Circa regna tonat: Political Anxiety, Censorship and Textual Strategies in the Literature of Henry VIII's Reign

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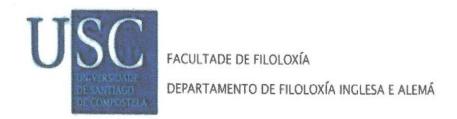**FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA**

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Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redactar o TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]:

In spite of the humanistic shift that England underwent in the Early Modern period, the production of literature throughout the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547) was extremely dependent on the political and religious scenario, thus prompting the need for writers to restrain, control and re-fashion their own statements and public *persona*. Thus, the aim of this dissertation will be to explore the textual strategies which a number of writers ingeniously developed in order to conceal dissenting private views to avoid political censorship during the above mentioned period.

This work will be mainly focusing on three different aspects: on the one hand, the analysis of the atmosphere of political anxiety in Henry VIII's Court, which substantially conditioned any literary production; on the other hand, the discussion of the existing tension between the author's self-effacement and the performative act of self-fashioning in literary works; finally, the examination of the ambiguity inherent to some Renaissance texts as a strategy of physical survival to evade the threat which maintaining one's personal stance entailed in the public sphere.

To serve the purpose of illustrating the textual strategies which were used to conflate subjectivity and compliance, I will be primarily concentrating on the work of Thomas More and Thomas Wyatt, among others. To do so, this dissertation will be informed by contemporary literary criticism which has reassessed the Renaissance period from a New Historicist approach, as understood by, among others, Stephen Greenblatt in his seminal work *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980).

SRA. DECANA DA FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA (Presidenta da Comisión de Títulos de Grao)

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INTRODUCTION

The modern idea of selfhood and subjectivity reaches back to the Renaissance period as an enlightened era where self-awareness, as opposed to the alleged collective anonymity of the medieval self, engendered an individual with a clearly defined desire for freedom, agency and self-exposure. Such a conception of subjectivity was enhanced during the nineteenth century among scholars such as Jacob Burckhardt, author of the seminal book *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860). In this work, Burckhardt aimed to extrapolate the romantic view of individuality and creative genius and apply this view to his interpretation of Renaissance figures. Although early modern literary criticism has consistently evolved since Burckhardt, his landmark publication still allows a return to his claims about individuality and to explore the degree of such self-consciousness in literary works which seem ultimately to articulate a personal voice inside their historical context. In this sense, the study of literature produced during the period of Henry VIII's reign is quite relevant for this topic: on the one hand, it shows a very particular transitional state in terms of court conception from a late medieval society towards a pre-modern one. On the other, the emergence of courtiers in the humanistic and artistic scene such as Sir Thomas More and Sir Thomas Wyatt, evinced the articulation of a non-conforming subjective expression at odds with these figures' influential social role.

In this regard, this dissertation seeks to explore the existing tensions as articulated in a selection of Thomas Wyatt's poetry and Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), respectively, in order to illustrate how such a conflicted expression of selfhood is the result of a process of self-imposed censorship. Prompted by an environment of rhetorical flattery, political and religious suspicion, and treachery during Henry VIII's reign, these texts in question seem to have developed some textual strategies that avoid

a univocal reading, with the aim to create a conscious ambiguity. Consequently, this orientation towards elusiveness led to a preference in the writers' choice of particular genres which allow for more elusive meanings and of intertextual intricacies, all of which will be addressed in the following chapters. My aim, therefore, is to examine the various ways in which these texts reflect the writers' internal struggle to portray a complex voice which simultaneously entailed opposing standpoints between a socially accepted self and a dissenting inner expression which could not be overtly expressed. The fact of taking these issues into consideration might shed some light on the articulation of subjectivity in relation to both privacy and public exposure in the early modern period.

To serve this purpose, Stephen Greenblatt's new historicist approach will be used as the major critical framework for Wyatt and More's study. Greenblatt's foundational book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) was a landmark which inspired further works which also examined several canonical writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century from a new historicist slant. Nevertheless, it was not until the publication of Greenblatt and Gallagher's *Practicing New Historicism* (2000) that Greenblatt offered a theoretical insight into his practical methodology. In the preface to this work Greenblatt and Gallagher clearly articulate the guiding principles of their new focus, which they regard as a shift from previous formalist approaches to the literary text which often disregarded contextual information and ignored literature production inside its cultural background. Most relevantly, Greenblatt and Gallagher advocate an interpretation which prioritizes culture as a text itself, thus reassessing the concept of "foreground" as a key element to the text, which in itself constitutes one of the key principles of New Historicism. By doing so, this critical perspective aimed to establish a non-privileged approach which broadened the

field of study and allowed to examine both literary and non-literary texts in dialogue with each other.

This approach seems quite useful to explore both Wyatt and More's works since new historicist criticism is interested in contemplating any kind of work as a hermeneutic object which could contain aesthetic, ideological or textual elements which, despite their authors' "intentions" when producing them, could be reassessed from a contemporary perspective in order to produce alternative and productive meanings. Greenblatt believes that history, as articulated in a variety of written records, should be contemplated and examined in terms of its textuality and within a particular cultural framework, which should also consider elements pertaining to domestic and social life unrecorded in the grand narrative of history.

Consequently, Greenblatt's concept of "self-fashioning" will be consistently used throughout the following chapters, since it functions as a relevant analytical tool to establish connections between the sociological context that conditioned literature at Henry VIII's court and, at the same time, the material conditions in which these works where produced, which articulated in the text itself the performative dimension of the writers' social dynamics, resulting in an interesting tension between the writer's outer and an inner self.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters: "The Impact of Henry VIII's Politics on Literature" examines the socio-political situation during Henry VIII's regency, making a strong emphasis on the impact of his figure in the environment of surveillance and the new conditions of patronage, social networking and self-restrictiveness. This first chapter will also offer the necessary historical and theoretical background to understand the subsequent parts of this dissertation. Chapter Two,

entitled "Sir Thomas Wyatt: The Paradoxical Confrontation of Fashioning Identity", looks into a number of selected political poems written by Thomas Wyatt, taking into consideration the confrontation between his ambassadorial and institutional rhetoric and his personal expression, in order to ultimately explore the degree of self-agency in his voice. Moreover, the textual choices to convey this conflicted identity will be carefully examined to delve into the divergent interpretations which a large number of critics have produced related to Wyatt's poetry. The last chapter, entitled "Thomas More: Intended Ambiguity as an Ideological Position" explores Thomas More's groundbreaking work *Utopia* (1516), which will be analyzed in terms of its intended ambiguity, largely stemming from its dialogic structure by considering the character of Raphael Hythlodaeus as an *alter ego* of More himself. By doing so, *Utopia* succeeded in evading censoring, while simultaneously allowing a fruitful humanist discussion relating to the work's multiple points of view, which allegedly embody both socially accepted statements and more controversial personal opinions.

1. THE IMPACT OF HENRY VIII'S POLITICS ON LITERATURE

The early Tudor court has been depicted as a world of surveillance where circumspection and uncertainty controlled social relationships and could transform an innocent conversation with the wrong person into a possible death threat. For this reason, studies in this area tend to keep a keen eye on the intentional ambiguity that is found in many works which had to adopt a more obscure discourse in order to tackle contemporary issues from a non-conforming perspective. This dissertation is named after a reference in the classical play *Phaedra*: *"Circa regnat tonat"* [it thunders around the throne], which, in my view, adequately illustrates both the formal strategies to convey subjectivity during this period and the fearful tension around King Henry VIII's court (1509-1547).[1] The refrain is part of a longer poem, "Innocentia Veritas Viat Fides Circumdederunt me inimici mei", written in 1536 whilst Sir Thomas Wyatt was famously imprisoned in the Tower after being accused of treachery by the king, owing to his alleged affair with Anne Boleyn. In this regard, "*Circa regna tonat*" draws a connection between Wyatt's own context and a previous period which also depicted a tyrannical situation, thus allowing him to state his position on the matter without using his own words. A proverbial tone emerges from the extrapolation of figurative "thunders" being transformed into real dangers. In this way, an unknown addressee could be warned about the perils for those who might also be in between Scylla and Charybdis in the quest for a more prestigious social position:

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[1] Since the early Renaissance, there was a wide interest in the Latin author which would reach its pinnacle during the Elizabethan period. Linda Woodbridge points out the personal identification with the turbulent environment in many of his plays as the motivation behind Seneca's translations: "The translators of the majority of the Seneca plays were religious dissidents, themselves persecuted for their religious beliefs, on both sides of the Reformational divide. It is significant, therefore, that their work is exactly with blockbusters of religious resistance writing" (123).

