

**THOMAS MORE'S PORTRAYAL IN A TWENTIETH-CENTURY  
TRANSLATION OF *UTOPIA***

PRESENTANDO A THOMAS MORE EN UNA TRADUCCIÓN DE  
*UTOPIA* DEL SIGLO XX<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract**

Ramón Esquerra i Clivillés (1909-1938), a Spanish intellectual born and raised in Barcelona, published in 1937 *Utopia (El Estado Perfecto)*, a translation of *Utopia* (1516) by Thomas More. The translator prepared a large prologue in which he minutely details the life and personality of the humanist and introduces *Utopia* and its reception in Spain. As a result, this illuminating introductory section becomes a brief piece of literary criticism. The way More is presented and how Esquerra emphasizes some of his most personal features creates a particular image of the humanist: that of a saint. The information shown was carefully chosen by the translator, serving from of More's latest published biographies to construct a useful context for the reader.

**Keywords:** Thomas More, Ramón Esquerra, *Utopia*, Spanish translation, the twentieth century.

**Resumen**

Ramón Esquerra i Clivillés (1909-1938) fue un intelectual barcelonés que publicó en 1937 *Utopia (El Estado Perfecto)*, una traducción de la *Utopia* (1516) de Thomas More. Esquerra aprovecha el prólogo para presentar extensivamente la vida del Canciller, cómo surge *Utopia* y su recepción en España y Europa, convirtiéndose en una breve pieza de crítica literaria. Curiosamente, la forma en la que el catalán presenta a More no es cualquiera, sino que realza todas sus

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virtudes, recordando a la ejemplaridad de un santo. La información que aquí presenta el traductor está seleccionada meticulosamente, no solo para acercar al lector a la obra, utilizando algunas de las últimas biografías publicadas del humanista.

**Palabras clave:** Tomás Moro, Ramón Esquerra, *Utopía*, traducción española, siglo XX.

## 1. Introduction

In 1937, a Spanish translation of Thomas More's *Utopia* with the title *Utopia (El Estado Perfecto)* was published in Barcelona by Ramón Esquerra i Clivillés (1909-1938). By that time, the only existing Spanish rendering of the text was *La Utopia de Thomas Moro*, translated by the Castilian courtier Gerónimo de Medinilla (c.1590- c.1650) and printed in Córdoba in 1637. In the seventeenth century, the image of the humanist was not far from the one drawn in the 1930s by the Spaniard—always minding the particularities of each period—. Medinilla, together with the *Siglo de Oro* author Francisco de Quevedo, who supported the translation and therefore participated in its edition, elevated Thomas More's virtues and martyrdom. The former defined the Chancellor's death as pious and pointed out the flawless representation of the state of Utopia (*La Utopia*, f. IIIv). The latter, an open and devoted admirer of the humanist, deemed his life exemplary and glorious (*La Utopia*, f. Xv). Definitely, More's witness and sanctity did not remain unmentioned in the paratexts—according to Gérard Genette's terminology, those elements that mediate “between the world of publishing and the world of the text” (xvii)—of this first Spanish translation of *Utopia*.

As this paper will present, Esquerra seems to share with them an immaculate view of Thomas More. However, the way of expressing it is not either explicit or literal. He takes advantage of the prologue to enhance the figure of the English humanist but in the form and content of a piece of literary criticism. While it provides the reader with factual information and secondary voices, it also aims to create a positive image of the English before looking at *Utopia*. Because of its laudatory nature, this could have been influenced by the canonization of Thomas More in 1935, officially becoming saint of the Catholic Church after being executed. For that reason, this essay will examine the description of the Chancellor and see if it fits any kind of religious interest after it. Besides, it will examine the reason for the translator to include this prologue and will briefly revise the reception of the work after its publication in 1937.

## 2. The translator

Ramón Esquerra was born in Barcelona. He worked as a translator, literary critic, journalist and French teacher throughout his life, being educated as a Christian. When he was young, he had an intense curiosity about foreign literatures. In fact, he was very good at languages, especially French, Latin and English. After finishing a degree in Law, he decided to study Arts and Philosophy at the University of Barcelona, graduating in 1933. Four years later, in 1937, he obtained a PhD in Modern Philology. Although the first proposed topic for his doctoral research was connected with the study of the Jesuit Baltasar Gracián and Quevedo, he reconsidered his decision and wrote the thesis dissertation “*El Artista, revista romántica Española (1835-1836)*.” His educational background coincided in time with the *Noucentisme*, a Catalan cultural movement born at the beginning of the twentieth century. This wished to elevate the use of the Catalan language and to promote Catalan literature, considering the medieval and humanist principles presented in *l'edat mitjana*. Along with the exponential growth of Spanish editorial industry, the different cultural movements flowing at that time could have influenced his work. Also, his political concerns about the national movements and totalitarian states on the rise in Europe during the interwar period could have been key to interpret his writings (Molla, *Ramon Esquerra (1909-1938?)* 29-32).

