

From *Lives* to *Discurso* in the biographies of Thomas More: Roper, Harpsfield and Herrera *

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ABSTRACT

This article compares the books about the *Lives* of Thomas More written by Roper and Harpsfield and the work *Tomás Moro* by Fernando de Herrera. The comparison is taken as a case in point of the divergent early development of the biographical genre in England and in Spain. The three texts were written by Catholic humanists, but under different contexts, which produced different kinds of text. Roper's and Harpsfield's Catholicism, marked by a close contact with the Morean tradition, the English form of Counter-Reformation under Mary, and the Elizabethan reversion to Protestantism, makes them drift towards an early form of modern biography. Fernando de Herrera, however, sets out to write his text from the background of the Spanish Counter-Reformation and a different discursive and textual conception of life writing.

KEYWORDS: biography; life writing; William Roper; Nicholas Harpsfield; Thomas More; Fernando de Herrera.

De las *Vidas* al *Discurso* en las biografías de Thomas More: Roper, Harpsfield and Herrera

RESUMEN: Este artículo se ocupa de la comparación de las *Vidas* de Tomás Moro escritas por Roper y Harpsfield y el *Tomás Moro* de Fernando de Herrera. La comparación se toma como un caso pertinente en relación al temprano desarrollo divergente del género biográfico en España e Inglaterra. Los tres textos fueron escritos por católicos, pero bajo contextos diferentes, que dieron lugar a dife-

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RESUMO: Este artigo compara as *Vidas* de Thomas More escritas por Roper e Harpsfield e *Tomás Moro* de Fernando de Herrera. A comparação é entendida como um exemplo do desenvolvimento inicial divergente do género biográfico em Inglaterra e em Espanha. Os três textos foram escritos por humanistas católicos, mas em contextos diferentes, o que produziu tipos diferentes de texto. O ca-

* This research article is funded by the project "Thomas More y España: construcción ideológica y textual" ("Thomas More and Spain. Ideological and Textual Construction") (Reference number: FFI2017-83639-P), carried out at the University of Jaén. I wish to thank SEDERI's anonymous readers for their generous advice and guidance.

** Translation into Portuguese by Miguel Ramalhete.

rentes tipos de texto. El catolicismo de Roper y Harpsfield, marcado por un contacto más estrecho con la tradición moreana, la forma inglesa de la Contrarreforma mariana y la reversión isabelina al protestantismo, aboca a estos autores a una temprana forma de biografía moderna. Fernando de Herrera, sin embargo, emprende su ensayo desde el trasfondo de la Contrarreforma tridentina en España y una diferente concepción discursiva y textual de la escritura de vidas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: biografía; escritos de vidas; William Roper; Nicholas Harpsfield; Tomás Moro; Fernando de Herrera.

tolicismo de Roper e Harpsfield, marcado por um contacto próximo com a tradição moreana, a forma inglesa da Contrarreforma mariana e a reversão isabelina ao protestantismo, impele-os para uma forma inicial da biografia moderna. Fernando de Herrera, contudo, propõe-se escrever o seu texto a partir do pano de fundo da Contrarreforma espanhola e de uma conceção discursiva e textual diferente da escrita de vidas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: biografia; escrita de vidas; William Roper; Nicholas Harpsfield; Thomas More; Fernando de Herrera.

In Spain the practice and theory of the genre of biography has only recently trodden the path opened by English biographical criticism and thus developed comparatively late (Soria Ortega 1983, 534; Romera Castillo 1997, 16–17).¹ The publishing of theoretical reflections on biography of the sort practiced in England and France (*new biography*, *biographie moderne*, or *biografía literaria moderna*, according to Soria Ortega or, simply, *biografismo*, according to Manuel Pulido Mendoza) had to wait until the decade of the 1920s in Spain. It was in part boosted by the modernist popularity in the last two aforementioned countries. Indeed, the scarcity of Spanish biographies and critical studies prior to that decade contrasts with the early emergence of the genre in England. This is a fact confirmed by the meagre bibliography on biographical studies of the early modern period in the Spanish domain, generally bemoaned by Spanish scholars when discussing the production of biographical texts in the twentieth century (Pulido Mendoza 2007, chs. 1–3). It is, indeed, only during the first third of the twentieth century that we find biographies and critical reflections on the genre similar to those occurring in England and the rest of Europe. For Olmo Ibáñez (2015, 21), biography

¹ A significant clue to the different consideration afforded the biographical genre in England and in Spain is the fact that the term “biography” appeared in English as early as 1662 (Cremonesi 2013, 25), whereas the corresponding term in Spain had to wait until the nineteenth century to be documented by the *Corpus Diacrónico del Español*. See Pulido Mendoza (2007, 58–65) for a wider treatment of the topic.

experienced the most relevant theoretical re-formulation and practice of the genre at the hands of Eugenio d'Ors, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, and Gregorio Marañón. Before these authors, we do not really find many examples.² So we can reasonably ask whether the lack of *new biography* and the belated emergence of a theory of biography in Spain before the twentieth century point to a different textual and ideological tradition—one that, I contend, dates back to the early modern period.

The two most important influences on the development of early modern biographical writing, in England and in Spain respectively, are the two English *Lives* of Thomas More: William Roper's *The Life of Sir Thomas More, Knight* (1626) and Nicholas Harpsfield's *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas More, Knight* (1553–1558?), on the one hand, and the Spanish *Tomás Moro* (1592) by Fernando de Herrera, on the other. I will probe here into the ideological, discursive and textual factors which limited the biographical scope of Herrera as part of a divergent Spanish tradition already operating in the early modern period.

