

**Belén Álvarez-Faedo. 2013**  
***Edward II, Dr. Faustus y The Jew of Malta.***  
***Análisis de sus traducciones al español.***  
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In 1964 Irving Ribner emphasized what he perceived as Marlowe's contemporariness when he stated that "Christopher Marlowe in a real sense belongs to the twentieth century" (1964: 211). This was the opening line of Ribner's article "Marlowe and the Critics," which appeared in a -now seminal- special issue (on the occasion of Marlowe's four-hundredth anniversary) of *The Tulane Drama Review* that included works by, among others, such keynote Marlovian scholars as C.L. Barber, Eugene Waith, Clifford Leech, Harry Levin and J.R. Brown, apart from Ribner himself. In a critical move that – following years of cultural materialist reading practices- many may find misguided, Ribner went on to argue that Marlowe is one of those authors who reflects "the doubts and uncertainties of his own time in a manner which we today find particularly meaningful" (1964: 211). Regardless of what we may think of the attempts, so typical of the 1960s, to make Elizabethan authors "our contemporaries," these kinds of statements showed to what extent the analysis of Marlowe's poetry and, especially, his drama needed some kind of justification, as it had been neglected on account of their ideologically subversive nature and had remained understudied by audiences and critics for more than three centuries.

Sadly enough, and as Lisa Hopkins has aptly argued, approaches to Marlowe's work have too often focused upon the following four issues: his (obscure) life and death, his relation with Shakespeare (regularly described as one of inferiority), his

“reputation as overreacher,” and his inability to create female characters of any interest, or male ones who are not “himself in disguise” (2008:142). However, since the 1960s, and especially the late 1980s, there has been a renewed interest in Marlowe’s drama, and this has become apparent in the proliferation of deep and interesting critical analyses of his plays and poetry, performance studies, and even biographies delving into the mystery surrounding his life and – especially – his death.

Granting that there is little that we know for sure about Marlowe’s life and how it influenced his work (J.A. Downie has convincingly argued that, to begin with, prior to 1593 there is no evidence attributing any given play to him), we do have the texts, and, whatever we make of their relation with his mysterious biography, it is clear that, from a strictly literary and/or theatrical point of view, they constitute one of the most significant corpora by any early modern author. In past decades it has been interestingly argued, for instance, that there are significant links and intertextual relations among these plays and poems and other texts by other Elizabethan dramatists and poets; indeed, Alan Dessen and Meredith Skura have recently examined Marlovian plays in connection with Greene, Kyd, and, of course, Shakespeare,<sup>1</sup> and it is well known to what extent a connection with the latter boosts the reputation of any author. Furthermore, Spanish scholar José Manuel Fernández de Sevilla has gone beyond the immediate Tudor context in order to suggest a comparative approach with some Spanish Golden Age plays (i.e., *comedias*): *Doctor Faustus* and Tirso’s *El condenado por desconfiado*; *Edward II* and Calderón’s *La vida es sueño*; and the *Tamburlaine* plays and Lope’s *Contra valor no hay desdicha* (1998: 129-135). In a more ideologically orientated analysis, some critics have focused on how Marlowe’s drama did not simply question and subvert established beliefs as a politically inane form of provocation (significant as this is in the context of Tudor England), but did so as part of a more complex and deeper examination of “the delineation of the alien” as “crucial to the fashioning of the self,” creating “a world where transgression is not merely the source of crisis but also the motivating force behind identity, ideology, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Bartels has written that “Barabas predicts and produces Shylock, Tamburlaine Othello, and even Faustus Hamlet, Marlowe’s socially embedded aliens giving way almost inevitably to Shakespeare’s socially alienated selves” (2004: 461).

institution of meaning" (Bartels 2004: 461, 446). Finally, recent work by several scholars has emphasized the significance of Marlowe's drama for theory itself (from a more strictly theatrical perspective) and also for discussions of ideology, sexuality, power, and ethnicity and alterity in the early modern period.<sup>2</sup>

If we focus on Marlowe and/in Spain, it has to be said that there is neither a long list of translations of Marlowe's plays into Spanish, nor a rich history of these plays' reception in Spain, although this has slightly changed in the past few decades. Fernández de Sevilla provided a brief overview of these in his excellent *El teatro de Christopher Marlowe* (1998:135-141), and Miguel Martínez – in a still more concise manner – also provided the references to some translations of *Doctor Faustus* in his similarly noteworthy *Y seréis como dioses* (1995:187-189). However, no thorough study of the Spanish translations of Marlowe's drama, or of the reception of his plays, has to my knowledge been published. In this sense, Belén Álvarez-Faedo's book-length study of a number of Spanish translations of Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Edward II* is a felicitous event, and, in its own way, a groundbreaking publication, for which both the author and the publisher should be praised.

