

RADCLIFFE-BROWN LECTURE IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

# Honour

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## Origins of Honour

THE WORD 'HONOUR' ORIGINATES from the Latin *honus*, the name of a god of war who endowed soldiers with the courage they needed in order to fight. Later, his name came to signify the gift of lands which had been earned by the victory or any other recompense given to those who had shown the quality of courage in battle which they owed to this bellicose divinity. From this basis the word extended the fan of its meanings in many directions: even as far as theology, or the 'honouring' of cheques or, in England, the Christian name for a girl.

The extension of its meanings has varied according to the uses made of the concept. It originated in a military society, but it found fresh applications as it elaborated its nature, soon becoming a mode of address and the title of a judge, for honour is a value which expresses a moral ideal, as well as a label for behaviour, and a social rank. As a moral value everyone would like to claim it and quite a lot of people are only too happy to criticise their neighbours for the lack of it. Hence it became grounds for discussion when individuals disputed the claims for its attribution or its loss. Thus a kind of social jurisprudence was developed around the subject, for example, in sixteenth-century Italy, where a notable work was published—*Il Libro del Cortegiano* (The

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Book of the Courtier) by Baldassar Castiglione (Castiglione (1987) [1528]).

The criteria of honour vary not only according to the country and therefore the society and the culture, but according to the social status of the individuals concerned. To begin with, the honour of a man is not at all the same as that of a woman. It is true that there are certain fields of honour which apply equally to both sexes without any distinction: general moral obligations, financial or intellectual, honour in friendship, honour of one's word (*palabra de Inglés*, 'an Englishman's word', used to be said in Andalusia to mean 'word of honour'). A lie is a lie whether told by a man or by a woman, but the obligation to tell the truth is not the same under all the circumstances.

The 'honour of the family' is the same for both sexes, though the different sexes contribute to it in different ways. Honour depends also upon age. The honour of a young man is not the same as that of an old man, because the two are not expected to have the same physical force (honour, to be defended, requires, under certain circumstances, 'courage', which demands self-confidence in one's ability to fight, which can hardly be expected of the over-eighties.

### Collective Honour

Quite apart from these practical disabilities, however, there is a functional distinction according to sex. In Europe 'family honour' derives mainly from descent, that is to say from antecedents of both sexes, but in patrilineal societies, priority is given to the male line and descent from a female line is generally invoked, rather as a supplement to descent through the father, than as having much value in itself, unless the descent through the mother happens to be considered socially superior (Pitt-Rivers 1954).<sup>1</sup>

Honour is, above all, a sentiment felt by the individual, it has been said, but it is often at the same time 'collective' in that it is shared by others, in the first instance by kinsmen as in family or lineage honour. In fact any social unit whose members recognise a common identity is likely to share a collective honour and a certain shared responsibility for it.

<sup>1</sup> These observations come from my own field notebook over the period of four years (1949–53) in Andalusia (with a concentration on the area of Ronda, especially Grazalema).

The honour of a family is one, but it is contributed to by members of both sexes whose individual honour is judged by criteria which are necessarily different—a conduct that is dishonourable for a woman is not so for a man, and vice versa. For a young man to show or imply that he is amenable to sexual relations with a specific girl does not dishonour him. For a girl the equivalent expression of such a desire does. For the same young man, to show that he is not prepared to fight to defend the girl from physical assault, dishonours him completely. To demonstrate the virtues proper to the other sex is not normally honourable. Hence the stigma attaching to homosexuality.

Courage is not expected, either from old men or from women. On the other hand, sexual purity is valued in women rather than in men and much more in the countries of the Mediterranean than in the north of Europe. This difference in the moral division of labour is clearly marked, and worthy of more attention than it has had.

To give an illustration, we may take Sicily as analysed by Maria Pia Di Bella (Di Bella 1992: 151–65; Pitt-Rivers 1992: 341 *et seq.*): masculine honour is referred to as the ‘name’ of the family: it is evaluated as the social status of the origins of the family, and to this is added the contemporary reputation of the menfolk. This is the masculine contribution to the family honour, while the feminine contribution (mainly more often negative than positive) is called the ‘blood’ and it depends upon the sexual purity of the women, such, at least, as it is known or imagined to be. Yet these same families, who have a different honour for each sex, have a common ‘family honour’, compounded of the two, for they all have the same ‘name’ and the same blood, and as Maria Pia Di Bella explains, it is the women of the family who exhort their men to fight to defend the family reputation, or to avenge it.

In Spain the identity of every person includes his place of birth, and this is entered in the municipal register. This is not just a bureaucratic means of identifying the population, but an internalised part of the personality of each member of the community, and, were he to move his place of residence, he would surely have, as his nickname, a reference to his place of birth. Thus, if he comes from another nearby *pueblo*, let us say, Ronda, he would be called *el Rondeño*—from further afield, by the name of his province, i.e. if he is from the province of Malaga *el Malagueño*, if from Cataluña, *el Catalán*. A man from Grazalema who goes elsewhere becomes *el de Grazalema* or *el Grazalemeño*, if he goes to another province *el Gaditano*, i.e. from the province of Cadiz. If he goes to the other end of Spain *el Andaluz*

and this would be obvious to anyone by his andalusian accent. Of course, in Grazalema, I was *el Inglés*, though not to my face, since nicknames are never mentioned to their owners neither in their presence nor in that of a member of their family (which is just as well, since some are not very complimentary, and some frankly insulting). One dark night, on my way home to the farmhouse in la Ribera de Gaidovar where I lived, I was challenged to say who I was and I answered *el Inglés* whereupon I received a lecture to the effect that this was very incorrect of me because nicknames are not mentioned in the presence of their owners, and least of all by the person whose nickname it is.

