Maison des Sciences de l'Homme PARIS-SACLAY

ACTES

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LES MOTS POUR LE DIRE

DIRECTION
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WEBINAIRE AVISA
(Historiciser le harcèlement sexuel)
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Early Modern Sexual Harassment in the Paradigm of Shame
The Case of Eliza/Avisa

Armel Dubois-Nayt

Résumé

En janvier 1548 ou 1549, Thomas Seymour, le frère du lord-protecteur d'Angleterre durant la minorité d'Édouard VI, fut accusé de trahison après une enquête au cours de laquelle des agissements envers la demi-sœur du roi, Élisabeth Tudor, furent révélés. L'historiographie récente les considère comme relevant du harcèlement sexuel et leur analyse à travers le prisme de la honte permet de mieux comprendre les raisons de l'invisibilité de ce type d'agissements à la période moderne. Aucun soupçon d'anachronisme ne pèse sur cette notion centrale dans le système de valeurs de la première modernité que l'historienne Hanna Dawson a scindé en deux catégories, distinguant la honte de culpabilité (« *guilt-shame* ») de la honte de réputation (« *reputation-shame* »). Cet article replace donc le harcèlement sexuel d'Élisabeth Tudor par Thomas Seymour dans le paradigme de la honte, afin de mettre en lumière l'impuissance de la victime, de sa gouvernante et de sa gardienne face aux manœuvres de son tourmenteur, dégagé à l'inverse de tout sentiment de honte par son adhésion au double standard sexuel qui prévalait pour partie à l'époque. Il confronte ensuite ce récit à l'aune du double standard à une autre version des événements dans le poème à clé *Willobie His Avisa* publié en 1594, soit presque cinquante ans après les faits. Celui-ci dénonce non seulement la bestialité du harceleur et son sentiment d'impunité, mais il dégage également la victime de tout sentiment de honte social en l'érigeant au rang d'héroïne ayant surmonté l'épreuve du harcèlement.

Mots-clés : honte, Élisabeth Tudor, Thomas Seymour, *Willobie His Avisa*, harcèlement sexuel

When embarking on the study of sexual harassment in the early modern period, the Elizabethan scholar supposedly comes across two pitfalls:

first, the fact that this particular sexual offence was not defined by law (contrary to rape, for instance) and therefore seems to have been unheard of in that society; second, the risk of importing into the Tudor world a modern notion that can only lead to distortions of the historical reality and hence anachronism, since what counts as sexuality has varied significantly over time.

To get round this epistemological problem, this paper aims at showing that rather than being unthought of, sexual harassment was rather unspoken of, which might explain the scarcity of words to denounce it in sixteenth-century England. It will show the thorny dilemma faced by the victims and the almost total impossibility for them to denounce sexual harassment. To this end, it will place sexual harassment in the early modern paradigm of shame, which might help us comprehend why sexual harassment was hardly reported and is now difficult to find in court records. Shame is understood here as defined by Hannah Dawson consisting of both guilt-shame, "focused on sinfulness and caused by mere introspection" and reputation-shame, "focused on social norms, and caused by the (albeit imagined) gaze of others" (Dawson, 2019: 377).

Shame, in fact, was at the very center of the judicial treatment of sexual harassment, since public shaming was part of the punishment of the offender if found guilty or of the victim when her accusations backfired into a trial for slandering an allegedly innocent man (Hindle, 1994). This is what happened to Margaret Knowsley, the wife of a laborer who worked as a domestic servant in Nantwich and who reported to her neighbors in the summer and autumn of 1625 that one of her employers—the writer and Church of England clergyman Stephen Jerome—had propositioned her several times and solicited sexual favors in a variety of circumstances. She ended being charged in 1627 with slandering Stephen Jerome, "taxing him with lascivious soliciting and lewd tempting her into uncleanliness" (Hindle, 1994: 403). She was found guilty and sentenced to six weeks in jail. Historian Steve Hindle who has analyzed the case in depth concluded: "Margaret Knowsley's offence was to tell the truth: she was shamed for making public, in the patriarchal sphere of Nantwich politics, information,

opinions, and judgments which were deemed fit only for the private, more feminine sphere of knitting and laundry" (Hindle, 1994: 392).

