

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: **THE WHITE ARM IN THE SMOKE:
THE MEANING OF THEATRICAL
VIOLENCE ON THE VICTORIAN STAGE**

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Dance, and Performance Studies**

This PhD dissertation examines Victorian theatrical combat on the London stage to place it in both historical and cultural context. By first establishing a possible dance-based origin for stage combat, the paper explores the overlapping modes of practice in different forms of popular and elite entertainments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as they influenced the development of historically inspired movement. Using archival documents, literary analysis of stage fights, physical culture and gender studies, the study aims to contribute original research to the field of stage combat history and propose new theoretic lenses with which to examine historical practice. The paper discusses the relationship between dueling as cultural habit and representations in dramatic literature, as well as the influence of changing patterns in physical culture. Finally, this dissertation examines the role of spectacle theatre and acting theory in the development of new Modernist ideas of representing sword fights on stage.

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VIOLENCE ON THE VICTORIAN STAGE

by

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Introduction

In *Cities of the Dead*, Joseph Roach describes the process by which “the memories of some particular times have become embodied in and through performance.”¹ Despite natural cycles of reinvention, performance traditions often retain continuity across great spans of time; long after the original conditions of creation have disappeared, present actions embody past beliefs. The question of my dissertation is how theatrical swordplay functions as this form of cultural memory, and how Victorian staged combat changed and embodied new ideas of cultural, historical, physical, and gender identity. Integrating performance studies, archival research, and physical studies my dissertation will examine why English staged combat changed gradually between 1850 and 1914. I will place that performance theory into social context and explain how the Victorian aesthetic developed and contributed to Modernist theatre practice. This change was not a revolution or a radical transformation, but the gradual development over time of a new way of doing a very old thing.

This dissertation attempts to fill gaps in theatrical scholarship. One such gap in the historiographic record is between the bounty of articles on Elizabethan stage combat and the scholarly consensus that practice changed in the late Victorian period. There is almost nothing written about stage combat in the intervening three centuries, and this project attempts to fill in missing details about an incredibly rich and well-documented period of stage practice. I am also attempting to use stage combat as the

¹ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xi

lens through which to see the body as the through-line of theatre, rather than text. Following Susan Foster, I hope to present stage combat and related physical performance as “body-centered endeavors with an integrity as practices that establish their own lexicons of meaning, their own syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes of signification, and their own capacity to reflect critically on themselves and on related practices.”²

Queen Victoria’s reigned from 1837-1901, and between the Victorian and start of the Edwardian eras England saw the development of mechanized warfare, the birth of modern physical culture, the Chartist movement pushing for popular representation in government, and radical movements in women’s suffrage. These ideological revolutions all forced a re-evaluation in the discourse of white Anglo-Saxon identity and its relationship to the body, which played out in a range of theatrical modes. The training, exhibition, performance, and display of arms and armor became points of intersection for a broad web of personal interests and social patterns, and my dissertation employs original research to offer new insight into four specific and overlapping trends in Victorian performance: changes in stage combat practice, the negotiation of meaning of the duel in Victorian material and pictorial culture, the interpretation and physical culture of swordplay exhibitions, and the intersection of all of these ideas on Henry Irving’s work at the Lyceum Theatre. Influenced by a broad public discourse on theatrical choreography, public demonstrations of historical swordplay, historical novels, articles and speeches,

² Susan Leigh Foster, “Choreographing History,” in Foster, ed. *Choreographing History*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 15

paintings, and museum exhibitions, audiences began to move towards a taste for historical accuracy in swordplay. Part of the larger antiquarian aesthetic movement, as well as the British Imperial fascination with material goods as cultural artifacts, the public sphere was transformed with images of spectacular masculinity.

Wellington probably never said that Waterloo was “won on the playing fields of Eton,” but the image of healthy sporting schoolboys growing into triumphant soldiers was important enough to Victorians in the wake of the Crimean War that they needed to invent and believe it. The phrase entered popular culture in 1856, just after the war and the ensuing Parliamentary investigations into high mortality rates from disease. A second political controversy came with the difficulty finding able recruits in the First Boer War in 1880. Fencing and military exercises were an opportunity for public displays of vibrant English prowess, and the weapons took on new social meaning and use by a society that was caught up in improving the social body.

The topic and time period of my dissertation represents original, archival research that will expand the history of Victorian and Edwardian theatre practice: although sword fights were a prominent part of the London stage and theatrical material culture – featured in newspaper articles and reviews, advertisements, celebrity postcards, cartoons – previous studies have not traced the historical development of stage combat or looked at the larger social context. Physical cultural studies have likewise not expanded on the connection to theatre and performance in this period, emphasizing later Modernist developments in dance, sexuality and Oscar Wilde, or military bodies after the war.

This paper is primarily a history project and is rooted in primary and archival material, and draws from semiotics, gender theory, and physical cultural studies. To discuss the signification of staged combat, I employ the ideas in Erika Fischer-Lichte's *The Semiotics of Theatre* and especially Andrew Sofer's *The Stage Life of Props*. Both Fischer-Lichte and Sofer apply their work directly to stage properties - including weapons - and frame meaning in terms of culturally specific audiences. Because my argument is that both the theatrical meaning and the embedding social system changed over the Victorian and Edwardian period, I will be often writing against Fischer-Lichte's construction of the sword as a protean prop: swords from the Elizabethan theatre onwards held multiple semiotic meanings simultaneously.

Sofer and Fischer-Lichte also treat the object itself as part of a material sign system that is experienced physically, rather than "read" intellectually. I am setting aside logocentric approaches in order to better examine the embodied experience that generates gestural meaning and material culture. Stage fights in the Victorian era mapped the ideological onto the corporeal. It is simplistic to observe that the sword is a phallic symbol, but my project does examine the parallel changes in the iconographic and experiential meaning of the sword while the political and ideological meanings of the male body were being contested. Judith Butler's methodology is supplemented by James Eli Adams' interpretation of masculinities in *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood* which examines the problematic creation of normative bourgeois masculinity. Adams shares Butler's

central thesis, but examines the relevant historical period for my study, and in doing so acknowledges the problems and limitations of applying theory across time.³

Carl Sagan quipped that “if you wish to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe,” and in order to document the ways in which stage combat changed in the Victorian period it is first necessary to look at how it was done before.⁴ In the first chapter I will attempt two parallel tasks: to provide a basic history of English stage combat from antiquity to the early nineteenth century, and to attempt to outline a taxonomy of different forms of theatrical violence. A definitive history of staged combat has yet to be written, and it is beyond the scope of my project to do that thorough task, but we do need at least the broad outlines. My emphasis is necessarily European and will largely set aside other historical performance traditions that feature combat, such as *kabuki* or *kathakali*, because they fall outside the geography of the research problem. My goal is not to present a linear or progressive history of European or English stage combat, but to trace the inspirations and practices available to - and employed by - Victorian theatre artists. My scope will also focus as evidence becomes more available, starting with any mention of staged violence from antiquity and winnowing down specifically to staged sword fights in the nineteenth century.

³ The Wildean dandy has often been positioned in binary opposition to ideals of conquering muscular Christianity, as in the mythology of Gen. Charles Gordon’s failed defense of Khartoum or Burton’s African and Middle Eastern experiences. In contrast, Adams sees a range of Victorian masculinities defined by similar strategies of identity construction. The dandy and hero are not opposites, but rather part of a continuum of Victorian expressions of masculinity. See James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 107-112.