A common feature unites the personalities of More, Harpsfield, Herrera and Roper: they were Catholic humanists.³ As Francisco López Estrada (2001b, 17–18) explains, the humanist subject conciliated the *studia humanitatis*, i.e., the humanist vision in which being “Man” was emphatically treated as an end in itself, along with *divinitas*, i.e., Man viewing himself within his personal and collective Christian spirituality. This conciliation was not always easy. The inner conflict between *humanitas* and *divinitas* wavered between radical

² This situation moved Ortega y Gasset (1966, 588–592) to wonder about the reasons that prevented Spanish writers from dedicating their time to writing memoirs.

³ Harpsfield, together with Rastell, Sander, Herrera, and Arias Montano could be considered Catholic humanists inasmuch as they were versed in Latin, Greek and, sometimes, Hebrew, to serve a philological and ideological concern for the classics of antiquity, for biblical studies, and for the history of the Church Fathers. This, however, does not imply any kind of commitment to a secular worldview. Their orthodox humanism was linked to Erasmianism inasmuch as they entertained Erasmian ideas, some of which were questioned by the Council of Trent or persecuted by the Inquisition. However, neither humanism nor Erasmianism meant for them an open attitude towards religious freedom as evinced by the involvement of Roper and Harpsfield, as right-hand men of Cardinal Pole (an Erasmian and hammer of heretics himself), in the campaign of burning of Protestants during Mary's reign. For this aspect of their personalities and its relation with the two *Lives* of More, see Duffy (2009, 179–183 and *passim*). For More's position in this respect see the following note.

secularism, religious dogmatism, either of a Protestant or a Catholic kind, and a variable balance between both. Although More, Roper, Harpsfield, and Herrera shared this common profile of orthodox Catholic humanists, their personal integration of both aspects was differently nuanced, reflecting the contemporary development of events and the different scenarios that those events imposed on them. Thus, each man, even the same man in the case of More, represents an intrapersonal degree of maturation in the history of the difficult coexistence of humanism and religion. More in his youth (the More of *Utopia*, Plato, Cicero, and Lucian) represents a first attitude: the youthful Erasmian confidence in the possibility of consilience between *humanitas* and *divinitas* within a universal Catholic faith. The late 1520s and early 1530s, however, coinciding with More's official responsibilities and his demise (as the anti-Protestant polemicist of *Dialogue concerning heresies* or the ascetic author of *De Tristitia Christi*), represent a nuanced period in the deepening of More's Catholic faith. This second period saw his personal response to the disintegration of the socio-political status that had sustained his worldview.⁴

Roper and Harpsfield could be included in this second period. They still shared a certain Erasmian humanism (Trevor-Roper 1996, 20–21), although a major concern of theirs at this point was the martyrological dimension of the figure of More and how it might contribute to the restoration of the Catholic faith in their country. We know little of Roper's Erasmianism, as he shows no intellectual concern, for he was a practical man too busy with keeping his administrative and political posts as a committed Catholic under Mary and a discreet recusant under Elizabeth I. Nicholas Harpsfield, however, was an accomplished intellectual. He was perpetual fellow of New College and principal of White Hall in Oxford (Freeman 2004, vii–viii), canonist, theologian and historian. After becoming a priest, he exiled himself under the reign of Edward VI and came back to England under Mary Tudor. He became Archdeacon of Canterbury and a prebendary of St Paul's Cathedral, being instrumental to

⁴ See Guy (2000, 14–15) for an account of the biographers' view of the More of *Utopia* as a Protestant reformer *avant la lettre* and More the Lord Chancellor as a Counterreformer and persecutor of Protestants. It is difficult to ascertain how More felt regarding Erasmianism at the end of his life. He never disavowed his friendship with Erasmus, some of whose works had not yet been included in the Index of Forbidden Books by the Catholic authorities.

Cardinal Pole in his attempt to restore Catholicism and in the persecution of Protestants. On the accession of Elizabeth I, he refused to accept the new order and suffered incarceration in Fleet Prison for seven years, being released a year and a half before his death. During this time, he was generously supported by William Roper. It is noticeable that in their biographies Roper mentions Erasmus only once and Harpsfield mentions him repeatedly. Besides, the latter expressed his admiration for the Dutch humanist in the manuscript of his *Historia Anglicana Ecclesiastica*, written during his incarceration (Trevor-Roper 1996, 20 note). *Utopia*, similarly, goes unmentioned by Roper but discussed positively by Harpsfield.

The biographies by Nicholas Sander, Thomas Stapleton, “Ro. Ba.,” and Cresacre More,⁵ between 1579 and 1626, represent a new stylistic period, effected by the coming to the Continent of a new generation of ardent young exiles schooled in Pole’s and Mary’s church. As they moved into the wider world of Tridentine Counter-Reformation, they contributed their own Marian Counter-Reformation (Duffy 2009, 202), at a time of increasingly bitter religious conflict in Europe and a post-Tridentine attempt to reinstate Catholicism in England from abroad with the intervention of the Spanish superpower. In the group of descendants and devotees who kept the flame of More’s saintly life alive, “the simple personal narrative of William Roper became more and more a hagiography” as biographers “took over and re-worked each other’s material” (Trevor-Roper 1996, 17). Recollection of More’s humanism, so apparent in his Platonism, his Erasmianism and his *Utopia*, was effaced (Trevor-Roper 1996, 20–21) and his saintly orthodox side, highlighted. Thus, Stapleton’s pro-Spanish *Tres Thomae* devoted a whole section to Thomas More in the company of two long-accredited saints (Thomas the Apostle and Thomas Becket). He does not hide the humanist side of More and his friendship with Erasmus, though he does hold the latter responsible for having “so widely sown the accursed seed [of heresy]” (Stapleton 1966, 36). Neither does he deny the literary and moral value of *Utopia*. Sander, however, in *De origine ac progressu Schismatis Anglicani*, devotes several chapters of his

