

Sebastián Fox Morcillo. 2017
De honore. Estudio y traducción
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Although not receiving as much attention as other early modern topics, the scholarly examination of the concept of honor in sixteenth and seventeenth-century English texts has consistently been part of academic endeavors since at least the 1950s. Indeed, already since Edward Wilson's pioneering studies on honor in Shakespearean drama (from the standpoint, it must be said, of a scholar of the Spanish Golden Age), various works have attempted to explore the notion of honor as a central concern of much early modern literature. To be sure, since Wilson's influential "A Hispanist Looks at *Othello*" (1952, re-edited in 1980), a number of books and articles have periodically approached this topic as one of evident relevance for the understanding of many early modern works. This is the case of, to mention just a few, Wilson's "*Othello*, a Tragedy of Honour" (1952); Charles L. Barber's *The Idea of Honour in the English Drama* (1957); Curtis B. Watson's seminal *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour* (1960); Norman Council's *When Honour's at the Stake* (1973); John Alvis's *Shakespeare's Understanding of Honor* (1990); and Ewan Fernie's *Shame in Shakespeare* (2001).

What all these works—and some others—have in common is, first and foremost, the strong belief that there is much in early modern literature that cannot be adequately grasped without properly addressing what honor (and related notions such as reputation, fame, glory, honesty or dishonor) meant for Elizabethan and Stuart communities. The aforementioned scholarship has mostly concluded that early modern creative texts by Shakespeare and others were informed by the pamphlets and treatises which helped shape the philosophical content of honor and its aggregates as they developed between the late fifteenth and the early seventeenth centuries.

There certainly is a consistent body of specialized pamphlets, conduct books and treatises which were instrumental in producing the concept of honor that informed so many works under the Tudors and the Stuarts. Among these, every scholar will recognize the relevance, for various reasons, of Thomas Elyot's *The Book Named the Governour* (1531); William Baldwin's *A Treatise of Morall Philosophie* (1564); William Segar's *The Booke of Honor and Armes* (1590); John Norden's *The Mirror of Honor* (1597); Count Hannibal Romei's *The Courtier's Academy* (1598); Lodowycck Bryskett's *Discourse of Civill Life* (1606); James Cleland's *The Institution of a Young Nobleman* (1607); Thomas Milles' *The Catalogue of Honour* (1610), Gervase Markham's *Honour in his Perfection* (1624), or Francis Markham's *The Booke of Honour* (1625).¹ These texts are the fundamental sources that anyone who wants to understand the early modern notion of honor that Shakespeare and other Elizabethan and Stuart authors introduced in their works needs to read.

Indeed, all these sources were influential in their own way, and most scholars acknowledged their relevance in the building of a narrative of honor in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England. Yet, among all these works, a book was published towards the turn of the century that every single scholar addressing this topic (then, as now) had to carefully consider, examine at length and cross-reference whenever honor was, in Hamlet's words, "at the stake."

Robert Ashley (1565–1641), lawyer, translator, polyglot, book collector and founder of the Middle Temple library (Ferris 2004) presented his manuscript essay *Of Honour* to Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, between 1596 and 1603. This text, currently preserved in MS Ellesmere 1117 in the Huntington Library, was edited by Virgil Heltzel in 1947. In his edition, Heltzel introduced the essay as "the first attempt by an Englishman to deal with the subject of honor comprehensively and systematically in a separate work" (1947, 349). After Heltzel's pioneering edition, scholars unanimously considered Ashley's *Of Honour*, which was a sophisticated combination of Aristotelian and Platonic ideas about honor, the major source of early modern writings on honor and related ideas. Although

¹ A few non-English sources were also highly influential for early modern readers and writers; notably, Antonio de Guevara's *Diall of Princes* (1529), and Michel de Montaigne's essays, especially "Of not Communicating One's Honour," "Of Recompenses of Honour" and "Of Glory" (ca. 1580).

some attempts were made by Heltzel to identify some more or less direct sources for Ashley's work, Heltzel's unambiguous conclusion was that Ashley's was "an original English work" (1947, 349). However, since the publication of Antonio Espigares's work on Sebastián Fox Morcillo, we know it was not.

Prof. Espigares Pinilla's *Sebastián Fox Morcillo. "De honore." Estudio y traducción* offers English scholars the invaluable evidence that Robert Ashley's *Of Honour* was not an original work or Ashley's own elaboration on the concept of honor. Quite on the contrary, it was an almost literal translation of Fox Morcillo's earlier work *De honore*, an essay originally written in Latin and published in Basel in 1556, at least forty years before Ashley's *Of Honour* appeared in print. In unequivocal terms, Espigares writes: "*Of honour* no es más que un burdo plagio del tratado *De honore* de Sebastián Fox Morcillo" (2017, 58). Espigares explains and demonstrates this plagiarism through textual comparisons which leave no room for doubt. Furthermore, although Espigares does not proceed to examine the whole Ashleian text (it is not his major concern), any interested reader may easily confirm that Espigares's conclusion is correct.