This paper, however, deals with a very different case of sexual harassment to illustrate its points for it involves a queen, not a commoner like Margaret Knowsley or the Bolognese fourteenth-century women studied in the volume by Chloé Tardivel[1]. This queen is the iconic Elizabeth Tudor whose physical interaction between 1547 and 1548 with Thomas Seymour, the brother of the Lord Protector during the reign of Edward VI, has been revisited in the wake of the #MeToo movement by Elizabeth Norton (2015). She has argued that Seymour's gestures towards Elizabeth when they lived under the same roof and his attempts at physical contact were unwanted, not reciprocated, and constituted acts of unwelcome social behavior that qualify today as sexual harassment.

In this paper, I intend to reopen the case to consider how the royal status of the victim adds to the myriad of reasons that might explain why early modern women kept silent when sexually harassed, how incriminating words from the harasser could be turned against the victim, particularly when she was Princess, and in that case be replaced by rumors as well as historical judgments or understatements. That notoriety came however with its perks, starting with the possibility for the queen to be represented in literature as having resisted male assaults.

This is the contention made by Barbara De Luna and accepted by another Renaissance scholar Robert Prechter in his own search for the identity of the author of a narrative poem in which a country innkeeper's wife is roughly wooed by a nobleman before her marriage, and by four foreign suitors after it (De Luna, 1970). Prechter and George Akrigg have worked on the hypothesis that Avisa is Elizabeth in disguise, the first suiter is Thomas Seymour, the second King Philip II of Spain, the third François de Valois, Duc d'Alençon, the fourth a combination of Sir Christopher Hatton and Archduke Charles Habsburg of Germany, and the fifth Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester with Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, as his double (Akrigg, 1968; Pretcher, 2011; Hamer, 1971; Roe,

[1] See the paper of Chloé Tardivel in this volume, p. 17-36.

1993)[2]. While the last four suiters of the Tudor heiress have never been suspected of sexually harassing the virgin queen, it is a different matter for Thomas Seymour as will be demonstrated in the first section. And the possibility to see in cantos 2-13 of *Willobie His Avisa* an alternative narrative of sexual harassment in the early modern period, one in which the woman is not the shamed victim but the challenged hero, as will be argued in the second section, suggests that female resistance to sexual pressure was recognized and praised.[3] If this is accurate, can we still consider that sexual harassment was utterly unthought of in the early modern period?

The facts reported, rumored, and interpreted in the paradigm of shame

The facts

The case at the heart of the matter here is based on events that took place between 1547 and 1548 between Elizabeth Tudor and Thomas Seymour. To comprehend the indecent nature of what was witnessed between the two characters, it must be pointed out that Thomas Seymour was the brother of Jane Seymour, the third wife of Henry VIII and the mother of Edward VI. He also became the second husband of Katherine Parr, who he married two months after the death of Henry VIII. However, before marrying Katherine, if we are to believe the Italian historian Gregorio Leti, Thomas Seymour proposed to

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[2] De Luna's interpretation and the one-hundred page-demonstration on which it is based is still controversial and being treated either as opening new horizons to Renaissance scholars or as a "gigantic hoax". Douglas Hamer and John Roe do not take it seriously. If Hamer and Roe are correct and De Luna's interpretation is erroneous, it hardly changes anything with regard to the point I am trying to make here, for the poem was written during Elizabeth's reign and still shows that it was possible in literature to portray sexually harassed women who managed to resist their harassers and, in the process, challenge the double-standard of honor and shame.

[3] *Willobie his Avisa. Or the true picture of a modest maid, and of a chast and constant wife. In hexameter verse. The like argument wherof, was never hereto fore published. Read the preface to the reader before you enter farther*, London, printed by John Windet, 1594. Here all references are made to Harrison's edition (1926).

Elizabeth in writing on February 25, 1547 and only proposed marriage to Katherine Parr after Elizabeth had turned him down (Leti, 1703: 169-172). As a result of this match, Elizabeth—who had been put in the custody of her former stepmother—became a member of Seymour's household.

The case is based on the confessions of two witnesses examined by the Privy Council in 1549 to prove that Seymour had long been plotting against his brother Edward VI. Seymour was thus examined for high treason, but not for sexual misbehavior: it was the nature of the relationship between Elizabeth and Seymour, as well as her possible involvement in his plot, that were investigated. The two witnesses were Elizabeth's governess Kat Ashley and her treasurer Thomas Parry. During their interrogations, elements arose to suggest that the young Elizabeth, who was only fourteen at the time, was sexually harassed by the man who had become the new husband of her guardian, the former queen consort Katherine Parr.

