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AUTHOR (S): BEN MERRIMAN

AFFILIATION (S): DEPT OF SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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CONTACT INFORMATION:

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY,

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO,

1126 E. 59TH ST., CHICAGO, IL 60637, USA.

MERRIMAN@UCHICAGO.EDU

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“Duels in the European Novel: Honor, Reputation, and the Limits of a Bourgeois Form”

Ben Merriman¹

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Abstract:

Sociologists and literary theorists have long viewed the novel, especially the realist novel, as a bourgeois literary form. This article examines the temporal and class specificity of the novel form by examining duels of honor as a plot feature in twenty European novels. Though duels commonly appear in novels written from the French Revolution to the end of World War I, these narratives diverge sharply from the historical realities and social logic of duels. In practice, duels were a ritual form of conflict resolution intended to preserve status equality in honor groups. In novels, duels are a violent means of escalating interpersonal conflict for the pursuit of individual interests. The tension between the fictional representation and social reality of dueling is important in two ways. First, it illustrates the historical and social specificity of the novel as a cultural product. Second, the divergence marks out social structural differences between honor and reputation as measures of individual worth, and consequent conflicts between noble and bourgeois value systems.

Keywords: class; duels; honor; novels; social form; violence

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¹ Department of Sociology, University of Chicago, 1126 E. 59th St., Chicago, IL 60637, USA.
merriman@uchicago.edu

Between the French Revolution and World War I, economic and political control of Continental Europe shifted from aristocratic and monarchical elites to the rising bourgeois class. During this period the two groups and their respective cultures coexisted, often uneasily. An exemplary product of bourgeois culture was the realist novel, which enjoyed its greatest success during this same period of time—before the late 18th Century, novels did not generally reach a large audience, and by the early 20th Century modernist innovations had begun to alter the rules governing the novel as a literary form. A recurrent plot feature of novels during this time is the duel of honor. Dueling fits uneasily into the novel: duels were most commonly fought by aristocrats and military officers, and the ritualized violence of duels is inextricably tied to the concept of honor, a group rather than a personal attribute. Yet realist novels sought to convey the particulars of the inner lives and outward circumstances of individual characters. This article demonstrates that the realist novel, as a form, deviates markedly from the historical realities of duels of honor. These deviations are sociologically significant in two respects. First, they illustrate the historical and social specificity of the novel as a cultural form. Second, they shed light on the social structural differences between honor and reputation as gauges of individual worth, as well as causes of value conflict between bourgeois and noble groups in 19th Century Europe.

The article begins by reviewing social scientific theories of honor culture, as well as historical research on dueling practices in Europe. This evidence suggests that duels were a relatively effective means of resolving conflict: they rarely ended in serious injury, and the rituals of the duel served to reinforce the formal status equality of participants, thereby confirming and preserving the honor of both. The article then examines duels in a number of notable works of European fiction from the 1780s to the 1930s, a periodization that is justified at greater length

below. In these works, duels routinely result in serious injury or death, and honor is commonly presented as a pretext for self-serving behavior. The actual narration of duels commonly involves sudden formal deviations from the narrative patterns established within the works. These deviations include shifts in narrative perspective or temporality, the use of framing devices, intertextual references to other novelistic duels, the use of allegory, and the introduction of magic. In important ways, novelistic duels do not function properly—they escalate rather than defuse interpersonal conflicts, and impose narrative requirements that authors often cannot fulfill.

These misrepresentations of the social realities of dueling are sociologically meaningful. Often, they convey the political inclinations of novelists. Intentionally or by accident, duels are used to criticize aristocratic and military classes, as well as the pretensions and personal failings of political progressives. More importantly, they provide a definite example of what it means for the novel form to be “bourgeois.” It is not simply that novels often narrate the lives of bourgeois characters, or that the historical readership for novels came from a particular class. Rather, this form of narration is ill-equipped to compass key psychological or productive features of honor culture, just as earlier forms such as the romance or the epic could not effectively describe the psychological dimensions of bourgeois life. Honor, in novels, is displaced by a concern for reputation or self-interest.

Status Honor and the Duel Ritual

The term honor has been used to refer to several different social phenomena, and there has been a pronounced tendency to understand honor, across historical periods and cultures, as meaning

something like “favorable social recognition” (see, for instance, Oprisko 2012). However, major works of sociological theory have presented a narrowly-drawn ideal type of honor defined by two key features: honor's formal rather than substantive character, and its connection to particular social groups, now mostly disappeared in Europe. A brief description of the social structure of European aristocratic honor culture is necessary, as the duel as a ritual cannot be disentangled from this particular understanding of honor.