The high mountains are blasted oft

When the low valley is mild and soft.

Fortune with Health stands at debate.

The fall is grievous from aloft.

And sure, *circa regna tonat* (6-10)

The poem questions, from Wyatt's own experience, the "satisfactory advantages" that may result from meeting the final goal for a less powerful member of the court. "The fall is grievous from aloft" (9), he states. Nevertheless, beyond a more personal or collective account, the poem reflects the only clear truth that any courtier should always bear in mind, that is, absolute fidelity and obedience to a king who considered himself the personification of both human and divine laws: "Bear low, therefore give God the stern" (24).

Henry VIII had, in fact, a complex personality and has been mainly remembered for his radical behavior in terms of executions and physical punishment from his mid-thirties onwards. Despite his beginnings as a well-rounded Renaissance monarch, there was a significant deterioration in his attitude.[2] Miles F. Shore has found evidence that since 1524, when the king suffered his first serious injury jousting with the Duke of Suffolk, followed by two more accidents in 1525 and 1536, Henry VIII's behavior became more erratic and unstable heightening his physical insecurities about his vigorous masculine appearance (377-387).[3] His inability to produce a legitimate male heir until his third marriage also provoked an obsessive anxiety on this demeanor. In the political field, he has been described as an autocrat due to his tendency to make

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[2] See Appendix I: Henry VIII's portrait. After his injuries, Henry VIII gained weight as a result of some knee issues. His portrait does not reflect his real body image, instead it offers a propagandistic view of a warrior king.

[3] Cfr. "Henry VIII and the Crisis of Generativity" for an insight into Henry VIII's narcissistic personality and physical insecurities.

decisions out of impulses that affected a wide network of public workers employed for the Crown, who encountered difficulties keeping up with the king's ideological shifts. In addition to his physical decay, the king also experienced public humiliation in the international scenario as he could not mimic other warrior kings such as Francis I and Charles V. In fact, his campaigns in France, with the exception of Boulogne (1544), were never successful and left England bankrupt. As a result of this instability, many landmark events took place during his reign: the abrupt schism in the Roman Catholic Church (1534) and the introduction of the Protestant faith in England, commonly regarded as the start of the Reformation period. Henry VIIII's sudden break from Rome caused an enormous social impact, and it also generated widespread fears and suspicions regarding Catholicism, which was to be prosecuted and stigmatized. This was remarkably blatant in those who questioned Henry VIII's political decisions, and thus were often forced to agree with the king's standpoint. Consequently, there were two clear gateways: creating a subservient *dramatis personae* whose responsibility would be pandering to the king's whims or censoring one's own thoughts by remaining silent.

Generally speaking, Early Modern England was often imagined as embodied by Henry VIII's figure and politics. Nonetheless, as G. R. Elton argues in *England Under the Tudors*, the king's figure did not only exist in terms of his physical body but also encompassed his political body, which was extended to the already mentioned network of "public workers", who represented the political decisions of the king and acted on his behalf:

> This realm of England is an Empire, and so hath been accepted in the world, governed by one Supreme Head and King having the dignity and royal estate of the imperial Crown of the same, unto whom a body politic, compact of all sort and degrees of people divided in terms and by names of Spirituality and Temporality, be bounden and owe to bear next to God a

natural and humble obedience. It is governed by a ruler who is both supreme head in matters spiritual and king in matters temporal, and who possesses by grant divine "plenary, whole and entire power, preeminence, authority, prerogative, and jurisdiction to render and yield justice" to all people and subjects resident within the realm. (162)

Henry VIII concentrated political power on himself, thereby transforming the royal household into the place where to attain a higher social position. Nadine Lewycky has suggested that the emphasis on social networking diminished the importance of hereditary nobility and gave rise to a certain degree of social mobility amongst the upper gentry (4). Networking was so ingrained in social relationships that even Thomas More uses *Utopia* (1516) to mock the stereotype in a conversation between Raphael Hythlodaeus and Thomas More, the fictional version of himself: "Now the most effective way of doing so would be to gain the confidence of some great king or other, and give him, as I know you would, really good advice. For every king is sort of fountain, from which a constant shower of benefits or injuries rains down upon the whole population" (41-42). Thus, court affairs could be described as an environment in perpetual competition to gain the king's favor to obtain a stable social position.

Consequently, individuals had to expose themselves to the perils of the public eye, crafting a sound personality which encompassed all the characteristics (*sprezzatura*) expected from a renaissance man, as prescribed by Pico della Mirandola and Baltasar Castiglione's manuals of manners. This shift in social relationships entailed a change in the spatial composition of the household, thus following the continental trend, which established a firm distinction through the compartmentalization of space between private and public lodgings. As Eric Ives notes, from the fifteenth century onwards "distance" in public life began to be cherished paralleling this spatial segmentation, which gave rise to a new way of measuring social prominence based on

the difficulty to access someone (16). Thus, access to the king's private rooms for courtiers required the implicit acceptance of a set of rules and conventions which did not only affect social relationships but also all sorts of artistic manifestations. In this way, a sense of moderate anxiety –which stemmed from the above-mentioned change in social dynamics– could be traced in the cautious and constrained expression of opinions, thoughts and reports.

Furthermore, Henry VIII's court was depicted as a place of "staggering opulence and detail", abundant in material possessions which underscored "the overpowering insistence on cost" and conspicuous garments to indicate the level of power in the social scale (Greenblatt 29). In this sense, Thomas Wyatt's "Satire I" echoes excessive opulence and looks when he dreams about escaping to the countryside to avoid the constant shallowness and surveillance from the court:

> The cause why that homeward I me draw
> And flee the press of courts whereso they go
> ……………………………………
> It is not for because I scorn or mock
> The power of them to whom fortune hath lent
> Charge over us, of right to strike the stroke;
> But true it is that I have always meant
> Less to steem them than the common sort
> Of outward things that judge in their intent
> Without regard what doth inward resort. (7-13)

In these lines, Wyatt describes the lack of interest in the inner self ("inward resort") in contrast with the skillful ability to perform in any public social context due to the importance on the "outward" appearance, which has become essential in his

contemporary world in order not to be misjudged by those who happen to be fortunate enough to be in power. This extreme awareness of his constant need to perform could be read as a general preoccupation regarding the apparently excluding relationship between individuality –along with the expression of subjectivity– and the lack of self-agency imposed by the public role, which required conforming to the royal institution.

In this respect, literature was mainly a court activity during the Early Modern period targeted at and dependent on a powerful person who possessed enough material assets to establish a relationship of patronage which enforced the ideological and religious expectations of the dominant group. The literary field maintained a tight connection with the field of power in the sixteenth century –which was deeply ingrained in its social context–, thus rendering individual autonomy problematic.[4] In his major work *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Jacob Burckhardt provides an insightful analysis of Renaissance culture which sheds some light on the limitations in terms of self-agency which a courtier, regardless of the nationality, had to endure in order to consolidate his reputation. Insofar as literature was controlled by a higher political figure, the topics that could be tackled were restricted to those appealing to the patron.[5] Therefore, writing implied some sort of auto-censorship in the process of an interior expression. It is true that in England there was not a purposefully intended organization for censoring works until 1538, when Henry VIII granted the Privy

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[4] Not surprisingly, the rise of postmodernism brought about new analytical paradigms that contested the traditional synchronicity of individualism to the so-called humanist "Renaissance". Thus, broadening the scope of this term to the study of the Middle Ages and, as a side effect, calling into question the extent to which it was sustainable a vision of the Renaissance based on the far-fetched idea of a rather autonomous individual, that is, an owner of his own personal freedom.