The behavior of Seymour between June 1547 and June 1548 has been much commented upon but never analyzed *per se*. This is what I will try to do by repositioning his actions, whose sexual character needs to be established, and their consequences in the paradigm of shame. This odd conduct consisted of regular early morning visits to Elizabeth's chamber, which seem to have had a double goal: embarrassing the young Princess and pawing her each time it was possible. I quote Ashley's confession: "At Chelsy, incontinent after he was maried to the Queene, he wold come many Mornyngs into the said Lady *Elizabeth*'s Chamber, before she were redy, and sometyme before she did rise. And if she were up, he wold bid hir good Morrow, and ax how she did, and strike hir upon the Bak or on the Buttocks famylearly […] And if she were in hir Bed, he wold put open the Curteyns, and bid her good Morrow, and make as though he wold come at hir: And she wold go further in the Bed, so that he could not come at hir. And one Mornyng he strave to have kissed hir in hir Bed" (Haynes, 1740: 99). This extract shows that Elizabeth did her best to avoid being seen half-dressed, being touched, grabbed, or kissed as did her governess who asked Seymour "to go away for shame" (Haynes, 1740: 99).

But shame was clearly not part of Seymour's vocabulary, and he continued bursting into her bedroom even though that terrorized Elizabeth who on one occasion "ran out of hir Bed to hir Maydens, and then went behynd the Curteyn of the Bed, the Maydens beyng there; and my Lord tarried to have hyr com out, she can not till how long" (Haynes, 1740: 99). Again, Ashley told Seymour that "thes Things were complayned of, and that [her] lady was evill spoken off" (Haynes, 1740: 99) but to no avail. Ashley's phrasing is interesting for not only did she use the catch-all or empty word "thing" to avoid labelling what she blamed Seymour for, but she reported the clear-cut classification of the victim as bad and reprehended in the same sentence. This is an outward expression of the double-standard (Capp, 1999).

It is however true that the sexual and aggressive nature of his gestures did not initially strike all members of the household as such. In the early days at Hanworth, Katherine Parr herself took part in the tickling sessions ("ther they tytled my Lady Elizabeth in the Bed") or even the weird garden scene in which Seymour cut Elizabeth's dress into pieces with his sword ("he wrated with hir, and cut hir Gown in an hundred pieces, beying black Cloth… she could not do with all, for the Quene held hir, while the Lord Admiral cut it") (Haynes, 1740: 99). Still, eventually she realized the awkwardness of the situation and confronted Kat Ashley about Elizabeth's behavior, not that of her husband, which constitutes a second manifestation of the double-standard: "At Hanworth, the Quene told this Examinate that my Lord Admirall loked in at the Galery-Wyndow, and se my Lady *Elizabeth* cast hir Armes about a Man's Neck. The which Heryng, this Examinate enquyred for it of my Lady's Grace, who denyed in weeping, and bad ax all hir Women: Thei all denyed it: and She knew it could not be so, for there came no Man, but *Gryndall*, the Lady *Elizabeth*'s Scholemaster. Howbeit, thereby this Examinate did suspect, that the Quene was gelows betwixt them, and did but feyne this, to thentent that the Examinate shuld take more hede, and be, as it were in watche betwixt hir and my Lord Admirall" (Haynes, 1740: 99-100). Allegedly jealous, Parr decided to leave Elizabeth behind in Hanworth when the couple returned to their London home in the summer of 1548. Oddly enough, in her interview with Ashley, Parr did not enquire into her husband's attitude

but instead reported his catching Elizabeth in the arms of a man, which is precisely what Parry caught sight of, except that in that later instance the man in question was Seymour (Haynes, 1740: 96). But again, the blame and societal shame rested with the fourteen-year-old young woman.

As for Seymour, he was clearly refusing to feel ashamed of his attitude and instead answered that "he wold not leave it, for he ment no Evill" (Haynes, 1740: 99). Should we thus assume that he meant nothing sexual by his gestures then? This is an almost impossible question to answer except if we consider Elizabeth's sexual reputation, which he did nothing to protect. From that angle, the next question that arises is whether that was intentional. Did he purposefully seek to shame her, to damage her reputation so as to make her dependent on him and more inclined to accept the marriage proposal she had declined in February 1547? One thing is certain when considering the psychological game played by Seymour: his morning habits over eighteen months demonstrated if not the desire to make Elizabeth feel ill-at-ease, at least the utter absence of consideration for her discomfort.