Álvarez-Faedo's *Edward II, Dr. Faustus y The Jew of Malta. Análisis de sus traducciones al español* is, as the title suggests, a contrastive study of a number of Spanish translations of these three Marlovian plays (2013:v). Furthermore, it also claims to attempt to explore mechanisms of cultural transference, the dynamics of literary production, and the functioning of linguistic, cultural and aesthetic codes. In order to do this, it focuses upon the processes of production, transmission and interpretation, paying attention to

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<sup>2</sup> Focusing on the last thirty years see, for example, on Marlowe's life and work: Lisa Hopkins' *A Literary Life* (2000), and also her *Christopher Marlowe, Renaissance Dramatist* (2008); Roy Kendall's *Christopher Marlowe and Richard Baines* (2003); and Sarah Scott and Michael Stapleton's *Christopher Marlowe the Craftsman: Lives, Stage and Page* (2010). On performance studies see: Simon Shepherd's *Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theater* (1988). For a literary analysis of the plays and poetry: Emily Bartels's *Critical Essays* (1997); Clara Harraway's *Re-Citing Marlowe* (2000); and the recent collection of essays *Placing the Plays* (2008), edited by Sara Deats and Robert Logan. Finally, the most relevant recent edition of the plays and poetry is, arguably, the *Complete Works* published in five volumes and edited by Roma Gill *et alii* for Oxford University Press (1986-1998).

such complex phenomena as those specifically involved in literary translation, namely those of re-historicization, re-interpretation and relocation of the translated text as relatively 'new' material within another geographically and chronologically different cultural and literary community (2013:1-8).

Considering the (recently acknowledged) centrality, as noted above, of Marlowe's drama, and the more than relative absence of Marlovian translations and critical editions in Spain, this study seems to fulfil an important, and neglected, function in Spanish studies of English early modern drama. More specifically, the book offers the specialized reader many additional achievements. Namely, it certainly is a thorough and academically sound study in the field of translation theory and theatrical translation studies, which examines in great detail a significant number of translations into Spanish of three of the most significant plays by Christopher Marlowe. Also, the author evidences knowledge of the field of study, plus a sound knowledge of translation theory and of the practice of literary translation. Besides, all texts (source and target) appear to have been deeply analysed, and complex linguistic and traductological issues are clearly explained to the reader. Finally, the book provides the reader with a rich account of all major Spanish (meaning Peninsular) translations of these three important Marlovian plays.

The book is divided into two major sections, each analyzing a corpus of Spanish translations of these three plays: from the oldest, dating back to 1904 (José Aladern's *La trágica historia del Doctor Fausto*), to the most recent, Julián Jiménez's 2006 translation of the same play. The first section, "Análisis del estilo en las traducciones de las tragedias de Christopher Marlowe" (2013:13-240), deals with what the author considers stylistic issues, including here, for the most part, questions of lexical choice and grammatical problems (such as syntactic functions, the use of *laísmo* and *leísmo* etc...). The second section, "Consideraciones culturales en las traducciones de las tragedias de Christopher Marlowe" (2013:241-418), introduces a number of recurrent topics such as the translation of monetary terminology (coins in England and Spain), idiomatic expressions, the use of foreign languages in the plays or the translation of the second person singular (you-thou/vos-tú). In both of these sections the author includes a great number of excerpts from both source and

target texts, which she discusses, analyses, and explains in depth. This is undoubtedly the major achievement of this book, and the one that makes it a valuable contribution to the field of study; through all these examples and analyses, the reader obtains a very informed and detailed knowledge of the differences and similarities, and of the achievements and shortcomings, of all these Spanish translations of Marlowe's drama.