⁵ Cresacre More’s *The life and death of Sir Thomas Moore Lord high Chancellour of England* was printed around 1631, though it was probably written at least a decade earlier. *The Lyfe of Syr Thomas More, sometimes Lord Chancellor of England / by Ro. Ba.* remained in manuscript until its contemporary edition (1950).

martyrological sections to Thomas More.⁶ The texts by Sander and Stapleton soon became sources for the transference from an international Latin domain to a national Spanish one in Pedro de Ribadeneyra's *Historia eclesiástica del scisma del reino de Inglaterra* (1588–1595), which profited extensively from the two English exiles.⁷ On the other hand Alonso de Villegas' *Tercera parte del Flos Sanctorum* (1588) offers a more biographical and humanistic portrait of More than the one by Ribadeneyra, in part because Villegas took as two of his sources Erasmus' 1519 letter to von Hutten and the *Expositio fidelis* of 1535, though cautiously concealing them (Lillo Castañ 2021).⁸

In Spain, by 1592, these effacing biographies were the only likely sources to be allowed, given the political and social context after the uprooting of the Protestant foci in Valladolid and Seville⁹ and the general repression of Erasmianism. But in fact the construction of the myth of Thomas More within Spanish orthodoxy had started even earlier with shorter texts, some of which were closer to Herrera's Sevillian setting. Indeed, the events concerning More's life and, above all, his martyrdom, were very popular in the Iberian Peninsula (Herrero Quirós 1993, 118–119; López Estrada 1992; 1980; Vázquez de Prada 1989, 303–310, 317–322; Olivares Merino 2013a, 2013b, 2015;

⁶ Thomas Stapleton's *Tres Thomae* was published in 1588. As aptly stated by Trevor-Roper, he was "untouched by the Erasmianism of the previous generation" (1996, 12). Sander wrote his work sometime during the 1550s. It was continued and finished by Edward Rishon in 1558 and would be finally printed at Cologne in 1585. Obviously, as Guy (2000, 11) has shown, the full succession of the lives of More, taking as their point of departure Roper's biography, formed part of a campaign to construct the post-Tridentine image of More as a Catholic martyr and saint.

⁷ Much of the first two books of the *Historia* relies heavily on Stapleton, and on Sander for the chapter on Thomas More (López Estrada 2001b, 75; Weinreich 2017, XXVI).

⁸ Lillo Castañ provides an illuminating description and comparison of Villegas's, Ribadeneyra's and Herrera's treatments of More's life.

⁹ For the repression of Erasmianism see Bataillon (1998, ch. XIII, XIV) and Abellán (1982). Márquez Villanueva takes for granted the surviving Erasmianism of Herrera, "thorough, but not dogmatic" (2005, 188 and 190). However, López Estrada (2001b, 131, note 25) has pointed out, and Randel (1971, 125) has acknowledged, that Herrera seems to be critical of Erasmus, writing "and so much guilt deserved the wise men who idly looked aside from the danger with which that beast threatened the Roman Church" (my translation here and elsewhere). This passage was underlined by a contemporary anonymous reader (Herrera 2001, 131), which shows the special concern with the issue for Herrera's readership. As for Herrera's Sevillian coterie, see Coster 1908, Rodríguez Marín 1927, and López Bueno 1987.

Lillo Castañ 2018). Herrera, as a Latin scholar, might have had access to the Erasmian *Expositio Fidelis de Morte Thomae Mori*, which was also extensively disseminated throughout Europe (Marc'Hadour 2009, 30–31). But there was no lack of texts in Spanish for those who were not conversant in Latin. In the very year of More's execution, a letter in Spanish "sent from England by a Spanish merchant on the glorious death of Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of the Kingdom"¹⁰ appeared in London. It must have reached Spain very soon, for there are copies of it in the Archivo de Simancas and in the Real Academia de la Historia (García Hernán 2017, 276).

The aforementioned works were immensely popular¹¹ and no doubt familiar to Fernando de Herrera. Furthermore, there were other probable Sevillian hypertexts from which he profited: a poetical composition in six cantos by Cristóbal Tamariz of 1584 about the martyrs of the London Charterhouse (with no mention of More), and also an *Historia de los Mártires de la Cartuja de Inglaterra*, a hagiography in manuscript by Fray Alfonso de la Torre from the Carthusian monastery of *Nuestra Señora de la Cueva*, in which Thomas More figures in chapters XX and XXI (López Estrada 2001a, 165–168, and 2001b, 52).

All the texts mentioned above indicate that the myth of More that Herrera could possibly receive and elaborate on was the one pertaining to the nuanced maturity of More's life. This was a fully orthodox image for post-Tridentine Spain; nevertheless, although this image was orthodox enough the socio-political conditions of Spain demanded an intensification of the orthodox and anti-Protestant myth. To speak only of Herrera's immediate milieu, the traces of humanism and heterodoxy remaining in Seville in the 1590s could only appear as insinuations under a thick cloak of Catholic orthodoxy.

¹⁰ "Carta enviada de Inglaterra por un mercader español, de la muerte gloriosa del maestro Thomás Moro, Chancellor mayor del dicho reyno" (Burguillo López 2013, 74). Allegedly printed in London in 1535 (García Hernán 2017, 276), the "carta" is part of the dissemination of European documents in Latin and vernacular languages issued during that year and the following one. For a clarifying study of the "Carta" in its context and a reproduction of the same, see Herrero Quirós (1993). For the analysis and reproduction of two Chancellery accounts, or *relaciones* in Spanish, see Vázquez de Prada (1989, 317–324).

