaven is accepted), and the men concerned with the Canon could not agree that poetry of so erotic a nature had a place in the book of God. It is interesting to note, consequently, that many scholars feel that much of this "secular" type poetry existed in early Hebrew history, but that most of it was lost, and that the inclusion of the Song in the Scriptures caused its preservation.[14] If the Song had not been canonized, it too would have been lost, along with the rest of non-religious Hebrew poetry.

At that point in the proceedings when the Song would have been rejected, a Jewish theologian of the times came to its defense with a

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[13]Baumgartner, pp. 230, 232. Bettan, p. 3. Buttrick, p. 91. Gordis, p. 1.

[14]Julius August Bewer, The Literature of the Old Testament (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922), p. 393. Washington Gladden, Seven Puzzling Bible Books (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1879), p. 155. Morris Jastrow, Jr., The Song of Songs (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1921), p. 30. George Foot Moore, The Literature of the Old Testament (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1913), p. 247.

verbalization of a religious interpretation of the poem. Rabbi Akiba systematized the allegorical interpretation of the poetry, and also used his idea of allegory to prove Solomon's authorship.[15] The allegorical interpretation limited, by its implication, the ideas of the book; but the interpretation won wide acceptance in Jewish philosophical tradition, then in its infancy. Within the framework of the allegory, Solomon, who was considered by the ages a very wise man and a king definitely ruling in the Wisdom tradition, wrote the poem to express God's love for Israel in terms readily understood by man. God (Yahweh) was the man, Israel the woman; God the faithful and forgiving, Israel the faithless but forgiven; God the loving, Israel the loved.[16] While the wording of the book seems to some critics not to reveal a knowledge of allegory, which would require some subtleties of language, many scholars accepted the theory on the basis of Solomonic authorship.[17] It was believed that if Solomon had written the poem, it would have to have some obvious religious significance, as a man of Solomon's stature would not have been concerned with so secular a topic as erotic love without some allegorical intention.[18]

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[15] A. I. Kok, "Levels of Love: Commentary on the Song of Songs," trans. by H. Weiner, Commentary, XXV (April, 1958), p. 334. Cohen, p. xii.

[16] Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg, Commentary on Ecclesiastes with Other Trestises, trans. by D. W. Simon (Philadelphia: Smith, English and Company, 1860), p. 274. Bewer, p. 393. Oesterley, p. 217.

[17] Hengstenberg, p. 295. Oesterley, p. 217.

[18] Bewer, p. 393. Hengstenberg, p. 295. Singer, p. 466.

The reasoning behind this argument is indeed understandable, as the Song of Songs is quite unusual in all its aspects. In the introduction to the Song in The Interpreter's Bible is given a list of eleven peculiar features of the book:

> 1) It is lyric poetry of exquisite beauty, full of sensuous imagery.
>
> 2) It is the only book of the Bible to put its total content into the mouths of speakers, and it is interesting that the speeches are monologues not dialogues.
>
> 3) It is marked by frequent repetitions, refrains, and antiphonal responses.
>
> 4) It lacks structure and displays no movement to a conclusion.
>
> 5) It is simple and naive, rather than a studied work, and is more manifestly folk-poetry than "belles-lettres."
>
> 6) It exhibits nature prominently throughout, showing remarkable appreciation of the beauties of nature through elaborate imagery and extravagant, "overbold" metaphors.
>
> 7) It has an elusive geographical background, showing a wider range than just the Hebrew people.
>
> 8) It is entirely secular in character, with no apparent theological, religious, or moral attributes, and God does not appear in it.
>
> 9) It uses the relative particle אֲשֶׁר or the personal pronoun הִוא, exclusively, a use found in no other book of the Scriptures.
>
> 10) It has a difficult vocabulary all its own, with at least 70 unusual words.
>
> 11) It displays unusual syntax, using frequent substitutions of masculine for feminine.[19]

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[19] Buttrick, p. 92.

This cataloging of the unusual aspects of the Song clarifies the peculiarities of the poem that made critics look for an allegorical meaning in it. However, these peculiarities also support those scholars who find a quite literal meaning in the book, and the debate often uses the same material to substantiate two different opinions.

The issue is whether the Song is to be interpreted literally or allegorically, and it is notable that smaller issues exist within each argument. Those who wish to apply a literal interpretation to the Song cannot agree as to which direction the interpretation should take, and consequently there are five strongly supported literal interpretations. Argument has been found for two dramatic interpretations, one a two-character drama and one a three-character drama: for organization as a cycle of Wedding Songs, cycle implying an inner pattern; for defining the poem as a secular love song by one author; and for reading the Song as a collection of folk-poetry, collection implying several authors.

The two-character dramatic theory has its origin in Hellenic tradition.[20] Earliest indications of this theory are found in two Greek documents containing commentary on the Song, the Codex Sinaiticus of the 4th century, and the Codex Alexandrinus of the 5th century.[21] The Codex Alexandrinus goes so far as to provide marginal notes indicating speakers and persons addressed.[22] There is also an early

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[20]Buttrick, p. 92.

[21]Buttrick, p. 92.

[22]Buttrick, p. 92.

Ethiopic theory, based heavily on the Greek, that divides the book into five parts, corresponding to acts in a play.[23] After the Protestant Reformation, the two-character idea became fully developed, with the characters identified as Solomon, the wise King, and the Schulamite, a lovely country maiden with whom Solomon falls in love.[24]

The three-character dramatic interpretation developed to fulfill the deficiencies of the two-character idea.[25] A contradiction in terms existed when only two characters were identified; for, with only two characters, there was no true dramatic development.[26] Consequently, a third character, a country shepherd was created.[27] This idea was popularized by J. T. Jacobi in the 18th century, and it came to revitalize the dramatic interpretation of the Song.[28] With the added figure of the shepherd, the Song was seen more distinctly as a drama, and the plot then became more interesting. Solomon, on a trip through his kingdom, sees the Schulamite maiden, falls in love with her, and takes her into his harem.[29] The maiden is in love with a young shepherd, however; and Solomon fails to win her love away.[30]

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[23] Buttrick, p. 92.

[24] Buttrick, p. 92. Bettan, p. 4. Oesterley, p. 218.

[25] Buttrick, p. 93.

[26] Buttrick, p. 93.

[27] Buttrick, p. 93.

[28] Buttrick, p. 93.

[29] Bettan, p. 5. Oesterley, p. 218.

[30] Bettan, p. 5. Buttrick, p. 93. Oesterley, p. 218.

Realizing that her love for her rustic lover is strong and cannot be dissuaded, Solomon releases the maiden from the harem, and she returns to her shepherd.[31]

Several problems are presented by these two dramatic theories. The most important is the fact that drama, as a literary genre, did not exist in Hebrew literature, and had any author of the Song intended to create a drama as a first example in Hebrew, he surely would have used dialogue rather than monologue.[32] Also, the three-character theory presents several more questions than does the two-character idea. Taken in its literal sense, three characters are seen in the book; but given a dramatic form and working out of action, this theory of the drama does great damage to the personal character of Solomon.[33] It is inconceivable that the book would have been admitted to the Canon had this interpretation been intended, for Solomon was too highly regarded to be put in such disparaging light.[34]

Considering such arguments as valid, scholars sought a more acceptable literary theory concerning the Song, and several new positions were established. A strong case was gradually built for interpreting the Song as a group of songs used during the Judean marriage ceremony.

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[31] Bettan, p. 5. Buttrick, p. 93. Oesterley, p. 218.

[32] Buttrick, p. 93.

[33] Buttrick, p. 93.

[34] Buttrick, p. 93.

It was known that the Syrian peasants held elaborate weddings, treating the bride and groom as a King and Queen, and reciting poems and songs praising their physical beauties.[35] The proximity of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to Syria made it possible that the Hebrew peasants had copied parts of the Syrian ceremony and that the Song of Songs was actually a collection of songs used in Jewish celebrations.[36]

Julius Bewer, in his book, The Literature of the Old Testament, supports this theory:

> ...we are fortunate in having a whole book of secular songs in our Bible, for the Song of Songs is nothing else but a collection of love and wedding songs.[37]

Bewer states that the Songs do not speak of the sanctity of marriage, nor of its moral and religious aspects; but rather they speak of the love of man and woman for each other, human love, deep and passionate, " 'strong as death', a very flame of Yahweh."[38] He continues by saying that the frank imagery of the Song is offensive to the Occidental mind, only because Western man does not understand the freshness and abandon of Oriental love poetry.[39]

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[35] Bettan, p. 6. Bewer, p. 391. Buttrick, p. 93.

