

THE DUEL: HONOUR AND AESTHETIC OF EARLY MODERN MASCULINE VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the 1550s culture of honour that focused primarily on the expressiveness of the (male) individual, rather than on content, which means that the code of honour was not a system of strictly defined normative rules; on the contrary, rules were formed based on the model of behaviour of a certain group. The purpose was thus to describe and popularise the pattern of honourable conduct through literary culture or published texts. The treatises on duelling served not only as manuals on how to approach or, better, how to avoid physical combat without losing honour, but also as reading for the courtiers to draw on when arguing, discussing, and citing (printed) opinions on duelling judgments and cases. The discourse and representation of duelling were forms of spectacle intended for life at court, and understood within that same context. Not surprisingly, the most eminent authors on duelling were courtiers. The study focuses on two examples of treatise: the “practical,” penned by the Bologna fencing master Achille Marozzo, and the “theoretical,” authored by the Koper man of letters Girolamo Muzio.

Keywords: Duel, honour, violence, chivalry, gender, Girolamo Muzio, Achille Marozzo, treatises of chivalry, 16th century

IL DUELLO: ONORE ED ESTETICA DELLA VIOLENZA MASCHILE NELLA PRIMA ETÀ MODERNA

SINTESI

Il presente contributo affronta il tema della cultura dell'onore nel Cinquecento, improntata com'era più all'espressività del singolo (uomo) che non al contenuto in sé, da cui deriva che il codice d'onore non si configurava come un sistema di regole normative rigidamente definite, anzi: le regole venivano plasmate sulla scorta del modello di comportamento invalso in un dato gruppo. Fine ultimo di tutto ciò era descrivere e popolarizzare un modello di condotta onorevole mediante la cultura letteraria e i testi dati alle stampe. I trattati sul duello non erano meri manuali con indicazioni sulla condotta da tenere o, meglio, su come eludere il corpo a corpo preservando l'onore,

bensì letture che fornivano ai cortigiani materiale per argomentare, dibattere e citare pareri (a stampa) su giudizi e casi di duello. Il discorso e la rappresentazione del duello erano forme di spettacolo destinate alla vita di corte e in questo tipo di contesto anche intese – ciò spiega perché i maggiori autori sull'argomento fossero essi stessi cortigiani. Il presente studio verte su due esempi di trattati, di cui uno di taglio «pratico» a firma del bolognese Achille Marozzo, maestro di scherma, e un altro «teorico» di cui è autore il letterato capodistriano Girolamo Muzio.

Parole chiave: Duello, onore, violenza, cavalleria, genere, Girolamo Muzio, Achille Marozzo, trattati cavallereschi, XVI secolo

INTRODUCTION¹

Throughout Western history various honour codes shaped male identity and ideals regarding what masculine behaviour should be, and, in most cases, regulated the social relations of men within different social groups, constructing the basis to set and resolve private disputes – aiming for reconciliation and peace. The renaissance (aristocratic) honour codes formed the elements of individual distinction and the exclusiveness of the class. The duel of honour played a significant role in the conduct paradigm of the upper social classes and persisted as a social element from the Renaissance till the first half of the 20th century. We can find almost everywhere in Europe episodes of duelling that were not limited exclusively to military entourages, but among writers, poets, physicians, newspaper editors, student associations *Burschenschaften*, etc., as well. A famous example, defending female honour, occurred in November 1911 involving the physicist Paul Langevin, who had a scandalous romance with the widowed Marie Skłodowska-Curie. The two did not hide their affair in Paris and gossip leaked into the public through incriminating letters, printed by the French newspaper *L'Oeuvre*, showing Marie Curie in a negative light as a homewrecker and a seductive Jew (even though she wasn't Jewish). The gossip added fuel to the fire of xenophobia, causing public outrage to the point that when Marie Curie returned from a conference, she faced an angry mob surrounding her house. To defend Marie Curie's honour, Langevin challenged one of the newspaper editors who had published excerpts of the love correspondence, Gustave Téry, to a duel (one of the five to be fought by Curie's supporters in the Curie/Langevin affair). The two staged a duel (pistols for weapons), but neither chose to pull the trigger (Ogilvie, 2004, 94–97). Another notorious duel, not for love but fatal, occurred in Rome, where Felice Cavallotti died on March 6, 1898, killed by Count Ferruccio Macola, editor of the conservative newspaper *Gazzetta di Venezia*, who had challenged him following a dispute. The radical Cavallotti had accused the count of lying and being responsible for publishing an unverified report related to a lawsuit he had received as a deputy. Cavallotti proposed the duel and Macola accepted, relaunching the challenge, proposing the use of the glove and swords as weapons. Cavallotti lost the duel and was killed but the challenger was sentenced by public opinion because Cavallotti was admired. Macola was marginalized from political and social life, and years later, in 1910, he committed suicide. Claudio Povolo suggests that a key element in the understanding of the complexity of duels of honour is the role of "spectators" as the third party (Povolo, 2014, 13–14).

Among the most recent examples of a fatal duel, as a result of a love affair and the protection of honour, is one traced to the first half of the 20th century on German soil. SS *Hauptsturmführer* Roland Strunk was one of the most important Dutch correspondents on the editorial board of the NSDAP *Völkischer Beobachter*. He died in a duel in October 1937. Adolf Hitler, after a series of such events, banned

1 This paper was co-financed by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) in the framework of the scientific research programme P6-0272 managed by prof. E. Pelikan.

duels in any form (Heim, 1980, 214). These are just some of the past practices and rituals of the duelling milieu that found its golden age of propagation through widespread treatises and manuals on honour and the code of conduct published during the 16th century print boom in Italy. But as Lawrence Friedman pointed out, in the 18th century the ritual of duelling crossed the Atlantic and found its way into U.S. codes of honour as well – became, as he says, a form of U.S. violence or “lawless law.” The most famous U.S. duel took place on July 11, 1804, when Aaron Burr killed Alexander Hamilton on a field in Weehawken, New Jersey. Friedman is clear about the duel’s illegality (officially it was a crime) in the North and South; in the North it was depicted as a dishonourable act, while in the southern states it flourished among the gentlemen and persisted much longer, till the end of the 19th century (Friedman, 2010, 299–300).

THE AESTHETIC OF THE DUEL

The Italian Cinquecento was a century of treatises on the courtier, man of honour, knight, aristocrat, secretary, gentlewoman, masculinity, ruler, duel, and honour. Their primary aim was to re-establish the order and conventional relations within social hierarchy by clearly prescribing responsibilities, privileges and duties. The 1550s and 1560s gave birth to an important literary genre called science of chivalry or *scienza cavalleresca*, which focused on the interlinked ideas on nobility, honour and duelling. Such mainstream literature on duelling and honour had a long-term impact on aristocratic *forma mentis* and (at the same time) *modus operandi* in the following centuries and provided the readership with special codes of conduct in the aristocratic world. A man of honour (who was also a man of letters) had to use the content and language (discourse) of honour and to identify with the mentality of treatises if he wanted to be active and successful within his cultural milieu (e.g., at courts and in other cultural and intellectual circles). The function of such treatises or codes of conduct was to form a perfect cavalier with an appropriate mental *habitus* and practical and theoretical knowledge (of history, combat, strategy, tactics, etc.). The knowledge that young men of honour acquired was founded on the values of honour and loyalty to their rulers and/or the Pope. As a rule, there was unceasing conflict between the ruling families of Italian city-states, and so the ruling duke tried to centralise the power around his family. In order to preserve his political authority, he had to control violence and smooth over (pacify) conflicts between patrician families, who were important members of the public life. Codes of conduct were needed because the old feudality could not give up its aristocratic and military identity on the one hand, and because socially aspiring patricians felt a strong need for clear rules ensuring admittance to and a place in the social elite on the other. Such “paranoia” resulted from the fact that the upper social classes were undergoing changes as there were several families who climbed the social ladder in a short period of time. In order to successfully adapt to the nobility, the latter had to assimilate the social etiquette or at least imitate it, as a result of which they also had to learn the knightly protocol and code of honour.

