

Chapter Two

A Double-Edged Sword: Honor in *The Duellists*

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The Duellists (1977), released on Blu-ray disc in the United States on November 20, 2012, nearly ten days before his 75th birthday, was Sir Ridley Scott's first feature-length film.¹ As one writer has pointed out, "*The Duellists* is a remarkably assured debut, technically dazzling, thematically mature."² In competition for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival that same year, it won the prize "*avec unanimité*" (unanimously) for best first film by a director.³ It also won the neophyte filmmaker⁴ the prize for Best Foreign Director at the David di Donatello Awards in Italy in 1978, an honor previously bestowed on some of Scott's favorite directors, among them Ingmar Bergman and Akira Kurosawa. These two awards, together with the other nominations that the film received in Britain⁵ and the generally positive reviews it earned worldwide (Pauline Kael, for example, called it "consistently entertaining and eerily beautiful"⁶) makes the "relative obscurity into which *The Duellists* soon fell all the more puzzling."⁷ Sadly, as Paul Sammon laments, "Once available on Paramount Home Video, virtually forgotten today [1999], only occasionally revived on American cable TV channels like American Movie Classics and Bravo, *The Duellists* has slipped through the pop culture cracks." He adds that it has become Scott's "least-seen, least-appreciated work. One wonders how long this distressing state of affairs will continue, however, since this is definitely a film ripe for rediscovery."⁸

This chapter aims to demonstrate that *The Duellists*, which is "one of the most satisfying cinematics of a Joseph Conrad story yet made"⁹ and emblematic of "[o]ne of Ridley Scott's finest hours,"¹⁰ contains the director's deepest meditation thus far on the nature of honor. Honor is a theme in many of his films, including the police thriller *Black Rain* (1989), the historical

epics *Gladiator* (2000), *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), and *Robin Hood* (2010), and the military films *G. I. Jane* (1997) and *Black Hawk Down* (2002).¹¹ Nevertheless, it is in *The Duellists* that Scott presents us with the most effective treatment yet of the subject, implying that honor is a double-edged sword—a notion capable of being wielded effectively or poorly.

THE TWO HUSSARS

The Duellists—note the English spelling—is an adaptation of the novella *The Duel*¹² by Polish-born Joseph Conrad, one of Scott's favorite authors.¹³ It first appeared in serial form in *The Pall Mall Magazine* from January through May 1908.¹⁴ That same year, it was published as a separate text in the United States under the title *The Point of Honor: A Military Tale*.¹⁵ It is a story about two hussar officers in Napoleon Bonaparte's army, Armand D'Hubert and Gabriel Feraud, who fight a duel in Strasbourg in 1800 during a lull in the Napoleonic Wars. D'Hubert, on orders from General Treillard, comes looking for Feraud to tell him that he is confined to barracks for severely wounding the mayor of Strasbourg's nephew in a duel earlier that morning. Feraud is outraged that D'Hubert would hunt him down in the salon of Madame de Lionne, a woman he has an interest in, and publicly embarrass him. Consequently, Feraud challenges him to a duel. Injured in this first encounter, Feraud afterwards insists upon dueling again. They proceed to have a series of duels in various cities over the next fifteen years. These transpire on foot and on horseback, using cavalry sabers, épées (dueling swords), and pistols, ostensibly in order for Feraud to gain "satisfaction." Finally, D'Hubert disarms his challenger in a pistol exchange. Instead of killing his man, he claims that Feraud's life now belongs to him and sends him on his way. The story is based upon the true tale of two French hussar officers, Pierre Dupont de l'Étang¹⁶ and François Fourier-Sarlovèze,¹⁷ who fought a series of duels over nineteen years, beginning in 1794, on foot and on horseback, as a result of the former having delivered a disagreeable message to the latter.¹⁸

Hussars were light cavalymen notorious for being impetuous and flamboyant. Napoleon once said that he would be surprised if a hussar lived beyond thirty, and Conrad remarks of his two characters, "they were officers of the cavalry, and their connection with the high-spirited but fanciful animal which carries men into battle seems particularly appropriate."¹⁹ Conrad presents the officers as opposites in almost everything—appearance, regional background, class, and temperament. D'Hubert, who is in the 4th Hussars, is "tall, with an interesting face and moustache the colour of ripe corn."²⁰ Feraud, who is in the 7th Hussars, is "short and sturdy, with a hooked nose and a thick crop of black curly hair."²¹ D'Hubert is a "Northman . . . born

sober under the watery skies of Picardy."²² Feraud is a "Southerner," a "Gascon . . . who . . . was as though born intoxicated with the sunshine of his vine-ripening country."²³ These differences in appearance and regional background are captured in the film by the casting of the tall, blonde, lanky, and relaxed-appearing Californian actor Keith Carradine as D'Hubert, and the shorter, brunette, more muscular and intense New York actor Harvey Keitel as Feraud.²⁴

