

**PHILIP II AND SEDUCTION
A LA ESPAÑOLA IN AN
ELIZABETHAN ROMAN A CLEF**

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The year 1594 saw the publication in London of what has been variously described as “a strange anonymous poem”,¹ “an extremely curious work”² and “a cryptic little work ... which has been immensely popular”.³ The text in question, *Willobie His Avis*, is indeed an intriguing piece of writing, which has been a source of curiosity for scholars since its first modern edition by A. B. Grosart in 1880 up to our own days, not least because, although the main corpus of the work is written in verse -and very pedestrian verse at that- a passage in prose is intercalated into Canto XLVIII, probably by a different hand, introducing a lovesick young man, H. W., and an “old player”, W. S. If we add to this the fact that the work was prefaced by a set of commendatory verses⁴ which contain the first literary allusion to Shakespeare by name, as author of *The Rape of Lucrece*,⁵ it is hardly surprising that Shakespeare scholars should have had, and still are

¹ Anthony Burgess: *Shakespeare*, London, 1970, pp. 131-32.

² Peter Quennell: *Shakespeare and his Background*, London, 1963, p. 137.

³ M. C. Bradbrook: *Shakespeare the Poet in his world*, London, 1978, p. 85.

⁴ By one *Vigilantius: Dormitanus* who L. Hotson in *I, Shakespeare*, London, 1937, Ch. III, identifies as two Oxford students, Robert Wakeman and John Napper.

⁵ “Yet Tarquyne pluckt his glistening grape, and Shakespeare, paints poore Lucrece rape”. All references to the text, etc., of *Willobie His Avis*, are taken from: B. N. de Luna: *The Queen Declined, an Interpretation of Willobie His Avis with the Text of the Original Edition*, Oxford, 1970. This quotation, p. 128.

Philip II and seduction a la española

having, a field day with this late Elizabethan text. It is not, however, the possible Shakespearean connection with which I am here concerned, but rather with the possible Spanish connection.

Willobie His Avisá is a narrative poem in 3139 lines (plus one long and some shorter passages in prose), divided into seventy-four Cantos, and followed by the author's "Conclusion". The sub-title of the poem is: "The true picture of a modest Maide, and of a chaste and constant wife". The work was published, supposedly, by a University friend of the Willoughby of the title, called Hadrian Dorrell who, as he informs us in the preface to the reader, found it among the papers left in the former's chambers in Oxford. Of Hadrian Dorrell, if he really existed -it may well be a pseudonym- nothing is known, but there certainly did exist a Henry Willoughby, who was matriculated in St. John's College in December 1591, who may have become acquainted with Shakespeare when the Lord Chamberlain's Men visited Oxford in 1592, who later served with the army abroad, and who, apparently, died in 1596.¹

To all appearances and purposes the poem tells us how the heroine, Avisá, first as a "modest maide" and then as a "chaste and constant wife", rejects the amorous advances of five different suitors of varying ages and personalities, and as such, might well be written off as a one more piece of characteristic Elizabethan didacticism. However, the fact that the work, as was mentioned, was so very popular, running into six editions between 1594 and 1635, and more significantly, the fact that in June 1599, it was included in the list of books in the Stationers' Register "to be called in",² that is, taken out of circulation, and that no copies of what was, presumably, the third edition of 1599 have survived, would seem to suggest that the work was less innocent than would at first appear, or, in the words of G. B. Harrison, in his 1926 edition:

Willobie His Avisá, in short, is not what it pretends to be. The initials of Avisá's suitors covered, or rather revealed to contemporaries,

¹ *The Dictionary of National Biography*, under *Willoughby, Henry*.

² G. B. Harrison: *Willobie His Avisá 1594, With an Essay on Willobie His Avisá*, Elizabethan and Jacobean Quartos, Edinburgh, 1926; 1966, p. 185.

persons of great importance; so great, in fact, that the scandals about them were still commercially worth retailing forty years later.”¹

In other words, we have here an Elizabethan *roman à clef*, a fact, which if nothing else, would account for its otherwise inexplicable popularity.

