

MARGARET MORE ROPER: A SURVEY OF HER WRITINGS

MARGARET MORE ROPER: UN REPASO A SUS ESCRITOS

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Abstract

As a contribution to the forthcoming 500th anniversary of the publication of Margaret Roper (née More)'s *A Devout Treatise* (1524-2024), the purpose of this article is to make a survey of her written production (public and private), including those works that were preserved as well as those others that were written but have been lost. The trial and death of Thomas More necessarily resulted in the loss of documents and writings, not only by More but by his daughter too. Sixteenth-century biographies of Thomas More are the main source of information about his daughter Margaret (1505-1544) and her written production. These early biographers were clearly concerned with the promotion of the figure of More, but they did not let pass the opportunity to ponder and testify to the scholarly excellence of his eldest daughter. This is particularly the case of Nicholas Harpsfield (1557) and, more especially, Thomas Stapleton (1588). Cresacre More's biography of More (Douai, 1631), even though in general terms it offers no original information, has also been used in this study. Another important corpus of information is the epistolary writings of Margaret and her father, as well as of Erasmus. Various other documents subject to recent literary criticism are also consulted.

Keywords: Margaret More Roper, Erasmus of Rotterdam, *A Devout Treatise upon the Pater Noster* (1524?), Thomas More, letter writing in the Renaissance.

Resumen

Como contribución al próximo 500 aniversario de la publicación de *A Devout Treatise* (1524-2024) de Margaret Roper (de soltera More), el propósito de este artículo es hacer un repaso de su producción escrita (pública y privada), incluyendo aquellas obras que se conservan así como aquellas otras que fueron escritas pero se han perdido. El juicio y la muerte de Thomas More necesariamente provocaron la pérdida de documentos y escritos, no sólo de More, sino también de su hija. Las biografías de Thomas More escritas en el siglo XVI son la principal fuente de información sobre su hija Margaret (1505-1544) y su producción escrita. Estos primeros biógrafos estaban claramente interesados en la promoción de la figura de More, pero no dejaron pasar la oportunidad de ponderar y dar testimonio de la excelencia académica de su hija mayor. En particular, este es el caso de Nicholas Harpsfield (1557) y, sobre todo, de Thomas Stapleton (1588). La biografía de Cresacre More (Douai, 1631), aunque no ofrece en términos generales ninguna información original, también ha sido utilizada en este estudio. Otro corpus importante de información son los escritos epistolares de Margaret y de su padre, así como de Erasmo. También se consultarán algunos otros documentos dispersos estudiados por la crítica literaria reciente.

Palabras clave: Margaret More Roper, Erasmus of Rotterdam, *A Devout Treatise upon the Pater Noster* (1524?), Thomas More; la escritura epistolar en el Renacimiento.

1. Introduction

On 6 September 1529, Erasmus sent a letter to Margaret Roper (née More), to whom he referred as “*Britanniae tuae decus*”, —the glory of your Britain— (Letter 2212; Allen and Allen 1934: 274/1-2). The Dutch humanist was not an easy man to please, and he was no sycophant either. Certainly, Erasmus was affectionate to this woman, the daughter of his friend, the English humanist Thomas More, but his praise was “not in mere flattery” (Thompson 1997: 514). Thomas Stapleton referred to this letter as proof of Margaret’s excellence: “[Erasmus wrote] to her not only as to a gentlewoman, but as to an eminent scholar” (1966: 104). Margaret Bowker has conveniently summarized the extent of her intellectual training as follows: “Besides studying Latin and Greek and reading the early fathers Margaret was introduced to astronomy, philosophy, theology, geometry, and arithmetic” (2017).

Margaret was born shortly before 1 October 1505 in London.¹ When she was four years old, Erasmus met her for the first time. From a very early age, she (together

with the other boys and girls that were brought up in the Mores' household) received a very solid education, by means of the several tutors that her father appointed. More was a fervent supporter of the right of women to education, so his three daughters (Margaret, Cecily and Elizabeth) were brought up the same as More's only boy, John. Erasmus himself, who kept regular contact with the family, is an exceptional witness of the progress of its members. In September 1521, he wrote a letter to the French humanist Guillaume Budé, providing relevant information about More's home school:

He [More] has three daughters, of whom Margaret, the eldest, is already married to a young man [William Roper] who is well off, has a most honourable and modest character, and besides that is no stranger to our literary pursuits. All of them from their earliest years he [More] has had properly and strictly brought up in point of character, and has given them a liberal education. [...] And he has a son by his first wife, now a boy of about thirteen, who is the youngest of his children. (Mynors 1988: 296)²

On the recommendation of the Flemish humanist Frans van Cranevelt, More had arranged for his friend, the Valencian humanist Juan Luis Vives, "to be paid to write a book on women's education" (Guy 2008: 140-141); and Queen Catherine of Aragon herself commissioned the book, which would be published as *De Institutione Feminae Christianae* (Antwerp, 1524). With this work completed, Vives arrived in England on 12 May 1523. When he visited the Mores some months later, Margaret played the "surrogate host" to the Spaniard (Guy 2008: 140-141), as her father was away from London.³ Vives, of course, mentioned More's daughters in *De Institutione* (Fantazzi and Matheeussen 1996-1998, vol. 1: 38-39). It has been argued that the Spaniard might have played a part in encouraging Margaret to publish *A Devout Treatise upon the Pater Noster*, shortly after his visit to More's household (Olivares-Merino 2007). This work (probably published in 1524) was a translation of Erasmus of Rotterdam's *Precatio Dominica in septem portiones distributa* (Basel, 1523).

