

Álvarez Recio, Leticia 2006
*Rameras de Babilonia: historia cultural
del anticatolicismo en la Inglaterra Tudor*
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Rameras de Babilonia is the culmination of several years of research in which Leticia Álvarez Recio has studied the articulation of anti-Catholic sentiment in Early Modern England. In this book, in which her doctoral dissertation is distilled, she approaches the development of this topic throughout the Tudor period, when its most important features and clichés were created and used in a wide variety of discourses. One of the novelties of this study is precisely the type of texts subject to analysis: pamphlets and plays. Disparate though they are in their nature, in their rhetoric, and in the way in which they interact with their audiences, Álvarez Recio manages to demonstrate the connection between them and how they supplement and influence each other in their depiction of anti-Catholic characters.

The method used by the author in order to make evident the relation of these genres combines diverse approaches: historical, rhetorical, iconographical and doctrinal. On the one hand, the detailed historical introductions to every period covered in the study supply the context the reader needs for a better understanding of the texts; the doctrinal information also serves similar purposes. On the other hand, rhetoric and iconography are not only background knowledge, but also interpretive methods that intend to disclose the devices by which pamphleteers and playwrights changed the meaning and intention of previously used symbology – sometimes even appropriating their opponents' discourse. In the author's own words :

Se pone, así, de manifiesto que el anticatolicismo es una construcción discursiva sustentada en el amplio repertorio generado por la Iglesia Católica durante siglos para justificarse como única y verdadera frente a cualquier voz disidente. El discurso se mantiene como un fluido

constante entre las dos posiciones contrarias, que lo utilizan prácticamente con el mismo sentido y finalidad. (90)

Consequently, the features of the pro-Catholic discourse and its rhetorical strategies identified by Shell (1999) and others (Corthel *et al* 2007) are at the origin of the expressions of anti-Catholicism devised by English Protestants (Marotti 1999, 2005). The book makes a chronological survey of these traits from the beginning of the Reformation until the early years of the seventeenth century, including a quick look at the aftermath of the Elizabethan age.

The result of this examination shows the deliberate creation of an image of Catholics during the sixteenth century: from the times of Henry VIII (chapter 1), the stereotype of the Roman papist is that of a corrupted, false, hypocrite person, with a taste for ostentation and riches, idolatrous, ambitious, seductive and superstitious; this type contrasts with the portrait of Protestants, presented like victims or martyrs, mainly from the Marian period (chapter 2) – a topic that has recently deserved further scholarly attention (Monta 2005). It is precisely at this stage when Álvarez Recio detects the entrance of the Spaniards in the panorama, as a result of the Queen's marriage to Philip II: the fear of a Spanish takeover of the English government led Anglicans to identify Rome and Spain, in a combination of religious and political elements whose main implication will be to equate 'true religion' with patriotic loyalty. From this moment on, it will not be infrequent to find political criticism of the current regime underlying many anti-Catholic pamphlets and literary works of this type throughout the sixteenth century – even if their authors had the same religious beliefs as the ruler.

One of the aspects that Anglican writers exploited in their condemnation of Mary is the fact that she was a woman. Misogyny was at its best in this type of discourse: feminine weakness, sinfulness and uncontrolled appetite were immediately connected with corruption, the same corruption that was attributed to Catholics. Álvarez Recio interestingly shows that, after Elizabeth I was crowned (chapter 3), it was necessary to change this notion and justify both the return of Anglicanism and a female ruler who was also the Head of the Church. In order to do so, the Queen designed a propaganda program based on well-known iconography that would reach her subjects through portraits and royal entrances (Strong 2003, Leahy 2005): Alciato, Ripa and the Bible were the main sources for the image of a monarch identified with the apocalyptic Woman

clothed with the sun as opposed to the Whore of Babylon. This same type of symbolism will be used by Protestant pamphleteers and playwrights, in a display of rhetorical artistry.

In the second half of the Elizabethan reign, a new group was added to the objects of anti-Catholic protests: the Jesuits. These churchmen were regarded with especial suspicion not because of their religious ideas, but mainly as a result of their political attitudes, considered by some as the quintessence of hypocrisy, simulation and covetousness. As a result of this, it was possible to associate them with the stereotype of Machiavellian characters that were habitual in Elizabethan drama. While earlier in the Tudor period the theatrical expression of anti-Catholic discourse had been conveyed through adaptations of medieval allegories in which vices and virtues were opposed, in the last decades of the century the newly developed genres are used – revenge tragedies, history plays and tragedies of reformist martyrs; even the Latin comedy will be found useful in their depiction of ridiculous characters, easily adaptable to Catholic stereotypes. Classical mythology was also reinterpreted in a similar pattern, as the author demonstrates in her analysis of Lyly's *Midas*. In the fourth chapter of the book, some of the most successful plays of the period are studied in the light of the rhetorical and iconographical devices established in the last decades of the Elizabethan period. Thus, *The Spanish Tragedy* is read in terms of the instability and chaos that can derive from the wrong behaviour of those on the side of 'otherness', such as Machiavellian characters, atheists, Italians, tyrants, etc.

Álvarez Recio examines the most relevant events of the century for the creation of the anti-Catholic discourse, paying especial attention both to religious circumstances and to political milestones such as the victory over the Spanish Armada – seen by Protestant authors as an expression of God's support to the Queen. Far from simplifying and reducing the complexity of this type of texts, the book *Rameras de Babilonia* faces the complexities, inconsistencies and paradoxes of the works under study and tries to explain them as part of the intricacies of the period.

As the book is intended for a Spanish-speaking audience, all the quotations cited in the text are translated, and this is achieved in a very accurate and elegant Spanish; the original English versions are confined to notes. However, this distribution of languages is not consistent throughout the book, something that could make some passages slightly cumbersome, especially in notes where both the

Spanish and English texts are rendered together. Here, what is intended as a help for understanding might lose some of its value.

A final comment on the index and the bibliography, two tools that are essential in a literary and historical study. The former, though presented as *index nominum*, contains also notions and topics that render it highly useful for consultation; however, a selection has been made in which it might also be worthwhile to include, for instance, symbols and iconographies, so relevant for both the Catholic and anti-Catholic discourse. It is also noticeable the absence of a bibliography of primary sources: though the authors and titles of pamphlets and plays are listed in the index, this other type of resource would allow complete references to the works – including all the bibliographical details – as well as a more defined idea of the wide corpus the author has worked with.

No doubt, this book is very timely, as it provides the Spanish readership with an insight into the ideological tensions underlying many Early Modern English texts, in an approach that has recently been identified as ‘the turn to religion in Early Modern Studies’ (Jackson and Marotti 2004). This turn has meant an increasing interest in the cultural implications of the religious debate, both on the Reformist and Catholic sides; it is precisely this what has been addressed by Dr. Álvarez Recio, who has bridged what had usually been considered as a gap between pamphlets and drama.

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