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THE PEACE AND THE DUEL; THE PEACE IN THE DUEL

Amanda MADDEN

George Mason University, Department of History and Art History, Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, 3200 Horizon Hall, MSN 3G1, Fairfax, Virginia 22030, United States
e-mail: amadden8@gmu.edu

ABSTRACT

Using statutory law, criminal records, cartelli, and chronicles that address both dueling and vendetta, this paper posits that the increase in dueling and state attempts to regulate peace were interconnected. Specifically, it addresses dueling as part of the peace process, thereby arguing for a reframing of the duel's place in dispute resolution and a reexamination of the type of violence it represents.

Keywords: dueling, violence, instruments of peace, vendetta, feud

LA PACE E IL DUELLO; LA PACE NEL DUELLO

SINTESI

Utilizzando leggi statutarie, precedenti penali, cartelli e cronache che affrontano sia i duelli che la vendetta, questo articolo postula che l'aumento dei duelli e i tentativi statali di regolare la pace fossero interconnessi. Nello specifico, affronta il duello come parte del processo di pace, sostenendo quindi una riformulazione del ruolo del duello nella risoluzione delle controversie e un riesame del tipo di violenza che rappresenta.

Parole chiave: duello, violenza, strumenti di pace, vendetta, faida

THE DUEL

In June of 1558, Captain Camillo Forni of Modena challenged another Modenese nobleman, Lanfranco Fontana, to a duel.¹ As was customary, Camillo sent a challenge, or *cartello di sfida*, which bore the signatures of three witnesses. Camillo's message expressed decidedly violent intentions in fastidiously polite form:

*I invite you as a man of honor to settle our enmities in a safe place, which out of courtesy I will undertake to find and offer you two sorts of the most honorable weapons, which I will send to you if you accept the battle.*²

Camillo's close companion Giovanni Battista Ronchi delivered the missive. In the honor culture of sixteenth-century Italy, no man, especially no man of arms, could ignore such a public challenge (Sposato, 2018; Shaw, 2014). In a response sent two days later, likewise witnessed by three signatories, Lanfranco insulted Camillo, accusing the latter of giving him the lie, that is, of questioning Lanfranco's honor.³ Thus began a ritual that was framed as civilized, whether its written exchanges were placid, inflammatory, or an odd mix of tones – and despite the armed combat that would conclude it.

The exchange of *cartelli* proceeded as each party insulted the other's honor. After the cartelli were publicly posted, the two men agreed on weapons and procured a moderator or patron, in this case Federico Gonzaga, Marchese of Gazuolo. Camillo and Lanfranco were to meet on a field of battle in the Duchy of Mantua. According to Vitale Papazzoni's epic poem about this duel – which probably exaggerated the facts – when the agreed-upon day arrived, the combatants celebrated Mass to cleanse their souls (Papazzoni, 1572, 121).⁴ Decked in ceremonial armor and cloth of gold, accompanied by retainers and witnesses, trumpets and drums, the two men progressed to the field on warhorses (Papazzoni, 1572, 121).⁵ A large crowd of men and women,

1 Count Carlo Forni and Niccolai Gamba "Il Combattimento fra Camillo Forni e Lanfranco Fontana" (cf. Combattimento). Copies of these cartelli can be found in the private archives of the Dal Forno family. Count Forni has graciously made these available.

2 ...[V]i invito come uomo di onore a difinire le nostre inimicizie in luogo sicuro, quale per mia cortesia mi obbligo a trovare, offrendovi due sorte di armi onoratissime, quali vi manderò accettando voi la battaglia (ASMo, Archivio Segreto Estense, Cancelleria, Archivio per materie Duelli i Sfide, b. 3, f. 17).

3 Messer Camillo Forni, In risposta alla vostra dei 17 del presente vi dico che mentite che io sappia le cagioni per le quali debba essere fra noi quella inimicizia che dite, come anche mentite che a ciò vi conduciate per men male (ASMo, Archivio Segreto Estense, Cancelleria, Archivio per materie Duelli i Sfide, b. 3, f. 17).

4 Ma come prima in oriente desto, / si vide il giorno, fu di lor ciascuno, / Ne i sacri Tempii a presentartisi presto. / La dove così all'altro, come à l'uno, / Fù celebrata una devota messa, / Con ciò che in simil caso era opportuno. / Ciascun con la persona genuflessa, / Levò le palme al cielo, Iddio pregando, / Che la vittoria à se fosse concessa (Papazzoni, 1572, 121).

5 Si ricca seta i bei ricami d'oro / Ch'haveano intorno, e le diverse ascice / Rendeano splendissimo decoro. / Molt'arme, e tutto di diverse guise / Portate lor innanti eran pian piano / Da molti Cavalier, fra lor divise / A quali venian dietro à mano à mano / Di varei sorti alcuni bei destrieri, / Che tutti quanti eran menati à mano. / Delle trombe e tamburri suoni alrieri, / Eccitatori della lor natura (Papazzoni, 1572, 121).

both nobles and commoners, were gathered to see the combat and witness the end of a ritual that had, from first *cartello* to actual combat, lasted several months (ASMo, Rettori dello Stato, Rettori di Modena, al governo al duca, 20 September 1558).

