



Lofty Dogmas

Poets on Poetics

EDITED BY

DEBORAH
BROWN

ANNIE
FINCH

MAXINE
KUMIN

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To the husbands:

Glen Brand, George Brown, *and* Victor Kumin

“If there is no meaning in it,” said the King, “that saves a world of trouble, you know, as we needn’t try to find any. And yet I don’t know,” he went on, spreading out the verses on his knee, and looking at them with one eye; “I seem to see some meaning in them, after all.”

—Lewis Carroll,
Alice’s Adventures
in Wonderland

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P R E F A C E

Maxine Kumin

For several years I have been carrying around in my head the idea for a book not unlike the one you are just now opening. In my long shelf-life as a poet I have often been struck—amused, amazed, even made thoughtful—by the sharply opposing views of poets as contemporary as Language poets and as ancient as the Greeks and Romans who were our literary ancestors. The views of the practitioners were what I was after, not those of the detached and theoretical critics. The title I had in my head for this book that did not yet exist was *Lofty Dogmas*, very tongue-in-cheek of me. Why hadn't someone pulled all these essays by poets on poetics together when I needed them, teaching? When I wanted to show students how prejudiced, how flagrantly idiosyncratic, yet how deeply insightful the poets were about their craft? Of the two dozen or more semester-long creative writing seminars I've led, a few stand out as especially gratifying. The students had in common Marianne Moore's impatience "with all this fiddle," but grasped and clung to her image of "imaginary gardens with real toads in them" as a writing lifeline.

One class, all MFA candidates, met at dusk in an upstairs conference room of the library at the University of Miami. (One of the students was married to the head librarian.) There were eleven of us, and everyone always came. I remember that among their own creative assignments, these students were invited (required) to write essays on a variety of issues, for example, Hopkins's eccentric metrics, or Denise Levertov's concept of organic form, or the use of caesura in Milton's tightly knit lines . . . not long, formal papers, but enough to force their engagement. When we emerged three hours later into full night, we were still held by "the raw material of poetry in / all its rawness" and found it hard to separate in the parking lot, driving off to our individual destinations as if we were just coming to after a drug-induced sleep. What a boon a book like this would have been then! Undergraduates in my class at Brandeis in the spring of 1975, when I was Hurst Professor, were unspoiled and thirsty. If not innocent of opinion, they were still open to every nuance. Poetry to them was a rich stew, a bouillabaisse inviting them to pick

apart and taste its several ingredients: what was an ode, an elegy? What was a sonnet, villanelle, sestina? What made blank verse blank, free verse free? They pored over the shaped poems of May Swenson and George Herbert; they read aloud Frost's and Browning's dramatic monologues and their own often moving early poems. I was awfully proud of them, these bright students, for their sustained interest in technique and their precocious understanding that though poetry begins in self-expression, it inevitably must address formal concerns.

"The mountain labored and brought forth a mouse," Horace admonishes any poet who tries to attain status by imitation or grandiosity or falls into inconsistency. It's a good metaphor to keep in mind as you write, I told them, counterbalanced by Rilke's soothing homilies to Mr. Kappus in *Letters to a Young Poet*, "Works of art are of an infinite loneliness and with nothing so little to be reached as with criticism." Do we all brag about our students' successes, their first-book awards, their plum teaching jobs? The quiet pleasure we take in their books arriving—one, nonfiction, from a former student at Princeton who had been involved in the sanctuary movement protecting illegals in Arizona, came with a note: "Dear Maxine: here is my long poem as promised." But back to the genesis of this book, which is far bigger and better than the one I grumbled over in my head. I first mentioned it to a poet-professor, Deborah Brown, who is my neighbor, give or take ten or so miles, which qualifies as neighborly in New Hampshire. We then appealed to poet Annie Finch, director of the University of Southern Maine's Stonecoast low-residency MFA program, to join us with her considerable expertise as an anthologist. What follows is a running account, only roughly chronological—for sometimes passion dictates that arguments face one another across a gap of years—of poets' essays on the subject of poetics. The main emphasis is on English and American poetry of our own era, with a bit of spice from other cultures for balance, and with some seminal essays and poems from early times. There is some spillage onto more public topics, commercial (i.e. conventional) versus experimental poetry, and the lacunae are numerous. I apologize to every professor and poet who is even now crossly riffling the table of contents and not finding his or her favorite essay by a poet we have omitted. Perhaps this book will invite the gestation of other texts that will fill in the blanks and expatiate further on the desire of poets to write about writing poems.