In the novella, one duelist is "a D'Hubert," a member of an aristocratic family, and is considered something of a "dandy."²⁵ Feraud, on the other hand, has "no connections" and is the son of "an illiterate blacksmith."²⁶ D'Hubert is thought by his colonel to have a "cool head" (with the exception of when dueling with Feraud), and is judged by his comrades to have "a frank and equable temper." Even to his sister, he has the potential "to prove eventually a sensible fellow."²⁷ His comrades nickname him "The Strategist."²⁸ His rival Feraud is "pugnacious," considered by his comrades to have "exuberance" and "simplicity."²⁹ D'Hubert repeatedly exclaims that Feraud is "mad," a "lunatic" and "impracticable," whereas Feraud considers the other soldier to be "that pretty staff officer" and one of the "general's pets."³⁰ In the film, the difference in temperament between the two characters is evident from their very first encounter, with D'Hubert continuing to plead for calm as Feraud becomes more and more enraged at him, hurling insults and taunting him until at last they duel. The difference in class emerges more gradually as D'Hubert is shown in more luxurious private quarters and eventually in the country estate of his wealthy sister, Léonie, while Feraud appears first in officers' quarters and later, walking alone in the streets.

THE BONAPARTIST AND THE REALIST

The above differences between D'Hubert and Feraud are not the most important contrasts in the story. The most vital differences are their divergent attitudes towards the military, towards Napoleon Bonaparte, and ultimately, towards dueling. D'Hubert is a career officer, a man "[m]ilitary to the very bottom of his soul."³¹ Highly observant of discipline and order, he is consistently promoted to special positions in his regiment, including *officier d'ordonnance* to General Treillard (while a lieutenant) and *aide-de-camp* to the Prince of Ponte Corvo (while a captain). He is also attached to the Major-General's staff after being promoted to General. This upward mobility, it seems, derives from his leadership ability and level-headedness. It is only his dueling with Feraud that causes him to lose favor among his superior officers and impedes his career at various points.

In contrast to D'Hubert, Feraud is "more pugnacious than military" and a "fighter by vocation."³² He "had been content to give and receive blows for

sheer love of armed strife, and without much thought of advancement."³³ He likewise advances in rank and eventually earns the title of general, but he does so seemingly on the strength of his fighting and fearlessness. For him, fighting was the essence of military existence: "A mere fighter all his life, a cavalry man, a *sabreur*, he conceived war with the utmost simplicity, as, in the main, a massed lot of personal contests, a sort of gregarious dueling."³⁴ In this respect, Feraud resembles the Emperor Napoleon, whose career Conrad described as having "had the quality of a duel against the whole of Europe."³⁵ Feraud only begins to actively consider his career in the military when D'Hubert is promoted from lieutenant to captain because "Now that D'Hubert was an officer of superior rank there could be no question of a duel. Neither of them could send or receive a challenge without rendering himself amenable to court-martial."³⁶ Feraud is, however, temperamentally unsuited to "seize showy occasions and to court the favorable opinion of his chiefs like a mere worldling." He confides in a friend, "I don't know how to fawn on the right sort of people. It isn't in my character."³⁷ He looks upon D'Hubert's advancing in rank as "intrigue, a conspiracy, a cowardly manoeuvre"³⁸ to avoid fighting with him.

In the film, this difference in the attitude of each protagonist towards the military is again made explicit from their very first encounter. Feraud, within minutes of meeting and quarreling with D'Hubert, calls him "a proper general's poodle." Later, after the final defeat of Napoleon, when Feraud is in danger of imprisonment (and possibly execution) for his anti-royalist beliefs and D'Hubert's future military career remains secure, the colonel pointedly says about Feraud, "Now there was a man who would ride straight at anything. He ends up at the mercy of that sewer rat, Fouché." The clear implication is that D'Hubert is not such a straight rider, but bends with the political wind in order to facilitate his advancement.