In comparison with the exchange of *cartelli* and the rituals and ceremonies that preceded it, the combat itself was of short duration. Once they arrived at the field, the two men dismounted their horses and faced one another with their ceremonial swords. After a brief exchange of blows, Camillo's armor was damaged and Lanfranco was mildly wounded. The two were beseeched three times by Federico to make peace. When his entreaties proved unsuccessful, the Duke of Mantua, whose appearance at the combat was a surprise, exhorted the men to lay down their arms. They agreed, embraced, and thus the duel was completed to wide celebration.

In many of the formative discussions of dueling among historians and literary scholars, this series of events has often been cited as one of the paradigmatic examples of a discernible change in violence and conflict resolution, a transformative shift from the unrestrained bloodshed of vendetta among Italian noblemen to a ritual that conformed to more civilized norms, and that, at least in some ways, bent to the will of centralized authority. This shift has been identified as part of a wider civilizing process wherein the Italian nobility moved away from trade and professions, bought land, gained titles, and began to join the expanding princely courts (Bryson, 1938; Cochrane, 1970; Quint, 1997). In these changing circumstances – so goes the conventional view – as feuds no longer had the same political rewards, the warrior nobility became courtiers, and princes gained increasing control over the rights of justice (Muir, 1993). More than any other development, the duel has been identified as an indicator of this shift.

This understanding of the duel has a measure of documentary support. There is no question that Italian noblemen of the sixteenth century began more regularly to undertake the ritualized aspects of dueling, including exchanging *cartelli*. Nor is there any doubt that some duels were not only extensively documented, but also widely understood to be freighted with larger meaning (Cavina, 2016). Some exchanges of *cartelli* did not lead to actual combat, but those that did were more likely to be seen as significant social and political rituals. One such duel was fought between the Marchese di Polignano and Camillo Orsini in 1533 to considerable notoriety (ASMo, Duelli i sfide, b. 2, n. 15). Also widely reported and discussed was a duel Federico Savorgnan fought with Troiano d'Arcano in 1568 (Shaw, 2014, 74). A famous duel fought in 1516 between Ugo Pepoli of Bologna and Guido Rangone of Modena, both members of noble families, was even more marked by ritual, pomp, and splendor than the duel between Camillo and Lanfranco. One of the more famous duels of the century, it occurred in the presence of members of the Gonzaga, the D'Este, and Baldassare Castiglione, the author of *The Courtier* (Cavina, 2014).

As was the case with the duel between Camillo and Lanfranco, these duels began with public challenges, each insulting the honor of the opponent. After a number of exchanges, which could go on for months or even years, the two principals would agree to meet in combat. Perhaps most importantly for scholarly proponents of the

duel as a civilizing force, a prince or a lord invariably mediated the actual combat, ensuring that all parties behaved honorably and by the rules. Often, these occasions were inflected with the trappings and rituals of the cavalier: prayers offered just before combat, the accouterments of decorated swords and armor, courtly words and manners, and obeisance to the prince. Any such event was markedly ceremonial and ended with a peace agreement between the two parties that formally satisfied their quarrel. In the scholarly framing that sees it as a key component of the civilizing process, dueling as it was developing was ritualized, contained, and courtly – and while its early stages might be extensive, its decisive conclusion was as brief in duration as it was effective in achieving peace.

A general survey of discourses on dueling would seem, at least initially, to support this view of the practice. Dueling certainly became a cultural phenomenon in the sixteenth century. It was written about at length and advocated for in the new manuals for courtiers and discourses on honor in the *scienza cavalleresca*, or the art of the nobleman. Duels were immortalized in the literature of Lodovico Ariosto and Torquato Tasso, as well as among lesser poets. Accounts of duels fill *avvisi*, diplomatic letters, chronicles, and the correspondence of government officials. Hundreds of *cartelli* and challenges were issued, exchanged, and posted in streets and squares. And the practitioners who took to the field of honor, like proponents on the sidelines, appeared to advocate dueling as a civilized and honorable way to settle disputes.

However, both the literature of dueling and records of individual duels contain discordant elements that trouble the conventional scholarly picture. Girolamo Muzio famously maintained that the duel was necessary to defend one's honor; as this was part of natural law, it superseded the law of the prince (Muzio, 1560, 220). Others similarly argued that dueling was not only a correct way to defend one's honor but was also a natural right that superseded all others. Such claims complicate any concept of dueling as fully congruent with the growing power of princes and their civilizing influence on the nobility. Notably, the aforementioned Duke of Ferrara, Ercole II d'Este, who ruled Modena (and whose family had done so for much of the previous two centuries), attempted to forbid the duel between Camillo and Lanfranco by *grida* or public proclamation (ASMo, *Rettori dello Stato*, b. 112). However civilized this duel may have appeared on the field of combat in Mantua, it apparently looked unacceptable to a prince who naturally considered both combatants to be his subjects, and to be answerable to him more than to any honorable rules of engagement.