[36] Buttrick, p. 93.

[37] Bewer, p. 391.

[38] Bewer, pp. 391, 392.

[39] Bewer, pp. 391, 393.

Presently, because of historical studies, this interpretation of the Song is rejected by most scholars. The poem is given a very late, post-exilic date by advocates of the wedding-song-cycle theory; and such late dating renders admission of the Song to the Canon inconceivable, as this dating would have made the songs contemporary with the men concerned with compiling the Canon.[40] According to this dating, the songs could have been sung at the weddings of these very men, and they surely would not have considered creations which they knew in their own time worthy of inclusion in the Holy Scriptures.[41]

Another idea concerning the Song which won wide acceptance at an early date was the idea that the Song was secular love poetry. This idea, too, falls into two divisions, similar and dissimilar at once; both find it "secular" in character, but whereas one considers it a poem by one author, or perhaps a collection of poems by one author, the other considers it a collection of lyrics by several writers, even written in different centuries.

Among the proponents of the "one poem" theory, are E. W. Hengstenberg, William Elliot Griffis, Washington Gladden, and Richard Moulton. On some points these men are in complete agreement; yet each of them has at least one individual idea. Hengstenberg finds that the Song is not a collection, either by several authors or by one author, nor

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[40] Buttrick, p. 94.

[41] Buttrick, p. 94.

does he find it a "thoroughly and regularly progressive whole."[42] He finds rather that the poem may be divided into two parts--union and reunion--with neither showing a dramatic process, but with each displaying stanzas grouped to display "the various aspects of love exhibited to us."[43] He describes the poem as portraying an "old relation disturbed by discord [which] is re-established."[44]

William Elliot Griffis, in his volume The Lily Among the Thorns, calls the Song of Solomon the "crowning work of inspired Hebrew Wisdom."[45] He feels that the Song lost its historical and literal character when the allegorical interpretation was accepted, gaining a purely mystical reputation, when it should have been accepted as the Hebrew document nearest the idea of pure literature.[46] The Song appears to Griffis as a single poem praising the love of one man for one woman.[47]

Washington Gladden agrees with Griffis on the one-poem interpretation of the Song, and he supports his argument by disproving the presence of any allegorical intention. He describes the poem as the "celebration of and glorification of that pure passion of love which

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[42] Hengstenberg, p. 269.

[43] Hengstenberg, p. 269.

[44] Hengstenberg, p. 273.

[45] (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1889), p. 16.

[46] Griffis, pp. 16, 106.

[47] Griffis, p. 18.

is the deepest thing in human life, and which ought to be regarded always as one of the most sacred things."[48]

Still another possibility in the one-poem theory is explored by Richard Moulton, who defines the Song as a lyric idyl.[49] To support his thesis, Moulton states that "clear knowledge of the outer literary form is an essential for a thorough grasp of the matter and spirit of literature."[50] He applies this theory to the Song by stating that the poem is a dialogue of dramatic character, with a story underlying it and using symbolism as a "softening veil," and that these qualities can categorize the poem as a lyric idyl.[51]

The idea of the Song of Songs being a series, or a collection of shorter poems, the opposite argument to the one-poem theory, has attracted an equal number of supporters, among them Andrew Harper, W. O. E. Oesterley, and Robert Gordis. Harper states that "a glance at the book is sufficient to show that in it we hear not one voice but several."[52] He feels that the inspiration of the writers is love between the sexes; its power, everlastingness and freedom, and

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[48]Gladden, p. 174.

[49]The Literary Study of the Bible (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1899), p. 218.

[50]Moulton, p. 207.

[51]Moulton, pp. 207, 224.

[52]"The Song of Solomon," in Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, old testament editor, A. F. Kirkpatrick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), p. xi.

the exclusiveness of its reality.[53] Oesterley calls the Song a series of erotic lyrics, saying that most of them are incomplete, with some being mere fragments.[54] The tendency of the poems to be shorter and more fragmentary toward the end of the book indicates, to Oesterley, that it is improbable that the verses collected in the Song were arranged according to a definite plan.[55]

Robert Gordis, in his book The Song of Songs, supports the intentions of Harper and Oesterley, but he goes farther into a discussion of the book by finding a theme which gives the book unity even without organization. According to Gordis, the Song is an anthology running a wide gamut of emotions, and it can be broken down according to these emotions.[56] He says that the book "contains songs of love's yearning and its consummation, of coquetry and passion, of separation and union, of courtship and marriage"; and, basing his analysis on these emotions, he gives this outline of the book:

A. Songs of Yearning
B. Songs of Fulfillment
C. Songs in Praise of the Beloved
D. Duets of Mutual Praise
E. Love in the World of Nature
F. Dream Songs
G. The Greatness of Love

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[53] Harper, p. xxxi.

[54] Oesterley, p. 217.

[55] Oesterley, p. 218.

[56] Gordis, pp. 16-17.

H. Songs of Courtship and Marriage
I. Love's Sorrows and Joys [57]

Within the classifications given by Gordis, the entire book of the Song is separated into its particular poems, and poems from many different parts of the book may be found in one category. An excellent example of this classification may be found in the "A" category, "Songs of Yearning"; there are six poems in the section, taken from various chapters of the book:[58]

A. Songs of Yearning

1:2-4 The Call to Love

O that you would kiss me with
the kisses of your mouth!
For your love is better than wine,
your anointing oils are fragrant,
your name is oil poured out;
therefore the maidens love you.
Draw me after you, let us make haste.
The king has brought me into his chambers.
We will exult and rejoice in you;
we will extol your love more than wine;
rightly do they love you.

1:5-6 The Rustic Maiden

I am very dark, but comely,
O daughters of Jerusalem,
like the tents of Kedar,
like the curtains of Solomon.
Do not gaze at me because I am swarthy,
because the sun has scorched me.
My mother's sons were angry with me,
they made me keeper of the vineyards;
but, my own vineyard I have not kept!

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[57] Gordis, pp. 17, 35-36.

[58] The titles given for the poems are according to Gordis, p. 35. The verse numbers and quotations throughout are according to the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

1:7-8 Tell Me Where My Love

Tell me, you whom my soul loves,
where you pasture your flock,
where you make it lie down at noon;
for why should I be like one who wanders
beside the flocks of your companions?
If you do not know,
O fairest among women,
follow in the tracks of the flock,
and pasture your kids
beside the shepherd's tents.

2:4-7 Love's Proud Proclamation

He brought me to the banqueting house,
and his banner over me was love.
Sustain me with raisins,
refresh me with apples,
for I am sick with love.
O that his left hand were under my head
and that his right hand embrace me!
I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the hinds of the field,
that you stir not up nor awaken love
until it please.

8:1-4 Would Thou Wert My Brother

O that you were like a brother to me,
that nursed at my mother's breast!
If I met you outside, I would kiss you,
and none would despise me.
I would leade you and bring you
into the house of my mother,
and into the chamber of her that conceived me.
I would give you spiced wine to drink,
the juice of my pomegranates.
O that his left hand were under my head,
and that his right hand embraced me!
I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
that you stir not up nor awaken love
until it please.

8:13-14 Let Me Hear Thy Voice

O you who dwell in the gardens,
my companions are listening for your voice;
let me hear it.
Make haste, my beloved,
and be like a gazelle
Or a young stag
upon the mountains of spices.

The classifications Gordis gives to the poems can be compared with the marriage-cycle theory in some respects, as the marriage-cycle theory attempts some organization, or progression, based on human emotion; Gordis, however, classifies the poems rather than organizes them, as is seen in the inclusion of poems from chapters 1, 2, and 8 under one category title.

Considering these several literal interpretations, it is noteworthy that each theorist mentioned has supported his idea by presenting conclusions about the supposed intention of the work. Their arguments take assorted directions, but the one unifying principle of them all is the attempt to prove a literal interpretation by disproving an allegorical one. In turn, the allegorists deny the presence of a possible literal intention, and support the precept that the original aim of the book was the presentation of allegory.

Early Jewish and Christian philosophers and theologians were greatly responsible for the perpetration of the idea of the Song as allegory; among them were Philo, Maimonides, Origen, and later Rashi. Origen and Rashi each wrote a commentary on the Song of Solomon, and both considered Solomon to be the author. Origen began his Commentary and Homilies on the Song of Songs in 240 A.D., and the work he produced is considered the first great work of Christian mysticism.[59] The allegory of the Song was, to Origen, the mystical union of the

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[59]Origenes The Song of Songs, trans. by R. P. Lawson (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1957), p. 4.

believing soul with God.[60] He wrote, in the beginning of his commentary that "each of the manifest things is to be related to one of those that are hidden; that is to say, all things visible have some invisible likeness and pattern."[61] He then interpreted the Song of Songs according to this standard.