As a contribution to the forthcoming 500th anniversary of the publication of *A Devout Treatise* (1524-2024), this study provides a comprehensive survey of Margaret's extant works (public and private), and examines the evidence of texts that she may have authored but that have not been preserved. Sixteenth century biographies of Thomas More are the main source of information about Margaret Roper. The purpose of these early biographers was clearly the promotion of the figure of More, but they did not let pass the opportunity to ponder and testify to the scholarly excellence of More's eldest daughter.⁴ This is the case of Nicholas Harpsfield (1557)⁵ and, especially, Thomas Stapleton (1588). Cresacre More's biography of More (Douai, 1631),⁶ even if in general terms it offers no original information, has also been used. Another important

corpus of information is the correspondence of Margaret and her father, as well as of Erasmus. Some other scattered documents subject to recent literary criticism are also considered.

2. Preserved Writings

This section discusses a variety of texts by Margaret Roper, or attributed to her, that have come to us in printed form. Only one of them was planned for publication. Letters, on the other hand, fall into that Early Modern practice in which the author wrote as if engaged in a private conversation, which intentionally or potentially might be public (Henderson 2002: 17-18). In one of these letters, the expression of private filial intimacy envelops a prayer by Margaret. Two other texts attributed to her and transmitted through other channels are also discussed.

2.1. Printed Works

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A Devout Treatise upon the Pater Noster (1524?), Margaret Roper's English translation of Erasmus's *Precatio Dominica in septem portiones distributa*, published in Basel in 1523.⁷ Even though the earliest extant edition of Margaret's translation is dated 1526, Richard Hyrde finished his prologue for this work on 1 October 1524. This detail has led some scholars to believe that the work was first published in 1524 (McCutcheon 1987: 460; Guy 2008: 303).⁸ Margaret Roper (whose name appears nowhere in the book) is the "yong / vertuous and well / lerned gentywoman of .xix. / yere of age" referred to on the title page of the translation (Reynolds 1960: 38-39). Of course, the elite of London humanists and scholars well knew that the author of this work was Margaret Roper.

Surely, Margaret did not choose the best time to print a translation of Erasmus. His Lutheran sympathies placed the famous humanist (and anyone associated with him) in an uncomfortable position. On 12 March 1526 (Bennett 1969: 34; Guy 2008: 157),⁹ Dr. Richard Foxford, the Bishop of London's Vicar-General, summoned Thomas Berthelet on suspicion of having printed three translations of Erasmus's works, among these Margaret Roper's *Devout Treatise*. Berthelet was accused of not following the legal procedures established in 1524 to prevent the coming of Lutheran books into England.¹⁰ The printer admitted that he had not followed the procedures (in Reed 1926: 169-170), and Margaret's book was withdrawn from sale.¹¹ Hyrde asked for the help of Stephen Gardiner, who at the time was Wolsey's secretary (Guy 2008: 157-158). The second printing (1526) had the cardinal's imprimatur; it is the earliest one that has been preserved.

2.2. Letters

Margaret Roper's extant epistolary writings include one letter in Latin, plus three in English.¹² *Margaret Roper to Erasmus of Rotterdam (4 November 1529)*. *Latin*. This is an autograph epistle preserved in the University Library of Wrocław, Rehder Collection, MS. Rehd. 254. 129. It was not published until the beginning of the 18th century.¹³ Margaret answered Erasmus's above-mentioned letter by thanking him for having chosen her as the addressee of one of his epistles: "for what could compare with the honour that was done me when one who is *the glory of the whole world* judged me deserving of a personal letter?" (Dalzell and Estes 2015: 87, emphasis added).¹⁴ Margaret was returning Erasmus's compliment to her (*Britanniae tua decus*) by calling the Dutch humanist *totius orbis decus*. Before concluding her letter to this old friend of the Mores', she addresses him as "our mentor" (Dalzell and Estes 2015: 87).¹⁵ Although she was fluent and proficient in Latin, this is her only extant letter written in that language.

Three complete English letters by Margaret are preserved. The three were written in 1534 and were first published by William Rastell in his edition of More's English works (1557). *Margaret Roper to Thomas More (Letter 203; May? 1534)*. This letter first appeared in More's English works (Rastell 1557: 1432). On 13 April, Thomas More was summoned to Lambeth to take an oath to the First Act of Succession (Roper 1958: 73). After refusing to do so, he was never able to return home. Margaret was the addressee of More's first letter after his imprisonment (Letter 200; 17 April); her answer (April or May) has not been preserved (see Section 3 below). More wrote to her again in around May (Letter 202). By the tone of his words, it seems that his daughter had tried to persuade him to take the oath. In his edition of More's English works, Rastell claimed that Margaret "semed somewhat to labour to perswade hym to take the othe (thoughe she nothinge so thought) to winne therby credence with Maister Thomas Cromwell, that she might the rather gette libertye to haue free resort vnto her father (which she onely had for the moste tyme of his imprisonment)" (1557: 1431).