Apart from the identification by a series of Shakespeare scholars of the initials W. S. as corresponding to William Shakespeare, and those of H. W. to Henry Wriothesley (rather than to Henry Willoughby), the two most detailed and stimulating attempts at interpreting the clues scattered throughout the poem have been made by G. B. Harrison² and B. M. de Luna.³ It would not be germane to our purpose to comment here on the often very complex *minutiae* of their analyses: suffice it to say that Harrison continued to accept the traditional view that Avisá is the pseudonym of a Dorsetshire innkeeper’s wife, whom a series of more or less illustrious gentlemen, including the Earl of Southampton, unsuccessfully attempt to seduce. Since, according to Harrison, the covert intention of the work was to attack the Essex-Southampton clique, he attributes the authorship of the poem to one of Sir Walter Raleigh’s group, possibly, for stylistic reasons, Matthew Roydon.⁴ More fascinating and more thought-provoking, it seems to me, is de Luna’s well-reasoned hypothesis, according to which Avisá is no less a personage than Queen Elizabeth herself, the five suitors constituting portraits, or in two cases, composite portraits, of the different wooers who at one time or another sought to *seduce* her into marriage. Two points here need explaining: the apparent incongruity between the identification on the part of two serious scholars of Avisá, on the one hand, as an innkeeper’s wife, and, on the other, as the Queen of England, arises from the probably intentional ambiguousness of the lines in Canto I and Canto XLVI which describe Avisá as dwelling in the “public eye”, in “... yonder howse, where hanges the badge Of England’s Saint” and which, therefore, Harrison interprets as referring to the George Inn in Sherborne, Dorsetshire,⁵ whilst de Luna points out that:

¹ Ibid., p. 186.

² Op. cit.

³ Op. cit.

⁴ Harrison: op. cit., p. 229.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 196-7.

Philip II and seduction a la española

“Elizabeth’s palaces customarily flew banners bearing the Cross of St. George, particularly when the Queen was in residence”.¹

The second point which needs to be cleared up if de Luna’s interpretation is to be understood is that both Elizabeth and Mary Tudor considered themselves as “wedded to England, and, in fact, wore appropriate wedding, i. e. coronation, rings.

Mary, indeed, told the Spanish Ambassador, Count Egmont, when he proposed a marriage between herself and the Prince of Asturias (the future Phillip II) that “her realm was her first husband”,² and the young Elizabeth, in 1559, when urged to marry, declared herself to be already “... ioyned ... in marriage to an husband, namely, the Kingdome of England”. According to this interpretation, therefore, Avisá, as “a modest maide” would be Princess Elizabeth, and as a “chast and modest wife” would be Elizabeth as Queen.

Now it is interesting to note that Spain, or rather, the Spanish, have a fairly important rôle to play both at the surface and the submerged levels of this intriguing work, for, on the one hand, the amorous customs of the Spaniard in love are both analysed and then, ostensibly, exemplified in the text, and on the other, if de Luna’s interpretation is correct, Philip II himself is here portrayed in the person of Avisá’s second suitor.

Let us consider the generic Spanish lover first. As was mentioned, the so-called editor of Willoughby’s(?) text, wrote an introduction to the work, in which the circumstances of its coming into his hands are explained, the name Avisá is glossed and what would appear to be a kind of smoke-screen justification for the work is offered, in order, on the surface at least, to endow it with an air of innocence which it evidently did not really possess. Not only, Dorrell tells us, did he find Willoughby’s poem in his room, but also “other odd papers”:

¹ Op. cit., pp. 8-9.

² William H. Prescott: *History of the Reign of Philip II King of Spain, New and Revised Edition ...* by John Foster Kirk, London, 1887, p. 39.

Patricia Shaw

“ ... wherein he had, as I take it, out of Cornelius Agrippa, drawn the several dispositions of the Italian, the Spanyard, the Frenchman, the German, and the English man, and how they were affected in love” .¹

Elizabethan and Jacobean essayists were fond of this kind of European comparisons, as witness, for example, James Howell’s gleeful affirmation that, according to the Spaniards, the ideal is:

“a Frenchwoman in a dance, a Dutchwoman in the kitchen, an Italian in a window, an Englishwoman at board, and the Spanish a-bed” .²