Therefore, one shares a common identity with all those who are born in the same place, and it is inevitable that one should be conscious of sharing a collective honour. This common identity, however, is not all a joy, for the collective nicknames are also vehicles for injurious rhymes and sayings by those of the other *pueblos* of which I gave quite a few examples in my monograph on Grazalema (Pitt-Rivers 1954: 33). They are usually critical, if not insulting, and, if collective honour would lead only to listening to collective insults, it would risk causing a lot of trouble. But people are careful not to quote such a rhyme in the presence of one whom it might offend. A Spanish dictum defines the sources of honour: 'I owe my body to my king' (i.e. to fight for him), 'my soul to my God' (because He endowed me with it, and I hope it will return to Him), 'but my honour only to myself', a pretension which is firmly contradicted by the existence of a collective honour in which the rest of my family or whatever other collectivity such as my *pueblo* participates.

### Honour and Marriage

Moreover, while this dictum encouraged the theologians to claim that honour has its source in the religious conscience, it was a point of view which was popular with churchmen but not usually shared by the aristocracy. As we shall see, a more commonly expressed attitude among the nobility is found in the words of the hero of Tirso de Molina's play, *La Villana de Vallecas* (Tirso de Molina 1952: 792):

My honour which I inherited from my father  
The best of patrimonies  
Which in Valencia was a mirror  
Of nobility and valour.

Yet neither in the dictum nor in the play is there any mention of the role of his mother in the origins of his honour. If the transmission of hereditary honour comes via the patriline, the legitimacy of identity comes from the mother. Therefore the most dishonouring insult in popular society is to question the morality of a person's mother.

Hence the ethical aspect of the family honour is, in popular cultures in the Mediterranean and elsewhere, predominantly matrilineal and, consequently, the worst insult that can be pronounced of anyone concerns not his own behaviour, but his mother's. To be *sin verguenza* (shameless), i.e. without honour, is to have been born without it, because one's mother had none. Honour in this sense has nothing to do with patrilineal honour as social status, but as ethical honour it is matrilineal. Honour in the sense of social status is patrilineal. Aristocratic titles are passed from father to eldest son, though in Spain, in default of a son they pass through the daughter, and if she marries, her husband assumes the title as well and thereafter it goes to the eldest child. Consequently the noble Spanish families change their surname as often as the title goes through a woman.<sup>2</sup> For this reason the honour of a man in the Mediterranean area depends upon the virtue of his woman and this means that, if you wish to bring total dishonour upon a man, you attack not the mores of the man himself but his mother's, for the lack of sexual purity casts doubt upon the value of his patrilinearity. Since noble patrilineal birth, titled or not, is the seal of honour, then the purity of one's mother is the guarantee of one's honour. Hence the destruction of the honour of a man is centred upon the reputation of his mother. If we examine the terminology of dishonour we find nothing but the implication of illegitimacy, of the absence of an identity that can give the person under examination the right to be somebody, regardless of the lack of social distinction of his father. By a subtle but generous

<sup>2</sup> A law was passed by the Spanish Parliament at the beginning of the first Socialist government in the early 1980s to the effect that since the equality of the sexes was incorporated into the constitution, an elder child should inherit a title in preference to a younger, regardless of their sex. A lot of noble sons with elder sisters saw their hopes of the family title being dashed in favour of their elder sister (and, of course, her spouse or future spouse), since when a daughter inherits a title in Spain her consort receives it also and in due course their children, with the exception of *titulos de varonnie* which are limited to being occupied uniquely by men. The king gave support to this law. This was understandable when one considers that the majority of the nobility were *Tejeristas*, that is to say, sympathisers with Lieutenant-Colonel Tejero of the *Guardia Civil* who, on 23 February 1981, occupied the Parliament in an attempted *coup d'état* in order to reintroduce Fascism. The King, as commander-in-chief of the Army, outwitted Tejero, by preventing the Army from supporting him.

**Figure 1.** A modern illustration of Adam and Eve fabricated in Germany, purchased in Paris.

instinct the British monarchy lends its name to all those children who can lay no claim to any other but that of the family of the house of Windsor, the royal family.

Ethical standards expected of women are higher than those required of men, to whom much can be forgiven on account of their obligation to defend and to feed the family and their frailty in the face of feminine charm—after all, it was Eve who produced the apple or, if one prefers another interpretation, Adam, the cad, who had her pinch it, to give to him,<sup>3</sup> and has blamed her ever since—this at least is an attitude commonly encountered in the Christian Mediterranean. *Los hombres son todos sin vergüenza* (all men are shameless) is sometimes heard from female lips in Andalusia.