In the Apennine Peninsula, the science of chivalry saw its golden age in the 16th century, with its main representatives being the following Italian men of letters: Torquato Tasso, Sperone Speroni, Francesco Patrizi, Girolamo Muzio, Fausto da Longiano, Possevino, Alciati, etc. The treatises on duelling and honour (*punto d'onore*) reached their literary peak between 1540 and 1570 owing to their printed editions. The undisputed production and printing centre of chivalric literature was Venice, with the most popular printer being Gabriel Giolito and his typography.

Given the fact that the publication of such treatises proved to be a success, the question arises whether the *auctoritas* of the *scienza cavalleresca* were familiar with the contemporary phenomenon of duelling. According to the basic hypothesis, the historical and cultural importance of the science of chivalry lay not only in its publishing and literary success but also in the significance of the habit itself. Such success was also possible in the broader context and larger role of the Italian Wars (1494–1559), due to the major presence of literate, highly-educated rulers, and condottieri that supported (including as judges) the practice of duels and their propagation on the Italian battleground.

According to the British anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers the word honour derives from the Latin *Honos*, a Roman divinity of war associated with *Virtus* (virtue), a goddess of masculinity and courage. If the concept of honour originated in a military society, it soon became a “value which expresses a moral ideal, as well as a label for behaviour, and a social rank.” (Pitt-Rivers, 1997, 230) Carlin A. Barton understands Roman honour as an emotion, “the paradoxical emotion of sacredness,” a compound of vitality and fragility, vulnerability and aggressiveness. Status was a limited resource which could not be given to one without being stolen from another (Barton, 2001, 186). “Roman honor cannot be comprehended apart from notions of reciprocity. We may think of status as static, but honor was, in ancient Rome, forever open to contest, enmeshed in a chain of challenge and response. It had to be tested; it required and agony and a spectacle.” (Barton, 2001, 187). The main criteria of honour were not based solely on the structure of society and culture, but also referred to the social status and, as a distinctive feature, to gender – “a sentiment felt by the individual” – a conduct that was perceived as dishonourable for a woman, would not be so for a man. A discipline such as anthropology could be essential to understand the concepts of honour vs. shame (dishonour or humiliation). For William Miller the concept of humiliation before 1750 was expressed by the word “shame”: a person whose conduct was not appropriate to his rank was humiliating himself. After 1750 humiliation was a more individual feeling (consequently the third party morphed into the ever more public opinion). “According to the Oxford English Dictionary the earliest recorded use of to humiliate meaning to mortify or to lower or depress the dignity or self-respect of someone does not occur until 1757. Its usual sense prior to the mid-eighteenth century is more closely related to the physical act of bowing, of prostrating oneself as in ‘Such a religious man may not ... humiliate himself to execute the rite of homage’ from 1602. The metaphoric underpinning of humiliate connected it more to humility and making humble than to what we now think of

as humiliation.” (Miller, 1995, 177). From the anthropological point of view the concept of “emotional communities,” the sentiments expressed in groups with their own particular values, modes of feeling, and ways to convey them, which Barbara Rosenwein investigated through the history of emotions (Rosenwein, 2016, 3), a theme that could be useful in the research area of the duelling culture.

In his monumental work *The Civilizing Process*, Vol. I. *The History of Manners* (1969), the German sociologist Norbert Elias compares the personality of a nobleman in the Middle Ages and in modern times, and claims that the medieval nobility had an affinity for combat, which was not only a social necessity but also a form of affective conduct. But we must underline the fact that there was a different control of emotions in the Middle Ages than there is in the modern age. Jennifer Feather in her study points out that early modern writers struggled with the tension between two antagonistic, but parallel, ideas of combat: that which Feather calls the “pre-modern subject” and remains deeply rooted in medieval ideas of self, where the combat was mutually constitutive of both combatants, and the second idea of a modern model, or the humanist subject of the 16th century, oriented in the conception of individuality and selfhood. By examining competing depictions of combat in early modern texts, the importance of combat in understanding the humanist subject and the previously neglected premodern subject can be detected: “This notion of masculinity and selfhood is implicit, though obscured, in traditional accounts of the emergence of the humanist subject in the early modern period. According to these accounts, subjectivity, as it emerges in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, entails an autonomous will directing a material body. The hallmark of the humanist subject that emerges is an interiorized self-consciousness at one remove from the body, which in turn is conceived of as an enclosed container. This understanding of the subject relies on an attitude toward the body both implicit in and made available by early modern depictions of combat.” (Feather, 2011, 3). On the other hand, there was also the exertion of social pressure on the individual, who had to internalise self-restraint for the benefit of the community and in order to avoid marginalisation. About the so-called monopoly of violence, Charles Tilly has argued that the state managed to prevail using the violence inherent in society itself (the themes of enmity and collective violence). Pacification had a strong impact on the changes in psychic structures, behavioural standards and emotions: individuals were forced to take into consideration the existence of one another, which decreased not only aggressive drives but also the imbalance of power between social strata and the relations between them. In this light the tracts on duels offer (also if in a theoretical perspective) an individual confrontation, the contrast of the enmities, as manifestations of feuds that are collective and destructive (also auto-destructive) (Tilly, 2003). According to the medieval duelling tradition, Ute Frevert enlisted three institutions of ritualised combats anchored in the culture of the Middle Ages: the feud (trial by ordeal), the judicial duel (trial by combat, conducted before a judge) and the knightly tournament (joust, court ceremonies), where the latter, unlike the feuds and judicial duels, was an act of amity rather than enmity (Frevert, 1995, 9–10). These

representations of the feudal heritage can be useful elements in understanding the origins and consolidation of the duel of honour (extra-legal private disputes) from the 16th century onwards, as a new form of ritualized combat that still includes the most representative medieval feature: the social equality of the contestants, who must possess the same behavioural patterns and values of honour. “In a feudal society, the only conceivable form of male honour was estate honour, and thus, it was self-evident that only members of the same estate who shared the same concepts of honour could engage in combat with each other in its defence. This principle of equality applied to men of both lower and upper rank: thus, for example, kings and princes could challenge each other to a duel, but they were not permitted to fight duels with anyone below them.” (Frevert, 1995, 11). Jennifer Low mentioned another type of ritual fight, the single combat, which was easily confused with the judicial and early modern duels. It was concerned with the medieval practice of the public fight between two opposed rulers or generals (Low, 2016). Frevert detected its similarity to early modern duels, which were staged in organised and regulated structures; the ruler determined the location and the time, but also had the power to grant pardons in accordance to the tradition of jousts and judicial duels. An element distinguishing it from its predecessors is the institutional sanction against the duel of honour. According to François Billacois, a duel is an institution, a factor of social differentiation, a political manifestation and ritual. The practice of duelling was resistant to various official norms that opposed the centralised authority of prohibition and propaganda. Another element setting it apart from the medieval trials by combat was not that the outcome of the duel determined the truth, but that the duel of honour was staged at all. To be in constant readiness (as a proof of courage and manliness – the anachronistic chivalric heroic ideal) to defend one’s own honour, risking one’s life, was the main concern for early modern duellists (Billacois, 1990). However, being the duel contestants members of equal rank, they were not always enemies: “the transformation of the enemy into a friend occurred via the medium of the duel, which generated an existential scenario. The proximity of death subjected both duellists to a sort of ritual purgation during which all feelings of hate, deliberate abuse and enmity were cast aside.” (Frevert, 1995, 24). Girolamo Muzio (1496–1576) was one among many contemporary writers whose attempt was to “civilise” the duelling practice through treatises and opinions on duelling matters, by regulating and theorising the code of its proper implementation, where gentlemen should adopt exclusively the honourable chivalric behaviour (which included, for example, the introduction of seconds, the total rejection of the vengeance emotions of vendetta and the vision of duel as an instrument to achieve reconciliation) (Muzio, 1550, 38v). Jennifer Low in her study of masculinity in English early modern drama compared the texts, treatises and notions of honour, fencing, duelling, and anti-duelling to prove the rootedness of duelling practices and related emotions in English culture. She highlighted the reciprocity between history and literary texts (especially playwrights), where one does not merely determine the other, but rather “influences, shapes, contends with the other in ways that do not conform to any single or generic

