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The Deterioration of Dueling

In 19th Century Russia, dueling was known as the gentleman's approach to resolve all conflicts, in such that a true gentleman has composure and self-control to withstand his anger until the organized fight. Part of what makes this formal altercation so popular was the fact that it was a clear cut method of retaining a man's honor given that they also have to adhere to the Honor Code or the rigid set of rules of proper dueling etiquette. Despite the popularity of this fight, the strict idea of dueling is unimportant as the idea of honor was sought to be retained in a different method for the greater good of the individual.

Ivan Turgenev's *Torrents of Spring* portrayed multiple instances of many traditional acts of dueling being disregarded. In this novel, the main character Sanin engages in a duel with a drunken German soldier who flirted with his female friend, Gemma Roselli, and thus causing the breaking two rules off of the purpose of the duel. Given that Gemma was already engaged to a character named Kluber, he didn't have the right to fight for her as it would portray Kluber as cowardly and dishonorable for not sticking up for his fiancée. According to the (translated) Honor Code or the 26 commandments that honorable Russian men had to follow, Rule #10 states "Any insult to a lady under a gentleman's care or protection to be considered as, by one degree, a

greater offense than if given to the gentleman personally, and to be regulated accordingly.”(James Keogh). In other words, this rule claims that if a man’s woman is insulted, then the degree of offense is raised than if the man himself to be insulted. Which in this situation, Kluber is the offended man, yet he does not defend his honor or his woman’s honor as he has more important matters he must handle to maintain his honor. As Frau Lenore (Gemma’s mother) explains, “as a solid business man, it was for him to look with contempt on the frivolous prank of some unknown little officer[...] And how is Herr Klüber to look after his shop, if he is to fight with his customers? It's utterly inconsistent!” (Turgenev ch23). Here Frau Lenore defends Kluber actions (or lack thereof) by saying that he refused to let a drunken officer potentially kill him in a duel, as Kluber is still a noble and very wealthy business owner. Which again goes back to the idea that the strict idea of the duel is unimportant as honor can be retained elsewhere. In Kluber’s case, the greater good of his honor was for him to keep his business intact thus disregarding the potential challenge. Yet Kluber was not the only person to challenge the traditional duel.

In addition, Sanin would challenge the duel as he is dueling for a woman who is in a relationship. That hinders her own reputation as it is rude for a man to fight for the unrelated and given that she already has an engaged partner, it will imply that she is also flirting with Sanin or even worse, having an affair. Pantaleone, a family friend to the Rosellis, mentioned this idea to Sanin concernedly asking “But allow me to ask you, Signor de Tsanin, will not your duel throw a slur on the reputation of a certain lady?” (Turgenev ch17), as he is aware of the social norms of the duel and alluding that it might hinder Gemma’s reputation. Sanin instead replied “I don't suppose so; but in any case, there's no help for it.” (Turgenev ch17) stating that he doesn't

indeed care very much about the dueling social conducts and instead he is fighting for the greater good of her honor. As shown, the traditional reasoning of a duel was disregarded as the idea honor was sought out in a different thinking. However, this is not the primary instance of which the rituals of dueling were disregarded in the Torrents of Spring.

The most apparent first instance was involved with the initial setup of the duel itself and that was when Sanin selected a character by the name of Pantaleone to be his second (or the man that was responsible for representing him in the duel). This violated the common rules of the duel as Pantaleone was an actor and not part of the nobility but rather was part of the Clergy as his skills were attained through craft. According to James Keogh, Rule #13 states “Seconds to be of equal rank in society with the principals they attend, inasmuch as a second may either choose or chance to become a principal and equality is indispensable”. Sanin’s opponent (the officer) Baron von Dönhof’s second is part of the nobility (as that is a requirement in participating in a duel) which means that, according to the Honor Code, Sanin’s second must also be a nobleman. Pantaleone can not escape this classification as his ranking was officially determined by the Russian royalty and uniformly accepted by society. In the Russian social hierarchy, the Czar (emperor’s family/royalty) were at the top, the Nobility (landowners), Clergy (workers, artisans), Peasantry (farmers) (‘Schmidt’). However, the tradition of dueling is targeted towards the nobility as 19th Century author Franca Beltrame mentions “the duel was a means to defend the noble’s honor, whether individual or corporate”. Given that the nobility were lower ranks than the upper class known as the Czar (or tsar), they had to prove themselves worthy of the honor of being upperclassmen as well as their own individual honor. Despite Pantaleone knowing he was wrong as he was unfit in participating in the duel, he instead took this as an acting job, as Sanin

