HONOR IN THE SPANISH DRAMA

The origin of the ideal of honor which makes its appearance in the plays of Lope de Vega and Calderón has not been discovered. Ticknor says in discussing the point of honor found in Calderón:

Here, therefore, we find pressed upon us the question, What was the origin of these extravagant ideas of domestic honor and domestic rights, which are found in the old Spanish drama from the beginning of the full length plays of Torres Naharro, and which are thus exhibited in all their excess in the plays of Calderón? The question is certainly difficult to answer, as are all like it that depend on the origin and traditions of national character.

He then proceeds to show that the rigorous laws which permitted a swift vengeance on an erring woman were in vogue from Gothic times; and he sets aside as groundless the assertion that the Spanish ideals of domestic authority might be derived from the Arabs. It is pointed out that "everything relating to domestic honor was left by these laws, as it is in Calderón, to domestic authority." While these were not legally in force in Calderón's time according to Ticknor, still "the tradition of their power . . . was not yet lost on the popular character, and poetry was permitted to preserve their fearful principles long after their enactments had ceased to be acknowledged anywhere else." This explanation of the origin of the point of honor contains a part of the truth, but only a part.1

Fitzmaurice-Kelly gives his view of the question as follows:

The point of honor—the vengeance wrought by husbands, fathers, and brothers in the cases of women found in dubious circumstances—is harder to explain, or, at least, to justify; yet even this was a perverted outcome of chivalresque ideals very acceptable to men who esteemed life more cheaply than their neighbors.2

Three possible sources are thus suggested: first, Arabic or Moorish influence; second, the Gothic laws; third, the chivalresque

2 Fitzmaurice-Kelly, History of Spanish Literature, p. 335.
ideals. If we regard, however, the question as merely that of the vengeance taken by her relations on an indiscreet woman, we shall soon be confronted by many possible sources. The Calderonian point of honor is much more subtle than the mere idea of vengeance. Indeed it is often characterized by the absence of the desire for vengeance. Before we attempt to trace the growth of the ideal of honor we must inquire very carefully into the sometimes rather elusive elements of this ideal. The knight, the courtier, the gallant and the gentleman have all given a different meaning to the word. What, then, does it mean when used by Calderón?

With Calderón the susceptibility of honor is almost incredible. The one thought of his heroes is: “What will they say?” An imaginary wrong had to be avenged and the punishment had to fit the crime. The reparation was often bloody and, if possible, was kept absolutely secret. The offended person was the only judge and he was not made to account for his actions. This was especially true in regard to an offense against marital honor, which always had to be avenged with blood. It is when a man's honor has suffered a stain by the real or suspected wrongdoing of a woman closely connected with him that he is most punctilious. Thus in El Médico de su Honra the husband reaches the height of cruelty when he causes his innocent wife to be bled to death, because he suspects her infidelity. The father, in the plays of Calderón, also guards his daughter jealously, and demands absolute obedience. He does not allow anyone to visit her except in his presence. If he finds she has received a man during his absence, marriage is the remedy; but if this be impossible, blood must be shed. The brother must also defend the honor of his sister, and the lover that of his lady.

The principal characteristics, therefore, by which we shall attempt to trace the ideal of honor are that honor is a pure crystal belonging to man and woman; it is not acquired, but is conferred upon them at birth; the slightest breath of scandal dims it; any stain upon it must be kept hidden at all cost; if the stain becomes visible it must be washed out with blood; a woman's transgression, or merely suspected transgression, is enough to wound the honor

*For a full discussion of these points see Rubio y Lluch, El Sentimiento del honor en el teatro de Calderón: Barcelona, 1882.
of a man connected with her by blood or by marriage. The cruelty of the law of honor is realized and bemoaned. *Dura lex, sed lex.*

These principles of honor exist not only in Calderón but in earlier Spanish drama. For instance, in the *Estrella de Sevilla* by Lope, the king has come to see the young girl, but her brother says to him:

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  . . . . . Dirán,
  Puesto que al contrario sea,
  Que viniste á mi casa
  Por ver á mi hermana; y puesta
  En buena opinion su fama,
  Está á pique de pederla;
  Que el honor es cristal puro,
  Que con un soplo se quiebra.
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*Act i; sc. ii.*

In the second act, when the brother finds the king in his house, he cannot believe that this person is really the king, for, as he says:

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  Es el Rey él que da honor;
  Tú buscas mi deshonor.
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*Act ii; sc. 5.*