Margaret was granted permission to see her father (Roper 1958: 75; Rastell 1557: 1432). Whether she had ever attempted to convince him cannot be ascertained. In any case, in the first of her extant English letters she seems to convey her acceptance of More's decision. She declares that she finds comfort in rereading her father's latest letter, "the faithfull messenger of your very virtuous and gostly minde, rid from all corrupt loue of worldly things, and fast knit only in the loue of God" (Letter 203; Rogers 1970: 510). She also gains consolation from remembering her father's "lyfe past and godly conuersacion, and wholesome counsaile, and verteous example" (Rogers 1970: 510), and concludes with her wish to be reunited with her father here on earth (Rogers 1970: 511).

Margaret Roper and Thomas More to Alice Alington (Letter 206; August 1534). Margaret's second English letter —first published in Rastell (1557: 1434-1443)—is problematic. It was addressed to Alice Alington (August 1534, Rogers 1970: 514-532), More's stepdaughter. In it, Margaret recounts a meeting with her father at the Tower and the conversation that followed. Rastell could not reach a conclusion about the authorship of the epistle: "whether thys aunswer [to Alice Alington] wer written by Syr Thomas More in his daughter Ropers name, or by her selfe, it is not certaynelye knowen" (1557: 1434).¹⁶ After bringing up for More's consideration the examples of "so many wise men" (Rogers 1970: 529) who had taken the oath, she recalled the words of Henry Patenson, More's fool, who had claimed "What aileth hym [More] that he will not swere? I haue sworne the oth myself" (Rogers 1970: 529). Immediately afterwards, Margaret added, "And so I can in good faith go now no farther neither, after so many wise men whom ye take for no saumple, but if I should say lyke M. Harry, Why should you refuse to swere, Father? For I haue sworne myself" (Rogers 1970: 529). To this, More laughed and said, "That word is lyke Eue to, for she offered Adam no worse fruit that she had eten herself" (Rogers 1970: 529). In a side note to More's comment, Rastell adds, "She [Margaret] toke the othe with this excepcion, as farre as would stande with the law of God" (Rastell 1557: 1441).¹⁷

Margaret Roper to Thomas More (Letter 209; 1534). First published by Rastell (1557, 1446). Margaret wrote another letter to her father in 1534 (Rogers 1970: 538-539)—presumably after the previous two—"answeryng to a letter which her father had sent vnto her" (Rastell 1557: 1446).¹⁸ For Margaret, "though it [More's letter] were written with a cole, [it] is worthy in mine opinion to be written in letters of golde" (Rogers 1970: 539). She also stated her wish to follow, with God's grace, her father's "fruitfull example of liuing" (Rogers 1970: 539). She hoped to achieve this end "thorowe the assistens of your deuoute praiers, the speciall staye of my frayltie" (Rogers 1970: 539). More's answer has also been preserved (Letter 210; Rogers 1970: 540-544).

2.3. A Prayer and a Petition

There was a fourth letter sent by Margaret to her father in 1534, which is now lost. In his answer (Letter 211, Rogers 1970: 544-547), More quoted her words whose tone and arrangement made them sound like a prayer. He wrote: "[T]hat it may please him (it doth me [Thomas More] good here to reherse your [Margaret's] own wordes) 'of his tender pitie so firmly to rest our loue in hym, with litle regard of this worlde, and so to fle sinne and embrace vertue, that we may say with S. Paule *Mihi viuere Christus est et mori luctrum*. Et illud, *Cupio dissolui et esse cum Christ*'" (Rogers 1970: 544-545).

More goes on with his letter and then quotes again “these words of your self” (Rogers 1970: 545):

But good father, I wretch am farre, farre, farthest of all other from such poynt of perfection, our Lorde send me the grace to amende my lyfe, and continually to haue an eie to mine ende, without grudge of death, which to them that dye in God, is the gate of a welthy lyfe to which God of his infinite mercie bringe vs all. Amen. Good Father strenght my frayltie with your deuoute prayers. (Rogers 1970: 544-545)¹⁹

2.4. A Verse Profession of Faith

A copy of *This Treatise concernynge the fruytful Saynges of David the King and prophete in the seven penytenyall psalms* (Wynkin de Worde, 1508) by John Fisher is held in the *Réserve Patrimoniale* of the Douai Public Library. The relevance of this volume lies in the fact that it was one of the last books More owned (and presumably read) before his execution; furthermore, it contains a revealing handwritten inscription. The first reference to this volume that I have located is in a Russian periodical, the *Journal of the Ministry of Public Education*.²⁰ After briefly describing the volume, the anonymous author adds that on the parchment cover there are verse lines declaring the faith and religious opinions of these famous friends, i.e., John Fisher and Thomas More. For this unknown author, the lines had been written by John Fisher (“The Psalter of Thomas More” 1836: 720-721). “Apparently”, —the note continues— “Fisher presented this book to Thomas More at the moment of his execution, which took place 14 days before the execution of the Grand Chancellor” (1836: 721). The anonymous author then quotes the final four lines of the inscription in Latin.