formula of interaction. Hence, the study of literary artefact in their cultural context becomes a study of the particular and, often, of the unique.” (Low, 2016, VII). Low pointed out that the duel had a paradoxical function of both the representation of social differentiation and gender roles as their transcendence. Therefore, duelling was not only a tool for dispute resolution or honour, but also a presumption of manhood. The aristocracy thus perceived masculinity as an integral part of identity, reflecting it through virtuous behaviour. Consequently, the duel of honour embodied the image of both the old military ideal and that of the courtier, always concerned about the safeguard of their reputation. The next, but not the last omnipresent and crucial element (yet frequently neglected by the historiography on the early modern period as a historical category) in the *scienza cavallersca* is the gender issue of the lady’s honour, seen always through the eyes of the gentlemen. Recent studies (Abreu-Ferreira, 2015; Strange, Cribb & Forth, 2014; Mansker, 2011; Walker, 2003; Jorgensen, Woodbridge & Beehler, 2003; Baharona, 2003; Spierenburg, 1998) have emphasised the importance of gender as one of the principal elements that determined the perception of violence acts. Still, most studies analyse physical violence as a male sector in maintaining the gender hierarchy, stating that early modern Europe’s culture of violence was a male culture, in which women participated in a passive role. Female honour has been primarily understood in a context of sexual reputation. Robert Nye has written that “women’s honour is primarily sexual in nature and consists first of her virginity and later her strict marital fidelity. Women can only lose their honour, but men are permitted to accrue to theirs by seeking glory and distinction in the public arena. Men, however, may also lose their honour in a variety of ways, suffering a kind of annihilation and social death.” (Nye, 1993, 10). In validating this thesis, Lyndal Roper underlined that female virtue in the early modern period was perceived in bodily terms, ultimately meaning chastity; male virtue, by contrast, was plural and concerned qualities which must be manifested in public: male was opposed to female, public to private, activity to passivity. Gender and a social history heavily influenced by anthropology might, from their different directions, converge. So, the male honour was perceived as a complex structure involving elements of power (physical and mental), economic, public self-representation, etc. In this vision the paper analyses masculinity as a socially learnt system of behaviour, which assured men dominance and upheld a male-dominated social order (Roper, 1994). Nye tried to point out that the question of male honour lay in the fact that it was never secure, required constant reaffirmation, and was always open to challenge: “A man was in greatest danger of dishonouring himself at the very moment he most expressly affirmed his honour.” (Nye, 1993, 13). A similar position, from a political point of view, was stressed by Hugo Dufour, pointing out that a possible failure of masculinity could damage the image of the prince, leading him to exposure through criticism, because of the implicit need to reflect and maintain a perfect masculinity (Dufour, 2018, 188). On the other hand, the perspective of masculinity permits a gendered rereading of the political history of this period. In these circumstances, the masculinity of the princes became an important and, in part, conscious

element amongst their strategies to assert their power. When princely masculinity was the object of attack, or in the conscious presentation of their manhood with the aim of protecting their political position or undermining that of their opponents, it could also be the object of performance,² constructed by princes themselves to legitimate their political authority: “A duel between rival dukes of the royal family which degenerated into a civil war, the conflict between the Armagnacs and the Burgundians was symbolically embodied in a confrontation in which the princes took on the appearance of the wild beast, adopting the fury of animality. The dramatisation of their masculinity by the princes was thus first transmitted by a demonstration of brute force, affirming once more the eminently warlike character of princely masculinity.” (Dufour, 2018, 191). Another key element in the context of self-presentation in the public sphere was the verbal aspect of the challenge itself, which mechanisms derive from the humanistic importance of language and public performance. The word played a key role in the activation of the duelling process. The verbal conflict as a key element of a ritualised fighting was taken in consideration among ethnologists, like *Irenäus* Eibl-Eibesfeldt. In his opinion the use of verbal conflict helped to harmonise and regulate the interpersonal relationships, finding in most cultures’ common universal principles patterns of accusation, insinuation, defamation, etc. Referring to Erving Goffman’s work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, verbal challenges regard individual prestige, being an effective provocation, since “the fear of losing face is deeply rooted” and it is a way to the understanding of social conduct (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 2007, 375). In Eibl-Eibesfeldt’s notions, duels are culturally regulated forms of fighting challenges and can assume many different ritualised forms, but mostly between men. He found a representative case of a duel between women in the Australian tribe Walbiri, where women fight with sticks. The quarrel is terminated when a third party separates the two women. The conflict could continue by insulting the adversary verbally and later with the attacker putting a stick between her legs like a phallus, making sexual movements in the direction of her rival (imitating the man) (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 2007, 399–400). Female duels can be traced back to 16th century Naples, to a historically recorded duel fought by two Italian noblewomen in 1552: Isabella de Carazzi and Diambra de Pottinella. The episode, known as “the duel of women,” was also portrayed in an astonishing canvas by Jose de Ribera in 1636. The two ladies faced each other in a “duel for love” in the presence of the Marquis del Vasto for the sake and the hand of a man named Fabio di Zeresola (Onieva, 1957, 44).

Besides this case, female violence was mostly presented as verbal non-physical conflict and antithetical to male violence. Pieter Spierenburg argues that violence between women was stereotypically portrayed as comical and was satirised by books and plays of the early modern period (Spierenburg, 2008). Some of the Italian dukedoms fostered the idea that a perfect man of honour was not entirely identified with a warrior (*uomo d’armi*); an important characteristic that he needed to possess

2 On gender as performance see also (Butler, 1990).



Fig. 1: Portrait of Charles V with a Dog (1533) (Public domain).



Fig. 2: Prince Don Carlos in Armour (1562) (Public domain).



Fig. 3: Albert VII and Rudolf II (1570–1573) (Public domain).

was grace, a quality acquired through a long and demanding study and manifested through conversational skills. In the early modern period, such an Italian model of a man of honour who was able to harmonise honour and virtue with court life and participation in city administration was promoted throughout Europe as it suited the needs of the ruling classes. This vision was in most cases associated to the military one, as we can notice in Renaissance art works; among the most representative examples is the painting by Tiziano, *Portrait of Charles V with a Dog* (1533), in which the emperor Charles V is wearing armour highlighting his genital organs – representing the male soldier; a similar pattern is traced in Jooris van der Straeten's *Prince Don Carlos in Armour* (1562) and the paintings of Alonso Sánchez Coello of *Albert VII and Rudolf II* (1570–1573).

In 16th century portraits of rulers and monarchs, the sexual organs are emphasised within a codpiece, interpreted as a visual symbol of power, strength, virility, and masculinity (also in the context of dynastic continuity). It is important to point out that the contemporary understanding of manhood was not limited to the sexual virility but also implied physiological and personal qualities. At Italian courts, the duel thus turned into an element of a complex system of conduct/behaviour in written form and was only rarely carried out in real life. With the presented analysis, the matter of the duel of honour as a cultural marker and performative act of masculine identity is becoming topical in the historical perspective of gender studies.

A clear example is the figure of Julie d'Aubigny (1670/1673–1707), better known as Mademoiselle Maupin or La Maupin, a 17th-century swordswoman and opera singer. She dressed as a man and was depicted in various representations in print material.