INTRODUCTION

Poets on Poetics

This book collects statements about poetry by poets. A glance at the table of contents will show that while we have included numerous acknowledged classics, from Horace's "Ars Poetica" to Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry" to Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," other selections are more eclectic: a shamanistic African song, a contemporary diatribe against National Poetry Month. Our aim has been not to compile a comprehensive history of world poetics, but rather to use our knowledge and instincts as poets to present a stimulating, challenging, and informative collection of remarks in poetry and prose. We hope that this book will at once educate poets and students of poetry in the traditions of the art, and stimulate them to fresh ways of thinking about poetics by showing the great variety of prejudices and convictions that poets hold about poetry.

Texts on the formal craft of poetry and anthologies of contemporary poetics abound, but we feel there is an as yet unmet need for a compilation of poetics by poets from different cultures, periods, and aesthetic schools. While the core of the book is made up of writings by English and American poets over the last two centuries, we have also included contributions from poets far apart in time and space, creating a conversation that ranges from Sappho to Stein, Wordsworth to Walcott, Po Chu-I to Pope. The goal of this inclusiveness has been to show at once the continuity between statements on poetics among poets of some widely differing eras and the persistence of certain ongoing debates over issues of poetics, including questions of diction, form, and the role of the poet.

We see this book as useful for poets of all levels of development and for professors not only in creative-writing courses but in literature courses and introduction to poetry courses. Since we are all poets ourselves, we are especially aware of its importance in the poetry-writing workshop, where it is all too easy for students immersed in the work of their peers to forget the centuries of poets who have struggled with the

challenges of writing poetry before them. Our intent is to illuminate poets' doctrines and convictions from era to era, to flesh out the ghosts of bold claims as disparate, say, as Milton's defense of blank verse in the seventeenth century to William Carlos Williams's call for the death of iambic pentameter in the twentieth.

The book is divided into three sections, each of which concentrates on a favorite topic of poets writing on poetry. "Musing" concerns issues of inspiration; "Making," issues of craft, from diction to meter to persona and voice; and "Mapping," the role of poetry and the poet. While organization within each of the three sections is broadly chronological, we have kept these central topics fluid in order to allow for the most unexpected juxtapositions, the maximum cross-pollination between poets. For the benefit of teachers and readers who desire a more structured approach to making such connections, we have included an appendix with a listing of essays arranged according to more specific topics. Headnotes at the beginning of each selection provide background information about the poet and commentary on the significance of the selection. Keeping in mind the book's potential use from the introduction to poetry class at the freshman level to its in-depth use in MFA creative-writing workshops, we have focused in the headnotes on providing a brief biographical sketch that places the poet in his or her literary context. This book is intended to deepen readers' understanding of age-old poetic ideas while at the same time pointing out new directions for thinking about poetry, juxtaposing the familiar and the strange, reconfiguring old boundaries, and shaking up stereotypes.



PART 1

Musing

BARRY SPACKS

The Muse

The Muse came pulling off her gown
and nine feet tall she laid her down
and I at her side a popinjay
with nothing to say. Did she mean to stay?

She smelled like flame; like starch on sweat;
like sperm; like shame; like a launderette.
No one, she said, has loved me right.
Day and night. Day and night.

