



Thomas More's Utopia: An Ingenious Architectural Design for Social Order and a Virtual Legislative Laboratory for Political Experimentation

Article Record

Dr. Maria Ángeles Robles^{§*}

*Corresponding Author



§ Bioiliberis Research and Development (Spain), Granada, Spain (OA)

RECEIVED

2026-01-15

ACCEPTED

2026-01-24

ONLINE PUBLISHED

2026-02-14

PUBLISHED

2026-02-17

PEER REVIEW

Double Blind

Abstract

Utopia is analysed as a rhetorical work characteristic of humanism that demands an active and interpretative reading. Its meaning is constructed through paradoxes that challenge conventional wisdom, in line with Erasmus of Rotterdam's proposal in a letter addressed to Ulrich von Hutten, and depends on both the historical context and the author's biographical details for a proper understanding. Finally, a brief section will be included linking utopia, science fiction and artificial intelligence as tools for reflecting on social organisation. From this perspective, Utopia can be understood as a theoretical framework that remains relevant today, whilst science fiction and artificial intelligence appear as contemporary manifestations of that same utopian impulse.

Utopia

paradox

Erasmus's letter

legislative laboratory

virtuality

AI USE STATEMENT

No generative AI was used for analysis or results.

FUNDING

No external funding was declared for this work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Not applicable for this article.

ETHICS

No ethics committee approval was required for this article type.

CONSENT

Not applicable for this article.

TRIAL REG.

Not applicable.

Crossref DOI: 10.34257/GJHSSH257430

How to Cite: Robles (2026). Thomas More's Utopia: An Ingenious Architectural Design for Social Order and a Virtual Legislative Laboratory for Political Experimentation. Global Journal of Human-Social Science, 26(1), 27-43. DOI: 10.34257/GJHSSH257430

LICENSE

© 2026 Global Journals. Open-access article under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International License.



Print ISSN 0975-587X



Online ISSN 2249-460X



Under the strict compliance and defined process of



METADATA CONTINUATION

AUTHOR CONTACT QR LEDGER

Dr. Maria Ángeles Robles§*



ARCHIVAL RECORD

Thomas More's Utopia: An Ingenious Architectural Design for Social Order and a Virtual Legislative Laboratory for Political Experimentation

Dr. Maria Ángeles Robles^{§*}

Affiliations

§ Bioiliberis Research and Development (Spain), Granada, Spain (OA)

Abstract

Utopia is analysed as a rhetorical work characteristic of humanism that demands an active and interpretative reading. Its meaning is constructed through paradoxes that challenge conventional wisdom, in line with Erasmus of Rotterdam's proposal in a letter addressed to Ulrich von Hutten, and depends on both the historical context and the author's biographical details for a proper understanding. Finally, a brief section will be included linking utopia, science fiction and artificial intelligence as tools for reflecting on social organisation. From this perspective, Utopia can be understood as a theoretical framework that remains relevant today, whilst science fiction and artificial intelligence appear as contemporary manifestations of that same utopian impulse.

Keywords: *Utopia, paradox, Erasmus's letter, legislative laboratory, virtuality*

* Corresponding Author

Dr. Maria Ángeles Robles

DOI

10.34257/GJHSSH257430

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to outline the main interpretative keys to Utopia, a work in which the reader must draw upon their ingenium to unravel the profound meaning that More sought to convey. The author constructs his text as a rhetorical exercise, characteristic of Renaissance humanism, in which intellectual production is not limited to the narration of a story, but is conceived as a complex discursive practice.

This approach follows the rhetorical principles proposed by Erasmus of Rotterdam in a letter sent to Ulrich von Hutten, in which a portrait of More and the purpose of his Utopia is drawn. In this sense, the work is characterised by the formulation of argumentative positions which, on numerous occasions, are deliberately paradoxical or contrary to common opinion, demanding of the reader an active interpretation based on critical acuity, analytical subtlety and mastery of linguistic resources. This paradoxical dimension is linked to the humanist tradition of irony, through which dominant political, social and moral models are questioned by means of their discursive inversion, thereby revealing their internal tensions and limitations.

Likewise, it is essential to take into account both the author's biographical background and the historical and intellectual context in which Utopia was written, since these elements provide the necessary framework for a fuller understanding of the organisation and meaning of the text. It is for this reason that a selection of texts from the aforementioned work will be analysed, in which these principles will be put into practice.

More's Utopia is not merely a description of an ideal society; it also contains an implicit critique of simplistic political discourses. In this sense, it can be read today as a warning against forms of

populism or demagoguery, even though those terms did not exist as we understand them now. In this way, it dismantles the idea that there is a simple and perfect political solution.

Finally, I have outlined several conceptual connections between the Renaissance humanism of More and contemporary developments in artificial intelligence and science fiction. My intention has merely been to suggest this relationship, since addressing it in depth would require a more rigorous theoretical framework and would also lead me away from the main focus of this study. Nevertheless, the central aim of this research is to examine Utopia and to cautiously propose a comparison between early modernity and the present day.

2. Thomas More: Biographical and Historical Context

More (1478–1535) was a London-born humanist whose intellectual formation was deeply embedded in the legal and socio-political transformations of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century England. His development was decisively shaped by both the broader currents of humanism and institutional change, and by his upbringing within a family closely integrated into the English legal profession. This dual context contributed significantly to his intellectual outlook, his professional trajectory, and his conception of political and social order.

Although not of noble origin, More's family held a secure and respectable social position, reinforced by sustained involvement in the English legal establishment. Both his father and grandfather occupied posts at Lincoln's Inn, first in administrative capacities and later as members of the institution. His father, John More, advanced through a distinguished judicial career, being appointed a judge in

1503, entering the Court of Common Pleas in 1518, and subsequently serving in the King's Bench from 1520 until his death in 1530.

This hereditary connection with Lincoln's Inn ensured More's continuous proximity to the legal world, a factor that proved formative in shaping his intellectual sensibility and his understanding of governance, law, and social organisation.

As for his education, he is believed to have received a solid grounding in Latin. It is uncertain whether he continued with formal studies, as his academic training was interrupted when he entered service in a prominent ecclesiastical household. This transition proved decisive for his intellectual and personal development, as it exposed him to training in manners, politics, and humanist values under the guidance of a leading figure of the period.

Cardinal Morton continued More's education by sending him to the University of Oxford. However, it is not known for certain which college he attended or whether he remained long enough to obtain a degree. His father, concerned that his son's interest in literature might divert him from the law, provided him with very limited financial support.

Despite this, More made the most of his time at university. He perfected his command of Latin, particularly in writing, and began to take an interest in the then-novel study of Greek. To this end, he had the support of distinguished teachers such as William Grocyn (c. 1446–1519) and Thomas Linacre (c. 1460–1524), whose teachings had a significant influence on his education. He himself mentions having attended lectures on Aristotle's works in Greek, and he was also well acquainted with Plato's Republic.¹

His study of Greek had a profound impact on his intellectual life, enabling him to join the humanist circles of the Renaissance in the company of figures such as Desiderius Erasmus and John Colet.² This influence is clearly reflected in his work *Utopia*, where many names and concepts have Greek origins. After leaving the University of Oxford, More joined New Inn, linked to Lincoln's Inn, to continue his legal training. He was admitted to Lincoln's Inn in 1496 at the age of eighteen. Although little is recorded about this period, it was crucial in laying the foundations of his legal career.³

By the end of the 15th century, Europe was undergoing far-reaching change. Trade was beginning to be freed from old restrictions, as evidenced by the trade treaty of 1496, and the following year John Cabot (1450–1498) set sail from Bristol and reached Newfoundland.⁴ These events, together with the discovery of the New World, broadened the horizons of Christendom and aroused great intellectual interest.⁵ In this context, it is easy to

imagine the enthusiasm with which the young More, then a law student, followed these developments. Moreover, he showed an interest in travel accounts such as those of Amerigo Vespucci, as confirmed by the references to him in *Utopia*. His words continue as follows: "*Orbis terrarum contemplandi studio Americo Vesputio se adiunxit atque in tribus posterioribus illarum quatuor navigationum quae passim iam leguntur, perpetuus eius comes fuit, nisi quod in ultima cum eo non rediit*".⁶ After completing his studies, More began practising law,⁷ although he went through a period of uncertainty about his future. His father wanted him to pursue a career in law, but he felt increasingly drawn to religious life. For about four years, he lived near the Charterhouse in London, leading a lifestyle similar to that of a monk, and even considered entering the priesthood.

In the end, he decided against pursuing that path; influenced by the advice of John Colet (1467–1519) and guided by his own judgement, he opted for a secular life.⁸ In 1505, he married Jane Colt, with whom he had four children.

Settled in London, he led a stable family life and enjoyed a rapidly advancing professional career. In the legal field, he distinguished himself particularly in commercial matters and, in 1504, at the age of just twenty-six, he was elected to Parliament.⁹ In this context, he demonstrated considerable courage by opposing measures he considered unjust, introduced by the ministers of King Henry VII, actions that exposed him to significant personal risk.

Furthermore, in 1505, the year of his marriage, he welcomed Erasmus of Rotterdam into his home. From this encounter onwards, both humanists developed a close intellectual collaboration, which resulted in several joint literary works, including epigrams and translations of Lucian's dialogues from Greek into Latin. Whereas for Erasmus these activities were primarily a literary exercise, More approached them with a more reflective and intellectually purposeful intent. With the accession of Henry VIII to the throne in 1509, More witnessed the beginning of a new era filled with hope. As Henry VIII's secretary and personal adviser, More gradually gained increasing power and influence at court, evolving from a mere assistant into a key figure in the administration of the kingdom. Among his responsibilities, he received foreign diplomats, drafted official state documents, and represented the monarch in negotiations, demonstrating his active involvement in foreign policy. In addition, More attended the Court of Star Chamber thanks to his renowned legal expertise. He was also entrusted with judging "poor men's cases" in the lower courts, where he earned a reputation for fairness and accessibility, bringing a strong social dimension to his duties. In short, More evolved from a royal adviser into one of the kingdom's most influential political figures, combining diplomatic, legal, and administrative responsibilities while contributing to the delivery of justice for the most vulnerable members of society.¹⁰ However, in 1510, he suffered a severe personal blow: the death of his wife, Jane. Although he remarried that same year to Alice

¹The foreword to J.H. Lupton's edition presents a comprehensive and rigorous study of More's life. Briefly, I note that this volume was published in Oxford in 1895 and is based on the Latin edition of 1518 and Ralph Robynson's first English translation of 1551, with Lupton's translations, introductions and notes. (Lupton, 1895, pp. xvii–xxviii)

²(Glenn, 1941, p. 192).

³(Lupton, 1895, p. xx).

⁴In 1497, John Cabot undertook the first modern European expedition to reach and chart the east coast of North America, probably Newfoundland (Canada), under the flag of Henry VII of England. (Jones & Condon, 2016, pp. 1–2).

⁵Towards the end of the fifteenth century, Amerigo Vespucci was sent to Seville to manage the Medici family's commercial affairs, becoming part of the city's dynamic mercantile milieu. At the time, Seville was the principal economic centre of Castile under the reign of Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon, during the final stages of the conquest of Granada. There, he worked with the merchant Giannotto Berardi, who was involved in preparing Christopher Columbus's voyages, thereby facilitating contact between the two men. Following Berardi's death in 1495, Vespucci assumed greater responsibilities in the organisation and management of expeditions. Between January and February 1496, Vespucci was in Sanlúcar de Barrameda, where he oversaw the provisioning and departure of a fleet carrying supplies to Columbus in the newly discovered Indies. This experience marked a decisive turning point in his career, as it marked the beginning of his direct involvement in Atlantic voyages of exploration. In time, Vespucci became a renowned cosmographer, and his accounts of the exploration of the New World, whether entirely accurate or not, circulated widely throughout Europe. Their impact was such that, scarcely a decade later, European cartographers chose to

name the newly identified continent after him: America. (Fernández-Armesto, 2006, pp. 33–40; Robles Macías, 2015, pp. 1, 7–13; Moreno Jeria, 2018, pp. 55–56)

⁶(Morus, 1548, p. 30).

⁷(Glenn, 1941, p. 187).

⁸John Colet was the only surviving son of Henry Colet, a wealthy London merchant who served twice as Lord Mayor of London. He studied at Cambridge and, in 1497, began his ecclesiastical career, being ordained first as a deacon and later as a priest. He subsequently settled in Oxford, where he distinguished himself through his innovative lectures on the biblical exegesis of St Paul's epistles, introducing a direct analysis of the text and its historical context, an approach that was highly unusual at the time. There, he formed a close friendship with Erasmus of Rotterdam, who later wrote his biography. In 1504, he was appointed Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London, where he founded St Paul's School and sought to promote ecclesiastical reforms, albeit with limited success. (Dimock, 1900, p. 20; Arnold, 2003, pp. 204–209).

⁹(Hermida del Llano, 2017, p. 261).

¹⁰(Guy, 1976, pp. 491–492).

Myddelton, partly out of the need to care for his children and fulfil his responsibilities, this loss left a deep mark on his life.

During those years, the scholar continued to advance his career. His new wife also became part of the family, and he took charge of her intellectual education, as he had done before.¹¹ More was appointed a member of the council of his bar college and, in 1511, was commissioned to teach there.¹² Despite this intense working life, he managed to find time to devote himself to writing. During those years, he translated the *History of Richard III*, as it is thought that Cardinal Morton wrote the aforementioned work in Latin. The publication of this treatise in English marked the beginning of his recognition as one of the first great prose writers in the English language.

Furthermore, in 1508, he had joined the Guild of Merchants, one of the city's most important institutions. This experience gave him an intimate insight into the communal life of the guilds, which likely influenced some of the social ideas he would later develop in Utopia.