This makes it possible to explain a variant of a Spanish insult utilised in Mexico which is not easily understood by Europeans, not even by Spaniards and it is as well that all should be warned: if, in a popular tavern, you hear an angry voice pronounce ‘I am your father’, do not wait to witness the family reunion, but get under the table quickly because the bullets are going to fly, for this is the crudest provocation that can be issued in Mexico. It is a variant of the Spanish ‘son of a whore’, but it is ‘son of *la chingada*’, that is to say ‘son of the violated one’. Whereas the Spaniards attribute total dishonour to the lack of paternity through the scandalous conduct of the mother, the Mexican, sons of the Conquest, see it as the result of the violation of the mother by a descendant of a conqueror. The shameless one’s mother has had no chance to prove her virtue: she was raped and to confirm this lack of a legitimate paternity, his aggressor is claiming to know, because he asserts ‘it was I who raped your mother’. The only possible answer to such an insult is clearly patricide: hence my advice to the bystander to get under the table as briskly as possible.<sup>4</sup>

Honour everywhere in the world is not only a question of sentiments and reputations but of the structure of society. This is, thus, fundamental

<sup>3</sup> Quite a few pictures of the original couple show Adam with the apple in his hand which he has evidently received or which he is receiving from Eve. Cf. Rubens and Bruegel, *The Earthly Paradise*, Mauritshuis, The Hague; Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Adam and Eve*, and Albertinelli ‘*The Creation and Fall*’, respectively of the Lee and Gambier-Parry collections, Courtauld Institute Galleries, London. Even modern naïve illustrations of this passage of the Book of Genesis stick to those of centuries ago.

<sup>4</sup> I have been asked, not without a hint of surprise, whether I have ever heard the challenge via the claim to paternity used, and I have to admit that I have heard it used but only in the absence of the would-be father on the part of the maligned one. It was a soliloquy to let off steam, so to speak. This made it unnecessary for us to get under the tables.

to the systems of marriage alliance as it is found among the peoples of the Mediterranean, and as indeed it must be, given the importance of the transmission of honour from the parents (Lévi-Strauss, c.1949: 52–65, 172–215; Peristiany 1976). Anthropologists seem to be agreed with Lévi-Strauss that endogamy reigns over this region, though it is not clear to me that they mean any more than that there are no *systèmes élémentaires* of kinship to be found there.

One must, however, distinguish at least between kinship endogamy and community endogamy, that is to say intermarriage between kin and intermarriage between neighbours (members of the same *pueblo*).

Kinship endogamy dominates the Islamic world and is very visible in the preference for marriages with the father's brother's daughter, the *bint el 'amm*. This preference is very evident in the high frequency of such appellations, as the late Emrys Peters, who studied no less than four different Islamic societies in the Mediterranean, pointed out. (Peters 1963: 1976). However, a careful calculation by John Peristiany, transmitted to me verbally at the time, showed that the number of possible father's brother's daughters available for demographic reasons, and neither too old nor too undesirable, was limited. So though this is a very prestigious marriage to make, nevertheless, it appears that it is understandably not a very popular one among the young today.

It is normal for the young bridegroom to address his father-in-law as *'amm* (father's brother), whether he is literally his father's brother or not. It is possible therefore that the statistics which failed to convince both Emrys Peters and John Peristiany were due to confusion caused by this usage of the courtesy title which was mistaken for a kin relationship. In fact throughout Islam the title of *'amm* is normally used by a younger man to address any older man to whom he wishes to show respect, and this is a common custom which has not diminished in modern times (Gélard, 1996).

None the less, it is to be noted that the preference for marriage within the patriline is a general tendency throughout Islamic society. There is also sometimes a certain Jewish preference for kinship endogamy. But such endogamy contrasts with Christians, who are forbidden to marry their close kin, making no distinction between patrilineal and matrilineal kin, but measuring kinship in degrees regardless of the lineage. The Greek Church requires the authorisation of the bishop in order to marry closer kin than of the seventh degree. Catholics require the bishop's authorisation for marriage with a first cousin and it can even on occasions be given to authorise marriage with a niece. The

doctor of Grazalema while I lived there was married to his niece. The different churches of the Middle East all have slightly different rules, so one can only speak in general of tendencies to endogamy and prohibited degrees. The Maronites often choose to marry their father's brother's daughter and this they call 'an Islamic marriage'.

Community endogamy is inspired by rather different motivations. There is no preference in favour of marrying a cousin, quite the contrary. Consequently, it is precisely the marriage which is preferential in Islamic society that is potentially prohibited among Christians. As to the prohibition to marry outside the community, it was not stipulated by any rule other than the recommendation of popular wisdom which was traditionally expressed, for example, in Brittany and equally in the Basque country as *se marier dans la coiffe*, that is to say, to marry a girl who wore the same traditional head-dress of lace as one's mother. This was reinforced in Spain by the fact that sanctions were applied against boys who came from another *pueblo* to court a local girl. Moreover, a popular rhyme warned young men against seeking a bride in another *pueblo*: 'He who goes to seek a bride from outside is going to be deceived—or to deceive'.

In a *pueblo* in Andalusia or Castille such an outsider would be chased away with a shower of stones and, if the intruder persisted in his courting, in spite of this ill-treatment, he would be captured and ducked in the fountain of the *pueblo* until almost drowned. After that he was freed to continue his suit without hindrance, for having been baptised in the 'holy' water of the fountain of the *pueblo* he became an honorary member of the community (provided the girl's family made no objection). The ducking in the water of the *pueblo* was a ritual of some symbolic significance, for every *pueblo* believes that its own water is the purest in the world. I have never been in a *pueblo* where this was not the case and none was ever so brackish or salty that it was not asserted to be so by the locals. And the same is true in Castile, as Susan Tax Freeman's lengthy bibliography on Castile shows (Freeman 1970).