Two years later, a similar report was published by Pierre Alexandre Gratet-Duplessis, at the time Rector of the Douai Academy.²¹ Fisher’s work was precious precisely for its inscription: on the flyleaf preceding the title of the work, a contemporary hand had written ten lines, followed by a Latin sentence and the names of John Fisher and Thomas More. Gratet-Duplessis transcribed the whole annotation “scrupulously and without any alteration” (1838: 461, my translation).²² He described this brief composition as More’s and Fisher’s agreed declaration of their beliefs, a profession of faith, their religious testament, composed while both were prisoners at the Tower of London (1838: 462). Gratet-Duplessis would not say, however, whose hand had written down these lines. For it was in fact one single hand, which excluded the possibility that one of the two had just added his name to what the other one had written. Gratet-Duplessis claimed that this composition had been elaborated by the two prisoners (More and Fisher), and originally written by one of the two in some book secretly kept—but not necessarily *This Treatise*. Ultimately, this French bibliophile was suggesting the possibility that

the handwritten words —only preserved in the said work— might have been jotted down by someone else, neither More nor Fisher (Gratet-Duplessis 1838: 463).

This issue remained thus until 1847, when an anonymous author made two significant claims. In the first place, Fisher had given *This Treatise* to More; in the second, the inscription had been “written by the learned Chancellor in his own hand-writing” (“Lines by Sir Thomas More” 1847: 256). The anonymous writer provided no support for these statements; neither did s/he make reference to Gratet-Duplessis’s paper.

Two contributions on this topic were published in 1851. In May, the director of the Douai Library, H.R. Duthilloeul, stated that (according to the tradition and testimony of the English Benedictines) this profession of faith had been written by John Fisher, who then secretly submitted the work to More, as Henry VIII had deprived the latter of those books he kept in his cell (1851: 255-256). Another paper was published shortly afterwards (November) in the well-known journal *Notes and Queries*. The author —only identified as S.H.— mentioned the previous article as his source (1851: 417), and basically adhered to Duthilloeul’s conclusions: it was a profession of faith of the two friends, written by Bishop Fisher (so said the Benedictines), who then gave More the said book (S.H. 1851: 417-418).

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Almost two decades later, in a review of the catalogue of the Douai Public Library, the authorship of the annotation reverted to Thomas More: “Tradition assures that the verses, [...], are by Thomas Morus, and that they, together with the other indications, were written by his hand in the Tower of London” (*Catalogue méthodique* 1869: lxix).²³ Surely, the anonymous author of this note was appealing to a different tradition than the previous two critics. Be that as it may, how is all this relevant for Margaret Roper?

Henri Meulon (one of the earliest contributors to the *Moreana* journal) travelled to Douai at the end of May 1969 and was able to take a close look at the lines written on the flyleaf of Fisher’s book. He concluded that it was not More’s hand-writing (Fisher’s was not even considered), but rather Margaret Roper’s on account of the graphological similarities between the lines in the book at the Douai library and the text of her Latin letter to Erasmus (4 November 1529), preserved in the University Library of Wrocław. “Attributing the lines in Douai to Margaret Roper” —Meulon concluded— “is only a presumption” (1969: 68, my translation).²⁴ Before finishing his paper, the author stressed that the composition’s metre and poor style ruled out More’s authorship: “the mediocrity of the style, especially of the last line, and the very form of the dizain, different from that of his [More’s] poems” (1969: 68, my translation).²⁵ To date, no one has refuted Meulon’s hypothesis. The inscription is the following:²⁶

The surest means for to attain
The perfect way to endless bliss
Are happy life and to remain
Within the Church where virtue is:
And if thy conscience is so sound
To think thy faith is true indeed,
Beware in thee no schism be found
That unity may have her meed.
If unity thow do embrace
In heaven joy, possess thy place.
Qui non recte vivit in vnitata Ecclesiæ catholica,
salvus esse non potest.
Thomas Morus, dominus cancellarius Angliæ.
Johannes [Fisher], episcopus Roffensis.

2.5. An English Poem?

Elizabeth Bruce Boswell (1673-1734), a Scotswoman known for her reading habits (Caudle 2018: 117), elaborated a compilation of works by different authors, known as *Devotional Miscellany of Elizabeth Boswell* and preserved at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. In her miscellany, Boswell attributed to Margaret Roper one of the poems included, adding the heading “Verses Writt by Sir Thomas Moore his Daughter when he was in prison, in Henry the 8s time”. This ascription was reported by Sarah C.E. Ross, who celebrated it as “a notable discovery, and will be of interest to scholars of Roper and of early modern women’s writing” (2009: 502). The poem begins with “How can the soul that loves her God / for very shame complain?”, Ross reproduced the whole verse composition (2009: 503-504), and claimed that it was “clearly embedded” in Margaret’s biographical circumstances at the time of More’s imprisonment and execution (2009: 503). Even when Ross was cautious enough as to admit that this poem might not after all be by More’s daughter, she stressed Boswell’s reliability as “attributor of authorship” (2009: 504-505). As Ross concluded, “if Boswell’s ascription of this lyric to her [Margaret] is correct, it is an exciting addition to her oeuvre” (2009: 506).

