Sir Philip Sidney refers to *Utopia* as a “perfect way of patterning a Commonwealth” (117), which might easily be understood as a reference to Sir Thomas More’s exploration of *Utopia*’s utopia—that is, to book two of *Utopia*. It is, after all, in book two where More, through his character Raphael Hythloday, unfolds for his created courtly listeners the nature of this ideal commonwealth, Utopia. But Sidney does not limit his attention in his *Defence* solely to fine examples of *works* of poesy. Sidney, in making a defence for embattled poesy, argues the importance of attending both to poesy’s audience and to poesy’s “maker,” the poet, in evaluations of a work’s poetic worth. From our own acquaintance with Sidney’s several examples in the *Defence* that depict the intertwined involvement of the poet with his poesy and with his public, we know that not one of these three elements should be removed in favor of attending to any of them in isolation. Therefore, knowing that Sidney refers to the “whole Commonwealth” (117) as the particular audience he has in mind for More’s work, with our “erected wit” (Sidney 109), we do not misconstrue *Utopia*’s first book as of secondary importance for our evaluation. The gentlemen in book one are, after all, debating the plausibility of “correcting errors” (7) in their “own cities, nations, [. . .] and kingdoms” (7). Still, we leave ourselves with two possible avenues of investigation, which lead to opposite conclusions. If, falling prey to our “infected will” (Sidney 109), we make the mistake of following our initial impulse and focus on the second book, we judge *Utopia* as not fully satisfying Sidney’s requirements for poesy, for we cannot imagine ourselves being moved to imitate Utopians or their commonwealth. However, assuming Sidney’s *Defence* works to “move [. . .] us to do that which we know” (Sidney 123), with both books in mind, we find More very well practices what Sidney preaches: he creates in *Utopia* a work which could very well improve a whole commonwealth.

Before exploring the basis for our investigation of *Utopia*—what Sidney believes a poetic work to be—we must first acknowledge that the relationship between the poet and his/her audience is not entirely absent as an interest from book two of *Utopia*. Admittedly, a teller—Raphael, as well as More’s created courtly listeners, are in a sense “there” throughout, but only emerge as the text’s primary subjects at the end of the work. Compared to the bulk of what constitutes book two, and compared
with what book one provides, we are offered but a snippet of them. This snippet of Raphael and, in particular, his listener, *the character* Thomas More engaging with each other, is indeed worth notice, but considering what mostly constitutes book two, we may only know to take notice if we have not misconceived book one as merely introduction, and thus of lesser import. Something similar can be said of Sidney's work: if we give scant attention to how Sidney begins his *Defence of Poesy*, perhaps imagining it as simply a device to persuade the reader to explore further on, we are likely to fail to attend well to Sidney's John Pietro Pugliano. If we are guilty of this sin, we are however surely punished for it, for we would miss discovering how this key example of Sidney's helps unlock the real worth of *Utopia* as a poetic work.

Sidney both directly and indirectly tells us what poesy does, and what it is, several times in the text, usually in combination with attempts to distinguish poesy from two other disciplines, philosophy and history. In the midst of his argument where he promotes poets over philosophers, Sidney tells us that “the inward light each mind hath in itself is as good as a philosopher's book” (123), and that “in nature we know it is well to do well, and what is well and what is evil” (123). Because learned men already know what the philosopher aims to teach, since poesy works to move “learned men […] to do that which [they] […] know, or to be moved with desire to know” (123), Sidney deems poesy superior to philosophy. Poesy moves men. To Sidney, that is what poesy does.

In his refutation of the philosopher's claim of superiority to the poet, Sidney also indirectly suggests what poesy is—that is, what it is about poesy that makes it move men—by drawing attention to the manner in which philosophers moralize. He presents us with a “perfect picture” (Sidney 116) of moral philosophers stepping forward to challenge him, “rudely clothed for to witness outwardly their contempt of outward things, with books in their hands against glory” (113). As Sidney claims that poesy is superior to philosophy because it would “win the goal” (116) through general precept and particular example, if we turn to the second book of *Utopia* with the details of this image of moral philosophers in our minds, we believe that Sidney's striking image of the particular philosopher inhibits us from learning from More’s “general notion” (Sidney 116) (i.e., the overall conception) of Utopian moral philosophy.