It is evident that the sentiment of the collective honour of the *pueblo* or the lineage is the basis of the traditional rules of endogamy in the Mediterranean, whether it is endogamy of kinship or of community. But it seems to have diminished in the last thirty years in Andalusia and perhaps further afield as well.

If the basis of the 'elementary systems of kinship' is the exchange of women, complex systems rest upon the refusal to exchange them. In

order that a people should wish to exchange their womenfolk they must conceive of them all as humanly equal or at least equivalent. But when a society is hierarchised this ceases to be the case: one hopes to conserve the same breed and the conception of marriage changes; women become in the expression of Lévi-Strauss *les opérateurs du pouvoir* (persons through whom power is manipulated). Consequently, one no longer wants to give one's women away, save in order to establish a favourable alliance. To give one's daughters away badly puts the collective honour in jeopardy. The monarchs of Europe seldom gave away a daughter without a calculated political motive.

There are, then, two possible matrimonial strategies: the defensive and the aggressive. The 'defensive' consists of keeping one's daughters 'on the home-ground', as it were, marrying them to a cousin or to an ally or a subordinate of their father. The 'aggressive' consists of giving a daughter away to a powerful neighbour or of marrying a son to the daughter of such a person and establishing thus an alliance with a previously unallied family. King Solomon is the perfect illustration of both strategies: he married his daughters to his generals or to their cousins, but he himself married women who brought him an extension to his political power or wealth, of whom the most impressive were the daughter of the Pharaoh of Egypt and the Queen of Sheba herself, from both of whom he gained considerable material or strategic advantages.

### The Duel

It is often the case that one can best discover the essence of a concept by examining its negative form. Hence in order to understand the essence of honour one might do well to examine how dishonour is earned. There are obvious ways of incurring it: by demonstrating cowardice on the battle-field or by being accused of lying (for courage and truthfulness were the absolute requirements of nobility in the Middle Ages). Such dishonourable behaviour is likely to cause criticism and accusations to that effect. The man who wishes to defend his honour is likely to reply by denying them and to end up by issuing a challenge to a duel.

In medieval Europe the institution of the 'judicial combat' allowed members of the nobility to settle a difference with regard to a question of honour by fighting a duel which had to be authorised by the King. This ordeal was based on the supposition that God would judge and would ensure that victory should go to the righteous. The challenge to

such a duel was called the *mentis* (i.e. the accusation of being a liar). Such a formula was conserved in the challenge to a duel long after the judicial combat had been abolished in French law by Louis IX ('Saint Louis'). Philippe Le Bel, grandson of Saint Louis, reinstated the judicial combat and, though it was subsequently abolished once more three centuries later when the Council of Trent (1545–63) forbade it, and though all forms of duelling were forbidden and punished savagely by Louis XIV (you could be condemned to the galleys even for being no more than a witness to a duel), the duel continued to be practised illegally (Thimm 1896; Billacois 1986).

Therefore it was in accordance with the rules conserved by custom for the simple reason only that gentlemen who considered that their honour had been blemished insisted on defending it at the risk of their life or of some most severe punishment. Indeed, it was not unknown for seconds also to be expected to fight, with the number of seconds limited to the same for each combatant, so that all participated, the duel ultimately resembling a battle between two armies.

The last judicial combat authorised by the King of France took place in 1547 and is commemorated by the name of the victor, Jarnac, who won against all the odds and a far superior opponent by a cunning, but perfectly legitimate, if unexpected ploy (Tricaud 1982). To win by a *coup de Jarnac* is today an expression still in common usage in France and it means to win by cunning rather than by superiority or strength.

Following the duel of Jarnac, King Henri II abolished the judicial combat as a legal measure requiring the royal assent and made the duel a crime. Far from putting an end to this custom it is precisely from this period, the mid-sixteenth century, that the number of duels increased in France, despite their illegality. During the seventeenth century which, it will be recalled, was a period of civil war between Protestants and Catholics in France, the number of duellists killed increased as did the treatises by lawyers and clerics condemning the practice.

Whether or not to allow duels to take place was discussed down the centuries and in general the state everywhere disliked to take the responsibility for allowing it, while at the same time showing itself unwilling to take action against those who violated the law by conforming to the custom whereby honour could be validated upon the field, that is to say, in a duel.

From then onward the duel flourished throughout Europe and, prior to the War of Secession, in the southern states of the United States where the aristocracy, the slave-owners, had a prickly sense of honour.

Unlike continental Europe, where feminine honour rarely extended to include such masculine practices, we have rich record of duels between women in Charleston (Thimm 1896).

In France, the duel continued to offer the solution to gentlemen whose honour had, they thought, been offended. Though not legal, it was not pursued by the law, on condition that nobody was killed, though even if somebody was killed it was sometimes recorded as 'killed by accident'. To fight a duel was accepted as a legitimate form of behaviour, particularly on the part of military men. In fact, in 1897 an officer of the French Army was revoked by the Minister of War for bringing a legal case against a man who had slandered him when, in the minister's opinion, he should have challenged his slanderer to a duel, i.e. he should have violated the law (Fabre-Luce 1974: 308). It was also during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century that Clemenceau fought a great number of duels, the first of which he won against a French officer who had, he thought, insulted him during a war trial following the Commune, but which caused him to be condemned to two weeks in prison. Others of his duels, all provoked by himself, included among his opponents the famous nationalist poet Paul Déroulède and the future president of the Republic, Paul Deschanel (Duroselle 1988: 423 *et seq.*).