In a more recent paper, Romuald Lakowski described the structure of this poetic work as follows: “The poem is composed in the ballad meter, basically in double ballad or common-metre double stanzas, and consists of thirteen eight line stanzas, whose even lines rhyme (xaxaxbxb), for a total of one hundred and four lines” (2016: 293). Interestingly enough, both Ross and Lakowski bring Thomas More’s great-great-granddaughter, Gertrude More,²⁷ into their discussions (Ross 2009: 504; Lakowski 2016: 294). Actually, Dame Gertrude More is the real author of the referred poem. It was included in *The spiritual exercises of the most vertvovs and*

*religious D. Gertrvde [...] (More 1658: 5-9),*²⁸ a compilation of her mystical writings published posthumously at Paris.

3. Missing Writings

Assumedly, Margaret Roper wrote many other texts that have not survived. Thomas Stapleton's testimony is crucial in this sense:

She wrote very eloquently *prose and verse both in Greek and Latin*. *Two Latin speeches* written as an exercise, which I have myself seen, are in style elegant and graceful, while in treatment they hardly yield to her father's compositions. *Another speech, first written in English*, was translated by both the father and the daughter separately with such great skill that one would not know which to prefer. When More wrote his book on the Four Last Things, he gave the same subject to Margaret to treat, and when she had completed her task, he affirmed most solemnly that that *treatise* of his daughter was in no way inferior to his own. (Stapleton 1966: 103, emphasis added)²⁹

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The credibility of Stapleton's testimony lies in the fact that he became personally acquainted with John and Margaret Clement, as the three had met in their continental exile years before the composition of *Tres Thomae* (1588).³⁰ This Margaret (née Giggs) had been brought up in Thomas More's household as another daughter of the family. There she met John Clement, whom More adopted as page and pupil. In his work, Stapleton explicitly mentioned the relevance of the memories of those who had either lived with More or were on terms of intimacy with him: "John Clement, a doctor of medicine" (Stapleton 1966: xvii),³¹ and his wife stand out.

Thus, as stated in Stapleton's above quoted words, we may include in Margaret Roper's writings the following:

1. A treatise on The Four Last Things. Margaret finished her text on the *novissimi*, but her father did not. Cresacre More—in his biography of Thomas More—adds that "her father sincerely protested that it was better than his, and therefore, it may be, never finished his" (1828: 154).
2. Latin letters. Margaret wrote more letters in Latin than are preserved, as can be deduced from the allusions to them in More's or Erasmus's epistles: "elegantēs epistolae vestrae" (Letter 43; Rogers 1970: 97); "literae tuae" (Letter 69; Rogers 1970: 134); "tali [...] epistola" (Letter 70; Rogers 1970: 134); "tuae [...] epistolae", "istae [...] tuae tam elegantes, tam politae" (Letter 106; Rogers 1970: 254); "Epistola tua", "epistolam tuam" (Letter 108; Rogers 1970: 257); "elegantissimae literae tuae [...] tam longam [...] epistolam" (Letter 128; Rogers

1970: 301); “tuis sororumque tuarum literis” (Letter 1404; Allen and Allen 1924: 366).

3. English letters. It is reasonable to assume Margaret wrote other letters to her father in English, while he was a prisoner in the Tower. More alludes to a letter that she wrote trying to convince him to take the oath, or pretending to do so in order to get Thomas Cromwell’s permission to visit her father. Rastell reports that “Within a while after Sir Thomas More was in pris[o]n in the Towre, his daughter Maistres Margaret Roper wrote and sent vnto hym a letter” (Rastell 1557: 1431). From More’s answer, we catch a glimpse of the mood of that lost epistle, which he describes as “lamentable” (Letter 202; Rogers 1970: 508/3). Apparently, Margaret questioned her father about the reasons behind his refusal to take the oath, since he defended himself in his reply: “Wherein as towchinge the pointes of your letter, I can make none answeare, for I doubt not you well remembre, that the matters which moue my conscience [...] I have sondry tymes shewed you that I will disclose them to no man” (Rogers 1970: 508-509). Most probably, Margaret also reminded her father of the difficult position in which his refusal put his family, something of which More is obviously aware in his response. What caused him more pain, he says, is that his family and friends are “in great displeasure and daunger of great harme therby” (Rogers 1970: 509).

Letter 210 (Rogers 1970: 540-544), as stated by Rastell —“answering her letter here next before” (1557: 1446)— is More’s response to Margaret’s letter 209. In this same epistle More mentioned “your daughterlye louing letters” (Rogers 1970: 540).

Letter 211 by More (Rogers 1970: 544-547) opens mentioning a previous one by Margaret: “Your doughterly louyng letter” (Rogers 1970: 544). Rastell, however, makes no reference to it.