The name of Henricus Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, scholar and student of the occult sciences, and chronicler of Charles V, was well known in sixteenth century literary circles: Rabelais ridiculed him as Her Trippa in the third book of *Pantagruel*,³ and Jack Wilton meets him in Nashe’s *Unfortunate Traveller*. His *De Vanitate Scientiarum*, published in Latin in 1530, was translated into English in 1575, and his name reappears in *Willobie His Avis* in a marginal note. According to Agrippa, then, affirms Dorrell:

“The Spanyard is unpatient in burning love, very mad with troubled lasciviousnesse, hee runneth furiously, and with pittiful complaintes, bewailing his fervent desire, doth call upon his Lady, and worshipping her, but having obtained his purpose maketh her common to all men.”⁴

Having thus sketched in the amorous behaviour characteristic of the five nationalities, Dorrell then tries to convince the reader that Willoughby’s sole intention in composing the poem was to illustrate this behaviour in action by means of the different suitors for Avis’s favours. The device, however, is clumsy and unconvincing, giving credence, therefore, to the impression that the book “is not what it pretends to be”,

¹ De Luna: op. cit., p. 122.

² James Howell: letter addressed to the Lord Viscount Colchester, from Madrid, Feb. 1st., 1623. See James Howell: *Epistolae Ho-Eliaanae*, Boston and New York, 1907, Vol. I.

³ Chapter XXV.

⁴ De Luna: op. cit., p. 122.

Philip II and seduction a la española

since, although Avisá does have five suitors, only the last three are identified with a given nationality: D. B. is a Frenchman, D. H. is *Anglo-Germanus*, and the last, H. W., or as the text specifies, *Henrico Willobego*, is *Italo-Hispalensis*, that is, a composite portrait of the Mediterranean lover. The courting customs of this latter, says Dorrell, are described by Willoughby in the last section of the poem, Cantos XLVIII-LXXIII. In his preface, Dorrell adds no more information about the other nationalities, but he does insist that the Spaniard and the Italian:

“more furiously invadeth his love, & more pathetically indureth than all the rest”¹

and winds up the paragraph with a typically ambiguous statement:

“It seemes that in this last example the author names himselfe, and so describeth his owne love, I know not, and I will not be curious”²

The reader, however, was undoubtedly meant to be very curious indeed!

Taking Dorrell’s affirmations at their face value, however, to what extent does the behaviour of young H. W. as described in these Cantos, bear out convincingly Cornelius Agrippa’s contention that the Spaniard is “unpatient in burning love”, etc., or, in other words, what impression of the Spaniard in love would the unenlightened Elizabethan derive from reading this text?

“Unpatient in burning love” H. W. certainly is: “sodenly infected with the contagion of a fantastical fit, at the first sight of A(visa)”,³ we learn that he is “not able any longer to indure the burning heate of so feruent a humour”, and we are left in no doubt as to the sexual nature, i. e., “the troubled lasciviousness”, of his complaint: thus, H. W. is presented as physically consumed by his passion: “I burne within, consume without”, he asserts, mentioning the “restless rain of (his) desire”, and adding:

“My humours all are out of frame,

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ Op. cit., p. 190.

I frize amid'st the burning flame".

Avisa is even more down to earth when it comes to diagnosing his condition: he is suffering, she says in several speeches, from "raging lust", and he intends his courtship to lead to "filthy folly", "filthy pleasure" and "foul desire". Although H. W. insists that this is not so, that he has put his feelings to the proof by "quenching his lust" with another woman - "Yet this ... could not suffice" -, he continues to lament not having "enjoyd" her, and even suggests that his "limmes might please (her)".

Agrippa's allusion to the Spaniard running "furiously", that is, impetuously or madly, or both,¹ to his lady, is amply exemplified in the text which abounds in words and expressions such as: "fantasticall fit", "raging flood", "fury", "folly" (repeatedly), "madness", "phantasticall fury", "wandering rages" or "breathless runne", not forgetting allusions to "loving fools" whose "wits" and "senses" are overcome by "raging love". Insofar as his reference to the "bemoaning of fervent desire" is concerned, there is no lack of illustrative examples of this tendency either: in H. W.'s addresses to Avisa, "deepest moanes" and "grievous grones", sighs, sobs and "trickling tears" running "like rivers" down his "slobered face" are the outward signs of inward "despair" and "gripping griefs" which are consuming the "melancholik" and "luckless wretch" who curses the eyes that ever let him behold the lady's beauty. Nor are "pathetic" and "pittyful complaintes" wanting in this discourse: his "wounded hart" and "pyning plight", his "flood of woe" and "fruitless payne" will lead to his saying farewell to life, and embracing "sweet death" as the only solution for his "doleful days", after which:

"When I am gon, I hope my ghost shall shew you plaine,
That I did truly loue, and that I did not faine".