We have here the idea that a mere visitor to a sister could harm her reputation, and that by her dishonor would come the dishonor of a brother. A strong statement in regard to the importance of honor is made by the brother when he exclaims:

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  Solo mi honor reina en mí.
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*Act ii; sc. 5.*

The same cruelty which appears in Calderón's *Médico de su Honra* is found in the source of this play, which is Lope's drama of the same title. Honor is the mainspring of the action. When Don Jacinto, the husband, finds the tell-tale dagger he exclaims:

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  La guerra está declarada
  Y mi honra está perdida.
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*Act ii.*

He calls upon Honor to advise him and constantly personifies it. When the incriminating letter is discovered he says:

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Aquesto ha de ser así:
Que me mate á mi el dolor,
Y el acero del honor
Mayor, que te mate á ti.

He brings the surgeon-barber and says:
Mal haya, amen, el primero
Que este género de honor
Impuso contal rigor
Tan bruto, bárbaro y fiero.

In spite of this, however, the barber reports Don Jacinto as saying to him:
. . . . Mi honor adolece,
Y así, yo soy de mi honra
Médico, y para curarla,
Importa que hagas agora
Á esa enferma una sangria.

Not only in Lope's plays but also in those of his contemporaries is the question of honor brought into the foreground; as, for example, in Guillén de Castro's Cid and in La Enemiga Favorable by Tárraga. In the latter drama—published in 1615—Polidoro tries to kill his sister Laura, who loves and is loved by the king, because she will not recognize Belisardo as her husband, whom Polidoro has promised she shall marry. Her brother tells her that his honor and her honor force her to do his bidding. The queen strikes Laura; and when the king and Belisardo find this out, they both claim they must kill the queen as a point of honor: the king, because she has insulted his palace; Belisardo, because she has insulted his wife. Laura says to Belisardo: “Hasme honrada; Belisardo.” She appears clad in black: Soy de mi honor monumento. She tells the king she thought he would wash the stain of the blow with blood. The significant question is asked:

Tú no ves que es, bien mirado,
Sangre del alma el honor?
Honor in the Spanish Drama

Thus it is not difficult to see the sources from which Calderón derived his ideas of honor, for plots of plays revolving about the point of honor are common enough before he began to write.

To return to the question of the source of this special kind of honor, we find that Ticknor has rejected the possibility of Moorish influence in this matter. From such investigations as I have been able to make through translations of the literature of the Moors and histories of their laws and customs, I have found no reason to depart from Ticknor's verdict. It is true that the Oriental woman is guarded by a jealous husband, and the custom of keeping the Spanish woman rather secluded from men's society may be the result of this influence. Yet the ideal of honor as conceived by the Spaniard of the seventeenth century does not seem to exist in Moorish life and literature even in an embryonic state.

The second of the sources suggested—that of the attitude of the laws toward domestic problems—is one which must be carefully considered. The Germanic laws are very significant on this point. According to Tacitus the Germans believed that woman possessed something of the divine. He reports that adultery was rare among the Germans and that the punishment was intrusted to the husband in the presence of the relatives. The unfortunate woman was deprived of her hair, disrobed, expelled from the house and flogged through the village. The Spanish laws embodied in the Fuero Juzgo declared the father innocent who killed his daughter found in compromising circumstances. If he did not wish to kill her, she and her lover were in his power. The same right was given to the husband to kill his wife. Even if the husband merely suspected the wife and proved her guilt by only circumstantial evidence, the wife and her lover were delivered into his hands.

The ideal of honor is reflected in laws from Gothic times down to the seventeenth century; but that does not solve the question why the Spanish dramatists suddenly begin to make the action of their plays revolve about the pudonor. Literary currents gather strength for a long time before they reach their greatest power. The laws and customs are the background. In the present case, we can

*Rallkoetter, The Legal Protection of Woman among the Ancient Germans, Chicago, 1900, gives a full discussion of the question.*
explain by them why such subjects as those of Lope and Calderón could be treated, and would be acceptable to the audience; but the whole question cannot be referred back to these laws.

Fitzmaurice-Kelly correctly points out that the honor in Spanish drama is a transformation of chivalresque ideals. Since the Calderonian ideal is so wrapped up with woman one naturally turns to the Provençal courts to find the possible source of this later conception. But the honor of the Provençal courts is far removed from that of the Castilian courts. In the former, honor was won in war and the tourney, in generosity, in defending the land from the enemy. The poet served and honored his lady. His greatest honor was to be accepted as a lover. There was honor to be gained in serving God.

