



# Writ in the Margins Podcast

Created by the students in REN670: Dramaturgy in the Shakespeare and Performance graduate program at Mary Baldwin University

Produced by Prof. Molly E. Seremet (she/her/hers)

## Episode Guide

### Season 2, Episode 1

#### *Presumed Dead: Weapons of Honor*

Hosts: Hailey Pearce and Pete Sheldon

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## Episode Resources

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Long, Hugh K. "At a Sword's Length." *Studylib.es*, 28 Feb. 2017.

Shakespeare, William, et al. *The Norton Shakespeare*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2016.

Soufas, Teresa Scott. *Dramas of Distinction: Plays by Golden Age Women*. University Press of Kentucky, 1997. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt130jffk>.

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## Episode Transcript

*(0:0 sword sound effects start)*

**Alberto:** Parry that!

**Don Álvaro:** There's no defense except the kind that comes from steel.

**Alberto:** Trust.

**Don Álvaro:** Honor is sacred.

**Alberto:** If you had any suspicions about my intentions, I was trying to satisfy them with my hand in marriage.

**Don Álvaro:** That doesn't satisfy me. Don Álvaro de Gamboa. Doesn't answer such insults except by killing you or by dying. This is how I'll avenge the insults to my honor.

**Alberto:** Honor isn't avenged like this, since trying to hurry revenge further offends it, and more so if your suspicions are based on a mistake.

**Don Álvaro:** What mistake, you traitor? My sword will inform you.

*(0:39) effects end*

**Pete:** What is honor?

**Hailey:** What does honor mean in Spanish Golden Age theatre?

**Pete:** More importantly, how does honor work within Ángela de Azevedo's *Presumed Dead*?

**Hailey:** Hi I'm Hailey Pearce.

**Pete:** And I'm Pete Sheldon.

**Hailey:** And we're going to investigate how honor affects *Presumed Dead* by Ángela de Azevedo. What religious and social circumstances inform the characters' view of honor but also how ideas of gender coincide as well. To begin with, *Presumed Dead* is a Spanish Golden Age play, as we've mentioned, written by Portuguese playwright Ángela de Azevedo. This has.. We have no record of it being performed professionally but we do have a really nice bound edition so we do know it was printed as well. The plot bounces back and forth between Jacinta who is mourning the death of her lover, Clarindo, and being forced to marry Don Álvaro (who supposedly killed her lover). Because he was jealous. Because he was Clarindo's best friend. And the only way to get Jacinta is to kill Clarindo. But don't worry Clarindo turns out to be alive and disguised as a woman named Clara. Meanwhile, Clarindo's sister, Lisarda, is disguised as a man named Lisardo who wants revenge on Don Álvaro for murdering her brother and he tells her this but before he tells her this, she ends up madly falling in love with him. If you're confused, don't worry the

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characters are too! To quote the character of Dorotea, I'll bet that in an hour and a half no one will be able to figure out what direction this play is headed (or at least that's how I imagine it). But that is the point, Spanish Golden Age drama loves to use asides and metatheatre to remind the audience that they are not only watching a play but experiencing the plot along with the characters themselves. Making them feel like full fleshed out characters. Things that could happen in your everyday life. Now I don't know if your brother's best friend would try to murder him but you get what I mean.

**Pete:** Yeah I don't have many sword fights in my everyday life either. Sad. The play includes several trademarks of Spanish age drama including as I just mentioned Sword fights, the dramatic use of the aside and several references to honor in the dialogue.

**Hailey:** But first what and when is exactly the Spanish Golden Age?

**Pete:** Well let me and my magical guitar playing tell you!

**Hailey:** What's magical about it?

**Pete:** Uhhhhhhhhhh well it's just a plain guitar really. I mean it's wood. It's got frets. Nylon strings.

**Hailey:** So it's a regular guitar?

**Pete:** Yeah

**Hailey:** You go and you play that magical.. Rather non magical guitar

**Pete:** I will! Thanks.

*(3:39 Classical guitar)*

**Pete:** According to the *Norton Anthology of Drama*, the Spanish Golden Age spans roughly from the early sixteenth century to late seventeenth century. It came in with the partial unification of Spain via the marriage of Ferdinand II and Isabella I, who as a little aside were cousins.

**Hailey:** And for all your history and theatre nerds out there. They are the parents of Catherine of Aragon. Y'know Catherine of Aragon. Henry VIII. The Dissolution of the Catholic church in England. There's a whole play about it. Whole musical. *Six* for all of you Broadway fans you know, I don't need to tell you.