At this point, we need to differentiate between treatises on duelling and honour on the one hand and those on the practical aspects of duelling on the other (fencing, horse riding, weapons, etc.), such as the most famous work by Achille Marozzo, *Opera Nova Chiamata Duello, O Vero Fiore dell'Armi de Singolari Abattimenti Offensivi, & Diffensivi* (1536). Having written down the rules of de facto duelling, Marozzo's handbook proved to be a milestone in the history of the Italian fencing school and was reprinted in 1550, 1568, and 1605, providing also an enriched illustrative edition depicting the combat moves in a duel. Such practical fencing manuals were much more attractive as they contained many illustrations (emphasising masculinity and virility by visual representations of the ideal cavalier); with the visual aspect of the publications being much more aesthetic, they attracted more attention. In the 16th century, the manuals focused on instruction on the techniques of the duel itself, i.e., on the exchange of strokes and practical aspects of duelling and fencing, while the treatises on the duel of honour contained only the text (with rare or no illustrations), focusing on the content and presentation of rules, examples, and circumstances leading to combat, and its aftermath. The main goal of such “analytical” publications, in which emphasis was placed on the content and the structure of the concept of honour, was the formation of a new social and cultural order. In the Italian peninsula – the cradle of the Renaissance duel – the



Fig. 4: Mademoiselle de Maupin (1898) (Public domain).

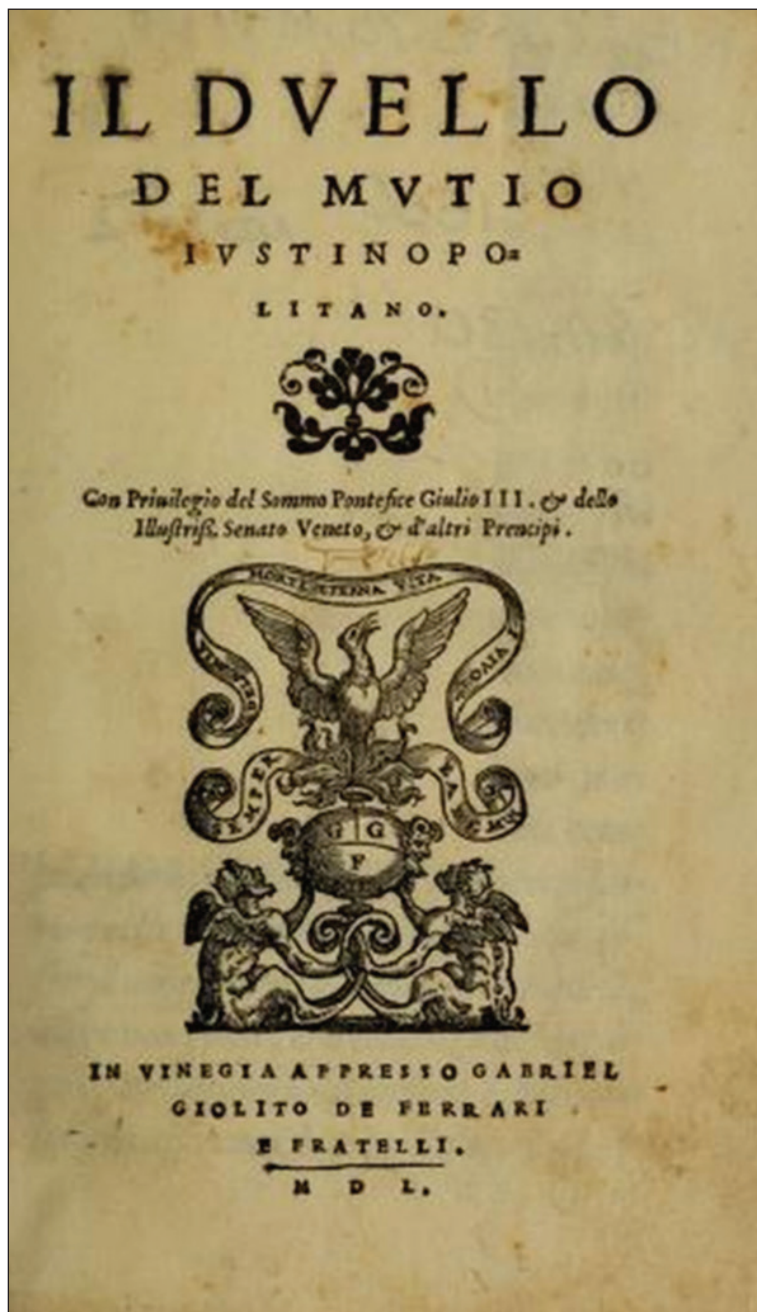


Fig. 5: *Il duello del Mutio iustinopolitano* (1550).

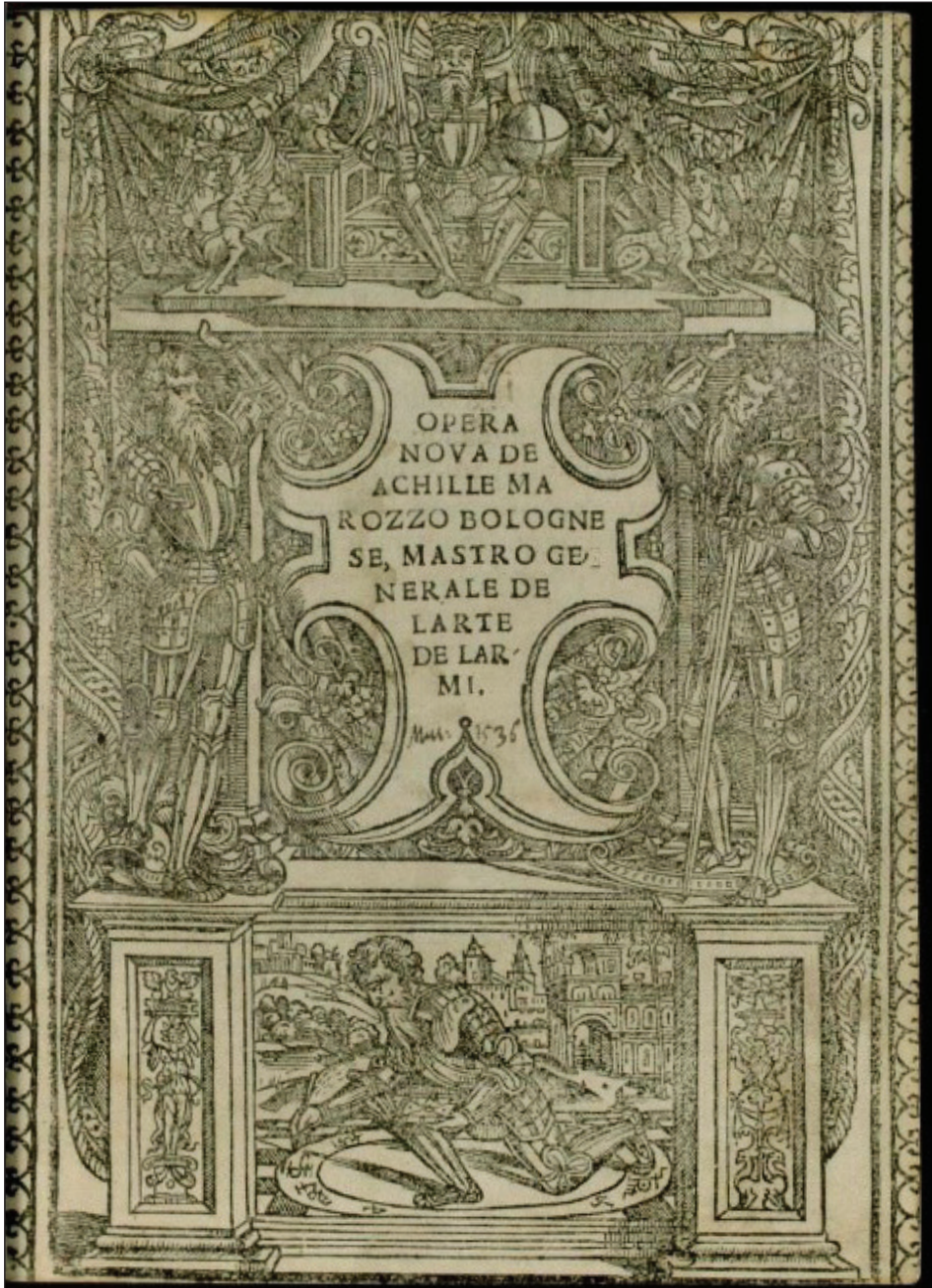


Fig. 6: *Opera nova chiamata duello* (1536).