Musing

No art besides poetry has had such attention lavished on its sources of inspiration. The popular legend of the nine Muses, daughters of Mnemosyne (Memory), and the stories of the slopes of Parnassus, the Pierian Spring, and the winged horse Pegasus all testify to the fascination that poetic inspiration holds in the popular mind. Anthropologist Julian Jaynes suggests that poetry, because it combines left-brain linguistic capacity and right-brain rhythmic capacity, effects a unique balance between the unconscious and conscious. On the other hand, Nobel Prize-winning poet Wislawa Szymborska views poetic inspiration as part of the universal human capacity for losing oneself in the joy of a task.

There seem to be as many ways to love the Muse—almost invariably a female spirit for women as well as men poets—as there are poets willing to discuss their infatuation and its origin. Poets can sing endlessly about the wellspring, the source. And still the Muse laments, as does the Muse in Barry Spack’s poem, that she has never been “loved right.” And still poets wonder whether she will ever favor them again.

So poets have long courted the favor of the Muses, sometimes taking their existence for granted, like Sappho, and sometimes envisioning them in complex detail, like Spenser who, in the invocation to the Muse that opens *The Faerie Queene*, claims to be a humble writer of pastoral (“me, all too meane”) who has just now been appointed by the sacred muse to exchange his shepherd’s pipe for a trumpet. For some poets, however, inspiration is not an unadulterated good. The Devil who writes the poem Blake sees in his *Vision*, or the Imagination which seems to hold Phillis Wheatley at its mercy, are just as much a source of inspiration as the beneficent muse of classical antiquity. The less gentle side of the muse inspires Lorca’s idea of the duende, which lives “in the remotest mansions of the blood.” This spirit has had a powerful hold on twentieth-century poets, calling forth radical changes in forms and smashing old styles with abandon. As Nathaniel Mackey explains, the duende is a complex, ambiguous force, far from the blandly angelic muse that has appeared in so many European paintings.

Sidney and Bradstreet, in their different ways, follow convention in claiming their verse is spontaneous, comes from the heart, and is as natural as childbirth. Joy Harjo describes her poem coming quickly and easily, with the poem's central character standing beside her, urging her on. On the other hand, poets often embrace the challenge of getting their inspiration the hard way. Seamus Heaney, at his desk, has a vision of his grandfather and his father digging potatoes in the old tradition. At the end of his hallmark poem "Digging" he is happy to have defined writing as an agricultural pursuit and to have taken his place in the procession.

As T. S. Eliot's classic essay makes plain, the long line of poets who have formed the canon we revere offers a poet challenge, confirmation, and a heightened sense of where he or she ultimately fits in the tradition. But, he adds, tradition cannot be inherited. It must be earned through the labor of studying past writers. For anyone who wants to continue as a poet past the age of twenty-five, a historical sense is necessary, and not only a sense of the past as past, but also an awareness of it as present in our time and in our literature.

Maxine Kumin's essay distinguishes between the poems that overtake the poet and those that must be brought forth with a more conscious effort. As the Elizabethan Sir Philip Sidney says, often "words come halting forth, wanting Invention's stay." Rarely is it a simple matter of "Fool . . . look in thy heart and write," as he puts it in the disarming ending to this famous sonnet. If a poem or a book of poems is a "child" as Puritan poet Anne Bradstreet would have it, that child may end up being "ill-formed" and the labor can be long and hard.

Still, the image of the lyric poet as a person open to inspiration is an appealing one. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" was delivered verbatim in an opium dream; many of the Beat Poets revved up on illegal stimulants. Emerson speaks ambiguously of the poet's "unlocking, at all risks, his human doors and suffering the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him," which, he adds, is the reason "bards love wine, mead, narcotics, coffee, tea, opium." Later, he advises that the poet "should be tipsy with water." The wholehearted embrace of experience that marked Romanticism seemed revolutionary when it manifested itself in Keats's negative capability: in his own words, "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties." Thus the true source of inspiration is a timeless openness, independent of aesthetic movements. It may not be a

simple process when a poet is aware of language's psychological and political obstacles, as is Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. To speak Cha's native language, Korean, was punishable by death during thirty-six years of colonization by the Japanese. Cha's book, *Dictée*, is about the difficulty of making poetry when even to speak is a severe challenge. But whatever the obstacles, many poets would no doubt agree with Rilke that the core part of our job is simply to remain quiet enough so that the words of the muse, inspiration, the duende, one's own heart, one's child, one's language, or nature can be heard.