The men's contrasting attitudes toward the military are closely connected to their differing perspectives of the Emperor. Feraud is a "rabid Bonapartist."³⁹ He might even be said to be the embodiment of a saying that Conrad attributes to Napoleon: "for a French soldier, the word impossible does not exist."⁴⁰ After the second and final defeat of the leader, no attempts are made to recruit Feraud to the king's army. Conrad explains, "The Royalists knew they could never make anything of him. He loved The Other too well."⁴¹ Feraud never considers D'Hubert to be loyal to Bonaparte and proclaims on numerous occasions after their initial duel, "This man does not love the Emperor."⁴² Such an assessment seems unfair. When Napoleon escapes from his first banishment to Elba to rule France again for what was called "The Hundred Days," the injured D'Hubert makes an attempt to saddle his horse and join up: "Such were the effects of imperial magic upon a calm temperament and a pondered mind."⁴³ He is also said to mistrust "profoundly the advances of Royalist society."⁴⁴ There is nevertheless some truth to the idea

that D'Hubert, as a career soldier, is not so much loyal to Napoleon as loyal to the commander of the army, whoever that commander may be. His sister, with whom he lives after the war, is a royalist, or at least becomes a royalist upon her successful marriage into a Southern family. D'Hubert himself marries the niece of Le Chevalier de Valmassigue, a rabid royalist. More importantly, after Louis XVIII is restored to the throne, D'Hubert accepts a position as commander of the 5th Cavalry Brigade under the king.

In the film, the difference between D'Hubert and Feraud on the matter of loyalty to Napoleon surfaces early on and remains central to their relationship. In doing so, the cinematic narrative diverges from the novella. In their first encounter, Feraud implies that he fought the duel with the mayor's nephew in order to defend the honor of the 7th Hussars and ultimately, Napoleon: "Would you have them spit upon Napoleon Bonaparte?" D'Hubert's response is "Bonaparte? Bonaparte has no more to do with this than Madame de Lionne." Outside, Feraud becomes incensed, asking if D'Hubert thinks "that name is common coin for the street." D'Hubert tactfully replies, "Whichever name you choose to defend, I used it with the utmost respect and solely in the cause of logic." Back at his lodgings he proceeds to challenge D'Hubert to a duel. Later, he rewrites history and tells his fellow officers that he dueled because D'Hubert said, "For all I care they can spit upon Napoleon Bonaparte." He tells them D'Hubert "is a turncoat. That is a fact." When this story is later reported to D'Hubert, he calls it "impertinent trash." It is indeed "trash" to say that he insulted Napoleon. However, in the film, unlike in the novella, D'Hubert refuses to join Napoleon's forces after the fallen leader escapes from Elba. The good soldier is also shown marrying into a royalist family. It is true that when his wife's guardian, Le Chevalier, proclaims D'Hubert "a royalist now," his noncommittal response is, "In the king's army we'll have more realists than royalists." Nevertheless, in the film, even more so than in the novella, Feraud emerges as the devoted Bonapartist and D'Hubert as the career soldier who has no special loyalty to the Emperor. The irony is that it is the latter's perceived independence that enables him to intercede on Feraud's behalf and save him by appealing to Joseph Fouché, Duke of Otranto and Senator of the Empire. This occurs when Feraud lands on a list of people who are to be executed as enemies of the new order.

By far the most powerful dramatization of the difference in attitude towards Napoleon between Feraud and D'Hubert occurs in costume. For the entire second half of the film, Feraud wears a black bicorn hat—the hat that is most closely associated with Napoleon. With his black hat and his squat figure, Feraud gradually comes to look more and more like Napoleon himself. The final image of the film is of Feraud standing alone on a hillside in that bicorn hat, looking out over an expanse of water. The image is obviously modeled on paintings of Napoleon in exile on the island of Saint Helena. As

D'Hubert (freed of Feraud forever) joyfully rejoins his wife and royalist in-laws at their country mansion, the disgraced duelist effectively becomes a copy of his beloved Emperor. As Charles Shiro Tashiro observes, "The hat evokes Napoleon, of course, still standing on a hillside imagining a battle for future *metteurs-en-scène*."⁴⁵

THE DUELIST AND THE ANTI-DUELIST

The most notable difference between D'Hubert and Feraud is neither their attitude towards the military nor is it their attitude towards Napoleon; it is their approach to dueling. D'Hubert, by his own insistence, "is not a duelist"⁴⁶ whereas Feraud is an inveterate duelist. This difference is crucial to explaining the nature of their relationship. Properly speaking, there is only *one* duelist.⁴⁷ The novella makes it clear that when D'Hubert first notifies Feraud that he is confined to barracks for skewering the mayor's nephew, the latter sees nothing remiss in having fought the duel:

"What is it you want with me?" he asked, with astonishing indifference. Lieut. D'Hubert could not imagine that in the innocence of his heart and simplicity of his conscience Lieut. Feraud took a view of his duel in which neither remorse nor yet a rational apprehension of consequences had any place. Though he had no clear recollection how the quarrel had originated (it was begun in an establishment where beer and wine are drunk late at night), he had not the slightest doubt of being himself the outraged party. He had had two experienced friends for his seconds. Everything had been done according to the rules governing that sort of adventure. And a duel is obviously fought for the purpose of someone being at least hurt, if not killed outright. The civilian got hurt. That was also in order.⁴⁸