To be sure, early modern "originality" is a concept we cannot take for granted, as it was common practice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to borrow themes and topics, even to lift whole passages *verbatim*, without acknowledging the source. However, Ashley's book can only be characterized as a mere translation, from Fox's Latin into Ashley's (significantly Latinate) English, with only some very minor adjustments which Espigares adequately explains and accounts for. Other than that, Espigares demonstrates – and any reader can observe – that Ashley's work, far from being an original conflation of Platonic and Aristotelian ideas on honor, is simply a translation of what, forty years earlier, Fox Morcillo had to say about this matter.

Sebastián Fox Morcillo (1528–*ca.* 1559), Prof. Espigares tells us in an informative biographical sketch (chapter 2), was a prestigious Spanish humanist from Seville who spent some years in the Low Countries, during which he had his *De honore* published in Basel. After some coming and going between Flanders and Seville, he died – presumably drowned in shipwreck – while trying to flee the Inquisition, which had already burned his brother as a heretic (25–30).

It must be emphasized that Espigares Pinilla's essay goes beyond exposing Ashley's plagiarism of Fox Morcillo's *De honore*. Indeed, he not only makes this important Latin work more easily accessible to scholars of the early modern period, but it also includes an informative introduction on the subject. Firstly, Espigares elaborates an interesting analysis of the concept which examines the evolution of "honor" from Ancient Greece to sixteenth-century Spain (chapter 1, 7–24). This introductory study addresses such classical authors as Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Cicero and Seneca. The author also considers the writings of Aquinas and Augustine and their influence on medieval notions of honor, and confronts them with dominant views of honor and reputation in early modern Europe. Ideas of Montaigne, Vives, Erasmus or Ginés de Sepúlveda are briefly examined and convincingly discussed by the author.

After the aforementioned summary of Fox Morcillo's life (chapter 2), Espigares considers his work on honor from a diversity of interconnected perspectives. Firstly (3.1), *De honore's* genre adscription and addressees, i.e., Fox Morcillo's potential readership. Then, Espigares carries out a valuable philological effort of identifying an impressive number of textual sources present in Fox Morcillo's work (3.2). The most important ones are—as Fox Morcillo himself acknowledged and could be presumed—Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Rhetoric*, and Plato's *Dialogues*. In addition, he considers many other, relatively minor sources such as Plotinus, Cicero, Plutarch, Marsilio Ficino, Lorenzo Valla, Antonio de Torquemada, Ginés de Sepúlveda, Castiglione, Possevino (the only contemporaneous source that earlier scholarship had claimed for Ashley) and several Biblical references. Espigares's comments are succinct and insightful, and any scholar interested on this topic (and early modern English texts) will find here significant food for thought.

In section 3.3 the author carries out an interesting stylistic analysis and concludes that Fox unsuccessfully tried to reproduce, as had so many early modern authors, a Ciceronian style. This Espigares shows through some thirty Latin expressions from *De honore* which he compares with their Ciceronian precedents. Finally, the fourth section of this third chapter demonstrates how Fox Morcillo's idea of honor was heavily indebted to both Aristotle and Plato. The former, he argues, can be perceived in the external manifestations of honor (the "honor-as-reward-of-virtue" approach), whereas Platonic honor is

associated with the introspective concept of honor: honor as virtue, disregarding awards and outward expressions. The final section deals with Ashley's plagiarism of *De honore*.

Espigares's translation of *De honore*, which constitutes the *raison d'être* of the work, is highly readable in spite of dealing with a source text dense with accumulated meanings and sophisticated concepts. At times, Espigares seems to yield to the convoluted syntax of the original ("Por otro lado [...] patentes," 96), but more often the resulting text lends itself to both academic and casual reading. Special mention must be made of the annotations. Espigares introduces abundant footnotes, with relevant and often even essential information, which clearly enrich the reading. These notes not only clarify obscure passages from the original but also introduce additional references and provide intertextual allusions.

The most significant shortcomings have to do, firstly, with the unexplained absence of bibliographical references for all those works included in the footnotes. Readers of such a scholarly edition as this one may require references to all the works mentioned in the translation notes. These include works by—among others—Horace, Tacitus, Plato or Cicero (notes 1, 4, 11, 14), but the source texts are left unreferenced. Also, either the author or the publisher has decided not to include the original—Latin—source text together with the translation. This is unfortunate, because a bilingual edition would have enriched the result by allowing readers to easily compare both texts, assess the quality of the translation and have access, with one look, to the two texts. This is especially interesting if one is also trying to work with what we might want to consider the "third" text, that is, Ashley's *Of Honour*.

In general, the edition could have also profited from a more nuanced approach to the notion of honor, not so much in terms of the classical origins of the concept (which are more than adequately addressed) but from an anthropological and historical—even ideological—perspective. All things considered, however, Antonio Espigares Pinilla's book is an extremely valuable contribution to early modern studies. It will prove of interest for the study of European humanistic writings, on the one hand, through the examination of Fox Morcillo's relevant contribution to early modern thoughts on honor, dishonor and reputation. And it will also provide a new understanding of English seventeenth-century texts on the same

notions (and their links with the poetry and drama of the period) by exposing the unexpected origin of Robert Ashley's *Of honour*, and its plagiarized nature.

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