MOIRA EGAN

Moira Egan (1962–) was born in Baltimore, Maryland. Her father, the poet Michael Egan (whose work was published primarily in Ireland) was the first of the family to attend university, but Egan grew up among voracious readers, surrounded by, and in love with, books. At Bryn Mawr she majored in German literature because the idea of studying English seemed too daunting, but eventually she re-found her footing as a poet and went off to Columbia, where James Merrill chose her MFA thesis for the David Craig Austin Prize. After working in New York for many years, the opportunity arose to teach in Greece, and so she followed her muse to that mythopoetic landscape. Currently, she directs the creative-writing program in a public high school in Baltimore.

Cleave, Egan's first book of poems, was published in 2004 and was nominated for the National Book Award. In part due to the influence of her father's formal aesthetic, Egan's work questions the philosophical underpinnings of various received forms, their use either as a naturally supportive foundation for the content of the poem, or as a device to achieve ironic tension between form and content. There has long been a war within her between an "inner formalist" and her free-wheeling, unconventional self: recent poems are, finally, an attempt to work the freedom of thought, the juiciness of language, and the messiness of emotion into and through fixed, as well as interestingly exploded, forms.

To My Muse, Upon Her Return

O Muse,
 sweet red jazz juice,
 featherboa attitude,

 where have you been?
 A mystery to me,
 your sporadic telegraphy

and how to please
Thee. Now, down on my knees,
most supple supplication, I offer you the keys

to my place. Tell me, what do I do to entice
you to stay and play nice?
In my house I keep no ice,

I tend to fire:
blue sparks along coiled electric wires
and the slow smoke incense of desire.

Is that it? Like love, it's only chemical?
a perfect fit of molecules
one into the other, sweetly nestled?

Big hands in the small of my back,
a kiss so luscious the room turns black
and the ticking of the clock

for a moment stills.
You come, and go, regardless of will.
Tears, libations, heart, what shall I spill

to keep you here with me?
you who make love in normal people,
and in me poetry.

HORACE
(QUINTUS HORATIUS FLACCUS)

As a young man, Horace, Quintus Horatius Flaccus, (65–8 b.c.) studied philosophy in Athens. When civil war broke out, he enlisted in Brutus's army, fighting in the battle of Philippi. Impoverished after this defeat, he came under the wing of Maecenas, a wealthy Roman politician, who became his, as well as Virgil's, patron. Maecenas bought Sabine Farm, a retreat where Horace was then at liberty to write for the rest of his life. Ultimately, Horace, whose often autobiographical works dealt with moral and political issues, became the most celebrated poet of the Augustan Age; Dante listed him third after Homer and Virgil in his *Divine Comedy*. His *Odes* and *Epodes*, descended from Greek lyrics such as Sappho's, were the models for seventeenth-century poets as diverse as Herrick and Marvell.

Ars Poetica is important historically as a major piece of Roman literary criticism and as a practitioner's guide. It is a series of wittily expressed maxims for the guidance of young poets, which set forth Horace's literary theory and his views on formal aspects of craft, both poetic and dramatic. His critical judgments stress the values of proportion, good sense, and decorum. Translated into the vernacular tongues of western Europe, Horace's *Ars Poetica* became the starting point for Renaissance literary criticism.

This selection, taken from the longest of Horace's poems, is found in nearly all manuscripts under the title *Ars Poetica*. Yet the composition is a letter rather than a formal treatise, and Horace himself was probably not responsible for the conventional title. The poem has the discursive and occasionally personal tone of an Epistle but not the completeness, precision, and logical order of a well-constructed treatise. Like other Epistles and Sermones, it is an expression of reflections, suggested by special circumstances, upon an art which concerned one or more of the persons addressed, in this case a father and two sons of the Piso family.

