THE CONCEPT OF HONOR IN GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ'S *DEL AMOR Y OTROS DEMONIOS*

In *Del amor y otros demonios*, García Márquez parodies the concept of honor on individual, societal, and religious levels. Essentially, he presents a society composed of individuals who either lack or pervert honor and its connotations of purity, integrity, fidelity, and reputation. Consequently, he depicts individuals and a society that proclaim honor, yet exhibit none. Instead, the characters within this novel personify dishonor, moral turpitude, and disreputability. All of the main characters in *Del amor y otros demonios* suffer a form of dishonor as a result of their own inherent flaws, which intensify and converge to the point of collective tragedy, rendering a portrait of a decrepit society devoid of honor.

The title of the work suggests that love is one among several demons, and that the novel will focus on love. Nevertheless, love is a mere pretext for the motivation of the novel, which has hatred and a feigned sense of honor as the impetus for an improbable chain of events. The novel begins as Sierva María de Todos los Ángeles and her mulatta servant, Caridad del Cobre, go to the market to purchase trinkets for Sierva's twelfth birthday celebration. The first transgression within the novel occurs here when, in order to see the slave ship unloaded, they venture beyond a boundary which had been prohibited to them. It is here that a rabid dog bites Sierva, who never shows symptoms of rabies, and three blacks, who subsequently die after being infected with hydrophobia.

The coincidental death of the three blacks provokes Bernarda Cabrera, Sierva's mother, to insist that the child is possessed, rather than a possible victim of a fatal disease that could impugn their family honor. Bernarda believes that, "hasta un simple mordisco de perro podía causar un daño a la honra de la familia" (GGM 22). Moreover, "Bernarda estaba dispuesta a hacer la farsa de las lágrimas y a guardar un luto de madre adolorida por preservar su honra, con la condición de que la muerte de la niña fuera por una causa digna" (GGM 25). Instead of seeking treatment for Sierva, as a caring mother would, Bernarda displays no maternal instincts and resigns herself to her daughter's imminent and premature death.

For Bernarda, this ignoble death would stain the family's honor, which she, as the self-appointed paladin, must uphold. Primarily, if Sierva were to die the same death as the slaves, Bernarda assumes that the slaves would then get the impression that they would be equal to their masters in death. Consequently, they might be able to discern that if they were equal in death, why not in life? While such a realization would cause a social and political revolution, Bernarda

merely desires to maintain the semblance of nobility and authority through her wily ruse.

In describing colonial society and its racial stratification, Irving Leonard notes:

> By diligently fostering a kind of "pigmentocracy," with caste distinctions based largely on the amount of white blood in an individual's veins, the possibility was slight that sufficient cohesion might develop among the exploited masses to tempt them to challenge the control of the privileged white minority. (38)

Américo Castro points out the relationship between honor, nobility, and authority when he writes, "el honor era patrimonio de la nobleza y de los depositarios de la autoridad" (31). During the Golden Age, Castro notes that "La fama, en efecto se convierte en la razón de la existencia humana; su cuidado y defensa exigen procedimientos análogos a los de la defensa contra la muerte física" (19). Because so much was at stake regarding one's family name, "family honour and the honour of its individual members were intimately related and interdependent" (Martínez-Alier 113-14). Juan María Marín observes that, "El honor es virtud objetiva, heredada, mientras que la honra es de carácter subjetivo, se merece, se alcanza con las propias acciones y la otorgan los demás miembros del grupo social..." (Lope de Vega 24).

With these thoughts in mind, we must consider the honor that Bernarda so vociferously seeks to guard. First, let us examine her husband—Ygnacio de Alfaro y Dueñas, the second Marqués de Casalduero—who is a rather unremarkable character. Typically, "Social position, based mainly on white blood, determined to a considerable extent the occupation of the individual in the more genteel pursuits, with idleness preferred, particularly in Creole circles" (Leonard 51). "Ygnacio, el heredero único, no daba señales de nada. Creció con signos ciertos de retraso mental, fue analfabeto hasta la edad de merecer, y no quería a nadie" (GGM 49). Ygnacio never overcomes his mental and emotional handicaps; hence, he is incapable of maintaining his father's ill-gotten gains. We may surmise that either his ineptitude or his idleness contributes to his state of affairs even though:

> Nunca se supo cómo había llegado el marqués a semejante estado de desidia... Habría podido ser lo que hubiera querido, por el poder desmesurado del primer marqués, su padre... a quien el rey su señor no escatimó honores y prebendas ni castigó injusticias. (GGM 49)

The son is never quite as despicable as his father, but neither his name nor his character brings him any special recognition. In fact, it seems that the son pays for the sins of the father by losing his fortune, his honor, and his line of succession.