In all likelihood, Ercole's disapproval of the duel stemmed from an awareness of what was really at stake in the combat: a sprawling vendetta among several Modenese families that significantly challenged the duke's capacity to govern in the city. In fact, such concerns were common for Italian princes of this period. Research on violence in early modern Italy continues to reveal that in urban centers vendetta retained a crucial place among the civic nobility even as discourses of dueling became more prominent (Vidali, 2019; Carroll, 2023). Further, there may have been a significant gap between discourses of dueling, which certainly proliferated, and the actual number of duels fought. As will be unfolded in what follows, duels were rare in

Modena while vendettas continued to be common among the city's elite well into the seventeenth century (Madden, forthcoming). In Bologna, the situation was the same; duels were fought far less often in proportion to ambushes in the streets, fights at masquerades, violent quarrels, and assassinations – all occurring among the same elite that, from time to time, challenged one another with *cartelli* (Rose, 2019). All evidence indicates an overlap between the two methods of dispute settlement that extended into the seventeenth century. And in this period, far from superseding or dampening vendetta, a duel was often a pause in a feud, ostensibly to make peace, rather than an actual conclusion. A duel could take place between two men of enemy families one year and an assassination could be committed in the next. Moreover, in the sixteenth century duels took place in the context of vendettas but not necessarily as a means to end them – indeed, on some occasions, as a way to perpetuate them beyond a show of peace at the conclusion of combat.

If dueling is misunderstood now as possessing more civilizing force than it actually had in the sixteenth century, this is partly because it was misrepresented at the time. In many cases, there was a disconnect between elaborate and often embellished accounts of duels and the broader realities of the conflicts of which they were part. The larger conflicts themselves, however, are readily detectable once we look beyond accounts narrowly focused on particular duels. The history of noble violence in which Camillo and Lanfranco feature is a signal case in point. Lanfranco and Camillo moved in the same social circles and were well acquainted. Members of politically prominent patrician families of Modena, they were social equals with a multitude of connections (Tavilla, 2017, 11–55). Their fathers and uncles worked together in local governance, and because of the highly endogamous nature of the Modenese elite, they were related to one another by marriage. Their careers were similar, as both men had served militarily with the Duke of Ferrara or in the retinue of other princes. Prior to their duel in 1558, each had been exiled by the Duke of Ferrara for violent offenses; more generally, each had a marked reputation for violence. But for both, individual reputation was effectively inseparable from larger familial involvement in vendetta.

On his father's side, Camillo was a member of a notoriously feud-prone Modenese family that had been heavily involved in vendettas since the fifteenth century; some were ongoing a century later. On his mother's side, Camillo was descended from the Bellencini, a noble house involved in the aforementioned feud with the Fontana, which was to become the most infamous and extensive Modenese vendetta of the century. Lanfranco, meanwhile, had been involved in the murder of Annibale Bellencini in 1547; this was the crime for which he was exiled (though later pardoned) (Forciroli, 2007, 184–92). Moreover, while Lanfranco is now most famous among historians for his duel with Camillo, he became best known among sixteenth-century Italians as a mass murderer who committed one of the most infamous crimes in sixteenth-century Italy. Both this incident, which will be expounded presently, and the murder of Annibale Bellencini were tied to the Fontana-Bellencini vendetta (Madden, forthcoming). The larger context of the duel of 1558 obviously demands both a rethinking of the meaning of the duel itself and a fresh understanding of the civilizing process that,

supposedly, turned Italian noblemen towards dueling and away from the vendetta, increasingly restraining their violent proclivities.

Both Camillo's and Lanfranco's families bore all the marks of powerful urban nobility of this period. The Forni had been central to Modenese government and civic life for over two centuries, and were important for the history of the city as a whole and in the specific context of vendetta. They played a starring role in Alessandro Tassoni's *La Secchia Rapita* (*The Stolen Bucket*), an epic poem about the Guelph and Ghibelline conflict between Modena and Bologna. Though some members of the Forni earned fame in the realm of letters – Giacomo Forni, for instance, was known for his learning, literary bent, and sacred *canzoni* – the family's prominence went hand in hand with a willingness to pursue personal enmities (Vedriani, 1665, 105). The first Forni death caused by dueling, that of Gianfrancesco Forni, occurred in 1482. As was typical for Modenese urban elites, violent tendencies scarcely interfered with a range of accomplishments and careers of service. Gianfrancesco's son, Messino, became master of the horse of Duke Alfonso I of Ferrara, and subsequently fought in the war between the Duke and the Republic of Venice. Messino's brother, Giralamo, likewise served in Alfonso's army, and was rewarded with land in Carpigiano; he also served in the ducal *camera*. As a sign of his prosperity, Giralamo eventually commissioned the renowned architect Andrea Palladio to build him a villa close to Vicenza. Captain Giovanni Battista Forni was banished by Alfonso II, grandson of Alfonso I, for homicide, whereupon he went into the service of Cosimo I, Grand duke of Tuscany. He became captain of the ducal guard and later governor of Livorno. While their military and other careers of service were cosmopolitan in scope, the Forni also frequently sat on Modena's Council of Conservators, the city's governing council, as well as serving in the ducal administration. Like his ancestors, Camillo Forni had a career that combined military exploits with other service to princes. The son of Giulio and grandson of Gianfrancesco, Camillo entered the service of Duke Ottavio Farnese. He later served in the siege of Siena and was imprisoned; Cosimo I compensated him with sums of cash, arms, and horses (cf. *Gli Este Signori*).