*from Book Two, Epistle III, To the Pisos*THE ART OF POETRY:
NOTES FOR ASPIRING POETS AND PLAYWRIGHTS

Suppose some painter had the bright idea
 Of sticking a human head on a horse's neck
 And covering human nether limbs up with
 Assorted feathers so that a beautiful
 Woman uptop was an ugly fish below,
 And you were invited in to take a look,
 How could you possibly manage to keep a straight face?
 Dear Pisos, dear friends, a poem's exactly like
 Such pictures as those, when the poet's fantasies
 Are like a sick man's raving dreams in which
 You can't tell head from foot nor what it is
 That they're attached to. "Poets and painters," you say,
 "Have the right to do whatever they dare to do."
 Well, yes. We poets claim that right for ourselves
 And recognize that other artists have it.
 But it doesn't go so far as mixing up
 Savage and civilized, mating tigers and lambs,
 Or having serpents get it on with birds.
 There are works that begin in genuine nobleness
 And therefore make large genuine promises
 Yet sometimes they're stuck about with shining purple
 Patches that catch the eye: for example, a pause
 To tell you all about Diana's grove,
 Or "the stream that winds yet hastens through the fields,"
 Or to have you admire the far-off scenic Rhine
 Or the rainbow you can see when the storm is over.
 There are places for things like these, but often not
 In the places where they occur. If what you know

Is how to draw the picture of a cypress,
That's not much use if what you're paid to do
Is to paint the picture of a panicked sailor
Swimming away from the sinking wreck of his ship.
Why does what was supposed to turn out to be
A wine jar, when the job began, turn out,
When the pottery wheel stops turning, to be a jug?
In short, whatever the work is supposed to be,
Let it be true to itself, essentially simple.

Father and worthy sons, we poets often
Know what we're aiming at, and often we miss.
I try my best to be terse, and I'm obscure;
I try for mellifluous smoothness, smooth as can be,
And the line comes out as spineless as a worm;
One poet, aiming for grandeur, booms and blusters;
Another one, scared, creeps his way under the storm;
And another, desiring to vary his single theme
In wonderful ways, produces not wonders but monsters—
Dolphins up in the trees, pigs in the ocean.
If you don't know what you're doing you can go wrong
Just out of trying to do your best to do right.
Down near the Aemilian School there's a craftsman's shop
Where he's very good at imitating in bronze
Things like toenails, say, or wavy hair,
But it turns out badly because in fact he isn't
Any good at all at doing the whole body.
If I wanted to write a poem, I'd no more want
To be like him than if I were happy to live with
My nose all crooked and funny, just because
I was praised for my shining dark eyes and lustrous hair.

Aspiring writer, be sure to be careful to pick
Material that you're strong enough to handle;
Give careful consideration to the question
Of what your shoulders can carry and what they can't.
The man who does this will find he doesn't have trouble
Thinking of what to say and in what order.
Order's important: the virtue and beauty of some
Long-promised poem, unless I'm mistaken, often
Depends on the author having judiciously chosen
To say the thing that ought to be said right now,
And keeping other things back for later on,
Favoring one thing over against another.

And furthermore, if you're shrewd about how to do it,
And do it very carefully, you can work it
So that the context makes a word that's worn
From being too familiar seem brand-new;
And if it comes about that you have to invent
New words because your subject's so abstract
Or recondite, you can invent new words
The Cethegi in their loincloths never heard of,
And you'll get away with it, as long as you do it
Circumspectly—you can get by with words
Recently coined if you get them from the Greek,
And if you don't attempt to *overdo* it.
Why on earth should Caecilius and Plautus
Be allowed to do what Virgil and Varius aren't?
And why should I be sneered at if I try
To add my little bit, when Ennius and Cato
Gave us new names for things, and doing so made
Our language by what they did so much the richer?
It's always been allowed, and always will be,

To introduce new words, fresh from the mint.
 Just as in forests in the changing year
 New leaves come in and the oldest drop away,
 So is it with words: the old ones die away
 And the new ones bloom and prosper in their time.
 We and all that we do are bound to die—
 The royal work that welcomes in the sea,
 Sheltering fleets from storms in man-made bays;
 The useless swamp, once fit for nothing but oars,
 Now fit for the plow, and nourishing its towns;
 The river once the ruiner of fields
 Now taught the art of going its harmless way—
 All things that mortals do and build are mortal;
 How mortal then the glories of our speech.
 Words that have fallen away may rise again;
 Words now in honor may fall, if Use, which is
 The governor of our language, should decide.