In Weber's classic formulation (1958), status honor, whether inherited or acquired, is found in a community with a shared style of life (187). This distinguishes groups with status honor from modern social classes in several respects: market culture, and remunerative labor, are inimical to honor (191-2); the equality conferred by status honor can be indifferent to material inequality—a poor aristocrat is still an aristocrat (187); and honor groups are small enough to function as genuine communities, while social classes are not (186). The fact that honor groups are not social classes helps explain their persistence in countries even after economic and political changes had stripped them of much of their social power (391). Simmel adds that honor groups such as aristocracies are surveyable—small enough that a member can, in principle, be aware of all the other persons of similar status (1950: 90). These basic properties of honor imply a number of features of social structures and individuals governed by honor.

First, though a person with status honor can become dishonored, or have their honor injured, honor is not specific to the individual person. Persons possess honor by virtue of their membership in a group with status honor. Though there are definite behaviors expected of an honorable person, honor itself is a formal rather than substantive attribute (Simmel 1950: 320).

Second, honor is a quality (Weber 1958: 187), and cannot be possessed in greater or lesser amounts (Simmel 1971: 210). All persons included in a status are equally possessed of the

honor particular to that status. Anything that disrupts this equality, such as an insult or an unfair attack, is dishonoring, and failing to respond is likewise dishonoring. It also follows from this that honor is not convertible and has no monetary equivalent. An injury to honor, understood in this sense, cannot be redressed by defamation law or financial compensation (O'Malley 1981: 83), though German law recognizes a right against defamation that is called “honor” by historical analogy (Stewart 1994: 14). As will be seen below, the primary function of the duel as a social ritual is to restore formal equality when it has been disrupted.

Third, injuries to honor cannot be redressed by an outside party. In addition to the inadequacy of remedies available from other institutions, submitting to an outside institution, such as the state or the church, for external remedy to dishonor would itself be dishonoring, as it would involve both individual submission and disruption of the social closure of self-regulating status groups.

Fourth, while members of a given honor group are status peers, such honor can, and usually does, coexist with a hierarchical social structure (Weber 1958: 193). Though it may be dishonorable for a junior officer to be insulted by another junior officer, it is honorable for a junior officer to obey the orders of a senior officer, just as it is honorable for a noble to obey a king. Indeed, the most important honor cultures in Europe—officer corps and landed aristocracies—were both characterized by systematic hierarchical organization. This took the form of patronage pyramids organized by antitransitive social ties in the aristocracy (Martin 2009: 211), and command structures of transitive social ties in the military (270). Two people who are possessed of noble or military honor may not meet as equals if they are of different rank: the setting aside of rank for the purpose of a duel was historically notable in itself (Mackay 1852: 294). Honor codes regulated this problem of hierarchy by deeming it honorable for men to

overlook insults from people of different rank (Henderson 1994: 59).

These social properties of honor may explain the function of dueling in honor culture. During the period considered here, duels were regulated by written *codes duello*, several of which are appended to the recent edition of Chekhov (2011). Though there are some cross-national variations in these codes, they present a generally valid sequence of events defining the duel ritual. Following some insult or provocation, a challenge is issued by the aggrieved party and accepted by the opponent. After this, seconds—necessarily men of comparable honor—are designated. The seconds meet to negotiate terms for the duel. Finally, the opponents appear on the “field of honor” at the appointed time, and, if necessary, fight the duel with the seconds as witnesses. All of this must happen within a specified window of time: generally a challenge must be issued more or less immediately once the insult becomes known, and the duel occurs within one day of the challenge.

All of the steps in this ritual are designed to reinforce the honor of both parties. The ritual is characterized by extreme courtesy in manners and language. The seconds, in addition to serving as important intermediaries, serve to testify to the preexisting honor of the combatants and to the honorability of the exercise itself (see Banks 2009). Collins (2009) synthesizes a wide array of historical evidence to demonstrate that this apparently violent ritual was in fact intended to defuse conflict. In the 18th Century, inaccurate and weak smoothbore pistols had become the standard dueling weapon, and remained so after more powerful firearms had developed. When swords were used, they were typically modified to prevent deep penetrating injuries (214). Terms for the fight could be negotiated in a number of ways, and many of the standard terms, such as firing while in motion during a “barrier duel,” minimized the chance of harm. Moreover, many challenges were resolved before actual fighting took place: the mere willingness of both parties