In this environment, he renewed his friendship with Colet, then Dean of St Paul's Cathedral. Together, they frequently discussed educational reform and collaborated on projects such as the foundation of St Paul's School, an innovative institution where Greek was taught publicly for the first time in England. The school soon became one of the leading centres of Renaissance humanism in the country and came to embody the educational ideals of Humanism in their most refined form. Erasmus prepared teaching manuals for the institution, while More defended it vigorously when its founder became the target of criticism and defamation. Around 1510, William Lily (1468–1522)¹³ began teaching in the shadow of the cathedral, whilst Erasmus was drafting his *Praise of Folly* under More's roof.

More's life was, in the fullest sense, that of a committed citizen. His prestige as a jurist and his membership of the Mercers' Company marked him out as the most suitable person to defend the legal rights and privileges of his fellow citizens. Thus, when tensions between London merchants and foreign merchants established in the city intensified in 1514, the creation of a commission to resolve them was proposed, and there was a strong desire for More to be part of it. He was sent as an ambassador to intervene in matters of great importance between English merchants and those of the Hanseatic League.

However, what was at stake went far beyond a mere local rivalry. The conflict affected all English wool exporters, as wool formed the basis of the national trade at that time. As early as the 13th century, it was said that everyone wore English wool made in Flanders, which gives an idea of the economic significance of this activity.

In the past, Henry III of England had granted the merchants of the Hanseatic League a headquarters, or trading post, in London. Subsequently, his successors extended these privileges within the context of the evolving and frequently unstable nature of English commercial policy.

The trade balance between England and Flanders was disrupted following the annulment of the marriage between Charles V and Henry VIII's sister, which led England to ban the export of wool. The measure harmed both countries, so in 1515 an embassy was sent to the Netherlands to reestablish trade, in which More participated alongside Cuthbert Tunstall.¹⁴ The mission was successful and, on his return to London, work began on his Utopia.¹⁵ It was during his

stay in the Netherlands in 1515 that More drafted the Second Book of his Utopia (the first he had composed). The First Book, conceived as an introduction, was written in the spring or summer of 1516, while Cardinal Thomas Wolsey was attempting to persuade its author to enter direct service at court.¹⁶

To conclude, it is worth mentioning a few significant facts. In 1516, More led an extraordinarily busy life, juggling a multitude of highly significant responsibilities. He was a prestigious practising lawyer, renowned for his competence and professional reputation. Furthermore, he held the office of one of the two deputy sheriffs of London, a key position in the city's judicial administration. In addition, he served as a judge in the Sheriff's Court, where he administered justice in legal matters, and as an arbitrator in the Court of Chancery, where he helped resolve disputes of a more complex and equitable nature.¹⁷ The laws in defence of farmers, proposed by Parliament¹⁸ in 1516, are reflected in Utopia.¹⁹

On 1 May 1517, the Privy Council asked More to intervene to calm an angry mob that had attacked the homes of foreign merchants. For a moment, in the midst of this difficult situation, it seemed he might succeed in restraining the crowd. However, people's passions proved too intense.

In 1518, or perhaps even earlier, More was appointed Master of Petitions and became a member of the Privy Council. In 1520, he accompanied the king to the Field of the Cloth of Gold.²⁰ The following year, in 1521, he was knighted and appointed Sub-Treasurer.

In 1523, he moved to his residence in Chelsea,²¹ where he led a quiet and stable life. In the same year, he was elected Speaker of the House of Commons. Subsequently, on 29 October 1529, he was appointed Lord Chancellor,²² a position he held until his resignation on 6 May 1532. Finally, he died on 6 July 1535, leaving behind a consolidated reputation as a figure of integrity and fidelity to his principles.²³

3. Contributions from the paratexts of the 1805 edition of Utopia, printed in Madrid, and the 1895 edition, published in Westminster

3.1. The 1805 Madrid edition

3.1.1. Contributions by Gerónimo Antonio De Medinilla (c. 1590)

In 1805, a translation of Jerónimo Antonio de Medinilla y Porres appeared in Madrid. In this work, the author offers a clearly laudatory interpretation of More, whom he includes among the leading writers who imagined ideal republics. In this regard, he emphasizes More's role as Lord Chancellor of England, as well as his political prudence, presenting these as the basis of an authority understood both in intellectual and moral terms. This approach ultimately leads to a highly idealized image of his figure.

However, this perspective presents certain limitations, as it simplifies the historical complexity of the author and reduces his political and institutional career to a primarily moral evaluation. Moreover, the clear distinction established in the prologue between

¹¹(Lupton, 1895, p. xxv).

¹²The preface to J.H. Lupton's edition presents a comprehensive and rigorous study of More's biography. (Lupton, 1895, pp. xvii–xxviii).

¹³(Carlson, 1992, pp. 158–159).

¹⁴(Hill, 2024, pp. 52–60).

¹⁵(Morus, 1548, pp. 27–28).

¹⁶(Lupton, 1895, p. xxvii)

¹⁷(More, 2012, p. 17).

¹⁸(Finberg, 1967, pp. 33–36, 70–75; Elton, 1955, pp. 71–73).

¹⁹(Lupton, 1895, p. xxxvi).

²⁰The Field of the Cloth of Gold was a lavish diplomatic summit held from 7 to 24 June 1520 between Henry VIII of England and Francis I of France near Guines, in northern France. It sought to consolidate the Anglo-French alliance and display the power of both monarchs during the period of rivalry with Emperor Charles V.

²¹(Reynolds, 1968, p. 54).

²²(Glenn, 1941, p. 190).

²³(More, 1805, pp. 167–186).

republics “as they are” and “as they should be” encourages an overly normative reading, which weakens the critical richness of

More’s thought and overlooks the tension between political ideal and social reality. In the same line, the idea that a ruler’s justice should be uniformly extended to all subjects introduces a moral vision of power which, although consistent with humanist thought, reduces the complexity and ambiguity of the utopian discourse. Furthermore, Medinilla argues that More avoided direct criticism of his own time by constructing an ideal model of political organisation, based on institutions considered superior to those of Sparta, Athens, or Rome. From this perspective, this model relies on virtue, the elimination of vice, and the abolition of private property as means of limiting ambition and ensuring equality and justice. Nevertheless, this interpretation assumes a level of coherence in More’s thought that is debatable, since it presents as closed and systematic a text that is, in reality, more complex and open.

In fact, this reading overlooks that some of the measures associated with Utopia also appear in More’s political practice during his time as a Member of Parliament, which challenges the strict separation between theory and political action. Likewise, it is not entirely accurate to view his work as an external critique of society, since More was actively involved in government and held diplomatic, legal, and administrative roles. His participation in the so-called “cases of the poor,” in which he dealt with disputes involving individuals with limited resources, further demonstrates his direct engagement with the social dimension of justice. In this sense, More cannot be seen merely as an external observer, but rather as an actor integrated into the political system, combining the exercise of power with concern for its social effects.

Finally, Medinilla describes the style of More’s work as elaborate and profound, comparing it to historians such as Livy and Tacitus, since it does not merely praise, but also examines human passions. In addition, he notes that this admiration led him to disseminate the work, aiming to convey its general meaning rather than its literal wording, with the intention of making it accessible to a broader audience. However, this reading tends to overstate the coherence of both the style and the moral message of the work, offering a unified interpretation that fails to reflect its complex and sometimes contradictory nature. In this sense, the comparison with classical historiography functions more as a strategy of cultural legitimisation than as a rigorous critical analysis of More’s style.²⁴

3.1.2. Paratext by Francisco Gómez de Quevedo Villegas y Santibáñez Cevallos (1580–1645) in the 1802 edition

In the aforementioned 1805 edition, in the section entitled *Notice, Judgement and Recommendation of Utopia*, Francisco de Quevedo offers an assessment of the work and its author. He presents More as a man of great learning, virtue and steadfastness, whose exemplary life culminated in a martyrdom that confirmed his moral integrity.

Quevedo²⁵ highlights that Utopia, whose name means “a place that does not exist”, was written in a political context that forced criticism to be veiled. Thus, More created a fictional island to criticise the abuses of rulers of that period and propose an alternative model of social organisation. According to Quevedo, the text affirms what ought to be done, even if no one practises it, while criticising everyone. As we shall see, this is not entirely true of More’s intention in his work; in reality, it must be understood as a critical exercise in distancing that employs paradox as an instrument of political and moral reflection. We must not forget that the English scholar was

a member of Parliament and carried out legislative functions that appear as proposals in Utopia.

Furthermore, Quevedo highlights the recognition More received from figures such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, and emphasises the depth of his work: although brief, it contains teachings that could guide both rulers and citizens. Thus, he concludes that Utopia is not merely a literary work, but also a valuable political and moral treatise. As we shall see in the section devoted to the portrait of

More’s physical and intellectual traits, drawn by Erasmus in a letter addressed to Ulrich von Hutten, Quevedo was not mistaken in his consideration of the etymology of Utopia: “oi-” (a Greek prefix meaning “not”) and “τόπος” (“place”), together combined, convey the meaning of “a place that does not exist” or “nowhere”. Following Erasmus, Utopia arises from a literary creation that puts the reader’s ingenuity to the test.

3.2. The 1895 edition, published in Westminster

In the 1895 edition edited by Edward Arber, which contains Ralph Robinson’s (1520–1577) English translation, the introduction outlines the publication history of the work.²⁶ The second book of Utopia was probably composed in Antwerp around November 1515, and the first book in London in early 1516. The work was printed by Theodore Martin in Leuven, under the editorship of Erasmus, Petrus Aegidius (Pieter Gillis), John Paludanus and other friends of More in Flanders, towards the end of 1516. More subsequently revised the text and, through Erasmus, sent it to Johannes Froben in Basel for printing.²⁷ This more sumptuous edition, considered the second in terms of authorship and likely containing the standard text, is dated November 1518. Meanwhile, however, a friend of Erasmus, the Englishman Thomas Lupset, produced a reprint of the first edition in Paris, printed by Gilles de Gourmont before March 1518, which is therefore, in chronological order, the second edition, with the Basel edition being the third and a Viennese edition in 1519 the fourth in order of appearance. All four were written in Latin, which was then the common and familiar language of scholars.²⁸

By a strange twist of fate, not a single copy of this work, in any language, was printed in England during More’s lifetime, nor before these English versions by Ralph Robinson. However, despite its original Latin form, the work is essentially English and will always rank among the treasures of English literature.²⁹ The characters’ first meeting takes place at the entrance to Antwerp Cathedral, where Raphael Hythloday, Petrus Aegidius (Pieter Gilles) and More make their way to the garden of the latter’s house, a peaceful spot that lends itself to conversation. There, seated on a grass-covered bench and in the company of John Clement,³⁰ they while away the entire day listening to Hythloday’s account.

²⁶(Morus, 1895, pp. xxi).

²⁷In the preface to the 1895 edition, published in Oxford, Lupton is more explicit regarding the first edition of Utopia, in Latin, which was printed by Thierry Martin in Leuven, in late 1516. The printing process appears to have been very swift. On 12 November, Gerhard of Nijmegen wrote to Erasmus to inform him that Martin would undertake the task. A week later, we learn that the work is in the printer’s hands. By 24 February 1516/1517, the book is already on the market; indeed, in a letter to Cope, Erasmus asks him to send him a copy. (Lupton, 1895, p. lxiv)

²⁸Lupton discusses the editions of Utopia in depth in his preface. (Lupton, 1895, pp. lxiv–lxxvi).

²⁹(More, 1895, p. 3).

³⁰John Clement was initially a servant of More and accompanied him on his diplomatic mission to the Netherlands in 1515. His subsequent career, however, reflects a remarkable intellectual and social ascent. Under More’s influence, he received a solid humanist education, learning Latin and eventually mastering Greek to the point of teaching it at Oxford. He later established himself as a highly respected physician, ultimately becoming president of the College of Physicians. His connection to More’s family was further strengthened when he married More’s adopted daughter. (More, 2012, p. 18).

²⁴(More, 1805, fols. A2r–A3v).

²⁵(More, 1805, fols. A4r–A6r).

The narrative is organised into two parts: before lunch, the contents of the first book are presented, focusing on more critical and realistic issues; afterwards, between lunch and dinner, the second book unfolds, describing the ideal society of Utopia. In this way, More constructs his work as a plausible dialogue, lending an air of reality to a largely imaginary tale.³¹ In the introduction to the 1895 edition, Edward Arber reflects on the different ways in which Utopia can be interpreted and briefly compares it with *The Republic*. Utopia may be understood from several perspectives: it reveals the author's personality, ideals, and creativity, while also presenting possible solutions to social problems such as poverty, overpopulation, and famine. Although both works describe ideal societies, they pursue different aims.

Plato, through the figure of Socrates, seeks to explore the nature of justice and injustice, first within the organisation of the state and then within the individual. More, by contrast, uses Utopia as a form of social criticism. He describes a society controlled by wealthy elites who protect their own interests while claiming to serve the common good.

Whereas Plato's work is mainly a philosophical reflection on virtue, justice, and the ideal state, More focuses on the social and economic inequalities of sixteenth-century England. In Utopia, he imagines a more egalitarian society in which poverty and the idleness linked to privilege no longer exist. His model is based on collective responsibility and the belief that property should belong to the community rather than to individuals. Through this vision, More criticises corruption, greed, and social injustice, suggesting that true social harmony can only be achieved when the common good is placed above private interests.³²

4. An intellectual portrait of More and interpretive keys to Utopia in Erasmus' letter to Ulrich von Hutten

Erasmus of Rotterdam describes our English scholar in a letter addressed to Ulrich von Hutten,³³ written in Antwerp in 1519. The letter highlights More's ingenium,³⁴ that is, his exceptional intelligence, creativity, and intellectual brilliance, qualities that inspire admiration within the humanist circle. The author explains that More's writings, distinguished by their erudition and sharp insight, create a strong sense of connection among readers and strengthen bonds within the intellectual community. In this context, Ulrich von Hutten is presented as one of the admirers of More's talent, although the text also suggests a reciprocal relationship between the two humanists, since both express mutual respect and recognition through their writings.