Feraud believes that he is innocent of any misconduct. Being publicly embarrassed by D'Hubert, he challenges his perceived insulter to a duel: "I mean to cut off your ears to teach you to disturb me with the general's orders when I am talking to a lady!"⁴⁹ D'Hubert may not be a duelist, but he is not the sort of man who will back down from a challenge. He later says to Le Chevalier about Feraud, "How is one to refuse to be bitten by a dog that means to bite?"⁵⁰ The question implies that there was nothing that he could do except fight Feraud. However, what D'Hubert really means is revealed in what he divulges to the Colonel: "I was put into a damnable position where I had no option; I had no choice whatsoever, consistent with my dignity as a man and an officer."⁵¹

Honor requires that once D'Hubert accepts Feraud's first challenge to a duel, he must fight; honor also demands that he continue to fight Feraud over the years. Indeed, these encounters appear to be one long, drawn-out duel; after all, the novella is simply called *The Duel*. D'Hubert shares his bitterness

with Feraud after years of their dangerous interaction: "You've forced me on a point of honour to keep my life at your disposal, as it were, for fifteen years."⁵² Essentially, honor is the leverage that Feraud has over his sparring partner. When his seconds come to challenge D'Hubert on Feraud's behalf for the final duel, they appeal to honor in order to get him to fight, although the duel is illegal: "The General has broken the ministerial order to obtain from you the satisfaction he's entitled to by the laws of honour. . . . It's a risk. But honor before everything."⁵³ Honor alone compels D'Hubert to do what is against his desire and nature.

The film underscores this difference in attitude towards dueling more explicitly. The opening voice-over explains, "The duelist demands satisfaction. Honor for him is an appetite. This story is about an eccentric kind of hunger." But what is obvious from the beginning is that only Feraud has the "appetite" and "eccentric hunger" for satisfaction. Hence, it is only Feraud who is the duelist by this definition. The opening scene of the film features him expertly dueling with the mayor's nephew and wounding him traumatically, an act not described in Conrad's novella. His dueling even before his meeting with D'Hubert is the reason why D'Hubert is sent to him in the first place. When both men meet, the milder D'Hubert is genuinely shocked to find Feraud so blasé about having fought a duel. When asked whether he did so in the morning, the fiery soldier replies, "Of course." This cavalier attitude earns him the rebuke from his interlocutor, "You make dueling sound like a pastime."

As D'Hubert tries to calm Feraud down, the irate man attempts to bait the officer sent to arrest him. It becomes clear that Feraud will duel on any pretext, pouncing on the former with excitement:

"Can you fight?"

"I see no reason whatever for us to fight."

"What reason would you like? Shall I spit in your face?"

After his duel with Feraud, D'Hubert sends his friend Jacquin, the army surgeon, to attend to Feraud's wounds. Jacquin remarks, "A tomcat would never dream of sending a surgeon to another tomcat." Similarly, Feraud the duelist would never dream of sending a surgeon to another duelist. D'Hubert, the anti-duelist, does.

It is true that at various points in the film, D'Hubert's friends make the point of telling him that he now has a great reputation as a duelist. Nevertheless, they know him well enough to understand that he does not wish for such fame. As his friend Lecourbe observes, "Like it or not, you are a man of reputation. A famous fire-eater. It brings you responsibilities. You must think of yourself as fighting on parade." Here Lecourbe is attempting to get D'Hubert to agree to fight with Feraud again, this time on horseback, "as a compliment to the cavalry. The regiment expects it." D'Hubert must again be talked into dueling (this time with a public mission), and it is honor once

again that makes him agree. This is also true of the final duel with pistols at the conclusion of the film. When one of Feraud's two seconds reflects, "Honor before everything," the other chimes in, "Honor first." D'Hubert replies that he could have them all arrested. To this threat, one of them responds, "We have proceeded on the assumption that you were a gentleman." D'Hubert replies, "Yes, damn you! Damn you, I am!" The anti-duelist is made to duel once again by means of an appeal to honor, swept up by the pressure of unwelcome social expectations.

A PRISONER OF HONOR

In the film's production notes, Scott provides his own interpretation of the plot:

It is the story of two men who fight for no particular reason. Their first encounter becomes a detonator for a duel which leads to other duels that mark their careers. The one man, played by Harvey Keitel, is a prisoner of his own hatred. He must kill or be killed. Keith Carradine plays the other man who is honor bound to fight. It is a fascinating story of man's violence within himself.⁵⁴

One way to understand Scott's interpretation of the story is that while Feraud is a prisoner of an emotion—hatred or rage—which makes him fight with D'Hubert, D'Hubert is a prisoner of honor, and it is honor that makes him fight. It is surely an undesirable thing to be held hostage by an emotion. The negative connotation of being a prisoner notwithstanding, is it always a bad thing to be a "prisoner of honor"—to be "honor-bound"? Furthermore, if Feraud is ostensibly at war with himself because this emotion makes him do something—namely, fight duels—which *in some sense* he does not want to do because it puts him in constant danger, then D'Hubert must be at war with himself as well because honor makes him do something—again, fight duels—which he also does not want to do. But is it always a good thing to be free of honor and do, in an absolute, unqualified sense, whatever one wants to do?