Origen accepted the Song as a "drama of mystical meaning" whose unifying theme was love.[62] He believed that the book came last in the writings of Solomon, so that a man might read it when his life had been purified and he had come to know "the difference between things corruptible and incorruptible."[63] Before reading the Song, a man had to have enough Wisdom to be able to understand the metaphors used to describe the love of the bridegroom, the "perfect soul for the word of God," without faltering.[64] That some had not understood what Solomon had said about love was Origen's great fear, and he believed some had taken the book as an occasion to "rush into carnal sins and down the steep places of immodesty either by taking some suggestions, or using what the ancients wrote as a cloak for their own lack of self-control."[65] The hidden relations between the seen and

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[60] Origenes p. 3.

[61] Origenes p. 220.

[62] Origenes pp. 21, 23.

[63] Origenes p. 44.

[64] Origenes p. 44.

[65] Origenes p. 23.

the unseen within the Song were obvious enough to Origen, but he felt that Wisdom, the ability to grasp the shades of meanings in words, as he defined it, was necessary to comprehend the book, and he strongly abjured prospective readers:

> I advise and counsel everyone who is not yet rid of the vexations of the flesh and blood and has not ceased to feel the passions of his bodily nature, to refrain completely from reading this little book.[66]

Origen retitled the Song of Songs "The Second Song of Man," for he said it was "not to be heard on earth alone, but also heard in heaven."[67]

Rashi, a medieval Jewish commentator, also wrote extensive commentary on the Song; and, while he differs from Origen in terms of religion, the obvious roots of Jewish tradition unite the two in their interpretations of the work they considered Solomon's. Rashi found the dominant theme of the book to be the romance between God and Israel, thus adhering more than Origen to the traditional allegorical idea, and he felt that Solomon saw what was to be Israel's destiny by means of the Holy Spirit.[68] Solomon saw, and revealed this vision in his Song, Israel being exiled into one diaspora after another,

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[66] Origenes pp. 42, 23.

[67] Origenes p. 48.

[68] Rashi "Commentary on the Song of Solomon," trans. by Michael Wyschogrod, Commentary, XV (March, 1952), pp. 292-293.

always lamenting her former dignity and remembering the days when she was Yahweh's first love, his most treasured of all peoples.[69] In this interpretation, Rashi interweaves lyrics of great personal intimacy with issues of national significance, one of the tendencies of the allegorical approach that has caused traditional objections.

Despite objections, much Jewish criticism and commentary support the allegorical interpretation of the Song. The Midrash Rabbah, one of the early collections of Judaic commentary, supports the idea of allegory in the volume that includes the Song. The Midrash is in agreement with Rashi in most cases, and it too states that Solomon composed the song under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and that Solomon intended the communication to be interpreted as the portrayal of the love existing between Yahweh, the bridegroom, and Israel, the bride.[70]

The allegorical interpretation is presented, too, by Cohen in The Five Megilloth. While Cohen does not support the theory, he recognizes its influence, and in his discussion of it he presents the book as bearing the allegorical message of the spiritual marriage between God and His Chosen People.[71] Cohen does find some support for

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[69]Rashi p. 293.

[70]Song of Songs, trans. by Maurice Simon; Vol. IX of Midrash Rabbah, trans. by H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (London: Soncino Press, Ltd., 1939), p. viii.

[71]Cohen, p. xi.

Solomonic authorship, however, even while he doubts such specific allegorical interpretation.[72] One argument he cites is the language of the book, and he states that "the nobility of thought and sublimity of expression that permeate every utterance of the lovers were not characteristics of the masses."[73] Cohen uses this argument to disprove authorship by any commoner, or attribution to folklore; he supports authorship by some Wise man, presumably Solomon.[74]

The consideration of the Song as allegory, then was primarily responsible for its acceptance into the Canon; but this interpretation was accepted not without controversy, and in later centuries the theory has been strongly denied. The men who deny the presence of allegorical significance within the poetry do not necessarily adhere to a specific literal interpretation; nor do they become greatly concerned with the question of authorship, although many questions do arise over the language of the book. Language and authorship are not, either, proofs of each other. Symbolic language, which is the language of the Song, does not offer explicit proof of Solomonic authorship; but neither does it imply a limited folk background; it is, though, of vital importance in any interpretation of the Song that is considered.

In supporting his idea of "one poem," Washington Gladden uses the

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[72]Cohen, p. xi.

[73]Cohen, p. xi.

[74]Cohen, p. xi.

language of the Song to disprove the allegorical theory. Gladden states that if the Song were not found as a portion of the Scriptures, no allegorical interpretation would have been considered.[75] He goes on to say that the human imagination is capable of yielding some fantastic results when it is used to seek occult meaning in a piece of literature like the Song.[76] Allegory, according to Gladden, must disclose its purpose, and he finds that the language of symbol is not so perfect that a long chain of splendid ideas can be developed without using any single word or phrase that is spiritual.[77] Also in support of his idea, he makes the following statement:

> ...even were this possible, it would be false art in the allegorist to hide away his sacred thought behind a screen of sensuous and erotic imagery so complete and so beautiful as to give no suggestion that it is only the vehicle of a deeper sense.[78]

He concludes by stating that the poem celebrates and glorifies the passion of love, which is at once the deepest and the most sacred thing in human life; and he says that the most simple story that the Song tells is full of divine significance, not allegorically, but rather in its essence.[79] In the expression of this idea, Gladden is

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[75] Gladden, p. 155.

[76] Gladden, p. 160.

[77] Gladden, p. 163.

[78] Gladden, p. 164.

[79] Gladden, pp. 174, 176.

presenting one of the most vital points of Hebrew philosophy, an idea which excites many scholars concerned with the Song.

In his introduction to the Song, Andrew Harper echoes this idea:

> The truth is that sensuality and mysticism are twin moods of the mind, interchanging in certain natures with inborn ease and celerity, mysterious only to those who have confined their study of human nature to the conventional and the commonplace.[80]

Cohen, too, supports this thesis:

> The main moral of the book is that love, besides being the strongest emotion in the human heart, can also be the holiest. God has given the gift of love to sweeten the toil of the laborer.[81]

Cohen goes on to say that while some have been offended by the free expression of the Song, there may be a deeper purity in the frank recognition and straightforward language of the book than is found in the veiled phrases of modern literature.[82]

Robert Gordis, in discussion of the divisions he makes in the book, uses the language of the poetry to support his arguments. He

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[80] Harper, p. xxxvii.

[81] Cohen, p. xii.

[82] Cohen, p. xii.

states that symbolism is much more profound than allegory, and that symbolic language is superior to literal speech because the elements of symbolism possess both essential reality and representational character.[83] Symbolism, as defined by Gordis, liberates the human spirit because it expresses more than it says and describes emotions that otherwise are beyond exact definition.[84]

According to these ideas expressed by Gladden, Harper, Cohen, and Gordis, then, the language of the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's is symbolical, rather than allegorical. An expression such as the Rose of Sharon poem (2:1-3), which Gordis classifies as a Duet of Mutual Praise, and which he titles Who is Like My Love, is not a conversation between God and Yahweh, veiled and secret, but is a conversation between two lovers, who use symbols to express what they cannot otherwise describe:[85]

> I am a rose of Sharon,
> a lily of the valleys.
> As a lily among brambles,
> so is my love among maidens.
> As an apple tree among the trees of the wood,
> so is my beloved among men.
> With great delight I sat in his shadow,
> and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

Another example, called by Gordis a song of Love in the World of

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[83] Gordis, p. 38.

[84] Gordis, pp. 37, 38.

[85] Gordis, p. 36.

Nature, and titled The Time of Singing Has Come (2:8-13) shows again this language of symbol:[86]

> The voice of my beloved!
> Behold, he comes,
> leaping upon the mountains,
> bounding over the hills.
> My beloved is like a gazelle,
> or a young stag.
> Behold, there he stands
> behind our wall,
> gazing in at the windows,
> looking through the lattice.
> My beloved speaks, and says to me:
> "Arise, my love, my fair one,
> and come away,
> for lo, the winter is past,
> the rain is over and gone.
> The flowers appear on the earth,
> the time of singing has come,
> and the voice of the turtledove
> is heard in our land.
> The fig tree puts forth its figs,
> and the vines are in blossom;
> they give forth fragrance.
> Arise, my love, my fair one,
> and come away."