Esquerra's works are classified into the following major groups: translations, literary criticism and journal articles. As for translation, he rendered nine texts, six into Catalan and three into Spanish. These were *L'Esmena de Jimmy Valentine* (1932) by O'Henry; *El Rector de Cucunya* (1932) by Alphonse Daudet; *Amfitrió 38* (1934) by Jean Giraudoux; three short stories by Gustave Flaubert compiled in the work *Tres Contes* (1936); *Una Avantguarda del Progress* (1936) by Joseph Conrad; *Dijous Sant* (1936) by François Mauriac; *Utopía (El Estado Perfecto)* (1937) by Thomas More; *Dos o Tres Gracias* (1938) by Aldous Huxley; and *Intermezzo* (1938) by Jean Giraudoux (Molla, *Ramon Esquerra (1909-1938?)* 171-80). The original languages of all these compositions were English and French, except for Thomas More's *Utopia*, which was Latin. This fact exemplifies the importance these two languages had in his professional career and also that he was updated on the latest literary trends flowing through the continent. Some of his translations were just published just few years after the original ones saw the light, for example, Giraudoux's *Intermezzo* (1933) and Huxley's *Two or Three Graces* (1926).

Esquerra wrote around five hundred and sixty articles, most of them dealing with literary theory. As aforementioned, his theoretical background was particularly influenced by *Noucentisme* as well as the French model of

comparativism once lead by the scholars Paul van Tieghem and Fernand Baldensperger (Molla, *Ramon Esquerra comparatista* 147). Inspired by these movements, he published essays and articles from 1932 up to 1938 in journals like *Criterion*, *Ginesta*, *El Matí*, *La Publicitat*, *La Veu de Catalunya*, *Mirador* or *La Vida Literaria*. His most recurrent thematic fields were literary theory, the current events in Catalonia, the emerging artistic trends, and the European conscience. Thus, he dealt with the work of many contemporary thinkers and intellectuals from Barcelona; reviewed many of the latest books published in Europe, specifically, English novels; proposed a reevaluation of Catalan culture based on the study of classic works and the promotion of new Catalan authors; and shared his critical reflection on the flourishing film industry. Some of his most iconic publications were “Shakespeare a Catalunya,” “Consideración de la novela inglesa actual” and “El Premio Nobel 1938, Roger Martin du Gard.” With regard to Esquerra’s profile as literary critic, he was particularly interested in comparative literature. Consequently, writings as the following ones show the application of French methodology to this field of study: *Lectures europees* (1936), “Notes sur la fortune de Lope de Vega en France pendant le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” “Juicios de Saint-Évremond sobre España y la literatura Española,” “Stendhal en España. 1835-1935,” *Shakespeare a Catalunya* (1937), three volumes of *Iniciación a la literatura* (1937), *Vocabulario literario* (1938), “Mointagne et Quevedo,” “Victor Hugo en España” and some texts dealing with humanism. Unfortunately, Esquerra disappeared after the *Batalla del Ebro* in 1938 at the age of 29 years yet to develop many literary ideas (Molla, *Ramon Esquerra (1909-1928?)* 170-83).

### 3. The construction of the work

*Utopia (El Estado Perfecto)* is clearly divided into two sections: the preface and the text of *Utopia*. The former is made up of six chapters, which serve as a general (and critical) presentation of Thomas More and his literary influence. The information gathered is relevant for the reader because it gets closer to the context of the text and the translator’s intention behind his work. In this case, it was written by the translator himself, as clarified in the final chapter of the preface. Here, he refers to some essential works authored by experts on the field: the biographies *Le Bienheureux Thomas More* by Henri Brémont (Paris, 1904), *Thomas More* by Daniel Sargent (French translation, Paris, 1935), and *Thomas More* by R.W. Chambers (London, 1935); the specific works *Thomas Morus und seine Utopie* by Karl Kautsky (Stuttgart, 1888), *Thomas Morus et les utopistes de la Renaissance* by M. E. Dermeng (Paris, 1927), *Sir Thomas Morus and his Utopia* by G. Dudock (Amsterdam, 1923), *L’essor de la Philosophie Politique*