The Amadís contains the ideals of chivalresque honor which are common to the romances of chivalry. Honor depends upon performing great deeds, by keeping one’s word, by not remaining inactive, by being loyal to one’s king and lady. It is to be noticed that honor is here considered as something to be gained, not something that, as in the Spanish drama, is inborn and to be kept spotless. In Amadís when Perion finds a ring under suspicious circumstances he suspects his wife as quickly as a Calderonian hero would have done; but the question of his honor is not brought into the foreground. It is also true that Amadís feared the least stain on the honor of his lady far more than his own death, but this is in connection with nothing tragic; it is merely a challenge to uphold her beauty. The protection of woman, though guilty, is exemplified; and honor is held dearer than all else. These are both elements in Calderonian honor; but since they are conceptions common to all ages in which honor has been an ideal, they cannot be pointed out in this case as striking parallels between the earlier and later ideals.

If these elements of chivalresque honor be compared with the elements of honor in Spanish drama, it is easily seen that the two conceptions are far apart. There are too many qualities lacking in the former to permit of its being regarded as the direct source of the latter. Calderon and Lope did not draw their ideas of honor at first hand from romances of chivalry.

* Settegast, *Die Ehre in den Liedern der Troubadours*, 1887.
In the middle of the sixteenth century the Italians began to discuss in lengthy treatises the ideal of honor; and since the intimate relations between Italy and Spain at that time caused a free interchange of customs and ideas, these codes of honor are important to the present question.

Possevini, in his Diálogo dell' honore, speaks of honor as a reward, as something to be acquired by means of virtù.

L'honore adunque per lo mezzo delle virtù si consegue, essendo solo l'huomo da bene degno d'honore . . . tutti coloro, che peccano estremamente contra qualche virtù morale (perché ciascun peccato è contra l'una della virtù) como contra la forza, la temperanza, la giustitia, la liberalità e altre virtù, o contra le cose congiunte alle virtù morali; come l'amicitia, tutti perdono l'honor loro.6

This statement is typical of the Italian treatises in which honor is dependent on virtù and is closely allied to love of fame. In regard to domestic relations Possevini differs widely from the Spanish ideal. He says that the man who knows his wife is false to him and tolerates it, loses honor to such a degree that he cannot have recourse to the duel or to the law to regain it; but if after having taken the necessary precautions—and he must do this—his wife is false to him and he does not know it, he is not dishonored. Suppose he catches her in the crime, what shall he do? Kill her? No.

L'ammazar le moglie è costume da Barbari: ne è cosa honesta, come gia dissi, ne honorevole l'adoperar le forze contra ad una femmina, ne contra ad alcuna altra persona debile.

He goes on to say that the ancients denounced their wives, but this being no longer possible the offended husband should have the law deprive his wife of her dowry and send her back to her parents. Should the husband put her to death, he himself would lose all honor. He should challenge the lover, but if the latter confesses that he has done wrong because of love, some compassion should be shown him. If such a disgrace falls upon a son through a father or mother and becomes public, he may not kill them, but he must show that he disapproves.7 The rest of the treatise is taken up with a defense of the duel.

Susio published a refutation of Possevini's ideas, entitled *Della Ingiustizia del Duello*, in which he agrees with Possevini that honor is acquired by living in accordance with the law and virtù; but he claims that the duel cannot restore honor, and since the punishment of an erring wife by law is sufficient for the husband's honor, so the lover, who has offended him less, should not be challenged but should be punished also by the magistrate. Thus Susio is even farther from the idea of Spanish honor than Possevini.

Muzio follows the same line of thought in *Il Gentiluomo*. The sentiment *La virtù e il fondamento della nobiltà* recalls the eighth satire of Juvenal, in which he says: *Nobilitas sola est atque unica virtus*. In his book on *Il Duello* he states that in the case of adultery the husband should challenge the offender not so much to vindicate himself as to avenge the marriage bond.

The *Dialogo de vero honore* by Urrea proves that honor depends on virtù, and since no one can deprive another of virtù so no one need fear dishonor except by throwing away virtù. One is honored when he is virtuoso, giusto, ben creato, verace, liberale, honesto, modesto, forte. In regard to woman he says she can honor her husband by loving him, serving him, keeping her faith and promises to him, and she can dishonor him by doing the contrary. The greatest shame a man can undergo is the adultery of his wife, for the wife dishonors herself and him at the same time. He should not kill her, for she is defenceless, and because in doing so in a rage he might be mistaken. He should send her to her father, or, if she has no father, to a nunnery. It will redound more to his honor if he controls his anger and does not kill her paramour, but gives him up to justice.