The Fontana, for their part, were a prominent family in Modena with respectably long lineage, having merchant origins in the thirteenth century, at which time they were entered in the *Liber magne masse populi*, or register of noble citizens eligible to hold public office (Tavernari, 2017). Geminiano Fontana, for instance, began serving on the Council of Conservators in 1465 and became *sottopriore* in 1478. The most notable evidence of the ascendance of the Fontana in Modenese public life is a stop by Ercole d'Este I at the Fontana palazzo in the Piazza dei servi on his first visit to Modena after his coronation in 1471. While the Fontana had not been entrenched as deeply in Modenese politics for as long as the Forni or Bellencini, by the middle of the sixteenth century their office-holding patterns and service in the Modenese government looked nearly identical. As was the case for many vendetta-prone Modenese, the Fontana often made their careers in Este service. At least five members of the Fontana family held places at the court of Ferrara during the sixteenth century and served on the Council of Conservators and in other governmental offices

(Guerzoni, 2000, 69–155). Like the Bellencini, they were noted jurists and included among their ranks Giovan Fillippo, lieutenant governor of Reggio (1522–3), podesta of Mantua (1523–4) and frequent Conservator. Giovan Francesco, who also served on the Council, was chosen by the Este to reform Modena's statutes in 1533, helped reform the statutes of the college of bankers, and, perhaps most notably, sat on the criminal court (Tavernari, 2017, 58).

All such accomplishments, offices, and careers gain in complex significance the more we keep in mind that, at the same time that they served the church, the government, and princes, these nobles fought bitter, public vendettas in the streets of Modena. The Forni and the Fontana were both at the center of Modenese violence in the sixteenth century, as vendetta combatants and as duelists. The Forni had fought bitterly with the Tassoni during the first half of the century. They became involved in the feud their Bellencini kinsmen fought with the Fontana after the murder of Annibale Bellencini – an act in which, it should be recalled, Lanfranco Fontana participated. Not at all coincidentally, Annibale Bellencini was Camillo Forni's cousin. All this is merely a representative sampling of the long, complex, and quite pressing series of events, each woven into the tapestry of a massive vendetta, that lay behind the duel between Camillo and Lanfranco in 1558.

This fact, however, must be grasped together with another: both families' dueling and vendetta practices usually made little impact on prominence and profitable service for individual members. This was certainly the case for Camillo, whose duel with Lanfranco did not, apparently, harm his career, despite his duke's quite public disapproval. Nor had he suffered much harm from earlier legal misadventures. In 1550, Camillo had been caught possessing a forbidden arquebus, and in 1551, he fought a duel with another Modenese noble, Cornelio Molza; this was the incident for which he was banished (Lancellotti, 1862, XII, 398). Yet Camillo became a Conservator in 1573, and only fell into disgrace in 1579 for his conduct in a card game; he was murdered in Brescia in 1583 for reasons unrelated either to his general involvement in vendetta or to his enmity with Lanfranco (Gli Este Signori). For the conventional view of dueling as a sign of the civilizing process and the growing power of princes, it is difficult and perhaps impossible to understand how highly successful careers – often spent largely or entirely in the service of one prince or another – were so compatible with robust involvement in vendetta. To comprehend this basic fact, we should first grasp that while these two men are leading examples of Modena's political ruling class in the sixteenth century, similar figures can be found in Brescia, Verona, Vicenza, or any Italian urban center during this period (Ferraro, 2003; Hanlon, 2002; Lavarda, 2007; Faggion, 2009; Povoletto, 2014).

Such men were marked by a particular combination of high career ambition, wide career opportunity, and substantial leverage in local and regional matters of governance. Members of increasingly ennobled ruling classes who, in addition to serving as lawyers, doctors, and governing officials, were turning to military service in the armies of rulers, these members of the urban nobility were likely even more conscious of status than their ancestors had been. In the context of wider European

conflicts, the Italian Wars, and more localized skirmishes, these men had ample opportunity both to emulate the chivalric ethos of the older nobility – the Pico, the Rangone, and the Bentivoglio – and to distinguish themselves as part of the new class of men whose ennoblement was not exclusively titular or feudal in nature, though it was bestowed by princes. As prominent urban elites upon whom princes depended for the functioning of their cities – in matters as various and essential as taxation, public works, and regulation of local economies – these were men whose dependence on the favor of their rulers was counterbalanced by two factors: their rulers' dependence on their competence in government and service, and their own capacity to seek service opportunities, and other chances for success, in a variety of places across the peninsula and indeed across the breadth of Europe. Thus, Camillo Forni could defy the displeasure of his duke by pursuing his duel with Lanfranco Fontana not despite, but partly because of, his successful service of that same duke in Modena's government.

This complex dynamic, whereby urban elites could, as it were, serve princes with the right hand while pursuing vendetta with the left, also points us nearer to the actual function of dueling in a larger frame that encompasses vendetta as an ongoing, indeed primary, fact of life for men like Camillo and Lanfranco. An initial indicator in this regard can be found a few years prior to the duel of 1558, when the Forni came into conflict with the Molza, another family whose history combined a record of prominent civic service with notable involvement in vendetta. In 1553, Girardino Molza and Camillo Forni had a "difference" after having some words together in a procession (Lancellotti, 1862, XII, 383). Subsequently, Camillo sent Girardino a *cartello* (Lancellotti, 1862, XII, 387). While the duke issued a *grida* against this duel, threatening to confiscate the property of the participants, it was ignored – just as the *grida* of five years later would prove ineffectual. Importantly, both Girardino and Camillo were in exile when the exchange of *cartelli* began. In order to return to Modena and have their sentences remitted, a peace process had to be signed. Officially, of course, a duel could be considered a long, ritualized process ending in a peace agreement. However, it did not appear in this light either to the two parties exchanging *cartelli* or to the duke to whom, ostensibly, they were both answerable. The duke apparently perceived what the intended duelists no doubt presumed: that whatever official promises might be made or implied by the ritual of the duel, its actual meaning could be found in the larger vendetta of which it was part – and which neither party was able or inclined to bring to a close.