We cannot say Feraud is always a prisoner of his emotions. For much of the story he is, but at the very end he, too, is a prisoner of honor. When D'Hubert finally disarms him in the last pistol exchange, he wants nothing more than for d'Hubert to kill him with his remaining shot. In the film, Feraud shouts, "Go, kill me!" This will give him satisfaction now that he has lost. Scott is quite right that Feraud believes that he "must kill or be killed." D'Hubert, however, refuses to do so. Instead, in a speech that is repeated almost verbatim in the film (in a flashback after he has returned to his pregnant wife, Adèle), D'Hubert explains to Feraud that the defeated man's

life now belongs to his vanquisher. He is honor-bound never to duel again and must live or die as D'Hubert sees fit:

You will fight no more duels now. . . . By every rule of single combat your life belongs to me. That does not mean that I want to take it now. . . . You've forced me on a point of honour to keep my life at your disposal, as it were, for fifteen years. Very well. Now that the matter is decided to my advantage, I am going to do what I like with your life on the same principle. You shall keep it at my disposal as long as I choose. Neither more nor less. You are on your honour till I say the word.⁵⁵

Feraud is finally in the same predicament that D'Hubert has been during all the years of their contact. As he complains in the novella, "It amounts to sitting all the rest of my life with a loaded pistol in a drawer waiting for your word. It's—it's idiotic."

Far from it being a bad thing that Feraud is a prisoner of honor, it is a good thing that he is. He may no longer do whatever he wants to do, in particular, challenge D'Hubert and innocents like him to possibly lethal duels on a mere pretense. It is indeed beneficial to be a prisoner of honor when what the baser aspect of that person desires to do is wrong. This is Scott's answer to the first question that was posed above: it is *not* always a bad thing to be a prisoner of honor because it ensures a measure of self-control.

Reflecting on his role in this film, Keitel has commented, "I still play the villain."⁵⁶ However, Feraud is not a true villain because his willingness to be bound by honor and to do as D'Hubert wishes when he loses the pistol match negates—or at least mitigates—his purported villainy. Such willingness to be bound is lacking in a true villain who, at the earliest opportunity, would simply kill the other and do whatever he liked, regardless of what the code of honor dictated. It is indeed the case that a true villain "must kill or be killed." The *yakuza* gangster Sato in Scott's *Black Rain* (1989), the mobster Joey Venza in *Someone to Watch Over Me* (1987), the Emperor Commodus in *Gladiator* (2000), and King John in *Robin Hood* (2010), to name just four of Scott's true villains, "must kill or be killed" (or at least be jailed), since they wish to annihilate or enslave others. They also lack any willingness to be bound by honor, morality, or the force of criminal law. It is precisely because the Muslim leader Saladin in *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005) has the willingness to be bound by honor not to kill or enslave others that he is not a true villain either.

If the case of Feraud suggests being a prisoner of honor is positive, the case of D'Hubert demonstrates the opposite. In the novella, D'Hubert chafes against the bonds of honor and resists dueling even as he duels. What is not fully clear, because it is not clear to D'Hubert himself, is *why* he does not wish to do what honor requires, even as he does it. At first it seems that it is his "worldly" ambition, that is, his desire for self-advancement, that makes

him averse to what honor requires: "This absurd affair would ruin his reputation of a sensible, well-behaved, promising young officer. It would damage, at any rate, his immediate prospects, and lose him the goodwill of his general. These worldly preoccupations were no doubt misplaced in view of the solemnity of the moment."⁵⁷ However, this explanation seems wrong. As much as D'Hubert is ambitious, he is not like "self-seeking" Fouché, Senator of the Empire, who is "traitor to every man, to every principle and motive of human conduct."⁵⁸

At another point it seems that it is the fear of losing his good name and being the subject of scandal that makes him reluctant to do what honor requires:

Ridicule would be added to the scandal of the story. He imagined the adorned tale making its way through the garrison of the town, through the whole army on the frontier, with every possible distortion of motive and sentiment and circumstance, spreading doubt upon the sanity of his conduct and the distinction of his taste even to the very ears of his honourable family.⁵⁹