to show up for the fight was often satisfactory (216). For these reasons, very few duels resulted in serious injury or death—in some countries where dueling was widespread, dueling fatalities had become completely unknown by the 19th Century (215), a fact also attributable in part to the generally inept character of violent face-to-face confrontations (Collins 2013). As Collins observes, “The point of the duel was more to demonstrate one's status-group membership than to establish dominance over one's opponent. Thus it was less important to win than to display courage” (2009: 218). Jankowski (1991) also characterizes losing a fair (that is, honorable) fight as preserving rather than injuring status in honor groups. It should be stressed here that the duel does not defuse conflict by resolving the substantive cause of the dispute: a single remedy cannot smooth over the variety of social tensions that might provoke a duel. What is crucial is the duel's symbolic restoration of equality of honor where a conflict or insult had disrupted it. Duels exist to promote social stasis.

Dueling and the Rise of the Bourgeoisie

Such are the general formal characteristics of the codified pistol or sword duel. Of course, this ritual did not emerge *ex nihilo*. Earlier forms of the duel such as trial by combat existed to produce legal truth, and the formal military competitions of the tournament were tied to the honor culture of chivalry. Elias (1994) views such honor codes as part of a larger project of social pacification, and indeed, the ritualized, individual combat of the duel was far less violent and destructive than the livery, retaining, and affrays that had characterized earlier conflict between European nobles, or the feuds and vendettas that persisted in Mediterranean honor cultures (Schneider 1971; on vendetta as pacification see Gould 2000). The duel effectively

disappeared from Europe after World War I with the destruction of the Prussian, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian Empires, though it persisted in parts of Latin America.

Although the codification of the duel of honor coincides historically with absolutism in a number of states and empires, scholars have viewed it as an intermediate step toward democratization. Its frequent appropriation by bourgeois groups demonstrates something of its relationship to the larger political economic transition of the time. As a matter of social ordering, Mahmooie and Vahrabi (2012) note that the duel of honor is, across a number of national cultures, an indicator of transition from relative anarchy to stability. The notions of equality undergirding the duel, while based on socially exclusive, masculine status honor, share many formal properties with the universalist egalitarian notion of “dignity” that served as the basis of modern liberal thought (LaVaque-Manty 2006). The extension of the vocabulary of status honor to all citizens may be one reason for the blurring of its historical meaning in social scientific research. This is especially so because a key development of 19th Century dueling practices is the diffusion of the duel of honor out of the aristocracy and military into bourgeois groups. Dueling became common in German universities, in part because the ability to duel was a requirement for various positions in the Prussian civil service (Weber 1958: 392). Student dueling clubs, despite perceptions to the contrary, promoted relatively liberal political views (Zwicker 2011). Duels also became common among politicians and journalists in both France (Nye 1993) and post-unification Italy (Hughes 1998).

The meaning of dueling in bourgeois groups appears to have been rather different from its meaning in aristocratic and military groups, and marks a transition from a formal, group concept of honor to a substantive, individual concept of reputation. In the specific case of Germany, bourgeois dueling had an aspirational, posturing quality (Frevert 1991). In Europe more

generally, bourgeois duels were confined primarily to the groups responsible for providing the remedies that replaced the duel as a response to social injury; it is striking that dueling was most common in Europe among journalists and politicians, given that the law and the press had emerged as the most important replacements for the duel in dispute resolution (Shoemaker 2002: 525). While the aristocratic duel was an assertion of the group's autonomy, in the case of these bourgeois groups it is a demonstration of heteronomy. Political assemblies and newspapers are obviously interested and partisan, and as such cannot provide credible resolution to disputes about the personal character of members of these own social spheres (see also Moretti 2013: 176). This suggests a shift from a purely formal sense of honor derived from membership in a status group to an internal sense of “honorableness” derived from the possession of certain virtues or moral qualities. As Henderson notes, a shift to this inner, virtue-driven concept of honor is wholly incompatible with the formal conception (1994: 48).

The duel of honor, as a form, was appropriated by particular segments of the bourgeois class for new symbolic ends. However, the duel of honor faced major ideological attack during the 19th Century. Frevert catalogs six distinct arguments advanced against dueling (1995: 18-20). These arguments come from groups as various as secular progressives, state authorities, and institutions such as the Catholic Church. The arguments have in common an emphasis on the importance of the individual as sacred object, state subject, or rational autonomous being. In each case, it is the group mentality of honor culture that is under attack rather than violence in itself, and while this group mentality was often characterized as irrational, the criticisms demonstrated that bourgeois critics nonetheless comprehended the psychology underlying the duel. As Mackay memorably put it, “To hang [duelists] as murderers would be of no avail; for to such men death would have few terrors. Shame alone would bring them to reason” (1852: 301)