*au XVIe siècle* by Pierre Mesnard (Paris, 1936); and other Latin versions of *Utopia* edited by Victor Michels and Theobald Ziegler (Berlin, 1895) and by J. H. Lupton (Oxford, 1895)—in German and in English, respectively—. Thus, throughout the different sections, many direct quotes or indirect translations taken from these sources appear. After observing the number of references in detail, Sargent's text is precisely central for the times mentioned. However, Esquerra clarifies that Chambers's work had actually made the most substantial contribution: "ha dado la obra definitiva sobre el tema" (*Utopia* 49). What is seen in the preface is that the translator is continuously combining sources, sometimes paraphrasing the content as if he simply wanted to detail few aspects of More's life, personality or ideology, and other times pasting full paragraphs from the original reference. Because the preface is organized in thematic units, the task of identifying when each source has been introduced is attainable due to references and the fact that he has provided literal translations of certain fragments of these sources. It was twice harder for Esquerra to bring this material to his edition: not only did he have to carry out some research on the topic and read appropriate sources, but, on some occasions, also to translate them back into Spanish for the sake of the reader. The original languages of these texts were principally French, English and German, and in his years working in the publishing industry he had already used those languages in other published translations.

In this particular case, he translates *Utopia* using the English edition. *The Utopia of Sir Thomas More* was published in 1895 at Clarendon Press in Oxford, and it offered the original text in Latin—the edition printed in Basel in March 1518—and the English version, more concretely, the complete translation made by Ralph Robinson in 1551. The former was released when Thomas More was forty years old, making it the fourth printing done while he was alive. This edition was actually "the last edition in which More is likely to have had a direct hand" (Surtz and Hexter clxxxvii), and this fact could have determined Esquerra's decision on using this source text. Lupton deals with the text in two different languages at the same time and preserves all the paratexts found in their original versions. However, Esquerra did not decide to include all the paratextual elements contained in those first editions, but just left the letter from Erasmus to Peter Gilles. Although the rest of letters were excluded, the translator decided to attach one new element to his edition: the "Noticia, Juicio y Recomendación de la Utopia y de Thomas Moro" by Francisco de Quevedo, included within Medinilla's *La Utopia de Thomas Moro* (1637). The reasons for this inclusion could be the admiration of the Catalan intellectual for the writer—captured in the preface—as well as to offer other (positive) opinions on Thomas More, which might coincide with his own. In relation to the formality of the translation, it has

a critical apparatus incorporated in Book I and Book II made up of 96 footnotes. However, after looking at Lupton's edition, it seems that these were not originally written by Esquerra but directly translated and shortened from the 1875 edition's critical apparatus.

As aforementioned, Esquerra edited several manuals on literature, with which he contributed to different areas of literary studies along with papers and articles. His profound dedication to literature is easily perceptible in the number of writings released. Focusing on the preface of this text, Esquerra again reflected on literature and his author, being his perspective towards Thomas More revealed. This action is not casual, since those biographical and literary details seem to be designed to help the reader acquire background knowledge before reading the text. The preface of his work *Iniciación a la Literatura* (1938)—written by himself—sheds light on this idea. His view is that literary works should be studied together with the social and historical circumstances of its time, that is, literary works are cultural products endowed with historical meanings. Esquerra notes the French literary critic Hippotyle Taine to develop this theory:

Intuyó, pues, el papel importantísimo de la relación entre la obra y el ambiente en que fue engendrada, pero consideró la cuestión de las relaciones entre la obra y la sociedad solamente como la posibilidad de explicar la una por la otra en un momento determinado. A su concepción estática se añade modernamente el concepto dinámico de la evolución cultural. Por eso, y aún más en Taine, hoy la relación entre historia literaria e historia de las ideas se hace más íntima, y dificulta, hasta hacerla casi imposible, su separación. (*Iniciación* 14)

Following this proposal clearly influenced by Historical Criticism, the data introduced in *Utopia (El Estado Perfecto)* shows the translator's intention to make the audience comprehend *Utopia* within a very specific context, the same which determined Thomas More's life and his literary piece.