After these two sections, which constitute the core of the volume, there also are two appendices: a very brief one on Marlowe's life ("Apéndice 1," 2013:481-484), and a textual and typological analysis of the three plays and their translations ("Apéndice 2," 2013:485-572); this second appendix offers a very useful list of editions of the plays and their translations, a scene-by-scene summary of the plots, and a brief textual comment on the edition of the plays. Lastly, a thematic index closes this almost 600 page-long volume.

Some of the major accomplishments of Álvarez-Faedo's book have already been mentioned: the deep scholarship, as well as the interest and comprehensiveness of the text must necessarily be praised. The lack of book-length studies of this kind, and the additional scarcity of critical analyses of Marlowe's work among Spanish (and European, for that matter) scholars, adds more value to this endeavour. However, I have found a few relatively serious shortcomings which, basically, have to do with the overall structure of the work and with the author's approach to a corpus of translations from three early modern plays. In terms of structure, it has to be said that -as the "Índice" clearly reveals- there is a disorderly, almost chaotic, distribution of the contents. To illustrate this a couple of examples may suffice. Firstly, the book opens with an endless sequence of very short (one or two pages long) texts that include: Dedications and introductory quotes, Table of Contents, Abbreviations and Acronyms (in English and Spanish), Prologue, Preface (again in English and Spanish), Acknowledgements, and, finally, a brief (barely 11-page long) Introduction. Also, there is an objectionable distribution of the topics to be covered: thus, the "Introduction" does not provide any "introductory" information on major features of Marlowe's drama (like the Marlovian blank verse, the use of cultural references in his plays, the socio-historical and ideological context of production of the plays etc...), and -oddly

enough- the first (and only) reference of some depth to Marlowe's style appears in the third Section of the second Appendix, that is, on page 539, together with some of the few explicit references to the translations and editions employed (2013:540-72). This sense of disorder is increased by the fact that there are various and different bibliographical lists in different parts of the book, that the editions of Marlowe's plays strangely appear as "Fuentes secundarias" (secondary sources, 2013:451-460), that some of the most revealing comments on the textual and content features of the plays are only included in an appendix, and that the Preface announces (in English and Spanish) that both sections 1 and 2 of the book are each one "divided into four chapters which correspond to the *four tragedies* and a general conclusion [...]" (v; my emphasis), while the book only examines three, and not four, tragedies.

I have also perceived, in Álvarez-Faedo's approach to Marlowe's plays as instances of early modern drama, a certain degree of imprecision and vagueness. It is certainly true that this work is primarily interested in the translations of the plays rather than on the plays themselves, but it may be argued that in order to examine the former, a rigorous approach to the sources may be expected. As noted above, the approach to Marlowe's drama lacks rigour, in terms both of structure and of content. Again some examples should suffice: the dates of some sources for the original plays are not provided (2013:3); the term "manuscript" is loosely employed, sometimes apparently meaning "first editions" or simply "quartos" (2013:4); while several canonical Spanish dictionaries are employed and their use is appropriately justified (2013:10), no reference is made to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an evidently inevitable primary source if we intend to discuss the meaning and translation of early modern vocabulary, etc... In terms of content, and as I briefly mentioned above, there is little or no discussion of the basic formal features (semiotic or otherwise) of Marlowe's drama, or of its ideological and cultural function or significance; in this sense, it is never clarified why the author decided to analyse the translation of, for instance, different "monedas" in two of the plays (2013:289-301; 367-373), but not other clearly more significant terms, considering the plays chosen, such as words denoting ethnic origin (in *The Jew of Malta*), sodomy and "unnatural" behaviour (in *Edward II*), or (potentially subversive) moral and religious concerns (in *Dr Faustus*).

All things considered, it has to be said that, as noted above, this is a valuable work, with far more to commend than to criticize; to be sure, this book provides Marlovian scholars, Spanish literary translators, and theatrical directors and producers, with a reliable and useful account of the translation history of three major plays from the English early modern theatrical tradition. For all these reasons, and notwithstanding the shortcomings mentioned, Álvarez-Faedo's book is a valuable piece of scholarship and a worthy addition to the (still reduced) corpus of Spanish translations of early modern drama and of Marlowe studies in Spain.

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