Dueling practices were thus threatened by open political opposition, as well as their loss of distinguishing status as bourgeois groups begin to duel. The social value of honor also faced obsolescence. The economic transition to capitalism often preceded the political destruction of monarchies by a long period of time. With the transition to capitalism comes a shift from formal, priceless honor to substantive, monetarily valuable reputation, the “set of judgments a community makes about the personal qualities of its members” (Emler 1990: 171). The emergence of this form of reputation, and its deliberate management, is central to Weber's account of the social logic of capitalism (2011 [1905]). O'Malley (1981) similarly views reputation, along with the legal and social institutions that emerge for its protection, as a defining feature of capitalist societies. Honor culture, moreover, proved especially likely to create interpersonal conflict in the context of market exchange (Baxter and Margavio 2000). The social values of the aristocratic duel of honor are thus in systematic opposition to the rising political economy of the 19th Century: it is the province a group that is losing political and economic power, and defends an idea of merit that is both irrelevant and maladaptive in a capitalist society.

The Bourgeois Novel and the Duel

The duel is a practice strongly associated with a social group and set of institutions that are in strong opposition to the bourgeois as a class and capitalism as an economic form. Despite this, duels appear frequently in European novels, which sociologists, historians, and literary theorists have widely regarded as a quintessentially bourgeois literary form. This section examines the uneasy place of the duel in European novels. Though there are good reasons to believe that both

authors and readers understood, or were at least familiar with, the social logic of honor cultures, novels themselves present duels within the frame of substantive reputation and individual self-interest. This section begins by examining what it means to call the novel a bourgeois literary form. It then delimits a historical period where duels (and honor groups) overlapped with political struggles for bourgeois rule and the expansion of capitalist economies in Europe. In this period, novels can treat duels as a socially current phenomenon, and for broader historical reasons novels of this period are quite different from those that came before or after. The section then examines duels in twenty European novels, taking note of a number of recurrent formal distortions and narrative difficulties that arise. These difficulties suggest that duels could not square with the generic requirements of the novel, and also that novels may provide sociologically valuable insight into the social conflicts of the 19th Century.

The novel is bourgeois in a number of respects. Novels are products of capitalism: they quickly became commodities produced for mass consumption (Moretti 2009), and their initial success as a form depended upon the emergence of a literate, semi-leisured urban class (Watt 1957). Novels are also responsive to, and constrained by, problems unique to capitalist societies. As Lukacs (1971 [1920]) has argued, novels, by which he particularly means 19th Century novels, are in substance homologous to the social patterns of market economies, and the essential narrative structure of the novel is the (necessarily unsuccessful) search for authenticity and meaning in a world degraded by the corrosive features of the market. For Lukacs as for subsequent thinkers, bourgeois subjectivity is one of rational calculation. The novel revolves around the “problematic hero” who does not fit into the social world of capitalism. The emphasis on the hero owes in part to the Lukacs' view that the novel is the modern successor to the epic, and remains an “epic” form. Goldman (1975) takes up the notion of homology between social

world and literary genre, but reduces the problematic hero to the problematic individual. By doing so, he attempts to explain more clearly how the universal and impersonal character of the market produces a literary form that is preoccupied with the inner lives and particular fates of individuals who are, in most respects, ordinary and unimportant.

Goldmann defines the novel form as “the transposition on the literary plane of everyday life in the individualistic society created by market production” (7). This definition compasses the novel's obligation to be realistic, a constraint not shared by precursor forms such as the epic or romance. The definition also indicates that novels are not, as older varieties of Marxist theory had once held, merely congealed representations of collective consciousness, but essentially individual. Refining the idea of the problematic hero, Goldmann views characters as problematic “in so far as their thinking and behaviour remain dominated by qualitative values” (11), as distinct from the quantitative logic of accumulation of money, power, or renown. Problematic characters of this kind particularly include “creators, writers, artists, philosophers, theologians, men of action” (11). The construction of novels around the qualitative logic of such lives may explain why novels are particularly useful in illuminating the social and economic underpinnings of cultural production itself (Bourdieu 1996: 5-7, Casanova 2004: 10).

The particular kinds of qualitative values emphasized by Goldmann partly mark the politically progressive impulse informing his theoretical approach. The need for a person of qualitative values to propel a narrative also leaves room for novels built around men of honor, whose values, while basically conservative, are also qualitative and at odds with market society (see also Moretti 2010). The duel is therefore a phenomenon that fits within the basic problem addressed by the novel, and the political controversies surrounding the duel and honor cultures are connected to the larger social upheavals that novels are bound to address—for a broader

treatment of the relationship between democratization and 19th Century novel form, see Slaughter (2009).

