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“In search of the phantom misnamed honour” by Cecilia Morgan and “Pistols at Six O'Clock” by Stephen Bown discuss the topic of duelling in Canada. Morgan in her document reflects on who and why took part in those duels and emphasizes that duelling was very controversial in some ways. Bown, at the same time, provides an example of the duel that happened between two law students.

Morgan argues that mostly men from the upper class participated in duels. In general, they fought to show their masculinity and defend the honour of themselves and their families. The author states that it not only included defending women’s chastity but also meant “reservation of other kinds of familial, social, and professional reputations”[[1]](#footnote-1). However, the definition of ‘honour’ was one of the things that made duelling controversial. That word did not have the same meaning for all duelists. “The duel therefore perverted the whole notion of manly 'honour', whether it was fought to uphold a man's own reputation or the good name of a wife or female relative. In these writers' eyes, male honour became synonymous with lawlessness, excessive pride, and murder; male bodies signified fashion, frivolity, and sexual licence”[[2]](#footnote-2), Morgan says. Thus, because of the ambiguity of the word ‘honour’ the notion of duelling was perverted: “In Upper Canadian discourses about duelling, issuing challenges was frequently perceived as nothing less than declarations of intent to murder”[[3]](#footnote-3).

Another thing that made duelling so ambiguous was the code of honour. On the one hand, it was, as the author claims “clearly forbidden”[[4]](#footnote-4). On the other hand, if the code was followed during the duel, a judge could justify a duelist charged with murder. So duelling was “an alternative to legal action, an alternative meant not to replace but to supplement the legal process with which so many Upper Canadian duellists were familiar”[[5]](#footnote-5).

In the document, Morgan states that “many duellists were lawyers and some were judges”[[6]](#footnote-6). The author of “Pistols at Six O'Clock” tells about the duel between two law students, too. Bown also points out that “there was only one way for gentlemen to settle a point of honour”[[7]](#footnote-7), and, of course, it was a duel. The scandal between John Wilson and Robert Lyon happened because of misunderstanding between two men, and Wilson sought reconciliation, but Lyon refused it. Thus, the duel was the only way for Wilson to “cleanse the taint of scandal and dishonour from himself and Elizabeth”[[8]](#footnote-8). In the duel Wilson killed Lyon but he was not charged with murder. This example proves Morgan’s idea that the conviction of duelists was very ambiguous and controversial.

In conclusion, both sources indicate that the main goal of duelling was to protect the honour of a gentleman, but the words ‘honour’ and even ‘gentleman’ were uncertain. The documents also prove that in many cases, if the duel was held properly, the person accused of murder could have been justified in court.

1. Cecilia Morgan, “In Search of the Phantom Misnamed Honour: Duelling in Upper Canada”, The Canadian historical review, 1995, p.542 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Morgan, “In Search of the Phantom Misnamed Honour”, p.557 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Morgan, “In Search of the Phantom Misnamed Honour”, p.555 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Morgan, “In Search of the Phantom Misnamed Honour”*,* p.547 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Morgan, “In Search of the Phantom Misnamed Honour”*,* p.546 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Morgan, “In Search of the Phantom Misnamed Honour”*,* p.546 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bown, Stephen R. “Pistols at Six O’clock”. Beaver, vol. 79, no. 4 (August 1999), p.1 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Bown, “Pistols at Six O’clock.”, p.4 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)