In England the duel does not appear to have been pursued by the law very often. The system seems to have been somewhat similar in operation to that pursued in France. It was perhaps understandable that there should be no further action in the case of Lord Camelford, for he was notoriously quarrelsome; the *Dictionary of National Biography* records that he 'was killed in a duel wantonly provoked of one Mr Best, a noted pistol-shot' (Tolstoy 1978). The case fitted David Hume's complaint that one could risk in a duel one's life on account of some 'small indecency'. Perhaps Queen Victoria's disapproval of the duel, however, did more to make it unfashionable than either Hume's commentary or even Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode*.<sup>5</sup> Loss of honour through cuckoldry had become less frequent than accusations of cheating at cards.

<sup>5</sup> London, National Gallery. A series of pictures representing the misfortunes of contemporary marriage in the mid-eighteenth century which shows the lover escaping out of the wife's window or killing the husband, or being killed by him.

## Honour in Literature

Honour has received ample attention in literature. In the seventeenth century, the Spanish 'theatre of honour' examined the problems presented by situations involving honour, such as: How to conceal your dishonour until you can avenge it? How to evade the situations when it is a royal prince who has seduced your wife (therefore you cannot do anything about it)? One of the plays of Lope de Vega,<sup>6</sup> *El mayor imposible*, suggests that it is a better solution to trust your wife's fidelity than to put her under lock and key with a broken leg—which is what a popular dictum recommended: *la mujer honrada con la pierna quebrada y la puerta cerrada* (the honourable wife with a broken leg and the door locked).

Shakespeare was not the only critic when Falstaff said that honour was nothing but wind, for already before him, the first picaresque novel in Spanish literature *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormés* (1554) explains that it is better to worry about getting enough to eat than about your honour. Lazarillo goes through a series of masters, starting with an indigent knight who sends him out to beg because he is penniless and then eats what Lazarillo has managed to collect for himself, and ending with a priest who sets him up in perfect felicity, married to the priest's mistress and eating to his full fill every day of the week.

From the end of the nineteenth century the theme of honour seems to be taken less and less seriously. Thus when in the 1930s the French playwright, Henri Bernstein<sup>7</sup> challenged the playwright and administrator of the *Comédie Française*, Edouard Bourdet, to a duel (because the latter had removed Bernstein's plays from the company's repertoire), quite apart from their *honneur blanchi*, both combatants were delighted with the publicity they were receiving from *Paris-Soir*. The first blood was drawn from the forearm of Bourdet by the author Bernstein, despite his seventy years of age and Bourdet's reputation as a duellist.

Another theatrical author to make fun of honour was Anouilh who, in *Ardèle ou la Marguerite*, presents a good bourgeois family gathered together for a reunion in their *château* where they are all lodged with

<sup>6</sup> Lope de Vega (1562–1635): Spanish poet and novelist; best-known playwright of the 'theatre of honour'; author of some 500 plays.

<sup>7</sup> Henri Bernstein (1876–1953): author of *Le Secret* (1913), a play which among others made him famous; known for his pride, he fought no less than twelve duels in his life.

the exception of the daughter's lover, who has to stay in the local hotel 'for the sake of appearances'. The jealous lover accuses her husband of seducing his own wife and ends by challenging the husband to a duel. The husband answers the challenge saying, 'If you really insist, we can find a quiet corner and try to puncture each other's forearms'.

In brief, honour as it was in former times, had become a subject of parody for the sophisticated, but that does not mean that it no longer existed at a more popular level. In 'street-corner society' its principles still function, as we can see in the following anecdote from London: a barrow-boy standing on the back of a bus gets his foot trampled on by a clumsy new passenger who has just got on. He says nothing, but as he gets off he catches the clumsy passenger a very sharp one on the shins. His honour is revealed to have been offended only by the gesture which avenges it. This is the conduct recommended by one of the plays of 'the theatre of honour' which shows how to conceal your dishonour until the moment when you can repair it. If the barrow-boy had had a coat of arms and a motto, this should surely have been '*Nemo me impune lacessit*'<sup>8</sup> which translated from Latin into modern very colloquial English might be given as 'Don't think you can pull a fast one on me and get away with it'.

The universality of honour is implied by this example, but others can equally be found and it is essential to recognise that the concept of honour can possess a multiplicity of meanings which can provide endless fuel for disputes and not only among anthropologists. Perhaps more interesting were those which separated the Church and the nobility of Spain in the seventeenth century.

Let us take, once more, as another illustration, a play of Tirso de Molina which was written in 1630, *Burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (The Mocker of Seville and His Stone Guest) on which more than a century later Mozart and Da Ponte composed the opera *Don Giovanni*. Unknown to the great majority of those who have seen either the play or the opera, it was in origin a major contribution to the polemic of the Church against the nobility—a fact which becomes more understandable when one considers that Tirso de Molina was, himself, a priest, like most of the other authors of the 'theatre of honour', and also that the phallogocratic values of the nobility in those days tended to assume that their rank entitled them to the favours of any

<sup>8</sup> A popular motto of quite a few noble families of England and the device of the crown of Scotland.

pretty girl they fancied. Thus the deplorable verse of the Conde de Villamediana, a Spanish poet of the seventeenth century (who this time was not a priest):

Tendran los que pobres son  
 La ventura del cabrito  
 O morir cuando chiquito  
 O llegar a ser cabrón

(Those who are poor  
 Have the same fate as the kid  
 Either to die young  
 Or to grow up to be a cuckold)

### The Cuckoo and the Horns

If, as we saw, the sexual purity of women was so highly valued in the Mediterranean countries, it was evidently in order to ensure the descent of legitimately conceived children. This is amply illustrated by the vocabulary of indecent insults: ‘bastard’ ‘son of a whore’, etc., and all those that amount to the same. The deceived husband is the ‘cuckold’ in English, a word which derives from an ornithological image. The ‘cuckoo’, the bird which lays its egg in another bird’s nest, leaving the other bird to raise the baby cuckoo. The image is most graphic. But let’s get at least our ornithology straight, if nothing else.