More tells us that Utopian moral philosophy is not disdainful of pleasure, even of sensual pleasure (56). They (the Utopians) in fact “think it is crazy for a man to
despise beauty of form” (56). However, Sidney’s example of moral philosophers, because it excites our senses and creates a lasting memory for us to draw upon, conflicts with and ultimately overwhelms the impression this “fact” has upon us. His example, in fact, draws out details which complicate any easy assuming that Utopians are best understood as enjoying, rather than as being barely tolerant of, sensual pleasures. For example, we notice that More introduces the section on moral philosophy by telling us how Utopians are “amazed at the foolishness of any man who considers himself a nobler fellow because he wears clothing of a specially fine wool” (48), wherein we hear echoes of Sidney’s poorly clothed philosophers, criticizing glory. Further, though we are told that Utopians take pleasure in outward things, we are now primed to attend to the things they take little visual pleasure from, such as gold and silver, and little olfactory or gustatory pleasure from, such as food or drink. Since they take such pleasure in music, the privileged portal must be their ears—but still also their eyes, for though they ignore the glitter of precious metals, they do yet marvel at the stars (48). But again, another of Sidney’s perfect pictures springs to mind and intrudes in our reading of the text: Sidney has us imagining them as foolish philosophers so busy admiring the stars and attending to celestial music that they “might fall into a ditch” (113)!

True, it may be argued that it is misleading to focus on Sidney’s ridicule of those who do, after all, “by knowledge [seek] [. . .] to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body” (Sidney 113), when, referring to “the most barbarous and simple Indians” (105), he scornfully refers to these “Indians” needing “to find a pleasure in the exercise of the mind” (105) lest “their hard dull wits [are never] softened and sharpened with the sweet delights of Poetry” (105). In Utopia, so the argument goes, since we also have “Indians” but who “[o]f all the different pleasures [. . .] seek mostly those of the mind” (More 55), surely considering Sidney’s disparaging remarks concerning “Indians” in the Defence we are likely to attend foremost to this discrepancy between Sidney’s “fact” and More’s “fiction” while formulating our impression of the Utopians. Exactly: we both attend to and wonder at this curiosity, and, as we will soon expand upon, not being children, we believe ourselves unmoved by it. Instead, Sidney’s image of the simply clothed priggish philosophers, because of its humorous exaggeration of a selection of characteristics we, being of a time when philosophers have “fallen” (103) “from almost the highest estimation of learning” (Sidney 103), might already be inclined to associate with philosophers, changes how
we encounter the Utopians: we impose a clear and vivid counter-image on the one we composed from More’s descriptions, which makes them seem at least as prudish and absent-minded as aesthetically and practical minded. The result is that they seem less worthy of our emulation, and our conception of Utopia as a poetic work is lessened.

Sidney offers another definition of poesy when he attempts to demonstrate poesy’s superiority to history. Here he does so through the use of a precept: poesy does not do what history does. History’s fashioners—historians—are “inquisitive of novelties [,] [which makes them] [. . .] a wonder to young folks” (114). So alerted, when we turn to More’s example of a utopia we note that each section has therein a particular novelty intended to both attract our attention and inspire our wonder. Within the section “Their Work Habits,” we learn that they devote only six hours each day to work (38)! Within the section titled “Social and Business Relations,” we learn that men at market take what they want without payment (41-42)! Within the section “Travel and Trade in Utopia,” we learn that “anyone who takes upon himself to leave his district without permission [. . .] is severely punished” (45)! Within the section on gold and silver, we learn that these metals have such little value (“which other nations give up with as much agony as if they were being disemboweled” [47]) that Utopians’ chamber pots are all made from these materials! And within the section on marriage customs, we learn that brides-to-be are shown unclothed to their grooms to ensure happily married couples! This utopia does a number of things Sidney believes good poesy does and that history does not do. It is set in a contemporaneous time (114). It is obviously not limited in conception to what “was” or even what is (120). It does offer us an example of a “house well in model” (116)—that is, a well thought out and thorough presentation of a harmonious society for our consideration and critique. But learning from Sidney to attend to how we react to novelties which might capture a child-like mind, it is difficult for us to imagine ourselves as inspired enough to either create a better world (be moved to do) or to learn more about the Utopians (be moved with desire to know) after our encounter with More’s fictional commonwealth.