⁴ Carl Sagan, Ann Druyan, Steven Soter, *Cosmos*, Episode 9: “The Lives of the Stars,” (Public Broadcasting Service, 1980)

The first chapter also examines the development of standard combats: a repertoire of routines that were generally known by working actors throughout England and which were used in pantomime, melodrama, spoken word, and variety entertainments. Historians of Victorian theatre have tended to dismiss the importance of stock format of stage fights, but the basic gestures and iconography was still evident almost a century later.⁵ This chapter presents a social history of swordplay in the theatre from antiquity to Victorian England by reconsidering these stock routines in contrast to the work of celebrity fencing arrangers, both of which informed the work of fight directors at the end of the century.⁶

The second chapter traces the development of the duel as both a literary and social practice. The Victorians were the first to come of age in an England without dueling or trials by combat, and the economies of social behavior and interpersonal power.⁷ The sword was already an antique when in 1895 Oscar Wilde sued Lord Queensbury – author of the eponymous Rules for boxing - for libel, marking a transition from manly challenge to legal recourse. But despite being an empire, a rhetoric of danger surrounded Victorian gentlemen, who imagined themselves besieged at home by psychopathic ruffians, inferior foreigners, and increasingly

⁵ A short film in the Library of Congress' collection includes a fight sequence that features gestures and routines that exactly match the Pre-Victorian descriptions and images. *Duel Scene from "By Right of Sword,"* American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, 1904.

⁶ In London, the premier celebrity fencer was Baptiste Bertrand, who ran the Salle Bertrand in London and was Egerton Castle's immediate predecessor as a theatrical fight director, and a fencing tutor to Dickens. His son Felix would be a leading fight director in the late Victorian period.

⁷ Douglas W. Allen and Clyde C. Reed, "The Duel of Honor: Screening for Unobservable Social Capital," *American Law and Economics Review* (March 2006). Starting in 1829 Peel instituted reforms that would lead to the creation of a permanent municipal police force – he is the Robert after whom English "bobbies" are named.

organized criminal networks within England.⁸ At the 2009 SETC conference, Andrew Sofer observed that a prop's meaning on stage can be renegotiated only when its social meaning is also undergoing change, and this was true for the Victorian sword. This chapter will examine the ways that images of the sword – visual, rhetorical, theatrical, and practical – changed meaning during the late Victorian era.

Chapter three examines the ways in which the male body was presented and interpreted in the para-theatrical world of Victorian physical culture: martial exhibitions, Grand Assaults-at-Arms, gymnasia, public lectures and demonstrations. Performance and spectacle were central to Victorian public discourse. At the height of Empire in the late nineteenth century, the British stage was a space to represent the exotic vastness of the colonies and demonstrate the supremacy of English culture. Performances emphasized historical and cultural authenticity, martial and physical spectacle, and narratives of patriotic and patriarchal triumph. Following European trends towards naturalism, popular theatre had already been moving towards increased authenticity in historical costuming and scenery, and especially the use of arms and armor. This authenticity and specificity were driven in part by the expanding colonial enterprise which forced cultural diversity on the London audiences, who were sorting out what it meant to be “English” when a quarter of the world could claim the same.

⁸ Nineteenth century English masculinity is often defined in terms of conquering global hegemony, but several scholars have suggested that the Victorians did not see themselves that way. Elaine Freedgood's *Victorian Writing About Risk* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Linda Colley's *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002) are relevant examples.

The Victorian theatre was often defined by its spectacle: it was the age of both Henry Irving and Eugen Sandow. Within the melodramatic theatre this included the sophisticated technology employed to recreate chariot races, burning buildings, incorporeal ghosts, sinking ships, and railroad disasters, but it also included acrobatic and stunt feats, bodies on display in tableaux, and climactic sword fights that were advertised boldly and separately as both the climax of plays and as separate performances. Public entertainment spaces included the legitimate theatre and opera, but they also encompassed educational lectures, public demonstrations, and private showings hosted by clubs.

These performances provided a way of understanding the physical activity of fencing within new physical and social contexts. William Clarke's *Boy's Own Book* from 1829 stated that fencing was a "means of affording excellent exercise, elegant amusement, and imparting an easy deportment and graceful action, as well as extraordinary acuteness of eye, and agility of body."⁹ Like the rest of the games in Clarke's book, fencing in England throughout the nineteenth century was part of a larger cultural transformation that entwined physical, moral, and national health. The cholera epidemic in 1831 had changed the way the English viewed both public and private health, and the resulting sanitation and health reforms helped revolutionize social medicine. Most importantly it placed health in the hands of the individual: better living was possible by improving one's diet (the birth of the vegetarian

⁹ William Clarke, *The Boy's Own Book; A Complete Encyclopedia of All the Diversions, Athletic, Scientific, and Recreative, of Boyhood and Youth, Fourth Edition* (London: Vizetelly, Branston & Co, 1829), 75

movement), exercise (the Victorians coined the term ‘calisthenics’), clothing (Shaw in his Jaeger suit), and environment (industrial pollution).

Central to this culture was the signifying value of the vigorous male body. Although ‘Victorian’ has become synonymous with sexual repression, images and narratives of bodily censorship indicate the degree to which the spectacular body was the object of *fin-de-siecle* performance, and the ways in which semiotic meaning was inscribed onto and read through the physical presence of that body.

The final chapter will use the focal point of Irving collaborations with the Kernoozers and other artists to consider the developing role of historically based movement in Victorian spectacle theatre, the process by which staged fights changed, and the possible ways in which Irving and the Kernoozers exploited each other for legitimacy. It also looks at the work of Herbert Beerbohm Tree to establish stage combat education, and the journey of theatrical fencing from the *salle* to the acting conservatory.

The movement towards historical authenticity in staging fight scenes at the end of the century was the natural extension of the pictorial staging and conspicuously researched spectacle that marked Victorian theatre. Starting in the 1850s and coinciding with Charles Kean’s management of the Princess Theatre, plays – especially Shakespeare – were staged with the twin goals of spectacle and authenticity.¹⁰ Drawing on the aesthetics of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Romantic fascination for a lost pre-Industrial world, as well as a rise in interest in defining

¹⁰ Jeffrey Richards, *The Ancient World on the Victorian and Edwardian Stage* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Richards cites the movement towards historical spectacle as far back as 1791, especially in Shakespearean revivals.

British culture through antiquity and archaeology, Victorian theatre became increasingly visually elaborate and reliant on popular history. The innovations started in scenery, progressed to costumes and props, and by Irving's time had arrived at historically informed physical performance. The devotion to historical authenticity of Kernoozers made Egerton Castle a natural choice to collaborate with Irving at the height of his social and theatrical success.

Irving's career was built in part on his acting, but also on his devotion as manager of the Lyceum to these heavily researched costume dramas set in exotic locations and designed by leading artists, including a productive collaboration with Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema.¹¹ This chapter will examine the possible ways in which the Kernoozers and Irving made use of each other and their theatrical collaboration for social capital.

Attached as an Appendix is the text of the play *Saviolo* by Egerton Castle and Walter Herries Pollock, commissioned for but never produced at the Lyceum Theatre. There appears to be only one copy of the play, although it is frequently cited as if it had been performed, and this is the first publication since 1893.

Finally, the title of this dissertation draws from two sources. 'The Smoke' or 'Old Smoke' were nicknames for the heavy cloud of smog that enveloped industrial-age London. John Hotten's 1874 *The Slang Dictionary* offers this entry:

From the peculiar dense cloud which overhangs London. The metropolis is by no means so smoky as Sheffield, Birmingham, etc; yet country-people, when

¹¹ These production designs often had an Orientalist or Imperialist subtext, and Irving was not alone in revising plays such as *Cymbeline* to be more conventionally patriotic when history or script did not oblige. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979) and Robert Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and its Discontents* (New York: Overlook Press, 2006).

going to London, frequently say they are on their way to the SMOKE; and Londoners, when leaving for the country, say they are going out of the SMOKE.¹²

In the Introduction to his 1884 *The Book of the Sword*, Sir Richard Burton wrote that “The history of the sword is the history of humanity. The ‘White Arm’ means something more than the ‘oldest, the most universal, the most varied of weapons, the only one which has lived through all time.’”¹³ In this he was drawing on the French *armes blanche*, often used to distinguish swords from firearms, or *armes à feu*. Burton saw humanity through the lens of the sword, and this paper will attempt to view the sword through the lens of humanity.