This article examines duels as a plot feature over a 150 year period, from the publication of *Dangerous Liaisons* in 1782 to the publication of *The Radetzky March* in 1932. Though this periodization is neat, it is not arbitrary with respect to the novels considered or the larger historical backdrop. André Malraux famously characterized *Dangerous Liaisons* as the first novel whose characters were motivated by acquisitive desire rather than irrational passions, and in this respect it marks the novel's turn toward the social logic that will define capitalism (see Allan 2012). This book was also published in the twilight of the *Ancien Régime*, whose demise is widely taken as the beginning of the long political struggle against aristocratic rule in Europe, a struggle that is effectively concluded by World War I and the Russian Revolution. *The Radetzky March*, which features a duel as an important plot point, is perhaps the last major European novel that relies upon the author's lived experience of aristocratic military life and is unaffected by the formal and stylistic innovations of literary modernism. Though duels remain common in fiction throughout the 20th Century, their meaning has been greatly transformed by modernist and postmodernist developments in literature (Croft 2013), and these innovations introduced a number of new ways of resolving the basic problem of the novel (Goldmann 1975: 12, 132).

While these macrohistorical and literary changes provide a relatively clean periodization, this does not in itself justify the pooling of works from six polities and five languages to make a single argument. There are several grounds for this decision. Historically, while the political and economic transition does not proceed in lockstep during this period, all of the countries considered did undergo this transition. More specifically, the class diffusion and political economic obsolescence of the duel also took the same form across several countries (Parent

2009). Literarily, Europe developed into a coherent international field during this time (Casanova 2004), with innovations in one country or language diffusing relatively quickly to others. In addition, there are clear lines of influence tying together a great number of the novels considered here. The authors, at least, understood themselves as part of a transnational culture.

Appendix 1 lists the 20 novels chronologically, and includes their authors, original languages, and details about the duels. This selection excludes many notable works that feature duels but do not conform to the novel genre considered here, such as adventure and fantasy novels (Dumas, Gautier), plays (Schnitzler, Sternheim), and short stories (Kleist, Nabakov). These genres are governed by different constraints. All of the the works considered are in print and available in English. It is likely that a great many works of European fiction featured duels but have failed to survive, have not been translated, or simply escaped notice. This selection of cases is therefore, in part, a question of convenience: systematic analysis of works in a single language to study changes in literary form (Moretti 2005), culture (Michel et al. 2011), or language use (Jockers 2013) require tremendous resources. Systematic, statistically-valid comparison across languages would seem all-but impossible.

However, the kind of generalization sought here is not statistical. The intention is not to say how a notional average European novel would have narrated a duel, but to describe the limits of the form, and the characteristic narrative devices that the form permitted². For this purpose, the cases considered here are very desirable. A great many are considered outstanding literary works in their own right, and the fact of their survival and translation is, at least ambiguously, a mark of

2 The evidence offered in this paper is thus negative: it shows makes a broader illustration of the historical specificity of the novel form by showing that novelistic duels misrecognize the nature of aristocratic honor. The paper says very little about what new narrative possibilities this misrecognition makes possible, though this is certainly a topic of interest.

their significance. If one wishes to understand the possibilities inherent in a form, rather than average tendencies, those who are acknowledged as innovators and masters provide more insight than do scribblers. A broader discussion of generalization according to this investigatory logic is found in Small (2009).

Findings From the Novels

The novels considered describe the sequence of a duel in ways very similar to historical evidence and the *codes duello*. In part, this may be because the general form of dueling was widely known. Additionally, the same features of sequence and timing that made duels successful as a social ritual also make it very engaging as a narrative. Consider, for instance, the close parallels between the duel ritual and the dramatic principles presented by Aristotle (1989), as well as the survival of the duel narrative in movie Westerns. Though the novels retain the basic form of the duel, the results diverge strikingly from historical reality in other ways.

The duels in the twenty novels considered here lead to the death of seven characters and the serious injury of six others. In circumstances where a challenge did not result in a duel or an injury, it is rarely because the characters resolved their differences, as would have been common in historical practice. Rather, duels miscarry because individuals refuse to fight, are deceived into participating in rigged contests, or face absurd obstacles. The causes of duels are also unusual: most of the duels in the novels were provoked by adultery or romantic rivalry, while simple insults were far more common as causes of duels historically. The mere fact that fiction does not faithfully reproduce social reality is of little interest—literary invention is to be expected. What is more notable is the particular ways that the novels are unfaithful, as these point to major

constrains on the novel genre, as well as the significant social distance between honor and reputation.