Bernarda's father convinces her to seduce the widowed Ygnacio after his

first wife is struck down by a lightning bolt purportedly sent by a madwoman who resides in the asylum that borders the marques's property. The *marqués* is still a virgin at 52 when the 23 year-old Bernarda seduces him. Not surprisingly, she becomes pregnant and appeals to Ygnacio's sense of honor to restore her own. Two months pregnant, she reminds Ygnacio that she "no era negra, sino hija de indio ladino y blanca de Castilla, de modo que la única aguja para zurcir la honra era el matrimonio formal" (GGM 58). Ironically, she clamors for restitution of her honor even though she has behaved in a manner that merits no respect. Of course, the obtuse *marquis* acquiesces —after her father arrives with a musket to guarantee a legitimate union.

While Bernarda demands that her bloodline merits marriage with Ygnacio, he may have been able to avoid such a union because of his own pure (i.e., Spanish) blood. Two views offer conflicting accounts of honor in regard to marriage between whites and Indians or mestizas. First, "In the overseas possessions, although strictly speaking both Indians and Africans were of 'infidel' origin, in the end it was only those of African origin who were regarded as contaminated and thus to be avoided by those of 'pure blood'" (Martínez-Alier 15). Conversely, another view holds that:

> Era preciso probar la limpieza de la sangre... para aspirar a cualquier cargo o dignidad, y un matrimonio con una india podía arruinar a todo un linaje. Además... la necesidad de mantener la honra no era favorable a las alianzas legítimas con mujeres de la raza vencida, que en definitiva era considerada como inferior. (Baudot 103-04)

It seems that Ygnacio could have ignored Bernarda's demand solely on the basis of blood purity. Nevertheless, he yields, perhaps more out of fear and debility than a sense of obligation. While earlier the parents of a deflowered lass had legal recourse to demand justice, "In the middle of the eighteenth century... aristocratic parents often argued that the girl's sexual activity made her —but not him— 'unequal,' thereby creating a bar to marriage" (Keen 118-19). Consequently, despite her mestiza heritage and promiscuous ways, Bernarda achieves a quasi-white status which allows her to marry a noble.

After twelve years of marriage, Ygnacio and his wife are unsociable to each other and Bernarda bears no titles that demonstrate her social rank. Moreover, she displays none of the social graces normally associated with noble or gentle ladies. Instead, "Bernarda Cabrera, madre de la niña y esposa *sin títulos* [emphasis is mine] del Marqués de Casalduero... con... el antiguo cuerpo de sirena... hinchado y cobrizo... despedía unas ventosidades explosivas y pestilentes que asustaban a los mastines" (GGM 15). This unflattering description of her flatulence increases our sense of her vulgarity and commonality as it heightens the parody of her efforts to preserve an honor that has never resided in her.

Further examples of her dishonorable traits include her drug experimentation with Judas Iscariote, her smuggling ventures in the slave and flour

business, and her adulterous liaisons with slaves. Initially, she espies Judas as he sweatily dances and arouses her. She offers to buy him, but he states that he is a free man. After negotiating, he agrees to come to the estate, where he realizes his place as a social inferior. Nevertheless, after she anxiously awaits with her door unlocked for an unknown period of time, Judas climbs in through the window and rapes her when she least expects it.

Presumably, this act ought to merit swift and thorough retribution as in virtually any honor play —especially since Judas grunts "puta, puta" in her ear during the act (GGM 34). But, the *marqués* seems oblivious to his wife's infidelity and the black's acknowledgement of her scandalous behavior. Rather than tell her husband of the violation, she happily receives not just one, but many black men, and begins a life of debauchery in which she willingly pays slaves to have sex with her. Hence, she progresses from a woman who has sex in exchange for social honor to a woman who offers money to have sex with the people she most despises. She not only condemns herself by her behavior, but also her family and her spouse for not being a more diligent guardian of her honor. The setting of the novel is the colonial period, when "White upper-class women and their families were controlled by the males of their families and protected from racial 'pollution' through marriage or, worse, sex with a black male" (Martínez-Alier xiii). The *marquis* neglects his duties as husband, breadwinner, and head of the house; consequently, his wife emasculates him and assumes the masculine role in their relationship when he fails to act like a man.

Though neither of the two pays attention to their daughter. Sierva, who has been cared for since birth by Dominga de Adviento, a slave. She raises her to be fluent in three African languages as well as knowledgeable in the ways of various African cultures and religions. The day of the dog bite, even though Sierva's parents neglect to remember or celebrate their daughter's birthday, "la música y la pólvora tronaban en el patio de los esclavos en honor de Sierva María" (GGM 17). The nobles, with their artificially contrived titles, contrast markedly with the slaves, who truly display a sense of honor here.