¹² John Camden Holton, *The Slang Dictionary: Etymological, Historical, and Anecdotal* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1874), 298

¹³ Richard Burton, *The Book of the Sword* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1884), xv

Chapter 1: Stage Combat Before the Victorians

In his 1836 *Sketches by Boz*, Charles Dickens offers an exaggerated but substantive critique of a theatrical fight that is still valid as satire almost two centuries later:

everybody knows what an effect may be produced by a good combat. One — two — three — four — over; then, one — two — three — four — under; then thrust; then dodge and slide about; then fall down on one knee; then fight upon it, and then get up again and stagger. You may keep on doing this, as long as it seems to take — say ten minutes — and then fall down (backwards, if you can manage it without hurting yourself), and die game: nothing like it for producing an effect.¹⁴

There is seemingly no equivalent to this moment in ancient or medieval theatre.

Unlike dramatic structure, or acting theory, or theatre architecture, or costuming, all of which can be traced back to antiquity, the stage fight seems to have emerged fully formed from Zeus' head and onto the Elizabethan stage.¹⁵ The sword has become so associated with early modern drama that, along with the skull, it has become a ubiquitous icon on educational posters, book covers, college theatre program brochures, lobby displays, Renaissance fairs, theatre advertisements, Shakespeare-themed children's crafts, Shakespeare acting intensives and graduate programs, and Shakespeare theatre gift shops.¹⁶ Staged fights did predate the ages of Marlowe and

¹⁴ Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1858), 72

¹⁵ John Lennox's *A History of Stage Swordplay: Shakespeare to the Birth of Film*, Arthur Wise's *Weapons in the Theatre*, and Richard Cohen's *By the Sword: A History of Gladiators, Musketeers, Samurai, Swashbucklers, and Olympic Champions* are representative academic, professional, and popular texts that start their history of stage fighting with Shakespeare.

¹⁶ Andrew Sofer has made an excellent argument for the bloody handkerchief and skull to be the signature props for Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, but the sword as signifier is potentially of body and death taboos. Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003)

Jonson, and this chapter will explore a broad history of representing violence on stage, examine the bias in scholarship, and attempt to fill in the gaps between Early Modern stage craft and Victorian attempts to recreate it.

A full history of stage combat is beyond the scope of this paper, and it is useful to narrow definitions to filter out the whole range of what could be considered violence on stage. For our purposes a stage fight involves seven elements: (1) performers (2) pretending to be someone else and engaging in (3) a non-competitive physical display (4) with weapons (5) within a narrative (6) with a pre-determined outcome (7) for an audience. This excludes combat sports such as Roman gladiatorial matches or medieval jousting, despite the many elements that Richard Schechner would fold under the umbrella of Performance.¹⁷ We will also largely leave out the medieval performances of body trauma discussed by Jody Enders in *The Medieval Theatre of Cruelty*, although they offer a very useful description of violence in medieval stagecraft. The goal is to home in on the very specific theatrical event of the sword fight.

Every depiction of violence is embedded in a cultural conversation about power: who has the legal, moral, economic, physical, social, religious, or educational ability to use force. These discussions are never culturally neutral, and any attempt at theorizing historical use or an audience response must filter through this lens as well. Both discourse and practice of stage combat have tended elide cultural context, or to

¹⁷ In addition to armor and weapons that allowed gladiators to portray specific, different cultures, matches were often staged to recreate historical battles – thus following a narrative with a presumably pre-determined outcome. Richard Beacham has an excellent discussion in *Spectacle Entertainments of Early Imperial Rome*. Schechner discusses some of these blurred boundaries in *Performance Theory*, 99-104.

be almost celebratory of the use of violence: emphasis on the objects without attention to who they were used against. Sword fights do not have the same performative diversity, equity, or inclusion as, for example, dance numbers.

The use of sword is not a universal human behavior, and its relationship to character, narrative, and design is within a matrix of the material object, how the object is used in the performance, how the audience perceives the object and its use, and the medium of the performer's body.

A History of Violence

It is useful to work backwards from the present day to trace the history of theatrical sword fights. The scope will be generally confined to England, although there are valuable parallels in other theatrical traditions. This is not a full history so much as a survey of notable inflection points where a substantial innovation in staging practice occurred. Most histories of staged combat orbit Early Modern London, but there is older evidence of sword fights and once we push beyond the gravity of Shakespeare there is a separate history that has been largely ignored. This second history of combat is the one we will bring back forward through time to the Victorian and Edwardian Kernoozers.

Modern professional and academic theatre practice in Canada, the United States, Scandinavia, England, and Australia is dominated by a standardized Eurocentric curriculum, informed by historical reference, performed with props roughly corresponding to rough historical periods (Broadsword for medieval plays, Rapier and Dagger for Renaissance, and Smallsword for the long Eighteenth

Century), and an aesthetic rooted on realism.¹⁸ Actors are often trained in university of theatre educational programs and perform a scene for an adjudicator to receive certification – this certification may be required by unions to perform fight scenes, as in the United Kingdom, or it may be a useful special skill for some actors. Both professional practice and educational work align to create a unified aesthetic of ‘stage combat,’ and the various international organizations that have created these curricula have cross-pollinated their ideas to the point that a student from Copenhagen would have no difficulty working with an actor from Calgary or Canberra or Chattanooga. In the United States the stated goal of the Society of American Fight Directors is to train students to work in American regional theatre, and that is the metric used in adjudications.

This globalized standardization of both aesthetic and training is a product of the last fifty years. The first formal stage combat society was created in 1968 in London, bringing together the instructors of leading drama schools with prominent fight directors to create a unified training program and consistent technique.¹⁹ Several choreographers who helped found the British Society of Fight Directors worked internationally in both theatre and cinema, helping to bring the two aesthetics closer together. The two most prominent and important were Patrick “Paddy” Crean and William Hobbs.

¹⁸ A Eurocentric curriculum is of course a byproduct of largely Western theatres producing the same cannon of European plays, but it is a bias worth acknowledging. The weapons chosen for certification do not always correspond to frequency of use or popularity in plays: the Smallsword, which only appears in European martial history and features in the fewest number of plays, is a certifying weapon for all Societies even when other more common weapons are not.

¹⁹ See Brian LeTraunik, *A History of Contemporary Stage Combat* (New York: Routledge, 2020)

The Roots of the Swashbuckler

Briefly, William Hobbs revolutionized swordplay for stage and film and was the most important fight choreographer in the second half of the twentieth century. Born in 1939, Hobbs was a gifted child fencer who enrolled in the Central School of Speech and Drama in London in 1958. A brief unsuccessful turn as an actor led him to marry his fencing skill with his theatre education and he began to stage fights for Laurence Olivier's National Theatre Company. He expanded into opera, working with Franco Zeffereilli, and then onto film with the celebrated swordplay in Richard Lester's 1973 *The Three Musketeers*. Hobbs brought swordplay in line with motivated acting choices, creating unique movement for each character, spatially integrated choreography, and historically accurate movement. His work on Ridley Scott's *The Duellists*, Zeffereilli's stage and screen adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*, and 1995's *Rob Roy* have earned wide acclaim from within the fight choreography community. Both Hobbs and Patrick Crean were instrumental in the late 1960s creation of the first formal stage combat organization, the Society of British Fight Directors, and helped to standardize stage combat practice and establish a fixed curriculum for actor training.