First, fictional characters participating in duels frequently use the discourse and trappings of honor as a means of pursuing their own interests. In several cases, characters fight a duel in order to displace or kill a romantic rival, as is the case in Laclos, Pushkin, Lermontov, Thackeray, Turgenev, and Chekhov. In other cases, duels are fought with the desire for vengeance, as in Flaubert, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Fontane. In Stendhal, Maupassant, and Kuprin, duels serve the professional interests or ambitions of a character. Of course, it would have been possible historically for somebody to fight a duel for reasons other than a pure interest in honor, and surely such motives were common. However, the individual aims of characters in the novels cannot be advanced simply by fighting a duel; the interests are only advanced if the opponent is injured or killed. Thus, the narrative presumption that duels are violent, which by itself appears as little more than an authorial liberty, provides the basis for the introduction of a variety of self-interested motivations that probably could not have been served by historical duels.

Second, novelistic duels, while presenting the duel ritual more or less accurately, frequently describe duels that are not honorable for any number of reasons. In eight of the novels (Stendhal, Turgenev, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, Schnitzler, Pirandello, Conrad, and Mann), one or more of the parties lack appropriate social status or qualifications to duel, are of markedly unequal statuses, or lack appropriate seconds. In three more (Lermontov, Thackeray, and Kuprin), the duels are unfairly rigged to produce a certain outcome. The duelists in Chekhov do not even know how to duel, and use their recollection of Lermontov's novel to negotiate the rules.

These duels are not honorable, and this may have the effect of making duels appear to the reader as something quite different from what they might have meant subjectively for duelists. First, the very idea of a coherent practice of honor is called into question, as the duels are in many ways not honorable, either because they violate the formal rules that define a fair and honorable combat, or because the form of honor is used as a vehicle for substantive interests that are either not honorable or actively dishonorable. Even in novels that hew more closely to historical realities, characters are concerned as much with their reputation as courageous men than their honor as such—this already marks the transition away from the pure concept of honor discussed above. In some cases, of course, this is precisely the point: the perverse presentation of a duel can be used as a form of ridicule, though notably the targets of this ridicule are not aristocrats themselves, but typically the intellectuals, artists, and bourgeois who seek to mimic aristocrats. In these cases, authors engage in a form of class ventriloquism in which members of honor groups serve as narrative props to dramatize conflicts that are internal to bourgeois groups. When the object of criticism is the military or aristocracy, it is often the case that the duelists themselves are not presented unsympathetically; rather, their earnest belief in honor attaches to a set of social institutions that are corrupt and unworthy of this sincerity. The blameworthy individual, in these novels, is often a superior (Maupassant, Roth) or somebody who has become corrupted by the aristocratic or military lifestyle (Laclos, Pushkin, Kuprin).

Though the coherence or social value of honor comes under attack in these cases, its felt reality is not; with the exception of the radically cynical Lermontov, whose major characters are uniformly self-serving, the duels could not have taken place without the narrative presence of at least one character who believed in honor and its obligations. Such characters experience honor in several ways. To the eponymous Lieutenant Gustl, honor is so deep that it shapes reality at the

level of sense perception. For some, honor is felt to be real and valuable, and for others real but unpleasant. Particularly in novels where challenges are issued with a secret motivation accessible to the reader but not all the characters, it is the feeling of honor that leads characters to fight duels even when they do not know the reason they have been asked to fight: an honorable person challenged without just cause has, by definition, been insulted, and is therefore obliged to fight. The perversity of this logic can, in itself, be seen as a criticism of honor cultures.

The political thrust of the novels is therefore not that honor is a confabulation. The criticism of honor rests in the fact that it is real, but has destructive effects. This must be understood, at least in part, as the product of the novel form rather than the intentions of the authors. The narrative effect holds in novels written by aristocratic authors who had dueled and bourgeois authors who had only read of them, and in writers with an avowed opposition to dueling as well as those with a rather firm allegiance to the aristocracy. The narrative distortions surrounding novelistic duels may be taken as some further evidence of this.