4. Latin Poems. In his letter of 11 September 1522? (Letter 108; Rogers 1970: 257-258), More tells his daughter that the bishop of Exeter, John Veysey, had examined a Latin letter by her (“epistolam tuam”; Rogers 1970: 257), which had accidentally fallen out of his father’s pocket.³² When More saw how delighted he was, he presented him with Margaret’s poems, “carmina” (Rogers 1970: 257), presumably also in Latin.
5. Latin speeches. As reported in Stapleton’s, “[t]wo Latin speeches written as an exercise [...] in style elegant and graceful, while in treatment they hardly yield to her father’s compositions” (1966: 103). Furthermore, he states that he has in his “possession a speech of hers” (1966: 107) —which I assume to be one of these two— that he praises in the following terms:

It is eloquent, clever, and perfect in its use of oratorical devices. It is in imitation, or rather in rivalry, of Quintilian's declamation on the destruction of the poor man's bees through the poison that had been sprinkled upon the flowers in the rich man's garden. Quintilian defends the cause of the poor man: Margaret of the rich. The more difficult such a defence is, the greater the scope for Margaret's eloquence and wit. If it were not that I fear to be tedious and to digress too much from the task I have undertaken of writing More's life, I would print the speeches both of Margaret and Quintilian, either in this place or in an appendix. (Stapleton 1966: 107)³³

Cresacre More further confirms this point: "She made an oration to answer Quintilian, defending that rich man which he accused of having poisoned a poor man's bees, with certain venomous flowers in his garden, so eloquent and witty, that it may strive with his" (1828: 158).³⁴

In the already cited letter of 11 September (1522?), More says that he also showed Veysey a Latin speech by Margaret, alluded to as "declamationem" (Rogers 1970: 257).

6. A speech written in English and translated into Latin. Margaret and her father translated separately a speech "first written in English" into Latin (Stapleton 1966: 103). Cresacre More augments what Stapleton says: "She wrote two declamations in English, which her father and she turned into Latin so elegantly, as one could hardly judge which was the best" (1828: 154).
7. Translations from Eusebius of Caesarea? Cresacre More stated that Margaret "translated Eusebius out of Greek, but it was never printed, because Christopherson at that time had done exactly before" (1828: 158). Thomas Fuller in his *The Worthies of England* (1662) follows Cresacre More almost verbatim: "she translated Eusebius out of Greek; but it was never printed because Christopherson had done it so exactly before" (1952: 358).³⁵ It is well known that it was Mary (Margaret's daughter) who translated Eusebius.³⁶ Cresacre More might simply be wrong, or there might be some truth to his account: perhaps Margaret had started translating Eusebius from Greek, and then Mary used or incorporated her mother's translation. In any case, the reference to Christopherson's work must necessarily be applied to Mary, rather than to Margaret, as his translation of Eusebius was published in 1569.

4. Conclusion

Margaret Roper died at Christmas 1544. She was not yet forty years old. John Guy has recreated the details of her funeral, which "must have been the bleakest of occasions" (2008: 270). I will not say that had she lived longer she would have published more works. I do not think she wished for public notoriety, but not necessarily because —as More liked to think— he himself and her husband William

were “a sufficiently large circle of readers” for what she wrote (Rogers 1961: 155).³⁷ She was more than rewarded by the esteem and admiration of a select group of scholars and humanists that were aware of her intellectual capacities and her solid scholarly training.

However, I have no doubt that Thomas More’s fall from grace and execution for high treason marked the last decade of her short life in many aspects, but particularly in one that is relevant for this paper. The persecution that the family suffered after the trial and death of the father necessarily resulted in the loss of documents and writings, not only by More but by his daughter too. Henry VIII’s henchman, Thomas Cromwell, brought Margaret before the king’s council in August 1535 to question her (Stapleton 1966: 193; 1588: 347-348). Despite the adverse circumstances and the two periods of exile that followed Henry VIII’s death (1547), those in More’s closest circle were able to safeguard most of the former’s writings, which Margaret had secretly kept and passed to them. Therefore, John and Margaret Clement, together with William Rastell (More’s nephew), as well as Dorothy Colly (Margaret Roper’s maid) became the depositaries of Thomas More’s heritage, but also of his daughter’s. Unfortunately, none of them saw the need to publish Margaret’s writings, as all the efforts were devoted to printing More’s works, first those in English (1557) and then in Latin (1568-1569). Stapleton was able to go through Margaret Roper’s works when he met the Clements; he even felt tempted to print some. However, in the agenda of English recusants in Counter-Reformation Europe, the figure to exalt and promote was Thomas More.

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Margaret Roper was not rescued from oblivion by 20th century feminist scholars. As early as 1550, John Coke was already praising her intellectual status (1550: K.i/7-13). John Leland, Henry VIII’s poet laureate, devoted two epigrams to More’s daughters (1589: 67-68). Her emendation of a corrupt passage in a Latin letter included in St Cyprian’s epistles was finally included in later editions, something for which she was given full credit (albeit posthumously).³⁸ Leaving aside Erasmus of Rotterdam’s praise, Margaret’s scholarly acumen was recognized by the first biographers of her father—excluding William Roper, her own husband. It is often argued that, by praising Margaret these authors were in fact aiming at indirectly enlarging the figure of Thomas More. There may be some truth in this, but I think she was also given the credit that was due to her. Harpsfield had met Margaret; Thomas Stapleton did not, but he did meet the other Margaret, John Clement’s wife and More’s daughter’s close friend. Their admiration for Margaret Roper was further complemented by the praise she received from the most eminent humanists of the day: Erasmus, Juan Luis Vives, Richard Hyrde, John Clement, Reginald Pole, John Veysey and Roger Ascham. They have all given posterity the picture of a woman who was, no doubt, an ornament of her beloved country.³⁹

Notes

1. In Hans Holbein's draft of the More family portrait (late 1526 – early 1527), Margaret's age is written below the book she holds as twenty-two years old. This points to a birth year of 1504 or 1505. There are also two Holbein miniatures of Margaret and William Roper at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Margaret is said to be thirty years old, but unfortunately the painting is undated. Richard Hyrde's preface to Margaret's translation of Erasmus's *Precatio Dominica* is dated 1 October 1524. On the cover page of this work we read that the translator is nineteen years old. This and the family portrait caption seem to point at 1505 as the year of Margaret's birth.