H. W.'s last missive to Avisa is riddled with woe, pain, griefs, sighs, tears, weeping and wringing of hands!

It will be remembered that Agrippa likewise presented his generic Spaniard as given to worshipping the lady of his desires, a most suitable trait, incidentally, if Avisa really does represent the Queen. This tendency,

¹ It may be remembered that the massacre by the Spaniards at Antwerp in 1576 was known as *The Spanish Fury!*

Philip II and seduction a la española

however, is not greatly emphasized in the text, although at the beginning, H. W. does assure his friend, W. S., that he loves “the seat where she did sit” and kisses “the grasse where she did tread”, and later hails Avisá as a “cheiftain” to whom he “surrenders”, because:

“ ... now I know you are the She,
That was ordaind to vanquish me” .

As regards the final and least attractive characteristic attributed by Agrippa to the Spanish lover -that of making his mistress “common to all men” once she has surrendered, there is no place in the text for the illustration of this tendency, since, of course, Avisá firmly rejects all H. W.’s advances.

However, something of this lamentable attitude is reflected in Cantos LVIII and LV, in H. W. ’s taking for granted that she will be unfaithful to her husband at his request, and in his assumption that women “made of flesh and blood” “will yeeld, if they be tride” . To encourage his young friend, W. S. likewise affirms that:

“ She is no Saynt, She is no Nonne,
I thinke in tyme she may be wonne” .

an observation, as scholars have been quick to point out, very reminiscent of Shakespeare’s:

“ She is a woman, therefore may be wooed;
She is a woman, therefore may be won” .

in *Titus Andronicus*,¹ It is, in fact, Avisá herself, with her characteristic outspokenness who voices most clearly mens’ attitude in this respect: if, she says, as a married woman I accept your love:

“ Then may you say with open voice,
This is her use, this is her vaine,
She yeelds to all, ... ”

¹ See Peter Quennell: op. cit., p. 138.

Summarizing, then, it may be said that the picture of the Italo-Hispanensis in love painted by Willoughby, coincides quite closely with Agrippa's definition of the "Spaniard ... in love", and were it not for the complexities of the rest of the book, might well be accepted at its face value as a conventional portrait of the Southern European lover and would-be seducer. If, however, de Luna is to be believed, this is not so, and this apparently Mediterranean conduct in affairs of the heart would have been equally applicable, on the testimony of contemporary records, to that of Elizabeth's two most distinguished English favourites, Leicester and his step-son, Essex, in what can only be described as their continual courtship of their relatively susceptible sovereign.

Thus far, then, the overt description in the *Avisa* of the wooing tactics of the generic Spaniard: let us now look at what, if de Luna is right, may be considered as the covert description of the seduction strategies of a specific Spaniard -Philip II. *Avisa*, after her marriage, the text informs us, is "tempted" by "Ruffians, Roysters, young Gentlemen and lusty Captaines",¹ all of whom are, however, then synthesized into one suitor denominated, simply, *Caveileiro*, and then *Caveileiro*, which is certainly significant, it being the only Spanish word introduced into the text, and one obviously familiar to English readers by the end of the 16th. century.

The Queen's godson, Sir John Harington, in his *Apology*, 1596, apparently referred to the Spanish King as " ... a beggerly, thridbare Kavalliero, like to Lazorelloes maister",² and Shakespeare, in 1597, in *Henry IV*, Part II, has Shallow observe:

"I'll drink to Master Bardolph and to all his cavaleiroes about London".³

Philip, of course, etymologically means "a lover of horses", and as the American historian, William Prescott, points out, Philip, on arriving in 1554 in England for his marriage to Mary Tudor, had been provided, on her orders, with "a spirited Andalusian jennet, which the prince instantly mounted":

¹ De Luna: op. cit., p. 153.

² Ibid., p. 56n.

³ V, iii, 1. 60.

