

**James Mabbe. 2013. *The Spanish Bawd*
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The literary history of any country, in this case England, should not be construed as a separate, isolated entity, made up entirely of the literary production of its people. As far as possible, greater emphasis should be placed on exploring the literary works read in that country at any given time, so that a more accurate picture of the literary milieu in which an author created emerges. It becomes immediately apparent that the literary culture of early modern England encompasses not just the works produced by English writers, but all the literary texts available in English, including those that were originally composed in a different language. In other words, foreign texts translated into English also made a significant contribution to the literary culture of England and, therefore, they should be considered part of the country's literary history. Yet, in order to make further progress in our understanding of how literary translation influenced literary history, it is necessary to be able to read translated works as they were actually accessed by contemporary readers. The Tudor & Stuart Translations series, to which the book under review belongs, has been started recently with the purpose of making accessible the translations of "the works that were most familiar to early modern readers," as the general editors, Andrew Hadfield and Neil Rhodes, state in their foreword (viii).

The Spanish Bawd (1631; STC 4911) is James Mabbe's translation of the work conventionally known as *La Celestina*, attributed to Fernando de Rojas (d. 1541), and printed in Spanish for the first time in 1499. As Pérez explains in his informative introduction, this work

enjoyed considerable success both in Spain and abroad. An Italian translation, by Alfonso Ordóñez, was printed as early as 1506, and an anonymous French translation appeared in 1527, reprinted on many occasions until a new translation by Jacques de Lavardin was published in 1578. From 1499 until 1644 approximately 90 separate editions of *La Celestina* were printed across Europe, including England, France, Italy, the Low Countries, Portugal, and Spain (6). The earliest evidence of the circulation of Celestina's story in England is *An Interlude of Calisto and Melebea* (STC 20721), printed by John Rastell ca. 1525, more than a century before the publication of Mabbe's translation. While inspired by the work of Fernando de Rojas, Rastell's edition actually contains a moralizing adaptation that has "modified the tragic outcome" of the original (46).¹

James Mabbe (1571/2–1642?) was a student at Magdalen College, Oxford, and was elected to a perpetual fellowship there in the mid-1590s. As a member of a diplomatic mission headed by John Digby (1580–1653), also a former Magdalen student, Mabbe travelled to Spain in 1611. But, as Pérez explains, "we know next to nothing about Mabbe's activities in Spain, except for the fact that through the mediation of [the poet and translator] Leonard Digges [d. 1635] he sent to Oxford a copy of the 1613 edition of Lope de Vega's *Rimas*" (11). Mabbe probably sent this book in a different trip he made in July, 1615 (Kathman 2004, 1000). It seems that Mabbe spent a substantial amount of time in Spain, probably in Madrid, and maintained some kind of contact with it when he left after his first visit. While in Spain, Mabbe became acquainted with its customs, culture, and literature. This direct knowledge was rather unusual and enabled Mabbe to translate directly from Spanish into English, instead of using French or Italian intermediary versions, as did Anthony Munday (d. 1633), the main translator of Iberian books of chivalry. Mabbe also translated Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache*, known by the title of *The Rogue* (1623; STC 288), which was an immediate success, and *Exemplarie Novells* (1640; STC 4914), containing the translation of six of these novellas by Cervantes.

Mabbe's interest in *La Celestina*, however, was prior to his visit to Spain. There is a manuscript, now housed in the library of the Duke of Northumberland, in Alnwick Castle, containing a translation of *La*

¹ For an edition of this interlude, see Allen (1926, 265–91).

Celestina that is earlier than and different from the 1631 translation of *La Celestina*. More literal, shorter and less interventionist, the manuscript version in Alnwick Castle, MS 510, is also attributed to Mabbe, who dedicated it to his friend Sir John Strangeways (1584–1666). While “[Guadalupe] Martínez Lacalle attributed the numerous omissions and its shortened format to its [i.e. the MS’s] possible use as the script for a staged performance, or perhaps for a public reading” (16), Pérez suggests the possibility that the “manuscript [was] meant for private circulation” (15). In her edition of 1972 Martínez Lacalle dates the manuscript version between 1603 and 1611, but Pérez provides evidence that narrows this period down to the years 1602–1603 (13–14), that is, several years before Mabbe travelled to Spain. This date is obtained from the information contained in the paratexts, which are usually written once the translation is finished. There is another significant textual witness: the manuscript annotation in English that appears in a copy of the 1599 Plantinian edition of *La Celestina* now in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid (pressmark R/13.410). The Italian scholars Patrizia Botta and Elizabetta Vaccaro (1992) attribute this annotation to Mabbe, as Pérez notes (15), thus allowing us to establish the base text Mabbe used for his translation. In addition, these notes also represent a new *terminus post quem* for the translation preserved in the Alnwick manuscript. Considering that the paratexts in the Alnwick manuscript were composed in 1602–1603, it seems safe to argue that Mabbe was busy producing the manuscript translation at most from 1599 until 1602/3.