However, our evaluation of how well Utopia conforms to what Sidney believes poesy is, and how it works, should not be influenced by our own reaction to More’s work. Further, we ought to take care not to judge ourselves unmoved simply because we think we haven’t been—i.e., there may be discord between what we know (gnosis) and how we actually behave (praxis). We will now both explain and explore
the importance of these two self-administered checks on our initial rush to judgment, towards a way of seeing *Utopia* as serving rather well as a poetic work.

Sidney does not believe that a work can be judged poetic before considering its effect on its intended audience, and we, though learned, are not the particular audience Sidney has in mind when he praises More’s work. Admittedly, Sidney does give some support for a conception of poesy which assumes that a certain reaction necessarily follows from experiencing a work of art. He uses the authority of Aristotle and his judgment of poesy as concerned “with the universal consideration” (119), to help augment the persuasiveness of his argument. However, he also takes care to tell us that, according to Aristotle, “the universal weighs what is said or done” (119), which, though literally meaning that everything said or done is evaluated against a constant truth, at least implies the well-reasoned state of mind of the poet who notes the inconstancies he sees and hears about him. Such a mind is Sidney’s, who we see refer to the effect poesy has on learned men, and hear warn of the effects of bad poesy—specifically, bare, unimproved history—has on uninformed, inexperienced listeners. Sidney understands that what moves a learned man would likely bore a child, and vise-versa. Sidney teaches us that a judgment of a work as poesy necessarily involves keeping the audience in mind; no art stands on merit alone.

Indeed, we, as readers of the *Defence*, knowing its examples and arguments, should not be so unlearned as to focus our attention on *Utopia*’s second book. Instead, we attend to Sidney’s reference to *Utopia* in the *Defence*, note that Sidney praises More for fashioning a work which would aid the learned man best placed to shape a commonwealth, and know to judge *Utopia* an example of poesy on its ability to move such a man to get to work accomplishing it. We are well directed, then, to consider book one of *Utopia* in making our assessment, since influence at court constitutes its primary interest.

We must acknowledge that Sidney does not refer to *Utopia* as a good example of poesy with which to influence *a prince*; rather, he says it is a good example with which to inspire a “whole Commonwealth” (117). However, in *Utopia*, when More (through his character More) says that for Raphael to maximize his influence he should aim to serve a prince, we have a characterization of a prince which should influence our reading of Sidney’s intended meaning here. More says, “a people’s welfare and misery flows in a stream from their prince, as from a never-failing spring” (8). He defines the prince as the source of societal destruction *and* of reconstruction. Sidney, both
naturally as an Elizabethan courtier, and by example with his attempt to promote poesy as the sovereign discipline—unless we assume that Sidney is radical enough to imagine the poet capable of bypassing the king and transforming a commonwealth through a direct appeal to the people—shows that he shares More’s conception of the prince as key to any reinvigoration of a commonwealth. Since the prince has advisors to inform his judgment on, for example, matters of policy, we believe the advisor to a prince the particular audience Sidney has in mind when he praises *Utopia*. If the more radical alternative seems too tempting to leave unexplored, to help weaken its appeal, we refer our reader to Sidney’s praise for poesy’s ability to “beautify” (121) historians’ recitations of “counsel, policy, or war stratagem” (121), wherein we hear of both counsel and policy in a passage about the good service of advisers to princes. Of course, Raphael doubts some aspects of More’s characterization of the prince. For instance, he thinks a prince is best understood as someone who makes *wars*, not commonwealths (8), which, if we believe his accounting of princes over More’s own, might have us imagine a prince as completely uninterested in *Utopia*. Such a prince might find something in the Utopians’ war stratagems that interests and even inspires, but this sort of inspiration leads to the destruction of commonwealths, not their reconstruction. Raphael, though, never calls into question the actual power of a prince. His disagreement with More concerns the disposition of the prince, and therefore also the effectiveness of virtuous advisers at court, a subject we will soon discuss.