Sierva's biological family ignores her from birth and she develops a "modo de ser... tan sigiloso que parecía una criatura invisible" (GGM 20). Her invisibility (which recalls Ralph Ellison's famous novel) insinuates that she is a non-entity ignored by her family; thus, she adopts a black persona to compensate for her identity crisis. As María Mandinga, her alter ego, she finds an identity and a culture that fit her. Her reaction toward authority (i.e., her parents, the Church) is rebellious and defiant. Amid the slaves, however, she encounters camaraderie and tranquility. Invisible to the white world, she holds a place of honor within the black milieu where she is the only free person among a throng of slaves.

Whites, within the novel, regard the blacks as promiscuous, dishonest, and threatening. For example, the *marqués* fears that they will kill him as he sleeps.

Dominga ushers slaves out of the house when she discovers them in the throes of passion. Still, amongst themselves, the slaves reveal a candor that they dare not display among the whites. The *marqués* tells Cayetano, "Los negros nos mienten a nosotros, pero no entre ellos" (GGM 149). In this instance, the slaves treat each other with a mutual sense of honor and respect, despite not holding many places of honor among their masters. Exceptions do exist, though.

Of the four exceptions that occur within the novel, two follow the stereotype of the oversexed African. The first of these two is the female captive from Abyssinia that the governor purchases for her weight in gold because of her beauty. The second is Judas Iscariote, to whom Bernarda pays 250 gold pesos for his sexual services. Although Bernarda willingly pays for her black stud, she tells Caridad del Cobre that "no hay mujer ni negra ni blanca que valga ciento veinte libras de oro, a no ser que cague diamantes" (GGM 16). Her comment implies that only men have worth (honor) for this society. The Abyssinian arrives on the same ship that holds a diminished "carga sobreviviente devaluada por su pésimo estado de salud" (GGM 14). Interestingly, the blacks are devalued by malnutrition and poor health rather than by slavery here. They have value only as sexual objects and beasts of burden, not as human beings.

While the Abyssinian and Judas are unmistakably black, two other characters with African ancestry may pass as white. Of these two, the most important is "Dominga de Adviento, una negra de ley que gobernó la casa con puño de fierro... el enlace entre aquellos dos mundos" (GGM 18). It is significant that Dominga is the tie between the black and white, or servant and master worlds because she, evidently, has characteristics of both. Moreover, she is the bringer of order, language, and culture to Sierva as well as the household. Furthermore, Dominga must be light enough to pass as not black, since she is a negress by law. "Legal colour was... an alternative way of determining a person's racial status when his physical appearance was not an unambiguous guide" (Martínez-Alier 73). Dominga has the honor of managing the household, which falls into decay after her death. The last person of African heritage to receive honor is the priest, Tomás de Aquino de Narváez, who had proved "la limpieza de su linaje por cuatro generaciones de blancos" (GGM 178). Blood purity is a key factor in the death of Sierva because her mother refuses to let the Jewish doctor, Abrenuncio de Sa Pereira Cao, treat the adolescent. Instead, she "Prefería morirse como estaba, sola y desnuda, antes que poner su honra en manos de un judío agazapado" (GGM 43). Abrenuncio, "el médico más notable y controvertido... había heredado su mala fama de nigromante y deslenguado, pero nadie ponía en duda su sabiduría" (GGM 27-28). The Inquisition, however, thwarts his attempts to cure the young girl, even though he is more qualified to diagnose her condition than are its inquisitors. He holds a tenuous place in the colonial society because he is a Jew and because he possesses numerous books that are on the forbidden list.

Inspite of Abrenuncio's bad reputation, the *marqués* gives him one of his own horses —the great *caballero* is afraid of them— and foolishly buries Abrenuncio's recently deceased mount in sacred ground. This act not only exacerbates Abrenuncio's community standing, but also impedes his treatment of Sierva because the Church regards the burial as sacrilegious. So, Sierva must take refuge in the convent, the traditional site of confinement for a woman to hide her stained honor, though normally, stained honor pertained to seduction or infidelity rather than a dog's bite.

Rather than welcome her to sanctuary, Abadesa Josefa Miranda crudely complains, "Tantos conventos en esta ciudad y el señor obispo nos manda los zurullos" (GGM 93). Josefa exhibits no Christian virtues. Instead, she is vindictive and prejudiced. She blames the bishop for a religious controversy (between her convent and the Franciscans) that had occurred nearly a century earlier, and uses Sierva María as the unfortunate object of her animosity toward the bishop. Josefa is a haughty peninsular who questions the existence of the *marqués* "con doble veneno, porque era asunto del obispo, y porque siempre negó la legitimidad de los nobles criollos, a los cuales llamaba 'nobles de gotera'" (GGM 90). Here, we see her rejection of Creole nobles, and her utter hostility toward not only fellow citizens, but also a fellow religious figure. Oddly, it seems that the *marqués* is as invisible to her as Sierva has been to him and Bernarda.