And nakedness, which has been defined as the original shame by many authors, played an important part in what seems to have been a perfectly conscious maneuver. For not only was he clearly attempting to catch a glimpse of her flesh but when this no longer worked—for she anticipated his visits, got dressed, and shielded herself behind a desk—he started "to come up every Mornyng in his Nyght-Gown, barelegged in his slippers" (Haynes, 1740: 99). By exposing his partly naked body, he was again focusing the eye on the original site of shame but this time not his eye, that of his victim. Yet, the double-standard did not apply there, for in the early modern period men, like women, were expected to feel the "original shame" of nakedness as demonstrated by Ashley's new remonstrance to Seymour: "it was an unsemly sight to come so bare leggid to a Maydens chambre" (Haynes, 1740: 99).

Still, the double-standard loomed large in the rumors around the events reported by Ashley: "Thes Things were complayned of, and [her] lady was evill spoken of" (Haynes, 1740: 99). This is how the feeling of shame Elizabeth might have experienced as a result of the discomfort Seymour imposed on her ricocheted in what Hannah Dawson has

termed "reputation-shame" by opposition to "guilt-shame" (Dawson, 2019). Reputation shame "is brought back by being seen by others, or by imagining being seen by others", which is exactly what Ashley points to in her warning to Seymour (Dawson, 2019: 4). I have not referred to Elizabeth's first experience of shame as "guilt-shame", for "guilt-shame" in early modern thought was "brought about by being seen by oneself or by God and tends to have as its object moral wrong, or sinfulness" (Dawson, 2019: 3). We have no persuasive evidence that Elizabeth felt guilty about what Seymour was doing to her.

We know however that she asked for it to stop in a handwritten note on the back of a letter dated June 9, 1548 from Parr to Seymour (Mueller, 2011: 169-170). That note has been attributed to Elizabeth on the basis of the very specific Palatino hand used; a script taught to royal children and very similar to the one used in a letter from Elizabeth to Katherine dated December 1547[4]. As for the message, it is quite straightforward although deleted and changed from "Noli me tangere" to "Nolito me tangere". It is thus a variation on John 20:17 in the Vulgate where Christ addresses Mary Magdalene. It contains a rare form, a 'future imperative'. The top line that has been crossed out means 'do not touch me in the future' and the bottom line means 'do not let him touch me in the future' or 'let him not touch me again', which indicates that 'touching' had taken place[5]. As Mueller pointed out, "this inscription raises questions on several fronts: how and when Elizabeth gained access to this addressed, thus presumably sealed letter from Katherine Parr to Thomas Seymour and what she meant by the inscription that she wrote" (Mueller, 2011: 169-170). In light of the unwanted sexual advances of Seymour, it appears reasonable to assume that this was a demand from Elizabeth to Seymour to stop his familiarity, and it is legitimate to question the assumption that Elizabeth might have entered a seduction role game with him in which she simulated her shielding before consenting outside the field of view of witnesses.

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4 I am grateful to Guillaume Coatelen for directing me to that letter.

5 I am grateful to Laetitia Sansonetti for her enlightening remark on this note at the seminar.

Contemporary rumor and historical narrative

We cannot but recognize that for lack of knowledge—the note was obviously not made public—or out of gender prejudice—Elizabeth was both a daughter of Eve and the daughter of the adulterer Anne Boleyn—her contemporaries read guilt-shame in Elizabeth's behavior when around Seymour and fueled rumor about it. To understand how this worked, we need to turn to a synonym of shame in the early modern period namely "blushing". Thomas Wilson defines blushing in *A Christian Dictionary* as "shame of face" (Wilson, 1612: 442). This means that at the time, blushing was a communicative act through which you revealed to others that you had broken their code of honor. And Wilson purely and simply equated the two words. "To be ashamed is taken for to blush" and "to blush" is "to be ashamed". The equation of shame and blushing resulted in the presumption of Elizabeth's guilt who was not caught red-handed, but red-faced. For instance, Kat Ashley's husband warned his wife "to take hede, for he did fere that the Lady *Elizabeth* did bere som Affection to my Lord Admirall, she semyd to be well pleased therewith, and somtyme she wold blush when he were spoken of" (Haynes, 1740: 100).