Hobbs was important for bringing together more realistic acting with realistic swordplay to produce naturalistic choreography. In doing so he was pushing back against the practice of using stock phrases – repeatable choreography which professional actors shared as a common pool of stagecraft. The use of stock phrases in England can be traced back at least to the fifteenth century, and the relationship

between original choreography and set pieces will be the contrasting ideas that guide this chapter. Writing in 1967 the famed film and stage fight director William Hobbs dismissed the practice:

In the early days when the play demanded that a duel should be played, a number of well-known routines were often used, referred to by the profession of that time as ‘The Square Eights,’ ‘The Round Eights,’ ‘The Glasgow Tens’ (known in England as ‘The Long Elevens’) – and even one called ‘The Drunk Combat.’ All these routines were made up from series of cuts, not as we know them today, but rather whacks at the opponent’s blade, which, when completed, could be repeated as often as required all over the stage; undoubtedly the older actor will recall these combinations.²⁰

The techniques Hobbs describes were still in living memory: the film recording of Orson Welles 1936 *Voodoo Macbeth* has such a looped sequence in its brief final swordfight.

Patrick “Paddy” Crean was Hobbs immediate predecessor, working first in London and then a brief Hollywood career before ending up as the resident fight director at the Stratford Festival in Ontario for two decades. He had an outsize influence on theatrical combat and was instrumental in forming the Society of British Fight Directors, Fight Directors Canada, and training the core of what would become the Society of American Fight Directors. Born in London in 1911, Crean discovered both fencing and acting at St. George’s College, the Catholic private school he attended from age 14 to twenty. Following a brief stint as an overseer on a colonial plantation in Maskeliya, Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), Crean enlisted in the British Army but then withdrew after one year rather than be transferred to India.²¹

²⁰ Hobbs, *Techniques of the Stage Fight*, 8

²¹ Crean was able to pay his way out of service with a simple fee of £40, which was paid by a former lover.

Crean returned to both acting and swordplay in 1932 to join the cast of *Casanova* at the Coliseum. The spectacle ran for a year, with music by Richard Strauss and staging by Erik Charrell, with the lead role shared by Arthur Fear and Charles Mayhew. Crean played several small roles and staged his first theatrical fight, all uncredited.²² A productive decade in London led him to play Laertes to John Gielgud as *Hamlet* at the Haymarket in 1945, and his choreography earned a 1946 news feature from Pathé Films. During this time fight directors began to receive program credit more frequently, and they emerge from the repertoire into the archive. Crean's next two decades were mixed: he started film work and appeared as an actor with Audrey Hepburn in *War and Peace*, but artistic differences with Laurence Olivier led to a decline in work in London. Olivier had wanted a grand theatrical gesture for the end of the duel, leaping down a staircase atop Laertes for the finale, but Crean preferred a more grounded fencing match. The leap won out and is preserved in Olivier's film adaptation where Dennis Lorraine took over the credit for Sword Play. Crean's work as both choreographer and stunt double for Errol Flynn's 1951 *Master of Ballantrae* was likewise uncredited, and in 1962 he was invited to work at the Stratford Festival in Ontario and moved there permanently in 1963.

Paddy Crean worked in a gap between public interest in swashbuckling films, and so he never achieved the status of Fred Cavens or Ralph Faulkner who had worked with Douglas Fairbanks, Basil Rathbone, and Errol Flynn in their prime in the 1920s and '30s. The fight directors for Hollywood films are worth mentioning insofar as they helped change public taste for what a film swordfight should look like,

²² Crean, 137

which changed expectations for stage choreography. In a thorough essay from 1965, film historian Rudy Behlmer noted that

the duels staged for the camera before 1920 were little more than “knife sharpeners.” Performers...brandished and clashed swords and used extravagant gestures, but no thought had been given to fencing routines that would be technically correct as well as cinematically effective.²³

Behlmer is not accurate that no choreography was technically correct before the 1920s, but he is right in noting that film fights started to take more care for their presentation on the film screen. Olympic fencers who were hired by Hollywood studios – especially Fred Cavens and Ralph Faulkner - started to favor saber fencing with its frame-filling curves over the horizontal and linear epee choreography modeled in Bernhardt’s *Hamlet* or the stock ‘knife sharpeners.’ Stage fights would follow suit.

Paddy Crean’s status within the theatrical world was important, as he became a guiding figure for the next generation of stage choreographers in the 1960s collaborated to form the Society of British Fight Directors. Born almost thirty years apart, Hobbs and Crean were also divided by the changes in global cinema and theatre prompted by the Second World War. Crean’s work was creatively progressive, but he wrapped himself in a nostalgia for empire and classicism, whereas Hobbs found a way to integrate sword work with the Stanislavski-based realism of kitchen sink acting and European cinema of the 1970s.

In his 1967 book *Techniques of the Stage Fight* William Hobbs’ claims that “perhaps the first man to be employed by a theatre in the specific role of fight-

²³ “Swordplay on the Screen,” in *Films in Review*, June-July 1965, Vol. XVI No. 6, p. 362

arranger was Patrick Crean.”²⁴ This is undone in the next paragraph when Hobbs goes on to say that “the great Master of Fence of the mid-Victorian period was Felix Bertrand, who set many stage combats.” Neither man was the first to be hired to stage fights, but the Bertrand family were staging fights when Paddy Crean was born and were instrumental in setting up the revolution in stage combat that occurred in the 1890s by changing the way London thought of fencing itself.

Separated by the First World War, which would have a profound effect on changing audiences, the symbolism of the sword, masculinity, and honor, Patrick Crean and Felix Bertrand are useful mile-markers in the development of an aesthetic. In the late nineteenth century Bertrand collaborated across the Victorian West End on Herbert Beerbohm-Tree’s *Hamlet* (1892) at the Haymarket, Johnston Forbes-Robertson’s *Macbeth* (1898) at Drury Lane, Charles Wyndham’s *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1900) at his own Wyndham Theatre.²⁵ The son of fencer Baptiste Bertrand, Felix was the second of three generations to provide fencing instruction to the English elite. Baptiste had founded an academy of fencing in London in 1856 and helped to transition fencing from a military or combative skill to an athletic and social one. Baptiste established an elite clientele, coaching the three daughters of Edward VIII, which helped to popularize fencing as an athletic activity as well as a coed pursuit. This shifting social role of fencing, as well as the ways in which fencing schools allowed for interclass mingling, will be discussed in depth elsewhere, but it is

²⁴ Hobbs (1967), 8

²⁵ *The Encyclopedia of the Sword*, (52) comments that Hobbs has credited the wrong Bertrand, and that Baptiste staged the theatrical fights. This is impossible, as the elder Bertrand died in 1898. The theatre program for Forbes-Robertson’s *Macbeth* clearly credits ‘The Fighting superintended by M. Felix Betrand.’

important here to note that the social cache of the Bertrand school was an attractive draw for actors looking for access to the aristocracy, and the interplay between London society and theatre was an important part of changing aesthetics on the stage.

Felix built on his father's work and branched into choreography for the theatre. The Bertrands were popularizers of the French epee, which emphasized horizontal linear attacks, deceptive and small point work, and quick exchanges. These were the shapes and rhythms that Felix brought onto the stage, and they can clearly be seen in the film recordings.