[5] Burckhardt points at the exceptional case of Pietro Arentino (1492-1556), an Italian courtier who wrote famous satirical works which entitled him with a huge reputation for extortion. Throughout his life, Arentino maintained a notorious rivalry with Rome which resulted in his exile to Venice for the great part of his life. It was from his peripheral position, far from the main power influences, that he could escape the limitations imposed by the court. Thus, he could be more blatant or circumspect depending on his needs and intuitions, something scarcely attainable for many courtiers (63-64).

Council the ability to do so (Wall 67). Nonetheless, even before its institutional creation, a self-restrictive writing mode was already a present in many literary works.

This kind of patronage was at the root of power relationships: the patron provided the material support required for the work, and the writer humbly pledged fidelity and servility to the patron. In this sense, Catherine Bates has examined the Tudors' use of patronage as "a way of regulating the flow of gifts in order to implement their overall policy of centralizing political power" (90). In her review of the historical conditions for writing, Bates concludes that patronage solidified the king's position in the pyramidal social hierarchy based on his power to bestow titles. Bates also broadened this issue through the theoretical input of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who perceived the exchange of gifts as the creation of a debt and an obligation bond which resulted in "a form of symbolic violence" (99). Nevertheless, this relationship had a twofold interpretation: either poets settled down for the prescribed command or they used their writing on their behalf against the patron's will.

All things considered, it could be stated that power dynamics largely defined the material conditions of the literary production in the sixteenth century. The act of writing became an extension of politics, which was reflected in many writers such as Thomas More, Thomas Wyatt or Howard Surrey among others. In their works these writers had to overcome a set of serious limitations and personal struggles to bypass the constant threat that their own words may entail. This tactful auto-cancellation, along with the striking flexibility to disguise themselves, has led scholars such as Scott A. Trudell to describe their role in the court as interpreters of their community (268). As Trudell further explains, writing functioned as a vehicle to articulate the language and thoughts of an environment which is difficult to describe in its totality without the possibilities that, according to Stephen Greenblatt, literature offers in three interlocking ways: "as a

manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes" (3). Thus, Greenblatt calls for an approach to literature "as a part of the system of signs that constitute a given culture" (4) since a literary text is, intrinsically for him, a reflection of the collective construction that is language.

In this way, Greenblatt, one of the founders of the so-called New Historicism, paved the way in his seminal work *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* to explore literature as a "cultural artifact" in future studies. Henceforth, key ideas, such as "crafting" or "disguising", were summarized under the umbrella term of "self-fashioning", which took into account the historical context that surrounded courtier writers with regard to the literary choices and the risks that they took in the formal structure and content later used in their work. His approach was mainly focused on the impact that the political climax had on the different strategies of self-effacement that writers used in their works and the connection with the performative nature of social dynamics, since there was "an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process" (2). Niccolò Machiavelli in his famous political treatise *The Prince* (1513) underscored manipulation and deceit as the central concern for a Renaissance individual: "one must know how to disguise this nature well, and how to be a fine liar and hypocrite; and men are so simple-minded and so dominated by their present needs that one who deceives will always find one who will allow himself to be deceived" (144-147). Consequently, this extreme attention to the control of public appearances gave rise to probably the biggest shift from the medieval approach to the self: not only was the individual aware of himself as a subject but also had to consciously seek new rhetorical strategies to articulate the tension

between a social identity and an inner one which might stand in contradiction with each other.

The idea of inner and outer, that is, the dialogue with some secret inner self was already present since the twelfth century, at least, when medievalists such as David Ears observed in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine a deep interest in self-examination as a vehicle to reach God (183). Furthermore, there was a long tradition of confessional Christian literature which regarded a prudential balance (*concordia*) between the spirit [private] and the tongue [public] as the main elements to bear in consideration when looking for a virtuous person capable of restraining sinful passions. Nonetheless, John Martin suggested that prudence as this harmonious balance departed in the sixteenth century from its moralistic medieval meaning to one completely divorced from its ethical background once individuals gained a "new understanding of the human person in terms of stress on the internal self as agent or subject, as director of one's words and deeds" (1330). Therefore, it could be argued that the sincere medieval connection between subjectivity and behavior was transformed in the early modern period, as it will be illustrated in the following chapters with Thomas Wyatt and Thomas More's use of rhetoric, into a more ambivalent relationship owing to the influence of a threatening external imposition.

In his analysis of Modernity, Anthony Cascardi saw, considering Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's philosophical thinking, the first features of a pre-modern society in the Renaissance court. According to Cascardi, this could be observed through the gradual fragmentation of a more hierarchical society into a specialized one which was comprised of several sub-spheres, thus forcing the individual to perform different roles at the expense of personal interest (209). Henry VIII's emphasis on a centralized political regency based on a network of public workers who had to carefully perform

certain roles fostered a more accentuated division in the relationship between the inner self and the social *persona*. It is for this reason that both Wyatt and More are useful examples when exploring the difficulties to articulate this complex identity. Both held important public positions –Wyatt was an ambassador and More an extremely influential humanist, who became first Privy Councilor and then Lord Chancellor– whilst maintaining personal non-conforming points-of-view against Henry VIII, resulting in their persecution. Thus, and through their use of textual ambiguous strategies, their work mirrors the process of auto-censorship stemming from the struggle to articulate a subjective discourse which would be socially acceptable.

2. SIR THOMAS WYATT: THE PARADOXICAL CONFRONTATION OF FASHIONING IDENTITY

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) was known to his contemporaries not only for his literary reputation as a courtly poet –his collection of poems *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557), which also included the work of other writers such as Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, introduced the sonnet form into the English canon– but also for being a key figure in Henry VIII's foreign policy. Even though Wyatt worked as the king's ambassador, the monarch was still suspicious of Wyatt's movements, hence he had to prove absolute submissiveness and loyalty to the king's desires. In the light of this experience, Jason Powell notes that the "the ambassador's role required a sublimation of personal identity beneath heavily prescribed rhetoric" which led to a "highly scripted performance" (425). As a result, Wyatt's writing conspicuously reflected the impact of power relationships in terms of rhetorical command and awareness to self-exposure, as can be seen in the author's cautious use of language. Consequently, Wyatt's poetry fluctuates in a tension between a performative public *persona* who follows the rhetoric of circumspection and flattery expected from a diplomat, and a very personal voice which demonstrates a deep preoccupation with the self and its autonomy.

Concerning the tension between public and private experience in Wyatt's self-effacement, the act of fashioning one's appearance in a calculated manner is rendered in Cascardi's account of modernity as the result of a transformation in the dynamics of power control. In a medieval society, it was expected from a nobleman to show fidelity to the crown by being ready to face death as a heroic sacrifice in the king's name. Furthermore, according to Fiona S. Dunlop, until the fifteenth century military prowess

conditioned an identity highly based on honor (126), thus limiting the interest in the subject's capacities as the central gear to achieve prestige. Nevertheless, in the early modern period the nobleman also becomes a courtier, which comes along with a "fundamental heterogeneity with respect to the forms and styles of speech" (Cascardi 208): in other words, there was no longer a univocal way to immediately gain the king's recognition. Thus, the old ideal of heroism is transformed into a new honor code which relies on a silent deliberate service: the art of flattering. In fact, and as previously mentioned, for Hegel service comes along with the "rejection of self-interest and its commitment to the interests of the State" (208). Therefore, Wyatt's rhetorical expression, as that of someone who was forced to act out the role of Henry VIII's ambassador, reflects the absorption of individual traits into the wider political structure that he was representing. For that reason, it is extremely interesting to explore the formal strategies that Wyatt used in order to convey subjectivity and inwardness since neither of them would be given a standard pattern to follow inside the performative framework which this new honor code entailed.

