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### The Art of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russian Dueling

Dueling is the practice of an arranged and organized fight where both participants must follow the rules that they agreed on. This organized fight has a very special place in Russian history as very few things come to show the “elegance, discretion, magnanimity, and courage” (Review of Reyfman) of a man. It portrayed the true essence of what it meant to be a gentleman. Which is why there were many social and psychological aspects that caused these organized fights. Overall duels helped build the 19th Century Russian man’s honor

Despite the fact that it was forbidden, dueling became more and more popular since it was introduced to the Russian military in the early 17th Century. According to author Irina Reyfman, early Nineteenth Century Russia saw “saw the largest number of duels in the history of dueling Russia” (‘The Emergence’). This gain in popularity was due to the fact that According to research by the St. Olaf College, ”Peter the Great issued the Sheremetev Code in 1705 which promised death to anyone who participated in dueling” (‘Dueling in Russia’). Peter the Great had forbidden dueling due to the fact that the russian military was receiving a lot of self-inflicted fatalities. Ironically, the punishment for this was death, but this wasn’t the type of death that most men desired as honor was seen to be matter more than life.

Initially inherited in from Western Europe, specifically France (and some parts of England as well) dueling was a way for both men to honorably challenge each other. The saying at the time was “the French do stab each other, but they do so honorably in duels face to face”(Kovan Zotas).

As time progressed from dueling in the military, the Russian 19th Century duel was meant to be only for men in the nobility as it tests their honor and rank. As Russian author Irina Reyfman states in ‘The Emergence of Duel in Russia’, “the dishonor of a physical assault between equals could be removed by a duel, but 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” (29). In other words, assault or attack in which one is at an unfair advantage stains the image and the honor of not only the perpetrator, but the entire view of the nobility class to the upper class. However this dishonor can also be withdrawn through a duel, as it was also believed that stain on one’s honor can be washed with blood. Another social aspect was seen from the perspective of the one being challenged. As it was seen cowardly and dishonorable if one was challenged to a duel and they refused to participate. Moreover, there numerous amounts of ways in which a Russian man’s honor can be stained that often lead to dueling. This could be due to the fact that they were challenged by a lower ranked classmen, if they were accused of being a liar, or the most popular reason of that they are a cuckold (implying that someone is flirting or even sleeping with their wife). Eventually duels became so popular that it was seen as a functional form of solving everyday altercations. A Russian man can be challenged for practically anything as expressed in ‘*The Emergence Of The Duel*’, such as “sexual rivalry, cheating at cards, an awkward word, a joke, a scowl, a frown, and so on” (1). Despite all these

temptations, a gentleman must be psychologically strong enough to control their anger and emotions until the fight. During the day of the fight (which women cannot know of), the same social standards remain.

In addition to all the societal influences that provoked the duel, there are more that remain during the fight. There are certain rules that a duelist must follow in a duel or else they lose their honor. These rules are based on societal standards as well as the rules that are created by both duelists. This includes the location of the duel, how far they are from each other, how many paces they can take, or in general the limitation of where they stand as well as how many shots they can take. However they are free to shoot whenever after the other one's turn has been taken. They are also partaking in a psychological war during the duel as they are constantly deciding if they should shoot or not, or if they would let the other person shoot first or not, or if they want to shoot in the air as a way of saying to the other duelist "you are not worth my shot". All these aspects are troubling the duelists as they want to die an honorable death rather than live an dishonorable life. Which is also the reason why in the *Hero of Our Time*, Pechorin was deciding whether or not to tell Grushnitsky that his gun was unloaded because he was cheating. As narrated by Lermontov, "Doctor, these gentlemen, no doubt in their hurry, forgot to place a bullet in my pistol. Please, load it again - and properly!"(145). As shown Pechorin was hesitant but when he remembered that Grushnitsky took his wife he shot him off while at the same time having second thoughts.

That's how important dueling is to the Russian history. Dueling was what defined a Russian man's honor which is why it was so psychologically challenging.

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