Stage fencing in the late Victorian and Edwardian was deeply rooted in the last traces of martial swordplay and dueling culture and the emergence of competitive sport fencing. It is the earliest choreography for which there is visual evidence. Filmed adaptations of stage productions by Johnston Forbes Robertson's 1913 *Hamlet*, Sarah Bernhardt's 1899 *Hamlet*, and a 1900 film of Coquelin's *Cyrano de Bergerac* are all extant.²⁶ Comparisons should be cautious, as the filmed spaces are substantially smaller than the original stages, and the performances altered to adapt. This is particularly notable when comparing the Forbes-Robertson film to photographs of the stage production: the film crams onlookers into the shot around Hamlet and Laertes, and they are required to fight essentially up and down camera, whereas photographs from the Drury Lane production of the same year orient the fight along the proscenium with much more room to move. It is likely, however, that

²⁶ Coquelin's choreography is slower and more presentational, with his opponent Valvert hanging in time to allow Cyrano to do a trick, but otherwise there is very little stylistic difference between the French and English choreography of Bernhardt and Forbes Robertson.

the choreography remained the same, as film swordplay relying on edits and camera angles had not been developed as a separate choreographic art form.

Because it is difficult to imagine historical movement, a brief comparison between Bernhardt's *Hamlet* and Coquelin's *Cyrano* is informative. The images below are traced from the two films and represent - frame by frame – roughly each sword position in the two fights. Salutes have been excluded, sword length has been standardized for both fights, and frames in which characters are standing for a prolonged time or the sword is not clearly visible have been omitted. Both fights take place in a single-camera, continuous static shot in an interior set, with other actors visible in the frame. I have not adjusted for depth of field, although the *Hamlet* fight is arranged flatter to the camera than the *Cyrano* fight.

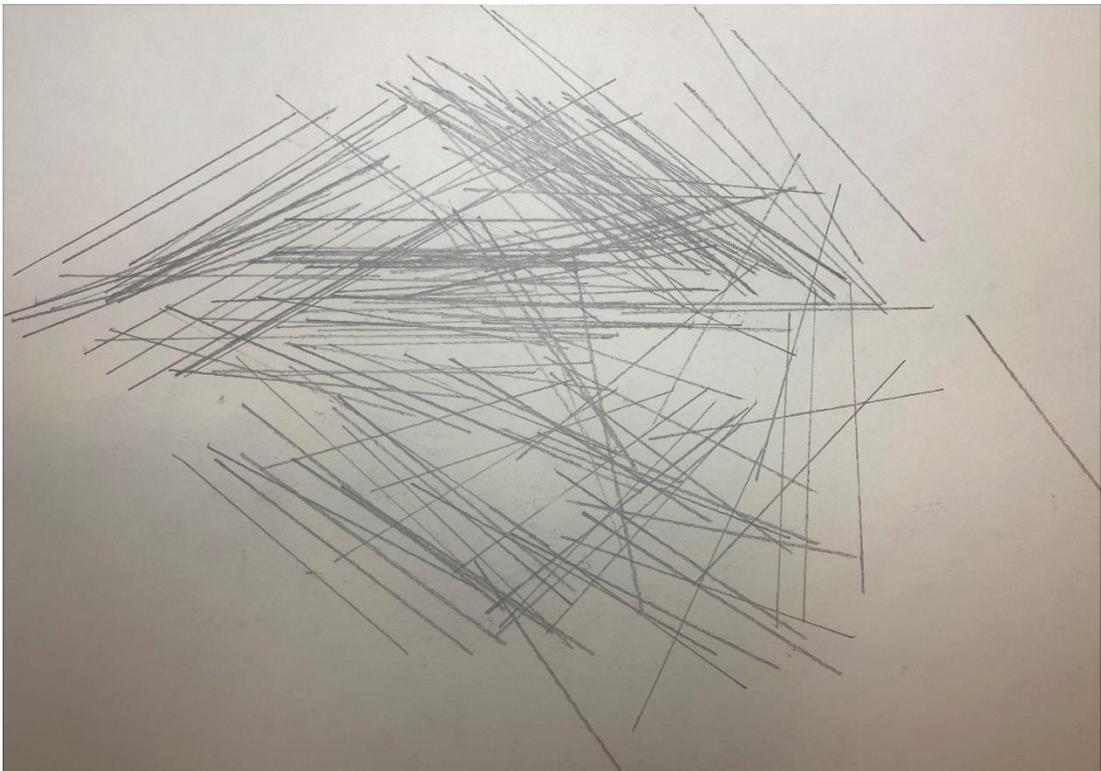


Figure 1: Bernhardt's Hamlet

In the image from Bernhardt's *Hamlet* the figures are very static – it is easy to see where each performer is standing on the extreme right and left of the frame from the angles tracing diagonally up and down from their wrists. The lines are more geometric, filling the volume between the two performers horizontally and in a clear diamond shape. The diagonal lines generally correspond to *en garde* positions or parries, with the horizontal lines being direct, linear attacks along the sagittal plane directly in front of each person. The separated, steeper diagonal lines in the lower right represent an urgent parry by Laertes.

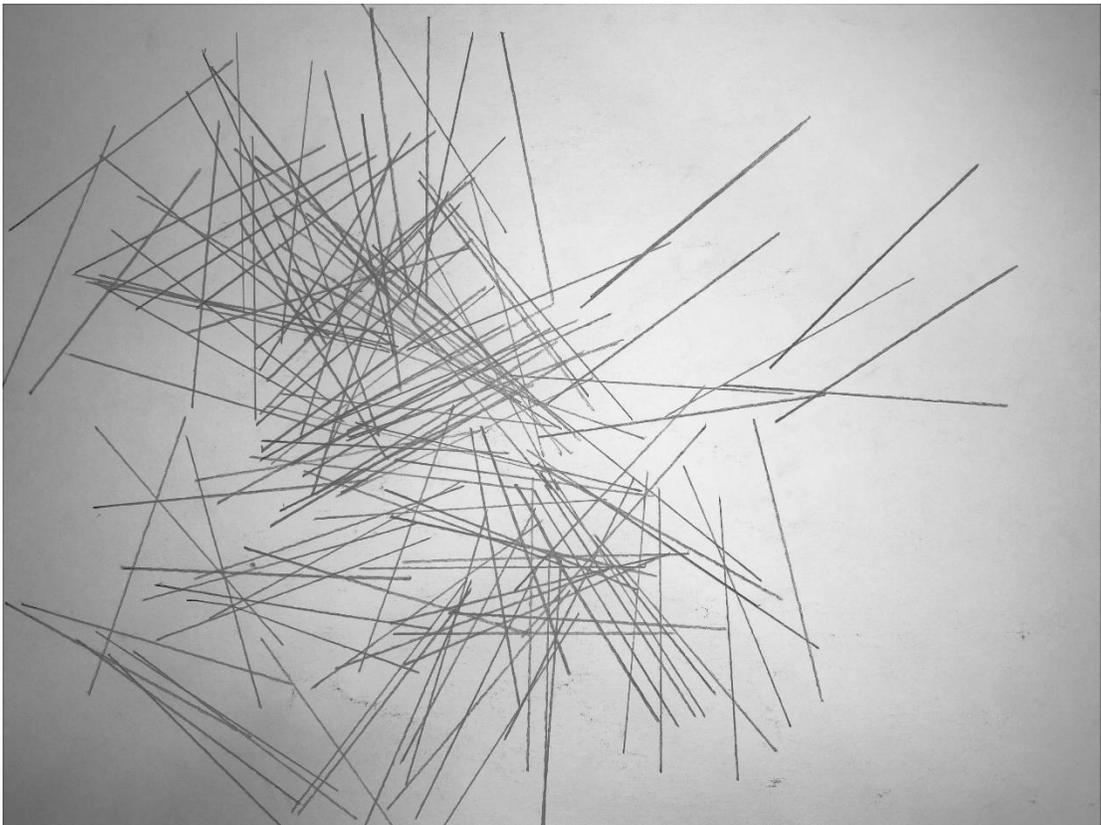


Figure 2: Coquelin's *Cyrano* Visualized

In the second image there is a completely different shape. The performers use the swords to sculpt the entire space around them, the swords moving well outside the outline of their bodies, with circular shapes represented by lines radiating from a

point, cuts and parries in higher lines above the head, and even a sword tossed behind the back. The greater space between lines indicates more spatial movement between frames. Remarkably, in both sequences the performers switch places, but in the *Hamlet* fight they take up almost identical spots. My intent here is only to show the general sculpting of space by traditional fencing (*Hamlet*) and stock phrases (*Cyrano*).