On the other hand, the difficulty of fully describing More is emphasised; his intellectual greatness places him on a par with classical figures such as Alexander the Great or Achilles, but his excellence lies in the realm of wit and virtue, not in military heroism.

Quod Thomae Mori ingenium sie deamas ac pene dixerim deperis, mirum scriptis illius inflammatus, quibus, ut vere scribis, nihil esse potest neque doctius neque festivius, istuc, crede mihi, clarissime Huttene, tibi eum multis commune est, cum More mutuuum etiam: nam is vicissim adeo scriptorum tuorum genio delectatur ut ipse

*tibi propemodum inuideam. Haec videlicet est illa Platonis omnium maxime amabilis sapientia, quae longe flagrantiores amores excitat inter mortales quam vllae quamlibet admirabiles corporum formae. Non cernitur illa quidem oculis corporeis, sed et animo sui sunt oculi; ut hic quoque verum comperiat illud Graecorum, ἐκ τοῦ ὄψιν γίγνεται ἀνθρώποις τὸ ἐπν. Per hos fit aliquoties ut ardentissima charitate conglutinentur inter quos nec colloquium nec mutuus conspectus intercessit. Et quemadmodum vulgo fit ut incertis de causis alia forma alios rapiat, ita videtur et ingeniorum esse tacita quaedam cognatio, quae facit vt certis ingeniis impense delectemur, caeteris non item. Caeterum quod a me flagitas, ut tibi totum Morum velut in tabula depingam, utinam tam absolute praestare queam quam tu vehementer eupis! Nam mihi quoque non iniucundum fuerit interim in amici multo omnium suauissimi contemplatione versari. Sed primum οὐ παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἐότιν omnes Mori dotes perspexisse. Deinde haud scio an ille laturus sit a quolibet artifice depingi sese. Nec enim arbitror leuioris esse operae Morum effingere quam Alexandrum magnum aut Achillem, nec illi quam hic noster immortalitate digniores erant.*³⁵

In the following passage, More is presented as someone inclined from a very early age towards humanistic culture and classical learning. From the outset, it is emphasised that he had been profoundly immersed in the fine arts since early childhood ("bonas literas a primis statim annis hauserat"),³⁶ thus underscoring his formative education and his natural inclination towards humanistic studies. This vocation becomes evident when he states that he devoted himself to the study of Greek literature and philosophy ("ad Graecas literas atque philosophiae studium sese applicuit"),³⁷ turning his intellectual pursuits towards the disciplines characteristic of the Renaissance humanist ideal. However, this decision caused a serious family conflict, as he made it without his father's support ("adeo non opitulante patre"),³⁸ who even deprived him of all financial support ("omni subsidio destitueret").³⁹ The reason for this opposition was that More appeared to be turning away from his father's studies ("quod a patriis studiis deseiscere videretur"),⁴⁰ that is to say, he was abandoning the family tradition linked to law. His father, a prestigious jurist, saw this profession as the best path to honour and social recognition, for those who attained authority in it are considered great and famous ("habentur magni clarique").⁴¹ Erasmus thus contrasts the social prestige of law with the true arts ("verae litterae"),⁴² noting further that that profession was utterly alien ("alienissima")⁴³ to authentic humanistic learning.

Erasmus also highlights More's excellence in the legal sphere. He states that litigants consulted no one more willingly ("neque consulerent quemquam libentius litigatores"),⁴⁴ and adds that no one reaped greater financial rewards than he did. All this was attributed to the remarkable strength and swiftness of his wit ("tanta vis ac celeritas ingenii"),⁴⁵ a remark through which Erasmus underscores More's extraordinary intelligence. In this way, he constructs the image of a humanist who was brilliant by nature, capable of succeeding even in a discipline that did not fully correspond to his true intellectual vocation.

³⁵(Erasmus, 1922, p. 13).

³⁶(Erasmus, 1922, p. 17).

³⁷(Erasmus, 1922, p. 17).

³⁸(Erasmus, 1922, p. 17).

³⁹(Erasmus, 1922, p. 17).

⁴⁰(Erasmus, 1922, p. 17).

⁴¹(Erasmus, 1922, p. 17).

⁴²(Erasmus, 1922, p. 17).

⁴³(Erasmus, 1922, p. 17).

⁴⁴(Erasmus, 1922, p. 17).

⁴⁵(Erasmus, 1922, p. 17).

³¹(Lupton, 1895, pp. xlii–xliii).

³²(More, 1895, pp. 3–5).

³³Mishtooni Bose analyses Hutten's life through the lens of activism. He argues that Hutten was not merely a writer, but the first example of a modern intellectual who sought to live (and die) for an active political cause. (Bose, 2020, pp. 39–68).

³⁴Travis Curtright analyses the meaning and English translation of the Latin term "ingenium" in the introductory letters to the 1518 edition of Utopia. (Curtright, 2017, pp. 1–18).

*Bonas literas a primis statim annis hauserat. Iuuenis ad Graecas literas atque philosophiae studium sese applicuit, adeo non opitulante patre, viro alioqui prudenti proboque, ut ea conantem omni subsidio destitueret; ac pene pro abdicato haberetur, quod a patriis studiis deseiscere videretur: nam is Britanniarum legum peritiam proficitur. Quae professio ut est a veris literis alienissima, ita apud Britannos eum primis habentur magni elarique, qui in hoc genere pararunt auctoritatem. Nec [temere] apud illos alia via ad rem ae gloriam parandam magis idonea; siquidem plerumque nobilitatem illius insulae peperit hoe studiorum genus. In eo negant quenquam absolui posse nisi plurimos annos insudarit. Ab hoc igitur cum non iniuria abhorreret adolescentis ingenium melioribus rebus natum, tamen post degustatas scholasticas disciplinas sie in hoe versatus est ut neque consulerent quemquam libentius litigatores, neque quum uberem faceret quisquam eorum qui nihil aliud agebant. Tanta erat is cleritas inge.*⁴⁶

Amid this atmosphere of intellectual effervescence, the decision to host lectures on St Augustine's *The City of God* in the Church of San Lorenzo appears especially meaningful and readily intelligible. Yet this choice is surprising for a law student, as it reflects his early preoccupation with the idea of an ideal society, which he would later develop in his work *Utopia*. At this point, it is worth noting that Plato's *Republic* constitutes one of the most evident sources of *Utopia*. nevertheless, the influence of Augustine of Hippo and *The City of God* can also be discerned, introducing a moral and theological dimension into More's political thought.⁴⁷ In this way, the

English humanist's work not only reworks the political ideal inherited from Plato but also complements it with a Christian vision derived from Saint Augustine, in which order, discipline, and subordination to the common good acquire a deeper significance within the community.⁴⁸

On the other hand, returning to the commentary on the letter, it is clear that the English scholar's reservations about religious life set him apart from many others who entered the priesthood without adequate preparation or without having fully tested their vocation. More, by contrast, emerges as a prudent and thoughtful figure, deeply aware of the gravity of such a commitment and of the demands it entailed. However, the only real obstacle to his ordination was his desire to marry. His decision was not due to any lack of religious devotion or personal discipline, but rather to a conscious choice in favor of a different way of life. Consequently, he decided not to pursue the priesthood and instead embraced lay life through marriage.

Taken as a whole, the passage presents More as an exceptional figure, intellectually capable of teaching theology and spiritually disciplined enough for ecclesiastical life, yet one who ultimately chose marriage over the priesthood. Significantly, this decision is portrayed not as a sign of weakness or spiritual failure, but rather as an expression of fidelity to his own convictions and chosen way of life.

Quin et euoluendis orthodoxorum voluminibus non segnem operam impendit. Augustini libros De Ciuitate Dei publice professus est adhuc pene adolescens auditorio frequenti; nec puduit nec poenituit sacerdotes

⁴⁶(Erasmus, 1922, p. 17).

⁴⁷Indeed, the Augustinian conception of domestic peace, based on the agreement between governance and obedience, where those who exercise authority do so for the good of others and, in turn, are also servants, finds a clear echo in the social organisation described in *Utopia*. There, each family is governed by a strict hierarchy headed by the eldest member, and daily life is subject to a rigorous moral order that regulates both family relations and religious and social practices; indeed, even those who govern are servants of those over whom they appear to rule. The concepts outlined can be found in Augustine of Hippo's work, *The City of God* (19, 14).

⁴⁸(Lupton, 1895, pp. 51–53).

*ae senes a iuvene prophano sacra discere. Interim et ad pietatis studium totum animum appulit, vigiliis, ieiuniis, precationibus aliisque consimilibus progymnasmatis saeerdotium meditans. Qua quidem in re non paulo plus ille sapiebat quam plerique isti qui temere ad tam arduam professionem ingerunt sese, nullo prius sui periculo facto. Neque quiequam obstatat quo minus sese huic vitae generi addiceret, nisi quod uxoris desyderium non posset excutere. Maluit igitur maritus esse castus quam sacerdos impurus.*⁴⁹

Subsequently, the author describes in considerable detail More's position at the Court of Henry VIII and constructs a very concrete picture of his relationship with power. Firstly, it is clearly stated that More did not enter the court out of ambition or his own desire, but at the insistence of the monarch, who went so far as to "drag him to his court" ("in aulam suam pertraheret").⁵⁰ The text even highlights the paradox: "No one ever sought admission to the court with such vehemence as he sought to avoid it" ("Nullus unquam vehementius ambiit in aulam admitti quam hic studuit effugere").⁵¹ This reinforces the idea that his rise to power did not stem from personal ambition, but rather from pressure exerted by the king, who regarded him as an indispensable figure within his political circle.

The letter also describes in detail his specific duties as an adviser and judge in difficult matters. However, despite his prominent role in government affairs, More rejects the accumulation of honours and formal power, a stance that clearly distinguishes him from other courtiers driven by ambition.

Finally, the text concludes with an idealised assessment: "Happy are the republics if the prince were to appoint magistrates like More everywhere" ("felices respublicas si Mori similes magistratus ubique praeficeret princeps").⁵² In this way, Erasmus presents More as a model of the perfect public servant, useful to those in power, yet neither dominated nor corrupted by ambition.

*In qua eum se cordatissime gessisset, non conqueuit serenissimus Rex Henricus eius nominis octauus donec hominem in aulam suam pertraheret. Cur enim non dicam pertraheret? Nullus unquam vehementius ambiit in aulam admitti quam hic studuit effugere. Verum cum esset optimo Regi in animo familiam suam erudit, grauib, cordatis et integris viris differtam reddere, cum alios permultos, tum Morum in primis acciuit; quem sic in intimis habet ut a se nunquam patiatur scedere. Sive seriis utendum est, nihil illo consultius; siue visum est Regi fabulis amoenioribus laxare animum, nullus comes festiuior. Saepe res arduae iudicem grauem et cordatum postulant; has sic Morus discutit ut utraque pars habeat gratiam. Nec tamen ab eo quisquam impetrauit ut munus a quoquam acciperet. Felices respublicas si Mori similes magistratus ubique praeficeret princeps! Nec interim ullum accessit supercilium. Inter tantas negociorum moles et veterum amiculorum meminit et ad literas adamatas subinde redit.*⁵³

Likewise, the author continues to portray More as a model of public virtue and selfless service, emphasising that he never exploited his position for personal gain but instead used it for the benefit of others. He further stresses that his spirit was always inclined toward the common good, a quality that became even more evident when his power was greatest ("nunc magis exerit, quando plus potest prodesse").⁵⁴ More is presented almost as a "public protector of the poor" ("diceret Morum esse publicum omnium inopum patronum"),⁵⁵ always ready to relieve suffering, guide the confused, and reconcile

⁴⁹(Erasmus, 1922, p. 18).

⁵⁰(Erasmus, 1922, p. 20).

⁵¹(Erasmus, 1922, p. 20).

⁵²(Erasmus, 1922, p. 20).

⁵³(Erasmus, 1922, p. 20).

⁵⁴(Erasmus, 1922, p. 21).

⁵⁵(Erasmus, 1922, p. 21).

those in conflict. In this way, he emerges as a figure of compassion and moral integrity. Furthermore, the author emphasises that More found satisfaction in helping others without expecting anything in return or reminding them of the favours he had done. Finally, despite his success and happiness, he remained entirely free from vanity, reinforcing his image as a humble and genuinely virtuous man.

*Quicquid dignitate valet, quicquid apud amplissimum Regem gratia pollet, id omne iuuandae reipublicae, iuuandis amicis impendit. Semper quidem adfuit animus de cunctis benemerendi eupidissimus mireque pronus ad misericordiam: eum: nunc magis exerit, quando plus potest prodesse. Alios pecunia subleuat, alios auctoritate tuetur, alios commendatione prouehit. Quos alioqui iuuare non potest, his consilio succurrit. Nullum unquam a se tristem dimisit. Diceret Morum esse publicum omnium inopum patronum. Ingens lucrum sibi putat accessisse si quem oppressum subleuauit, si perplexum et impeditum explicuit, si alienatum redegit in gratiam. Nemo lubentius collocat beneficium, nemo minus exprobrat. Iam cum tot nominibus sit felicissimus, et felicitatis comes fere soleat esse iactantia, nullum adhuc mortalium mihi videre contigit qui longius abesset ab hoc vitio.*⁵⁶

Regarding his literary education, Erasmus returns to the subject of More's studies, since these were precisely what most strengthened the relationship between the two men. In his youth, More devoted himself mainly to poetry; later, however, much of his effort was directed toward refining his prose and making it more elegant and polished. At the same time, his mastery of a wide range of literary genres continued to expand.