Philip II and seduction a la española

“He was a good rider, and pleased the people by his courteous bearing and the graceful manner in which he managed his horse”.¹

For de Luna then, this second section of the *Avisa* refers to Philip II’s courtship, through the Spanish Ambassador, Count Feria, of his sister-in-law, Elizabeth, when by Mary’s death in 1558, he became a widower and she became a Queen. It must be remembered, however, that this real-life episode was being recounted in 1594, thirty six years later, and six years after the hostilities culminating in the Armada expedition, and at a time when the Queen was assuring her Parliament:

“I fear not all (the King of Spain’s) threatenings, his great preparations and mighty forces do not stir me. For though he come against me with a greater power than ever was his Invincible Navy, I doubt not but, God assisting me upon whom I always trust, I shall be able to defeat him and overthrow him. For my cause is just”.²

It is hardly to be expected, therefore, that the portrait of Caveleiro come a-courting should be other than pejorative!

Caveleiro approaches *Avisa* in a bluff, hearty fashion, taking for granted, in a rather *machista* way that she will find him as attractive as he finds her, suggesting that she has encouraged him with her “side-cast glance”, and offering to come to her when and where she wishes (from Spain, presumably), whilst assuring her that she cannot “fare so well at home” (i. e. with an English suitor). Although a “stranger” “seldome seene, before this day” (Elizabeth and Philip had apparently met only once in 1557), he can offer her great “store of wealth”, similar, one supposes, to the wagonloads of bullion paraded through London on the occasion of his previous marriage.³ He ends his blunt, forthright speech urging her not to miss this opportunity, for he has little time to spare,⁴ and rounding off his proposal with a gaming metaphor containing a frankly sexual innuendo.

¹ Prescott: op. cit., p. 45.

² J. E. Neale: *Queen Elizabeth I*, Pelican Books, 1960, p. 338.

³ Prescott, op. cit., p. 50.

⁴ As de Luna points out: “ ... when Philip actually brought himself to make the formal proposal ... ”, he instructed Feria to make it understood that he could

Patricia Shaw

Avisa, in the following two Cantos, as forthrightly rejects these offers, supporting, I think, de Luna's thesis, by her opening lines:

"What now? what newes? new warres in hand?
More trumpets blowne of fond conceits?"

and later referring to him sarcastically as "your worship". As in the case of H. W., she accuses Caveleiro of "thoughts ... uncleane", of "lust", of "filthy love" and "wanton will", and in six extremely vituperative verses refers to Philip's reputation -possibly fomented by the malice of Antonio Pérez and the foreign Ambassadors at his court -as an inveterate womaniser.¹ Spend your money, she says punningly, on "your queanes", for, of course, by 1594 Philip had been married four times, and "quean", of course, is a synonym of harlot. She adds significantly:

Your wannie cheekes, your shaggy lockes,
Would rather moue my mind to grudge,
To feare the piles, or else the pockes:"²

She then shows him the door, capping his final gaming metaphor with one of her own.

There is a marginal note beside the beginning of Caveleiro's incredulous reaction to this rejection, commenting cryptically: "A right Caueleiro", which I take to mean that this is a typical Spanish reaction, like that of H. W. as well.

Using martial metaphors related to the siege, Caveleiro insists that, wise as he is in experience (another reference perhaps to Philip's reputation as a Don Juan), and successful too:

"I never have that woman tri'd
Of whom as yet I was deni'd".

spend very little time with her "whether he left her pregnant or not". Op. cit., p. 56.

¹ Sir Charles Petrie: *Philip II of Spain*, London, 1963, p. 45.

² De Luna, op. cit., p. 59, suggests that venereal disease may have been the cause of the "suppurating sores" (see Neale: op. cit., p. 355) whose "stench" overcame his doctor at the time of his death in 1958.

Philip II and seduction a la española

he knows she is not really as chaste as she is making out to be, although her very pretence of “godly zeale” pleases him:

“For they are often found the worst,
That of their conscience make such a store,”

an allusion, probably, to conscience-laden Protestantism.