**Pete:** Their marriage united the houses of Aragon and Castile, and thus started the Spanish Inquisition. Nobody suspects the Spanish inquisition! Did you?

**Hailey:** Well yes but that's because I'm not living in that time period. However, if I was I probably wouldn't have seen it coming.

**Pete:** Catholicism was the dominant religion of the era. The Norton also points to the previous Muslim

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occupation as why plays of this era focus so much on honor, however, that doesn't mean there wasn't some carry over in values with Catholicism. A few of the prominent playwrights of this age include Lope de Vega, Ana Caro, Pedro Calderon de la Barca and Ángela de Azevedo. While Azevedo wrote plays for the court of Portugal, there was a lot of crossover between the two nations.

**Hailey:** To frame a few of our talking points on theatre in this era, women were licensed to perform in 1587 though it remained controversial until 1599 when a decree stipulating women who married theatre company members could perform freely. Because a women could only be married in order to do things. Also crossdressing technically wasn't allowed onstage but women characters disguised as men, like Lisarda, could wear mens clothing from the waist up with a skirt underneath. The audience just needed to know men couldn't wear skirts. But men can wear skirts. Wear whatever you want!

**Pete:** Should I get my skirt?

**Hailey:** Absolutely go right ahead

**Pete:** Yay!

*(6:11 End of guitar)*

**Pete:** But going back to honor and *Presumed Dead*. What are some of the specific ideas around honor? Particularly, the religious and social relevance. Pulling from Honor and Violence in the Spanish Golden Age, it's really unclear where exactly this unwavering sense of honor came from. Religion, either previous ideas from Islam or the now prominent Catholicism, may have emphasized and assimilated this code of honor but it was more something that was innately tied to the culture. In a sense, it's hard to tell where religion begins and honor ends. Honor was used in everything. It was what guided Spanish culture in their views of family, men, women, dueling and sexuality. Many of the Spanish Golden Age plays are often labeled as "Honor Plays" given its prominence.

**Hailey:** So what did honor do for women in the Spanish Golden Age? Rather what didn't it do? Honor during this era reinforced patriarchal restraints on women. The honor code placed an overemphasis on a woman's purity and sexual fidelity.

**Pete:** Many of the plays of this era feature stories focused on a woman's infidelity and what many saw as the justified violence that followed after. One practice of this era that coincided with the religious and social components of honor was the practice of enclosure. Women, usually by their father's doing, were not allowed to leave their home until she was married to a husband.

**Hailey:** Essentially, a woman's body was not her own to make her own choices. If she broke her chastity, shame was not only brought to her, but to her family or her spouse. Enclosure was meant to shield a woman from the world's temptations and therefore kept her pure and the family's honor was upheld. According to Religion, Body and Gender in Early Modern Spain, enclosure was also practiced by Catholic priests who would forbid nuns from leaving the convent. Therefore, ideas of honor were embedded in the practice of marriage and religion during this time. The code of honor dictated a woman had to be locked away either in marriage to a man or in a marriage to

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god. Her body either belonged to her father, her husband or the church never to herself.

**Pete:** We'll get into how this is showcased in *Presumed Dead* but we also want to touch on honor and another prominent staple of Spanish Golden Age Drama, dueling.

**Pete:** What exactly was behind the chest puffing braggadocio found in duels in the Spanish Golden Age? For this segment I'll be pulling again from "Honor and Violence and the Spanish Golden Age" and "At Sword's Length: Theatrical Dueling in Early Spanish Drama" by Hugh K. Long. To summarize the ideas behind honor and the duel, Long states, "Failure to acknowledge or accept these cultural rules would inevitably lead to a loss of status in a world where social standing was of the utmost importance. If at any time one felt that either through their actions or the actions of another these aspects were compromised it was imperative that they be addressed immediately." And duels were able to do just that.

**Hailey:** But these weren't just random brawls, these duels adhered to a code of honor known as Duello or single combat. First an insult was given from one party to the other. And this wasn't just some random petty insult. This was one that really affected someone to the core.

**Pete:** Then they continued insulting each other until a challenge was issued.

**Hailey:** Honestly, the insults and theatrical showboating in these duels were more prominent than the actual duels themselves.

**Pete:** So it's easy to see how duels fit themselves into the plays of the Spanish Golden Age. In public, they were often as theatrical as the plays themselves. So duels became a prominent staple within Spanish Golden Age drama. It became a way to reflect the violent sense of honor so stringently held in society. A man had to restore his honor quickly even through violent means. You could even see how it was satirized in later works.