In 1895 Henry Irving revived his celebrated *Romeo and Juliet* for the fourth time, although with the younger Forbes Robertson assuming the title role. At fifty-eight the newly knighted Irving had aged out of his leading roles, and his transition out of the limelight saw Robertson taking over the parts that Irving had been famous for: Hamlet, Romeo, and Macbeth were all produced that season. The choreography work was divided between Felix Bertrand and Egerton Castle, whose innovations with Irving involved recreating Elizabethan martial arts, and in doing so brought fight choreography in line with the historical research behind Irving's costumes, properties, and scenery.²⁷

A century before the Bertrand family had their fencing academy in London, Domenico Angelo bridged the gap between theatre and the fencing school by leveraging martial skill and social capital to make the *salle* a liminal social meeting place. It was in this school that fencing became a sport, which became open to women, and in which multiple social groups could meet in a new category defined by fitness. The House of Angelo would create a space where fencing became an athletic

²⁷ See Richards (2009), 152-168

activity rather than a marker of class or mode of violence, and in this moment of social transition the image and imagination of the sword onstage changed.

Born in Livorno, Italy in 1717, Angelo favored horsemanship and fencing over a future in his father's merchant business. Sent to Paris to study accounting, Angelo continued his study of equestrian and martial arts, and it was at an exhibition of his skills around 1750 that Angelo caught the eye of the actress Margaret Peg Woffington. The Irish actress was on tour in Paris, and according to J.D. Aylward, Woffington presented Angelo with a rose and "the favored fencer pressed it to his lips before pinning it to his right breast and challenging all opponents to disturb a single leaf of it. Needless to say, the roses emerged undamaged from the ordeal."²⁸ Angelo accompanied Woffington to England, where his relationship with the actress gave him access to both theatrical and elite London society. By 1756 the pair had separated romantically, and Angelo had met Lord Pembroke whose friendship and patronage brought Angelo into royal circles. After a demonstration for the Princess of Wales in 1758 Angelo became the riding instructor to the future King George III, and "became a hugely popular riding and fencing master among the royal court, aristocracy, artists, actors and poets."²⁹

Angelo opened an expansive school in Carlisle House in Soho, where Czajkowski condescendingly notes that "[t]he pupils of Angelo's Fencing Academy were not only men, but – which was a great novelty in those days – also women.

²⁸ J.D. Aylward, *The House of Angelo*, London 1953, The Batchworth Press.

²⁹ Zbigniew Czajkowski, "Domenico Angelo – A Great Fencing Master of the 18th Century and Champion of the Sport of Fencing." *Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism*, Vol. 17, No. 10, 2010, p. 326

They were mostly theatre actresses, who probably dreamt of the role of Hamlet.”³⁰

Angelo transferred his school to his son Henry around 1780, and Henry transferred the school to Her Majesty’s Royal Theatre, Haymarket. Henry solidified the social status of the school, and it was around this time that the work of the Angelo family began to shape theatrical practice.

Both Angelos were regular theatregoers, and actors were regular students at the school. Domenico was a friend of both celebrated actor David Garrick and Thomas Sheridan, father of Richard Brinsley Sheridan; Angelo *pere* offered fencing instruction to the future playwright when he was a child.³¹ Domenico was particularly interested in scenic painting and stage effects, and Henry credits many of the technical innovations of Garrick’s theatre to Angelo’s reports on continental advances.³² This interest in pictorial realism was a part of the long process by which scenic practice spread to performance theory.

A suggestion of the Angelo family’s effect on acting can be found in a 1776 copperplate engraving in *Bell’s Shakespeare*. William Smith is depicted as Richard III, presumably during the Battle of Bosworth Field depicted in Shakespeare’s Act V. The image has historical idiosyncrasies: the sword is held in a smallsword grip, unsuitable for the heavy medieval blades of the play, and Smith’s body is depicted with feet wide but narrow, body open and hand aloft in a contemporary eighteenth-

³⁰ Czajkowski, 330

³¹ The tutoring became important in 1772, when Sheridan fought two duels with Captain Thomas Mathews – one interrupted and the other notably savage. The Sheridan duels were some of the last fought with swords before pistols became the preferred weapon.

³² Henry Angelo, *Reminiscences of Henry Angelo* (London: H. Colburn, 1828), 9

century *en garde*. The image of Smith is almost identical to images from Domenico Angelo's influential 1765 *The School of Fencing*, with its beautifully illustrated full-color plates. The picture of Smith from a decade later matches the shadows at their feet, the weight shift slightly left and back from center, the overall body silhouette, and even the extended pinky finger on their left hands. This does not tell us that the medieval fight on stage looked like an eighteenth-century duel, although that is likely, but it does show that the visual reference point for theatrical fencing was Angelo's *salle*.

Sheridan adapted his own experience into the climax of his 1775 play *The Rivals*, in which Jack and Sir Lucious meet to fight. By the end of the eighteenth century the sword had transformed socially, and as a result the theatrical meaning of the prop was up for reimagining. Holinshed had noted in his 1580 *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* that

[S]eldom shall you see any of my countrymen above eighteen or twenty years old to go without a dagger at the least at his back or by his side...[.] Our Nobility wear commonly swords or rapiers with their daggers, as doth every common serving man also that follows his lord and master.³³

By the late eighteenth century swords were no longer everyday objects: as Captain Absolute quips in *The Rivals*, "A sword seen in the streets of Bath would raise as great an alarm as a mad dog."³⁴ The century between the Restoration in 1660 and the founding of Angelo's school in 1758 was marked by a transition in the dramaturgical function of swordplay. This will be explored in depth in the next

³³ Holinshed, *Chronicles*, 335

³⁴ *The Rivals*, Act 5, Scene 2

chapter, but several trends changed the meaning of the sword in the eighteenth century:

1. Increased professionalization of the English Army and advances in firearms meant that the sword was no longer a symbol of feudal social status (the right for knights to bear arms), and the sword was no longer a meaningful battlefield weapon.
2. Public taste swung away from the violence and ribaldry of the Restoration and towards sentimental and later laughing comedy, in which combat had a much smaller role and was frequently either the source of humor or never actually happens. English tragedies in the eighteenth century often emphasized middle class concerns and a stable social order, in which violence was not a meaningful solution to character's problems.
3. A changing athletic culture was transforming the idea of the sword from a tool of violence and social order to a piece of sporting equipment.

Just as the sword was changing its theatrical meaning during this century, it was also largely disappearing from the stage. The cluster of plays which require extensive onstage swordplay that came out of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods were disappearing by the beginning of the eighteenth century. The last era for whom swords were established parts of a gentlemen's dress and behavior was during the Restoration, and that period saw the decline of the sword play as a subgenre. John Dryden's 1671 *Marriage A-La-Mode* has offstage sword clashes but in a more Neoclassical mode the events and outcome are reported on stage rather than seen. In Thomas Shadwell's 1675 *The Libertine* and Aphra Behn's 1677 *The Rover*, and

George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* there are onstage sword fights, but in each play the violence is increasingly a backdrop to dialogue or ends abruptly: in Behn one group judges that their swords are too short to win and decides not to quarrel, and in Farquhar the characters Brazen and Plume stop fighting as soon as their audience has left. The swordplay in these plays is quite different than the fights of the preceding Jacobean era in which the plots turn on acts of violence.