Henry VIII's politics restricted personal development in order to avoid the lack of commitment to the State and prevent uprisings against his policies. In this historical context, the King's physical body impersonated his ideals and the State, which turned him into a vulnerable target. Consequently, scholars such as Powell have studied Wyatt's poetry as a transference of his ambassadorial language to the literary sphere. As would be expected, Wyatt adopts an impersonal and rigorously correct political appearance since his inner voice had been subsumed by Henry's power. In truth, "his [Henry VIII's] ambassadors in this period were employed like character actors, in bit parts written for their own personality" (Powell 422). Therefore, even if this were Wyatt's conscious self-effacement, the desired outcome from the higher power would

be to shape the individual self to the point where there would be no difference between the public performance and the internal self-consciousness in his closest social network, as shown, for example, in Wyatt's "Tagus, Farewell":

> And to the town which Brutus sought by dreams
> Like bended moon doth lend her lusty side.
> My king, my country, alone for whom I live,
> of mighty love the wings for this me give
> *I flee.* (5-9)

"Tagus, Farewell" is embedded in the imperial tone that avoids any instance of intense personal lyricism so as to highlight the poet's absolute compromise in the ideological and aesthetic form of the poem in order to contribute to the creation of an idealized national image: via Brutus, the mythological founder of London, the poet here intentionally connects England with a glorified vision of the Roman Empire and, by extension, with the early Tudor social system as a whole. In fact, the source of control in these lines may seem to stem from the lyrical voice ("I flee"), but agency could only be attained once the external power creates this safe space that ensures the individual with the conviction that he possesses the mechanisms to advance ("the wings for this me give").

In the same manner that the system conforms an identity that Wyatt uses to exploit his audacity and confidence as a highly valued courtier, it also offers the possibility to avoid confronting failure and responsibility from a personal standpoint. Instead, this code of honor to which a courtier had to adapt and fashion his public rhetoric prompted a sense of detachment from reality by exalting the qualities of a servant's submissiveness. In addition, another advantage of a more anonymous and self-

concealed approach would have been the possibility of evading guilt for one's faults or frustrations. An accusation intended for someone of a more elevated social status, even if true, would have been considered a violation of power dynamics and, consequently, deemed to be punished. In this sense, Ahnert emphasizes this claim by pointing out the ambiguity and obscurity that accompanies many of Wyatt's poems as a strategy to prevent incriminating anyone despite their status as allies or enemies (147):

> Of Carthage he, that worthy warrior
>
> Could overcome, but could not use his chance,
>
> and I likewise of all my long endeavour
>
> The sharp conquest through fortune did advance
>
> Could not it use, the hold that is given over
>
> I unpossessed. So hangeth in balance
>
> of war my peace reward of all my pain. (6-7)

Failure in this poem is read through an anonymous character in a distant mythological location such as Carthage. According to Powell, "as in so much of Wyatt's diplomacy, the distinction is not fully clear between his official strategies and personal objectives" (428). The poem seems purposefully elusive due to the detachment that the third person creates, enhanced by the personal experience which comes along with the warrior's story. However, the poetic voice is here confronted with the third person to underscore the frustration that arises from being dismissed from his own conquest by using the passive voice ("the hold that is given over") in order to signal some sort of external interference but without adding any information to fathom it out. The warrior character in the poem which relates to the "I" owns his chance, even if he is unable to use it. Thus, the solution to ease the pain for the poetic voice might be the fictionalization of the struggle in terms of a setting that evokes the honor that allegedly

brings about the warrior/courtier role that he is performing. In this way, war stops being a harmful element despite the loss of the conquest, that is, personal failure. The warrior's present state of peace –which is indeed a concomitant part to his ambassadorial position as someone who is an intermediary in a metaphorical political battle between different powers– erases his internal frustration as it is absorbed by the courtly code that fosters emotional relief through self-reward in the correct performance of loyal servitude.

The examples above mentioned show how the prevalence of a detached impersonal approach to conflict functions insofar as there is a rigid social structure which guarantees a safe space towards where frustration and anxiety can be directed. For that reason, the poem entitled "The Pillar Perished Is Whereto I Leant" functions as a nice contrast with the two poems discussed above because of its uncontained honesty that comes into existence from the destruction of security. The poem is thought to be written in 1540 after Thomas Cromwell's execution, when Wyatt was being held in prison. The first line that gives the poem the commonly quoted title comes originally from Petrarch's *Rime X*, which in its previous context was an elegy for a member of the extremely powerful house of Colonna: "Gloriosa columna in cui s'appoggia/ nostra speranza e'l gran nome latino/ ch'ancor non torse del vero camino/ l'ira di Giove per ventosa pioggia" (1-4). In this poem Petrarch manifested his gratitude to some brave leader who had the courage to stop the civil war between aristocratic families for the control of Rome. Wyatt's poem recovers the motif of the pillar –along with the idea of strength which Petrarch's poem entailed– in order to emphasize the absolute loss of the structure which sustained him. Wyatt's thorough understanding of the Italian poet allowed him to translate many of his poems into English, thereby becoming well versed in the use of Petrarch's figurative language. Consequently, critics such as Jon Robinson

have also pointed out Wyatt's pervasive use of Petrarchan metaphors "to express social and political frustration" (126). Thus, Wyatt's poem gains a multilayered dimension that adds a more tragic tone to the poetic voice's despair and links him with a wider literary tradition:

> The pillar perished is whereto I leant,
>
> The strongest stay of mine unquiet mind.
>
> The like of it no man again can find
>
> From east to west still seeking though he went.
>
> To mine unhap, for hap away hath rent
>
> Of all my joy the very bark and rind. (1-6)

Loss of favor or trustworthiness with the possible physical consequences that this could entail drives in this poem the "unquiet mind" to seek the "bark and rind" that metaphorically encapsulates the poetic voice's joy. Both words are semantically connected through their function as external holders, in this case, the skin that protects both trees and fruits. In other words, the personal crisis that pervades the poem emerges from the realization that there is no external structure where to hold on besides the self itself: "My mind in woe, my body full of smart/ And I myself myself always to hate/ Till dreadful death do cease my doleful state" (12-14). Consequently, this poem stands out from many in Wyatt's collection for the pure expression of personal emotion without the appeal to the poet's performative conventionalism. In this sense, it is striking the fact that Wyatt's focus on the physical experience of this pain, since the body as a topic and locus of subjectivity might have been a vehicle of expression too vulnerable and close to his most private self to expose it in such a clear way.

As a matter of fact, this way of expressing subjectivity contrasts with Wyatt's most typical textual choices to convey personal criticism against the king. In this regard. H. A. Mason discusses the tendency to read Wyatt's poetry as a linguistic space which has been given a personal stamp (182): those poems which fall under the confessional category are more likely to be shaped, on the one hand, within literary forms that have been born from communal experience –psalms, proverbs, epigrams, classical myths– and have survived throughout history alongside the myriad of new meanings and interpretations of their numerous readers. On the other hand, genres such as the satire appear to be an interesting venue to master Wyatt's performative self-representation owing to the multilayered semiotic nature that comes along with subverting literal meaning in this particular genre. Furthermore, according to Greenblatt, the conscious selection of the above-mentioned forms "constitute, in effect, a dynamic model" (117), which means that Wyatt exploits the flexibility of these mechanisms to fulfill his own personal objectives and adapts them to his own circumstances. Creating a space which belongs to the collective experience, but which has been privatized for Wyatt's use not only magnifies the multiplicity of interpretations, but also enables the poet to evade the weakness which derives from self-exposure:

> These bloody days have broken my heart.
> My lust, my youth did them depart,
> And blind desire of estate.
> Who hastes to climb seeks to revert.
> Of truth, *circa Regna tonat*. (11-15)