THE PEACE

And thus it was for the duel between Camillo Forni and Lanfranco Fontana five years later. Persuaded by the Duke of Mantua, both men did agree to peace. However, it lasted less than a year. In August of 1559, Lanfranco, his Fontana cousins, Galeazzo and Jacopo, and some compatriots ambushed Cesarino di Parma, an adherent of Camillo Forni's uncle, and left him for dead in a ditch. A few years later, in 1562, Lanfranco took much more radical steps. He sent seven letter bombs to cousins

and uncles of Camillo Forni on the latter's maternal side, thereby murdering at least a dozen people. It is likely that another bomb was intended for Camillo himself. Clearly, the duel that has become one of the paradigmatic examples of the shift from vendetta to dueling did not end in peace (Forcioli, 2007, 184–192). It was simply one moment in a century-long vendetta, in which Lanfranco Fontana's infamous participation came to such a barbaric and explosive end that it earned him a sculpture, in which his likeness was engulfed in fire, outside the Fontana palazzo—to say nothing of numerous accusations of monstrousness in letters and chronicles across the peninsula. The Lanfranco Fontana of the duel and the Lanfranco Fontana of the letter bombs have yet to be linked in the scholarship, not least because the latter has yet to be well accounted for at all. When one understands the larger context, Lanfranco the honorable duelist is eclipsed by a more complex figure whose robust participation in a decades-long vendetta was part and parcel of his career as Modenese citizen and decorated cavalier.

With this spectacular – but more accurately rendered – figure in mind, we can better appreciate how clearly both Camillo and Lanfranco saw the duel of 1558 as part of a larger story. Their *cartelli* bear witness to their perspectives. The first sent by Camillo reads:

Messer Lanfranco, knowing that there will be constant enmity between us for the causes you know, the man of letters [Giovanni Battista Codebò] who was killed at the end of Vespers in the Church of S. Pietro near the Chapel of the Baptistery, having been shot at with stone muskets, and then given 27 wounds. The criminals were four, who fled through the holes in the walls, and mounted on horseback they headed towards Spilamberto. Of said death which is much spoken of and for which my friends and yours have to suffer labor and to buy the wrath of the Prince, I invite you as a man of honor to settle our enmities in a safe place, which out of courtesy I undertake to find, offering you two sorts of most honorable weapons, which I will send you by accepting the battle. And when this doesn't satisfy you, to show you how much my soul is, I'll be content to accept one of yours in the same manner described above.⁶

Here Camillo points to the murder of Lanfranco's brother-in-law, “the man of letters,” in August of 1547 while he was at vespers. The culprits behind this murder

6 *Messer Lanfranco, Conoscendo che fra noi di continuo sarà inimicitia per le cause che sapete, e acciò un giorno non succeda, homo in la sua condizione de letere, fu ucciso sul finire del Vespro nella Chiesa di S. Pietro presso la Cappella del Battistero, essendogli stato tirato contro con schioppi da pietra, e poi datogli 27 ferite. I malfattori furono quattro, che se ne fuggirono pei buchi che sono nelle mura, e montati a cavallo si diressero verso Spilamberto. Di detta morte multi multa loquuntur cosa per la quale li miei e vostri amici abbiano a patir travaglio e farsi acquistare l'ira del Principe, vi invito come uomo di onore a difinire le nostre inimicitie in luogo sicuro, quale per mia cortesia mi obbligo a trovare, offrendovi due sorte di armi onoratissime, quali vi manderò accettando voi la battaglia. E quando questo non vi soddisfaccia, per mostrarvi quanto sia l'animo mio, mi contenterò accettarne una delle vostre del medesimo modo soprascritto (Combattimento).*

were actually Camillo's uncle, Alessandro Bellencini, and several of his Bellencini cousins. Camillo seems almost to implicate himself (insofar as he seems to be among those who have had to suffer "the wrath of the Prince"), presumably to spur Lanfranco to assent to a duel; at any rate, Camillo certainly frames the duel as an opportunity for Lanfranco to avenge his brother-in-law. At the same time, there is, if only implicitly, an invitation to settle the violent dispute between the Bellencini and Fontana for which Lanfranco was partially responsible since, again, he had participated in the murder of Camillo's cousin Annibale Bellencini in 1547. Thus, both men could avenge not only their own wrongs but also the wrongs of their families. Camillo seems to claim that the duel is a physical manifestation of an instrument of peace that would end the vendetta. Further, it would mitigate the "wrath" of their prince. The duel was thus, ostensibly at least, a tidy solution, particularly given the notorious propensity of the Fontana and Forni families to vendetta.