The Thomas/Elizabeth episode thus confirms, as suggested by Laura Gowing, that "men were rarely made culpable for their sexual transgressions and never defined by them; women however were at the pivotal centre of the circulation of blame and dishonour for sex, responsibility was channelled entirely through them" (Gowing, 1996: 109). And this shaped the lack of recognition of sexual harassment at the time and until very recently in the historical narrative. Today's Tudor historian should ask about the impact of that experience on Elizabeth in the long term? Did it damage her sense of self? Did it alter her relations with men? How much did it distort her view of both what happened and the future? But those were not the questions first raised by historians and they still await answers. An insight may be provided by a contemporary version of the events presented in a narrative poem *à clef*, *Willobie His Avisa*. This poem was not published with the intent to establish the link between fact and fiction, and it is the mystery that still surrounds it that has prompted scholars in the direction of Elizabeth and her experience of sexual harassment.

Eliza/Avisa

Blame and shame in the pastourelle tradition

Another version of events existed and was proposed as early as 1594 in the narrative poem *Willobie His Avisa* printed under pseudonymous names. Such a literary endeavor, however, was risky for it required describing Elizabeth's sexual harassment by Seymour without further shaming her. This challenge may account for the layers of mystery surrounding the author as well as the decision of the state authorities to have the volume of verse removed from circulation in 1599 (Drabble, 2000: 1102).

Part of the poem's interest when considering sexual harassment in the paradigm of shame is first that it gives an account of Seymour's behavior that ends up empowering Avisa/Eliza and second that it challenges the double-standard of honor and shame that may have covered up early modern cases of sexual harassment. I will contend that it does so by revisiting a literary genre where resistance to male rough wooing was a possibility and not the norm. Just like when discussing historical facts, looking for representations of sexual harassment in sixteenth-century literary texts may raise suspicion of anachronism for the scenes and gestures represented, and which may be perceived by today's readers as sexual harassment when they were not considered and intended as such by early modern authors. My argument is that in the case of *Willobie His Avisa* these doubts can to some extent be dispelled.

Douglas Hamer in his review of *The Queen Declined* sees literary connections between *Willobie His Avisa* and an episode in the Cupar Banns in Sir David Lindsay's *A Satire of the Three Estates*, which tells the story of a young wife who is pursued by three suitors: a courtier, a merchant, and a priest (Hamer, 1971: 336). She rejects them all but does not resist the fool nor does she express any feeling of shame for betraying her old husband. Hamer also sees the basic story told by *Willobie His Avisa* in the ballad of "Buxom Joan of Betford" in William Congreve's *Love for Love*, III, iv (Congreve, 1735: 65). This time a maid is wooed in turn by a soldier, a tailor, and a tinker, but all are beaten to it by a sailor. Again, the intertext is limited to the succession of suitors and the resistance of Joan

until a sailor "won this fair Maid's heart" (Congreve, 1735: 65). At no moment is there any reference to the discomfort or shame experienced by the maid in the process of courtship. To find a literary source for this theme, one must turn to a different genre: the 'oaristys' (wooing) whose sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French adaptations are discussed in this volume by Guillaume Peureux.[6]

In the Middle Ages, the *oaristys* developed into the pastourelle, which flourished in Western Europe during the twelfth through fourteenth centuries and were still read in Henry VIII's court including by Henry's daughter Mary. As demonstrated by Dietrich Helms, "Hey troly troly lo" for instance is found in a songbook used to teach music to royal children and to educate them about female victimization and resistance (Helms; 2009: 120).

To summarize the genre, I will borrow Carissa Harris's synthesis: "The typical pastourelle is a debate poem, a confrontation between a man and a woman who give alternating speeches. The man is first to speak, narrates all non-verbal action, and frequently has the last word in the exchange inviting readers to view the encounter from his perspective. The poems center on a social and sexual clash; a knight or cleric encounters a young peasant woman in a rustic, secluded setting and engages in a dialogue with her, attempting to seduce her with sweet words and courtly love, promises of marriage, and gifts of clothing or jewelry. She initially resists, often rebuffing him with harsh language. Sometimes she is won over by his promises or gifts, but many times she continues to refuse him" (Harris, 2018: 106). Kathryn Gravdal who has also studied the French corpus of pastourelles composed of one hundred and sixty poems adds that in one-fifth of them the maid is raped (Gravdal, 1985: 361). This suggests that in the British context, scholars have recently been more inclined to read in the genre "a figuration of male sexual violence and its acceptation in a world where men dominated speaking and writing" rather than "a role play in which the man takes what is factiously refused first".[7]

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6 See the paper of Guillaume Peureux in this volume, p. 95-108.