There were substantive difference between the moral worlds of Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy, but they are more similar in their use of swordplay as substantive theatrical and narrative events. The shared influence of Senecan tragedy, with its use of violence to define character and find violent solutions to narrative problems was a match for a burgeoning middle class which had only recently been given regular access to arms and was transitioning from a feudal social order of vertical hierarchies to a new mercantile framework based in law. Early Modern London was a city laid out in terms of power and violence. The city west was marked by the double-tiered gallows of Tyburn, public squares were used for executions like Guy Fawke's in 1605, the open fields of the north such as Moorfield and Finsbury Field were used for military exercise of the town militia, Spitalfields to the east was a recreational field for working class stick sparring on Sundays, and theatres and violent animal entertainments flourished on the south side of the Thames in part because laws were lax. An armed urban population, with no meaningful police, surrounded by the exhibition of violence would serve to see itself reflected in the theatre of late Renaissance London. As Andreas Höfele notes, "(t)he blood rituals of baiting and criminal justice would inevitably be part of their physical and cultural

environment and thus be incorporated in the store of everyday experiences that their imagination drew on.”³⁵

The Prize Fight Thesis

The ‘prize’ of a prize fight could be monetary, but specifically referred to ‘playing your prize’ in order to advance through the professional ranks from scholar to free scholar, then from provost to master in a series of bouts. At each step candidates would have fought anywhere from one to forty-seven opponents using a few selected weapons: longsword, English backsword, sword and buckler, sword and dagger, and staff:

The said ancient masters shall agree and conclude to appoint and set his days when he shall play his prize, and when that day is come the said scholar shall at the long sword play with so many scholars as will play with him that day and the next day which shall be appointed, to play at his other Weapon with so many scholars as will play that day...³⁶

This link between prize fights and drama has provided the foundation for scholarship on Early Modern staged combat and has obscured other possible forms of stage combat that might change the way we think about actor training, theatrical stage practice, and the ways in which these audiences understood stage violence. It is worth unpacking to establish a more complete timeline of stage combat in England and to help understand the different forms of stage sword fights that overlapped in Victorian theatre.

³⁵ Andreas Höefele, *Stage, Stake, & Scaffold*, 14

³⁶ British Library Sloan manuscript No. 2530

Scholarship on Early Modern stage fights began in the early twentieth century but expanded after two publications in 1971 which detailed the Masters of Defense. Berry's book in particular and later Charles Edelman's *Brawl Ridiculous*, cemented what I will refer to as the Prize Fight Thesis. In brief, this argument posits that the expanding social and economic presence of fencing instructors in London in second half of the sixteenth century, as well as their practice of public exhibitions in the form of prize fights, intersected with early modern theatre practice in profound ways. Stage fights began to resemble prize fights visually, actors took training with fencing masters, plays began to reference martial arts textually, and audiences changed the ways in which they understood how to read the meaning of a stage fight using prize fights as a reference point.

The Prize Fight Thesis has dominated classroom, rehearsal, and scholarly discussions of early modern stage practice, but there are valid reasons to be critical of the argument. Moreover, the bias towards prize fights has obscured both research and discussion of alternative forms of early modern staging that inform both our historical understanding of Elizabethan theatre and modern practice. There are four main supports for this thesis, each of which is worth examining.

1. Participant overlap between the fencing and theatrical communities, in particular Richard Tarleton
2. Geographic overlap between fencing and theatrical spaces, in particular the stages for prize fights and Blackfriars
3. Textual references to both fencers and fencing language specific to Elizabethan London.

4. Aesthetic expectations between the shared audiences of prize fights and theatre

The first line of thought proposes that stage fights must have mirrored real fencing because Elizabethan actors were skilled fencers. As James Jackson notes in his essay of fencing actor-lines, “We may be sure, then, that if there were sword and rapier techniques to be learned by long practice, and if the audiences demanded expert shows...there were undoubtedly expert fencers in the Shakespearean company to act the important fencing parts.”³⁷ The primary example of this is the comic actor Richard Tarleton, who did indeed play for his fencing Master’s prize in 1587.³⁸

There is circularity to the argument – actors must have been good fencers because the plays required them to be so, and the plays were venues for expert swordsmanship because the actors were such good fencers. Based on the work of L.K. Wright and T.W. Baldwin, Jackson further observes that the lion’s share of fencing parts went to two actors in Shakespeare’s company: Richard Burbage, who probably played Hamlet, Romeo, Macbeth, and Prince Hal; and Burbage’s foil William Sly, who played Laertes, Tybalt, Macduff, and Hotspur. One problem with this assumption is that those actors who were known to be expert fencers – like Tarleton - played comic parts. Contemporary accounts do not mention his fencing skill, but rather emphasize his wit and dancing. Although his status as a Fencing

³⁷ James Jackson, “The Fencing Actor-Lines in Shakespeare’s Plays,” *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 57, No. 8 (Dec. 1942), 616

³⁸ Craig Turner and Tony Soper, *Methods and Practice of Elizabethan Swordplay* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), 17

Master is often listed in discussions of his theatrical career, there is little evidence that he used his fencing on stage in any part he played.

The second main argument is that there is geographic congruence to fencing and stage swordplay – prize fights were held on theatre stages, while the Blackfriars complex held both the fencing academy of Rocco Bonetti (and later Saviolo), and the indoor playhouse of Burbage and Shakespeare. It is true that some theatrical stages were used for fencing matches, and it has been noted that the proximity to slaughterhouses made blood easy to come by, but when Charles Edelman refers to the “tradition of combat-sports in the playhouses,” we may be overstating the historical reality. As O.L. Brownstein notes in his study of the records of the Masters of Defense, in the fifty years before 1590 the Curtain hosted a mere seven prize fights and the Theatre only six, while the Bull and Bell Savage each hosted at least twice those numbers. Although they predate Shakespeare’s fencing tragedies, those years are significant because they encompass the lives and teaching careers of the foreign fencers who brought continental swordplay to London: Bonetti, Saviolo and Jeronimo – all of whom were dead by 1599. At the height of their fame and activity, these masters of Defense only occasionally played the theatres.

By the time Shakespeare moved into Blackfriars in 1608, with its fencing school and a wealthier audience presumably more familiar with the fencing world, Shakespeare was no longer writing plays which featured fencing.

Prize fights are bound by both space and time: we do not see them outside of London, and they disappear from the formal record after 1590. Scholarship regarding prize fights and Elizabethan theatre tends to center on London and an imagined urban

audience. The Sloan document records only a few prizes fought outside of London itself, and Mark Brayshay notes that from 1525 to 1640 there is evidence of a single travelling swordsman entertainer.³⁹ There simply doesn't seem to have been an entertainment market for this style of martial demonstration outside of the capitol, and so both early modern textual references and fight choreography reliant on the audience's understanding and familiarity with prize fights would have made less sense for the touring companies.