Fig. 7: Detail. *Opera nova* (1536).

largest number of theoretical texts about the science of chivalry was written by the so-called “doctors of duelling” or “professors of honour” between 1360 and 1560. As mentioned above, the *scienza cavalleresca* reached its heyday in the mid-16th century through the dissemination and circulation of printed, translated and reprinted works written (in the vernacular language) by the authorities in this fields, such as Muzio (six editions between 1550 and 1563), Alciati (six editions between 1544 and 1552) and Possevino (five editions between 1533 and 1564).

Between 1545 and 1565, such treatises were important subjects printed by the Giolito family and other Venetian printing houses. Venice is in this light an appropriate cultural environment and editorial centre for studying the propagation of the duel literature that consequently propagated the nature of masculinity and femininity, leading us to understand much better the cultural impact of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation on the perception of the body and subjectivity.

The work *Il Duello* is thus classified among treatises of a popular nature which were written in vernacular Italian (*volgare*) and intended for a wide reading public, and were, between 1545 and 1565, part of the major printing production of the Giolito family and Venetian printing shops (Donati 1988, 93–94).

Il Duello was a great publishing success. It was the first work of this genre to have been written not by a military or legal entity, but by a man of letters and a courtier – i.e., a layman in the field. It was one of the first books on the science of chivalry that met the demands of the new taste of the public, i.e., the market, and as such quickly gained popularity: it saw five editions within the first five years, thirteen editions by the end of the century, two translations into French, one into Spanish, and several imitations and translations in England. In this work, Muzio related of his insights and experiences from his life as a courtier. In his introductory address to the Duke of Savoy Emmanuel Philibert he explained that having repeatedly witnessed disputes among knights he decided to deal with the subject of duelling in more depth and present his study in the form of a manual:

This subject is generally treated by two types of people: by knights and scholars, with the former usually basing their conclusions solely on their experiences, and the latter forming their opinion purely based on what they find in their papers. I have sought to create a new mixture from the erudition of the latter and the experience of the former, seasoning it with my own research and my other studies, which hopefully may be such as to please anyone who has not too fastidious a taste. (Muzio 1550, 3)

In the three volumes that compose *Il duello*, Muzio describes what noblemen should know about duelling: who can decide to duel, what the duellists need to know, how to act in determinate circumstances, etc. The explanations of technical chivalric terms are supported by practical examples. The first volume is concerned with the origins of duel, which is defined as a test of truth and is supposed to have been introduced by the Lombards. In time, and with the approval of the courts,

their customs as well as military skills and rules developed into duels, which were considered as acts of male honour. The second volume focuses on the obligations and duties of nobles, and the third discusses the duellists and noble ranks.³

Muzio asserted that only those who were “*noble by birth and then earned honour and praise with excellent deeds*” could be called nobles, adding:

Rather than contenting themselves with being noble by birth, people should seek not only to preserve that nobility, but to enhance it further with their virtues. [...] In the beginning, Nature made us all equal. It was the virtue which began to distinguish the nobles from the non-nobles. And then fortune added to virtue, usurping the lordship over human success. (Muzio 1558, 202v–203r)

However, as Donati points out (Donati, 1988, 96), these words do not proffer a simple humanistic definition of nobility and virtues, for Muzio develops his theory with the following paragraph about the key element of honour:

I say that in the cases of chivalry we are bound by law to respect the opinions and customs of knights. And the opinion of knights is that no duty, either to the homeland or the ruler, nor desire for property or for life, should be given precedence over honour; and that knights are, in the face of any written rules and the danger of losing, to obey the law of honour. Which means that when another one is called high and dry to a dare with weapons, they should respond with promptness of the spirit, and whoever does otherwise, is not worthy of being counted among honourable knights. (Muzio 1558, 175)

Muzio thus noted that the topic of duelling no longer concerned groups of knights and warriors only, rather its importance was extending into the remaining classes of nobility as well. During the 1540s, Muzio served in Milan with Alfonso d’Avalos, Marquis of Vasto, where he was entrusted with the study and resolution of all knightly disputes or complaints that the marquis was required to adjudicate.

3 Muzio’s treatise was a kind of theorisation of chivalric rules regarding how to answer and react to insults and injustice. As one of the principal “weapons” of the duel, Muzio specifies the so-called *mentita* (denial), which usually denoted the onset of the ritual of duel. Before actually engaging in the physical combat, it was possible to opt for a “verbal” version of a duel, which transformed into a chivalric complaint (*querela cavalleresca*). To avoid physical combat, the so-called “professors of honour” (*professori d’honore*) offered advice in the role of mediators for a peaceful resolution of the dispute, which (most of the time) materialised in the conclusion of private peace. For that reason, towards the end of the 16th century, treatises on duelling and on the science of chivalry in general, which discussed the concept of nobility in connection to duelling and honour, became a constituent part of the *forma mentis* of the upper Italian strata: “*Let us not demonstrate with weapons what can be demonstrated by conduct [...] Demonstrating through weapons is very uncertain; no divine and no human law sanctions it as an adequate means of duelling; it is condemned even by those who first introduced it to us in Italy [...] Neither can we ascribe courage to one who is not attended by reason and justice, but impudence and anger.*” (Muzio 1571, 212).

In his fourth book, titled *Le Vergeriane*, Muzio admits:

That of the several hundred disputes that I had been asked to deal with by just as many different people, only some four or five ended in combat. And of those who engaged in combat only one man died, the one who in the confrontation with his enemy did not follow the orders that I had given him. And in the disputes managed by me, no one went to the battlefield, instead, days passed in exchanging opinions. (Muzio 1551, 158v)

Muzio held the same assignment also with don Ferrante Gonzaga, the successor to the Marquis of Vasto, until 1550, when he decided to publish his treatise on duelling. Between 1540 and 1550, the number of knightly complaints increased, particularly towards the end of the 1550s when printed manifestos about retorts, defences, disputes, verbal assaults and the like proliferated. There were 27 treatises on duelling published only between 1550 and 1563 (Donati 1988, 95).

Donati thus wonders what determined the link between the concurrent increase of knightly complaints and treatises about duels and honour and the purpose of these latter. Comparing the printed texts of the science of chivalry to those of proclamatory imputations he concludes that their intersection was the bearer of honour, who could legitimately challenge or was challenged to a duel (Donati, 1988, 96).