This, too, is a song of love between man and woman, and is not a veiled picture implying God's love for Israel. It is a song of joy and promised fulfillment, seen as an existent part of nature. The fact that it does so extol the joy of human love, does not however, separate it completely from being a part of Yahweh, and thus a part of Israel, an entirety existing in the love between man and woman. Within the framework of later Jewish philosophy, and the developing

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[86] Gordis, p. 36.

Wisdom tradition, there was no necessity for separating types of love, nor for separating God from man. Also within this tradition there was no need for an allegorical interpretation of the Song, as each piece of literature existed as a whole, and the fact of its existence made it also a part of Creation.

No conflict between things sacred and secular existed, because the two ideas participated in each other, so balanced as to find each other necessary. Certainly no conflict existed within the writer of the Song, whether he be Solomon, or some unknown Hebrew poet, or several Hebrew poets; nor did a conflict exist within the book itself, be it one poem or several. The historical conflict was imposed on the song by its interpreters, who had an incomplete knowledge of the background of the poem, and who believed the unabashed delight of the book to be somehow sinful and secular. In their fear that the ideas so obvious in the book might be abused, they put it to use to support the idea that the sacred world must somehow conquer the secular.

This point of view was not an exclusive theory of Biblical interpreter's, but has existed in many ages, under many guises, and it was a significant conflict during the Renaissance. Renaissance man, developing from a Judeo-Christian background, had many ideas in common with the Hebrew Wisdom tradition, to whom he was indebted, and he can be seen confronting many of the "Wiseman's" problems. As concerns of the flesh terrified and tempted the Solomonian allegorists, so did these same concerns assault the Puritans of the Renaissance era, and as the Hebrew "Wiseman" sought to resolve the dilemma, so did concerned

Renaissance thinkers. Of these true men of the Renaissance, one man spoke profoundly to the sacred-secular issue, as he defended the Art of Poetry; and in Sir Philip Sidney's Defense of Poesie, many Hebraic comparisons can be found.

CHAPTER II

The Renaissance, as an age of man, stands out in history as a time of amazing progress. Defined as a time of the "rebirth of learning," it produced many still-beloved artists, writers, and statesmen; and in England, where Elizabeth I reigned over a brilliant and heroic court, literature flourished. This was the age of Shakespeare, and it was the age of poetry, that long debated art that won as its champion in this Elizabethan Age, Sir Philip Sidney.

It is impossible to separate Sir Philip Sidney from Renaissance England, or to try to interpret his works apart from this environment. Sidney was not an exception to his age; and, for all his accomplishments as a writer, courtier, and soldier, he cannot be remembered as an exceptional Renaissance man. Sidney was a promise and a token of what could be created by the Renaissance spirit, and it is as that promise that he can be remembered:

> There are great writers, poets especially, of whom we can think without any strong consciousness of the time in which they lived; but Sir Philip Sidney is not one of them. When he enters upon the stage of our imagination there troops about him the whole pageant, with all its music and bravery, of Elizabethan England. We cannot think of him without his England, or of his England without him. He was one of the men of whom that proud time was proudest, and the legend of his life and death is one of the illustrious things that his age left to the world.[1]

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[1]Sir Philip Sidney, Defense of Poesy, ed. by Dorothy M. Macardle (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), p. ix.

Seriousness and idealism were the basis of Sidney's life and philosophy, and he adhered carefully to the ideal of the Renaissance which was virtue, rather than mere virtuosity.[2] He was impetuous, a man of strong passions who strove to subordinate his weaknesses to strict moral principles.[3] Sidney was, before everything else, a poet; and his writings reveal his creation of an ideal world where exist folly, selfishness and treason, yet with courage and goodness enjoying their full scope.[4]

C. Henry Warren, in his book, Sir Philip Sidney: A Study in Conflict, makes this statement about Sidney:

> A poet of this stature (and only one other poet has achieved so much pure poetry in so short a time) does not arrive at maturity of vision by the accident of an enforced idleness and an unhappy love affair: he is a poet first, last, and by virtue of a rare integrity.[5]

Warren describes Sidney as a man whose mind was a "thoroughfare for all thoughts," and a man for whom Justice was an instinctive guide which urged him to see almost too much of either side of a question.[6]

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[2]Sir Philip Sidney, Selections from Arcadia and Other Poetry and Prose, ed. by T. W. Craik (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965), p. 1.

[3]Sidney, Selections, p. 2.

[4]Clarence Henry Warren, Sir Philip Sidney, A Study in Conflict (London and New York: T. Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1936), introductory note. Sidney, Selections, p. 3.

[5]Warren, introductory note.

[6]Warren, p. 4.

As a writer, Sidney gave outstanding contributions to his age. In Astrophel and Stella he produced a sonnet sequence that ranks with the creations of Shakespeare and of Spenser.[7] The Arcadia is unsurpassed in the field of prose romance.[8] The Defense of Poesy established him as a literary critic of the stature of Jonson; yet, had Sidney not written at all, he would still have to be regarded as a "cultural landmark."[9] He, with his sister Mary, the Countess of Pembroke, was responsible for the birth of the academic spirit in English literature.[10]

Sidney was surrounded, in the company of his sister, by a group of strong neo-classicists for whom rules were the most important part of literature; but from this academic background, Sidney emerged a romantic.[11] As a romantic, he found inspiration in the company of such literary friends as Edmund Spenser and Edward Dyer, in their meetings at Leicester House, with the group Spenser titled "Areopagus."[12] Influence of both literary groups was profound on Sidney, if only in that he in some respects reacted against the arguments he heard. It is from this background of reaction that the Defense of Poesy emerges.

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[7]Albert C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), p. 472.

[8]Baugh, p. 472.

[9]Baugh, p. 472.

[10]Baugh, p. 472.

[11]Baugh, pp. 472, 473.

[12]Baugh, p. 473.

The Defense is at once a great piece of criticism and a highly romantic work. It vindicates the spirit of poetry as opposed to details of form and content, and it approves what is genuine, even when it is not justified by rules of art.[13] Sidney dealt with the critical question of decorum in poetry; but he did not abandon, in his support of decorum, his own heartfelt response to literature.[14] For all his traditionalism, he remained a romantic; and the presence of the two ideologies within his own thinking has sparked considerable debate.

Sidney's Defense was one of the first modern documents in the genre now identified as literary criticism; and he, along with other notable writers of his age in England and in Italy, was one of the men responsible for the establishment of criticism as an independent literary form.[15] Until the time the Defense was written, English criticism had consisted principally of questions of practical consideration, and there had been little concern with theory of poetry.[16] The poet's function was rhetorical and technical, and the marks of a perfect poet were skillfulness in rhetorical figures, a quick wit,

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[13]Baugh, p. 477.

[14]Vernon Hall, Jr., A Short History of Literary Criticism (New York: New York University Press, 1963), pp. 37, 46.

[15]Hall, p. 48.

[16]J. E. Spingarn, Literary Criticism in the Renaissance (New York: Columbia University Press, 1899), pp. 261-262.

and a good memory.[17] Sensibility, imagination, and knowledge of nature and of human life were not taken into account.[18] Poetry was a skill used primarily to delight, and on this basis it was judged.[19]

When theory of poetry was considered, it was in an allegorical framework, with the poet always hiding some moral truth beneath a fable of his own invention.[20] When the Puritan attacks against poetry became vehement, later developments in criticism were seen, and the theory of poetry became more carefully developed. Poetry, under the hand of Sidney, was defended as art which made instruction delightful.[21] In his criticism, Sidney achieved a genuine unification of ethical and esthetic values, an accomplishment that was not really felt strongly until the post-Renaissance era.[22]

It has been said that the glory of the Renaissance critics was the fact that they established the critic as an honorable citizen in the republic of letters.[23] The glory of Sidney as a critic is the fact that he created one of the few good pieces of criticism

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[17]Spingarn, p. 262.

[18]Spingarn, p. 262.

[19]Spingarn, p. 262.

[20]Spingarn, p. 263.

[21]Guy Andrew Thompson, Elizabethan Criticism of Poetry (Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Company, 1914), p. 112. Spingarn, p. 269.

[22]Thompson, p. 117.