#### **4. The work: Utopia (El Estado Perfecto)**

Having said that, the preface has the following sections: “Retrato del Canciller,” “Un Retrato de Holbein,” “Nace Utopia,” “Bajo el Signo de Platón,” “Fortuna Hispánica de la Utopia” and “Bibliografía.” This paper will focus on the two first chapters, as they permanently deal with the description of the humanist. The content of the following is devoted to the presentation of *Utopia*, More's political mindset and the reception of the humanist in Spain.

In “Retrato del Canciller,” Thomas More is presented with his historical and personal circumstances, while the author carries out an analysis of the reasons that might have led More to write *Utopia*. The Catalan translator had already shown his concern about the use of biographies in 1935, when he published a biographical note on More titled “Sant Thomas More, humanista” in the journal *El Matí*. He shows there his admiration for the “gracious” and calm way in which Thomas More died: “sin duda alguna, la más elegante y serena que registra la historia de los mártires de la libertad de conciencia” (Molla, *Ramon Esquerra (1909-1938?)* 225). The translator praises More and magnifies his religious projection.

As far as the content is concerned, a long quote from Daniel Sargent's biography *Thomas More* (1935) opens the chapter. These four initial paragraphs summarize some of the main events in the life of the saint: More's birth, his professional career in London, the King's matter and his martyrdom. At the same time these are narrated, virtues such as his “sagacidad” and “perspicacia” are stressed. Thus, to support Sargent's opinion, he adds some other references from the humanist's friends Desiderius Erasmus and Richard Pace. Erasmus admires the suavity of the future Chancellor (“*Mori suavitatem*”) and declares, in his letter to Richard Witford, that he has never met such an ingenious person like the Englishman. In the same way, Esquerra, quoting Pace's *De Fructu qui ex doctrina percipitur liber* (1517), enhances More's eloquence and ability to use languages: he was not only good at his mother language, but also at Greek and Latin (*Utopia* 10-11).

Then, after paying his tribute to More's well known sense of humor, Esquerra goes on to the Chancellor's personality by including a poem written by the humanist in his youth. This allegorical poem talks about “la vanidad de las cosas humanas,” which he tries to put aside. For Esquerra, these verses seem prophetic, as More could be foreseeing how human vanity would impact on his life—Henry VIII's personifying it—. Besides, the translator enhances the Chancellor's philosophy of life and his fervent Christian standards by quoting one of the letters he wrote to his wife. This epistle tells how More encouraged her to be generous and share their possessions with their neighbors. Also, Esquerra quotes Erasmus to foster More's austerity to drink water instead of beer when he is invited to parties as well as to display his passion for animals, outlining the saint's purity and magnificence (*Utopia* 12-13).

Next, Esquerra selects William Roper's narration of the King's visit to More's house in Chelsea. This encounter portrays the moment in which the Chancellor becomes aware of the fact that Henry VIII would not hesitate to chop off his head if his throne required it. More, concerned about it, transmitted his

thoughts to his daughter's husband. Roper gets astonished because of the Chancellor's strength to accept his immediate future (*Utopia* 14). In the following lines, the role of Thomas More as a politician and laureate lawyer is remarked. The translator demonstrates More's sound knowledge and wide experience on how to rule by referring to his work *History of King Richard III* (1513). Hence, Hythloday's voice in the dialogue of *Utopia's* Book I is seemingly a practical example of what More thought about politics (*Utopia* 15). Leaving aside the most personal profile of the humanist, Esquerra ranges over the clashes between More and the crown. Book I, as the translator discusses, will bring the reasons for More's rejection to Henry VIII (*Utopia* 16-17).

After this descriptive section, an analysis of the disagreement between the Tudor king and the Chancellor is provided. The duel is depicted as spiritual, in the sense that there is no physical violence, but a fight between opposite principles: “un duelo espiritual entre dos voluntades celosas de sus prerrogativas” (*Utopia* 17). Esquerra emphasizes More's strength of spirit over the king's authority and how he preserves it throughout the conflict. This attitude is continuously underlined by the translator in sharp contrast to that of the king—first supporting Catholicism before Luther's Reformation, and then triggering the schism of the English Church—. Esquerra considers More a victim of the history of his own country, to the extent that an unknown Oxford's professor is quoted to point out the obscurity of this historical period in England: “Los últimos años de este gran monarca fueron oscurecidos por trastornos domésticos” (*Utopia* 18).