¹¹ There is a manuscript translation of Stapleton's work in the Biblioteca Nacional, MS 2773 (López Estrada 2001b, 74; Lillo Castañ 2021).

Fernando de Herrera himself was a man of the establishment. He had taken minor orders and was a beneficiary of the Church of San Andrés, although he also formed part of a small circle of intellectuals which included orthodox Catholic humanists such as Juan de Mal Lara, Juan de Arguijo, Francisco Medrano, Francisco de Medina, Francisco Pacheco, and Benito Arias Montano. All of them demonstrated as much secular humanism as could be allowed in Tridentine Spain at the end of the sixteenth century.¹²

These constraints considered, it is hardly surprising to discover that there is no mention whatsoever of *Utopia* in Herrera's *Tomás Moro*, though Mary Gaylord Randel (1971, 184–187), seconded by Francisco Márquez Villanueva (2005, 180), does find echoes of the work. It is impossible that Herrera and his fellow humanists in Seville had not had access to, or at least had heard of, this humanist fiction. Herrera himself must have known of its existence, for, as we have seen, it is discussed by Stapleton, one of his acknowledged sources. He must also have known of the 1518 Basel edition of *Utopia* and *Epigrammata* that Hernando Colón (1488–1539) possessed in his large library in Seville. In addition, in the Library of the University of Seville there is an edition of Thomas More's *Omnia Latina Opera* dating from 1566 which also might have influenced Herrera and which contains a copy of *Utopia*. And, finally, we must consider the fact that the Morean work had been translated into Spanish by the time of Herrera's writing.¹³ This absence of *Utopia* may well suggest the ideological limits met by Spanish intellectuals when approaching not just Protestant, but mere Erasmian, ideas. These limits are amply evinced by the vicissitudes of *Utopia*'s first translation, that of Vasco de Quiroga, Bishop of Michoacán in Mexico. He had read, translated and used More's work in his missional endeavor about 1530–1535 (Zavala 1937 and 1955, and 1977; Gómez Rivas 2018, 165–169; Lillo Castañ

¹² Today some critics claim Arias Montano to be an example, successfully concealing heterodoxy concerning his esoteric affiliation with the *Familia Charitatis*, but this idea is utterly rejected by the majority. See Cantera Burgos (1970), Reker (1973), Alcalá (1973, 1975, and 1998), and Morocho (1999, 255–256). Morocho (1999, 294) confirms that Herrera and Pacheco formed part of the Sevillian circle of friends of Arias Montano.

¹³ The first printed translation of *Utopia* into Spanish was by Jerónimo Antonio de Medinilla (1637), who was prompted by Quevedo (owner of a Latin copy). Recently, Lillo Castañ (2018, 2020a, and 2020b) has thoroughly studied an earlier manuscript translation, by Vasco de Quiroga, probably in the 1520's.

2018, 2020a, and 2020b), but about fifty years later the name of More was included in the Index of Forbidden Books by Vasco's nephew Gaspar de Quiroga, then General Inquisitor of Spain (López Estrada 1965, 291–292; Marques Villanueva 2005, 180).¹⁴ Herrera's treatment of More may well have been influenced, too, by the printed version of *De origine ac progressu Schismatis Anglicani* (1585), where the image of More is in line with post-Tridentine propaganda and the erasing of *Utopia* from the martyr's curriculum; this edition of Sander's manuscript was probably masterminded by Robert Persons. The relation of Persons with Spain and Seville is well-known. In 1592 he founded the English College of St Gregory as a Roman Catholic seminary in Seville, forging at that time a close relationship with its Cardinal-Archbishop Rodrigo de Castro (Burguillo 2013, 81–82). De Castro, in turn, was the dedicatee of the 1592 edition of *Tomás Moro*, which makes him a suitable intermediary between Herrera and Persons.

Herrera's *Tomás Moro* appeared, first in Seville in 1592 and later in Madrid in 1617. It is not a proper biography, the first indication of the change undergone in the genre being the dropping the word "life" from the title. In the *licencia* or approval for publication of 1592 by Juan Vázquez it is referred to as *El discurso de la vida de Tomás Moro*. Also in 1592, the Jesuit Pedro Fernández described it in the same way in the *censura*. Only in the *licencia* of 1617 by Hernando Vallejo is it called *Vida de Tomás Moro*.¹⁵ Furthermore, metatextual proof of the non-

¹⁴ The marginal comments of a copy of the 1548 Louvain edition of *Utopia* owned by Quevedo (Jones 1950b, 480–482) "indicate that he recognized the Erasman leanings of the document, and found it necessary to excuse the shortcomings of the book with respect to orthodox Catholicism by supposing that the oppressive situation in England had forced More to 'fingir' in order to be heard. There is no question that Herrera would have experienced similar misgivings particularly over More's controversial notions of religion" (Randel 1971, 174).

¹⁵ López Estrada calls it "a moral biography" (1996, 80) and later states rather daringly that "the book has been considered as one of the *modern* biographies" (2001b, 66–67) according to the taxonomy established by Soria Ortega (1978, 177), while Javier Burguillo López (2013, 82) characterizes it as "the embryo of the modern essay." I join a number of critics in disagreeing with both, as it is not an example of biography (as will be revealed from the Roper- Harpsfield's comparison); and it is not an essay either, at least according to the model for the genre established by Montaigne and Bacon. There is a general consensus that, although containing biographical matter, the work by Herrera cannot be considered a biography. Thus, Márquez Villanueva (2005, 179–180), acknowledging the problem of literary classification, includes it within the oratorial-

biographical nature of the text is provided by Herrera himself. He openly declared that he would not deal with aspects of Thomas More's life and works already treated by learned men (Herrera 2001, 136), nor did he provide his sources. Randel (1971, 117) has remarked that "what Herrera promises is no simple biographical narrative." Instead, what Herrera offers are details perfunctorily taken without citation from Sander and Stapleton (Herrera 2001, 154-157, 159-161).