[23]Hall, p. 48.

produced during the Renaissance, and that he defended not specific works of poetry, but poetry itself.[24] At the time the Defense was written, there was little contemporary poetry worth defending; what Sidney defended was a love of poetry, and the realization that poetry must teach, and do so delightfully.[25]

Many controversies have arisen over the Defense since its creation, controversies arising partly from a disagreement over what prompted the writing of the Defense. Stephen Gosson, who dedicated his School of Abuse to Sidney, is often accused of precipitating the Defense because of the views he perpetrated.[26] Gosson was actually a Puritan idealist who earnestly sought moral reforms.[27] He believed that art contained within itself the germ of its own disintegration; and, in his School, he meant to chastise the abuse of the art of poetry, rather than to banish poetry itself.[28] Because of the adamancy of its views, the School of Abuse was interpreted as a threat to poetry. In spite of the apparent contradiction it implies because of its usual interpretation, the dedication of the School to Sidney was

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[24]Kenneth Muir, ed., Elizabethan and Jacobean Prose, 1550-1620. Vol. I of The Pelican Book of English Prose, gen. ed. Kenneth Allot. 5 vols. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican Books Ltd., 1956), p. xxiii.

[25]Muir, p. xxiii.

[26]Spingarn, p. 266.

[27]Spingarn, p. 266.

[28]Spingarn, p. 266.

a sincere action by Gosson and not a mockery and as a consequence the theory that Gosson inspired the Defense is often questioned.[29]

Whatever the original inspiration, it is clear that Sidney spoke eloquently to the conflict he witnessed around him. The Defense is a logical discourse from beginning to end; it evidences a deep conviction in the mind of Sidney, and it propounds a desire to impress that conviction on others, not merely as "a sentiment of the heart or a theory of the brain," but as "a settled and active belief of the reason and judgement."[30] That poetry should need such a defender presents some question, but Sidney apparently found that the atmosphere around him demanded it. Says an unsigned article in Retrospective Review:

> ...it appears it The Defense was considered necessary by the most poetical person of the most poetical age that England or any other country ever knew--the early, bright dawn of the Elizabethan day.[31]

In responding to the necessity he saw confronting him, then, Sidney created an essay on the nature, objects, and effects of poetry as an art, in an age when English poetry had yet to be achieved, and when art was held in slight contempt.[32] He answered the Puritan

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[29] Baugh, p. 476.

[30] "The Defense of Poesy," Retrospective Review (1824), X, p. 45.

[31] Retrospective, p. 43.

[32] Retrospective, p. 44.

challenge which sought to reduce life to austerity and deprive men of creative outlets, and he may be seen as defending art against the entire body of Puritanical belief.[33]

However, Sidney was moved not only by the rampant Puritanism of his age, but also by the historical influences of his background to write his Defense. While G. Gregory Smith can say, in all honesty, that "the great forces which stimulated literary defense were in themselves unliterary," these forces must be termed philosophical and ultimately historical.[34]

There is an obvious Aristotelian influence evidenced in the Defense, and this influence has often come under scholarly discussion. It is said that Sidney's definition of poetry is the beginning of Renaissance Aristotelianism.[35] It is also said of Sidney that he is a critic writing in the Aristotelian tradition, who attempts to define poetry as a relation of manner and matter, attempting to unite Art--the imitation, and Nature or Truth or Reality, that which is imitated.[36]

Plato, too, is seen as a strong influence on the Defense, and

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[33]Cornell March Dowlin, "Sidney's Two Definitions of Poetry," Modern Language Quarterly (1942), XX, p. 580.

[34]Elizabethan Critical Essays, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), p. xiv.

[35]Spingarn, p. 269.

[36]Richard B. Young, "English Petrarke: A Study of Sidney's Astrophel and Stella," Three Studies in the Renaissance: Sidney, Jonson, Milton, ed. by Benjamin C. Nangle. Yale Studies in English, Vol. 138 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), p. 6.

several modern critics feel that Sidney is actually defending poetry against Plato rather than against Puritanism. Platonism is, however, a widely interpreted philosophy, and looking for it in a pure form in the Defense presents varied problems. As Michael F. Krouse says:

> Platonism is an exasperating subject to work with in the study of Renaissance literature because Plato's influence was, from the first, so organic in Western culture, and was transmitted in such a multitude of ways that one can never be sure if he has to deal with Plato, or with some later transformation of Platonism, or with several strata of transformed Platonisms.[37]

Krouse does find, in spite of these difficulties, that the Defense relies on Plato for its fundamental conceptions of the nature of poetry and of the ethical effects of poetry, and he believes that the Aristotelian influence on the Defense is found in the presentation of the relationship between form and function in poetry, and in the treatment of the formal aspects of poetry.[38] Krouse states that while most of Sidney's poetic depends upon Aristotle, most of his defense depends upon Plato.[39]

Irene Samuel, too, finds Plato's word to be the main source of Sidney's Defense; and she feels that Sidney's purpose is to reconcile

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[37]Michael F. Krouse, "Plato and Sidney's Defense of Poesie," Comparative Literature (1954), VI, p. 139.

[38]Krouse, p. 140.

[39]Krouse, p. 140.

Platonism, the accuser, with the function and form of poetry, the accused.[40] Sidney uses the doctrines Plato used to convict poetry to acquit her, states Samuel; and consequently, no direct reference to Plato is possible, as to quote Plato on any point would have invited immediate opposition from those who denied poetry with the argument that Plato had banished poets from his Republic.[41] However, without being paraphrased or quoted, Plato's philosophies are abundant in the Defense, and when examined closely these philosophies are revealed as the controlling purposes of the Defense.

Plato objected to poetry because it was concerned with passionate and irrational action, and in the Tenth Book of the Republic, Socrates presents the argument against poetry.[42] The argument has three basic points. First of all, poetry is seen as but one of many types of knowledge, and Plato sees other knowledges as more valuable and more worthy of man's attention than poetry.[43] Secondly, poetry is called the "mother of lies," as it has no direct share in perfect knowledge, but presents a third-hand view.[44] Lastly, poetry is accused

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[40]Irene Samuel, "The Influence of Plato on Sir Philip Sidney's Defense of Poesie," Modern Language Quarterly (1940), I, p. 383.

[41]Samuel, p. 383.

[42]J. D. Kaplan, ed., Dialogues of Plato (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1961), pp. 370-376. Dowlin, "Two Definitions," p. 577. Samuel, p. 385.

[43]Alwin Thaler, Shakespeare and Sir Philip Sidney: The Influence of the Defense of Poesy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), p. 67. Samuel, p. 387.

[44]Thaler, p. 67. Samuel, p. 387.

of immorality because it encourages sinful abuse by infecting man with pestilent desires and arousing him to passion.[45]

Sidney defended poetry against these three attacks by stating them in his own terms, and by then using Plato's ideas as vindication. Convinced that poetry is "beneficial to communities and to human life," Sidney set out to prove that Plato was arguing against the abuse of poetry, and not the art itself.[46] Plato's great concern was the education of men to virtue, and Sidney supported the idea that the purpose of poetry is this education.[47] To present this argument, Sidney gave a definition of what a poet is and what poetry does:

> Which I speak to show that it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet (no more than a long gown maketh an advocate, who, though he pleaded in armour, should be an advocate and no soldier) 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 a poet by.[48]

This so-called "second definition" of poetry is often quoted as the more important of Sidney's two definitions of poetry because it is seen as the controlling purpose of the Defense.[49]

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[45] Thaler, p. 67. Samuel, p. 387.

[46] Samuel, p. 389.

[47] Samuel, p. 386.

[48] Sidney, Defense, p. 10.

[49] The "first definition" states that poetry is an "art of imitation," which has as its end both "to teach and to delight," and it defines three types of poetry. Sidney, Defense, pp. 8-10.

Cornell March Dowlin states that the "feigning" or creating images or patterns of perfection, and the rejection of verse or other ornaments as the distinguishing characteristics of poetry are Sidney's most important pronouncements on the nature and technique of poetry, and on the purpose of the "right poet."[50] Dowlin cites the Tenth Book of the Republic as the inspirational source of this argument.[51] A. C. Hamilton agrees with Dowlin as to this source inspiration, and he discusses more fully the idea of the "right poet." Hamilton finds that Sidney places the perception of ideas within the power of the poet, and he states that Sidney relates the "right poet" to God, as both are considered "makers."[52]

Sidney, Hamilton says, clearly distinguished the poet's purpose from the end of his poetry.[53] The poet's purpose was to create a world that was perfect, to present images of things not as they are, but as they should be.[54] The end of the poetry thus created was, then, the moving of men to action; moving was found to be of a higher degree than teaching, because it could, through its images, "Strike, pierce, and possess the sight of the soul."[55]

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[50]Dowlin, "Two Definitions," pp. 574, 578.

[51]Dowlin, "Two Definitions," p. 578.

[52]A. C. Hamilton, "Sidney's Idea of the 'Right Poet'," Comparative Literature (1957), IX, 54.

[53]Hamilton, "'Right Poet'," p. 57.