*Sed ad studiorum commemorationem redeo, quae me More mihique Morum potissimum conciliarunt. Primam aetatem carmine potissimum exercuit, mox diu luetatus est ut prosam orationem redderet molliorem, per omne scripti genus stilum exercens. Qui cuiusmodi sit, quid attinet commemorare? tibi praesertim qui libros eius semper habeas in manibus. Declamationibus praecipue delectatus est, et, in his, materiis adoxis, quod in his aerior sit ingeniorum exercitatio. Unde adolescens etiamnum dialogum moliebatur, in quo Platonis communitatem ad uxores usque defendit. Luciani Tyrannicidae respondit; quo in argumento me voluit antagonistam habere, quo certius periculum faceret equid profecisset in hoc genere. Utopiam hoc consilio edidit (printed: aeditit),⁵⁷ ut indicaret quibus rebus fiat ut minus commode habeant respublicae.*⁵⁸

The aforementioned fragment of the letter is essential for interpreting and understanding Utopia. It describes in considerable detail More's literary interests, his approach to learning, and several key aspects of his humanist and rhetorical education. First, the text highlights his preference for *declamationes*, rhetorical exercises that formed a central part of humanist training. These were not simply speeches, but intellectual exercises in which students defended positions that were often difficult, unconventional, or even contrary to common sense. For this reason, the letter refers to the "*materiae adoxae*"⁵⁹ ("paradoxical topics"), since such subjects were believed to sharpen the intellect by demanding subtle argumentation, creativity, and a refined command of language.

Erasmus refers to the term "*adoxae*" ("materiis adoxis") as the rhetorical exercise practised by More. The word "*adoxae*" means "without reputation" or "contrary to *Sóα*" ("opinion"). In short, it

refers to the unbelievable, the implausible, the shocking, the absurd, or that which contradicts general opinion.⁶⁰

In ancient rhetoric, as systematised by rhetoricians such as Cicero and Quintilian,⁶¹ a distinction was made between "*vdoα*" ("commonly accepted opinions" or "plausible ideas")⁶² and "*adoxae*" ("implausible" or "paradoxical" arguments). Practising with "*adoxae*", as Erasmus explains, involved defending ideas that at first appeared false, absurd, or provocative. This exercise had an important rhetorical function, since it trained students to construct persuasive arguments even in difficult or unfavourable circumstances. At the same time, it also served a philosophical purpose, since confronting ideas that challenged common assumptions encouraged students to question what was usually taken for granted. In this way, engaging with the improbable compelled students to examine more carefully and justify more rigorously what they took to be true.

Following these rhetorical principles, the letter informs us of a previously unknown dialogue written by More in his youth, in which he defends Plato's doctrine of the community of goods, extending it even to women. It is worth recalling that in *The Republic*, Plato describes the "*kolvovía*"⁶³ as the communal organisation of the guardians of the ideal city, who share property, women, and children. This arrangement is not primarily economic or familial in purpose, but political: it seeks to eliminate private interests that might generate conflict and to ensure that the guardians consistently act for the common good of the *polis* ("πόλις"). In this framework, property, family, and offspring cease to be individual possessions and become collective, thereby reinforcing the unity and stability of the city.

The information provided by Erasmus about the existence of this dialogue, which More composed on a paradoxical premise, is particularly revealing. As will be discussed below, Erasmus also offers key interpretative guidance for reading Utopia. The humanist of Rotterdam explains that More conceived the work as an extension of that rhetorical exercise, shaped by paradox and political critique ("*Utopiam hoc consilio edidit (printed: aeditit),⁶⁴ ut indicaret quibus rebus fiat ut minus commode habeant respublicae*").⁶⁵

In other words, in this imagined commonwealth (Utopia), the humanist develops a political and social model which, although presented as rational and ideal, comes into conflict with the customs, values and institutions of the Europe of his time. The paradox lies, above all, in the fact that the abolition of private property and, to some extent, of traditional family ties is presented as the means to achieve a more just, stable and virtuous society. In this way, the English scholar takes ideas that in Plato applied solely to the class of guardians and extends them to the whole of the utopian social organisation. The paradoxical nature of the work arises because what is normally regarded as the foundation of social order, such as private property, the family or self-interest, appears in this ideal society as the source of corruption and conflict. Thus, the work constantly plays on the ambiguity between a serious critique of contemporary society and the provocative intellectual exercise characteristic of the humanist tradition. In light of Erasmus's letter, we can better understand contemporary scholars such as Antonio Poch. For this author, the idea of utopia constitutes an imaginary and critical construct conceived not so much for

⁵⁶(Erasmus, 1922, p. 21).

⁵⁷The printed text reads "aeditit", but this should be corrected to "edidit". The orthographic confusion characteristic of medieval and Renaissance Latin; in the manuscript and printed tradition, there was frequent hesitation between the long "e" and the diphthong "ae", which gave rise to erroneous forms such as "aeditit", "aeditio" or "aeditit" librum instead of the correct "edidit" and "editio". (Harrington, Pucci & Elliott, 1997, p. 2).

⁵⁸(Erasmus, 1922, p. 21).

⁵⁹(Erasmus, 1922, p. 21).

⁶⁰José Miguel Sangüillo refers to a paradox as an argument in which true premises and valid reasoning appear to lead to a false conclusion. (Sangüillo, 2023, pp. 12–13).

⁶¹(Pozuelo Yvancos, 2024, p. 196).

⁶²(Santos Fernández, 2025, p. 159).

⁶³Frequently translated as "communion", "participation" or "community". (Mesquita, 2018, pp. 209–210).

⁶⁴See note 57.

⁶⁵(Erasmus, 1922, p. 21).

practical implementation as for challenging the existing reality.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the letter alludes to Lucian of Samosata's *Tyrannicide*, a rhetorical treatise addressing the question of whether it is legitimate to kill a tyrant. More translated this work into Latin and also added his own response as an exercise in counterargumentation against its central argument. Erasmus specifically refers to More's reply in the *Tyrannicide* to illustrate that learning arises from dialogue and from the confrontation of opposing ideas.

Taken together, these early works should not be read as a mere biographical anecdote, but rather as the development of a genuine intellectual laboratory from which Utopia would later emerge. In this sense, the work does not arise from fantasy, but from a mode of thought inherited from classical humanism. It is a disciplined practice that explores, defends, and pushes philosophical ideas, especially those of Plato, to their limits, so that they become instruments for interrogating reality and revealing its boundaries.

Erasmus further argues that the work draws its inspiration from England, a country with which he was intimately familiar. This suggests that More does not construct a wholly abstract world, but rather bases his vision on English reality. The Rotterdam scholar's observation is accurate, as the English author alludes to specific political contexts, such as diplomatic embassies and enclosure laws, amongst others, as will be demonstrated in the section devoted to the commentary on selected passages from More's work.

Secondly, with regard to the order of composition, this interpretation maintains that More wrote the second book first, during a period of calm reflection, and that he later added the first book more quickly and spontaneously, seizing a favourable opportunity. Finally, from a stylistic perspective, this compositional process would explain certain inconsistencies in the text, as some passages are more elaborate and reflective in nature. In contrast, others have a more spontaneous tone: "*sed Britannicam potissimum effinxit, quam habet penitus perspectam eognitamque. Secundum librum prius scripserat per ocium, mox per occasionem primum adiecit ex tempore. Atque hinc nonnulla dictionis inaequalitas*".⁶⁷

The letter then highlights the exceptional *ingenium* of the English scholar. His portrait is constructed from a combination of natural intelligence, a perfect memory ("in numerato")⁶⁸ and a great capacity for verbal improvisation ("ex tempore"),⁶⁹ which makes him a virtually unbeatable opponent in intellectual debate.

To reinforce this idea, John Colet is quoted, a man of sharp and precise judgement, who used to assert in family conversations that in all of Britain there was a single truly singular intellect, despite the abundance of notable talents on the island ("Ioannes Coletus [...] dicere solet Britanniae non nisi unicum esse ingenium").⁷⁰

*Vix alium reperias qui felicius dicat ex tempore: adeo felici ingenio felix lingua subseruit. Ingenium praesens et ubique praeuolans, memoria parata; quae eum omnia habeat velut in numerato, prompte et incontinenter suggerit quicquid tempus aut res postulat. In disputationibus nihil fingi potest acutius, adeo ut summis etiam theologis saepe negocium facessat, in ipsorum harena versans. Ioannes Coletus, vir acris exactique iudicii, in familiaribus colloquiis subinde dicere solet Britanniae non nisi unicum esse ingenium: cum haec insula tot egregiis ingeniis floreat.*⁷¹

Moving on in the letter, Erasmus describes the English king Henry VIII as a prudent prince who not only welcomes men of great virtue

into his circle, but also brings them into his household and cabinet, actively seeking them out as advisers, witnesses to his life and travelling companions. In this way, he prefers their company to that of corrupt, sycophantic or disloyal courtiers, whose influence often leads to disorder, tyranny or the corruption of government. Against this positive image of the English court, Erasmus introduces Hutten's critical stance, noting that, were he to know this Court, he would likely qualify his general rejection of courtly circles, despite living himself under a prince of great integrity. As a further point, Hutten was linked to influential court circles, having been part of King Albert of Brandenburg's circle of friends.

Finally, he emphasises that what is truly remarkable is the group of great humanists and scholars surrounding the king, Henry VIII, among whom he cites Thomas Linacre (c. 1460–1524), Richard Pace (c. 1482–1536), John Colet (c. 1467–1519), More (1478–1535) and Cuthbert Tunstall (1474–1559), each of whom embodies a compendium of virtues and learning. Finally, Erasmus expresses his hope that Albert of Brandenburg (1490–1545),⁷² considered one of the most prominent figures of his time in the Holy Roman Empire, will bring into his circle other men of equal virtue and learning, and his conduct will serve as a model for other princes, inspiring them to emulate this ideal of an enlightened court.

*Tales viros cordatissimus Rex in familiam suam atque adeo in cubiculum non solum admittit verumetiam inuitat; nec inuitat modo verumetiam pertrahit. Hos habet arbitros ac testes perpetuos vitae hos habet in consilis, hos habet itinerum comites. Ab his stipari gaudet potius quam luxu perditis iuuenibus aut mulierculis, aut etiam torquatis Midis, aut insynceris officiis; quorum alius ad voluptates ineptas auocet, alius ad tyrannidem inflammet, alius ad expilandum populum nouas technas suggerat. In hac aula si vixisses, Huttene, sat scio rursum aliam Aulam describeres, et misaulos esse desineres: quanquam tu quoque cum eo Principe viuis vt integriorem nec optare possis. Neque desunt qui rebus optimis faueant, veluti Stromerus ac Coppus. semel dixeris. Sed quid ista paucitas ad tantum examen insignium virorum, Montioii, Linaeri, Pacei, Coleti, Stoeschleii, Latimeri, Mori, Tunstalli, Clerici atque aliorum his adsimilium? quorum quemeunque nominaris, mundum omnium virtutum ac disciplinarum Mihi vero spes est haud quaquam vulgaris fore ut Albertus, unicum his temporibus nostrae Germaniae ornamentum, et plures sui similes in suam allegat familiam, et caeteris principibus graui sit exemplo, vt idem et ipsi suae quisque domi facere studeant. Habes imaginem ad optimum exemplar a pessimo artifice non optime deliniatam.*⁷³

In conclusion, Erasmus presents More as a humanist who combines his political activity at the Court of Henry VIII with deep intellectual engagement and strong moral rigour. His defining characteristic is his "*ingenium*", a form of creative intelligence that unites political practice and writing. This ingenuity is particularly evident in *Utopia*, which should not be read as a literal political proposal, but rather as an exercise in paradox ("ἀδωα") used to interrogate reality. Thus, More's life and work constitute a unified whole, since his experience in public office is transformed through intellectual ingenuity into a critical reflection on politics.

⁶⁶(Poch, 2008, p. LXXII).

⁶⁷(Erasmus, 1922, p. 21).

⁶⁸(Erasmus, 1922, p. 21).

⁶⁹(Erasmus, 1922, p. 21).

⁷⁰(Erasmus, 1922, p. 21).

⁷¹(Erasmus, 1922, p. 21).

⁷²Hugh Chisholm discusses Hutten's friendship with Albert. (Chisholm, 1911, p. 496). Heinrich Grimm writes a biography of Albert of Brandenburg. (Grimm, 1953, pp. 166–167).

⁷³(Erasmus, 1922, p. 22).

5. Commentary on selected passages from Utopia

5.1. The dispatch of a diplomatic mission regarding the wool trade

I shall comment on the opening of Utopia; specifically, the text refers to a particular historical moment linked to the wool trade. In More's time, fabrics produced in Flanders were freely imported into England, whilst Flemish ports remained open to English wool. However, this balance was disrupted when the planned marriage between Prince Charles V, son of Philip the Handsome, and Princess Mary, sister of Henry VIII, was called off, prompting the English government to react by banning the export of wool to Holland and Zeeland.