The cuckoo hen lays her egg somewhere else and plants it in the mother thrush’s nest when the right time comes (thrushes can’t count up to more than five) so the egg is slipped in later, and the mother thrush does not recognise the fraud. The baby cuckoo grows faster than the baby thrushes and as it grows, it pushes them all out of the nest and remains the only heir to the thrush family: the most efficient confidence trick in Nature. The analogy is obvious.

But where the anthropologists get interested, is that the cuckold is not the cuckoo, but the unfortunate thrush who has been ‘conned’ into raising a baby cuckoo, instead of a family of thrushes. It is not the ‘guilty party’ but his victim, who is the cuckold.

Now, the Mediterraneans do not use the ornithological image but instead go on goats and their horns. To be a billy-goat is to be a cuckold, and the horns are the symbol of dishonour. Hence the Spanish term *cabrón* is a grave insult and this imagery is known in England or at least was known in the seventeenth century. Shakespeare knew it and

probably quite a few modern British tourists do today too. But the horns are also the horns of the Devil, in the Christian interpretation, while in the pagan tradition they are the symbol of Pan, the deity of Nature. That the adulterer should be represented by the God of Nature is surely appropriate, but the same transfer is once more imposed. The horns are the symbol, not of the person whose taste for 'natural' activity has caused the marital infidelity, but of the lack of it, which appears to have been the cause of the wife's dissatisfaction with her husband. It is the *latter* who wears the horns, the symbol of the sexual enthusiasm which he lacks. This apparent contradiction can perhaps be given an explanation: one must not expect Culture to obey the rules of moral justice and the principles of Blackstone. It has other preoccupations concerned with the fate of the reproduction of society as a whole.

To find an appropriate analogy in anthropology we might refer to Evans-Pritchard's description of adultery among the Nuer of East Africa which creates a state of pollution, but 'it is not the adulterer but the injured husband who is likely to be sick'. A parallel also can be found in the first fruit ritual in South Africa: if the chief's right to the first fruit is violated, it is not the violator who is smitten by disease (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 189; Gluckman 1954: 12). In the same spirit the cuckold is responsible for satisfying his wife and if he has not done so, it is for Nature to set things right. She takes priority over Blackstone.

*Cabrón*, or billy-goat, is also used as a general invective for anybody of whom the speaker disapproves. Curiously enough, the only persons who do not use this word are the shepherds of their herd, they make the sign to repel the evil eye, the closed fist with index and little finger stretched out, like two horns. They themselves refer to the billy-goat of the herd as *el cabrito*, the 'kid', the diminutive form.

The word *cabrón* itself was not much used in the *vitos*,<sup>9</sup> the public mockings at night, when I witnessed them in Grazalema. In origin, in the nineteenth century, the *vito* was used to celebrate the remarriage of a widow. To remarry a widow is somehow to be not the first husband of the lady and therefore, as it were, a retrospective cuckold which perhaps explains the institution as well as its gentleness in that epoch. However, the ones which I witnessed were no longer provoked by the remarriage of a widow, for this practice had been dropped, but by an offence

<sup>9</sup> In English, the *vito* is the 'skimity ride' or 'riding', such as we can find in the novels of Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, for example. For a comparative insight into the culture of cuckoldry in early modern France, see the classic study by Nathalie Zemon Davis.

against the mores of the *pueblo*; they were organised to mock, not a cuckold, but an unfaithful husband who had abandoned his wife and family to set up house with another woman. Yet all the symbols of cuckoldry were present; there we found the horns, the bells, the tins on a string, and above all, the rhymes composed in very local andalusian for the occasion of which I was able to record the texts from those who had written them. The victim besieged in his house had to listen, for his punishment, to these insulting rhymes, including injurious comments upon the woman with whom he was living.

In brief, the *vito* is a ritual imposition of dishonour which was even credited, on one occasion, with mortal results. Several years before I arrived in Grazalema, there was a famous *vito* whose victim showed unwillingness to defend his conduct or to excuse himself, but instead attacked his critics who decided in response to bring down the great 'bell of the snows', the bell used in the sierra by those who transported on muleback the ice-packs to Cadiz. The noise was so resounding that it could be heard as far away as Ronda and no one in the region could fail to ask in whose dishonour it was ringing. It rang for weeks and then something in the victim's heart burst and he died.

It is to be noted that *señoritos* did not attend the *vito* since they were not part of the plebeian community of the *pueblo*. Most of them in any case had sold out their lands and moved to live in Jerez or Seville. There remained only one landowner who lived permanently in the *pueblo* and he was called *el Señorito*, which was regarded as a nickname. Moreover he was the only *señorito* to have a nickname other than the function of a professional class such as 'the doctor' or 'the chemist', and he even had another one (not very often heard): *orejón* (fat ear).