[54]Hamilton, "'Right Poet'," pp. 56, 58.

[55]Hamilton, "'Right Poet'," pp. 57, 58.

The ideas of Hamilton concerning Sidney's concept of the poetic function are echoed by Dowlin in an article in the Review of English Studies. Sidney's purpose, says Dowlin, was to prove poetry capable of containing edifying and emotionally effective images which delightfully inspire right conduct.[56] Dowlin finds in Sidney one vital, controlling idea:

> Sidney's fundamental concept of the function of poetry is that, instead of making verses, the poet invents fictions and moving representations of what is good or bad and thereby induced mankind to live a virtuous life.[57]

Dowlin urges that this particular idea is original with Sidney, and that Sidney is displaying, throughout the Defense, originality of thought, dispite his seeming reliance on ancient authority.[58]

Sidney may be seen, then, taking the concepts of Plato, and transforming them into a new and vital philosophy. Plato's great concern with the education of men to virtue became in Sidney's hands an argument that elevated poetry to the position of teacher and mover. Within the framework of this idea, poetry became nearly synonymous with teaching, and the presence of an ethical effect became a distinguishing characteristic of poetry.[59] Plato's idea of the ethical myth

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[56]"Sidney and Other Men's Thought," Review of English Studies (1944), XX, 261.

[57]Dowlin, "Other Men's Thought," p. 259.

[58]Dowlin, "Other Men's Thought," p. 261.

[59]Krouse, p. 144.

which charms the part of the soul where fear and hope are bred became the poetical myth in the hands of Sidney.[60] The ethical myth which had kept man hopeful and courageous as his soul struggled toward wisdom and virtue became the controlling purpose of poetry; and within this framework, the man who sought wisdom sought it both intellectually and emotionally, finding in poetry's "delightful teaching," a response of his undivided being.

The wonder of this response is the ability of man to see beyond his fallen nature. The knowledge revealed by poetry is the highest end of learning, the knowledge of a man's self.[61] Through this kind of knowledge, man is guided on the way to salvation, and the word of God is reinforced.[62] In these ideas expressed in the Defense, A. C. Hamilton sees the influence of Cornelius Agrippa as well as that of Plato, and he states Agrippa's idea of knowledge as supporting the previous arguments. Agrippa, says Hamilton, sought to replace the knowledge of good and evil which belongs to man's fallen state, with the unfallen state of vision.[63] That unfallen state can be revealed only by poetry, because poetry alone, of all methods of learning, is not limited by nature; rather in poetry is created another nature,

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[60] Krouse, p. 146.

[61] A. C. Hamilton, "Sidney and Agrippa," Review of English Studies (1956), VIII, 156.

[62] Hamilton, "Sidney," p. 156.

[63] Hamilton, "Sidney," p. 156.

where poets are "makers of themselves, not takers of others."[64]

Sidney never tires, in the Defense, of stressing the ethical function of poetry, and of making clear the fact that the end of all earthly learning is "virtuous action."

> So that the ending of all earthly learning being virtuous action, those skills that most serve to bring forth that have a most just title to be princes over all the rest; wherein, if we can show, the poet is worthy to have it before any other competitors.[65]

Poetry was not made by external form, but by the quickening power within it, and fundamental to the Defense is the stress given the importance of creative imagination.[66] Virtuous action was not encouraged by the literal reality of poetry, but by the fact the truth which it revealed enabled man to "soar heaven-high, above the dull mists of casual, matter-of-fact history."[67]

History is seen, by Sidney, as tied to the "bare was" of literal reality, "captivated to the truth of a foolish world," where a historian is forced to record what was, while the poet is free to create a perfect world, where he is the maker and recorder of what should

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[64] Hamilton, "Sidney," pp. 153, 155.

[65] Thaler, p. 16. Sidney, Defense, pp. 11-12.

[66] Thaler, p. 42.

[67] Thaler, pp. 46-47.

be.[68] The moral lesson taught by history was, then, not of the same cloth and righteousness as was that lesson taught by poetry. Before the writing of the Defense, history had been considered a branch of philosophy which could teach man the moral lessons of the ages.[69] Sidney presented the theory that poetry could teach morality better than history.[70] History was useful as a teacher, in Sidney's view, only in so far as it could give specific instruction to men of action.

> Where the historian, bound to tell things as things were, cannot be liberal (without he will be poetical) of a perfect pattern, but as in Alexander, or Scipio himself, show doings, some to be liked, some to be misliked; and then how will you discern what to follow, but by your own discretion, which you had without reading Quintus Curtius?[71]

Sidney ejected history from the realm of moral philosophy, and recognizing still its ability to teach, relegated it to the realm of political philosophy, replacing it, in the moral field, with poetry.[72] This he did because he saw history as a diffuse and inarticulate teacher far inferior to poetry, which went straight to the point

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[68] Thaler, p. 64.

[69] J. Levy, "Sir Philip Sidney and the Idea of History," Bibliotheque d'Humianisme et Renaissance (1964), XXXI, 608.

[70] Levy, p. 614.

[71] Levy, p. 615. Sidney, Defense, pp. 17-18.

[72] Levy, pp. 616-617.

of an issue and illuminated it.[73]

On the issues mentioned, Sidney's views as expressed in the Defense flow into the main stream of Renaissance criticism. The Defense falls into three main parts, each dealing with vital issues of the day, each presenting the somewhat revolutionary views of its author, and each somewhat overlapping the other so that the parts are not mutually exclusive, and even support each other. Alwin Thaler finds that Sidney roughly marks the sections of the Defense with his own summaries, and Thaler paraphrases those summaries:

> 1) Presents Sidney's definitions of poetry, reviews its imaginative, historic, and philosophic background, enumerates rapidly its "kinds or species" and asserts its claims as the earliest of teachers, the mirror of nature, and in various respects, the superior of history and philosophy.
>
> 2) Analyzes and refutes the various "objections" made against this art by the "poet-haters"---Stephen Gosson and his tribe.
>
> 3) Inquires "why England" has "grown so hard a step-mother to poetry," touches upon earlier and contemporary English poets, and discusses in some detail the defects of the English drama. It then examines current affectations in the lyric, in prose style, and diction, and closes with an excursus upon the English language and English versification.[74]

These three divisions present three questions under real consideration at the time, and they indicate Sidney's concern with the ethical and

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[73] Levy, p. 614.

[74] Thaler, p. 14.

aesthetic function of poetry, which had been and still was under question.

Sidney believed that "profitable" learning must have a rational basis of human pleasure, and that as a consequence, impassioned learning, "heart-ravishing" knowledge, which was the civilizing power of poetry, also gave poetry its vindication.[75] The supreme logic of this vindication was that there need be no separation between man's intellect and man's emotions.

> This purifying of wit, this enriching of memory, enabling of judgement, and enlarging of conceit, which commonly we call learning, under what name soever it come forth or to what immediate end soever it be directed, 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.[76]

The defense of poetry, as given by Sidney, was that poetry, in its moral philosophical framework, united a man's self rather than divided it. In answer to the Puritan and Platonic charges that poetry "feeds and waters the passions," Sidney stated that it was by the right use of poetry that it should be judged and not by the abuse of it.[77] Sidney saw poetry as presenting both the greatest evil and the greatest good to man, as by its improper abuse or by its proper

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[75] Thaler, p. 14.

[76] Thaler, pp. 36-38. Sidney, Defense, p. 10.

[77] Samuel, p. 388.

use, it could make man either foolish or wise.[78]

Sidney argued that both parts of the human soul--reason and passion--must be ministered to by the poet, and that the ethical myth which thus resulted was demanded by man's irrational nature.[79] Its function was somehow to reconcile man to his own being, and through man's reason this end could be accomplished. Rather than being antithetical to reason, poetry was shaped by it; and in the right use of this poetry true ethics could be taught, as neither good nor anything else could be Known until it had been apprehended with passion as well as with reason, and poetry offered the perfect union of both ideas.[80] In these ideas, Sidney brought about a genuine unification of ethical and aesthetic values, a rare accomplishment for a man faced all around with Puritan absolutism.[81]

Sir Philip Sidney, in his Defense of Poesy, then accomplished the writing down, in a piece of literary criticism, of ideas which were to become the great Renaissance goals. He answered the Puritan challenge that decried literature, and especially poetry, as being secular and unworthy of attention; and he defined, for those who had long misunderstood it, the Platonic objection to poetry. He faced the

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[78] Samuel, p. 388.

[79] Krouse, p. 142.

[80] Krouse, p. 142.

[81] Thompson, p. 117.

of Songs, whether that author be Solomon, or an unknown poet (or poets) who comprehended Hebrew Wisdom.