2. "*Habet filias treis. quarum maxima natu, Margareta, iam nupta est iuueni, primum beato, deinde moribus integerrimis ac modestissimis, postremo non alieno a nostris studiis. Omnes a teneris annis curauit imbuendas primum castis ac sanctis moribus, deinde politoribus literis. [...] Habet filium ex vxore priore, natum annos plus minus tredecim, ex liberis natu minimum*" (Letter 1233; Allen and Allen 1922: 577).

3. See letters 115-128 (Rogers 1970).

4. William Roper, Margaret's husband, was the author of the first account of More's life. It was completed before 1557, but not printed until 1626: *The mirrour of vertue in worldly greatnes. Or The life of Syr Thomas More Knight, sometime Lo. Chancellour of England, At Paris* [i.e. Saint-Omer: Printed at the English College Press], MDCXXVI. He makes no reference to Margaret's intellectual skills.

5. Though he finished the biography of Thomas More in 1557, it was not printed until 1932. Harpsfield's work is the main source of the anonymous text known as *Ro.Ba.* (1599). The two main editions are Wordsworth (1810) and Hitchcock, Hallett and Reed (1950). What remains of William Rastell's planned biography is very interesting, but has no relevance for my present purpose.

6. *D.O.M.S. The life and death of Sir Thomas Moore Lord high Chancellour of England. Written by M. T.M. and dedicated to the Queens most gracious Maiestie* (Douai: Printed by B. Bellière, 1631?).

7. "*A deuoute treatise vpon the Pater noster, made fyrst in latyn by the moost famous doctour mayster Erasmus Roterodamus, and turned in to englishe by a yong vertuous and well lerned gentywoman of. xix. yere of age*" (London: In fletestrete, in the house of Thomas Berthelet, 1526). (rpt. London: Thomas Berthelet, ca. 1531). For the latest critical edition of Margaret Roper's work – a reprint from German Marc'hadour's edited transcription published in *Moreana* 2 (7), 1965: 10-62 – see Gentrup and McCutcheon (2022: 60-99). There have been several critical approaches to Margaret Roper's translation of Erasmus (Olivares-Merino 2022a: 42-43, n. 208), but see especially Demers (2022).

8. Dating the publication year of Margaret's translation is a complex issue. Reynolds thought "Margaret's translation was published at the beginning of 1525" (1960: 38), and so does Sarah C.E. Ross (2009: 502).

9. Reynolds, however, dated this episode to 1525 (1960: 39-40). Reed claims that Dr. Foxford summoned Berthelet a month after "Fisher preached a second notable sermon on a wet Sunday in February, 1525-6" (1926: 169). He means 1526, for at that time the chronological year started in the month of March. Hall placed the episode in February of the seventeenth year of Henry VIII's reign, that is, 1526 (Hall 1809: 708).

10. On 12 October 1524, Bishop Tunstall had warned the London booksellers against "importing into England books printed in Germany or any other books whatever containing Lutheran heresies, or selling or parting with any such books already imported under pain of the law" (Reed 1926: 165-166).

11. Reed claims that Berthelet's fault was "a technical one"; his summoning by Foxford points to the fact "that the Court

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exercised the wider powers that it possessed [...] and that it was not limited by the terms of Tunstall's inhibition of 12 October, which dealt only with imported books" (1926: 170).

12. For several approaches to Margaret's epistolary writings, see Olivares-Merino (2022a: 44, n. 215).

13. *Epistola CCCLII* in Clericus (1703: 1743-1744).

14. "Quid enim cum illo honore comparandum quo digna habita sum, qua totius orbis decus suis litteris dignatus sit?" (Letter 2233; Allen and Allen 1934: 300).

15. "praeceptorem nostrum" (Letter 2233; Allen and Allen 1934: 300).

16. The question of authorship or collaboration between More and Margaret of this very long and important document remains unsettled. For the most recent discussions, see Betteridge (2013), Curtright (2019), McCutcheon (2020), Foley (2022) and Rodgers (2022).

17. The text of this letter is included in Gentrup and McCutcheon (2022: 103-119).

18. More's letter is not extant.

19. Guy has edited and rewritten this prayer to imitate the liturgical collects Margaret included in her *Devout Treatise* (2008: 249).

20. Журнал министерства народного просвещения (*Journal of the Ministry of Public Education*) was founded in 1834 on the initiative of the Minister of Education, Count S.S. Uvarov. Published in the printing house of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, it was Russia's earliest ministerial periodical. Heartfelt thanks to Dinara Klimovskaia, who has kindly translated this article.