The reference to God arouses Avisá's indignation even more, and she quotes St. Paul at him to suggest that as a fornicating “brother” (or brother-in-law), it is forbidden her by Holy Writ to sit down and eat with him. The idea of fornication then triggers off one of the most interesting allusions in this Canto, and one of the most supportive of de Luna's thesis: a cautionary tale, concerning “A brain-sick youth” who was “stricken blind”, for looking, says the marginal gloss, “dishonestly upon a godly woman”. This might well be a clear reference to Don Carlos' famous fall in Alcalá de Henares, which caused him to go temporarily blind; the fall, says the historian, Martin Hume, was due to his descending a dark stair “to keep an assignation (with the grounds-keeper's daughter)”.¹

Avisá insists on her unswerving chastity, rebuking Caveleiro for his taking for granted that:

“ ... others have possest
The place that you so lewdly craue” .

and comparing herself to a “rose unblusht” without a stain, the rose, it will be remembered, being one of the Queen Elizabeth's principal heraldic emblems. Plainly unnerved by her preaching and her insults, Caveleiro takes up a gaming metaphor again to suggest that what she is really interested in is a discreet, secret affair which he will willingly concede, even pretending to be rejected by her to increase her good name. But, he insists finally, resorting again to a martial metaphor, he must have her:

“Then you say yea, or say you no,
I'll scale your wals, before I go” .

¹ Quoted by de Luna, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

Patricia Shaw

Avisa congratulates him on his cunning, which probably explains his success (amorous success, we are to understand), but assures him that he had best retire from this particular siege, for:

“No Captaine did, nor ever shall,
Set ladder here, to skale the wall”.

Like all Don Juans, Caveleiro is genuinely flabbergasted at Avisa's continued rejection of his suit: in a very modern sounding couplet, he admits:

“I little thought to find you so:
I never dreamt, you would say no.”

but is resigned to giving up the attempt against her virtue, provided that she will swear -a typical *machista* trait this- that she has known no other man but her husband “In carnal act”, a condition which she is willing to accept, assuring him that:

“From others yet I am as free,
As they this night, that boren bee.”

and the whole episode finally ends on a good-tempered, conciliatory note- as Philip's real-life suit apparently did¹ -with Caveleiro saying:

“Well giue me then a cup of wine,
As thou art his, would thou be mine”.

one of the few allusions in the text, as de Luna points out, that might contribute to the notion that Avisa was a barmaid! The wine here is

¹ Maria Perry: *Elizabeth I, the Word of a Prince, a Life from Contemporary Documents*, the Folio Society, London, 1990, p. 149: “He never once questioned his ability to achieve the proposed ends, simply assuming that as Elizabeth was younger than her sister and would obviously produce an heir to keep England safely within the Hapsburg dominions, marriage would cure all the rest. Such matters were in the hands of God. When she refused him he was not offended. He wrote on 23 March that he was very sorry such a marriage could not be arranged, as he had greatly desired it, and “the public weal demanded it”. The same objects, however, could be achieved by good friendship”.

Philip II and seduction a la española

probably significant: at the time of Philip's marriage to Mary, the French Ambassador, Noailles, noted that he encouraged his Spanish followers to acquire English habits:

“ ... a quoy ill vouloit bien commancer et leur monstret le chemin,
puis se fist apporter de la bière de laquelle il beut”.¹

his calling for a farewell cup of *wine*, may well symbolize his renunciation of all things English, including the Queen.

They, presumably, then drink amicably together, Avisá saying:

“Have t'ye good lucke, tell them that gaue
You this aduice, what speede you haue.
Farewell.”

thus emphasizing the success of her rejection and having, as it were, the last word! Indeed, it should be said that Philip II comes out of the episode in a far from unattractive light, whereas Avisá, both here and in the other four similar episodes, leaves an unfortunate impression of excessive sanctimoniousness and self-complacency -this portrait of Elizabeth is hardly flattering, and almost certainly most unlike her. Nor, it should be added, do his forthright, down-to-earth and rather expeditious tactics of seduction resemble those adopted by the plaintive, self-indulgent so-called exponent of Spanish courtship Italo-Hispanensis, H. W!

In fine, *Willobie His Avisá* can hardly be considered a great work of art, nor are its contents in any way transcendental, but it does, certainly, offer some intriguing and sometimes amusing insights into the contemporary and, therefore, probably jaundiced, English view of seduction Spanish style as practised both generally and individually.

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¹ Prescott, op. cit., p. 46.