Lanfranco Fontana's response, however, evinces skepticism regarding Camillo Forni's motive:

I tell you that you are lying; I know the reasons why the enmity you mention must exist between us, just as you are lying that you are doing it for the good of all. And to avoid the travail that can arise between our families and friends, and so that we don't have to lose the favor of the Prince which is so esteemed and revered by me and my family that we rather hope to acquire it more and increase it every day, that you are afraid of losing it altogether.⁷

Lanfranco's accusation that Camillo was not seeking peace between the parties or an ending to the vendetta but instead was trying to return to ducal favor had more than a grain of truth. As previously noted, this was not Camillo's first duel, and he was just as prone to trouble and general law-breaking as Lanfranco. Lanfranco's pointed barb that Camillo was pushing for peace as a subterfuge to curry the favor of the prince was simply true. Both the duel and the proffered peace were embedded into – rather than providing a conclusion for – the feud itself. It is thus little wonder that the duke publicly forbade the duel. It is perhaps even more unsurprising that, knowing he might not be obeyed, he also commanded his citizens not to attend it.

From the perspective of the court at Ferrara, the promise of peace through dueling appeared quite empty, as indeed it frequently was. Notably, at the same time governments were harshly cracking down on vendettas, they were increasingly regulating the peace process, or at least attempting to do so (Tavilla, 2001). Many instances of

7 *Messer Camillo Forni, In risposta alla vostra dei 17 del presente vi dico che mentite che io sappia le cagioni per le quali debba essere fra noi quella inimicizia che dite, come anche mentite che a ciò vi conduciate per men male. E per schivare il travaglio che può nascere fra le famiglie e amici nostri, e perché non si abbia a perdere la grazia del Principe la quale è da me e dai miei tanto stimata, e riverita che piuttosto si spera di acquistarla ogni dì maggiormente ed accrescerla, che si tema di perderla punto. Se vorrete rispondere per il termine di otto dì mi ritroverò qui in Venezia io, o mio legittimo procuratore, che sarà Messer Tommaso Fontana (Combattimento, Di Venezia, il 22 Giugno 1558).*

such attempts are related to Modena itself. In 1531, for example, Ercole II attempted to regulate Modenese instruments of peace with new reforms. The rationale for his attempt was explicitly given:

*we have observed the contention, difficulty, and disputations that have arisen and are arising around the instruments of peace, and truces celebrated among our subjects. Following their execution and exaction, arguments among the principals over the penalties stipulated, or a lack of notarization, or either the inexperience of the notaries themselves, all of which problems are causing great disorder ... and leading to vendetta.*⁸

The duke went on to make clear that the imprecision and irregularity of these instruments led “in our minds to the multiplication of scandal” In this law, he stipulated that precise clauses had to be included when drawing up these documents. Peace agreements were now to specify penalties agreed upon by both parties; the signatories were to include not only the principals, but also offenders sentenced in *contumacia*, and they were to be ratified in front of an official of the ducal *camera*.

The inclusion of these measures represented a notable change from the customary nature of earlier peace agreements. Up to the sixteenth century, peace agreements (and truces, which constituted a more restricted category) were voluntary barring exceptional circumstances (Tavilla, 2001). Further, their many customary and flexible features marked them as essentially self-regulatory. In trying to regulate peace agreements more strongly, the Este dukes were actually attempting to restrict the power of citizens at odds with one another, violently or otherwise, to end the conflict as they saw fit – a parallel strategy to regulating violence and consolidating power. Again, in this respect, the Este were part of a larger trend. In addition to addressing rising rates of violence via statutory law and ad hoc measures, Italian states were increasingly unwilling to leave truces and peace agreements in private hands. It is thus unsurprising that the reformed 1547 statutes make no provision for peace agreements in homicides, assassinations, or for “fighting like Guelfs and Ghibellines.”

With such developments in mind, a better understanding of dueling is fully open to us. We need only understand peacemaking as a process that required collaboration between the duke and warring families; peace agreements could not be forced on Modena’s ruling nobility (Tavilla, 2001). The voluntary nature of peace agreements doubtless extended the time necessary to broker them. On average, at least three to five attempts at pacification were made, most of which involved a brief period of truce (Darovec, 2017). A particularly lengthy time to broker a first peace agreement can be

8 *Perché havendo noi inetto le constationi, difficultam et disputatione che tanti volta, sono accadute sopra Instrumenti di pace et tregua celebrata nostri sudditi, et sopra la essecutioni, et essationi che di hanno da fare e contra li principali e contra li fideussori delle pene singolari et essi Instrumenti et questo perché tal hora le notai che ne sono rogati...per esse cause nuovo disordine...e che ne faccia l'eminente vendetta* (ASMo, Rettori dello Stato, February 11, 1531, B.12).

seen in the Fontana and Bellencini vendetta. After protracted negotiations between the families in Ferrara in the presence of the duke himself (at least two members of each family rented houses there because their stay was becoming so long), the two factions resorted to a truce in 1548. It was to be in effect for two years under a security of 2,500 scudi. A scant year after the truce was made, however, hostilities resumed. Even after much cajoling and pressure from all sides, it took until January of 1551 for a peace agreement to be signed (Madden, forthcoming). And while there were harsh penalties for breaking peace agreements in the reformed 1547 statutes of Modena, which included stiff financial penalties, exile, and even death, these agreements only seemed to take longer to broker as the century wore on as the Modenese elite increasingly resisted involvement in matters they believed to be theirs to govern.