The work could be classified indeed as a very brief "discourse" in the sense understood by the Spaniards of the time or, more specifically, by Fernando de Herrera himself. A "*Discurso*" meant for Herrera a written prose dissertation of moderate length, which informs the reader about a given subject, in which the author can share his own opinion (López Estrada 2001b, 62). Typically, as explained by López Estrada (2001b, 64-65), this type of genre follows the classical Aristotelian structure in four parts much in line with Jesuitical religious preaching (Coello 2007, 116-123): exordium, containing the demonstration or *propositio* (124-127); narration, of More's exemplary deeds (127-162); argumentation, with the ensuing *confutatio* or *refutation* (162-168), and conclusion or *peroration* (168). It follows then that it was the *licencia* of 1592 that provided the most suitable genre description.

Three reasons can be identified to explain Herrera's approach. The first derives from the discursive conventions of the Spanish medieval biographical tradition, which contributed to hampering the emergence of the Roper and Harpsfield type of nascent biographies. As José Luis Romero (1944) has pointed out, already in the fifteenth century a distinctive peculiarity of Spanish biographical texts was the adherence to ideal archetypes almost exclusively represented by either the knight or the clergyman. This feature goes hand in hand with "the presence of a systematic doctrine looming in the historical background" and "the tendency to summarize in a categorical formula the value of the personage, quite characteristic of the didactic nature of the biography and history of this period" and with "the

moral genre, and calls it an *oratio*. Lillo Castañ (2021) calls it "a kind of biographical narrative with a moralizing aim," and insists later on this idea, citing in addition the descriptions given by Jones (1950a), Randel (1971), or Neumeister (2009): "meditation," "semihumanist sermon," "exemplary life," "heterogeneous biography [...], which lies somewhere between history and hagiography," "memorably," etc. My own position will be apparent from this essay.

tendency to intercalate a moralizing excursus on the value of each episode" (Romero 1944, 121–122). As a result, the typical biographical Spanish (or rather Castilian) form is a characteristic type of portrait called *semblanza* or *retrato de claros varones* (sketch or portrait of illustrious men) in their two canonical forms, either as noblemen or clerics. The reason for this peculiarity of the Spanish biographical texts, Romero tells us, is to be found in the yielding of the narrative structures of the Renaissance biography originating in Italy to the spiritual and historical contents of Spanish social life of the late Middle Ages. The Spanish biographers of the time were not interested in exploring the individual life of the characters; rather, their work served to reflect the strict regulation of the estates.

A second reason is religion, more and more important as the sixteenth century advanced. Eugenio Gallego (qtd. in Palomo 1987, 277) has suggested that perhaps the paucity of authors of importance devoted to biography in Spain is due to the intolerantly theological organization of the country at that time. The early opening of minds towards *humanitas* brought about by Erasmianism was, in the later sixteenth century, effectively replaced by a general suspicion of any kind of humanist inquiry that might minimally clash with Catholic dogma. This ran parallel to an impassioned defense of preconceptions judged unquestionable, boosted by the emotional approach of the dominant religious preaching (*oratoria sacra*).¹⁶ This is a phenomenon which did not catch on in England, where early Erasmianism survived among pre-Tridentine Catholic humanists, and later absorbed into Anglicanism's "middle road." As a consequence, without the handicap of Spanish tradition and national implementation of the Counter-Reformation, in England the new treatment of biography coming from Renaissance Italy could be received, evolve, and be

¹⁶ Spaniards at the time saw themselves as chosen by God to defend the true faith. This could hardly be reconciled with the defeat of the Armada in 1588 (Weinreich 2017, 39–42; Márquez Villanueva, 187) and the reaction was a resort to, and an insistence on, the exhortative mode at the expense of the expository one. The discursive and textual consequences of this providentialism filter out into the historiographical conception of Ribadeneyra (Weinreich 2017, 27–31, 43–47, 80) and in Herrera's historical corpus (Randel 1971, 80–92), including *Tomás Moro* (Randel 159–170; Márquez Villanueva 2005, 185–187). It is indicative of Ribadeneyra's and Herrera's exhortative style that both end their respective works with a peroration (unpublished in the case of the former, see Weinreich 2017, 38) much in the sense listed by the *OED*: "a rhetorical conclusion, esp. one intended to rouse the audience" (*s.v.*).

propelled further into the future in a line of continuance where Roper and Harpsfield were not dissonant notes.

A third factor is textual convention. In the Spanish tradition reaching Herrera, texts were still organized in accord with Aristotelian scholastic models. Elsewhere in Europe, the humanist innovations introduced by Rodolphus Agricola (1444–1485) and, above all, by Peter Ramus (1515–1572), decisively changed the approach to education, in general, and to textual organization, in particular. In the long run Ramus' ideas would be conducive to the Puritan theology, and to the new learning promoted by such second-generation English humanists as Roger Ascham and by forerunners of the modern scientific method heralded by Roger Bacon, Gabriel Harvey, or René Descartes. In Spain, however, Ramism, despite a rich presence during the first half of the sixteenth century, was rooted out after 1550 (to a great extent due to suspicion of heresy) and displaced by the new sacred rhetoric promoted by the Jesuits. In England, however, Ramism penetrated the university curriculum during the Protestant Reformation,¹⁷ while in Spain it never really became a part of the university curriculum and was finally suppressed by the Inquisition (Olmos Gómez 2007 and Ramis Barceló 2015). The extinction of Ramism in Spain curtailed the appearance of the essay of the type cultivated by Bacon or Montaigne and the English tradition of biography which subsequently flourished with Walton, Johnson, or Boswell.