Finally, Esquerra ends this section referring to the way in which the Chancellor was meant to die. Hence, he introduces a quote from Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, proving the translator's wide notion on literature. Then, he lists the number of people who were decapitated by the monarch in More's times as a result of opposing to his religious power and decisions. This is relevant because once again More's sanctity is brought up, taking advantage of the mention to pay homage to those victims of the Reformation—many of them then declared martyrs—. His serenity is enhanced in his conversation with the Duke of Norfolk, who claimed that displeasing the king is a synonym of death. However, More disagreed with him and stated that, in the end, everybody dies. The last paragraph is nearly a direct translation from Sargent's biography that narrates More's execution. More dies on the 6th of July 1535, and his good humor and politeness are again fostered (*Utopia* 20-21).

“Un retrato de Holbein” is the next chapter. It revisits the figure of the Chancellor as portrayed by the German painter Hans Holbein (1497-1543). Esquerra firstly lists the Latin names of the thirteen characters appearing in the



famous family portrait “Sir Thomas More and Family.” Then, the translator briefly explains how the painter met More and speculates that it was likely that in his first visit to London Holbein painted the two more important paintings of the saint: the portrait preserved in the Frick Collection of New York and the lost portrait of More’s family, of which only a sketch is preserved. Esquerra discusses that the former truly depicts the personality of the Chancellor: “serena y amable, aunque no exenta de severidad” likewise discerning his gravity and severity (*Utopia* 23). As for the second painting, Esquerra finds in this domestic representation a source of information to highlight More’s feelings about being surrounded and supported by his family: “sentía perfectamente la influencia del ambiente familiar sobre el ser humano y procuraba dignificarlo para mejorar así el hombre” (*Utopia* 25). This idea predominates in humanist and Christian standards, and can be captured in *Utopia*’s Book II.

In order to transmit further knowledge about his family, the translator reveals some information of three of the members of his household: John More (More’s father), Alice Middleton (More’s second wife), and Margaret More (his eldest daughter). The translator focuses on addressing More’s beliefs in education and, more specifically, women’s education, which is clearly exemplified through the character of his daughter Margaret. She is highlighted as a “sorprendente humanista” because she was able to correct and make perfect translations in Greek and Latin (*Utopia* 27). This education program was extended likewise to Margaret’s siblings, and, consequently, they were well educated with a humanist formation too. The role of women in Utopian society relates to More’s real thoughts of More on this issue.

In brief, throughout these two chapters, Thomas More is depicted as a true and honest man, someone who lived wisely and died unfairly, and always loyal to his own principles and family. It might be inferred that, if Esquerra wished to add these specific words into the preface of his translation, it is because he entirely agreed with its contents and message. It is uncertain if the Catalan translator accessed the words pronounced by Pope Pious IX when canonizing More in 1935, but they truly remind of some of the qualities underlined by the Church in the official act. The humanist was canonized on the 19th of May together with John Fisher, a contemporary of the Chancellor. On that day, the speech venerated both characters, highlighting their martyrdom:

Endowed with the keenest of minds and supreme versatility in every kind of knowledge, he enjoyed such esteem and favour among his fellow-citizens that he was soon able to reach the highest grades of public office. [...] A strong and courageous spirit, like John Fisher, when he saw that the doctrines of the Church were gravely

endangered, he knew how to despise resolutely the flattery of human respect, how to resist, in accordance with his duty, the supreme head of the State when there was question of things commanded by God and the Church, and how to renounce with dignity the high office with which he was invested. It was for these motives that he too was imprisoned, nor could the tears of his wife and children make him swerve from the path of truth and virtue. In that terrible hour of trial he raised his eyes to heaven, and proved himself a bright example of Christian fortitude. (*The Center for Thomas More Studies*)

As previously stated, the Catholic Church raised his spirit, loyalty and social disposition. More is certainly described as a staunch supporter of Catholicism and a representative of Christian ideal behavior. Nonetheless, there is an important subtle detail to be mentioned in the formulation of the hypothesis of Esquerra's presenting the humanist as a saint: the translator does not specify at any point of the preface or the book that Thomas More was honored with the title of saint two years before the printing of *Utopia* (*El Estado Perfecto*). Despite that fact, he does allude to the fourth anniversary of More's death, which temporarily coincides with the religious event. An apparent reason could be that Esquerra wrote the preface before the act took place. However, some of the bibliographical references employed date back to 1935 and 1936, so this idea is discarded. Maybe a justification is that he wanted to prevent his book from becoming a religious referent instead of a literary one, or just deviating from his contribution to literary criticism, but there is no reliable evidence to prove it. Thus, it cannot be concluded that Esquerra aimed to draw a saint, because mentioning its canonization must have been key to vindicate it.