Increasing ducal initiatives to regulate peace gave notice to vendetta-practicing families that if they did not assume the burden of disciplining their unruly members, they would be placing more power in ducal hands. Practicing vendetta without attention to these matters could prove costly to the foundations of noble power. Several ducal initiatives to wrest the power of peace-making from families and to legislate the variety of practices that comprised vendetta strategies, including regulating the clauses of peace agreements and enforcing greater penalties on rupturing the peace, threatened their political autonomy. As a result, vendetta-practicing families had to renew their efforts to develop coherent strategies to retain their power. Ultimately, the efforts of the Modenese elite were aimed not at suppressing vendetta, but at managing cycles of peacemaking and peacebreaking advantageously. Any such cycle typically included verbal insult, wounding which sometimes resulted in death, retaliation, truce between the two parties, another act or two of violence, and a peace agreement that, more often than not, would shortly be broken, beginning the cycle again.

It is here that dueling can most clearly be seen in a fresh light. During the sixteenth century, there were at least three major, long-term vendettas in Modena; the shortest lasted at least a decade before a definitive and effective peace agreement was signed, and the longest lasted four decades before peacemaking was successful (Madden, forthcoming). In the face of such facts, it is not possible to argue that the Modenese nobility became more peaceful as they became more civilized; there is simply no evidence for such a trend. Likewise, there is no evidence for a growing monopolization of violence by the Este government, even when they moved from Ferrara to Modena to make it their capital in 1598. The same families that had been involved in vendetta in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were still practicing vendettas in some form or another into the seventeenth century. At best, there is some evidence that the Modenese nobility began to duel more. However, many duels were simply part of the same cycle already described; in essence, they constituted another way to pursue vendetta. When we examine the clear cynicism with which Camillo and Lanfranco approached their duel in 1558 – clear, that is, with the benefit of hindsight – and the equally clear skepticism with which the duel's promise of resolution was apparently seen by ducal power in Ferrara, dueling appears simply as a new component of an existing tactic: to publicly avow peace in word only, making an empty show of commitment

to self-regulation of factional violence. Against the background of the rising tide of regulation, the duel can be seen as a form of dispute resolution that was more useful to vendetta-practicing disputants than it was to those attempting to regulate them. In general, peacemaking of any kind could be part of a flexible process embedded in the feud; dueling in particular became a form of dispute resolution that feuding families employed in order to conserve autonomy (Gluckman, 1955; Carroll, 2003).

I turn briefly to another famous duel that was embedded in a vendetta, and that can best be understood as an alternative to an instrument of peace. This duel was part of a feud between the Colloredo and the Savorgnan in the Friuli, and as it happened, it was also connected to the 1558 duel between Camillo Forni and Lanfranco Fontana. In one of his periods of exile in the 1550s, Marzio Colloredo served as a soldier under the Gonzaga. It was there that he most likely met Lanfranco, who was also in exile and serving under the Gonzaga; the two men formed a friendship that was to shape their vendetta practices just as much as it did their dueling. In 1562, both men commissioned the same artisan to construct letter bombs to use in their vendettas. Marzio sent his letter bombs to Urbano and Tristano Savorgnan; like the bombs Lanfranco commissioned, they were concealed in boxes disguised as gifts. The recipients, however, saw through the ruse. Likely because Lanfranco's letter bombs quickly became so infamous, Marzio's were identified immediately; the bombs were disarmed and no one was injured (Muir, 1993, 264).

The Savorgnan responded to the bombs by ambushing a member of the Colloredo faction; at the same time, the factions began to exchange *cartelli*. In 1563, Niccolo Savorgnan challenged Marzio to a "contest of honor." Marzio accepted on the condition that it bring about a lasting peace between the two clans, observing: "thus we cavaliers with risks to few can put an end to the deaths of many." This formulation strongly echoed what Camillo Forni had written to Lanfranco Fontana years earlier. Thus began what has been called the pamphlet war, a run of *cartelli* exchanged between the years 1563 and 1568. It eventually ended in a duel fought between Federico Savorgnan and Marzio in Ferrara, and then in Liguria. But neither the *cartelli* – whose markedly long run certainly indicates something other than an urgent desire for peacemaking – nor the duel itself dampened, much less ended, the vendetta of which they were a part (Brown, 2021, 252–257). Even with the formal reconciliation between the factions in 1568, the feuds continued until the beginning of the seventeenth century (Makuc, 2015, 214).

It is not without irony that two of the most notoriously violent and vendetta-committed men in sixteenth century Italy have been remembered not as letter-bombers but as duelists. In order to situate the duel alongside other developments, we must locate it on the spectrum of violent crime in Italy between the years 1500 and 1700, a key period in the development of the state and criminal courts. It was a period of discernible shifts in violence. Some changes were brought about by new innovations such as firearms, some occurred as violence became more subtly defined, and some were dependent on political, economic, and social forces. But dueling was, apparently, quite a small component of these changes (Carroll, 2016). The embeddedness

of dueling into the feud may be a leading reason we do not have a good sense of the place and rate of dueling in comparison to other types of violent crime. But while a systematic overview has yet to be done (and indeed may be impossible), dueling makes up a very small percentage of the criminal cases in state archives containing extensive criminal records for the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, including those in Verona, Venice, Bologna, and Vicenza.