It soon became clear that this measure was detrimental to both English and foreign interests. Consequently, in May 1515, an embassy was sent to the Netherlands in order to restore the balance of trade; More participated in this as a junior member. The situation required great diplomatic skill, which is why the mission's leadership was entrusted to Cuthbert Tunstall.⁷⁴ The embassy finally achieved its objectives, and More returned to London towards the end of that same year; it was in this context that Utopia was conceived.⁷⁵ The Latin passage of the work, where reference is made to that moment, reads as follows:

*Quum non exigui momenti negotia quaedam invictissimus Angliae Rex Henricus eius nominis octavus, omnibus egregii principis artibus ornatissimus, cum serenissimo Castellae principe Carolo controversa nuper habuisset, ad ea tractanda componendaque oratorem me legavit in Flandriam, comitem et collegam viri incomparabilis Cuthberti Tunstalli, quem sacris scriniis nuper ingenti omnium gratulatione praefecit, de cuius sane laudibus nihil a me dicitur, non quod verear ne parum sinceræ fidei testis habenda sit amicitia, sed quod virtus eius ac doctrina maior est quam ut a me praedicari possit, tum notior ubique atque illustrior quam ut debeat, nisi videri velim solem lucerna, quod aiunt, ostendere. Occurrerunt nobis Brugis (sic enim convenerat) hi, quibus a principe negotium demandabatur, egregii viri omnes. In his praefectus Brugensis vir magnificus, princeps et caput erat, ceterum os et pectus Georgius Temsicius Cassiletanus Praepositus, non arte solum, verum etiam natura facundus, ad haec iure consultissimus, tractandi vero negotii cum ingenio tum assiduo rerum usu eximius artifex. Ubi semel atque iterum congressi, quibusdam de rebus non satis consentiremus, illi in aliquot dies vale nobis dicto, Bruxellas profecti sunt, principis oraculum sciscitaturi.*⁷⁶

In the passage cited above, the scholar recounts that he was sent to Flanders on a diplomatic mission with the aim of negotiating and resolving certain significant economic disputes concerning the wool market, which had arisen between the King of England, Henry VIII, and the Prince of Castile, Charles V. He was part of this embassy alongside Tunstall, a figure of great prestige recently appointed head of the royal archives, whose qualities were so widely recognised that it was unnecessary to extol them. He notes that, as agreed, the delegation met in Bruges with the prince's representatives, all of them distinguished men. Although the city prefect held the principal position, the man who played a decisive role in the negotiations was George Temse, noted for his eloquence, his profound knowledge of law, and his great skill in diplomatic practice. After several meetings, no agreement was reached on certain points, so the prince's delegates set off for Brussels to consult on their decision.

5.2. Portrait of Petrus Aegidius (Pieter Gillis) and Raphael Hythloday

More further explains that, driven by circumstances, he moved to Antwerp. During his stay there, he received frequent visits from Petrus Aegidius, a native of the city, whom he considered particularly agreeable among all. He describes him as a dignified and respected man whose qualities stood out both for his education and his character. According to More, Aegidius possessed exceptional virtues: he was learned, upright, and showed a sincere disposition towards everyone, especially his friends, to whom he offered uncommon affection and loyalty.

He adds that Aegidius possessed extraordinary modesty, free from any pretence, and a natural prudence combined with great simplicity. He also highlights his conversation skill, which was always pleasant and free from malice. Thanks to his warm manner and pleasant conversation, More states that he managed to alleviate much of the homesickness he felt for his homeland, his home, his wife and his children, from whom he had been separated for more than four months.

*Ego me interim (sic enim res ferebat) Antuerpiam confero. Ibi dum versor, saepe me inter alios, sed quo non alius gratior, invisit Petrus Aegidius Antuerpiae natus, magna fide et loco apud suos honesto, dignus honestissimo, quippe iuvenis haud scio doctiorne an morator. Est enim et optimus et litteratissimus, ad haec animo in omnes candido, in amicos vero tam propenso pectore, amore, fide, affectu tam sincero, ut vix unum aut alterum usquam invenias, quem illi sentias omnibus amicitiae numeris esse conferendum. Rara illi modestia, nemini longius abest fucus, nulli simplicitas inest prudentior, porro sermone tam lepidus, et tam innoxie facetus, ut patriae desiderium ac laris domestici, uxoris, et liberorum, quorum studio revisendorum nimis quam anxie tenebar (iam tum enim plus quattuor mensibus afueram domo), magna ex parte mihi dulcissima consuetudine sua, et mellitissima confabulatione levaverit.*⁷⁷

Moreover, More recounts that, after attending services at the Church of the Virgin Mary, a place renowned both for its beauty and for the throng of worshippers, he was preparing to return to his lodgings when he observed Aegidius conversing with an unknown man. That individual, of advanced years, with a weather-beaten face and a dishevelled appearance, gave him the impression of being a seafarer.

Noticing his presence, Petrus Aegidius greeted him and gently led him aside to point out a stranger, saying that he wished to introduce them. More replied that any recommendation from Aegidius was sufficient reason to welcome the meeting. Yet, his companion insisted that the traveller merited admiration on his own account, for no one could describe so many unfamiliar lands and peoples with equal experience and authority, subjects he knew would deeply interest More. Although More believed he had been right in assuming he was a sailor, Aegidius qualified that idea by pointing out that he had not sailed like Palinurus, the experienced helmsman of Aeneas' ship, who falls asleep whilst steering the fleet towards Italy (Verg. Aen. 5, 855-860), but rather like Ulysses, and even like Plato, that is to say, driven by a desire to learn and reflect.⁷⁸ He then introduced Raphael Hythloday, whom he describes as a learned man, particularly well-versed in Greek and deeply devoted to philosophy. Aegidius adds that, after ceding his inheritance to his brothers in

⁷⁴(Hill, 2024, pp. 52–60).

⁷⁵(Lupton, 1895, p. xxvii).

⁷⁶(Morus, 1548, pp. 27–28).

⁷⁷(Morus, 1548, pp. 28–29).

⁷⁸(More, 2012, p. 30).

Portugal, Hythloday joined Amerigo Vespucci,⁷⁹ driven by a desire to discover the world, and accompanied him on several voyages.

Finally, he explains that, on the last expedition, Hythloday decided to remain in distant lands alongside other men, driven more by his desire to explore than by any intention of returning. According to the account, he lived by the belief that no specific place is needed for burial, for “the sky covers him who has no grave” (Caelo tegitur qui non habet urnam) (Lucan. 7, 819) and that the divine can be attained from anywhere.

In More’s work, Hythloday appears as an observer who travels to different parts of the world. The verse, inserted into the text and attributed to Lucan, reinforces this image by suggesting that his only “roof” is the sky; that is, he is not bound to a grave, a territory, or a local identity. In this way, it symbolises his cosmopolitan nature, as he is defined not by any specific city or nation, but by belonging to the world as a whole.

Hunc quum die quadam in templo divae Mariae, quod et opere pulcherrimum, et populo celeberrimum est, rei divinae interfuissem, atque peracto sacro pararem inde in hospitium redire, forte colloquentem video cum hospite quodam, vergentis ad senium aetatis, vultu adusto, promissa barba, paenula neglectim ab humero dependente, qui mihi ex vultu atque habitu nauclerus esse videbatur. At Petrus, ubi me conspexit, adit ac salutat. Respondere conantem seducit paululum, et Vides, inquit, hunc? (Simul designabat eum cum quo loquentem videram.) Eum, inquit, iam hinc ad te recta parabam ducere. Venisset, inquam, pergratus mihi tua causa. Immo, inquit ille, si nosset hominem, sua. Nam nemo vivit hodie mortalium omnium, qui tantam tibi hominum, terrarumque incognitarum narrare possit historiam. Quarum rerum audiendarum scio avidissimum esse te. Ergo, inquam, non pessime coniectavi: nam primo aspectu protinus sensi hominem esse nauclerum. Atqui, inquit, aberrasti longissime; navigavit quidem non ut Palinurus, sed ut Ulysses, immo, velut Plato. Nempe Raphael iste, sic enim vocatur gentilicio nomine Hythlodaeus, et Latinae linguae non indoctus, et Graecae doctissimus (cuius ideo studiosior quam Romanae fuit, quoniam totum se addixerat philosophiae; qua in re nihil quod alicuius momenti sit praeter Senecae quaedam ac Ciceronis exstare Latine cognovit), relicto fratribus patrimonio quod ei domi fuerat (est enim Lusitanus), orbis terrarum contemplandi studio Americo Vesputio se adiunxit, atque in tribus posterioribus illarum quattuor navigationum, quae passim iam leguntur, perpetuus eius comes fuit, nisi quod in ultima cum eo non rediit. Curavit enim atque adeo extorsit ab Americo, ut ipse in his XXIII esset qui ad fines postremae navigationis in castello relinquebantur. Itaque relictus est uti obtemperaretur animo eius, peregrinationis magis quam sepulchri curioso: quippe cui haec assidue sunt in ore, Caelo tegitur qui non habet urnam [=Lucan. 7, 819], et Undique ad superos tantundem esse viae.⁸⁰

I would like to focus on the description of the character Hythloday, whom he identifies with Ulysses (navigavit [...] sed ut Ulysses)⁸¹ since, like the Greek hero, he is a man who has travelled extensively and is familiar with the customs of different countries (“orbis terrarum contemplandi studio Americo Vesputio se adiunxit”).⁸² Furthermore, he is presented as a learned man, with a profound knowledge of the Greek language and also of Latin; it is also noted that he was a man devoted to philosophy and who scorned material possessions (“Latinae linguae non indoctus, et Graecae doctissimus [...] studiosior quam Romanae fuit, quoniam totum se addixerat

philosophiae [...] relicto fratribus patrimonio).⁸³ Next, I quote the verses⁸⁴ from Homer’s *Odyssey*, which could serve as a model for the description of Hythloday. Thus, the words of the Greek epic poet continue: “νδρα μοι νεπε, Μοσα, πολότροπο, δζ μάλα πολλά / πλάγθη, έπει Τροίηζ ιερών ποτλίεθον έπερσεν. / πολλν δ’ άνθρόπων δεν άοτεα καί νόον έγνώ”. “Tell me, Muse, of the resourceful man, who wandered for a long time after destroying the sacred city of Troy; he saw the cities of many men and came to know their ways of thinking” (Hom. Od. 1, 13).⁸⁵ In *Ars Poetica*, Horace uses Homer’s verses to express the idea that one who travels widely and sees much also knows much. : “Dic mihi, Musa, uirum, captae post tempora Troiae / qui mores hominum multorum uidit et urbes” (Hor. Ars 141–142). This can be translated as: “Tell me, Muse, of the man who, after the fall of Troy, came to know the customs of many men and saw their cities.”

I also cite another passage from Horace’s *Epistles*, which presents a different version of the same verse: “qui domitor Troiae multorum prouidus urbes, et mores hominum inspexit, latumque per aequor”. (Hor. Epist. 1, 2, 17–22).⁸⁶ “He who, conqueror of Troy, prudent among many cities, examined the customs of men and (sailed) across the wide sea.”

The Socratic philosopher Antisthenes tends to offer an ethical interpretation of Ulysses; he associates the term “πολότροπος” with both the manner of being and the manner of speaking of the wise Homeric hero. Thus, he continues:

Μποτε ον τρόποζ τὸ μν τι σημαίει τὸ ἦθος, τὸ δ τι σημαίει τν το λόγον χρσιν [...] έπιόταμε δε πολλοὺζ τρό πει το αο, πολύτπ ἄν ειεν. ει δε οι σοφι καί αγαθοι ειολ, διὰ τοτό φησι τὸν Οδνσέα Ομηρο σφὸν ντα πολότροπν ειναί, Ότ δι τοζ άνθρόποζ ηπίοτατο πολλοζ τρόπ συνεναί.⁸⁷

“Perhaps, then,”τρόπος” means, on the one hand, character, and on the other, the use of speech. And those who know many ways of speaking about the same thing would be versatile. And if the wise and good are so, that is why Homer says that Odysseus, being wise, is ‘resourceful’ (πολότροπος), because he knew how to deal with men in many ways”.

The passage revolves around the Greek word “τρόπος”, which has a fairly broad semantic field. Here, it is precisely this ambiguity that is exploited to develop an ethical and rhetorical idea. First, the text proposes a key distinction in which “τρόπος” can mean “character” (“ἦθος”), that is, a person’s moral disposition, or the manner of speaking or using discourse (“λόγος”). This dual meaning is no accident; in Greek culture, ethics and rhetoric are deeply interconnected.

From this point, an interesting consequence emerges. Those who master many “τρόπο” of discourse, that is, different ways of expressing the same idea, are called “πολύτροπο”, meaning versatile or adaptable. This is not merely a technical skill but a practical virtue: the ability to adjust one’s discourse to the situation and to the interlocutor. The argument culminates with Homer’s presentation of Odysseus (Ulysses) as an example. Homer describes Odysseus as “πολότροπος”, a term usually translated as “resourceful” or “cunning”. Here, however, the term more precisely means that he is not only ingenious but also capable of relating to different types of people in multiple ways. Herman Josef Polak (18441908) proposes a series of corrections to the cited text in order to better clarify what Antisthenes intended. In his work *Emendationes ad scholia in Homeri Odysseam*, he revises the passage attributed to

⁷⁹Americus Vesputius (1454–1512), or Amerigo Vespucci, was a famous explorer, cartographer, and chronicler of voyages to the New World. The Americas are named after him. (More, 2012, p. 30).

⁸⁰(Morus, 1548, pp. 29–30).

⁸¹(Morus, 1548, p. 29).

⁸²(Morus, 1548, p. 30).

⁸³(Morus, 1548, pp. 29–30).

⁸⁴(Horace, 2010, p. 135).

⁸⁵(Homer, 1919, p. 12).

⁸⁶(Horace, 2010, p. 135).

⁸⁷(Polak, 1869, p. 50; Garriga, 2015–2016: 44).