This poem, already quoted in the opening lines of this dissertation, not only provides contextual information on Wyatt's emotional response to the sense of increasing danger at court, but also shows how Wyatt embodies here personal

experience by using poetic genres which suggest a collective experience, as above argued. In the poem there is a clear shift between the third and the fourth line in terms of linguistic register: "who hastes to climb seeks to revert" seems to evoke the Gospel according to Luke (19:5) through the character of Zacchaeus. In this biblical story, Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector, climbs up a tree in order to spot Jesus amid the crowd. However, when Jesus notices him, Zacchaeus is told to descend in order to feed the chosen one. The action of moving up in a physical space is paralleled in Wyatt's poem with an ascension in the social ladder, which often, as the poetic voice seems to suggest, produces the opposite effect by actually "seek[ing] to revert" (14). In this sense, Adrian O. Ward emphasizes how "proverbs offer an acceptable language by which the poet can articulate his resentment towards those at court who do not satisfy his desires, because they simultaneously legitimize his accusations and help him escape charges of slander" (461). Moreover, *circa Regna tonat*, a line taken from Seneca's tragic play *Phaedra*, is here subtly adapted to Wyatt's historical context by recalling Jove's tyranny as described by Seneca, which recalls Tudor England. Translations in this century were often political statements and "responded to specific circumstances and concerns" (Winston 42), thus becoming subtle strategies to mirror personal experience without moving out from the political correctness of the courtier's diplomatic discourse.

Concerning criticism and exposure in relation to Wyatt's ability to perform different *personae*, Stephen Greenblatt gives a thoughtful insight on his position inside the system of power relationships in which his writings had to circulate:

> Wyatt may complain about the abuses of the court, he may declare his independence from a corrupting sexual or political entanglement, but he always does so from within a context governed by the essential values of domination and submission, the values of a system of power that had an absolute monarch as head of both church and state. For all his impulse to negate, Wyatt cannot fashion

himself in opposition to power and conventions power deploys; on the contrary, those conventions are precisely what constitute Wyatt's self-fashioning. (117)

Therefore, Wyatt's criticism seems to seek individuality in terms of personal autonomy outside power relationships, yet his resistance to domination is grounded in inaction. In that sense, his personal voice stems from the contradiction of wanting to maintain the privileges and comforts that his position entails but being unable to truly enjoy them owing to his lack of agency. Such a contradictory position goes in line with what other critics have considered Wyatt's ultimate poetic aim, which is rejecting the system but not striving to reform it because it is from this intersection where Wyatt's individualism arises (Trudell 281).

Wyatt's poem "Satire I" –most commonly known as "Mine John Poyntz"– ingeniously illustrates his blatant personal criticism against the court's corrupted environment, while also illustrating the poet's conscious attempt to engage in a subtle vindication without prompting the moral reformation that other courtiers, such as Thomas More manifested. The poem is set as a dialogue with a friend named John Poyntz in order to instruct him in the court's internal intricacies. The use of a dialogic structure resembles what Powell has considered as a linguistic feature of Henrician diplomatic correspondence, which in many cases helped to disguise the original source of a statement or an opinion (428). Wyatt's critique does not entail a transparent and emotional speaker such as the one in "The perished pillar is whereto I leant"; instead, this voice emerges from a position of submissiveness that accepts his role in the social hierarchy and fashions himself inside the system, considering the advantages of being perceived as weak and tamable:

> I cannot with my word complain and moan
>
> And suffer nought, nor smart without complaint,
>
> Nor turn the word that from my mouth is gone. (28-30)

By inscribing his discourse within the satirical genre, as Jon Robinson has noted, Wyatt played with the genre's ability to imitate the rhetoric of those who are in power in order to subvert it (141). Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic violence" goes in line with Wyatt's strategy of adapting himself to mainstream dominant discourse while, at the same time, articulating a critique of power structures. Wyatt is aware of the "metafictional potential of poetics to create a dramatic and functional self that exists outside of the verse" (Robinson 117). Therefore, he deploys the linguistic double dimension that the satire possesses to simultaneously mock his own imposed, public self-fashioning as a product of his social context and the court itself. For that reason, despite expressing his disgust for the court's rhetoric of flattery and vanity ("I cannot speak and look like a saint,/ Use wiles for wit, and make deceit a pleasure" [31-32]), Wyatt was certainly aware that his personal prestige and identity as an admired courtier stemmed from his power to master the right literary forms and display his wit and tricks with prudence and circumspection. Thus, in this poem there is a ubiquitous anaphoric repetition of the negation "I cannot" in order to vindicate the poet's inability to escape the social conventions that his position entailed ("I cannot crouch nor kneel, to do great a wrong/ To worship them like God on earth alone" [25-26]), more specifically, the constraining relationship of patronage that controlled his hypocritical effacement ("My Poyntz, I cannot frame my tune to feign/ To cloak the truth for praise without desert" [19-21]). However, despite presenting himself as a submissive courtier, harmless and honest in his manners, Wyatt plays with figurative language using linguistic games typical from the court's rhetoric and adopts an ironic tone of humble inexperience that contradicts his previous remark of being unable to "moan and complain":

I am not he such eloquence to boast

To make the crow singing as the swan,

Nor call the lion of coward beasts the most,

That cannot take a mouse as the cat can,

And he that dieth for hunger of the gold

Call him Alexander, and say that Pan

Passeth Apollo in music manifold. (43-49)

In this poem, the poetic voice ironically laments his poor writing skills, which would never turn his voice into that of a "swan", remaining just a plain "crow". Ironically enough, the poetic voice claims to be incapable of depicting the lion, a symbol of the aristocracy, as inferior to the cat, but the very act of writing the poem is in itself a political and aesthetic statement of his own abilities, both as a poet and as a courtier. Both the image of the lion and the poetic voice's craving for gold signal Henry VIII's wish for opulence and manliness. But at the same time, the lion, a creature that seems powerful and strong, is eventually a clumsy animal when confronted with an ordinary act, such as chasing a mouse. Moreover, the speaker points at Henry VIII's desire for wealth and luxury as dangerous, suggesting that this would eventually entail his own destruction. The pinnacle of the poetic voice's wit occurs in the poem when Pan, an inferior god, is suggested to surpass Apollo in several ways, an image which eventually invites the reader to reconsider the nature of our received assumptions pertaining to strength, courage and wealth.

The poem also criticizes the court's foolish nature, which would vale counseling based on the advice of a drunkard, as the one in Chaucer's story "Sir Thorpas", which gives a clear idea of Wyatt's critical position against the court's depravity: "Say he is rude that cannot lie and feign,/ The lecher a lover, and tyranny/ To be the right of a

prince's reign:/ I cannot, I-no, no, it will not be!" (73-76). However, the poem progressively abandons its incisive critical tone as it advances towards its closing lines by fostering some sort of moralistic conclusion, thus connecting with the theme of personal freedom, one of Wyatt's most prominent concerns:

> This maketh me at home to hunt and to hawk,
>
> And in foul weather at my book to sit,
>
> In frost and snow then with my bow to stalk:
>
> No man doth mark whereso I ride or go,
>
> In lusty lease at liberty I walk. (80-84)

In this poem, Wyatt shows a romantic tone of liberty and independence, later to be also shared by a large number of writers who longed for a literary space to articulate their private desires. Thomas More is an example of such a desire to discuss private matters in literature as reflected in his book *Utopia*, which intensifies the deep lack of autonomy that these courtiers considered essential to achieve a complete development both as individuals and writers. Thus, Wyatt's criticism, as previously suggested by Greenblatt, appears to be grounded in his paradoxical position as a poet with an enormous interest in his literary consolidation, and, at the same time, the anxieties produced by his personal limitations at court, a position which conditioned his personal poetic imprint.

