

English 205
Take Home Final Exam
LENGTH: 5-6 double spaced pages
DUE: 16 January, 2006
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Philip Sidney in Theory and Practice

Renaissance. Philip Sidney cared about both: he was himself an accomplished poet and writer of sonnets, but he also cared deeply about the ethical purpose of poetry; the principles articulated in *The Defence of Poetry* (1595) were the statement of literary theory in Renaissance England and this work is an important and frequently cited statement throughout all literary periods up until the present. The key question, then, in d

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question because Sidney had a vaunted opinion of the function of poetry. Not only did he think that poetry had the capacity to teach, he felt that it could actively assist in constructing a more virtuous

claims for literary works (but also read the whole Defense in the NAEL):

that is to say, a representation, counterfeiting, or figuring forth to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture

goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger; and teach, to make that them know that goodness whereunto they are moved which being the noblest

and fatherly antiquity, as from whence other learnings have taken their beginnings; since it is so universal that no learned nation doth despise it. . . Since [the poet] effects be so good as to teach goodness and delight the learners. . . [he] doth not only far pass the historian, but, for instructing, is

virtue; and that none can both teach and move thereto so much as poetry: then is the

Through a close reading of some of the poems *Astrophil and Stella*, evaluate these claims and try to determine if his own poetry actually lives up to his theoretical precepts. Do the poems in the sequence actually have the capacity to move to virtue through delightful teaching? Why or why not? This is a complicated question, so be creative in your approach, but also make sure your thoughts are well-organized, bring to bear your knowledge of Renaissance poetics and the sonnet tradition, and definitely back up your claims through a close reading of specific words and phrases in both the *Defence* and *Astrophil and Stella*.