7 *Ibid.*

To complement this outline of the genre, I would like to add that blame and shame are central *topoi* in poems where harassed maids are either raped, yield to false promises, or succumb to their own sexual urges. In "Throughe a Forest as I can ryde", a middle-English pastourelle dated circa 1475, the fair maid expresses clearly her concern for her reputation at the beginning of the encounter:

> "Be Cryst, I dare nott, for my dame,
> To dele with hym that I doo not knowe;
> For soo I might dyspyse my name
> Therefore the crow shall byte yow". (Jansen & Jordan, 1991: v. 21-24)

Once she has been raped and rejected as wife-to-be, she tries to barter for her shame:

> "But sythe ye have i-leyn me by,
> And brought my body unto shame,
> Some of your good ye wyll part with me,
> Or elles, be Cryst, ye be to blame" (Jansen & Jordan, 1991: v. 41-44).

In another middle-English pastourelle "My deth I love, my lyf ich hate", the suitor is a clerk who turns the shame argument against the girl he is harassing again at the start of the exchange[8]:

> "Be off, you clerk ! You're a fool! I don't want to argue with you.
> You'll never live to that day you obtain my love.
> If you are caught in my room, may shame befall you;
> You're better to go on foot than ride a wicked horse".
>
> "Wailaway ! Why say you so ? Have pity on me, your man !
> You're always in my thought whenever I'm on ground.
> If I die for your love, it's much to your shame:
> Let me live and be your love, and you my sweet dear"
> (Greer Fein ed., 2014: v. 9-16)

[8] I am using modernized spelling for this quote and the next. For the original verses in Middle English see reference.

Blame and shame in Avisa

These two examples illustrate both the centrality and the fluidity of the shame *topos* in the pastourelle and therefore justify looking at *Willobie His Avisa* through this prism since I believe the poem revisited the genre. I will however contend in this last section that it completely reverses the codes of honor and shame by turning the harassers into "beasts in shapes of men" (Harrison ed., 1926: 29). In fact, I will argue that it opposes two honor codes and reverses two symmetrical shame codes. The harasser is the representative of the first, the victim of the latter.

The male character, called the "nobleman" is in fact an early modern version of the medieval knight of the pastourelle who still believes that his prey will be impressed by his generosity; hence, his repeated offers of gifts and money. But there is no ambiguity about his proposal, which is not based on the shared understanding that marriage will follow consummation, as sometimes happened in medieval pastourelles. He only offers Avisa the so-called opportunity of becoming and remaining "his secret friend" (Harrison ed., 1926:31). He claims that this would not constitute a transgression of moral rules on the ground that his social status will save her reputation and guarantee her fame:

> "Abandon feare that bars consent,
> Repel the shame that feares a blot,
> Let wisdome way what faith is ment,
> That all praise thy happie lot;
> Thinke not I seek thy lives disgrace;
> For thou shalt have a Ladies place" (Harrison ed., 1926: 32).

His sense of omnipotence is such that he pretends to have the power to rid her of the very feeling of shame: "What then doth not my mightie name,/ Suffice to sheeld thy fact from shame" (Harrison ed., 1926: 42)

But Avisa—the revised version of the shepherdess in the pastourelle—is streetwise, reformed, and educated, and I would argue that she epitomizes the concern of Elizabethan society with "reformation of

manners".[9] She has learnt from the examples of "the yeelding maids of former age" and has seen "their lasting shame" (Harrison ed., 1926: 34). She quotes Jane Shore, the mistress of Edward IV of England and Henry II's unfortunate concubine who, legend has it, was forced to kill herself by Henry II's legitimate wife Eleanor of Aquitaine. She does not have second thoughts like the maid in "a fryht as Y con fare fremede" ("In a wood, as I, a stranger did walk") who hesitates when she thinks about her alternative marriage prospect:

> "Yet it's better to accept one beautifully clothed,
> To kiss and embrace him in arms,
> Than be wed to a wretch so ill-tempered
> That were he to beat me, I might not escape"
> (Greer Fein ed, 2014: v. 37-40.)