It has indeed been argued that "D'Hubert's obsession with protecting his reputation"⁶⁰ compels him to continue to duel. Again this seems insufficient to explain his reluctance to do what honor requires. The one clue to the reason underlying his reluctance to do what honor requires can be found in his colonel's response to D'Hubert's statement that he cannot talk about the duel and its origin because "[i]t will be said that a lieutenant of the 4th Hussars, afraid of meeting his adversary, is hiding behind his colonel."⁶¹ Conrad explains, "But the colonel was well aware that the duelling courage, the single combat courage, is rightly or wrongly supposed to be courage of a special sort. And it was eminently necessary that an officer of his regiment should possess every kind of courage—and prove it, too."⁶² Although D'Hubert does not realize it, it is in fact his lack of "duelling courage" that makes him reluctant to duel. This is made clear in the description of his motivation before the final duel with Feraud, when d'Hubert is convinced that he will die: "But if true courage consists in going out to meet an odious danger from which our body, soul, and heart recoil together, General D'Hubert had the opportunity to practice it for the first time in his life."⁶³ In fighting his last duel, D'Hubert finally experiences true courage, or "duelling courage." It was fear rather than self-interest (or the desire to avoid a scandal) which made him reluctant to do what honor required prior to this moment. The novella's conclusion about honor would appear to be that throughout his life, D'Hubert was motivated by honor to continue to fight with Feraud because he lacked the necessary "single combat courage" to fight. Only in their final encounter is he motivated by that kind of courage. Only

then does D'Hubert do what honor requires without experiencing the usual internal strife.

What the novella does not address is the possibility that what honor requires D'Hubert to do, namely fight with Feraud, might be *wrong*, and hence that he might be doing the wrong thing from this kind of courage. Fear points in the direction of not fighting with Feraud. Since he does not succumb to fear, D'Hubert fights. Worldly ambition and self-interest also point in the direction of not fighting. But these motives are no better than fear, and so he fights. What Conrad's text does not consider is the possibility that not fighting could be motivated by a better motive. If this is correct, then it helps to show that what honor requires may be wrong as well.

THE TWO SIDES OF HONOR

While it appears that Gerard Vaughan-Hughes, the author of the screenplay, "attempts a direct adaptation of Conrad's narrative,"⁶⁴ the single greatest departure from the novella is in the creation of Laura, D'Hubert's lover in the first half of the film. This is where Scott's picture comes into its own. Vaughan-Hughes said that in the Conrad story, D'Hubert "doesn't have a private life, particularly" and that "Laura is produced to give him a private life."⁶⁵ However, this woman is the character who offers the only criticism of honor to be found in the entire film. It is not a coincidence that Scott's own interpretation of his work (quoted above) seems to be a summary of Laura's best lines. It is true that the "Laura subplot also introduces the feminist thread that runs throughout Scott's work."⁶⁶ When she confronts Feraud in his army tent, surrounded by assorted officers and women, she shouts at him, "Nobody understands why you fight with Armand. It's supposed to be a secret between the pair of you. I believe it's a secret of your very own. I believe you feed your spite on him with no more sense than a blood-sucking louse." Clearly she believes that it is not honor that motivates Feraud to fight, but spite—a synonym for Scott's "hatred." Feraud is consumed by his spite for D'Hubert and this is why he fights with him. But he keeps his motive secret from everyone else, including D'Hubert. Only Laura has figured it out.

Her visit to Feraud comes after an important scene between Laura and D'Hubert. Laura is giving D'Hubert a bath after his wound has been dressed following the second duel. She asks him why he did not just get up and shake hands with Feraud. He responds:

"I wasn't well. Besides, he would only have stuck me again. He was waiting for the chance."

"Do you mean you would have gone on fighting?"

"No question."

(Sigh of exasperation)

"It would have been the only honorable thing to do."

Next Laura tries to stop D'Hubert from sneezing by getting him to talk about something, such as honor:

"Describe honor."

"Honor?"

"Honor."

"Honor is . . ."

"Go on, you must."

". . . indescribable . . . unchallengeable . . ."

These exchanges reveal that Laura looks upon what the two officers are doing—in the name of honor—as wrong. Not only are they treating life as cheap, they are attempting to kill each other for what she views as an insufficient reason. When she asks D'Hubert to explain what honor is, such that it can motivate him to fight when he clearly does not wish to do so, he is unable to give her an articulate answer. To say that honor is "indescribable" and "unchallengeable" is simply to be unable (or to refuse) to provide an explanation. Although she does not put it in so many words, Laura clearly believes that D'Hubert is a prisoner of honor just as she holds that Feraud is a prisoner of spite. The former does that which he does not want to do—fight duels with his tormenter—because of honor and he cannot even explain why.