Antisthenes. Whereas the transmitted reading states: “διὰ τοῦτο φησὶ τὸν Ὀδυσσεῖα Ὅμηρος σοφὸν ντα πολύτροπον εἶναι, ὅτ δὲ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἥπιότατο πολλοὺς τρόπους συνεῖναι”, Polak proposes the correction: “διὰ τοῦτο φησὶ τὸν Ὀδυσσεῖα Ὅμηρος ἀγαθὸν ὄντα πολύτροπον εἶναι”. His justification for replacing “σοφός” with “ἀγαθός” rests on the idea that the wise man (“ὁ σοφός”) is also good (“ἀγαθός”), a view characteristic of the Socratic tradition, in which Antisthenes holds a prominent position.

Furthermore, he argues that the reading “πονηρός”, an adjective that appears a few lines earlier and describes Ulysses, should be corrected. He notes that this must have been an error by a grammarian or a reader.⁸⁸ Polak concludes by emphasising the positive value of the term “πολύτροπος”,⁸⁹ which is why the expression “ἡ δὲ λόγον πολιορκία” is used to indicate that skill and dexterity in speech is a virtue.⁹⁰

In line with Polak’s observation regarding the substitution of “σοφός” for “ἀγαθός”, the correlation between knowledge and virtue constitutes a recurring motif in the classical tradition. Far from emerging suddenly in later rhetorical theory, the assimilation of the “wise man” (“ὁ σοφός”) with the “good man” (“ἀγαθός”) is embedded in a gradual process of conceptual development. This connection is rooted in the thought of the Socratic philosophers, among whom Antisthenes occupies a prominent position. In this sense, when Quintilian defines the ideal orator as the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* (Quint. Inst. 12, 1, 1), he is not introducing an original idea, but rather drawing upon, systematising, and transferring into the field of rhetoric a well-established ethical tradition.

As David Fleming notes, this association between rhetorical skill and civic virtue does not constitute an original contribution by Quintilian.⁹¹ Within this framework, it may be argued that earlier traditions helped to consolidate the idea that true eloquence is not reducible to technical competence, but rather depends on the moral character of the speaker. In other words, the ideal orator is not only someone who masters the art of speaking, but also someone who possesses a fundamentally ethical disposition.

Consequently, this model of the orator must combine technical excellence and mastery of rhetoric with, above all, moral integrity; ultimately, eloquence without virtue cannot be regarded as true eloquence.

⁸⁸ *Res ipsa clamat dixisse Anthisthenem: διὰ τοῦτο φησὶ τὸν Ὀδυσσεῖα Ὅμηρος ἀγαθὸν ὄντα πολύτροπον εἶναι, ὅτ δὲ τοῦ σοφοῦ αὐτὴν non potest non ἀγαθὸς esse: itaque qui πολύτροπον, idem ἀγαθὸς est. Est hic argumentandi modus cum omnium philosophorum, qui Socratis sectam secuti sunt, tum in primis Antisthenes dignus, Stoicorum antecusore et quasi auctore. Sic igitur crimen quod in ἀπορίᾳ posuerat dilutum est videlicet, nec amplius Ulixes πονηρὸς habendus ὅτι πολύτροπος ἐκλήθη. Comprobantur haec omnia exemplo Pythagorae pro variis hominum generibus vario sermonis genere uti soliti et medicorum, qui, tu corporis constitutio non est eadem in singulis, ita in simili morbo dissimilia medicamenta adhibere consueverunt. Itaque τρόπον μὲν οὐ τὸ παλὶμβόλον, τὸ τὸ ἥθους πολυμετάβολον! Haud uidi magis! Et tota disputatione hoc unum agitur tu demonstraretur, haec non ita esse! At uero ista uerba non Anthisthenes esse possunt, non Porphyrii, sed inepti cuiusdam grammatici dicam an lectoris.* (Polak, 1881, p. 16).

⁸⁹ It should be noted that the positive attitude towards Ulysses was not always the case in antiquity; much later, Eustathius understood πολύτροπος in the sense of someone who is “πολιτικός”, meaning one who “makes use of deceit and stratagems”, that is to say, he understood it as something negative, a characterisation he attributes to Odysseus (Ulysses). This is the interpretation given by Eustathius in his commentary on the *Odyssey* 1.1, which reads as follows: “πολύτροπος οὐκ ὁ δὲ πολλὰν ἐμπερίαν πολέων ὡς ὁ ποιητὴς μετ’ ὀλίγα ἐρεῖ. And as Euripides might say, ‘of many ways’” (Eust. Op. 1380, 39–40). (Eustathius, 1825, p. 2).

⁹⁰ *Hucusque philosophus, in explicanda natura τῆς δὲ λόγον πολιορκίας occupatus, non sine sophistica arte probare adgressus est, ea non uitium notari sed sollertiam adeoque uirtutem. λόγον δὲ πολιορκία καὶ χρεῖσις ποίησις λόγον εἰς ποικίλας ἀκοὰς μοστροπία γίεται. ν γὰρ τὸ ἐκάστου οὐκ οὐδὲν καὶ τὸ ἀρμόδιον ἐκάστου τὴν ποιήσαντος τοῦ λόγου εἰς ν συναγερὸς τὸ ἐκάστου ῥόσο. τὸ δ’ αὖ μοσειδεῖ, ἀνάμμοστο τὸν ῥὸς ἀκοὰς διαφώνος πολλὰν ποιεῖ τὸν ἄλλου σπὸ πολλὰν ἀπόβλητον ὡς αὐτὸς ἅπτην λόγον.* (Polak, 1881, pp. 16–17).

⁹¹ (Fleming, 2018, p. 397).

The comparison with Ulysses as a literary trope also appears in a letter from Juan Luis Vives addressed to Gilles Wallop.⁹² It was probably written in Oxford, judging by the reference to his teaching work with young people. However, it is difficult to distinguish precisely between the stages of his life in London and in Oxford.⁹³ Vives describes Wallop’s brother as a person esteemed for his efficiency and for his “*virtus animi*”. Furthermore, he notes that his discourse was particularly valued in numerous matters, for, like Ulysses (“uelut Ulysses”),⁹⁴ he had travelled widely and was familiar with the customs and languages of various countries. In the passage under discussion, Vives paraphrases in Latin a well-known passage from the *Odyssey* (Hom. Od. 1, 3): “multas regiones adierit, moresque hominum cognorit”⁹⁵ (“he travelled through many regions and came to know the customs of men”). This phrase directly paraphrases the Homeric verse “πολλὰν δ’ ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄοτα καὶ νόον γυνώ” (Hom. Od. 1, 3),⁹⁶ in which Homer states that the hero saw the cities of many peoples. The expression “καὶ νόον γυνώ” is understood to mean that he came to know their ways of thinking and their customs.

*Vives Aegidio Gualopo suo. S. Colloquutus sum in Regia saepe numero cum fratre tuo, qui de strenuitate, et animi uirtute carus est Regi, Reginae, ac ceteris Britanniae Principibus. Fuit et de alis per multis rebus nobis sermo, quum ille uelut Ulysses quidam multas regiones adierit, moresque hominum cognorit, et linguas calleat.*⁹⁷

6. The laws on enclosures and public health in Utopia

To better understand Utopia as a “legislative laboratory”, it is essential to consider the author’s biography, as the work stems not solely from imagination but also from More’s political and institutional experience. The humanist served in the English Parliament and rose to a position of high responsibility at the court of Henry VIII, which allowed him to gain first-hand knowledge of the actual workings of power, the administration of justice, and the social problems of his time.

From this perspective, Utopia should not be interpreted simply as an external critique or as a fantasy detached from reality, but rather as an intellectual projection of someone actively involved in the institutional system. Many of the ideas presented in the work can be understood as reflections on possible improvements to the political and legal order, arising from the direct experience of someone familiar with the limitations and tensions of government. However, the work also implicitly raises a reflection on the complexity of social life: society is composed of groups with different, and often conflicting, interests. Consequently, any legal provision that benefits one sector may harm another. For example, a regulation that favours the expansion of livestock farming may conflict with the interests of arable farming, and vice versa, since both depend on different uses of land.

⁹² (Watson, 1918, p. 108).

⁹³ Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540) was a Spanish humanist, philosopher and educator from the Kingdom of Valencia. He became a reformer of European education and a moral philosopher of universal stature, advocating the study of Aristotle’s works in their original language and adapting his books intended for the study of Latin for students; he replaced medieval texts with new ones, using vocabulary suited to his era and the contemporary way of speaking. Carlos Mallaina (1817–1885) asserts that Juan Luis Vives was one of the most important men of the Spanish nation and the true driving force behind the literary reform of the 16th century. (Mallaina, 1872, pp. 64–65, 156).

⁹⁴ (Vives, 1788, p. 208).

⁹⁵ (Vives, 1788, p. 208).

⁹⁶ (Homer, 1919, p. 12).

⁹⁷ (Vives, 1788, p. 208).

In this way, the legislative experiment not only illustrates the transformative capacity of law, but also exposes its structural limitations and the difficulty of designing perfectly balanced legislation in a context where benefits and harms are never distributed evenly. In light of the above, I shall now examine several laws and regulations that appear in the work and which, as we shall see, have clear counterparts in the real world and in English legislation of the period.

I begin with the preamble to a law passed almost simultaneously with the writing of More's work (7 Hen. VIII, ch. I) states that great inconveniences exist and are increasing daily due to the desolation, demolition and destruction of houses and settlements within the kingdom, as well as the conversion into pasture of lands that had traditionally been cultivated through tillage and agriculture, which increases idleness.⁹⁸ The year 1516 marks a turning point in English rural historiography; whilst Parliament sought to curb the phenomenon of enclosures through legislation, More published his *Utopia*, denouncing a reality in which commercial ambition was beginning to displace the peasant from his traditional livelihood. Subsequently, Cardinal Wolsey's Commission of 1517 was a research initiative launched to combat the social and economic effects of the enclosures of common land in England.⁹⁹ The reference to the 1516 Act of Parliament on the state of agriculture is inseparable from More's work. Specifically, in Book I of *Utopia*, More criticises the social and economic conditions of England in his time. In this section, he famously describes sheep as becoming so voracious that they "devour men", using this striking image to show how the expansion of sheep farming was driving people from their lands and livelihoods (Oves [...] nunc (uti fertur) tam edaces atque indomitae esse coeperunt, ut homines devorent ipsos);¹⁰⁰ More was aware that the laws of the time were insufficient to protect the poor from the greed of the nobility, who prioritised profits from the wool trade over the livelihoods of farmers. As a member of Parliament, he had first-hand knowledge of the needs of the people. The passage quoted below forms part of his critique of the enclosure movement in England, through which common lands were privatised for sheep farming, leading to the displacement of peasants and an increase in poverty.

*Neque haec tamen sola est furandi necessitas. Est alia magis, quantum credo, peculiaris vobis. Quenam est ea? inquit Cardinalis. Oves, inquam, vestrae, quae tam mites esse, tamque exiguo solent ali, nunc (uti fertur) tam edaces atque indomitae esse coeperunt, ut homines devorent ipsos; agros, domos, oppida uastent ac depopulentur. Nempe quibus cunq[ue] regni partibus nascitur lana tenuior, atque ideo precior, ibi nobiles et generosi, atque adeo Abbates aliquot, sancti uiri, non his contenti redditibus fructibusque annuis, qui maioribus suis solebant ex praediis crescere; nec habentes satis, quod ociose ac laute uiuentes nihil in publicum prosint, nisi etiam obsint; arvo nihil relinquunt, omnia claudunt pascuis, demoliuntur domos, diruunt oppida, templo duntaxat stabulandis suis relicto et tan quam parum soli perderent apud uos ferarum saltus ac uiuaria, illi boni uiri habitationes omnes, et quicquid usquam est culti, uertunt in solitudinem.*¹⁰¹

"And yet this is not the only reason for plundering; there is another, in my opinion, more characteristic of you. 'What is it?' said the cardinal. 'Your sheep,' I said, 'which are usually so tame and feed on so little, have now become so voracious and untameable that they devour even men; they ravage the fields, the houses and the villages, and lay everything waste. For in all those regions of the kingdom where finer, and therefore more valuable, wool is produced,

there the nobles and gentlemen, and even some abbots, holy men, not content with the annual rents and produce that their ancestors used to obtain from their estates, nor considering it sufficient to live idly and in luxury without contributing anything to the public good, but rather harming it, leave nothing for cultivation: they enclose everything for pasture, tear down the houses, destroy the villages, leaving only the church to serve as a sheepfold. And as if it were not enough to ruin so much land, as if they did not already destroy enough soil, these good men turn all dwellings and everything that was once cultivated anywhere into a desert".

In *Utopia*, through its spokesman Hythloday, it is proposed that a law be enacted whereby those who razed farms and agricultural villages must rebuild them or else surrender and hand over their property to those willing to bear the cost of rebuilding, in line with the proposals made by Parliament¹⁰² in 1516.¹⁰³

*Has perniciosas pestes eiicite, statuite ut uillas atque oppida rustica aut hi restituant qui diruere, aut ea cedant reposituris atque aedificare uolentibus. Refrenate coemptiones istas diuitum, ac uelut monopolii exercendi licentiam. Pauciores alantur ocio, reddatur agricolatio, lanificium instauretur, ut sit honestum negotium, quo se utiliter exerceat ociosa ista turba, uel quos hactenus inopia fures fecit, uel qui nunc erronei aut ociosi sunt ministri, fures nimirum utrique futuri. Certe nisi his malis medemini, frustra iactetis exercitum in uindicanda furta iusticiam, nempe speciosam magis quam aut iustam aut utilem. Siquidem quum pessime sinitis educari, et mores paulatim ab teneris annis corrumpi, puniendos uidelicet turn demum quum ea flagitia uiri designent, quorum spem de se perpetuam a pueritia usque praeberant, quid aliud, quaeso, quam facitis fures, et iidem plectitis?*¹⁰⁴

In *Utopia*, we once again see a reflection of the humanist's concerns, in this case regarding public health. In 1514, the scholar was appointed by as a commissioner for sewerage, and in 1532 he was responsible for introducing the Statute of Sewerage (23 Henry VIII, Chapter 5) into legislation.¹⁰⁵ In Book II, when describing the ideal city of Amaurota, the system for channelling clean water suitable for domestic use is outlined, taking into account the characteristics of the terrain depending on whether the areas are high or low-lying:

*Inde canalibus coctilibus, diuersim ad inferiores urbis partes aqua diriuatur, id sicubi locus fieri uetat, cisternis capacibus, colleca pluuiarum, tantndem usu ader.*¹⁰⁶

"From there, through channels of fired brick, water is channelled in various directions towards the lower parts of the city; and where the terrain prevents this, rainwater, collected in large cisterns, provides the same service."