In 1553 another important work about duels was published,⁴ the treatise *Dialogo dell'honore [...] nel quale si tratta a pieno del duello* by Giovanni Battista Possevino, which contains the key concepts of 16th century aristocratic mentality. Possevino understood nobility as a hereditary (i.e., consanguineous, natural) endowment which provides distinctly for social inequality:

Nobility is something real, it is not just an opinion; it is something that exists in the world and is cause of distinction between men. For let us suppose that two children are born in a forest, one to a peasant father and mother, and one to a noble father and mother, and that both are raised in the same way. I tell you that the child born of a noble father and mother will learn the virtues, both intellectual and moral, as well as manners and customs with greater ease than the child born of a peasant father and mother. It is indeed so that nobility is more capable; the reason is that one born from a noble lineage (although in the event of some impediment that may sometimes turn out differently), being more temperate and delicate, is therefore more capable of learning all the virtues. Therefore nobility

4 Possevino was of a different opinion than Muzio with regard to duelling. For Possevino the role of the duel was primarily political, and a nobleman, to defend his honour, was not to follow the instructions and orders of various city jurists who, in the spirit of preventing city riots, condemned physical assault and tended towards peace-making with no regard for the honour of the nobility. Whereas Muzio found the duels in cities to be useful precisely as a means of prevention of clashes and hostilities between families (escalation into *faidas*). For this reason a duel had to be permitted by law and as such regulated by provisions. It can be assumed that the duel acted as a regulator in preventing outbreaks of *faidas* between urban families.

have had the benefit of wealth in various respects, and by respects we mean that which preserves nobility; wealth is in fact a lever for better disposing the mind, for the rich can enjoy good food, which makes for a greater subtlety of mind and aptness to learn the virtues. (Possevino, 1553, 206–207)

Muzio already took a very clear position on the notion of nobility in his earlier writings *Il Duello* and *Le risposte cavalleresche* (1550); which he developed even further and in more depth in his later works *Il Cavaliero* (1569) and *Il gentilhuomo* (1571).

The main character in these works was, naturally, a gentleman (*gentilhuomo*), sometimes referred to as a *cavaliere* (knight or cavalier), who was partly linked to the tradition and partly to the image of the courtier, which means that also such representatives of the court as writers, philosophers, artists, and noblemen, all living off their lords and rulers, were encompassed under this image. Not surprisingly, the writers about duels were also authors of treatises about gentlemen, who had both the possibility of ascending the social ladder and, of course, the role of consolidation of the aristocracy who sustained them.

CONCLUSION

The chivalric code was composed of a complex and autonomous system of rules, which existed as an alternative to state legislation and as a means of one's cultural and social recognition. As a result, the Italian state and church authorities were powerless to suppress private combat. According to Erspamer (1982, 26), the definition of the science of chivalry or the culture of a social group (nobility) is not based on the duel as such, rather on the concept or system of honour (*sistema dell'onore*), which in the 16th century assumed a high social value – which semantically equals a transformation into a ritual.

In the Middle Ages and the early modern age, honour was still based on proving oneself, mainly through combat or duel. Defeat in a duel and a tournament was cause for shame and could even lead to the loss of honour. In medieval times, the concept of honour was not yet crucial, for knights could acquire it with a victory followed by a reward. In the 16th century, however, honour became the central virtue of the class of nobility, who could only obtain it by following and respecting a code of honour or conduct (Erspamer, 1982, 30).

The culture of honour focused primarily on the expressiveness, rather than on content (as was the case in the Counter-Reformation and countries under absolutist regimes), which means that the code of honour was not a system of strictly defined normative rules; on the contrary, rules were formed based on the model of behaviour of a certain group. The purpose was thus to describe and popularise the pattern of honourable conduct through literary culture or published texts. There are numerous manuals on honour and duels based on citations and *auctoritates* from

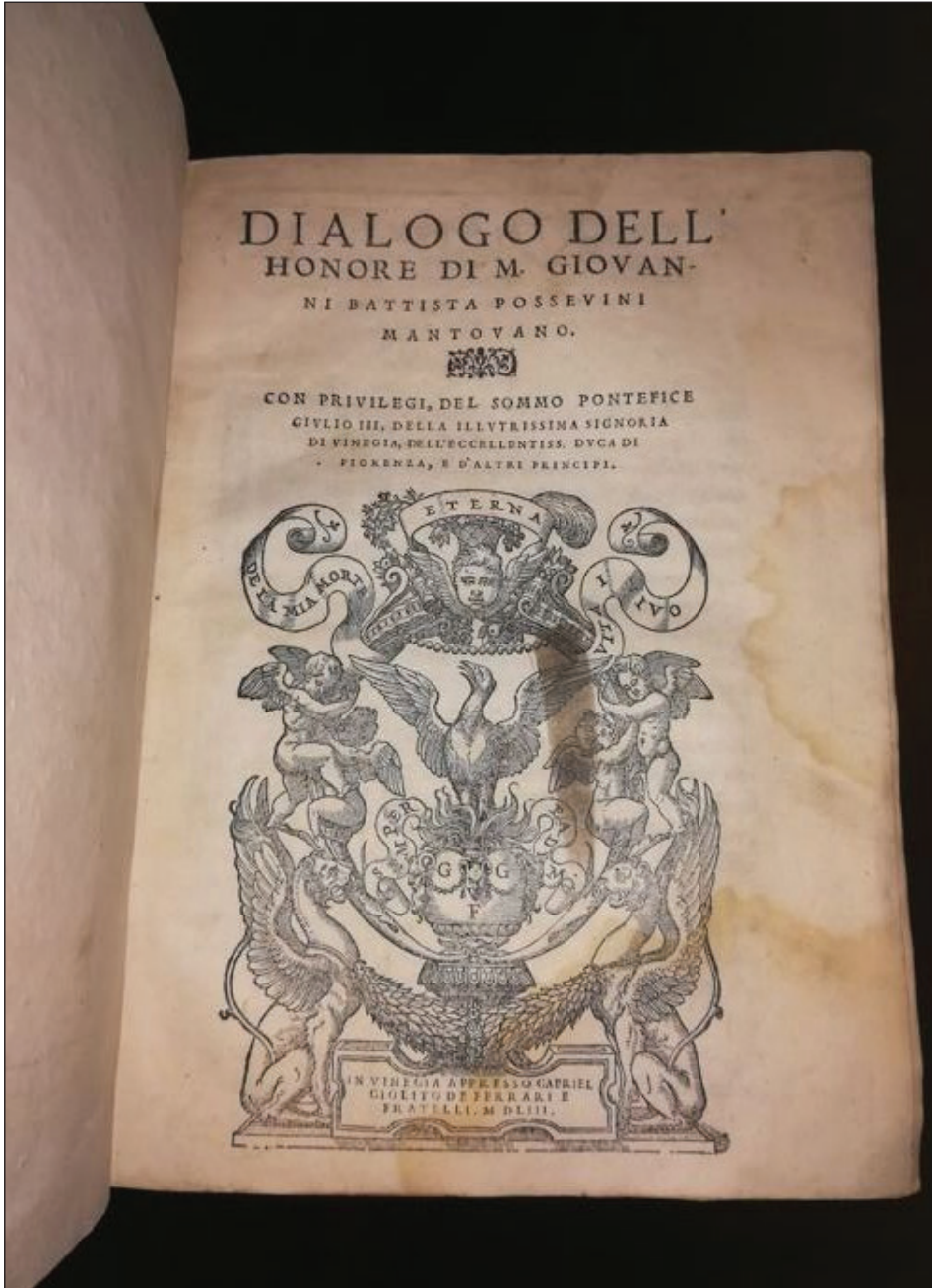


Fig. 8: Dialogo dell'honore (1553) (Public domain).

