

AMOR PROPRIO: SELF-LOVE AND POLITENESS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ITALIAN CONDUCT BOOKS

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ABSTRACT

In a corpus of 38 Italian nineteenth-century conduct books (CGIO), *cortesia* ‘politeness’ is rather consistently defined as *amore per il prossimo* ‘neighbourly love’, love of other because of the love of God. However, there are also frequent references to *amor proprio* ‘self-love’. The paper investigates the causal relationship between self-love and politeness based on a semantic analysis of the term *amor pro-prio*. During the bimillenary history of self-love, authors such as La Rochefoucauld, Pascal and Rousseau, working at the interface between religion, moral philosophy, political science and conduct, propose definitions, which resemble present-day academic definitions of face. Whilst, in CGIO, *faccia* ‘face’ is only used in an anatomical meaning, the reflexive, metapragmatic meaning of ‘face’ might have been circulating via a different term: *amor proprio*. In other words, ‘face’ as theorised in these historical attempts at rationalising politeness, i.e. face2, may have been named by the folk term *amor proprio*, a lexeme indicating face1. The paper argues that self-love in other has an interactive meaning, whilst self-love in self regards enduring, individual qualities as found in the post-unification discourse on self-improvement.