



Giacomo Casanova and Castello di Spessa

The Castello di Spessa in Capriva del Friuli is inseparably linked to the fascinating figure of Giacomo Casanova.

(1725-1798), its illustrious guest.

Although he is universally known for his ability as a seducer, Casanova was above all a prominent representative of 18th century culture and an inspired scholar.

Giacomo Casanova, Knight of Seingalt: a brilliant man who exhibited an amazing “multilateralism for us modern people”, as Hermann Hesse defined him. Not just therefore, a famous lover, adventurer, Venetian Inquisition spy, but also and above all a many-sided and cosmopolitan intellectual who wrote some 43 works, translating Homer and inventing a number of different literary forms.

Giacomo Casanova became acquainted with count Luigi Torriano during a performance of a French comedy held in the home of Baron di Königsbrunn in Trieste. Whilst there, the count invited him to spend a few weeks at his country home in Spessa, 6 miles away from Gorizia, during the autumn. Casanova accepted the invitation and, at the beginning of September 1773, arrived in Spessa and stayed there for around two months.

During his time in Spessa, the illustrious Venetian dedicated it a number of pages of his *Storia della mia vita* (Story of my life), his very well-known memoirs. Amongst other things he told of how the count's estate mainly consisted of his great vineyards which extended around the castle from which “*an excellent wine*” was produced.

The tranquillity of country life allowed him to dedicate himself to his studies and writings and to finish his *Istoria delle turbolenze della Polonia* (History of the trouble in Poland), a work which he published in Gorizia the following year through publisher Valerio de Valeri.

However, not even in Spessa, was Casanova's fame as a seducer denied. Sgualda, a young widow in the count's service, entered into the good graces of the illustrious suitor, and is described as “*in love and mild as a lamb, something this is quite rare in Friulian peasants*”. Clandestine meetings followed, night after night: Sgualda came to Casanova's chamber at midnight, without being seen, and left at dawn. But the secrecy of the affair was only an illusion. One morning, apparently the same as many others, Sgualda left Casanova's chamber, and as soon as the door was closed a frightening scream was heard. Reopening the door, in front of the beholder a scene was taking place which when described as unpleasant is oversimplifying things: the count was beating Sgualda, restraining her by her clothing. Torriani was the girl's sworn enemy because, although harassing her whilst her husband was still alive, she had always denied him. Casanova's reaction was immediate: still dressed in his night shirt he leapt onto Torriani's back, seized him by the throat until he almost strangled him, and with the same stick that only moments before the count had used to beat Sgualda, began striking him, forcing him to flee.

This episode, given the count's lack of grace on other occasions too, convinced Casanova to leave the castle. He then lived between Gorizia and Trieste for more than a year, awaiting pardon from Venice (where he was being investigated by the Inquisition) and a recall to his birthplace which took place in 1774.