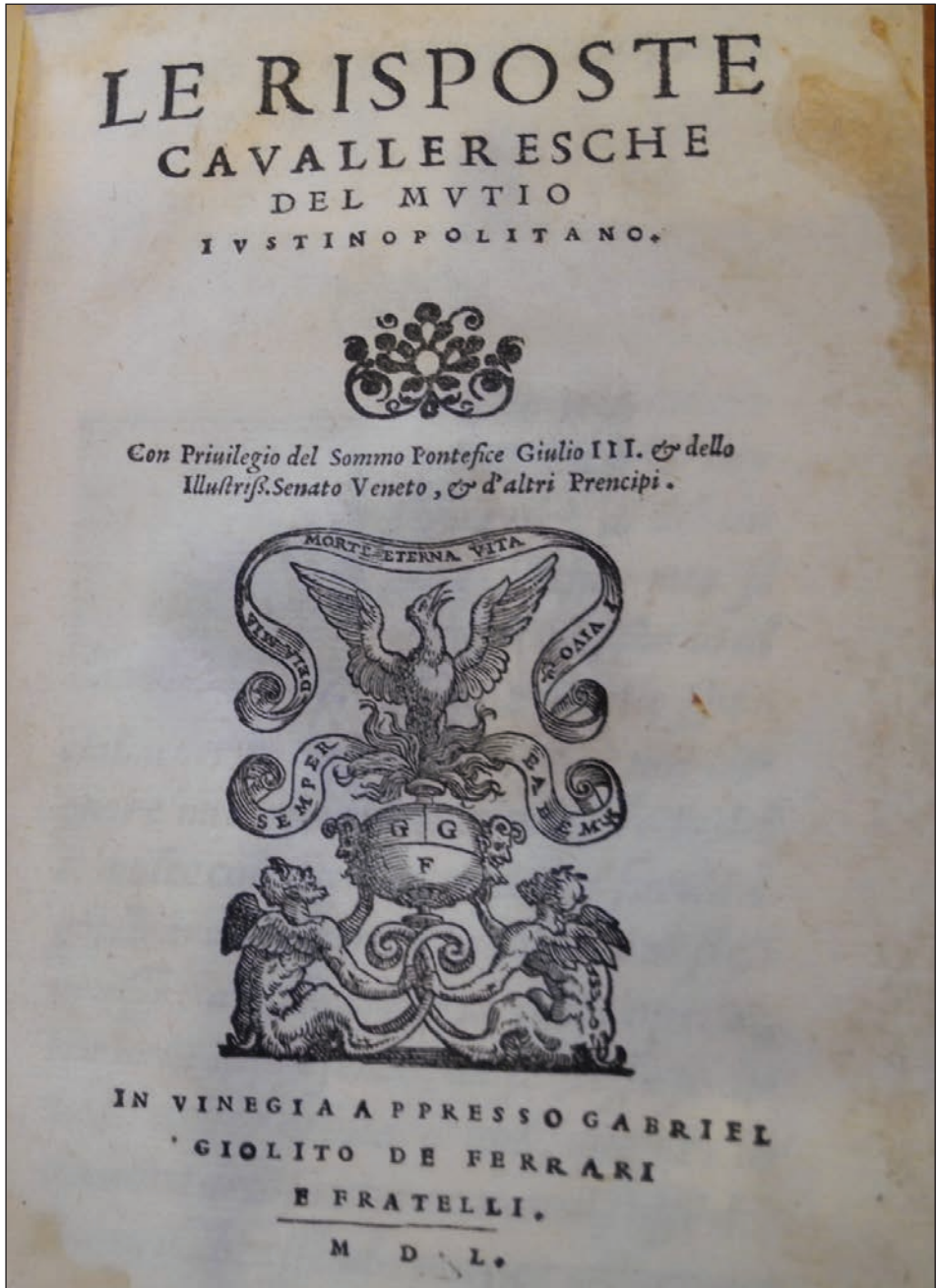


Fig. 9: *Le risposte cavalleresche* (1550).

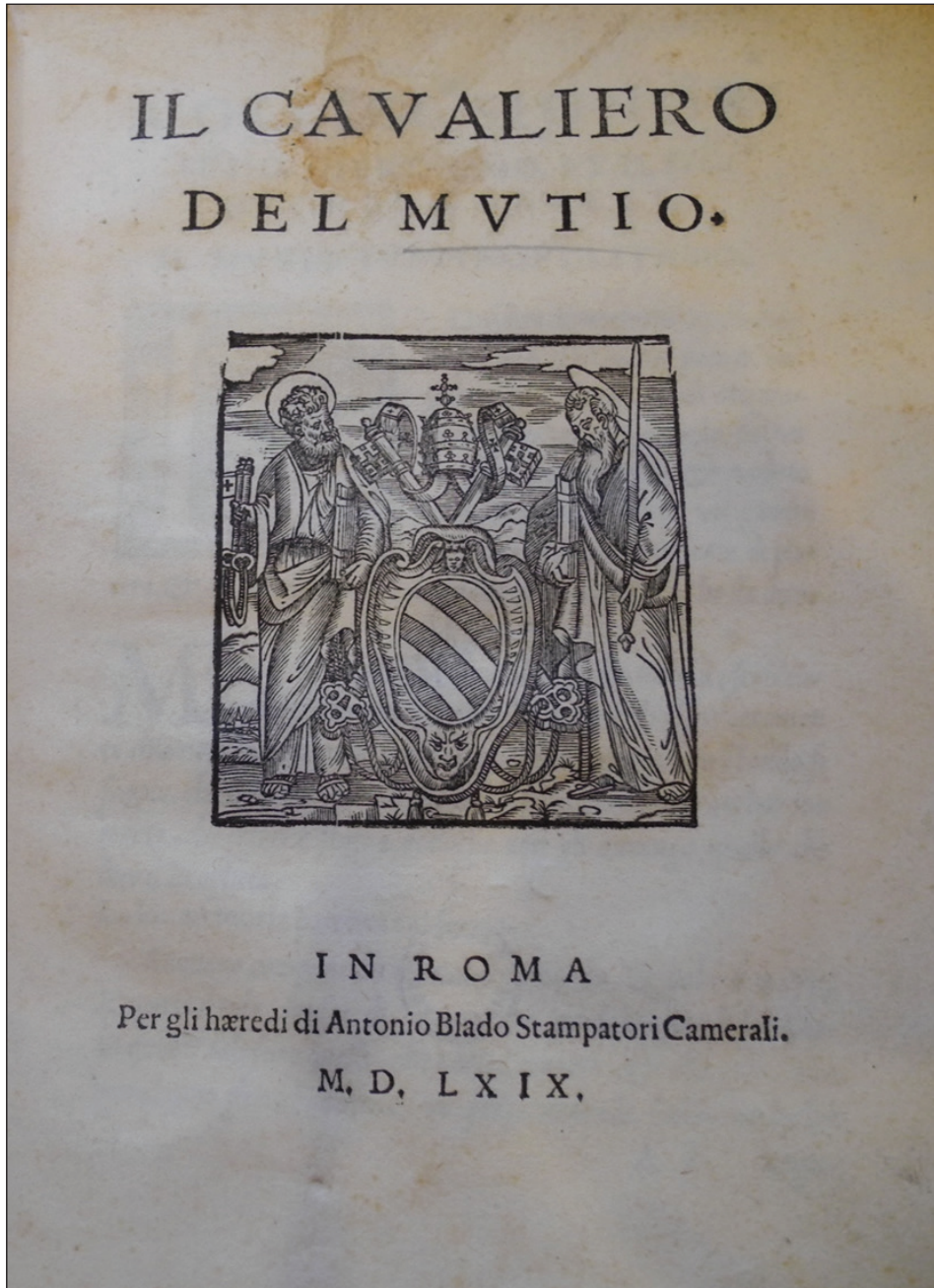


Fig. 10: Girolamo Muzio. *Il Cavaliero del Mutio* (1569).

philology and literature to prove it, as well as examples of behaviour/conduct of major historical actors or high society contemporaries. The citing of examples was not meant as an aid to the understanding of the content of the manual – that was not unfamiliar to the reader – but as a means of shaping the content of the very code of honour (Erspamer, 1982, 40). The code of honour was based on the preservation of a *status quo* of one's own culture, with no extraneous influences. The notion of honour developed into a typical and key identification element among the classes of nobility and courtiers.