The subsequent sections deal with other aspects of the work, complementing those addressed in the previous pages. Esquerra seeks for explaining relevant data about the literary, political and historical value of *Utopia*. In that sense, what is seen in the content of those chapters is the translation's own interpretation, clearly influenced by what he had read about the Chancellor and the origins of his text. In "Nace *Utopia*," Ramón Esquerra leaves behind the presentation of Thomas More and moves to the genesis of *Utopia*. According to the translator, the origin of More's most famous text lies in those trading conflicts between the Low Countries and England triggered by Henry VIII's policies. The future Chancellor was sent there as an ambassador. Inspired by the present events, he started working on his masterpiece. The translator believed the work might have been finished by 1515, when he was back from his duties in the continent. In addition, Book I is said to be written after Book II and it aimed to express More's preoccupations with the political and economic

situation, all of them materialized through the speech of Raphael Hythloday. The Catalan author felt he was actually reading More's arguments when getting through the sailor's report. Furthermore, another idea introduced is that Thomas More could be paying tribute to those exemplary cities that were later on swallowed by the centralism of modern states: "Las ciudades utópicas son quizá un monumento elevado a su memoria" (*Utopia* 33). Nevertheless, the author remarks one more significant aspect regarding More's political contributions. It is that, even though the English humanist developed an active political career, which made him experienced and wise, the description of the political structure is not as detailed and complex as he expected, that is, he vaguely talks about politics. The reason for this could be, according to the translator, his own experience, as More did not want to reveal the corrupted reality of his time despite the allusions to the English political panorama throughout Book I.

In any case, "Bajo el signo de Platón" claims that More's thoughts about Utopian civilizations cannot be understood without referring back to Classical utopias (like Plato's *Republic* and Augustine of Hippo's *De Civitate Dei*) or contemporary texts like the *In Praise of Folly* by Erasmus of Rotterdam. Although it has been stated that *Utopia* directly derived from Plato's work, there is also a sense of critique inherited from Erasmus's text. In fact, Esquerra insists that *Utopia* would not have existed without Erasmus. More's awareness of the impossibility to accomplish this state organization dwells in the following quote: "Cosa que más deseo que espero" (*Utopia* 252). It states it is the flawed human nature what triggers corrupted states. Thus, the translator highlights that humanism reinforces self-improvement and aims to heal those human imperfections: "Precisaría una reforma substancial de ella [human nature] y el único camino es el que ofrece el humanismo: el mejoramiento progresivo del individuo mediante aquella creencia del hombre—creación renacentista—[...]" (*Utopia* 37). The translator strongly agrees with More on the fact that the Utopian nation was a representation of the perfect state—as the title of the work shows. At the end of the day, Esquerra points out that *Utopia* was produced due to the historical events occurring in England, even though there are also some inspiring universal experiences that might not have anything to do with English history and may have a timeless nature. For that reason, he brings back the connections between *Utopia* and the *Republic* by Plato, considering Plato's discourse more abstract, and More's more practical.

However, despite the accurate description and complexity of these utopian states, they cannot be materialized. Esquerra connects this feature of non-applicability with totalitarian governments. The translator suggests that, if governors started imposing pre-established structures, which are usually

designed without bearing in mind the particularities of any certain country but according to an imaginary one, these states would not adequately adapt to them because they are set on specific historical and social circumstances. The Catalan author affirms that World War I and the post-war period are clear examples of impracticable governments because the features of fascism had to fit first the necessities of each country. All in all, to his mind, More was predicting what would occur four centuries later. Nevertheless, there is a fact that cannot be left aside: in the preface Esquerra does not mention the Spanish Civil War, which was taking place in Spain by the time the work was published and occupied the whole political scene. Catalonia was still republican when *Utopia (El Estado Perfecto)* was released and, as Molla presents, the Catalan was planning to leave Barcelona and starting a new life with his family as a Literature teacher in the United States away from the conflict. However, this could not be possible because the number of available positions was scarce (*Ramon Esquerra (1909-1938?)* 63, 68). In the same way Esquerra did not believe in the totalitarian forms of government rising in Europe in the 1930s, he may have then opposed Franco's regime and may have wished the book *Utopia* was used as an instrument of peace and justice as well as a model to be followed by the dictator and other European leaders. These ideas correlate with what More introduced in his *Utopia*: collectivism, public administration and individual contributions to the state were good alternatives to authoritarianism. By publishing the text, he was offering criticism for improving the current situation of not only Spain but all those nations under the influence of fascism, therefore giving food for thought for those readers who content with the current sociopolitical systems. Perhaps the intention behind this work lies in his will to spread a message of opposition to these rather than giving More a more relevant position in the literary and religious side.