As consequence, the style of *Tomás Moro* is argumentative rather than expository. Herrera makes liberal use of evaluative terms, value judgements, suasive reasoning and unwarranted suppositions. Hence, *Tomás Moro* should be placed in the discursive tradition of the *claros varones* and the post-Tridentine aftermath of epic oratory which produced a mode of emplotment completely different from that of Roper and Harpsfield.¹⁸

¹⁷ "The Royal Injunctions given to Cambridge by Henry VIII in 1535 prescribed that students in arts should read him [Agricola] together with Aristotles, Trapezuntius, and Melanchthon, instead of the 'frivolous questions and obscure glosses of Scotus, Burleigh, Anthony Trombet, Bricot, Bruliferious, etc.'" (Ong 1983, 94, citing C. W. Spitz). We may also remember the early attitude of More, Colet, Linacre, and Erasmus against the scholasticism of Oxford and Cambridge (Ackroyd 1999, 70–77, 387).

¹⁸ As is typical of Herrera's persuasive manner, he does not go straight from the narration to the argumentation. Instead, he displays six transitional paragraphs (162–

The emplotment of Roper and Harpsfield, shows a predominantly narrative quality and focuses on events. This was what moved Lord Acton to praise the latter “for the candor and moderation of his numerous historical works” and to present Harpsfield as “one of the earliest ecclesiastical writers whose mind fell naturally into an historical attitude, and with whom religious controversy resolves itself into the discussion of fact” (Lord Acton as quoted in Chambers 1935, 33). The accounts of both Roper and Harpsfield deal much more straightforwardly with events, using broad thematic units dealing with biographical vicissitudes. Reynolds’ cross-headings list 25 in Roper and 52 in Harpsfield. Thus, as has been pointed out by Harold Nicolson (1933, 137), the books of Roper “though marred by vestiges of their commemorative and didactic heredity, are indications that psychological curiosity – the desire, that is, to learn a man’s character rather than his exploits—still existed.” Although there are hagiographic and subjective judgements interwoven, all in all the predominant modes of discourse in both English authors is the narrative one. This is possibly one of the features which made Raymond Wilson Chambers (1935, 24) feature Roper’s account as “what is probably the most perfect little biography in the English language,” while affirming of Harpsfield’s that “it is the first formal biography in the English language” (1935, 31) and that he “is the first to compile a complete biography in English” (1935, 32).¹⁹ Of much the same opinion is de Silva (2001, xii-xiii), who has highly praised Roper’s *The Life of Sir Thomas More* (2001, xxvii-xxxi). Even Eamon Duffy, when putting rightly the *Lives* within the context of the anti-protestant propaganda project orchestrated around the publication of More’s *English Works* by his nephew William Rastell under the aegis of Cardinal Reginald Pole (2009, 179-187), acknowledges that “Harpsfield’s book was emphatically a product of the Cardinal’s circle, refracting in the gentler form of biography Pole’s stern view of

165) in which he gives a factual account of his own assumption about the collective feelings of the English people as essentially a collective inner monologue. By presenting his information as factual, he confirms previous prejudices intended to appeal to a fervent Catholic audience, a prime example of the necessity of the ruling classes to persuade, and of the ruled to be persuaded in Baroque society (Maravall 1975, 165-166).

¹⁹ But Nicolson (1933, 29), much more exacting about what he calls “impure” and “pure” biography, disagrees: “the book is generally (and somewhat misleadingly) referred to as the first English biography. It would be more accurate to describe it as the first sustained narrative of an individual’s life written in the English language.”

the treason of the clerks" (185); he defines it as "the only book written by a Marian cleric that can still be read with unalloyed pleasure today" (185). To this, Herrera's predominant modes of exposition and argumentation present a stark contrast.

It should be added that Harpsfield's account of More is clearly complying with one of the demands of modern biographical theory which is absolutely missing in Herrera: the corrective impulse. Ira Nadel (1984, 177) claims that as early as 1666 this was already articulated in Izaak Walton's introduction to the life of Richard Hooker. For me, however, Nicholas Harpsfield exemplified this drive a century before. Following Roper's text as a kind of template, Harpsfield corrects him in many places, expands largely (more than double), and introduces relevant new information of biographical interest. The main contributions by Harpsfield are the inclusion of appropriate contemporary written references to More (from Erasmus's letters among others), excerpts of More's writings, and, finally, the account of More's trial. Documentarily (see above and Reynolds 1963, v and ix), we know that Nicholas Roper had given him this assignment.

Herrera, however, does not present any corrective intention. He does not presume to know any first-hand or documentary data about the life of Thomas More with which to enlarge, nuance or correct previous texts. Furthermore, he twice acknowledges that he lacks first-hand knowledge, and that his interest lies, rather, in culling and summarizing the works of others in order to construct his own argument (Herrera 2001, 136, 137).