### The Honour of the Honourables<sup>10</sup>

As I explained at the beginning of this essay, the notion of honour is associated with aristocracy, with 'noble birth', moral qualities

<sup>10</sup> The title 'Honourable' is a prefix to the name of a child of either sex of a baron (but not of a baronet), and this is normally appended in abbreviated form to the initials of any order the recipient may have received such as Knight of the Garter (KG), or Dame Grande Cross of the Order of the British Empire (GBE). It also features in a novel of the brilliant Nancy Mitford, who, in *The Pursuit of Love* (London 1945), gives a description of the children of a large and varied family of whom some were and some were not 'Honourables'. The 'Hons', aged between five and fifteen, decided to establish their rank and make it their privilege to hide in a certain cupboard (the 'Hons's cupboard), in which the 'non-Hons' were forbidden to hide when playing hide-and-seek.

supposedly being inherited together with the noble genes, special prerogatives and social privileges being logically accorded to those thus favoured, in the European countries.

Towards the end of my field-work in Spain I made the observation that those whose claims to honour by their birth were the greatest, appeared to have the least concern for their sexual honour and the least apparent fear of dishonour which, as we have seen, is most vulnerable through their women. Most aristocratic women were allowed a far greater degree of freedom than the women of the bourgeoisie. They could smoke, drink in public, drive a car, use somewhat more liberal language, dress in a somewhat more international style, and they tended to know English—for the great ‘sherry families’ of Jerez were largely interbred with Scottish or Irish families and therefore Catholic in origin. It is understandable that their sophistication should be greater, and with it the liberties they should assume. In brief, they were more internationally-minded than the middle classes, and this was not surprising, in view of the fact that this was expected of them by their status, for which reason they had been given in their youth British nannies and French governesses. But the question was not to stop there, for thanks to the great anthropologist and historian Julio Caro Baroja and the magnificent library founded by his uncle, the eminent novelist Pio Baroja, I was able to have in my hand a volume, published in 1729, which was of the greatest historical value to me, entitled *El Chichisveo impugnado por* (impugned by) el Rev. Padre Joseph Haro SJ. The *cicisbeo* was the institution of a friend of the husband who, during his absences, keeps company with the wife to ensure the protection of his honour.

The author, a Sevillian priest, was clearly against all forms of modernity, especially the *cicisbeo* which included husbands allowing their wives to receive homage, and even gifts expressing such homage, from gentlemen other than themselves, and Father Haro feared the worst: women would be climbing up on to chairs in no time, for in this period in Spain, chairs were restricted to ‘men only’ and women sat on cushions on the floor. Nor was he so wrong. As soon as his campaign against the *cicisbeo* had made its mark, the women were up on to chairs and his tirades appear to have served as predictions. Indeed, by the end of the century the situation was the same in Palermo, where the morals of the belles on account of the *cicisbeismo* were a scandal to the whole continent and attracted the attention of German tourists, including Goethe, and French *galants* (Pitrè [1904] 1977: 306–30). Later,

Stendhal, in his *Promenades dans Rome*, was able to observe that ‘Love had not been slow to take advantage of the *cicisbeo*’ (Stendhal 1955: 514), whether he was called the ‘cavalier servant’ or the *bracciere* (the man who gives his arm), or by any other name for the gentleman-in-waiting of a lady.

In 1829, when Stendhal was in Rome, the *cicisbeo* was still going strong, though he maintained that it had been eliminated from all except the backwoods after Italian mores had been enlightened by Napoléon. If, however, the regrettable adoption of this custom by Italian mores was to be attributed in origin to the Spaniards (who furiously denied this and maintained that it was introduced into Spain by the Italians, and like the pox, was bandied about between the nations of Europe), at least it could not end up, like the pox, by being blamed on the llamas of Peru. Stendhal dated its introduction into Italy as 1540, which might possibly suggest French or Spanish influence, but it seems most unlikely that it should have been Napoléon who had reformed the Italian mores of the upper class at that time. It could have been the Bourbon’s influence, which had brought them the *cicisbeos*, if indeed the French mores had already adopted such a custom. We know at least that it was adopted in Seville by the date of Father Haro’s publication, that is to say early eighteenth century.

In Italy, every well-off wife expected to be granted a *bracciere* to lend her a hand in public when her husband was otherwise engaged. He had to be of good family, to be a friend of the husband, and to have his approval, but his exact duties were not specified. What were they, these duties? It was not at all clear and I think it was not intended to be made so, if they had become what Stendhal thought. The official title of the *cicisbeo* was to defend the husband’s honour while the latter was away, for whatever reason he thought he had a duty to be away. If Stendhal was right, it was obviously essential that the *cicisbeo* should be on good terms with the husband.

It is likely that he would be needed in a society where the motives for arranging marriages tend to be political or financial and where, as a result, the ages of the spouse tend to be somewhat unequal. When husbands marry at the age of fifty or more, they usually want to marry only a young woman and this young woman is likely to have interests which she does not always share with her husband, particularly if the marriage has been arranged for the financial interests of the family.

I cannot contain my curiosity to know whether the *cicisbeo* has ever

been the fashion in England and if so, whether the institution was taken over by love, as Stendhal thought it had been in Italy.