**Hailey:** So in summary, *Presumed Dead* works under these specific ideas of honor that came about during the Spanish Golden age. For women, it meant a religious patriarchal society that confined her to marriage or life as a nun. Women had to be locked away in order to preserve their purity and fidelity. Any other action was seen as bringing shame not only to herself but to her family too.

**Pete:** *Presumed Dead* also makes use of the ideas of honor as it pertained to men as well as dueling. Dueling was seen as man's overly-masculine attempt to restore his honor by any means necessary. Honor was the code which social and religious order moved throughout the Spanish Golden Age.

**Hailey:** By contextualizing this form of honor in *Presumed Dead*, we can begin to explore the ways de Azevedo either reinforces their ideas or subverts them.

**Pete:** Next we'd like to focus on specific scenes that highlight this discussion.

**Hailey:** Beginning with the first scene, Don Rodrigo goes after his daughter Jacinta with a dagger for being unmarried and therefore bringing dishonor to the family. Which if I must say, is very very dramatic and brings

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dishonor to the family in a different way.

**Pete:** Oh yeah. Dishonor to everyone. But yeah let's read a bit. Because after he comes in with the dagger, he proceeds to give this really really long speech. Now we're not going to read the whole thing but I thought I'd pick certain moments to highlight. Firstly Rodrigo says, "When honor is involved, there's no room for freedom in one's children."

**Pete:** One could see this as the broad idea of honor being introduced. Rodrigo will stop at nothing to retain his honor. As we see at the beginning of the play when he is pulling a dagger on his daughter! Next more specifically we have Rodrigo say, "In situations such as these, Jacinta, when a good child attempts to follow a father's orders, remember that fathers are the image of God. Those who don't abide by God's will, even if only verbally, shall not be called Christian."

**Pete:** Again, we see the religious component as it interlaced with the ideas of honor. The man of the family was upheld as divine and justified his control over women. This echoes the practice of enclosure we talked about earlier. Next we have more religious rhetoric and kind of the idea of a woman having to marry someone or become a nun

**Rodrigo:** Although it might be better to become a nun, it's also good to marry.

**Pete:** This starts to dive into more of how honor was inflicted on women and reinforced by men in this era. Religion again played into the enforcement of honor's rules. Women had to choose between being married or becoming a nun. These were the only ways honor could be upheld. Moving on to 1.2. We have Don Álvaro and his duel with Alberto. Again love this scene. Just enter sword fighting. I love it. And uh I chose this line from this piece we read earlier because I think it really highlights what honor is and how Álvaro uses honor.

**Don Álvaro:** That doesn't satisfy me. Don Álvaro de Gamboa. Doesn't answer such insults except by killing you or by dying. This is how I'll avenge the insults to my honor.

**Pete:** Here Don Álvaro demonstrates the code of honor via the duel. As gleaned from both Honor and Violence in the Spanish Golden Age and in Hugh K Long's work, these duels were as much for showboating as they were actual fighting. During the fight, Álvaro insults Alberto and clearly makes known the wrongs that he thinks he has committed. That being his attempt to run off with his sister Beatriz without marrying her. Again Álvaro activates what is seen as the masculine code of conduct for immediately restoring honor with violence. Álvaro's honor is also tied to his sister and the idea of enclosure. Since he believes Alberto is pursuing his sister without his blessing or knowledge, Álvaro is attempting to restore his honor by either controlling Beatriz or killing Alberto.

**Hailey:** And speaking of Beatriz, lets now look and see how honor affects women in the play looking at Jacinta, Lisarda and Beatriz. In the first scenes of the play Jacinta says in an aside