Several narrative dodges and swerves surround duels. In some cases, very verbose and descriptive works narrate duels very rapidly. Authors such as Stendhal, Constant, Fontane, and Roth confine the action of the duel to a single sentence or a portion of a sentence. In these cases, the action of the duel, and the psychology behind it, seem not to fit into the narrative scheme previously established. More common is a sudden increase in formal complexity of the text, particularly by the introduction of references to other text. Many novelistic duels are tied together by chains of intertextual reference, even when such references are otherwise unusual: Lermontov makes open reference to Pushkin, while Chekhov and Kuprin refer to Lermontov. Mann refers to Turgenev. Roth and Conrad make allusions to works by Kleist and Vigny not treated here. More often, duels are connected to texts within texts: in Laclos and Tolstoy, the

duels are provoked by letters. In Pirandello, Kuprin, and Broch, the action of the duel is conveyed to characters (or the reader) by telegram. Omniscient narrators may report the duel through the limited information available to a single character, while limited narrators may, for a moment, come to possess a greater narrative scope. This is not definitive evidence of anything, as concepts such as limited or omniscient narrators are ideal forms, rarely strictly realized in a given novel (Booth 1983). The impression of a narrative block, however, is unmistakable.

The overall suggestion from the novels is that the form is not adequate to describe the honor cultures prevalent in Europe during this period. Duel plots often serve to advance the concrete interests of characters, but can only do so by means of conflict escalation. Though the duel of honor tended to resolve conflicts and rarely resulted in physical harm, injury or death are the norm in novels, and only these outcomes can serve to advance the declared or tacit interests of the characters³. When a clear political intention animates the plot, the political concern has to do with the bourgeois classes, or with a structural critique of honor culture as a system of social organization. In cases where authors (or their characters, if the character controls the narration) have a presumed sympathy to the values and commitments of honor groups, the action of the duel is reduced to the narrative minimum of reporting the outcome. Two narrative strategies predominate in novelistic duels. First, duels appear as an exercise in personal calculation, with the understanding that the duel could produce a range of desirable outcomes for a character. This is in stark contrast to the duel ritual, which is designed to produce a single outcome in all cases—the restoration of disrupted status equality. Dueling characters, whatever their ascribed status,

3 The distinction between ritual and game found in Lévi-Strauss (1966) may be a useful scheme for understanding this difference. In historical practice, the duel is a ritual whose power derives from the fact that the outcome is known in advance. In novels, duels function as high-stakes games, which are compelling because the outcome cannot be anticipated.

behave like bourgeois and in accordance with bourgeois reputational concerns. Second, duels present a challenge to the style of narration, and produce a variety of distortions. The only technique that does not produce a formal distortion not narrating the duel at all.

Honor, because it is a qualitative value, presents itself as a candidate topic for the realist novel, and the duel as a specific plot feature possesses obvious dramatic virtues. However, the qualitative value of honor proves resistant to narration: in being narrated, honor becomes something else. In this respect, it functions much like the qualitative value of faith discussed in Kierkegaard (2006 [1843]). The criticism of Left Hegelian and liberal theological attitudes about faith rests upon Kierkegaard's memorable efforts to narrate the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac. Any attempt to lend psychological dimension to the story, that is to present it as anything other than the barest chronicle of the events, as it is originally rendered in the Old Testament, tends to distort faith as a qualitative value. The result is, necessarily, Abraham engaging in calculation and second-guessing: faith, then, lacks a definite cognitive dimension, and is purely a felt imperative. Honor may be understood similarly as a felt imperative rather than a rational calculation⁴.

Conclusion

The formal equality conferred by possession of status honor, and the ritualization of duels as guarantor of such honor, marked a transitional period in European history. Though formal status

⁴ Field theoretic forms of social explanation, which rest upon the reduction of complex social behaviors to embodied or perceived imperatives for action, have thus far been most common in areas, such as the arts, where qualitative values prevail (see Martin 2011). The line of argument advanced here suggests that many historical social formations may possess characteristics that could be elucidated by field theory, an insight present throughout works such as Gorski (2013).

honor typified the mode of life of the aristocracy and military, its emergence already signaled a shift away from social disorder to greater state control. Likewise, the equality of honor, though denied to the overwhelming majority of Europeans, proved to be a spur to the liberal philosophy of the universal equality of citizens—in many cases, the extended analogy of the honorable citizen was enshrined in law, though such law protected the dignity of the individual, not the honor of the closed group. Honor, a basically conservative value that does not point a way out of itself, was productively misread by the ideological proponents of the rising bourgeois class. Though this misreading was not necessarily conscious or intentional, there is evidence that defenders of the bourgeois position nonetheless understood the social logic and structure of honor culture; such understanding was the basis for effective criticism.

