

Sandra Gayol, *Honor y duelo en la Argentina moderna* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2008), pp. 284, pb.

By the middle of the 1870s, the popular press in Buenos Aires had begun to comment on the increasing number of duels with a negative tone that centred on residual barbarism in Argentina. During the next decade the references to codes of honour and the custom of duelling became even more numerous, in fact a fixture, in many popular newspapers. Until recently there has been relatively little research on the growing interest in duelling throughout this period, except for the work of David S. Parker. It is in this context that the work of Sandra Gayol comes as a most welcome contribution toward better understanding the social regulations that evolved during a crucial time in Argentinian history.

In this book Gayol focuses her attention on the ways in which honour was understood during a period that starts in 1880 and ends in 1920. During these years matters of honour became 'natural' and 'essential components of the bourgeois culture', and for this reason this work attempts to reconstruct the 'history of duelling and honour, in order to discover the reason behind their impressive visibility and evident decadence' (p. 13). In order to accomplish this ambitious goal, Gayol includes nine chapters that contextualise the important connections between honour and politics, and the introduction of new practices for determining who was a gentleman and who was not. Using an impressive array of sources, some of them seldom used before, this book calls our attention to the pervasive importance of certain notions of masculinity during these years. The book is at its best when it details the different ways in which certain men of the elite classes, and particularly public men, felt compelled to display certain attitudes to justify their place in society. Perhaps one of the author's most striking contributions is her demonstration of the influence of the popular press in determining social interactions. The way in which the newspapers mediated, reproduced and sometimes created disputes on issues of honourability makes this book an indispensable read for those working on this period. Gayol's command of her sources, and skilful research, provide a clear understanding of the dynamics behind questions of honour, and the lives of the men who were affected by them. In this sense, this is cultural history at its best.

Reading the wide array of sources collected in this volume, one cannot help but wonder about the origins of duelling and its importance in Argentina. But those who become fascinated by the complexity of the practices that evolved during the last part of the nineteenth century may be disappointed by the absence of satisfactory explanations for the emergence of codes of honour in the country. It is indeed ironic that a book that raises so many questions can provide so few answers. In my view, Gayol's lack of interest in treating the material of the book from a gender perspective partially obscures the relevance and impact of her evidence. Duelling did not begin in the 1880s; it had a past related to old codes of honour that were perceived by the beginning of the nineteenth century as an undesirable aspect of the Spanish legacy. In 1814, for example, Gervasio Posadas signed a decree forbidding duelling according to civilised practices. In the following years the ban against duelling persisted, even during the Rosas years. In the debates surrounding this prohibition it is clear that different notions of both manliness and civilisation were at stake.

The book pays no attention to the idea of manhood, or to gender, and asserts that codes of honour 'provided a language and a repertoire of values that were

indispensable to the political and social dynamic' (p. 16). In a society experiencing radical change, 'the rhetoric of honour tried to create an order, and to provide a menu of general references that were minimally shared' (p. 17). But this is an unsatisfactory explanation, since the most relevant changes related to honour were located not only in political and social dynamics, but also in the new model of masculinity advanced by the ethos of competition that dominated the culture of the last part of the nineteenth century. It is for this reason that in most 'civilised' parts of the world we see the emergence of codes of honour, even when the political and social circumstances were different from those affecting Argentina. Besides, the recognition of honour codes as a 'natural' expression of manhood did not, for the most part, originate in purely political discourse, but in scientific discourse. Since Gayol barely addresses the contradictory ideas about manhood that existed during this period, one of the most relevant elements of her topic's dynamic is absent.

This may explain why we find what seem to be striking contradictions. For example, in an early chapter the author states that her book is not proposing the existence of one kind of honour for men of the general populace and another for men of the elites, since there were no differences in 'substance or principles' (p. 19). In a later chapter, however, we learn that there was a popular form of duel that was not recognised as a 'natural' expression of men's honourability and that did not operate under the same principles. In fact, popular expressions were not recognised as honourable because they were associated with an old masculine model (p. 163). The fact that this model is never explained or contextualised confuses the reader, and leaves one wondering why the argument was not structured more around the competing notions of what it was to be a man.

The existence of such contradictions only exposes the limits of the ambitious goals that Gayol has set for her book, without in the least erasing the important contributions that it makes to our understanding of the period. The precise and excellent account of the world developed around new notions of honourability, and their social and political impact, will remain indispensable for understanding the culture of modernity in Argentina.

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Helen Kelly, *Irish 'Ingleses': The Irish Immigrant Experience in Argentina 1840–1920* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), pp. xx + 250, €60.00, €26.95 pb; £40.00 hb.

Research on the Irish in Argentina – smaller in quantity than on the Welsh but greater than on the Scots – is based on the work of Eduardo Coghlan. He assembled plausible data on the origins of Irish immigrants by province and county; he calculated the volume of nineteenth-century Irish immigration and its gender division; he identified the distribution of the migrants and their immediate descendants in the province of Buenos Aires. Coghlan demonstrated that most emigrants to Argentina originated in the province of Leinster, from the counties of Westmeath, Wexford and Longford, in that order. They arrived in Argentina principally in the 1820s, 1840s and 1860s. Of the three decades, the 1840s, when the Irish settled as sheep farmers, was the most important. Coghlan estimated Irish male and female immigrants at a little more than 7,000 in total.