Avisa is only concerned with God's judgment: "On wordly feare, you thinke I stand,/ Or fame that may my shame resound,/ No Sir, I feare his mightie hand,/ That will both you and me confound" (Harrison ed., 1926: 44).

She therefore argues back that princely palaces do not have the power "to shade the shame of secret sinne" (Harrison ed., 1926: 34) and puts the nobleman in his place by suggesting that he does not set a shining example for the honest poor ("Needs must the people well be taught,/ whose chiefest leaders all are naught" (Harrison ed., 1926:37). The nobleman, whose archaic sense of honor has been wounded, retaliates by mocking the very idea that a commoner like her should be concerned about her fame, or in other words fear shame: "you sprang belike from Noble stocke/ that stand so much upon your fame […]/What need'st thou then to feare of shame/ When Queenes and Nobles use the same" (Harrison ed. 1926: 36, 37).

This is of little effect on the reformed Avisa who represents an age that defined itself by its attack on vice and its attempt at sexual regulation. As an idealized personification of that redeemed social order, she believes

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[9] On the reformation of manners in the wake of the religious Reformation see: Hindle (2002) and Steinberg (2018).

that the double-standard does not apply to either rank or gender. She illustrates the fact that the reformed believer is first and foremost susceptible to "guilt-shame" i.e. "the thought brought about by being seen by oneself or god" (Dawson, 2019 : 4). This does not mean that she does not pay attention to reputation-shame, but for her guilt-shame precedes and outranks reputation-shame. Introspection gives her the strength not to avert the public gaze or that of the nobleman who threatens to shame her if ever she lapses in the future: "Thou selfewill gig that doth detest/ My faithfull love, looke to thy fame,/ If thou offend, I doe protest,/ I'le bring thee out to open shame" (Harrison ed., 1926: 52).

And we can easily imagine how the nobleman might have done so, since community-based public shaming was common in cases of sexual misadventure in early modern England. In Britain, the plebeian ritual that started with 'rough music' was the most frequent type of communal humiliation. It consisted like the French *charivary* in gathering in front of the house of the alleged offender to make a lot of noise by beating pots and pans or ringing bells before further humiliating him or her by riding them or their effigy on the back of a donkey or of a pole. The nobleman in the poem does not develop precisely on his intentions but his threat no doubt made sense for the early modern readers, all the more so as we know from earlier research that these plebeian shaming practices could involve landowners and noblemen (Ingram, 1984).

David Nash even claims, on the basis of Martin Ingram's research, that some landowners and noblemen were the victims of such public shaming (Nash, 2010: 26-47). I have failed to find evidence of the public shaming of a nobleman in a case of sexual misconduct and most cases mentioned by Ingram (1984) involve magistrates mocked by criminals eager to express their contempt for the law or by rioters for political motives. I therefore tend to believe that just like the male character in *Avisa*, the male gentry and nobility felt sheltered from hostile derision in public for breaking sexual community norms. This might explain the total absence of guilt-shame in the nobleman who does not even envisage that he was a threat to the patriarchal order.

Just like Seymour never envisaged that his attitude towards Eliza/ Avisa was shameful, the nobleman in *Willobie His Avisa* is representative

of an order that still valorized aristocratic masculine aggression of plebeian or peasant women as a marker of their social and gendered superiority. That order, however, was beginning to be challenged across the British Isles in the sixteenth century. To go back to Lindsay, the author of the Cupar Banns that stages a scene where a maiden is chased successively by three suitors, he also authored another text entitled an *Answer to the Kingis Flyting* which sheds new light on the dynamic of shame in *Willobie His Avisa*.[10] That text was written to sexually reeducate the King of Scotland, James V. According to Andrea Thomas, James V had been encouraged into promiscuity from the age of fourteen by his custodian and stepfather who wanted to "distract him from wanting to exercise political power" (Thomas, 2005: 41).

In his *Answer*, Lindsay condemns the instruction given to the young king by his self-serving 'counsel' and he mocks him and shames him for assaulting a female brewhouse worker, just like Avisa who becomes an innkeeper's wife when she marries between her first and second temptation.