Herrera overtly shows that he is not as interested in the personal life of Thomas More as he is in the hagiographic interpretation of More's life as an international myth and martyr. *Tomás Moro* is for him more than a metaphor; he is an archetype. Herrera's main method is the synecdoche, for he selects only one aspect of the personality of his subject as standing for the whole. Hence, in contradistinction to his English counterparts, he does not provide any information of his personal or emotional life (Randel 1971, 119 and 126). Moreover, there is not in Herrera the unavoidable confrontation between the private life of the man and the myth already created.²⁰ As Nadel says, "the

²⁰ There is no denying that Roper and Harpsfield were constructing an image of More as part of their lobbying for his recognition as a martyr and saint by the Catholic Church

division between public and private self separates myth and fact – but one always unites with the other” (1984, 176). They constitute two sides of the same coin. These two facets have a clear presence in Roper and Harpsfield, each of whom both mythologizes and demythologizes More. Roper had presented the more familiar and personal aspects of his father-in-law already, and Harpsfield preserved them while expanding on More’s public images. They both have kept the many anecdotes dealing with the festive personality of More. Herrera, however, has almost completely ignored such details beyond vague allusions possibly originating in Sander (López Estrada 2001b, 153).²¹ As a consequence, Roper’s and, above all, Harpsfield’s, works can claim their status as biographies in line with the historical development of the genre in the ensuing centuries, even if we take into account their hagiographic intention. Herrera, on the other hand, is only interested in More as a symbol: the few details he supplies concerning his personality always contain a symbolic reverberation. Ultimately, Herrera’s work is not only a hagiographic piece, but a propagandistic one, based on argumentation and persuasion. This is consistent with the line of thought underlying Tridentine and Jesuit recommendations for polemics prevalent in Herrera’s Spain.

However, Herrera does show some secular facets and opinions in line with his own Catholic humanism. His stoicism is apparent in his whole opus and also observable in *Tomás Moro*, whose civil courage and exemplarity is not left out (Lillo Castañ 2021). Indeed, Herrera puts the myth of Thomas More to the service of his general and long-asserted topic of the virtuous and courageous men of ancient times set against the dissolute and weak men of his own. In this respect, Herrera does not restrict the significance of his symbolism to the orthodox defense of the Catholic faith, but also deals with topics which are constant leitmotifs in his historical output. These, as enumerated by Randel (1971), are (1) the exemplary conception of

(Guy 2000, 17). But the rhetorical strategy displayed is not as blatant as in the hagiographic or martyrological tradition. This rhetorical strategy is thus assimilated into the Western development of biography leading to the so-called “new biography.”

²¹ “The modesty and softness of his customs were in equal comparison with the integrity and measure of his life and the festivity and grace of his wit [...]” (Herrera 2001, 128–129).

history;²² (2) divine providence and the concept of heroism; (3) the individual struggle of the Spanish or Christian hero against overwhelming circumstances; (4) and the contrast between the flourishing of virtue in antiquity and its contemporary decay.

Thus, the moralizing and exemplary intention is present in both works, but they appear in a subtler, more diluted form in Harpsfield. His biography, much longer than the brief essay by Herrera, covers many dimensions of the figure of Thomas More, which E. E. Reynold, the editor of the 1963 edition, has been able to group the different aspects of More's personality according to neat cross-headings. We obtain thus a polyhedral personality which presents More, the man, from different perspectives. In Harpsfield's approach More's value as a model of religious and civil honesty is more implicitly suggested than overtly stressed. Herrera, in contrast, makes a stringent reduction of the aspects of More's life, the better to render it an instrument to convey the point of view he wants to demonstrate, namely, the decay of virtue and the preponderance of vice in modern times in contrast with a golden era in which resolute men were endowed with both religious and civil virtues. As we have seen, this point of view with its related topics has been conditioned by Herrera's ideological, discursive and textual horizon. Indeed, his readership seems to share it: underlining by an anonymous reader in the R-1428 edition in the Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid covers only Herrera's commentaries. The reader seems to take little interest in the historical facts of More's biography. Perhaps they were well-known to him/her, or perhaps he/she assumed that they did not count for his/her personal experience (López Estrada 2001b, 84–87); but no less likely this response suggests contemporary acceptance of the suasion of Herrera's *discurso*.

The comparison of the emplotments and narrative techniques of Roper and Harpsfield with Herrera's clearly reveals up to what point the former venture into the domain of biography and how the latter steers far from it. In Roper's text, as noted above, there are 25 main thematic nuclei; in Harpsfield's, there are 52. In both cases these are unfolded with a remarkable richness of details and leisure of

²² The conception of history by Herrera is akin to the epic, too; a kind of epic in prose (Márquez Villanueva 2005, 169–172). He is not far from the then-current conception of history as exemplified by Ribadeneyra (Weinreich 2017, 75–86).

deployment. As Chambers (1935, 32) has aptly commented referring to Harpfield's *Life* (and for that matter to Roper's), it "has a finished design and a power of arranging material which is noteworthy." In Herrera's, in contrast, I have distinguished up to 47 thematic nuclei in total, of which only three deal with factual pieces of material as found in the English biographers. This is what has allowed López Estrada to group Herrera's text in his edition into three main sections.²³ Besides, Herrera, after cursorily dealing with the birth and early life of More, focuses on the two culminating events in his life as a saint:²⁴ his persecution and his martyrdom. In this way, Herrera complies with the demands of hagiography, the chronicles, and *semblanzas de claros varones* [sketch or portrait of illustrious men], a quasi-biographical mode common in Spanish biographical works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Here the interest does not lie in the complete life of the biographees, but rather in the achievement that made them exemplary. It is also exemplified in the very social milieu of Herrera, for his portrait, both textual and pictorial, was written and drawn by Francisco Pacheco in his *Libro de descripción de verdaderos retratos de ilustres y memorables varones escrito y dibujado* (1599).²⁵

In his attempt to write a sketch of *semblanza* of Thomas More, Herrera recurrently deals with the model aspects of his personality: his mildness, integrity and alacrity (128–129), his exemplary life (132–134) and marvelous behavior as a magistrate, his intellectual fight against heresy (148), his fortitude, constancy, and religiosity in countering royal coercion (135–136), his readiness for martyrdom and

²³ These are the titles of the sections: 1. In a time when virtue was uncommon, Herrera writes *Tomás Moro* in memory of a virtuous man. 2. More turns away from the King when the issue of the divorce of Queen Catherine is raised. 3. Imprisonment, trial, and martyrdom of More (López Estrada 2001b, my translation).