It is possible that it could have been introduced under Charles I, but most unlikely. Certainly not under the Puritan reign of Cromwell, who distinguished between his own partisans (the 'Roundheads') as 'men of conscience', and the royalists (the 'Cavaliers') as 'men of honour', by which he meant 'honour as social status' (opposed to conscience). Thanks to Puritan mores, the theatres of London were closed for twenty years, but they were reopened as soon as the restoration brought back the King, and for ten years no jokes were made except about cuckolds—as the titles of the plays show: *The Golden Horn*, *A Horn for Cuckolds*, etc. and let us not forget *The Country Wife* by William Wycherley, whose hero had the bright idea of letting the rumour get around that he was impotent. He thus became extremely popular in the role of *cicisbeo* and, of course, it is only in the last act of the play that it is revealed that he was not at all what he was said to be. Yet we wonder where the author got his idea of the *cicisbeo* from, and if the *cicisbeo* was already introduced into England?

I don't think that such a well-organised arrangement to deal with the problems of married life, such as the *cicisbeo*, could ever have been generally adopted in England, but it was reported to me not so very long ago that a certain peer of the realm had reached a philosophical conclusion to the effect that, I quote, 'Best friend of husband is boyfriend'. I understood that to mean that he was well satisfied with the *cicisbeo* of this ménage.

A very remarkable novel, *Le Bal du Comte d'Orgel* (Radiguet 1924) was written by Raymond Radiguet and published after his premature death at the age of twenty in 1926. This was his second novel, confirming the success of the first one, *Le Diable au corps*. It was remarkable for many reasons, but most of all for the subtlety and sophistication of his perception of the aristocratic society of Paris in the 'roaring twenties'.

When the young and beautiful Countess d'Orgel reveals to her husband her love for their young friend who is their constant companion, one would expect, as the young man's rather less aristocratic mother suspected, that, in order to defend his honour, the count would try to put an end to their friendship with her son, but on the contrary, the latter is made to be the hero of the fancy-dress ball, planned by the count, and the countess must choose his costume.

Taken to this extreme, honour somehow becomes inverted. Sexual

jealousy is an utterly unworthy reaction to be reserved for the middle classes. This seems to have been the count's attitude to the situation:<sup>11</sup> by showing jealousy he cannot but degrade himself. It is a point of view I have heard expressed occasionally in certain upper-class milieux, justified by the argument that one must defend the honour of one's wife, the mother of one's children. (In the case of Radiguet's novel this would not apply, since the countess does not have any children.)

### Honour, Power and *Mana*

Thomas Hobbes was certainly very much concerned with honour, yet, unlike many other philosophers and many theologians, he was not preoccupied with the fine sentiments which this word inspired nor the ideals which it represented, but with the mechanisms whereby it functions. Hobbes was concerned above all with power, and his interest in honour is inspired by his hope to explain that honour, quite apart from the self-satisfaction it may afford to one's ego, provides the road to power and how it can be used. He recognised that honour, rather like the *capital symbolique* of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1979), represents a moral credit to be drawn upon by those who possess this kind of honour, whatever its source, which may be converted into power. As he put it, 'reputation of power is power' (Hobbes 1960: 56). Hobbes appears to have understood that it is culture which makes a society what it is, because it is the way in which people think that makes them behave as they do.

Therefore, in conclusion, we should reconsider the question which has rarely been asked, except perhaps by Marcel Mauss: can honour be brought into anthropology? Is 'honour' a cultural oddity of Western civilisation or is it a universal concept? Is it a concept necessary in order to discuss human society? Beyond the continuities of honour in the Mediterranean world as I have argued, we should recognise for example that Japanese culture must contain a sense of honour or it would not be possible to understand *hara-kiri* and the threat to commit it. *The Forty Samurais Without a Master*, so a Japanese friend told me, would be

<sup>11</sup> It has been suggested that the count was homosexual and, like his wife, was in love with the young man, although it is never made explicit in the text. Cf. Bernard Pingaud's preface in Radiguet (1983: 47–52). This interpretation is supported by the close relationship between Radiguet and Jean Cocteau, which could imply such a possibility, but does not necessarily indicate that this was the intention of the author.

incorporeable without the Japanese sense of honour, this play being the equivalent in Japanese literature of *Hamlet* in English, though rather more costly in lives. Let us also recall that Marcel Mauss saw *mana*,<sup>12</sup> the magical power centred in the head of Polynesian chiefs and the source of their prestige and authority, as nothing other than the concept of honour in primitive society. Therefore my answer to Mauss's question whether honour can be brought into anthropology is yes, but on condition that it should be recognised as varying from one culture to another.

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<sup>12</sup> In 1881, the missionary R. H. Codrington (who was also a linguist and an ethnologist) described the religious concept of *mana*, which he had identified as a form of spiritual power or symbolic efficacy supposed to dwell in certain objects or persons in Polynesia and Melanesia. After ten years of correspondence with R. R. Marett, Professor of Anthropology at Oxford, and with Marcel Mauss, the leading anthropologist in Paris at that time, among others, it was accepted that *mana* was a powerful influence enjoyed by certain persons and things manipulated by spirits and ghosts. It was thought to be among other things the source of the power of chiefs located in their heads. Cf. Pitt-Rivers, *Mana: An Inaugural Lecture* (London School of Economics, 1974). See also Keesing (1992), an excellent entry on *mana* in Bonte and Izard.

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