And don't begin your poem the way the old
 Cyclic "Homeric" poets saw fit to do it:
 "I sing of the famous war and Priam's fate."
 What's to come out of the mouth of such a boaster?
 The mountain labored and brought forth a mouse.
 Ridiculous. He does much better who doesn't
 Try so hard or make such grandiose claims:
 "Muse, tell me about the man who, after Troy,
 Witnessed the ways of men in other places."
 His aim is light from smoke, not smoke from fire,
 To make the wonders he tells of—Scylla, Charybdis,
 Antiphates, the Cyclops—shine more brightly.
 To tell Diomedes' story he doesn't think
 He has to start with the death of the hero's uncle,
 Or start, in telling about the Trojan War,

By telling us how Helen came out of an egg.
 He goes right to the point and carries the reader
 Into the midst of things, as if known already;
 And if there's material that he despairs of presenting
 So as to shine for us, he leaves it out;
 And he makes his whole poem one. What's true, what's invented,
 Beginning, middle, and end, all fit together.

• • •

Poetry wants to instruct or else to delight;
 Or, better still, to delight and instruct at once.
 As for instruction, make it succinct, so the mind
 Can quickly seize on what's being taught and hold it;
 Every superfluous word spills out of a full mind.
 As for delight, in what you invent stay close
 To actuality; your fable shouldn't
 Feel free to ask your audience to credit
 Just anything whatsoever, no matter what:
 Produce no human babies from monsters' bellies.
 The elders in the audience reject
 The work that yields no profitable wisdom,
 The young aristocrats what yields no pleasure.
 He who provides to all both profit and pleasure
 Wins everybody's vote: his book will bring
 Money for bookstore owners and fame across
 The seas and down the years to the author himself.

P O C H U - I

Po Chu-I (772–846), a Chinese poet of the Tang dynasty, held a number of government posts and served as president of the Imperial Board of War. Although he had a classical education and was an advisor to the emperor, he was nevertheless banished for arguing against certain repressive government policies, such as the grain tax, which was clearly discriminatory. Deeply concerned with social problems and with questionable religious practices, he wrote over three thousand poems, many of them brief topical verses in clear language. His “Song of Everlasting Regret” records the sufferings of Emperor Ming Huang after the murder of his concubine by rebels; this poem figures in the famous tenth-century Japanese *Tales of Genji* by Murasaki. His sympathy with the oppressed appears in his perhaps best-known poem, “The Charcoal Seller,” which describes a life of hard work and of vulnerability to corrupt officials. While he grieved deeply over the death of his mother and his young daughter, he spent three years as a recluse. To critique his poems, he tested them on an old country woman and rejected anything she could not understand.

This selection, “Madly Singing in the Mountains,” is a poem in praise of poetry, a lyrical voice raised in a pastoral setting despite or even in tribute to his banishment from the province. In it, Po Chu-I honors his muse and rejoices in the lifelong act of composing poems. In 832, he retired to a monastery where he accepted Buddhist practices that encouraged serenity and peace. “Done adoring it; done loathing it; / So we begin boundless and free,” he wrote.

Madly Singing in the Mountains

There is no one among men that has not a special failing:
and my failing consists in writing verses.
I have broken away from the thousand ties of life:
But this infirmity still remains behind.
Each time that I look at a fine landscape:
Each time that I meet a loved friend,
I raise my voice and recite a stanza of poetry
And am glad as though a God had crossed my path.
Ever since the day I was banished to Hsün-yang
Half my time I have lived among the hills.
And often, when I have finished a new poem,
Alone I climb the road to the Eastern Rock.
I lean my body on the banks of white stone:
I pull down with my hands a green cassia branch.
My mad singing startles the valleys and hills:
The apes and birds all come to peep.
Fearing to become a laughing-stock to the world,
I choose a place that is unfrequented by men.