Once Sierva takes residence in the convent, the Abadesa puts her in the most squalid cell and serves her revolting food. The child also suffers an infestation of lice, malnutrition, and delirium as a result of her abject living conditions. The other nuns persecute and frighten the young girl rather than respect her privacy. Consequently, they dishonor their vows of service to the Lord when "Aun las monjas más rígidas escapaban de la clausura después del toque de queda, y se iban en grupos de dos o tres para hablar con Sierva María" (GGM 96). Moreover, "Una pretensión frecuente era que les sirviera de estafeta con el diablo para pedirle favores imposibles" (GGM 96). Not only do they break strict rules established to control their behavior, but also they turn to the Devil rather than the Lord to grant their prayers. Besides breaking the rules of the order, they also break the commandment against bearing false idols and against killing (Martina Laborde). On the whole, the convent is disreputable, dishonorable, and dishonest.

While the nuns try to steal Sierva's clothes, rings, and necklaces, Cayetano Delaura is much more insidious. He is the 36 year-old priest who aspires to be the librarian at the Vatican. In order to facilitate his path to such a position, his mentor, Bishop Cáceres, appoints him as the exorcist to Sierva. Such an honor must go to a priest sufficiently qualified to cast out the demon. Cayetano, however, is a bibliophile rather than a practicing priest. Nonetheless, early on, Cayetano tells the bishop, "creo que lo que nos parece demoniaco son las

costumbres de los negros, que la niña ha aprendido por el abandono en que la tuvieron sus padres" (GGM 124). He becomes enamored of the child, who is only twelve, and with trembling voice, admits to her that he will cure her "Porque te quiero mucho" (GGM 126).

This is carnal love—not spiritual love—and he recites Garcilaso's poetry to win her love. Despite their caresses, both remain virgins; however, Cayetano realizes that he must atone for his behavior by mortifying the flesh. He passes out from the pain, only to have his shameful behavior exposed when the bishop finds him wallowing in his own blood. No appointment to the Vatican awaits him as a reward for saving Sierva's soul. Instead, his reprehensible behavior merits swift punishment. "Cayetano aprendió pronto que un poder grande no se pierde a medias" (GGM 164). He is condemned to serve in a leper colony after being "a disposición del Santo Oficio, y condenado en un juicio de plaza pública que arrojó sobre él sospechas de herejía y provocó disturbios populares y controversias en el seno de la Iglesia" (GGM 196).

Scorned by those who curried his favor earlier, Cayetano seeks a release from his life of dishonor, but to no avail. He never contracts leprosy or rabies, which are both highly contagious. Even though he and Sierva had exchanged saliva (rabies is a saliva borne virus) when they kissed and when she had spit in his face, he seems immune to either disease.

Sierva does die, but from love. In colonial society:

> Love, by overriding social restraints, meant the assertion of individual freedom of choice over social conventions... a potential threat to the social order... Love and passion are unpredictable and render people insensitive to their duties to family and society. (Martínez-Alier 66)

Obligation and duty convey the sense of honor that each individual intrinsically ought to have, based on this colonial perspective. Essentially, this is the Spanish concept of *honor* (virtue, courage, or integrity). On the other hand, *honra* is the respect bestowed on others based on their courage, integrity, and virtue. García Márquez lampoons both levels of honor within Hispanic colonial society and shows the tragic consequences when an imbalance between love and passion exists.

To summarize, the *marqués* lacks courage and integrity. He fears horses, slaves, and even an imaginary giant chicken. Moreover, he is lazy and retarded. His wife repeatedly cuckolds him, an act that demands retribution according to the code of honor; yet, he does not remove the stain on his reputation. He is not the stereotypical *conquistador*. Bernarda, ironically, clamors for the preservation of her *honra* even though she has become a sex slave to Judas Iscariote, a former slave who sells himself into bondage (no pun) as her paramour. Here, in a reversal of roles, the lady of the house takes advantage of the servants. In addition, she rejects her maternal duties and causes her daughter to

suffer death at the hands of the Church, whose authorities also behave abominably. Consequently, not only does the Casalduero name fall from honor, but also the family line dies out after three generations. Nevertheless, the legend of Sierva María de Todos los Ángeles, whose "nombre sin apellidos... era venerada en los pueblos del Caribe por sus muchos milagros... fue... el origen de este libro" (GGM 11). The child, whose mother considered her dishonored, begins and ends the novel as the only person honored, revered, and adored.

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