Sidney offers an example of an encounter between a would-be poet trying to affect a learned man—Sidney himself—in the *Defence*; in fact, it serves as his introduction to the work. In the exordium, Sidney tells us of his encounter with John Pietro Pugliano, of Pugliano’s attempt to “enrich” (102) Sidney’s mind as to the greatness of his (Pugliano’s) placement as equerry at Emperor Maximilian II’s court. From attending to Sidney’s reaction to Pugliano, we note that the learned man is well aware of man’s tendency to enjoy self-flattery, of the length of time a teller takes in telling his tale, and of the possible relation of teller to listener as one of master to servant (102). Guilty of telling a drawn-out tale intended to promote himself and demean others (to make them want to be horses rather than their riders [102]), Pugliano is presented as an example of the inept poet for our consideration.

Before we compare Sidney’s reaction to Pugliano with how we might imagine a particular sort of learned man—one who hopes to influence a prince—reacting to
Utopia’s Raphael, it is important to note that Sidney clearly does not want to introduce his argument by boring his audience. That is, since Sidney wants to demonstrate poetry’s worth by engaging and familiarizing his learned audience with poesy’s art, he obviously assumes that the learned enjoy the playful ridicule of foreign (Italian) dignitaries. Presumably, the learned man, as with Sidney, also enjoys demonstrating that he has not been moved, not been “persuaded” (Sidney 102-03), remaining composed, contemplative, and critical of both the “poesy” and the “poet” after his encounter with them. Sidney suggests, though, that we can believe ourselvescomported, feel ourselves unmoved, experience ourselves as wholly cognizant, yet still none the less find ourselves influenced and changed: that is, he suggests that the learned man can in fact be moved through bad poesy. Sidney, by example, demonstrates that he is himself sufficiently moved by his encounter with Pugliano’s poesy to make it the introduction to his Defence, and he implies that his experience with Pulgiano serves, along with the poor regard poesy is held in, as a springboard from which to investigate the nature of good poesy.

The most prominent examples Sidney offers us of good poesy draw our attention as much or more to the poet, and the effect he has on his audience, as he does to the tale. We do not encounter in the Defence lengthy replicas of poesy; Sidney’s method is instead to wow us with the abilities of a singular individual, like Menenius Agrippa, who, “though he behaves himself like a homely and familiar poet” (125), so “masters” his audience that he creates “such effect in the[m] [. . .] that words [. . .] brought forth so sudden and so good an alteration” (125). Why is this? If we note that the effect Agrippa has on the Romans is as exaggeratingly characterized as Pugliano’s purported effect on Sidney (that it almost makes him wish himself a horse [102]) is, we see a pattern: Sidney’s account of Agrippa and the Romans makes him comparable in his storytelling “ineptness” to Pugliano. Indeed, in his Defence Sidney warns us early on that he, as with Pugliano, is presenting us with examples of “strong affection” (103) (i.e., his enthusiastic desire to persuade), which lead to the creation of “weak arguments” (103) (i.e., over-ripe accounts) out of good material. Unlike Pugliano, Sidney’s ineptness is deliberately fashioned to move his learned readers to embrace his argument. Sidney’s learned contemporaries might, at first, think most of the argument pure folly and judge it wholly unpersuasive (especially the claim that the playful poet is monarch over the philosopher!), but ultimately find themselves revisiting the memorably presented (with its humor and its daring) defence in their
memory and perhaps too, finding some use in practice for the ideas Sidney puts forward. In sum, modifying an expression of Sidney’s, we can say that to Sidney “a ['bad'] [. . .] example hath as much force to teach as a ['good'] [. . .] example” (120), at least where the learned are concerned.