S A P P H O

Sappho (630 b.c.–570 b.c.) is generally considered the greatest early Greek lyric poet. Facts about her life are few. Plato called her “the tenth Muse,” a term that has since been applied to numerous women poets down the centuries, reminding us that women were long thought, in Andrew Lang’s words, “meant to inspire poetry rather than to create it.” She was born into a prosperous family of wine merchants on Lesbos, a major cultural center where women were more educated and had more freedom than elsewhere in Greece. Orphaned at age six, Sappho is thought to have started a school for young women, and eventually became renowned for the poetry she wrote for her circle of friends and students. A lesbian by preference, she had one daughter, Cleis, whose father may have been a merchant named Cercylas.

Sappho wrote in the Aeolic dialect with great skill in a variety of meters, one of which, the Sapphic stanza, is named after her. Her poems are emotionally direct and usually concern the joy, pain, and complications of love. In the third and second centuries b.c., her poetry was edited and collected into nine papyrus books. Her work was revered for several centuries and influenced the Roman poets Catullus, Ovid, and Horace. But the scribes who transcribed papyri into books in the fifth century a.d. ignored her poetry, and sexism caused it to be forgotten until the 1890s. Though only brief, tantalizing fragments of the poems survived this neglect, Sappho remains one of the world’s central poets. She was accurate when she wrote of herself and her followers, “I think that someone will remember us in another time.” This fragment of a poem, addressed to Cleis with characteristic directness and emotional vividness, shows to what extent the Muses were a regular part of life in Sappho’s circle.

No Room for Grief

It is not appropriate, in a household
given to the Muses. No! Lamentation
does not belong here.

Translation by Annie Finch

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

Sir Philip Sidney (1554–86) was born in Kent of a powerful family. His father was Lord Deputy (governor) of Ireland, his uncle was Queen Elizabeth's favorite, the Earl of Leicester, and his godfather was King Philip II of Spain. He left Oxford before completing his degree and traveled throughout Europe, studying languages, music, and astronomy and serving on several diplomatic missions. On his return to England, he became a leading member of Queen Elizabeth's court and was considered a model of the Renaissance man: dashing, handsome, strong, and brilliant. He exerted a strong influence on English poetry as critic and patron. Most importantly, he encouraged Edmund Spenser, who dedicated *The Shepheardes Calendar* to him.

Sidney's poems were unpublished during his tragically brief lifetime and were circulated only in manuscript, not an uncommon situation for courtier-poets. *Astrophil and Stella*, a sequence of 108 sonnets and eleven songs, was presumably inspired by Sidney's love for Penelope Devereux. However, in 1583, he married Frances Walsingham, the daughter of Sir Francis Walsingham. The famous sonnet reprinted here describes Sidney's views on the sources of inspiration. In emphasizing the importance of the poet's individual "heart," the sonnet is one of the earliest manifestations of the modern view of the poet as a highly sensitive individual, a view which became common in the Romantic period and still reigns today.

Sidney's *The Defence of Poesie* was the first philosophical defense of poetry in English. Sidney makes an ethical argument for the value of literature on the grounds that it teaches the ability to make judgments. And, his argument continues, good judgment in turn leads to wiser action. He may have written this treatise in response to a Puritanical attack on poets, "The School of Abuse," dedicated to him by its author, Stephen Gosson.

Sidney served several years in court, acting as unofficial ambassador to the German emperor and the Prince of Orange, helping Queen Elizabeth recruit allies for a Protestant league. He also served in Parliament before he was dismissed from court, perhaps for opposing Elizabeth's marriage to the Roman Catholic Duke of Anjou. He then stayed with his sister, the poet Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke. At her estate, Wilton, he wrote the prose romance "The