CHAPTER III

The problem of the sacred and the secular has been a part of man's dilemma since the Fall. Before the Fall, man lived in an ideal state where no division between things worldly and things heavenly existed; and, since the Fall, man has sought somehow to return to that ideal state. There have been many paths trodden along this way, with many absolute philosophies appearing as ultimate answers to the question. There have been some who affirmed a completely sacred approach, the most notable being the Puritans; and there have been some who have affirmed the delights of the flesh and taken the path of Hedonism. In between these two extremes, there have been those who affirmed a perfect mingling of the two and who in the process praised the opportunity of man, even in his fallen state. Two ideas expressing this position from very similar viewpoints, yet widely separated in history, are the Hebrew Wisdom tradition and the ideal of Renaissance man.

Hebrew Wisdom was a gradually evolving philosophical tradition in Jewish history, and only in retrospect can the main points of it be sharply defined. As background to the idea of Wisdom, however, an understanding of the Hebrew idea of man is necessary. John Pederson, in his book Israel: Its Life and Culture, makes this statement concerning the situation of man:

> The Israelitic conception of man is made clear to us through the myth of creation. Yahweh created man from clay and breathed into him His breath of life, in which manner man became a living soul. The basis of essence was fragile, corporeal substance which became a soul--nephesh (נֶפֶשׁ). It is not said he is supplied with a soul--such as he is, man, in his total essence is a soul.[1]

This idea, so sharply expressed by Pederson, is one of the most vital controlling ideas of Biblical Judiasm; for the Old Testament Jew was concerned with what he was, and as he saw himself, he was a soul.

In God in Search of Man, Abraham Joshua Heschel discusses the religious position of the Old Testament Jew, and he finds this religious position an integral part of what ultimately came to be Jewish philosophy:

> ...the issue which must be discussed first is not belief, ritual, or the religious experience, but the source of all these phenomena: the total situation of man; not how he experiences the supernatural, but why he experiences and accepts it.[2]

The total situation of man was that he was a living soul, and it was as a living soul that God sought him and the idea that God cared to seek man is the controlling factor in Jewish morality. There was, in

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[1]Johannes Pederson, Israel: Its Life and Culture (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 99.

[2]Abraham Joshua Heschel, God in Search of Man (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1959; Philadelphia: Jewish Publishing Society, 1959), p. 7.

the total situation of man, a binding relationship between God and His people, and the single most important factor of the Old Testament is this relationship between God and man.[3] The personality of Yahweh was a central idea in Israel's religion, and this idea of personality implied a moral obligation, as personality, both human and divine, finds its highest expression in morality.[4] In the development of the Wisdom tradition, then, one of the principal aims of Wisdom came to be the application of this morality to the circumstances of life.[5]

As the philosophy of Judiasm developed into the Wisdom tradition, it came to support definite philosophical positions, and these positions reflect the integral ideas of Judiasm. First, the existence of conscience and of consciousness was recognized.[6] Secondly, importance was placed upon the concept of all things being in a state of becoming.[7] Thirdly, the assertion was made that Life is an essential reality.[8] Fourth was the dominant fact that evil is stupidity, reversed and equally acceptable as, stupidity is evil.[9] These four

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[3]Henry Wheeler Robinson, The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1919), p. 38.

[4]H. W. Robinson, p. 38.

[5]H. W. Robinson, p. 43.

[6]Duncan Black MacDonald, The Hebrew Philosophical Genius (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), p. 12.

[7]MacDonald notes that there is no word in classical Hebrew for "to be," there is only a word for "to become." P. 16.

[8]MacDonald, p. 12.

[9]MacDonald, p. 12.

positions are plainly intellectual, and they are reached by application of independent thought to the obvious facts of life.[10]

Always, along with these principles, went the controlling influence of the Personality of Yahweh, and the primary object of all philosophy was to determine the nature of this God. The assurance that the Hebrews felt of the power and personality of Yahweh's presence behind life left open the marvelous possibility that just such friendship as existed between individuals could exist between man and God.[11] It was on this basis that man approached God, and it was within this framework that he came to comprehend Reason, which ultimately developed into Wisdom.[12]

One of the most distinctive features of biblical monotheism is the concept of an intensely powerful divine will which rules history.[13] According to this view, God imposes His will upon the will of man and thereby makes man aware of his relationship to God.[14] Communion with God is recognized then as a communion of moral wills.[15] The

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[10]MacDonald, p. 29.

[11]MacDonald, p. 4.

[12]MacDonald notes that the philosophy of Wisdom which he finds within the Hebrew tradition is different from the usual interpretation of Wisdom, which normally is considered a much more limited view of life. Pp. 29ff.

[13]Julius Guttman, Philosophies of Judiasm, trans. by David W. Silverman. Anchor Books (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1959), p. 5.

[14]Guttman, p. 5.

[15]Guttman, p. 5.

possibility presented in this concept is the idea that man possesses a moral will independent of the moral will of god; and consequently, man is capable of a Reason of his own, independent of the rule of Yahweh.

Again the concept of the Fall becomes important, for it may be said that it is at the Fall that man acquires the ability to Reason and the knowledge that he possesses his own moral will. The Genesis account of the Fall presents Adam and Eve in the Garden, having permission from God to eat of all trees in the Garden except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.[16] When they eat of the tree at the serpent's tempting, they are banished from the Garden, and from the perfect life they have led there.[17] It is interesting that in historical folklore, there are many Trees of Knowledge, but the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is unique to Hebrew mythology.[18] The presence of this particular tree allows for man's attaining an independent moral sense and becoming a self-determining moral being even against the will of Yahweh.[19]

The accomplishment of attaining this moral independence was the establishment of Reason as a guide in life besides the Will of

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[16]Sir James George Frazer, Folklore in the Old Testament (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, Inc., 1923), pp. 16-18.

[17]Frazer, pp. 16-18.

[18]MacDonald, p. 14.

[19]MacDonald, p. 14.

Yahweh.[20] Reason became an ultimate of itself, but once this reality was reached it was limited by the knowledge that there was an ultimate and absolute behind existence that also possessed Reason and Personality.[21] Thus there existed in Life two definite, knowable awarenesses, conscience and consciousness; and somehow, between these two awarenesses, Hebrew man found not conflict, but rather purpose and logic. It did not occur to him that he could escape the Personality of Yahweh because of the moral sense he had acquired; rather he was aware of himself becoming ever more aware of himself, and ever more aware of the Personality that was the only Absolute he recognized.

The philosophy of biblical Jusiasm was dynamic in its conceptions. It saw the world as constantly flowing and changing--as constantly becoming. The metaphysic of this world was "becoming" not "being," and it did not conceive of a constant state. Within this metaphysic, Life existed as a mysterious, ultimate reality, and it was this reality that was in a state of becoming. When God blew his spirit into man to give him life, he made him in literal Hebrew "a living desire"; the essence of this living desire was that man had no thought of not living, but rather he saw himself and "a living desire" constantly becoming that desire.[22]

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[20] MacDonald, p. 33.

[21] MacDonald, p. 33.

[22] MacDonald, p. 20.

This quality of existing as "a living desire" implied for man a moral imperative, and he interpreted that imperative as a question of intelligence.[23] Possessing, by virtue of the Fall, a knowledge of absolute good and absolute evil, man used the Reason he had obtained to affirm the fact that stupidity, or a lack of Reason, was evil. If man did not constantly become more knowledgeable, he was static; if he was static, he was not becoming; if he was not becoming, he had ignored the moral imperative of Reason, and in so doing he was evil and he was ignorant.

It is interesting that no one of these Hebraic ideas concerns itself with a division between God and Man. In fact, the moral imperative of this Judaic philosophy demands a constant interchange between God and man, and that interchange requires the total awareness of being "a living desire." Total awareness implies an awareness of all levels of life at once, and the essentials of Hebrew Wisdom are the affirmation of the ability to know total awareness. Within this awareness, the marvelous Love that Yahweh feels for the man he has created exists in all areas of man's life; and, wherever he turns, even when he faces God's anger, he is aware of God's love.