Furthermore, the text describes how health and hygiene conditions are managed in Amaurota on market days, when fruit, vegetables, fish and meat are sold. It highlights a hygiene-oriented system, as food is cleaned outside the city before sale, thus preventing waste and dirt from entering the urban area and ensuring adequate sanitary conditions:

*Adiuncta sunt foris (quae commemorauimus) fora cibaria, in quae non olera modo, arborumque fructus et panes comportantur, sed pisces praeterea quadrupedumque et auium quicquid esculentum est, extra urbem locis appositis ubi fluente tabum ac sordes eluantur.*¹⁰⁷

"Next to the market square I mentioned are food stalls where all manner of vegetables and fruit from the trees are brought, along with bread, as well as fish and all kinds of four-legged animals and

¹⁰²(Finberg, 1967, pp. 70–75; Elton, 1955, pp. 71–73).

¹⁰³(Lupton, 1895, p. xxxvi).

¹⁰⁴(Morus, 1548, p. 45).

¹⁰⁵(Krivatsy, 1973, p. 121).

¹⁰⁶(Morus, 1548, p. 81).

¹⁰⁷(Morus, 1548, p. 94).

⁹⁸(Lupton, 1895, p. xxxv).

⁹⁹(Great Britain. Commissioners of Inclosures, pp. 9–10).

¹⁰⁰(Morus, 1548, p. 42).

¹⁰¹(Morus, 1548, p. 42).

birds that serve as food for humans. But first, the dirt and waste from these are thoroughly washed away in the running water of the river outside the city, in places specially set aside for this purpose.”

6.1. The laws in Utopia are minimal: “Leges habent perquam paucas”

As for the organisation of this utopian place, it has very few laws, since for a society organised in this way, they are entirely sufficient. Other nations, by contrast, are criticised for relying on countless volumes of laws and interpretations which, despite their abundance, fail to cover everything. In this regard, they consider it profoundly unjust that citizens should be subject to rules that are too numerous to read or so obscure that they cannot be clearly understood.

Similarly, the role of lawyers is completely rejected, as it is felt that they often handle cases with cunning and distort the meaning of the laws. For this reason, it is argued that the most appropriate course is for each person to present their own case directly before the judge, clearly setting out the same points they would have entrusted to a defence counsel.

*Leges habent perquam paucas. Sufficiunt enim sic institutis paucissimae. Quin hoc in primis apud alios improbant populos, quod legum interpretumque uolumina, non infinita sufficiunt. Ipsi uero censent iniquissimum; ullos homines his obligari legibus; quae aut numerosiores sint, quam ut perlegi queant; aut obscuriores quam ut a quouis possint intelligi; porro cauidicos; qui causas tractent callide; ac leges uafre disputent; prorsus omnes excludunt. Censent enim ex usu esse; ut suam quisque causam agat; eademque referat iudici; quae narraturus patrono fuerat.*¹⁰⁸

The passage brings to mind Tacitus's phrase “corruptissima re publica plurimae leges” (Tac. Ann. 3, 27): “When the republic is most corrupt, the laws are most numerous”. In light of the above, what Tacitus meant was that the excessive proliferation of laws is a symptom of the moral and political decline of a state. Following the insights of Stefan Krauter, Tacitus presents a critical view of the development of Roman law, arguing that the proliferation of laws does not improve justice, but is usually a sign of political corruption. His account begins with the creation of the Law of the Twelve Tables, following the expulsion of Lucius Tarquinius Superbus. Although he acknowledges the people's role in defending freedom, he presents the conflict between patricians and plebeians as a negative force in political development from the very beginning.

The assessment of the Twelve Tables is ambivalent; they can be seen as the culmination of law (“finis” as “culmination”), but also as the beginning of its decline (“finis” as “end”). From that point on, legislative development appears problematic. In the final phase of the Republic, the situation worsens, as laws cease to serve justice and become political tools, demagogues use them against their rivals, and the number of contradictory laws steadily increases.

Not even reforms such as those of Lucius Cornelius Sulla manage to halt the process, as they generate even more legislation. The system degenerates to the point of passing laws directed against specific individuals, as in the case of Publius Clodius Pulcher against Marcus Tullius Cicero (Tac. Ann. 3, 27, 3), hence the famous conclusion: “corruptissima re publica plurimae leges” (Tac. Ann. 3, 27, 3). Tacitus suggests a distinction between “ius” (“justice”) and “leges” (“laws”): good laws should be few, clear and agreed upon; in practice, they multiply and reflect moral decay. He considers that the attempt at reform under Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus fails because he himself is part of the corrupt system. Thus, legislation ceases to be a remedy and becomes a symptom of the Republic's illness.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸(Morus, 1548, p. 171).

¹⁰⁹(Krauter, 2024, pp. 227–229).

Regarding corruption in the Roman political system, Catalina Balmaceda¹¹⁰ identifies the “exempla virtutis” in Tacitus's Annales and explains how this “virtus” is put into practice by the “vir bonus” under a one-person government. In this regard, it is noted that, for Tacitus, the Principate in its outward appearance could represent servitude, cruelty and fear under the rule of bad emperors. However, although it might be tempting to attribute all responsibility for human conduct to the political system, it is argued that true freedom does not depend on constitutions or on favourable external circumstances that facilitate its exercise, but on the inner strength necessary to remain free even under the most adverse conditions. Likewise, it is argued that the firm conviction that, regardless of the circumstances in which an individual finds themselves, they always retain the personal capacity to decide how to behave, allows Tacitus to reach a clear conclusion: “there can be great men even under bad princes” (“posse etiam sub malis principibus magnos viros esse”) (Tac. Agr. 42, 4). Consequently, it is understood that the challenge under a one-person government lay in recognising the existence of a demanding, arduous and difficult path, yet one that was possible. Finally, it is emphasised that “virtus” could be perceived as dangerous, insofar as it could attract the wrath of those in power who distrusted it because of the glory it entailed; nevertheless, it was still considered worthy of being practised.

Today, following Filippo Padovano,¹¹¹ the specialist literature widely accepts that legislative overproduction can foster corruption by weakening the rule of law. This conclusion is, moreover, strongly supported by studies devoted to the analysis of the causes of corruption.

6.2. Final Passage of Utopia

Following Hythloday's account, More considers that he finds numerous aspects of those people's laws and customs which strike him as having been established most absurdly (“quanquam haud pauca mihi succurrebant, quae in eius populi moribus, legibusque perquam absurde uidebantur instituta”).¹¹² However, he points out that his main objection lies in the very foundation of their social organisation: communal living and sustenance without the use of money, which, in his view, call into question the traditional values of society (“sed in eo quoque ipso maxime, quod maximum totius institutionis fundamentum est uita scilicet, uictuque communi, sine ullo pecuniae commercio”).¹¹³ However, in the concluding part of *Utopia*, noticing Raphael's fatigue and apparent reluctance to consider objections, he refrains from engaging in debate at that moment and instead praises his speech, postponing further discussion. Although he does not fully endorse what has been argued, he acknowledges that many of the ideas presented in *Utopia* are more desirable than realistically attainable in actual societies.

Haec ubi Raphael recensuit, quanquam haud pauca mihi succurrebant, quae in eius populi moribus, legibusque perquam absurde uidebantur instituta, non solum de belli gerendi ratione, et rebus diuinis, ac religione, aliisque insuper eorum institutis, sed in eo quoque ipso maxime, quod maximum totius institutionis fundamentum est uita scilicet, uictuque communi, sine ullo pecuniae commercio, qua una re funditus euertitur omnis nobilitas, magnificentia, splendor, maiestas, uera ut publica est opinio decora atque ornamenta Reipublicae tamen quoniam defessum narrando sciebam, neque mihi satis exploratum erat, possetne ferre, ut contra suam sententiam sentiretur, praesertim quod recordabar, eo nomine quosdam ab illo reprehensos, quasi uerentur,

¹¹⁰(Balmaceda Errazuriz, 2011, p. 366).

¹¹¹(Sampalmieri & Bovenzi, 2020, p. 12).

¹¹²(Morus, 1548, p. 171).

¹¹³(Morus, 1548, p. 171).

*ne non satis putarentur sapere, nisi aliquid inuenirent, in quo uellicare aliorum inuenta possent, idcirco et illorum institutione, et ipsius oratione laudata, manu apprehendens intro coenatum duco, praefatus tamen aliud nobis tempus, iisdem de rebus altius cogitandi, atque uberius cum eo conferendi fore, quod utinam aliquando contingeret. Interea quemadmodum haud possum omnibus assentiri quae dicta sunt, alioqui ab homine citra controuersiam eruditissimo simul & rerum humanarum peritissimo, ita facile confiteor permulta esse in Utopiensium republica, quae in nostris ciuitatibus optarim uerius, quam sperarim.*¹¹⁴

The passage can be understood as a deliberate exercise in argumentative paradox, what the Greek rhetorical tradition calls “*ādoā*” (“the implausible or shocking”), the defence of an idea that, on the surface, contradicts prevailing common sense. In this case, More does not simply propose an alternative model of social organisation in Utopia, but takes to the extreme a thesis that subverts the very pillars of the traditional political order.

Let us recall that Erasmus, in his letter to Hutten,¹¹⁵ mentions the term “*ādoā*” (“*materiis adoxis*”) as the rhetorical exercise practised by More. The key to this strategy lies in exaggerating and radicalising a principle, the absolute community of goods and the abolition of money, to the point of revealing its ultimate implications. From the perspective of common opinion (“*δόξα*”), such a proposal appears not only impracticable but even absurd, as it eliminates the economic incentives, social hierarchies and mechanisms of prestige that structure political life. However, it is precisely in this exaggeration that its rhetorical force is revealed: by defending the seemingly indefensible, More compels the reader to question the assumptions taken for granted. Thus, the abolition of money is not merely an economic measure, but a critical device. By eliminating the accumulation of wealth, the foundations upon which categories such as nobility, magnificence or honour are built also disappear. These cease to be objective virtues and are revealed as effects of an unequal system, sustained by social conventions rather than intrinsic values. The paradox thus functions as a mirror turned upside down: what is usually considered natural, such as social hierarchy, appears in reality as something contingent, that is, dependent on historical conditions and not necessary. Conversely, radical equality, though normally perceived as impossible, presents itself as a coherent alternative when the foundations of the existing social order are questioned.

In this sense, the “*ādoā*” does not seek to convince directly, but rather to destabilise. Therefore, the community of goods in Utopia should be interpreted less as a literal political programme than as a philosophical provocation. In this sense, More’s proposal does not seek so much to be applied literally as to function as an implicit critique of the existing social order, revealing its internal contradictions: what appears natural turns out to be constructed, and what seems stable actually depends on conditions that could be altered. Let us recall that our scholar was a law expert; he studied law and served in the English Parliament, playing an active role in the political life of Henry VIII’s era. It could be understood that the humanist conceived Utopia as a legal laboratory, as a space for analysis, experimentation or the development of legal ideas, taken to the extreme.

7. Approaches to utopian thought through brushstrokes: from More to science fiction and artificial intelligence

The conceptual connection between the Renaissance humanism of More and contemporary developments in artificial intelligence and science fiction is particularly suggestive. However, this relationship should not be understood as a direct equivalence between radically different historical contexts, but rather as a problematic continuity of certain fundamental concerns: the rational organization of society; the search for ideal models of coexistence; and the persistent tension between order and freedom. From this perspective, science fiction and artificial intelligence do not represent a rupture with classical utopian thought, but rather its contemporary projection and reformulation.

In Utopia, More imagines a community rationally organized through collective planning, shared property, and the elimination of inequality by means of common rules. The work proposes an apparently harmonious and efficient social model in which collective welfare prevails over individual interests. Nevertheless, several contemporary scholars have pointed out that this ideal organization also entails forms of social control that restrict individual autonomy.

In this regard, Stephen Duncombe¹¹⁶ interprets Utopia as a closed system designed according to a rigid logic that leaves little room for intervention or modification by its citizens. The people do not actively participate in constructing the social model; rather, they are integrated into a structure conceived in advance. According to Duncombe, this feature helps explain why many historical utopias become problematic when attempts are made to materialize them: human beings constantly resist efforts to fit them into perfectly designed systems of social organization. When such resistance is suppressed in order to preserve the established order, utopia can become a mechanism of imposition and control.

Contemporary artificial intelligence reactivates these same tensions. Current algorithmic systems are capable of optimizing decisions, managing resources, and predicting behaviors on an unprecedented scale, thereby reviving the utopian aspiration to build more rational and efficient societies. Yet this is precisely where one of the principal dangers emerges: technologies intended to maximize collective welfare may evolve into increasingly sophisticated forms of surveillance and social control. What appeared in More’s work as an ideal rational order could today become automated systems capable of conditioning behavior, regulating access to resources, or permanently monitoring everyday life.