> "You will not refrain from copulating with loose women,
> No matter how often the monsters make a loud outcry.
> Remember how, beside the malt-masking vat,
> You threw a whore across a stinking trough?
> That fiend, with jerking of her overheated haunch,
> Knocked over the vat; as a result, drink, dregs, and liquid refuse
> Came crudely flowing down around your ears.
>
> I wish to God that the lady who loved you best
> Had seen you there, lying wallowing like two swine!
> But to describe the condition of that slovenly slut,
> Drenched with lees, whimpering with many squeals,
> The process of reporting it would be a great effort." (Harris, 2018: 90)

In the poem, Lindsay has no sympathy for the king's victim on the ground of her social status and she is shamed as a polluting agent of the king's political body. In contrast, Avisa is raised above the nobleman on

[10] David Lindsay, "The Answer to the Kingis Flyting" (Williams, 2000: 98-108).

the ground of her moral standards in *Willobie His Avisa*. She is given the last word, like many female characters in the pastourelles, but in her case words are enough to stop the harassment and to prevent rape. She is furthermore given the possibility of shaming a male member of the aristocracy who did not value sexual 'honesty' as an intrinsic part of his good name. She overcomes the different assaults made by the nobleman just like in the rest of the poem she overcomes the assaults made by her different suitors.

Conclusion

It is thanks to this process, which is very similar to the iterative process found in martyrdom or chivalry, that Avisa overcomes shame for good. Both the martyr and the knight have to withstand several trials and ordeals before achieving recognition, and so does Avisa (Grande, 2017: 15). At the end of her first trial, and even more so at the end of the poem, she has become an unambiguous female speaker who articulates resistance without fear or anguish, achieving what the wenches of earlier times did not manage by ridding herself of the shame they felt over their gender, age, class, or single status. This brings us back to the identity of Avisa, which might force us to qualify the empowering of women in *Willobie His Avisa*. If she is Elizabeth in disguise, her self-confidence cannot be separated from her social status, and thus the poem should be read as preserving the distinction made by Lindsay and others between ladies of the court and low women ('ladronis'), the former being the only ones who can resist harassment while the latter remained vulnerable to sexual advances and social disapproval, or in other words, shame.

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ÉCRIRE L'HISTOIRE DU HARCÈLEMENT SEXUEL

LES MOTS POUR LE DIRE

Depuis 2017 et l'affaire Weinstein, la parole des femmes semble se libérer devant les violences qu'elles subissent. Pour bien comprendre la singularité de l'ère post-Weinstein, il apparaît nécessaire de considérer le harcèlement sexuel comme un phénomène historique ayant connu des occurrences antérieures à la post-modernité. Telle est la dynamique générale du projet AVISA dans lequel s'inscrit ce premier ouvrage, partant du constat que l'histoire du harcèlement sexuel reste à écrire.

Car si le terme même semble surtout mis en lumière depuis la fin du XX^{e} siècle, au gré des lois s'adaptant peu à peu aux évolutions apparentes de la société, certains comportements tels que des contacts physiques non consentis ou des comportements verbaux à caractère sexuel ne sont pas nouveaux et se retrouvent dans de nombreux documents. Comment rendre compte du « harcèlement sexuel », qui n'est d'ailleurs pas tout à fait la même chose que le droit de cuissage, quand il n'existe pas de terme usité à l'époque étudiée pour le nommer, sans risquer de tomber dans une forme d'anachronisme ?

Pour répondre à cette question, ces actes comportent des contributions de disciplines différentes (histoire, littérature, sociologie, études cinématographiques…) exploitant une diversité de sources (archives, nouvelles, manuels, procès, films…), de périodes (du XIV^{e} au XXI^{e} siècle) et de zones géographiques (France, Italie, Angleterre, États-Unis…). Cette approche comparatiste met à jour des schémas récurrents, que ce soit dans les relations de genre et de classe, dans les conséquences pour les victimes, dans les stratégies des femmes face à ce type d'agissement ainsi que dans celles de leurs auteurs. Les contributions se répondent, se croisent et s'enrichissent pour mieux cerner les contours de cette histoire. Voir comment le harcèlement sexuel est représenté et évoqué avant Weinstein permet de mieux comprendre la nature et les mécanismes d'une expression de la domination masculine à travers les siècles.

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