The last chapter is "Fortuna Hispánica de *Utopía*," which focuses on the impact Thomas More's masterpiece had in Spain. The Catalan translator used to employ the expression "fortuna" for its title to refer to the influence a text had in a certain historical period or literature. Comparatists have commonly used this term, which definitely reveals the intellectual's academicism (Molla, *Ramon Esquerra (1909-1938?)* 444). What can be found in the following lines is a brief descriptive study of the reception of *Utopia* in Spain, which lists the different versions and translations of *Utopia* found in sixteenth century's Europe. He then goes on to the reception of *Utopia* in Spain. The translator pays special attention to Medinilla's 1637 translation and highlights its quality and partiality. The Catalan critic simply points out the existence of two later editions from this translation (1790 and 1805, both in Madrid), and a previous Catalan rendering by Josep Pin y Soler (1912), to which he makes only a passing reference. Also, it

should be mentioned that Esquerra did not reference the existence of Fernando de Herrera's biography of the Chancellor, *Tomás Moro* (1592). This work might be relevant for the study of Thomas More in Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century. Regarding the translation by Pin i Soler, a renowned figure of La Renaixença, it has a very interesting preface written by the translator itself. This scholar coordinated the collection "Biblioteca d'Humanitats," in which this rendering was included as well as the Catalan translation of Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, among others (Pin i Soler x).

## 5. Reception

There is documental evidence of how this edition of *Utopia* was received after its first publication in 1937. However, it might not be sufficient to prove the quality of the translation and impact it might have had on the society of the time. The first fact to stick to is that *Apolo*—the original publisher of the 1937 edition—reedited *Utopia* (*El Estado Perfecto*) in 1948. Therefore, it can be assumed that the number of sales was good and the book was relevant for part of the public. Guillem Molla, in one of his articles, attaches a fragment of two reviews of Esquerra's *Utopia*. The following was done in 1937 for the newspaper *La Vanguardia*:

Otras obras representan en estos momentos un raro—y elocuente—esfuerzo por alcanzar altas cimas espirituales, de las que nos creíamos definitivamente apartados por la violencia y la lucha... ¿Qué otra cosa sino esa aspiración, a un "más alto y mejor," nos señala la edición—cuidadísima—, precisamente ahora, de la célebre (pero apenas conocida por las generaciones jóvenes) *Utopía* de Thomas More? Y el *Ensayo sobre la desigualdad de las razas humanas*, del complicado Conde de Gobineau, que, sin duda, ha de encender, aquí y allí, chispas de ardiente polémica. Aparece también una importante *Iniciación a la literatura*, de Ramón Esquerra, obra vulgarizadora concebida y realizada con raras claridad y eficacia. (Molla, *Ramon Esquerra (1909-1938?)* 489)

The work by Esquerra was strongly recommended especially for the historical circumstances undergoing in the country—the civil war started in 1936—. It is remarkable that the reviewer highlighted that it was not usually read by younger generations, as if he wanted to focus on the moral values transmitted by the content of the work and the good qualities of the saint. Also, that lack of interest of a younger audience for the text could be the mass circulation of modern European literature around the continent. Publishing companies seemed to be

focused on keeping the catalogues up-to-date with the latest European works. Consequently, the demand of non-contemporary texts could have decreased and publishers did not invest in them as in the rest. Maybe just smaller groups of readers, like intellectuals or students, were still interested in buying classical works. In addition, within this review *Utopia* was not the only text recommended, but also his manual *Iniciación a la literatura*, once again emphasizing Esquerra's literary contribution.