3. THOMAS MORE: INTENDED AMBIGUITY AS AN IDEOLOGICAL POSITION

Thomas More's (1478-1535) reputation in the sixteenth century English canon largely relates to his milestone work *Utopia* (1516), a book with a huge impact not only for its political proposals, but also for representing a new literary genre. Nonetheless, and despite being an outstanding book in literary history for its thematic influence, *Utopia* has also remained influential due to the varied –and often conflicting– interpretations of the work from the moment of its publication. In fact, *Utopia* has been read both as a grappling defense of Catholicism and as a groundbreaking advocacy for Communism, depending on the ideological perspective of the reading community. Critics have been polarized to the point of disagreeing in regarding the book as a utopian or a dystopian work. In a sense, the abundance of such manifold interpretations might stem from the intended ambiguity that dwells at the center of *Utopia*, as if several voices from radically opposite directions had merged into the book to create a new product whose main characteristic would be its hermeneutic openness. In this sense, the book's resistance to offer a single, univocal reading may be understood as More's strategy to convey his deep ethical concern –both from a humanistic and a philosophical point of view– for what he might have considered righteousness in a world threatened by corruption. As a result, this chapter examines the inherent ambiguity to More's *Utopia* in connection with the use of the dialogic structure in the book, which is often present as a major formal convention in the utopian literary genre.

Unlike Wyatt, Thomas More does not represent the frustrating struggle to establish an authorial identity in a yet nonexistent space for individuality inside the patronage system. In this sense, More's writing might be regarded as being less concerned with his own artistic prestige than Wyatt's. Instead, More seems to be more attracted to the idea of fashioning himself within the cultural assets expected from a

reputed humanist within the orbit of the early European *République des Lettres.* In fact, More's personal value was grounded in a commonplace cultural currency which was shared by and approved by many other Renaissance humanists. It was, of course, no coincidence that *Utopia* was first published in Latin for an international audience and later translated into English. The few personal brushstrokes that More left in *Utopia* reveal him as a man firmly rooted in his humanist circle, with a wide cultural background divided by, on the one hand, the social obligations deriving from his public agenda and his prominent position in Henry VIII's court and, on the other, his personal and family duties, for which there was little time left: "Most of my day is given to the law […] I have to visit this man because of his social position and that man because of his business; […] and then for myself —that is, my studies—there's nothing left" (573). While revising More's life events in order to offer a more insightful account of his intriguing personality, Elizabeth McCutcheon highlighted the importance that the difficulty to find private time for himself had on his abiding concerns with being a public officer. In a sense, McCutcheon claims that he longed for a monastic lifestyle which allowed him to search into his inner self (Kinney 119).

In this regard, Timothy J. Reiss locates *Utopia* in the abyss between a medieval longing for a communal society –far away from the segmentation into several sub-spheres, which Cascardi noted as the features of a modern society, and monetary transactions– and the product of the transition towards Modernity in its fragmented structure (137). Even in his brief depictions of realistic daily moments, this physical fragmentation into imposed personal and social commitments seems at odds with his true passion, that is, writing. Perhaps the only place to reconnect with himself without any public interference to attain balance: "What time do I find to write, then? especially since I still have taken no account of sleeping or even of eating, to which many people

devote as much time as to sleep itself, which consumes almost half of our lives" (573). More's complaint brings to mind Wyatt's "Satire I", which connects with a larger preoccupation in the sixteenth century, owing to a generalized and uncomfortable relationship with power in men with prominent political positions.

If we take into consideration that writing mirrors this introspective revision of ethical and intellectual aspects, it is not surprising the fact that More masks in *Utopia* his personal inquiries about the current socio-political situation in a fictional, dialogic stage-play, since overt criticism of the establishment would have brought him about social distress. Stephen Greenblatt reinforces this idea by claiming that in More's work appearances are more complex due to their problematic relationship with a world extremely committed to complying with conventions in which no one believed (14). Therefore, social or political criticism could not be explicit or overt by any means: when More criticized the hypocritical and preposterous procedures of social convention or those individuals who held far-fetched or idealistic dreams, such a critique should be within the spectrum of social acceptability. Consequently, *Utopia* deals with many contemporary political and social issues, such as death penalty for larceny, the increase of beggary in the cities in contrast with the opulence at court, land enclosure for commercial purposes or extremely bad governmental advice, but all these subjects were addressed in a subtle way. In this sense, authorial judgment –which in *Utopia* could be quite tempting to be done due to More's self-fictionalization as Morus– is actually displaced to secondary characters in order to avoid More's rejection by those he had himself committed to.

Another aspect which enhances the difficulty of interpretation of More's *Utopia* relates to the writer's choice of different literary genres for Book I and Book II: the first one has been read as a dialogue, whilst the latter, the most influential one, belongs to

travel literature, which provokes, according to scholar Edward Surtz (Maczelka 97-98), the impression of inconsistency when read together. Greenblatt offers an interesting insight into *Utopia*'s discontinuity, since he considers More's book as "two distinct worlds that occupy the same textual space while insisting upon the impossibility of their doing so". It is impossible to separate them or "bring them into accord", which results into the inability to reach a fulfilling and integrated reading (22-23).

As previously mentioned, *Utopia* is divided into two books surrounded by some paratextual information; namely, a series of letters to Peter Giles that help create a fictional framework which adds additional layers of intricacy to the whole work. Book I entails a conversation between Morus and Raphael Hythloday –a stranger who has resigned from his role as an advisor to become a traveler– which reflects upon ethics and political counseling at court, thus recalling Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Book II, however, is a detailed account of life in Utopia based on Hythloday's experiences encountering the inhabitants of that place. It seems quite clear from the first heading – "A Truly Golden Handbook No Less Beneficial Than Entertaining by the Most Distinguished and Eloquent Author Thomas More Citizen and Undersheriff of the Famous City of London" 572)– that More sought to establish a conspicuous connection between his fictional creation and his contemporary context through the introduction of continuous references to real life elements. In fact, here More does not conceal his own name or social status, the identity of civil servants such as Peter Giles or Cuthbert Tunstall, important historical figures of his period as Amerigo Vespucci or real political events, such as Henry VIII's confrontation with Charles V over the wool trade.

However, and at the same time, More also creates a sense of unreliability and ambivalence which stems from the lack of specificity in terms of physical locations and the use of satirical place names as "Utopia" –which means "No Place"– or "Hythloday"

–where "Hythlo" stands for "nonsense"– that question the otherwise serious tone of the content as well as the authorial voice. Such evasion of responsibility is quite evident insofar as *Utopia* was written as if it were a discourse given by Raphael Hythloday ("All I had to do was repeat what you and I together heard Raphael describe"), thus allowing More to extend his criticism as far as he wanted through indirect quotations: "Still, my dear Giles, I see some people are so suspicious that what we simple-minded and credulous fellows have written down of Hythloday's account can hardly find any credence at all with these circumspect and sagacious persons" (646). In this sense, the fact that Utopia appears framed by an unreliable narration and that many other voices participate in its plot development facilitates More's use of irony and wittiness while, at the same time, enables him to find the necessary distance from his own work.

More's portrait (1526) by Hans Holbein is a nice visual parallel to reflect the writer's intense effort to fashion himself according to the court's code, which shows in his powerful and luxurious garments in spite of his personal criticism against extravagant looks.[6] It is said, however, that under More's velvet and fur clothing, he used to wear a hair shirt so as not to forget his moral principles in the luxury of the court. In that respect, *Utopia* functions quite similarly by presenting a complex and misguiding form which follows the literary decorum of the period yet hiding inside an unconventional content. In this regard, the introduction of "borrowed voices" to add complexity to his work resembles Thomas Wyatt's strategy to detach himself from his poetry by introducing a third-person speaker or a dramatic monologue. Therefore, it could be argued that this preference for polyphonic voices appears to be a new model for these writers to express problematic views, thus avoiding a "single authorial consciousness" in favor of a plural one, "with equal rights and each with its own world

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[6] See Appendix II.

[ideology in this case], combine but not merged in the unity of the event" (Bakhtin: 51). Raphael Hythloday's discourse is especially autonomous in that sense, and holds a distinct authority throughout the book, highlighted by his role as an outsider. By doing so, More created a character who embodied opposite characteristics to courtly culture and, as a result, independent from its dynamics of power.