**Jacinta:** (*Aside*) I'll die a thousand times before that happens.

**Hailey:** A woman's honor was tied to who she married, and in Jacinta's eyes Don Álvaro is dishonorable. Clarindo

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was the honorable choice for Jacinta, they met in a church and therefore their union is blessed by God. I mean, how much more godly can you get than falling in love in the church. She talks a lot about the heavens and fate when discussing her love for Clarindo, but also this idea that she can only have one great love, and to marry someone else is dishonorable in her eyes. Her honor is now firmly tied to Clarindo's even though she believes he is dead and to the churches. Because even though she is not married, she is still upholding the Catholic idea against remarriage, which is why she wants to become a nun. She is "safe" from her fathers pressure and insistence to get married to a man that she doesn't love like Clarindo. And most importantly he is a soldier, in a play that focuses on soldiers who have just come back from fighting for their country, nothing is seen as more honorable. During the Inquisition, soldiers needed to be seen as honorable, fighting not only for the crown but for God himself, spreading Christianity throughout the world, Which is very problematic. We should not be sending other people to convert people to Christianity. That's just definitely definitely wrong. Plays during the Spanish Golden Age were commissioned by the crown, so of course there was going to be some pro- Inquisition rhetoric. And while this is there within the context of the play, de Acevedo contrasts this with the Don Álvaro. Who is so jealous and dishonorable that he would kill his friend, Clarindo in order to steal away the person that Clarindo loves. Which is ironic when you think about it, because Jacinta knows that this man isn't honorable. The audience knows he isn't honorable. But the audience also knows Clarindo is alive and it's a great time for dramatic irony. And later on we see that Jacinta states she doesn't conform to these ideas. Dorotea says, "Enough, sir; my mistress will conform to your wishes in all matters." And that's when she says

**Jacinta:** I don't conform to that.

**Hailey:** This idea that she is taking her own honor into her own hands because the person that she loves she can no longer have and so her honor is tied to his. When looking at Beatriz, the servant says,

**Hipólita:** My lady, your single-minded boldness was imprudent.

Dona Beatriz says

**Doña Beatriz:** Hipólita, I was left in a terrible spot, for even though we conducted ourselves according to the rules of propriety, my life would have been the spoils of my brother's anger.

**Hailey:** But even by going through the correct steps and rules set out by society, Dona Beatriz is still seen as being dishonorable, through her choice of suitor in Alberto. Because he is of a lower class, class and honor are tied hand in hand. He is seen as not being worthy enough for Beatriz, which in turn spoils her honor but also turns her into a spoil and a reward of the duel. Whoever man's honor is upheld gets to keep her honor pure. Which is why Don Álvaro immediately turns to the duel. To fix one's honor meant that one had to turn to violence, which is gendered in its own right. Sword fights were done exclusively by men, to other men to somehow fix the honor of their family. But if you really think about it, it was the ceremony of the duel, and the insults that were traded that supposedly fixed the honor of the family and thereby restored the masculinity of the man that was being insulted. Feminine honor was upheld through masculine honor and we see this through the duel and through sword fights. And we also see this in a way with Lisarda and her crossdressing. She states.

**Lisarda:** I'll use this male outfit to exact my revenge, so I can search for my brother's murderer more freely.

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**Hailey:** And what about you, Pete. Do you think by Lisarda crossdressing it affects her honor in a different way than if she was dressed as a woman?

**Pete:** Kind of yes and no. On the one hand, Lisarda is pursuing revenge in her own way but she can only do it by way of dressing like a man. Yet, she reveals herself at the end of the play and ends up married. In a way, I can see how Azevedo is subverting the ideas of honor while still playing within its boundaries. What do you think, Hailey?

**Hailey:** I think Azevedo is subverting it in a really really interesting way. This idea that Lisarda can only defend her own honor and the honor of her family by dressing as a man. She no longer has her brother to defend their honor so who else is going to that? Through this, Lisarda has her own agency and is able to enact the revenge she needs. Now does she enact that revenge? No. Clarindo is alive and she ends up marrying the person who murdered her brother. But for a little while, she takes on the role of her brother therefore trying to restore the honor to her family. It's really really interesting when you think about it. And I would love to see it staged in a way where we can see that, because reading and seeing that are two completely different things

*(20:26 Guitar)*

We hope you enjoyed a little trip back to the Spanish Golden Age and how religion and gender affect the Spanish view of honor. To recap, honor was an embedded part of Spanish culture, pulling both from Islam and Catholicism. For both men and women honor was tied to a woman's chastity and purity.

**Pete:** Two things that men needed to uphold through dueling. We can see these ideas woven throughout de Azevedo's work, *Presumed Dead*, and we hope this dive into the play sparked your interest to read or produce the play.

**Hailey:** Yes. produce the play. I would love to see it. I think it would be really really fun and interesting especially with all the asides that are in it. Anyway, just produce the play. Thank you so much for listening to the Writ in the Margins Podcast. Please check out our other episodes on *Presumed Dead*, *The Antipodes*, *Life is a Dream*, *Loa to the Divine Narcissus* and *The Island Princess*. I'm Hailey Pearce

**Pete:** And I'm Pete Sheldon

And this is Writ in the Margins

*(21:50 guitar ends)*

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