Camerata departs even more widely from the idea of an intangible honor and defines it as *un segno della virtù fatto del conosciuto d'essa per manifestarlo*. This sign can be made with

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*Susio, Della Ingiustizia del Duello, Venezia, 1555.
*Muzio, Il Duello, Venezia, 1576, p. 35.
*Urrea, *Dialogo de vero honore*, 1569. This is a translation by Ulloa of the *Dialogo de la verdadera honra*... published at Venice in 1566. The latter book is entirely Italian in spirit, although written in Spanish.
*Camerata, Trattato dell' Honore, 1558.*
Honor in the Spanish Drama

voice, as in orations, titles, salutations; with actions, as rising to one's feet, bowing etc.; with works, as poems, books, crowns! In fact any form of praise brings honor.

A still more curious book setting forth the views of the Italian philosophers is Modio's Il Convito: Dove ragionando si conclude che non può la Donna dishonestà far vergogna a l'Uomo (1554). The proof of this interesting thesis rests upon the assertion that honor and dishonor depend on the will, and while the unchaste woman may be the cause of her own great shame, yet, since the woman used her free will, no blame falls upon the male relatives. Modio also insists that it is worse to shed blood and break the laws in punishing her, than to have an unchaste wife.

It is significant that when the same question is discussed by a Spanish contemporary the opposite conclusion is reached. Torquemada, in his Colloquios Satíricos (1553), shows a knowledge of the Italian view-point as set forth in the treatises when he says of honor: Según el filósofo, no es otra cosa sino premio de la virtud. All interlocutors admit that one should have more obligation to faith than to honor, and that humility is the foundation of faith, hence honor is a vana et soberbia presuncion. In regard to the treatment of a fallen woman, a new argument is put forth as to why she ought not to be judged too harshly.

Absolvió Christo a la mujer adúltera, y parece que por este exemplo ninguno pueda justamente condenarla, pero los maridos que hallan sus mujeres en adulterio, y muchas veces por sola sospecha, no les perdonan la vida.

Such an argument did not occur to the Italian philosophers, soaked with pseudo-Aristotelian learning and reasoning. The passage contains another proof that wives merely suspected of wrongdoing were put to death. When the question is raised why the laws permit this, Antonio, the chief speaker, explains that the laws permit the husband to do what he wishes. If he desires to kill his wife, he may do it without harm to himself; but in so doing he sins mortally. Yet this is permitted in order to prevent the crime becoming more common. Thus even Antonio almost admits the right of the husband. The dialogue continues, after this one passage, to set

14 Published by Menéndez y Pelayo, Orígenes de la Novela, vol. 2; pp. 531-548; Nueva Biblioteca de Autores españoles, vol. 7.
forth ideals of honor which have a strong Italian stamp. True
honor is said to be gained by good and virtuous works; but the
honor which is really sought is that gained by depravity and money.
In the final speech of the first part, however, Antonio admits that
his ideas are not those which are in vogue.

Although the philosophers conclude that it is dishonorable to
put a woman to death for such reasons, yet this mode of punish-
ment existed not only in Spain but in Italy in the sixteenth century,
perhaps through the influence of the Spanish. Bandello gives
evidence that this was the case in his ninth novella.

E quantunque i padri, i fratelli e i mariti molte di loro (per
levarsi dagli occhi il manifesto vituperio che rende loro la malvagia
vita della figliuole, sorelle e moglie) con veleno, con ferro e con
altri mezzi facciano morire; non vesta per questo che molte di loro,
sprezzata la vita che naturalmente a tutti è così cara, e sprezzato
l'onore che tanto si dovrebbe stimare, non si lascino dagli sfrenati
appetiti trasportare in qualche fallo.

Also in his twenty-sixth novella he says one hears that il tale ha
mortì la moglie, perché dubitava che non lo facesse vicario di
Corneto. That such events were taking place is also proved by
the history of the times. Official reports of murders read: Per omicidio
d'una sorella per causa d'onore. The wife of the Duke of Brac-
ciano, having been suspected of adultery, was killed by her husband
in 1567. The deed had the entire approval of her brothers.