21. I have identified the author behind the initials G.D., with which the paper is signed.

22. "*Scrupuleusement et sans aucune alteration*"

23. "*La tradition assure que les vers, [...], sont de Thomas Morus, et qu'ils ont*

été, ainsi que les autres indications, écrits de sa main dans la Tour de Londres"

24. "*Attribuer les vers de Douai à Margaret Roper n'est qu'une présomption*"

25. "*la médiocrité du style, surtout du dernier vers, et la facture même du dizain, différente de celle de ses [More's] poèmes*". Romuald Lakowski echoed this statement and further added: "The poem, which Henri Meulon calls a 'dizain', is made up of two English alternating iambic tetrameter quatrains and a final rhyming couplet, a rhyme scheme that More himself never uses, together with a concluding note in Latin" (2013: 289).

26. I have only modernised the original spelling, retaining the meter of the lines.

27. Helen More (1606-1633), known in religion as Dame Gertrude More, became a Benedictine Nun at the Monastery of Our Lady of Consolation at Cambrai. Her writings were published posthumously by another English Benedictine, Augustine Baker.

28. For a contemporary edition of this work, see Weld-Blundell (1911: 5-8).

29. "Compositus Graece Latineque, soluta & pedestri oratione elegantiissime. Vidi ego duas eius declamationes Latinas exercitij causa scriptas, quae ut stilo quidem ornat[ae] & facundae erant, sic inuentione no[n] ita multum patri cedebant. Et altera quidem declamatio quum Anglice primum scripta esset, ab utroque Latine versa, a patre & filia ea elegancia ab utroque vertitur, ut nescias vtra alteri sit praeferenda. Certe quum Thomas Morus librum suum de 4. novissimis scriberet, dedit idem argumentum Margaretae tractandum: quod quum fecisset, affirmabat sancte filiae tractatum nulla ex parte suo esse inferiorem" (Stapleton 1588: 237).

30. In Stapleton's words: "In the familiar intercourse which existed between us some years ago, owing to our common exile, from time to time I gathered from all of them many particulars of the sayings and deeds of Thomas More, which I now reproduce exactly as they are in my memory" (1966: xviii). "Ex horum omnium in hoc communi exilio nostro conuersatione familiar quae mihi cum eis

ante aliquot annos intercesserat, plurima per occasionem de dictis ac actis Thomae Mori libenter audiui, diligenter retinue, et nu[n]c fideliter collegi" (Stapleton 1588: 8).

31. "Ioannes Clemens doctor Medicus" (Stapleton 1588: 6-7).

32. "He took it into his hand with pleasure and examined it. When he saw from the signature that it was the letter of a lady, he was induced by the novelty of the thing to read it more eagerly. When he had finished he said he would never have believed it to have been your work unless I had assured him of the fact, and he began to praise it in the highest terms (why should I hide what he said?) for its pure Latinity, its correctness, its erudition, and its expressions of tender affection" (Stapleton 1966: 106). "Delectatus manu coepit inspicere: vbi ex salutatione depræhendit esse mulieris, legere coepit audius. Sic eum inuitabat movitas. Sed quum legisset & (quod nisi me affirmante nom erat crediturus) tuam ipsius manum esse didicisset, epistolam, vt nihil dicam amplius talem: (quanquam cur non dicam quod dixit ille?) tam Latinam, tam emendatam, tam eruditam, tam dulcibus refertam affectibus, vehementer admiratus est" (Stapleton 1588: 241-242).

33. "Est penes me declamatio quaedam huius Margaretæ eloquentissima, & ingeniosa admodum, omnibusque veri oratoris numeris absoluta, qua Quintilianum imitata, vel aemulata potius respondet illi eius orationi, quæ est de pauperis apibus in horto diuitis veneno floribus asperso necatis.

Pauperis causam defendit Quintilianus. Diuitis tuetur Margaretæ. Quæ sane causa quanto ad defendendum difficilior, tanto ars & eloquentia Margaretæ excellentior videri debet. Nisi prolixitatis hic tædium aut nimiam a proposita Thomæ Mori vita digressionem metuerem, vtramque declamationem Quintilianæ, & Margaretæ vel hoc loco vel huic operi subiecissem" (Stapleton 1588: 242-243).

34. For Guy this was the speech said in front of Henry VIII in December 1525 at Richmond Palace, when the king invited Margaret and her sisters Elizabeth and Cecily to have some kind of philosophical debate in his presence (2008: 156-157). Vives's influence on this Quintilian-like *declamatio* by Margaret has also been argued (Olivares-Merino 2007: 398).

35. In his *Memoirs*, George Ballard reached the same conclusion (1752: 152). This error has also found an echo in recent scholarship; see Olivares-Merino (2009: 157, n. 33).

36. For a full discussion on these translations, see Olivares-Merino (2009) and Goodrich (2010).

37. "frequensque legenti tibi theatrum simus, maritus tuus et ego" (Letter 128; Rogers 1970: 302).

38. See Olivares-Merino (2022b).

39. This paper is an extended and revised version of part of Olivares-Merino (2022a).

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