It is in book one of *Utopia* that the learned reader who prides himself on his insusceptibility to foolery, perhaps due to being “a piece of a logician” (Sidney 102) himself, likely notes the discrepancy between the nature of a teller and his tale. The Utopians, who “actually practice” (26) “the kind of thing that Plato advocates in his *Republic*” (26), are described in book two as being rooted to their isle: it is their minds, “in their diligence and zeal to learn” (30), which “move” about. Yet Raphael, “eager to see the world” (5), is a sailor who, even after encountering the Utopians and claiming to be so impressed with them he “would never have left” (29), remains a man forever on the go, living, as he tells us, much as he pleases (7-8). The learned man, knowing his Greek, is sure to take pleasure in understanding why Raphael Hythloday is to be understood, in part, as a “speaker of non-sense.” As with the *Defence*, this likely leaves the narrator—who in this case is also the character Thomas More—who remains a sceptic, and who remains in part unmoved, unconvinced at “story’s” end, as the person the learned reader is most likely to sympathize and identify with.

At the end of book two More tells us he would like to challenge Raphael on a point, but, noting that Raphael “was tired of talking” (84), and as More remains unsure whether Raphael “could take contradiction in these matters” (84), instead placates him with praise and leads him on to dinner. This odd foreign storyteller Raphael, with his over-lengthy tale, consisting of interesting but often absurd ideas, and with his imperial but clownish persona, clearly is a delight to More. Raphael is harmless; he is not given the authority to win his argument with More that, even delivered with skillful attendance to the particular likes and dislikes of court, it is impossible to give good ideas a fair hearing at court. Instead, much as with Sidney’s Pugliano, we learn that a good way of passing on new ideas to courtiers is to frame them within a story dealing with topics of clear interest, such as an Italian courtier and fine horses in the *Defence*, or of strange peoples and their strange worlds in *Utopia*, but to create room for the learned listener to distance himself from the teller and his tale so he doesn’t feel manipulated into experiencing our would-be poet as “monarch” (Sidney 123) and himself as subject. Good advice to win the ear, mind,
and heart of an advisor, as well as for him to gain the attention, consideration, and inspiration of a prince. “Entertain” (7) the prince, and offer him a “supply of examples” (More 7) to discard, and he might just keep some with him, perhaps to help re-invigorate a “fallen” commonwealth once considered worthy of the “highest estimation” (Sidney 103).

*Utopia*—if we include both its first and second books—is well framed to both entertain an advisor and inform his address to a prince. It is also well stocked with suggestions that could be refined into promising policy changes that would help improve a commonwealth. *Utopia* is a work of poesy. And if we consider the sort of literature that follows *Utopia* in sixteenth-century England, such as Spenser’s *Faerie Queen* and Shakespeare’s comedies (with their “green worlds”), it may well be that Sidney’s precept for good poesy, along with More’s fine example of it, moved at least some learned men to attempt to influence a prince. Their “prince,” after all, unlike Raphael’s sketch of a prince from which so much followed, was both acquainted with and interested in much more than simply “the arts of war” (More 8): Queen Elizabeth, that is, was very much interested in re-constituting—and thereafter maintaining—a stable commonwealth out of one divided by (religious) strife.

One last thing needs to be addressed before we part. We have only explained why we believe that, after a close look at both of *Utopia*’s two books, we find *Utopia* corresponds to what Sidney, by both what he directly states and what he indirectly shows, believes qualifies a work as poetic. We have told you we know to inform our judgment with a close look at both books of *Utopia*, and revealed the conclusion we believe follows from having done so. However, we have not exempted ourselves from willfully preferring to stick with our initial impulse and make our assessment primarily based on *Utopia*’s second book. Why is this? Because, since we only claimed we learned from Sidney’s argument, and only acknowledged that we were moved by its parts, not by its whole, to make such an assessment would require an exploration not of how well *Utopia* satisfies Sidney’s definition of what poesy is, but rather how well Sidney’s *Defence itself* works as a poetic construction. That is, we would need to explore how well the *Defence* moves us to do what we now know we ought to do. We will gladly explore this with you, but at another time, as we have already talked so much, kept you overlong, and burdened you with many novelties. And besides, we feel sure that “another such [. . .] opportunity will present itself some day” (More 85).
Works Cited