For instance, in the Giudice di Maleficio in Verona, roughly two-thirds of which can be classified as some type of violent crime, only two can be explicitly classified as dueling cases prior to 1640. Among the thousands of sentences in the deliberations of Venice's Council of Ten, none are clearly duel-related; the same is true for the processi, or depositions, in the Avogaria di Comun, another Venetian court (ASVe, Giudici de Maleficio, 4a–82).⁹ As for Bologna, the center of the *scienza cavalleresca* and dueling, there is little quantitative evidence in the criminal courts that there was an uptick in the practice among the Bolognese nobility, whose violence often threatened to push Bologna into civil war. Indeed, the Bolognese senatorial class continued their private warfare and revenge politics well into the seventeenth century (Rose, 2019). Colin Rose notes that, in the years he has sampled in the *Tribunale del Torrone* up to 1632 for violent crime in Bologna, there are no duels between noble families (Rose, 2019, 196). There was a shift in violent warfare between the noble factions after 1632, but the increase was in street violence, not dueling. Ghiselli's chronicle of Bologna stretches into the late 1680s, and while he notes with interest and much detail select duels between the Malvezzi and Bentivoglio and other senatorial families, there are far more accounts of ambushes in the streets and fights at masques (Ghiselli, XVI, 1575–80 436–440, 512–18, 539–46, 559–63, 570–595; XVII, 1580–85, 7–17, 33–4, 41–8; XX, 1595–1600, 10–41; Angelozzi & Casanova, 2003, 284–285). Similarly, in the case of Modena – which was rife with bloody vendettas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – while very few criminal cases remain in state records, the chronicle of Spaccini, which describes a great deal of violence among families who had been practicing vendetta for well over a century, contains very few examples of dueling and far more examples of vendetta-related homicides (Spaccini, I–VI, 1588–1636). Indeed, in the criminal court records I have examined, while enmity-related crimes represent a fraction of the cases in any given criminal court, there is quite ample evidence that vendettas were ongoing.

The few cases of duels I have discussed here were fought during, and as part of, ongoing vendettas. And in such cases as these, dueling and vendetta ought to be understood now as they were apparently perceived in Lanfranco's lifetime. Dueling is certainly a cipher for changes in early modern practices of violence and dispute resolution. The explosion in the sixteenth century of treatises on dueling, treatises against dueling, *cartelli*, and accounts of famous duels all clearly mark the rise of a new and important mode of violence among the nobility. However, it is unlikely that dueling actually marked the advance of a civilizing process that would extinguish the

9 Cf. the inventories in the *buste* of the Giudice di Maleficio, ASVe.

fires of vendetta through ritual conflict resolution. Rather, dueling was a flexible element in a larger process of ongoing noble violence that remained deeply meaningful in the face of new attempts at control and reform.

Again, this is not to say that the rise of the duel is not evidence of some sort of shift in practices of violence among the nobility. Nevertheless, the quantitative and qualitative evidence available to us at this point does little to support the thesis that dueling replaced vendetta practices. We can know with fair certainty that some of the century's most famous duels bound their participants neither to actual peace nor to ruling authority. Quite the contrary: the duel was yet another in an arsenal of practices that were, in their way, as important to the pursuit of vendetta as weapons and occasions of violence. Just as statutes against violence became more numerous and penalties more harsh, the elites developed more creative means of circumventing punishment and pursuing their grudges. In the cases I have examined here, the entire discourse of dueling, from first insult to last blow, was one such exercise of creativity.

MIR IN DVOBOJ; MIR V DVOBOJU

Amanda MADDEN

Univerza George Mason, Oddelek za zgodovino in umetnostno zgodovino, Center Roya Rosenzweiga za zgodovino in nove medije, 3200 Horizon Hall, MSN 3G1, Fairfax, Virginia 22030, Združene države Amerike
e-mail: amadden8@gmu.edu

POVZETEK

Dvobojevanje je koda za spremembe zgodnje novoveških praks nasilja in reševanja sporov. Trdilo se je predvsem, da je bil dvoboj del širšega civilizacijskega procesa, ki je plemstvo usmeril stran od dozdevno nebrzdanega nasilja fajd. Vendar nedavne raziskave kažejo, da je vendetta v Italiji še naprej ohranjala svoj pomen ob hkratnem naraščanju števila dvobojev. Hkrati je celovitejše proučevanje vendette jasno pokazalo na prekrivanje obeh načinov reševanja sporov še globoko v 17. stoletje. Eno leto je lahko prišlo do dvo-boja med dvema moškima iz sovražnih družin, drugo leto pa do atentata – kaj je vplivalo na to, da so se nasprotniki odločili za eno metodo nasilnega reševanja sporov namesto druge, ni povsem jasno. Obenem so države vse bolj regulirale pomiritvene postopke, kar je bil le na videz nepovezan proces. Natančneje, ob zakonski obravnavi naraščajoče stopnje nasilja s statutarnim pravom in ad hoc ukrepi, italijanske države niso bile več pripravljene pustiti sklepanja premirja in miru v zasebnih rokah.

Ključne besede: dvobojevanje, nasilje, orodja miru, vendetta, fajda

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