Laura realizes that she cannot stop D'Hubert and decides, after a remarkably insightful tarot card reading about "a quarrel pursued for its own sake," that she will give up the man and marry another. She writes "Goodbye" in red lipstick on his sabre and leaves. However, later in the film, she tracks him down. She is now a destitute widow who begs for sustenance and even prostitutes herself. She wants D'Hubert to take her back. He tells her to go back to France and that "There's only grief to be got from following soldiers." She realizes that she has no chance of being taken in by him. Crying, she hollers a last warning, "This time he'll kill you!" and leaves.

Although veiled, what this final exchange reveals is that Laura thinks that the problem with honor is that it is, or can be, destructive. Honor is deleterious when it supersedes more important considerations such as a person's caring for a loved one. On the one hand, in the case of Feraud at the very end of the film, honor makes him stop dueling with D'Hubert. Morally, Feraud should refrain from dueling with D'Hubert because his nemesis is innocent and has done nothing to cause offense. *Therefore, in this case, it is a good thing that honor requires him do something that he does not want to do.* Thus it is a good thing, in this case at least, to be a prisoner of honor.

On the other hand, in the case of D'Hubert, until the very end of the film, honor makes him duel obsessively with Feraud. Dueling is, however, not what he wants to do. It can be agreed that, morally, D'Hubert should not duel with Feraud because it endangers his life without a sufficiently serious reason, which is both bad for him and bad for those who love him. It jeopardizes

his military career, drives Laura away, risks making his pregnant young wife a widow, and may render his future child fatherless. Constant dueling feeds Feraud's rage, which is bad for him psychologically as well. *Therefore, in this case, it is a bad thing that honor makes him do something that he does not want to do.* Thus it is a bad thing, in this case at least, to be a prisoner of honor.

From the above parallel discourses, the double-edged sword of honor is unsheathed in *The Duellists*. Being bound by honor can be a good or bad state of affairs depending on whether moral obligations are present or not. As Immanuel Kant theorized about "the inclination to honor," it may light "upon what is in fact in the common interest and in conformity with duty," which then "deserves praise and encouragement"⁶⁷; it may also light upon what is contrary to moral duty, in which case it deserves blame and moral censure.

NOTES

1. Work on this essay was supported by a Lenfest Grant from Washington & Lee University in the summer of 2012. I would like to thank H. F. (Gerry) Lenfest as well as the university for their generosity. Research was conducted at Yale University using materials from the Sterling Memorial Library and the Bass Library, as well as the Whitney Humanities Center. I would like to thank all of the staff for their assistance. Finally, the Leyburn Library at Washington & Lee provided further interlibrary loan materials through the help of the staff, especially Elizabeth Teaffe. I thank the staff for procuring these materials, as well as my father, Joseph Mahon, for reading an earlier draft of this essay and for providing insightful comments. This essay is dedicated to the late Tony Scott.

2. Paul M. Sammon, *Ridley Scott* (London: Orion, 1999), 46.

3. "Awards 1977," Festival de Cannes, accessed August 11, 2012, <http://www.festival-cannes.fr/en/archives/1977/awardCompetition.html>.

4. I refer to feature films specifically. Scott had written and directed his first film, *Boy and Bicycle* (1962, 1965), a 26-minute black and white film, while still a post-graduate art student at the Royal College of Art in London, using a 16-mm Bolex cine-camera that he borrowed from the college and taught himself how to operate. With funding from the British Film Institute, he re-did the sound three years later, persuading John Barry to record a new version of the track "Onward Christian Spacemen" for the film.

5. In 1978, the film's cinematographer Frank Tidy was nominated for the Best Cinematography Award by the British Society of Cinematographers, and in the same year he was also nominated for a BAFTA for Best Cinematography. At the same awards ceremony, the costume designer, Tom Rand, was nominated for a BAFTA for Best Costume Design.

6. Pauline Kael, "The Current Cinema: "The Duellists"/"The Battle of Chile," *The New Yorker*, January 23, 1978.

7. Sammon, *Ridley Scott*, 46.

8. *Ibid.* Part of the problem was that Paramount only made seven prints of *The Duellists* in 1977 and marketed it as an art house film. Indeed, as of its release on DVD in a Special Collector's Edition in 2002, it had yet to make back its \$900,000 budget. This makes it all the more puzzling why Paramount Pictures Corporation released a tie-in novelization of the film by Gordon Williams.

9. Roderick Davis, "Conrad Cinematized: *The Duellists*," *Literature Film Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (1980): 125.

10. James Clarke, *Ridley Scott* (London: Virgin Film, 2002), 28.

11. See the entry entitled "HONOR" in Lawrence Raw, *The Ridley Scott Encyclopedia* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 166-167.