The other important reference was written in 1954 by the journalist and critic Juan Ramón Masoliver again in "Los libros del día" of the Spanish newspaper *La Vanguardia*. He stated that:

No hace muchos años que apareció la versión, que sobre el original latino condujera nuestro llorado compañero Ramón Esquerra. Pero ésa, como la primera (la de Jerónimo Antonio de Medinilla, prologada por Quevedo) no daban en su totalidad los valores del original. La presente, de Pedro Voltes, tiene a gala seguir el sabio y mártir canciller en la letra misma de sus expresiones, en el encadenamiento sintáctico, en aquel su modo de exponer que fue común a los sabios de Europa por última vez unida en nombre de la fe y de la cultura (Molla, *Ramon Esquerra (1909-1938?)* 168).

In this case, Masoliver argues that this new 1952 translation is more faithful to More's Latin original than the text rendered by Esquerra. From his own perspective, the way in which Pedro Voltes uses the language and expresses the humanist message is more similar to the linguistic expression of the Chancellor. Nevertheless, this review pays more attention to his skills in translation rather than to the transmission of knowledge expected from a twentieth-century edition of *Utopia*.

In brief, it could be said it was well-received, although it might not have had enough consideration as other subsequent editions. The work was reprinted by the publishing houses *Akal* and *Mestas* in 1985 and 1999 (Molla, *Ramon Esquerra (1909-1938?)* 177). This is not the only edition published in the twentieth century: in the following years different translators would elaborate alternative Spanish translations. It is interesting to remark that one of these used Esquerra's as a guide source: the edition printed by *Bruguera*, in Barcelona, in 1973. It was titled *Tomas Moro, Utopía* and its editor was Teresa Suero Roca.

## 6. Conclusion

The different aspects and information found in its prologue have not only triggered an approach to the figure of Thomas More, but also to the literary critic *The Grove. Working Papers on English Studies* 28 (2021): 127-144. ISSN: 1137-005X.

and journalist Ramón Esquerra too. The Catalan has contributed to constructing the reception of Thomas More in Spain at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Guillem Molla adds, the intellectual was a humanist of the 1930s, and his passion for literature and humanism is purely shown in his words (*Ramon Esquerra comparatista* 139). From his perspective of historicism, he permits the audience to recreate More's intentions with *Utopia*, as well as to connect the Chancellor's ideas with his own. Hence, it could be concluded that Esquerra projected his ideals through that of the humanist. There are ideas yet to tie about the political and philosophical connections between Esquerra and More, but this research is limited because the number of articles and works published on him are actually scarce. Also, for future study of the translator and how he implemented his translation skills, the text could be analyzed with text mining and make a comparison with other renderings of *Utopia* or other texts of the Catalan.

Esquerra aids from the preface and translation to amplify the ideas—which he thought—Thomas More wanted to transmit in his original *Utopia*, at the same time he brings out his current preoccupations and theories about the twentieth-century politics. Hence, Esquerra's intentions seemed to go further from just publishing a translation. He believed that texts were the result of a series of circumstances. That is why, as aforementioned, he claims that *Utopia* is inevitably related to the history of England. This historicist understanding is what also makes him draw a complete and detailed biography and account of the historical events in the preface of the translation. Not only was it important for him, as a translator, to have access to each of those pieces of information, but also it was relevant for the reader to comprehend the text. Parallel to this, Esquerra's translation can be more easily understood if it is read with a historical, social and cultural context as well.

All in all, the preface is full of valuable information that sheds light on the opinion the intellectual had about Thomas More. However, it should be considered that the translator did not originally write nearly all the data presented. They are taken from the literary sources he specifies at the end of the preface, in section "Bibliografía." As the preface was completely written in Spanish, Esquerra had to translate all of the French and English sources for the reader's sake. Although the exact translation of other's commentaries lacks originality, he is responsible for choosing the information he aimed to express in his preliminary study—in fact, those critical literary works are not short enough to simply reproduce them verbatim—. Thus, these selections of facts are not random, and it shows that the author intended to create a particular image of the Chancellor by sharing his view on him. Although the Englishman compelled

tremendous admiration to Esquerra and that triggered the description of More as a saint, the truth is that his intention was not to make his work a mere propaganda of a religious model despite the cited qualities, but to communicate how the perfect humanist was, and propose an inspirational model in a period characterized by totalitarian governments and uncertainties. Virtues such as sanctity, loyalty and purity are just part of a personality that should be universally recognized and followed, and justice and equality should be preserved in all nations.

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