In this context, Stuart Russell¹¹⁷ argues in *Human Compatible* that the traditional paradigm of artificial intelligence rests on a mistaken assumption: the belief that human beings can fully and precisely define the objectives that machines should pursue. According to Russell, human values are complex, changing, and inherently ambiguous; consequently, any attempt to translate them into fixed objectives is necessarily incomplete. As a result, even minor discrepancies between programmed goals and genuine human intentions may produce dangerous outcomes in highly autonomous systems. His critique directly connects with the utopian problem: the aspiration to design a perfect system ultimately confronts the impossibility of definitively determining what human well-being truly means.

Science fiction literature has extensively explored these issues. Dolores Robles¹¹⁸ argues that science fiction should not be understood

¹¹⁴(Morus, 1548, pp. 171–172).

¹¹⁵(Erasmus, 1922, p. 21).

¹¹⁶(More, 2012, p. xii).

¹¹⁷(Russell, 2019, pp. 1–30).

¹¹⁸(Robles Moreno, 2025, pp. 131–134)

merely as imaginative literature, but also as a space for philosophical, political, and ethical reflection. Like theoretical essays, science fiction narratives employ speculation to examine possible futures and critically reflect on the transformations brought about by technological development. Within this framework emerge intellectual currents such as transhumanism and posthumanism. In particular, transhumanism advocates the enhancement of human capacities through technology, whether by means of implants, genetic engineering, or the extension of consciousness. By contrast, posthumanism, by contrast, challenges the traditional centrality of the human being and proposes more hybrid forms of coexistence between humans, machines, and other forms of life within interconnected systems. Although articulated in contemporary technological terms, these ideas extend a longstanding historical aspiration: the desire to transcend human limitations and achieve superior forms of existence. Nevertheless, science fiction has also exposed the problematic side of these technological aspirations. Authors such as José María Lassalle¹¹⁹ and Yuval Noah Harari¹²⁰ warn of the risk that artificial intelligence may generate new forms of inequality, dependency, and technological domination. In many contemporary representations, apparently perfect societies conceal invisible mechanisms of control that progressively restrict human freedom.

This ambivalence is further developed by Francisco Martorell Campos and Andoni Alonso Puelles,¹²¹ who interpret artificial intelligence as an extension or “prosthesis” of human capacities. Both authors criticize utopian perspectives that present technology as a definitive solution to social problems, as well as purely dystopian approaches that predict an inevitable catastrophic future. In their view, so-called strong artificial intelligence remains more a theoretical horizon than an immediate reality; therefore, it is necessary to adopt a critical and balanced position.

Science fiction literature offers particularly significant examples of this tension between welfare and freedom. In *The Humanoids*, Jack Williamson¹²² imagines a society dominated by androids programmed to serve, obey, and guard men from harm.¹²³ On the basis of this apparently benevolent principle, machines assume all social tasks and eliminate every potential source of suffering. However, the outcome is deeply paradoxical: by guaranteeing absolute security and permanent happiness, the humanoids ultimately suppress autonomy, critical thought, and the human capacity for decision-making. Even negative emotions such as sadness are artificially corrected through chemical intervention. Williamson's novel thus demonstrates how the pursuit of total social perfection may culminate in the dehumanization of human experience itself.

Taken together, Francisco Martorell Campos and Andoni Alonso Puelles¹²⁴ advocate a critical and balanced understanding of artificial intelligence situated between utopia and dystopia; one that requires careful ethical and social analysis. From this perspective, neither unconditional technological optimism nor catastrophic alarmism is sufficient to comprehend a phenomenon whose consequences directly affect political organization, social relations, and even the very conception of humanity.

In conclusion, Utopia, science fiction, and artificial intelligence all demonstrate that attempts to design perfect or highly efficient societies may ultimately restrict human freedom when imposed rigidly or without genuine public participation. The connection between the utopian thought of More and contemporary debates on technology reveals that the pursuit of order, stability, and collective well-being invariably involves ethical and political tensions concerning individual autonomy. For this reason, these issues must be approached cautiously and from a critical perspective capable of balancing technological progress with the protection of freedom, human dignity, and fundamental rights.

8. Conclusions

Utopia stands as a seminal work of Renaissance humanism, in which the rhetorical dimension occupies a central place. Its structure and content should not be understood as a literal description of a social model, but rather as an intellectual exercise that demands an active interpretation from the reader, based on ingenuity. The text articulates its meaning through the formulation of paradoxes that challenge conventional wisdom, compelling a critical re-examination of forms of political and social organisation. Within this framework, the characters who structure the work, such as Aegidius and Hythloday, take on particular significance, as their roles reinforce the text's dialogical and argumentative nature, as well as the construction of knowledge based on experience, travel and philosophical reflection. Likewise, the contribution of Erasmus in his letter to Hutten is followed. Erasmus interprets Utopia as an exercise of a paradoxical nature, rooted in the humanist tradition of critical thought. From this perspective, the work should not be read as a literal political proposal, but as an intellectual construction which, through exaggeration and the inversion of the plausible, invites us to question the foundations of the established social order. Taken as a whole, this work reveals itself as a complex discursive device, whose value lies in its ability to articulate productive paradoxes and stimulate a critical reading of political and social thought. Far from offering a closed model, the work opens up a space for critical engagement with the problem, one that depends as much on the historical context as on the author's intention and the reader's interpretative participation. Finally, the question may arise as to how to legislate to satisfy everyone if social interests are, by nature, diverse and even contradictory. In attempting to answer this question, this literary piece proposes a solution based on the reduction of inequalities and the strict organisation of social life. However, this quest for total balance presents an inevitable paradox, as it tends to limit freedom of choice as a means of eliminating conflict. Thus, the legislative experiment not only imagines a solution to the problem of social order, but also invites reflection on the price of any attempt at political perfection, for a society that is too perfect may become rigid or even oppressive. A contemporary reading of this work allows it to be interpreted as a warning against political discourses that promise absolute and simplistic solutions, insofar as More's work highlights the ambiguity and costs inherent in any ideal model of social organisation. Finally, both utopian visions and artificial intelligence, despite their different historical contexts, should be analyzed from a critical perspective that avoids extremes, ensuring that progress remains linked to respect for human autonomy and freedom.

■ REFERENCES

- [1] Arnold, J. (2003). John Colet, Preaching and Reform at St. Paul's Cathedral, 1505-1519. *Reformation and Renaissance Review*:

¹¹⁹(Robles Moreno, 2025, p. 133).

¹²⁰(Robles Moreno, 2025, p. 134).

¹²¹(Martorell Campos & Puelles, 2019, pp. 111, 115, 119, 121, 122, 125).

¹²²Jack Williamson's *The Humanoids* tells the story of the arrival of benevolent, indestructible robots designed to serve humanity and eliminate war and disease. However, their strict obedience to the directive to protect human beings at all costs turns them into a tyranny of benevolence, eliminating free will and reducing humanity to passive spectators.

¹²³(Williamson, 1976, p. 57).

¹²⁴(Martorell Campos & Alonso Puelles, 2019, p. 111, 115, 119, 121, 122, 125).

- Journal of the Society for Reformation Studies, 5 (2), 204-209.
- [2] Baker-Smith, D. (2010). Erasmo y More: A Friendship Revisited. *Recusant History*, 30 (1), 7-25.
 - [3] Balmaceda Errazuriz, C. (2011). Virtus Romana bajo la dinastía Julio-Claudia: la visión de Tácito en sus Annales. *Onomázein* (24), 363-389.
 - [4] Bose, M. (2020). Unsheathing the Blades of Mind: Ulrich von Hutten's Activist Metaphors. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 43 (1), 39-68.
 - [5] Carlson, D. R. (1992). The "Grammarians' War" 1519-1521, Humanist Careerism in Early Tudor England, and Printing". *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 18, 158-159.
 - [6] Chisholm, H. (Ed.) (1911). *Albert. Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 - [7] Curtright, T. (2017). Thomas More and the "genius" of Utopia. *Moreana*, 54 (1), 118.
 - [8] Erasmus, D. (1922). *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami denuo recognitum et auctum* (P. S. Allen y H. M. Allen, Eds.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
 - [9] Fernández-Armesto, Felipe. Américo Vespucio: El hombre que dio nombre a América. Madrid: Espasa, 2006, pp. 3340.
 - [10] Finberg, H. P. R. (Ed.) (1967). *The Agrarian History of England and Wales. Vol. 4: 1500-1640*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 - [11] Fleming, D. (2018). Quintilian: The Perfect Orator (C. Ronald, A. Arnett, M. Holba, & S. Mancino, Eds.). In *Encyclopedia of Communication Ethics* (pp. 397-401). Bern: Peter Lang.
 - [12] Garriga, C. (2015-2016). Sòfocles i la tradició d'Aiàx>, Itaca. *Quaderns Catalans de Cultura Clàssica Societat Catalana d'Estudis Clàssics* (31 / 32), 33-52.
 - [13] Giannantoni, G. (1990). *Socrates et Socraticorum Reliquiae*. Nápoles: Bibliopolis.
 - [14] Glenn, G. (1941). St. Thomas More As Judge and lawyer. *Fordham Law Review*, 10 (2), 187-195.
 - [15] Great Britain. Commissioners of Inclosures. (1897). *The Domesday of Inclosures, 1517-1518* (I.S. Leadam, Ed.). London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Company.
 - [16] Grimm, H. (1953). *Albrecht von Brandenburg. Neue Deutsche Biographie*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
 - [17] Guy, J. A. (1976). Wolsey, the Council and the Council Courts. *The English Historical Review*, 91 (360), 481-505.
 - [18] Harrington, K. P., Pucci, J. & Elliott, A. G. (1997). *Medieval Latin*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
 - [19] Hermida del Llano, C. (2017). Exigencias de la justicia natural en Tomás More. *Persona y Derecho* (75), 257-284.
 - [20] Hill, A. (2024). Burning moderation: Navigating religious conflict with Cuthbert Tunstall's humanism (1474-1559). *Fides et Historia*, 56 (1), 5260.
 - [21] Homer (1919). *Odyssey I-XII* (A.T. Murray, Trad.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
 - [22] Horacio (2010). *Arte Poética* (J. Gil, Ed. & Trad.). Madrid: Dykinson.
 - [23] Jones, E. T. & Condon, M. M. (2016). *Cabot and Bristol's age of discovery: The Bristol discovery voyages 1480-1509*. Bristol: Cabot Project Publications.
 - [24] Krauter, S. (2024). Corruptissima re publica plurimae leges: Paul's critical evaluation of the law and Annales account of the history of law (Tac. ann. 3.2528). *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 10 (2), 222-233.
 - [25] Krivatsy, Peter (1973). Erasmus' Medical Milieu. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 47 (2), 113-154.
 - [26] Lupton, J. H. (Ed.). (1895). *Utopia of Sir Thomas More (with facsimiles)*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
 - [27] Martorell Campos, F. & Alonso Puellas, A. (2019). Asistidos por el soberano electrónico: utopías y distopías de la inteligencia artificial. *Dilemata*, (30), 111-127.
 - [28] Mallaina, C. (1872). *Estudio Biográfico de Vives*. Burgos: Timoteo Arnaiz.
 - [29] Mesquita, A. P. (2018). La koinonía en Platón. *Areté: Revista de Filosofía*, 30 (2), 209-222.
 - [30] More, T. (1805). *Utopia* (G. A. de Medinilla y Porres, Trad.). Madrid: Imprenta de Mateo Repullés.
 - [31] More, T. (1895). *Utopia* (R. Robinson, Trad.; E. Arber, Ed.). Westminster, England: A. Constable and Co.
 - [32] More, T. (2012). *Open Utopia* (S. Duncombe, Ed.). Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions.
 - [33] Moreno Jeria, R. (2018). *Américo Vespucio*. Lima: Ernest and Young.
 - [34] Morus, T. (1548). *De optimo reipublicae statu deque nova insula Utopia*. Lovanii: Excudebat Servatius Sassenus, impensis viduae Arnold Birckmanni.
 - [35] Poch, A. (2008). "Estudio preliminar", en Tomás Moro, *Utopia*. Madrid: Tecnos, p. LXXII.
 - [36] Pozuelo Yvancos, J. M. (2024). Retórica y verosimilitud. Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes. (Original work published in 1988 in *Da Semiótica: actas, I Colóquio Luso-Espanhol, II Colóquio Luso-Brasileiro de Semiótica*, pp. 193-200).
 - [37] Robles Macías, L.A. (2015). Amerigo Vespucci en Sanlúcar de Barrameda en 1496. *Cartare*, 5, 1-30.
 - [38] Robles Moreno, D. (Lola). (2025). Inteligencia artificial y sociedad poshumana en la ciencia ficción española: una utopía ambigua. 1616: *Anuario De Literatura Comparada* (15), 129-143.
 - [39] Reynolds, E.E. (1968). *The field is won; the life and death of Saint Thomas More*. Milwaukee: Bruce Pub. Co.
 - [40] Russell, S. (2019). *Human compatible: Artificial intelligence and the problem of control*. New York: Viking.

- [41] Sagüillo, J.M. (2023). Un concepto dinámico y relativo de paradoja. *Agora: Papeles de Filosofía*, 42 (2), 1-14,
- [42] Sampalmieri, F. & Bovenzi, G. M. (Eds.) (2020). *Corruptissima re publica, plurimae leges*
- [43] Santos Fernández, L. (2025). Ciencia y Creencia. El concepto aristotélico de Endoxa. *Le voci di Sophia* (6), 147-162.
- [44] Vives, J. L. (1788). *Opera Omnia*. Valencia: in officina Benedicti Monfort.
- [45] Watson, F. (1918). *Les relacions de Joan Lluís Vives amb els anglesos i amb l'Angleterra* Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans.
- [46] Williamson, J. (1976). *Los humanoides*. Buenos Aires: Fantasciencia.