The 1550s can also be presented as a period of the hegemony of a culture of honour. During this time, honour became an element of public consensus, shaping the activity and production of the courtier. Even politicians dealt with the topic of the science of chivalry; for instance, Paolo Paruta in the third volume of *Della perfezione della vita politica* (1572–1579). If a gentleman wanted to occupy a high administrative or state and municipal post (military ones in particular), he had to keep his honour untarnished – *senza macchia nell'onore*.

The importance of the science of chivalry originates in the cultural role of the latter (in terms of publishing, in particular) and in the education of the 16th century intellectual and courtier. During the late Renaissance, when literary production became an important part of the publishing market, new titles and reprints on the science of chivalry proliferated, and manifestos and notices of challenges to duels (*cartelli*) were published as well.

In the first half of the 16th century, the wars in the Apennine Peninsula arrested the development of the printing production. While other publishing centres found themselves in severe crisis, Venice, thanks to the Peace of Cambrai and its own neutral position successfully developed into one of the leading printing cities in Europe. In general, the 16th century is considered the renaissance of the Italian printing industry. There were several reasons for the development of the book production: growth of literacy and consequently the precedence of the vernacular Italian over Latin, demand for contemporary works, strengthened relationship between market and consumption, supply stimulating demand, development of collections, series, catalogues, and manuals. The conditions of this time of experimentation were prime for the development of the genre of treatises on duels or manuals of the science of chivalry.⁵

The decline in the production of chivalric treatises can be observed from 1563 onwards, when the Council of Trent passed an edict banning duels. Although the edict expressly prohibited the act of duelling, the ban did not extend to the genre or books on duelling; still, authors preferred to replace the topic by treatises on conciliation (the concept of reconciliation). But certain treatises on duelling dating from

5 Between 1550 and 1569, 65 chivalric titles were published, which at the time represented 60.7% of the total Italian book production on this topic. One of the major publishers was the print shop of the Venetian Gabriele Giolito (35 titles in the mentioned period). Among the best-selling chivalric manuals were Muzio's *Il Duello* (1550) and Possevino's *Dialogo dell'onore* (1553) with ten and eight editions, respectively (Nuovo & Coppens, 2005).

the 1550s continued to circulate and were reprinted without strict censorship (e.g., Muzio's *Duello* was reprinted together with the *Risposte cavalleresche* all through 1585). This was made possible by the ambiguity or cleverness of the writers who would tend to avoid bloodshed with an epilogue in the form of conclusion of peace. The tendency to regulate the issues of honour was a preferred alternative to direct confrontation. Every treatise would thus conclude with a chapter on reconciliation or ways of avoiding physical combat, though the main purpose was still the theorising of the chivalric rules of honour.

According to Erspamer, most readers who would peruse such treatises were lawyers and, above all, courtiers. In the 16th century, the science of chivalry detached from the judicial duel (*duello giudiziario*) completely and became a subject of study of the courtly environment. In Italian courts, the duel thus came to be an element of a complex system of conduct in written form which rarely saw its practical application. A treatise on duelling served not only as a manual on how to approach or, better, how to avoid physical combat without losing honour, but also as reading for the courtiers to draw on when arguing, discussing, and citing (printed) opinions on adjudications and cases of duelling. The discourse and representation of duelling were forms of spectacle intended for life at court, and understood within that same context. Not surprisingly, the most eminent authors on duelling were courtiers. In addition to concepts of other Italian *auctoritas* or “professors” of the science of chivalry (da Longiano, Possevino, Alciato), Muzio's notions and rules too were summarised in several English works, including *Honor and Armes* (1590), *Paradoxes of Defence* (1599), *Vincentio Saviolo, his Practise* (1595), and even Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1599–1600) (Erspamer, 1982, 72).

And even after 1596, when Pope Clement VII banned all writings about duelling in his Index of Forbidden Books, lay people were allowed to read these (albeit only) in their “purified” versions when such works could contribute to dispute resolution. Much of the credit for this concession went to the popularity of this literary genre among nobility and bourgeoisie (like in the case of astrology) (Donati, 2001, 134–5).

DVOBOJ: ČAST IN ESTETIKA MOŠKEGA NASILJA ZGODNJEGA NOVEGA VEKA

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POVZETEK

Petdeseta leta 16. stoletja lahko predstavljamo tudi kot obdobje hegemonije kulture časti, ki je dosegla svoj vrhunec in založniški uspeh predvsem v renesančni Italiji in se tako razširila še v druge predele Evrope. V tem času je čast postala element javnega konsenza ter je izoblikovala delovanje in produkcijo dvorjana ter javno reprezentacijo kavalirja in idealizacijo vojaške estetike med plemiškim redom. Slednje dokazuje dejstvo, da s temo viteške znanosti so se ukvarjali tudi politiki, npr. Paolo Paruta v tretji knjigi dela »Della perfezione della vita politica« (1572–1579). Če je plemenitaš želel zasesti visoke uradniške in državno-mestne funkcije (še posebej vojaške), je moral ohranjati neomadeževano čast – »senza macchia nell'onore«, ki jo je dokazoval ali bolje izkazoval s simboliko nošenja meča, bodala, rokavice. Dvoboj za čast se je razvil tako v praksi s tehniko mečevanja (sabljaški priročnik Achilleja Marozza) kot v teoriji s pomočjo viteške znanosti (Muzievo teoretsko delo Dvoboj), ki je vsebovala pravne in etične okvire pravilnega pristopa do dvoboja. V študiji se avtor osredinja predvsem na teoretični vidik italijanskega dvoboja 16. stoletja, saj so italijanski »doktorji« na področju viteške znanosti močno vplivali na družbene razsežnosti v primerjavi s tehnično literaturo o dvoboju. Med prvimi uspešnimi italijanskimi teoretiki 16. stoletja, ki so bili tudi prevedeni in so želi velik uspeh v tujih deželah, so bili: Girolamo Muzio, Giovanni Battista Possevino in Andrea Alciato. Pomembnost viteške znanosti izhaja iz njene kulturne vloge (predvsem založniške) ter izobraževanja plemiča, intelektualca in dvorjana 16. stoletja. Članek tako obravnava kulturo časti 16. stoletja, ki je bila usmerjena predvsem v ekspresivnost (moških) posameznikov in ne v samo vsebino, kar pomeni, da kodeks časti ni bil sistem strogo določenih normiranih pravil, ampak obratno, da so se pravila oblikovala na podlagi modela vedénja določene skupine. Namen tega pa sta bila opis in populariziranje vzorca častnega vedénja s pomočjo literarne kulture oziroma objavljenih besedil. Traktati o dvoboju torej niso bili samo priročniki z navedbami, kako pristopiti ali bolje, kako se častno izogniti fizičnemu spopadu, ampak so služili tudi kot čtivo, ki so ga dvorjani uporabljali pri argumentiranju, razpravljanju in navajanju (tiskanih) mnenj o sodbah in primerih dvoboja. Diskurz dvoboja in njegova reprezentacija sta bila obliki predstave, namenjeni dvornemu življenju in razumljeni v okviru tega. Zato so bili tudi najuglednejši avtorji o dvoboju v službi dvorov. V študiji je poudarek na dveh primerih traktatov: »praktični« vodnik bolonjskega sabljaškega mojstra Achilleja Marozza in »teoretični« koprškega literata Girolama Muzia. Viteški traktati niso

nudili le praktičnih pravil in konkretnih nasvetov pri fizičnem spopadu, so pa močno prispevali k ohranitvi kulturne simbolike plemiškega razreda. Literatura o viteški znanosti ni imela le pasivne vloge v smislu reprodukcije znanih modelov, ampak je postala model za propagando določenih tipologij vedênja in simbolike. Zato je pri razumevanju bistva renesančnega dvoboja za čast ključna vzajemnost med dvobojem kot »pravno« institucijo, literarnim delom in reprezentacijo.

Ključne besede: dvoboj, čast, nasilje, viteštvo, spol, Girolamo Muzio, Achille Marozzo, viteški traktati, 16. stoletje

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