In the same way, novels, a bourgeois literary form, engaged constructively with the notion of honor during the height of literary realism. Between the French Revolution and the First World War the quintessential ritual of aristocratic and military honor, the duel, regularly appeared in novels. In crucial ways, these novels misrepresent the duel of honor: novelistic duels are violent confrontations that advance the individual interests of one or more of the characters, while duels in practice produced little injury and served the social end of equality. Similarly, the duel fit uncomfortably within the narrative constraints of the novel, and as a plot feature it necessitated significant invention and distortion on the part of authors. These distortions lead noble characters to appear, psychologically, as though they were bourgeois calculators, persons driven by quantitative rather than qualitative values.

The suggestion here is not that authors failed because the novel form could not accurately convey the subjectively felt imperatives of the duel of honor. Rather, it indicates the historical and social specificity of the novel as a form—whatever social world it putatively describes, it is

at root a means of dramatizing the conflicts of a society ruled by the law of the market. This limitation becomes more apparent when examining a time period when two radically conflicting social forms coexisted, and may offer insights not only about the European past, but about literary forms and production in a culturally pluralistic present. Just as Thompson (1967) examined the historical transition to capitalism as a means of criticizing neo-colonialism and modernization theory, the historical sociology of the novel may provide useful tools for the sociology of contemporary culture.

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Appendix 1: Chronology and Characteristics of Consulted Novels

Year	Author	Title	Language	Cause	Duelists	Result
1782	Laclos	<i>Dangerous Liaisons</i>	French	R	A/A	2
1816	Constant	<i>Adolphe</i>	French	O	A/A	1
1830	Stendhal	<i>The Red and the Black</i>	French	I	B/A	1
1836	Pushkin	<i>The Captain's Daughter</i>	Russian	I	M/M	1
1841	Lermontov	<i>A Hero of Our Time</i>	Russian	R	M/M	2
1844	Thackeray	<i>The Luck of Barry Lyndon</i>	English	R	A/M	0
1862	Turgenev	<i>Fathers and Sons</i>	Russian	R	B/B	1
1869	Flaubert	<i>Sentimental Education</i>	French	I	A/B	0
1869	Tolstoy	<i>War and Peace</i>	Russian	A	A/M	2
1872	Dostoevsky	<i>Demons</i>	Russian	I	A/M	0
1885	Maupassant	<i>Bel Ami</i>	French	I	B/B	0
1891	Chekhov	<i>The Duel</i>	Russian	R	A/M	0
1896	Fontane	<i>Effi Briest</i>	German	A	A/M	2
1901	Schnitzler	<i>Lieutenant Gustl</i>	German	I	M/B	-
1904	Pirandello	<i>The Late Mattia Pascal</i>	Italian	I	B/B	0
1905	Kuprin	<i>The Duel</i>	Russian	A	M/M	2
1908	Conrad	<i>The Duel</i>	English	R	M/M	1
1924	Mann	<i>The Magic Mountain</i>	German	O	B/B	2
1931	Broch	<i>The Sleepwalkers</i>	German	O	A/M	2
1932	Roth	<i>Radetzky March</i>	German	A	M/M	2

Cause of duel: A: Adultery, R: Romantic Rivalry, I: Insult/Slander, O: Other/Not stated

Duelists (listed as challenger/challenged): A: Aristocrat, M: Military Officer, B: Bourgeois

Result of duel: 0: No injury/duel miscarried, 1: Serious Injury, 2: Death

Start by marking "The Duel in European History: Honour and the Reign of Aristocracy" as Want to Read: Want to Read savingâ€¦
Want to Read. The romance and drama of the duel has made it an enduring attraction in novels, plays, and operas; but it takes on a deeper significance when considered in its social, evolutionary setting. Kiernan discusses the duel as something unique to Europe and its colonies, its practice in Ireland and Scotland compared with English practice, what women thought of it, and how it contributed to the development of an officer corps, throwing new light on the long ascendancy of aristocratic classes and their values in European history. ...more. This article explores this cultural transformation by examining duels in 20 European novels and comparing these duels with theoretical and historical work on duels as a social practice. The novels present a significantly distorted representation of dueling. This distortion demonstrates the limited ability of the novel, a bourgeois form, to describe group-oriented values such as honor. This is, in turn, sociologically significant: the novels point to major differences in the social psychologies underpinning honor and reputation, and also anticipate the obsolescence of honor culture well before Duels in the European Novel: Honor, Reputation, and the Limits of a Bourgeois Form. The emergence of market society in Europe prompted a major change in the social measurement of individual worth. The formal system of aristocratic honor culture was gradually supplanted by a bourgeois concept of reputation rooted in the more. The emergence of market society in Europe prompted a major change in the social measurement of individual worth. This article explores this cultural transformation by examining duels in 20 European novels and comparing these duels with theoretical and historical work on duels as a social practice. The novels present a significantly distorted representation of dueling.