There is one further piece of evidence we need to take into account: on October 5, 1598, the printer William Aspley obtained a licence to print *La Celestina* (Pérez 14; Arber 1875–1894, III.127). It is conceivable that this licence referred to a text projected for publication, in which case it could correspond to the translation prepared by Mabbe between 1599 and 1602/3.² Obtaining a licence without having a text ready for publication is not unheard of, and in this case it could also be a pre-emptive action prompted by the publication in 1596 of a work titled *The Delightful History of Celestina*

² Note that Vaccaro (2005, 35) rejects this possibility, basically because she is still using the dates proposed by Martínez Lacalle, i.e. 1603–1611: “In base alla datazione del Ms. [Alnwick MS 150], sembrerebbe che questo non possa identificarsi con *The Tragick Comedy of Celestine*, di cui a tutt’oggi possediamo come unico indizio solo l’annotazione dello *Stationers’ Register* alla voce 5 ottobre 1598.”

the Faire (STC 4910). In spite of its title, this edition does not contain a translation of *La Celestina*, but instead William Barley's translation of the first thirty-two chapters of *Primaleon de Grece*, also known in English as *Palmendos* (Pérez, 50–51).³ Despite being ready for publication, the text in the Alnwick manuscript, however, was never printed, a circumstance Mabbe may be alluding to in the opening words of the epistle dedicatory: "Sir, I now send you your long since promised *Celestina*, put into English clothes" (69.3-4).

We know that Mabbe translated directly from an edition of the Spanish original, but there is also scholarly agreement that he consulted Ordóñez's and Lavardin's translations into Italian and French respectively (Pérez, 2). As Pérez states, *Celestina's* "different European translators also engaged in an interpretation of the text that sought to eliminate, modify or tone down its most controversial aspects" (20). Mabbe took the same approach and revised both the style and the content of the Spanish original, but preferred to present himself as a faithful translator, a "poor parrot, who accents [i.e. utters] but other folks' words, and not his own" (73.139-40). Such a description is better applied to the Alnwick translation, more literal throughout than the 1631 edition, for which Mabbe changed his previous translation policy, particularly in passages involving sexual references. To give an example, in Act VII, *Celestina* calls *Parmeno*, "Come hither, modesty, come hither you bashful fool" (213.600-1), but fails to spell out the purpose of her command. The Spanish original reads, "Llégate acá, negligente, vergonzoso, que quiero ver para cuánto eres ante que me vaya. Retózala en esta cama" (Lobera 2011, 181). The Alnwick version, as Pérez indicates (213, n. 375), provides a more complete and accurate translation of the original passage, including *Celestina's* intentions: "for I will see before I goe what metall you [i.e. *Parmeno*] be made of. Come playe the wag a little with her [i.e. *Areusa*], and tickle her as she lyes in her bed." Leaving sexual references aside, religious elements represent another headache for Mabbe. With clear Catholic associations, the rite of confession proves particularly thorny, and more so since confession plays a crucial role in the narrative outcome of *La Celestina*. When *Calisto* meets his death as he goes down a ladder, the Spanish original reads, "¡Oh váleme Santa María, muerto soy! ¡Confesión!" (Lobera 2011, 323). The 1631 edition translates *Calisto's* words as,

³ For more information about the text of *Palmendos*, see Álvarez-Recio (2015).

"Oh, oh! Look upon me! Ay me! I am a dead man, oh!" (346.265), whereas the Alnwick manuscript renders them more accurately as, "*Saint Marie*, haue mercie on my soule! I am slayne, I am slayne! *Confession, Confession*" (Pérez, 346 n. 549; cf. 347 n. 551).

In its literalness the Alnwick translation reproduces the original's obscene character, and maybe because of that this version was deemed unfit for publication. When Mabbe's translation was printed in 1631, it was an altogether less offensive text in which the more controversial passages had been removed. Could this be the reason for the 1631 edition's lack of commercial success? *The Spanish Bawd* was not reprinted until the nineteenth century and, furthermore, in 1634 the unsold copies were bound together with the much more successful *The Rogue* (Randall 1963, 168). Thus, despite the fact that *La Celestina*, "became a widespread international phenomenon that exemplifies the formation of an early modern European canon" (Pérez 66), English audiences seemed to have lacked the enthusiasm shown by their continental counterparts.

The purpose of the book under review is, in Pérez's words, "to facilitate access to James Mabbe's 1631 translation in a modernized text" (4). The engaging introduction that precedes the text of *The Spanish Bawd* discusses the main issues relating to Mabbe's translation, in particular its cultural context. Moreover, Pérez annotates the text with 566 footnotes that contain a wealth of knowledge enabling readers, regardless of their level of expertise, equally to understand this literary work and Mabbe's handling of it. In these notes Pérez compares the English text and the Spanish original, discusses discrepancies with the Alnwick manuscript, as mentioned above, and explains classical references, proverbs and sources. Pérez also uses footnotes to gloss the meaning of obscure words, mostly by referring to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. But when a word is not included in the OED, Pérez gives his own interpretation: e.g. the word *friculation* (239.348), not attested in the OED, is defined by Pérez as "copulation, or intercourse [...]. Probably related to *fricatrice* ('a lewd woman,' OED) and *frication* ('The action of rubbing the surface of one body against that of another,' OED)" (Pérez 239–40, n. 422). Although the meaning of many words is elucidated in footnotes, Pérez has also compiled a short glossary (365–69) with "archaic, obsolete, or less common words found in the play" (365). In sum, the information provided in

the introduction together with the annotation and glossary contributes to making Mabbe's translation of *La Celestina* more accessible to modern readers, thus fulfilling the edition's purpose.