This vocal multiplicity and the work's resistance to univocal interpretations has not gone unnoticed by the great majority of criticism addressing the formal structure of More's *Utopia*. However, and regarding formal conventions, *Utopia* is not an anomaly in sixteenth century literature since the dialogic genre had already become quite popular owing to the Renaissance's renewed interest in classical literature –more specifically in Plato and Lucian– and the perpetuation of the medieval patristic dialogues. Csaba Maczelka has studied this phenomenon following Jon R. Snyder approach to Late Renaissance Italian literature and has highlighted the relevance of four prominent Italian writers of the second part of the sixteenth century –Sperone Speroni, Lodovico Castelvetro, Torquato Tasso, and Carlo Sigonio– in articulating a theoretical approach to this increasingly popular genre (99). Snyder found evidence that the way dialogues were interpreted from the sixteenth century onwards became problematic for these authors, since Aristotle's *Poetics* could not give an enlightening account of the new extra-linguistic characteristics that the dialogue had recently acquired. According to his findings, there was a noticeable awareness of the level of intricacy between fiction and the pure dialectical debate inherent to many woks in this period, hence the resistance of dialogues to be categorized (9).

Significantly, Thomas More used the dialogic structure not only in *Utopia*, but also in *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529) and *Dialogue of Comfort* (1534 [1553]), both written at the end of his life and after his imprisonment. In the light of this

information, *Utopia* actually followed the literary prescriptions for this genre, while also establishing a connection –a dialogue– with other works of its period by conceiving of its formal disposition, as Maczelka has pointed out in her reading of Jon R. Snyder (100), in terms of a rhetorical exercise. Snyder divides *Utopia* into two clear unities: *praeparatio* (vestibule), which he sees as corresponding to Book I, the contextual information before stating the true focus of interest in the debate between Morus and Hythloday. On the other hand, the book's *contentio,* or the statement of the work's subject-matter, would be subdivided into *quaestio* (thesis) at the close of Book I – private property is contested as the origin of all corruption– and *probatio* (testing the thesis), which would correspond to Book II as a whole.

If this structure were extrapolated to dialectical terminology, *Utopia* would be a clear example of analytical reasoning as it fulfills the scheme *thesis, antithesis* and *synthesis*, to be seen in More's last conclusion of Hythloday's description of Utopian life: "I cannot agree with everything he said. Yet I freely confess there are very many things in the Utopian commonwealth that in our own societies I would wish rather than expect to see" (645). Nevertheless, Hythloday's final words, despite contradicting the whole book, do not entail the overt rejection that one could expect from a text which defies hegemonic ideology in so many levels. It might be for this reason that *Utopia* surpassed many other works which used the same structure but did not accomplish a further exploration of its generic limits, which compels the reader to revise his own assumptions after finishing the work. The book itself encourages a sort of loop-reading to discern the "real" intentions behind the text, or at least to determine whether More was being satirical or not. To do so, the alleged veracity of Morus' comments should be tested against Hythloday's predominant voice in both books.

The dialogic genre promotes, as Romuald Ian Lakowski has claimed, a constant challenge to received beliefs, ideas and preconceptions of the role of the individual in society (37). *Utopia* is never stable or predictable. Therefore, the radical opposition between Morus and Hythloday may not be actually designed to find a final solution, but rather as an outlet to articulate new theoretical alternatives and the revision of existing ones. Hythloday's depiction, both physically and socially, represents the characteristics which a humanist and a civil servant should not imitate in order to achieve an adequate performance according to their social background: "The stranger had a sunburned face, a long beard, and a cloak hanging loosely from his shoulders; from his appearance and dress, I took him to be a ship's captain" (576).

Therefore, and as a sort of alter-ego, Hythloday poses forward, from his position as an outsider regarding humanist values and social acceptability, the very questions and self-doubts that More could not articulate himself. In that sense, *Utopia* functions as a space for self-criticism, experimentation and longing for the accomplishment of a different model to the imposed one. This does not imply that *Utopia* was seeking to produce a radical reaction to its predicaments, as a political manifesto would, or a validation of More's political ideas. As Greenblatt has argued in his thorough analysis of More's complex process of self-effacement in court politics, his act of self-fashioning is precisely an "act of self-cancellation", or a composite of differing views articulated in the most possible neutral discourse. In that regard, the way Hythloday is portrayed as a marginal individual could be interpreted as the embodiment of More's internal ethical dilemma when he was himself on the verge of attaining a highly valuable position as Henry VIII's counselor. In fact, this dialogue has been read as the textual split of an internal debate on the hypocrisy and cynicism that public life often entailed. According to David M. Bevington, who has studied More's dialogues as dramatic dialogues,

Utopia might be staging More's decisive choice as to whether he wanted to become Henry VIII's counselor or not, based on his ethical considerations (507):

> There is another philosophy that is better suited for political action, that takes its cue, adapts itself to the drama in hand, and acts its part neatly and appropriately […] Otherwise, when a comedy of Plautus is being played, and the household slaves are cracking trivial jokes together, you propose to come on stage in the garb of a philosopher and repeat Seneca's speech to Nero from the *Octavia*. Wouldn't it be better to take a silent role than to say something wholly inappropriate, and thus turn the play into a tragicomedy? You pervert and ruin a play when you add irrelevant speeches, even if they are better than the original. So go through with the drama in hand as best you can, and don't spoil it all simply because you happen to think of a play by someone else that would be better. (594)

While Morus is debating with Raphael Hythloday on the positive use of philosophers as royal counselors and the ethical approach they should take in these concrete situations, he gives Hythloday this piece of advice which functions as a sort of summarized dramatic poetics on the importance of pragmatism and adaptability to the court. Morus' advice somehow anticipates the principles of the seventeenth-century *Comedia Nueva*: in fact, Lope de Vega considered as his main guiding principle the general taste of the public, even if this implied a lack of "cultural prestige". Although Morus acknowledges Seneca as an interesting choice to teach household slaves political thinking, he is also capable of distinguishing his personal interests from the ones that would genuinely suit a less cultivated audience. As Bevington points out, Seneca was a referent for More and he, as well as More, encountered many difficulties in separating his true principles from his commitments: "The counselor of state is forever in need of reappraising the situation, while the man of principle stands fast on his logic" (508). This discussion is extensively problematized in *Utopia* due to the impossibility of conciliating both positions in detriment of neither of them.

In this regard, this brief fragment epitomizes More's conception of life as self-performance. Thomas More, the real author, produces a work of fiction which seeks to maintain a realistic tone through the depiction of its setting and its social interactions in order to mirror a reality where the author is himself a fictional character. Bevington reads this as the textual articulation of two alternative models, as entailed by "Hythloday's wariness of all Machiavellianism as an earnest of future ill intent, and *persona* More's cautiously idealistic tendency to seize upon any ray of hope as a basis for gradual improvement" (507). In that sense, Hythloday in Book I advocates the independence of philosophy and knowledge from political power in favor of its own autonomy, which would be the solution to combat inner and outer corruption: "How can one individual do any good when he is surrounded by colleagues who would more readily corrupt the best of men than do any reforming of themselves?" (594). Morus does not reject Hythloday's position but tries to refine these thoughts by moving from the theoretical world of ideas towards a more practical use of them: "You may at least make as little bad as possible. For it is impossible to make everything good unless you make all men good, and that I don't expect to see for a long time to come" (594). Morus and Hythloday hold opposite views that cannot be reconciled as a unity. Likewise, More knew how difficult it would be to develop a coherent ideological discourse without being sent to the scaffold.