12. Joseph Conrad, *The Duel* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing, 2011).
13. Conrad's influence upon Scott extends beyond *The Duellists*. In his second feature film, *Alien* (1979), the commercial towing spaceship is called the *Nostramo* after Conrad's novel *Nostramo: A Tale of the Seaboard* (1904), which is about a conflict between big business and workers in a South American mine. The correlation reflects the theme of the conflict between the spaceship's owners, the Weyland Yutani Corporation, and the civilian crew on the spaceship. The *Nostramo*'s shuttle is also called the *Narcissus* after Conrad's 1897 novel *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (published in the United States with the title *The Children of the Sea*) which is about a ship's crewman who becomes infected with a deadly disease. The parallel with the plot of *Alien* is almost too obvious to mention.
14. The original title was *The Duel: A Military Tale*. It was published later in the year as a story in the collection *A Set of Six* (London: Methuen, 1908). The book's cover bore the lines: "A Romantic Tale / An Ironic Tale / An Indignant Tale / A Desperate Tale / A Military Tale / A Pathetic Tale," with "A Military Tale" referring to *The Duel*.
15. *The Point of Honor: A Military Tale* (New York: McClure Company, 1908).
16. The full name is Pierre-Antoine, Comte Dupont de l'Étang (1765-1840).
17. The full name is François Louis Fourier-Sarlovèze (1773-1827).
18. According to the story about the two duelists in *Harper's Magazine* in September 1858, Dupont was ordered by his general to tell Fournier that he was not welcome at a large ball being held on the night of the burial of one of Fournier's victims, a popular young man named Blumm whom Fournier had provoked into dueling. Fournier then replied to Dupont, "I can not fight the general, for his rank; you will, perhaps, have no objection?—you who commit impertinence at second-hand." Quoted in DeLauncey J. Ferguson, "The Plot of Conrad's 'The Duel,'" *Modern Language Notes* 50 (1935): 386.
19. Joseph Conrad, *The Duel* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing, 2011), 3.
20. *Ibid.*, 11.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, 15.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Scott had originally intended to cast Oliver Reed as Feraud and Michael York as D'Hubert. Paramount Pictures, however, required him to choose from a list of four up-and-coming American actors.
25. Conrad, *The Duel*, 92, 69, 101.
26. *Ibid.*, 22, 61.
27. *Ibid.*, 42, 35, 61.
28. *Ibid.*, 100.
29. *Ibid.*, 46, 35.
30. *Ibid.*, 15, 13, 15, 35.
31. *Ibid.*, 66.
32. *Ibid.*, 46.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*, 79.
35. *Ibid.*, 3.
36. *Ibid.*, 45.
37. *Ibid.*, 46.
38. *Ibid.*, 45.
39. *Ibid.*, 71.
40. *Ibid.*, 102.
41. *Ibid.*, 68.
42. *Ibid.*, 62.
43. *Ibid.*, 65.
44. *Ibid.*, 67.
45. Charles Shiro Tashiro. "The Bourgeois Gentleman and the Hussar." *The Spectator: University of Southern California Journal of Film and Television Criticism* 13 (1993): 43.
46. Conrad, *The Duel*, 52.

47. Richard Collins comes closest to making this point when he says about D'Hubert's claim to his sister that he is "not a duelist" that "His identity, in other words, is not completely determined by his actions." Richard Collins, "Truth in Adversaries: Ridley Scott's *The Duellists* and Joseph Conrad's 'The Duel,'" *Studies in the Humanities* 27 (2000): 6.
48. Conrad, *The Duel*, 11.
49. *Ibid.*, 14.
50. *Ibid.*, 93.
51. *Ibid.*, 42.
52. *Ibid.*, 106-107.
53. *Ibid.*, 86.
54. *Paramount Pictures Press Book: The Duellists* (London: Paramount Pictures Corporation, 1977).
55. Conrad, *The Duel*, 106-107.
56. *Paramount Pictures Press Book: The Duellists*.
57. Conrad, *The Duel*, 19.
58. *Ibid.*, 70.
59. *Ibid.*, 22-23.
60. Richard A Schwartz, *The Films of Ridley Scott* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 4.
61. Conrad, *The Duel*, 40.
62. *Ibid.*, 41.
63. *Ibid.*, 96-97.
64. Allan Simmons, "Cinematic Fidelities in *The Rover* and *The Duellists*," in *Conrad on Film*, ed. Gene M. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 121.
65. *Duelling Directors: Ridley Scott and Kevin Reynolds*. DVD, directed by Charles de Lauzirika (Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures Corporation, 2002).
66. Schwartz, *The Films of Ridley Scott*, 11.
67. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 11.

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