The modernization of the text Pérez refers to when describing his edition's aim (4) is actually a criterion established by the general editors for the series. In Pérez's edition, the text's modernization is applied to the following elements: (1) spelling: e.g. "O thou Diuell whom I coniured" (61) appears in Pérez's edition as "Oh thou devil whom I conjured" (171.5-6);⁴ (2) morphology: e.g. "shew'd" (80) appears as "showed" (196.8), "spake" (80) as "spoke" (196.11), "strucken" (81) as "struck" (196.21); (3) punctuation: e.g. "thou who submittedst all things vnto men, I humbly beseech thee" (117) becomes "thou who submittedst all things unto men ... I humbly beseech thee" in Pérez's edition (249.24-25); (4) syntax: e.g. Pérez regularizes the interrogative construction "What *it's* thou tell'st mee?" (150; my emphasis) as "What *is it* thou tell'st me?" (293.94; my emphasis).

Still, even if he does not provide an explicit statement of editorial policy, Pérez is not simply presenting his readers with a modernized transcription of the 1631 edition. Instead, he makes significant editorial interventions. Since the edition has no textual apparatus, Pérez records some of his emendations in footnotes: e.g. in footnote 200 Pérez informs us that he has emended the original *faddle* as *fardle* (111.871). But not all editorial modifications are noted: e.g. "jewel" (299.74) appears in the original as "ewell" (155). Occasionally Pérez interpolates words that are indicated in the text with square brackets, e.g. "worthy [of] perpetual memory" (75.4), "seek not to pluck her wings, and [come back] yourself without your plumes" (143.246-48), "he tells it [to] his master" (171. argument 5), "Must my steps end [in] this" (255.270-71). But some interpolations are not signalled at all: e.g. "all that *was* past was true" (291.22-23; my emphasis), "what *a* great dishonour" (292.60); neither *was* nor *a* are printed in the 1631 edition.

There are also other silent textual modifications that can be understood as editorial emendations. However, since these are not

⁴ I have consulted the 1631 edition (STC 4911) used as base text for Pérez's edition (1 n. 3) in the British Library copy available in the database Early English Books On-line (accessed March 5, 2016).

made immediately apparent to the reader, some kind of explanation is in order. At the beginning of Act VII Pérez's edition reads, "I [i.e. Celestina] perceive some old relic yet still remaining of *thy* [i.e. Parmeno's] former folly" (196.16–17; my emphasis), whereas the 1631 edition reads, "*my* former folly" (80). The Spanish original is revealing: "Todavía me parece que *te* quedan reliquias vanas" (Lobera 2011, 163). Some lines below Pérez once again departs from the *editio princeps* of Mabbe's translation and interpolates the form *not* in Parmeno's words: "I am (I confess) *not* the man I was" (198–99.83–84; my emphasis). And this happens to be the exact intention of his words in the Spanish text: "*no* soy el que solía" (Lobera 2011, 164). In the two cases the Spanish original confers authoritativeness on the readings offered by Pérez, but it might have been appropriate to inform the readers that the 1631 edition had been textually corrupted by mechanical mistakes.

Finally, there are textual discrepancies between Pérez's and the 1631 edition that are not mentioned in the footnotes and do not seem to constitute an improvement on the original edition. For instance, Pérez's text omits *fit* (196.2) from the original "I haue not had any *fit* opportunitie" (80; my emphasis); Pérez's text reads, "That maid, Sir, of *her* [i.e. of Celestina's]" (295.149), when the original has "of *hers*" (151); Pérez gives "in her *dealing*" (295.181) instead of *dealings* (152); "as such *gentleman* as he" (297.11) instead of "Gentlemen" (153), when the Spanish reads "mancebos" (Lobera 2011, 271).

All in all, these textual quibbles do not detract from a book that has fully accomplished its purpose of making Mabbe's translation accessible to a wide audience, not limited to scholars. In fact, Pérez's edition will also be of interest to Hispanists that are familiar with the Castilian tradition of *La Celestina* and, though unacquainted with early modern English, can now consult Mabbe's text in this modernized, readable version. It is also remarkable that the edition has been prepared by someone who is comfortable with both the Spanish context in which Fernando de Rojas composed *La Celestina* and the English context in which Mabbe published *The Spanish Bawd*. Pérez's knowledge of the two cultural milieux becomes apparent in the notes and introduction, which contains an up-to-date discussion of the scholarship produced on *The Spanish Bawd* (see the bibliography on pp. 383–95), thus presenting the relevant materials for anyone wishing to conduct research on this text. In sum, Pérez's

edition is a welcome invitation to approach Mabbe's translation as an example of how a Spanish literary text became available and was read in England, thus earning its place in English literary history.⁵

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