The jealous and suspicious character of the Italian was recog-
nized by Geffraie Fenton as early as 1567. He says in comparing
the Frenchman to the Italian, that the former is not "so suspicious
and cruel, and apte to synister conceits without juste cause, and
who can not breake the instinct whiche nature hath given him, not
only to doubt the honestie of his wife be she ever so virtuous, but
also to keep her so short with straight imprisonmet that she shall
neither be suffered to visit her frendes abroade nor admitt any
accesse at home." It is striking that these characteristics, applied

12 See Burkhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, London, 1893,
p. 444.
14 Ibid., p. 279. See also p. 295.
15 Certain Tragical Discourses of Bandello, translated into English by Geffraie
Fenton, 1567, no. 11.
Honor in the Spanish Drama

to the Italian in 1567, fit exactly so many of Lope's and Calderón's heroes whose ideas of honor and domestic relations we are studying.

Thus there are two ideals of honor in Italy during the latter half of the sixteenth century. One is discoursed upon by the philosophers. It is a mingling of the desire for praise, fame and public distinction with the reputation for virtù—the word to conjure by in Italy. This honor is acquired. But there is also in real life an honor which resembles the Calderonian honor in all its suspicion and cruelty. Where, however, does this latter ideal exist in Italian literature? Were its problems set forth in Italy before the Spanish dramatists recognized it in a wonderful source of dramatic material? Naturally, one turns to the Italian novelists, from whom the writers of plays both in England and Spain drew so much of their inspiration; but an examination of these works does not reveal any elements of honor which may be branded as strictly Calderonian. Honor is generally laughed at. The marriage vow is not taken seriously. If the unfaithful wife is killed, the husband does the deed in a spirit of vengeance and rage. On the other hand, calmness in washing out the stain on one's honor is one of the striking characteristics of the Spanish husband, at least in the drama. He does not fly into an ungovernable passion, but laments the inexorable law. He reasons out his course of action.10

Another bit of evidence that such ideas of honor existed in Italy and were being disseminated from that country before the Spanish drama brings them to light, is found in Regnier's sixth satire, which has for its source two capitoli of Mauro entitled: In Dishonore dell' honore and Del Dishonore. These lines were published in 1668.

Je bannirois l'honneur, ce monstre abominable,
Qui nous trouble l'esprit, et nous charme si bien, ...
Que sans lui les humains icy ne voyent rien;
Qui trahit la nature, et qui rend imparfaite
Toute chose qu'au goust le délices ont faite.

qui veut faire entendre en ses vaines chimères,
Que pour ce qu'il nous touche, il se perd, si nos mères,
Nos femmes, et nos soeurs, font leurs maris jaloux:
Comme si leurs désirs dépendissent de nous.

Even earlier than this satire is Garnier's Bradamante, the plot of which turns on the point of honor and is drawn from an Italian source. I hope to take up in the near future the question of the influence of Italy in this regard on both French and English drama, and to publish some data on the subject.
Before attempting to give the final solution of the problem, let us trace as accurately as possible the treatment of the honor ideal in Spanish drama from the Celestina onward. In this so-called comedy honor is mentioned as the best of worldly goods and as the premio e galardon de la virtud.29 The idea of the honor of the father depending on that of his daughter is shown by Melibea, when she says

... perder y destruir la casa y honra de mi padre ... 21

As for her own honor Melibea exclaims ... nombrarme ese tu cavallero que conmigo se atrevido a hablar, e tambien en pedirme palabra sin mas causa, que no se podia sospechar sino daño para mi honra.22

Calisto is none the less tragic over the fact that his dishonor is likely to become public through the killing of his servants.

O amenguado Calisto! deshonrado quedras para toda tu vida. ... Pues yo bien siento mi honra. Pluguiera a Dios que fuera yo ellos, e perdiera la vida e no la honra ... O mi triste nombre y fama, como andas al tablero de boca en boca.23

It is true that the conception of honor as set forth in this play cannot be considered as chivalresque; but the scheme of Spanish honor as set forth by Lope and Calderon cannot be derived from this one play, although the Celestina had a wide influence in Italy and Spain in regard to the central character. Yet Ticknor claims that this comedy "produced little or no immediate effect on the rude beginnings of Spanish drama." 24

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(To be continued)

20 Comedia de Calisto e Melibea, published by Fouche-Delbose, Madrid. 1900, Act ii.
21 Ibid., Act iv.
22 Ibid., Act iv.
23 Ibid., Act xiii.