recalls “by the recollections of his theatrical career, he played the part of second simply as a part” (Turgenev ch18). This depicts Pantaleone belittling the duel’s formal laws as they are not as of a great importance as retaining the honor of Gemma and Sanin. As shown the rules of a traditional duel were disregarded as it was unimportant to follow them given the greater purpose. Yet this method of retaining the ‘greater’ honor continues onwards as the next major instance of when the common traditions of the duel were disrespected occurred during the duel itself.

Given that the initial purpose of the duel was practically one sided as the German officer was clearly in the wrong, this led to even more traditional acts to be tarnished. After Sanin shot and missed, the officer intentionally shot the air, to which Sanin does not fire back, and then he proceeded to apologize to Sanin. In this scenario, two rules have been broken and the first was the officer shooting in the air. Referring back to James Keogh’s translated Honor Code, Rule #12 states “No dumb firing or firing in the air is admissible in any case”. The officer’s shooting in the air is considered an offensive move as it showing to his challenger, Sanin, that he is not worthy of his shot. In which, Sanin should have shot back. Both duelist did not follow the rules of the duel and fire back as they did not want to kill or injure one another, although expected of a traditional duel. Sanin earlier had claimed to Pantaleone, when asked about killing the officer, that he was not “Bloodthirsty”(Turgenev ch18) and thus proving that he could have retained honor without the required violence of a duel. The second rule that was broken was brought up by the second of the officer as he interrupted the duel claiming “‘gentlemen ...' began von Richter; 'duelists have not the right to talk together. That's out of order.’” (Turgenev ch22). The second is alluding to the officer apologizing before firing two shots. Referring back to the Honor Code, Rule #12 states “But no apology can be received in any case after the parties have actually

taken their ground without exchange of two shots”(James Keogh). Both duelists continue to talk and in fact Sanin states that he will decline his second shot to officiating second, while the officer then continues to apologize, shake hands and smile! Despite the multiple rules being broken in the duel, the outcome was worth it for both men as neither had been injured or dead (although also an expected outcome of a duel) as the officer’s second announced “Honour is satisfied, and the duel is over!” (Turgenev ch22). Which proves that despite the lack of obedience from both sides and both risking their honor to not follow the customs, the outcome for both was honorable. Not only were the formal acts of the duel disregarded during the event, after the fight the disrespect continued. However, the duel could not have been disregarded as badly as it was in Leo Tolstoy’s book.

In Leo Tolstoy’s “The Kreutzer Sonata”, the main character Pozdnyshev knew that his wife and Troukhatchevzky (wife’s piano instructor) had mutual feelings towards each other. However, one day Pozdnyshev let his frustrations take over him and he decided to take action. He entered his house without the awareness of his wife nor the pianist, grabbed his dagger, then approached their room. He initially attempted to strangle his wife, but then when Troukhatchevzky held his hand, the following occurred, “I tore my hands from his grasp, and leaped upon him. I must have been very terrible, for he turned as white as a sheet, to his lips. His eyes scintillated singularly, and — again what I did not expect of him — he scrambled under the piano, toward the other room” (“The Kreutzer”, Chapter 27). Here Tolstoy illustrates the two men disregarding all codes of honor and having an uncivilized brawl instead of an organized duel. In this instance, Troukhatchevzky ran and hid under the piano while Pozdnyshev had an unfair advantage with the blade in his hand, all this while they are in front of a woman. 19th

Century author Alexander Pushkin explains the wrong in these situations as he states, “a situation in which a gentlemen was powerless to defend his honor led both to the deterioration of the nobility’s spirit and to the demise of the noble class itself”. Pushkin illustrates that their dishonorable actions could have been prevented by an organized duel. Tolstoy demonstrates that both men are psychologically weak and cowardly since they could not restrain themselves from such unsophisticated acts of violence.

Both novels portrayed dueling being configured in a different way, yet while still retaining their honor. This proves the traditional rigid rules and concept of the duel is not the most effective way of handling one’s honor as multiple men had either avoided it or alternated it for the greater good of their honor.

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