This dilemma leads to the final climax of *Utopia* in Book II, which has been read in different, and often even opposing ways. Almost as a succinct encyclopedia, Book II compiles all the necessary information to picture an alternative model to Hythloday's defense of private property. More's alternative model in Book II, which entailed a subversive political proposal, has often been considered a landmark in political history. However, and following Greenblatt, I would suggest that the state of

Utopia might not imply a flagrant attack of England, nor a naive embrace of a radically different political system. The nation of Utopia might have been perceived as too absurd to be real by its contemporaries; however, Morus, who seems to be aware of this, does not see this in a negative way: "Aren't there any absurdities elsewhere in the world? And did any one of the philosophers who've offered a pattern of a society, a ruler, or even a private household set down everything so well that nothing ought to be changed?" (645). It could be argued that this is precisely the point Morus tries to make: the possibility of posing forward a new model, even if it could not be put into practice, as a sign of the humanist spirit to debate. In this sense, the readers of *Utopia* would engage in discussions pertaining to the applicability of Morus's radical model with the intention of triggering in them political awareness by fostering critical thought. By doing so, *Utopia* vibrates according to Ikram Ben Arfi inside "More's particular humanist reformation rather than belonging to an enclosed self-sufficient realm of literature" (1218).

In line with Arfi, Greenblatt explains how *Utopia* is a product of its sociological environment and, as such, it demonstrates how "political life cannot be resolved into underlying forces, cannot be treated as a code that the initiated understand and manipulate, because it is fundamentally insane" (Greenblatt 15). *Utopia* represents a world where neither More nor Henry VIII, in their respective functions, could exist, as it promotes egalitarianism through the eradication of private property, out of which class and social prominence originate. Although such a political alternative could be absurd, the possibility to articulate a parallel dimension where More, as his actual self, could be free of his social and political commitments entails the humanist ideal of an independent intellectual. Therefore, the work's aim is not so much to propose an alternative political model, but rather to articulate humanist critical interrogation, best at work in the

dialogic form. In this sense, it could be argued that Book I in *Utopia* also engages in a critical dialogue with Book II, Hythloday's monologue, which could have been regarded by More as the expression of freedom, which he himself could not have voiced as a result of his political commitment.

In conclusion, *Utopia* does not seem to be oriented to the production of a univocal textual interpretation, but rather to promote critical dialogue by fostering political awareness through a variety of interpretations. The ambiguity of *Utopia* stems from its textual context, where word choice held an enormous ethical and ideological responsibility, thereby many decisions in terms of formal representation tried to expand its limits in order to set up this openness. In that regard, More's work was able to avoid a self-enclosed reading which could possibly locate him as a threatening political figure, while simultaneously fostering a model of humanist thinking which escaped the material restrictions that controlled real life.

4. CONCLUSION

As has been argued in the previous chapters, during Henry VIII's reign literary production was largely influenced by an abiding sense of fear and caution of reprisal which conditioned the writer's personal and material conditions. The intense external pressure to comply with social conventions, in addition to Henry VIII's aggressive attitude towards dissenting attitudes, led to a self-restrictive approach to subjectivity. As historian John Jeffries Martin has signaled, auto-censorship –or "prudence" in his terminology as the chief feature behind the heightening of individual self-awareness– determined the transition from the late medieval subject to the early modern one (1330). Nevertheless, in spite of a more clearly defined idea of individualism, the court's socio-political dynamics did not allow a real development of personal autonomy and self-agency, which seems to contradict the vision of a large number of literary critics, who have perpetuated a solid conception of the Renaissance individual as the epitome of a "true" modern self. Therefore, what I have encountered in both Thomas Wyatt and Thomas More's analysis is a problematization of identity owing to the extreme disparity between inner experiences and public performance, which positions their writings as spaces of confrontation and liminality where such identitary thresholds are constantly tested out.

Both writers appeared to be concerned with the gradual separation of different spheres that the changes in the early Tudor administration entailed. In this sense, both Wyatt and More show in their writing a nostalgic longing which points at an absence of privacy and of a space for development, owing to the progressive consolidation of a pre-modern society. Wyatt seeks shelter by imagining a retired life in the countryside where to escape from the court's opulence and extravaganza, thus implying a desire for a domestic life that would nurture his inner self. In tune with this, More is trapped, as he

explains in the introductory letter to *Utopia*, between his social commitments and his strong impulse to examine his deepest inner issues with regard to his contemporary context. The public role of both writers inside the patronage system is satisfactory in terms of social prestige and stability, yet the necessity to regain autonomy and convey a non-conformist standpoint transforms their writings into products with a high interest from a sociological perspective. In this sense, close examination of the interactions between the literary field and power relationships unveils the strong impact that the historical context had on the literary production of both writers. Consequently, Stephen Greenblatt's key concept of "self-fashioning" accurately captured the complex tensions between social appearance and staged *personae*, which has been more extensively tackled during the Elizabethan period due to the existence of strict institutional censorship. Wyatt struggled to explore his private, authorial personality inside an institutional discourse, whilst More needed to create an outsider character who would mirror his personal doubts, thus establishing a dialogue which addressed the ethical repercussions of such a role. In this sense, I have tried to capture the transitional essence of the Henrician court and the consolidation of new writing strategies which allowed a more detached approach to texts as one of the main legacies for subsequent decades.

The hyper-awareness of the self as a performative construct, followed by the already mentioned restrictiveness in rhetorical strategies, gave rise to works which overtly resisted a literal or univocal understanding. As explored throughout this dissertation, there was indeed a multiplication of semiotic layers inside the work of both writers, either through the use of intertextuality or through the introduction of dialogism. A conscious attempt to disguise personal ideological positions and opinions seems to account for these writers' interest in genres that endow the text with a polyphonic structure. Thus, Wyatt navigates in his poems between extremely

emotionally charged lines and a courtly, institutional discourse that emulates his ambassadorial social role. But despite Wyatt's doubleness, criticism is expressed through references which point towards contexts, quite distant from his own, which allow him to conceal his personal position inside a network of multiple meanings. Likewise, Thomas More establishes a conversation where questionable topics can be discussed, while preserving his public position thanks to the intended textual entanglement that structures *Utopia*. Thus, after studying both writers, it could be concluded from their texts that this hyper-awareness has triggered a more conscious use of language, one especially aware of the denotative dimension of words and of the writer's power to use them accordingly. In this way, Wyatt and More's literary production became more allusive and indirect, and imposed on the reader a more careful approach.

However, this dissertation has only encompassed some literary examples produced by major, canonical writers. In this sense, my final results are not conclusive, but they could exemplify a point of departure for subsequent analyses of alternative texts produced by different authors. To do so, manuscript circulation and editorial changes should be taken into consideration if a broader examination of textual ambiguities and self-censorship is carried out in subsequent research works. Moreover, minor writers during the early Tudor period have not been extensively addressed in literary criticism, which results in a limited view of this era. In addition to this, the development of a growing awareness of masculinity in the Tudor period, considering the ultra-virile image that Henry VIII promoted, could shed light on the particular understanding of subjectivity and restrictiveness which writers such as Wyatt and More acutely developed.

Finally, I have drawn interesting conclusions from the analysis of the environment of surveillance in Henry VIII's court and its impact on subjectivity and self-perception, especially in what relates to my own understanding of our present society. In my opinion, exploring the relevance of the Renaissance court as the root of modern political dynamics –despite its changes with the development of capitalism and the emergence of globalization– is still useful to illustrate how the concept of the self has been radically altered in the twenty-first century owing to, among other things, the impact of technology and social media. There is still a panoptical vision which conditions self-expression, but its location has been transferred from a physical court to a cybernetic one. The digital world has brought about a new and invisible form of surveillance whose virtual form often entails self-censorship due to the importance of external validation in order to reach a new sort of social mobility. Therefore, a parallel in terms of restriction and public appearance could be drawn between both centuries in relation to the hyper-awareness of subjective forms of expression, thereby rendering subjectivity as a space of continuous uncertainty.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Propagandistic Portrait of King Henry VIII

After Hans Holbein the Younger. *King Henry VIII*. 1537. *Walker Art Gallery*, http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker/collections/paintings/13c-16c/item-236761.aspx

Appendix 2: Sir Thomas More's Portrait

After Hans Holbein the Younger. *Sir Thomas More*. 1527. *The National Gallery,*
https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw04514/Sir-Thomas-More