Against this background must the Song of Songs be understood. When the Song of Songs is read as a song of Hebrew Wisdom, the long debate over whether the poetry is secular or sacred, allegorical or

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[23] MacDonald, p. 26.

erotic, becomes insignificant. The Song is a song of love, be it the creation of Solomon, or an anthology of folk-poetry gradually assembled through several centuries. The Love which it describes as existing between man and woman is but one level of the same love which exists in every breath of Life. As Herbert Weiner states:

> ...for Judiasm, love is one flame expressing itself on many different levels. To diminish the flame on any one level is to weaken the capacity of love on all levels.[24]

Perhaps the message of the Song is that man, in knowing love on any one level of his life, participates in the Love that exists at all levels. Certainly this idea does not point to conflict but to unity, and it may be safely asserted that the writer (or writers) of the Song knew there was no Judaic conflict. The historical conflict evident in studying the Song of Solomon was imposed upon it by its interpreters, and is not inherent in the poetry. However, it is the conflict rather than the content that has made its influence felt in the world of literature; and many centuries after the first discussion of the Song, in the Age of the Renaissance, the conflict still raged, as Renaissance man sought to affirm in his life the kind of unity Hebrew Wisdom quite completely acknowledged.

Between the development of Hebrew Wisdom and the founding of a Renaissance world view, the phenomenon of Christianity somewhat

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[24]A. I. Kok, "Levels of Love: Commentary on the Song of Songs," trans. by H. Weiner, Commentary (April, 1958), XXV, 383.

altered the Hebraic heritage that Renaissance man inherited. The coming of Christ brought a promise of salvation and eternal life that the Old Testament Hebrew had not known. It was a promise distorted somewhat by later influences and philosophies, and it was a promise rejected by the continuing Hebrew community. In spite of this rejection, Christianity was the outgrowth of ancient Hebrew ideas, and that influence could not be denied. In spite of the expected changes, Renaissance desires greatly duplicated those of the early Hebrews. E. M. W. Tillyard says of the Renaissance:

> People still think of the Renaissance as a secular period between two outbreaks of Protestantism: a period when other religious enthusiasm was sufficiently dormant to allow the new humanism to shape out literature.[25]

He concludes, however, that it is wrong to look on the Elizabethan Age as purely secular, for he finds that the greatness of the Elizabethan Age lay in its ability to contain so much of the new without bursting the form of the old.[26]

In viewing the world in which he lived, the Renaissance humanist, which was the name this idealistic man ultimately acquired, saw man placed in the midst of the Universe, between the angels and the beasts.[27] Placed in the center of these two forces, angels being the

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[25] The Elizabethan World Picture (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 3.

[26] Tillyard, pp. 5, 8.

[27] Tillyard, p. 3.

forces of Heaven and beasts being the forces of Earth, man was constantly afflicted by the claims of two different worlds. Man existed in the high state of tension produced by the friction of two contradictory principles.[28]

Man was in this position of conflict because of the Fall; for, before the Fall, he had lived in a position of grace, unworried by sin, and after the Fall, he was forced, because of sin, to seek some path to salvation. All conflict existent in the world around him occurred because something had disturbed the careful order of the world, and the only means of resolving this conflict was the reestablishment of proper order.[29] Proper order could be regained through the theological scheme of sin and salvation; for, in spite of the Fall, man retained some of his original virtue, as he was created in the image of God.[30] Man could reach toward Heaven and rise above his imperfections because God had shown the compassion to give His Son as an atonement for man's sins. The two ideas, order and the scheme of sin and salvation, were so fused in Renaissance thinking that they are hardly separable, and their influence was profound.[31] As Tillyard states, this ideological background was so strong that any man "could revolt

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[28]Tillyard, p. 5.

[29]Tillyard, p. 9.

[30]Tillyard, p. 21.

[31]Tillyard, p. 20.

against it, but could not ignore it."[32]

The problem that arose in the Renaissance, embodied in Puritan Absolutism, was an over-emphasis on the attainment of Heavenly goals and a rejection of worldly pleasures. The age-old conflict between things sacred and things secular became again vehement, and men were greatly discouraged from any participation with the beasts, as worldly interests naturally fed the sinful delights of the flesh. All activities of man came into question at this point, and perhaps the greatest conflict occurred over man's use of language.

Language, as man's most obviously powerful communicative tool, presented the most threatening influence on man's thinking. Language, in the hands of a clever man, was capable of moving man to action, and the great fear was that man could be as easily moved to sinful action as to Heavenly action if presented with a well-wrought argument. Action was one of the key words of Renaissance thinking and ultimately, the desire to persuade man to act became one of the dominant themes of Renaissance literature. Persuasion by use of Rhetoric (language) became condemned, however, because it was too easily abused. Because it was abused and could be used for evil, written language itself came to be considered evil, and of all literary genre, poetry was considered the worst offender.

Through poetry, as through any form of art, man seeks to capture

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[32]Tillyard, p. 18.

and perpetuate those fleeting moments of ecstasy experienced in a lifetime. Because man knows so few moments of pure Joy, he desires somehow to preserve them, to create them in an eternal state. Such is the desire of the poet, to create an immortal moment of Joy, so perfect in its conception that it captures the essence of man's life, and holds that essential moment in a form many may view more than the one time he experienced it and thus made it creation. Poetry has this obvious affiliation with the emotions of man, and thus it becomes the prime suspect when considered an outlet for language. Poetry has too easily become the tool of passion.

Against this background Sir Philip Sidney defended poetry. Sidney recognized that the power of most things is capable of dual effects--constructive and destructive--and he also recognized the fact that this conflict was inseparable from knowledge, as all things and all men have a dual nature, and a capacity for good and evil.[33] Sidney thus supported the concept that language was neither good nor bad, but was a means to either.[34] In the Defense may be seen reflections upon the goals of language and its influence, and the later definition of J. T. McCullen that the "major function of rhetoric is to unite understanding and action," may be seen as one of Sidney's defending arguments for poetry.[35] Sidney believed that poetry was the

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[33]Joseph T. McCullen, "Renaissance Rhetoric: Use and Abuse," Discourse: A Review of the Liberal Arts, V (Summer, 1962), pp. 254-255.

[34]McCullen, p. 261.

[35]McCullen, p. 256.

most obvious route to this desirable union.

The poet, as seen by Sidney, was a "maker," a creator of the wonder of life that man wished to remember. The poet was able, by virtue of his abilities as an artist, to recall for man the times when he was aware of rising above his fallen state. The poet was inspired by passion, but his passion was at once lustful and holy, for his awareness encompassed the totality of man's situation and responded to the duality of his existence. Taken in proper balance, therefore, and put to proper use, poetry participated in the goodness of God's creation; it taught men, and taught them with beauty and delight; it moved men to action, and through the knowledge it provided, this action poetry provoked was moral. In abusive hands, poetry was capable of urging men to undesirable action; but, though poetry could be abused, it was not evil of itself. Poetry itself was innocent, and after Sidney's Defense, poetry stood vindicated.

In writing the Defense of Poesy, Sir Philip Sidney responded to a conflict that he witnessed rather than a conflict he experienced. He was moved to action not because good and evil were at war within him, but because good and evil were at war without him, and he knew the possibility of reconciliation. In this knowledge, he stands as one of the first Renaissance speakers to the issue, but historically there is other precedent for his position: earlier, the Hebrew philosophic position had maintained this idea, even though critics had imposed conflict upon it.

The Old Testament Jew and the Renaissance Humanist, in spite of

centuries of separation, had sought similar goals. Both had been acutely aware of a creative power behind life. For the Old Testament Jew, that power was the personality of Yahweh; for the Renaissance Humanist, it was God the Father, who ordained the orderly universe. The Hebrew and the Humanist both realized the state of things "becoming" and the idea of flux, even if for the latter, the state of becoming had a quality of rigidity in the concept of order. The Humanist and the Hebrew joyfully affirmed life, and recognized its ultimate reality; for, even in the Renaissance knowledge of Christ and his promise of eternal life, there existed the desire to make life on earth as great a gift as life in Heaven. These two historical persons agreed too, on the importance of knowledge and the virtue of learning, and the quest for adequate understanding was ever encouraged.

Having in common four such vital philosophical positions, the Old Testament Hebrew and the Renaissance Humanist arise easily identified in the Song of Songs and the Defense of Poesy. The conflict between things sacred and things secular which the one aroused, and that same conflict to which the other responded, has existed since the Fall, traveling under several guises (good and evil, use and abuse) and it is a conflict which both sought to resolve, one purposely, the other unknowingly.

Sir Philip Sidney and the poet of the Song of Solomon were aware of a magnificent balance in life. Their two writings, one representing an historical person, the other representing an historical idea,

expressed the assurance that all levels of life partook of passion and of blessedness: at once, in an inseparable and reconciled world, man loved God and man loved life, and man most bountifully expressed this love through the establishing of relationships with other men. Thus was man in action, aware of a moral balance in the universe that could be perpetuated in the world of poetry. Thus could man praise the sensuous love he felt for a woman, and through that love know something of the love of God.

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