²⁴ It is also worth remembering that, as already mentioned, in the Spanish tradition of the *semblanza* or *retrato de claros varones*, the only two characters who deserve attention are the nobleman and the saint and that, "even before the sheer physical portrait, it seems fundamental to the biographer to point out the ancestry of the character" (Romero 1944, 118). This justifies Herrera's choice of portraying More and his initial obsession with justifying More's lineage: "Thomas More was born in the most noble city of London [...]. His father was John More, a man of a more honest than noble lineage" (Herrera 2001, 128).

²⁵ Francisco Pacheco was both Velázquez' painting teacher and his father-in-law. He was nephew to the Francisco Pacheco who was a member of Herrera's coterie.

acceptance of his death sentence with a festive spirit (153), and his ardent desire and humble heart while waiting for his trial (153–154).

Yet Herrera does not resort to these *vignettes* for their own interest. They serve him as the exemplary support to persuasively ground his three cherished themes:

- Contemporary prevalence of vice versus virtue. This is his most important and recurrent theme. It appears tightly interwoven with the other two themes, receiving support from them and also giving them coherence. This is why they frequently overlap. The example of Thomas More, Herrera suggests, is most valuable, because it shows to his contemporaries that virtue can still be practiced, even when the majority of men, especially those in high posts, yield to the tyranny of princes.

- How a counsellor should be (*Cómo ha de ser el privado*). After a brief delineation of Thomas More's ancestry and works, Herrera discusses the highest point of his career, his rise to the dignity of Lord Chancellor (132), and unleashes another favorite topic: his honesty, impartiality, efficiency, affability and detachment as a magistrate (132–133). In this way, Herrera links More's private and public virtues with his own preoccupations. A clear example of his concern with this topic can be seen on pages 138 and 140–142. In the former, apropos Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon, Herrera raises the theme of how the counsellors of princes should be and sends a strong warning on a related subtheme: the danger posed by flatterers, especially when they spur the whims of kings.

The issue of the counsellors is a subsidiary concern to the general thesis of vice and virtue in a degenerate age. It was, however, highly relevant for Herrera, since the nature and function of the favorite or *valido* was a question, which became a public concern during the reigns of Philip III and Philip IV. Quevedo gave fitting voice to this subject in his essay *Discurso de las privanzas*, (ca. 1606–1608) and in his play *Cómo ha de ser el privado* (1629?). Herrera is interested in More's example as an efficient and honest civil servant as presented in Harpsfield's biography. The theme probably reached him through Sander and through the Erasmian *Expositio Fidelis* (Jones 1950a: 436–438; López Estrada 2001b, 155 note). Herrera emphasizes honesty as one of More's outstanding social virtues, a factor for which he was still remembered by Londoners half a century after his martyrdom (Chambers 1935, 47).

Fittingly this civic topic is put to the service of a religious one: Catholicism versus heresy. More's opposition to tyranny is

presented as justification for rebellion and tyrannicide, which would soon be authorized theologically in Juan de Mariana's *De rege et regis institutione* (1599). Herrera appears reluctant, in principle, to condone rebelling against a prince (Herrera, 2001, 147), but he could accept it theoretically to prevent the alteration of the Catholic faith (147, 165–166).

– Orthodox Catholicism versus heresy. Only the defense of orthodox Catholicism could justify such an immense crime as the rebellion against a king. Catholicism constitutes the overtly and pervasive topic closely interwoven with the preceding ones. Herrera stops just short of declaring More a saint, strongly implying it by placing his attitude and actions close to saints and their saintly actions (154–155). As we have seen, this is what Stapleton and Sander had done at the macro-textual level in their endeavor to canonize More.

In conclusion, while one can assert the impossibility of identifying Herrera's work as an antecedent for the *new biography* by Spanish Catholic writers, the same cannot be said for the English Catholic biographers Roper and Harpsfield, even if they form part of the early Counter-Reformation project promoted by Cardinal Reginald Pole in England during the Marian period (Duffy 2009). In Spain, the slower emergence of modern biographical theory was due to the restrictions imposed by the ideological horizon created by both the national and international evolution and transmission of the myth, by the specific form of Spanish Counter-Reformation, and by the prevalent discursive and textual tradition that metamorphosed it on its Spanish reception. Herrera draws from the themes present implicitly in the biographical narration of his English counterparts (More's moral integrity, exemplary character, and quasi-saintly status) as a base to argue for his own explicit thematic concerns in such a way that *Tomás Moro* cannot be considered a biography in the sense in which the genre ultimately evolved in the modernist and postmodernist Western World. This is a fact amply highlighted by Royston Jones, Randel, López Estrada, Sebastian Neumeister, and Víctor Lillo Castañ. Instead of dealing steadily with facts, Herrera constantly wavers, as was customary in the Spanish genre of life writing and religious epic, between a few specific, momentous events in the life of More, and the political and moral reflections which Herrera intercalates on every possible occasion (Lillo Castañ 2021). He constitutes therefore one of many early examples of the restrictions to the emergence and

development of the modern concept of biography in early modern Spain.

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How to cite this article:

García García, Luciano. "From *Lives* to *Discurso* in the biographies of Thomas More: Roper, Harpsfield and Herrera." *SEDERI* 31 (2021): 7–30.

<https://doi.org/10.34136/sederi.2021.1>

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Submission: 23/04/2021

Acceptance: 03/06/2021