Some plays, especially *Romeo and Juliet*, are full of textual references to fencing terminology, most notably that of Vincentio Saviolo, who provided the terms *punto reversi*, *stoccata*, and *passado*. Ben Jonson included all of these terms and more in his 1599 play *Every Man in his Humor*, and terms crop up in several other playwrights' work. Following Egerton Castle's lead, modern stage combat scholars like Arthur Wise, J.D. Martinez, and Aaron Anderson have proposed that because the fencing techniques are referred to textually, they were probably performed physically. Joan Holmer goes further to suggest that the codes of honor that Saviolo outlined in his 1595 fencing manual are essential to understanding both plot and character in *Romeo and Juliet*, and Dori Coblenz's *Fencing, Form and Cognition on the Early Modern Stage* suggests that actors and playwrights "looked to fencing theory and performance for physical cues and formal structure."⁴⁰ But there is no need to suggest that because the fencing terms are used that they were performed. Benvolio's

³⁹ Mark Brayshay, "Waits, musicians, bearwards and players: the inter-urban road travel and performances of itinerant entertainers in sixteenth and seventeenth century England," *Journal of Historical Geography*,

⁴⁰ Dori Coblenz, publisher's summary.

summation on the arrival of the grieving Capulets and Montagues mentions nothing specific and does not refer to the articles of honor – the original insult, the letter, the personal challenge – that could excuse Romeo or explain the deaths. The argument assumes a level of audience familiarity: that audiences were familiar with fencing conventions, personalities, and technical debates, and wanted them to be equaled or echoed in stage fights. Certainly a more educated audience, perhaps students of the fencers themselves, would have gotten the references in plays like *Romeo and Juliet*. University skits like the 1615 *Worke for Cutlers, or, A Merrie Dialogue Between Sword, Rapier & Dagger* are only funny or even intelligible to an audience fluent in fencing terminology. But it is significant that the plots do not turn on fencing specifics: it does not ultimately matter to narrative or audience whether Mercutio is attacked *imbroccata*, *reversi*, or *fendente*.

Using the texts to argue for realistic fencing has encouraged an elision of other evidence. In *Titus Andronicus*, Demetrius taunts his brother

Go to; have your lath glued within your sheath

Till you know better how to handle it. (II.i)

Sexual imagery aside, the stage image of a wooden lath sword must have been familiar to audiences, and it occurs in both *Titus* and *Henry VI, Part II*. Wooden swords predate Shakespeare and crop back up in English folk drama of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and textual references in these two early plays suggest the possibility that Shakespeare started with less realistic props than current scholarship suggests.

The historiography built on Egerton Castle's original suggestion that stage fights are best understood through real fights has been excellent, but it is not the only possibility. Excluded are other performance traditions that employed swordplay or elaborate choreography. In his recent volume *Shakespeare and Violence*, R.A. Foakes links Shakespeare's early work, especially *Titus Andronicus*, to Christopher Marlowe and the spectacular productions at the Rose in the 1580s, most notably *Tamburlaine*.⁴¹ Certainly there are similarities, particularly in the range of violent activity, but I would suggest that instead of assuming that the Elizabethan theatre developed its own style of swordplay out of whole cloth, and that Shakespeare was aping Marlowe, there was instead a shared ancestry. Extensive scholarship has yet to link Elizabethan and later Jacobean violence to the medieval theatrical traditions, even though the spectacular effects of *Tamburlaine*, *Titus*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet* and the later plays seem quite at home in what Jody Enders refers to as the Medieval Theatre of Cruelty. The onstage injuries and blood effects are all described in the late medieval traditions that Enders charts and suggest a history of stagecraft which may have made stage fencing and other dramatic violence of the later Elizabethan plays possible. Enders quotes Quintilian calling for lawyers to produce "blood stained swords, fragments of bone taken from the wound, and garments spotted with blood...wounds stripped of their dressings, and scourged bodies bared to view," as dramatic props to present at trial. All of these were effects necessary for the staging of Shakespeare and the Jacobeans.⁴²

⁴¹ Foakes, 37

⁴² Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theatre of Cruelty* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 186

The idea that the only way to create convincing or theatrically compelling stage fights would have been to *actually* fight on stage, as Charles Edelman proposes, even in a controlled improvisation, excludes other traditions of sword performance.⁴³ Many scholars have assumed that only fencing would provide the familiarity with swords and physical skill necessary for these complex sequences. Edelman refers to the texts which mention armor and the great number of scenes that center around a character dressing for war. The armor was necessary, Edelman suggests, because the actors were really fencing. But the presence of armor on stage is neither necessary nor sufficient for real or realistic combat, just as a pipe on stage is not evidence of real smoking. Armor had – and still retains - a visual signification well beyond practical usefulness

Finally, the most common argument made in support of a relationship between Elizabethan playhouse and prizefights – and by extension Early modern theatrical and martial practices – is that Elizabethan audiences would have been familiar with real fights and would have expected to see the same on their stages. There are fundamental historiographic problems with this argument. The first is that Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences were familiar with many concepts that they did not expect to see represented realistically on stage: for example bears, twins, and women. There are few other aspects of early modern stagecraft where we would make the argument that audiences expected realism, and so it is striking how often this argument gets made for stage fights.

⁴³ Aaron Anderson, "An Argument Against Realism," *The Fight Master*, Fall/Winter 2005 Vol XXVIII Number 2, 32

A useful parallel are the fight scenes in traditional kabuki, known as *tachimawari*. Many scholars have noted the cultural affinities between the theatres of London and Edo, and with the theatres heavily patronized by the samurai class *kabuki* had an audience that was very familiar with arms and their proper use. And yet a realistic style of swordplay did not emerge, and instead an allegorical and symbolic form of storytelling movement was highly valued by an educated audience. The body of theatrical sword movements in *kabuki* are known as *tate*, and Aaron Anderson notes that

[T]he martial form is also clearly distinguished from the stage form. In some instances, different names are given for identical movements in each form. For instance, over two hundred specific movement patterns are catalogued for *tachimawari* that are distinct from martial (movements).

He goes on

The *tate* used in these confrontations dramatize the emotional—not chronological or real—length or weight of the encounter. One of the most famous examples of this type of combat takes place in the play *Natsu Matsuri* (Summer Festival) when the lead character, Danshichi, murders his father-in-law, Geiheji. Although Danshichi fights armed with a *katana* and Geiheji is both unarmed and essentially caught unaware, the murder itself can take well over ten minutes (sometimes up to twenty minutes) to perform. Although some of the movements in this fight outwardly look like real combat moves, this outer display is largely just a circumstance of the physics of the weaponry. The true quality of the *tate* in this scene is not the correct martial use of the weapon but the emotional weight of the murder.⁴⁴

Shakespeare was employing a similarly symbolic form of performance, and it is notable how often the fights in *kabuki* are referred to as “dancelike” or “stylized” in literature, while English staged combat is rhetorically framed as more aggressive, physical, and authentic.

⁴⁴Anderson, 31

Samuel Pepys recorded seeing a prize as late as 1669. Seventy years after the dissolution of the Masters of Defense, the practice of using theatres as spaces for prize fights had returned with the Restoration although by then the term referred to smaller amateur matches: fencing masters, prize fights, and the public exhibition of fencing seems to have barely survived into the Stuart reign. Pepys records going to see a prize fight at the New Theatre (home of Thomas Killigrew's King's Company, formerly the Gibbons Tennis Court) in June of 1663. At the age of 30, the diarist notes that "here I came and saw the first prize I ever saw in my life."⁴⁵ Despite being a regular playgoer, with an estimated 345 trips to various London theatres between the reopening of playhouse in 1660 and 1669, Pepys records seeing only five prize fights in that time – including one between a butcher and shoemaker.⁴⁶ Whatever influence prize fights may have had on theatrical combat in Shakespeare's day, the fights in plays like Aphra Behn's *The Rover* almost certainly drew on another aesthetic.

The point here is not that Restoration theatrical practice should be used to illustrate Elizabethan theatre. Rather, the goal is to note that there was a tradition of staging fights that predated the prize fights, likely survived alongside whatever brief influence the prize fights had, and when theatres reopened after the Interregnum audiences and actors stepped back into an embodied practice for which prize fights were a deviation and not the norm. The meaning of swords and martial culture for London audiences had substantially changed in the six decades between *Romeo and*

⁴⁵ Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1905), 198.

⁴⁶ Pepys records prize fights on June 1, 1663; April 23, 1664; May 27, 1666; September 9, 1667; and April 12, 1669.

Juliet and the Restoration. An audience in 1662 did not necessarily receive a reference to a prize fight in a play the same way an audience from 1593 because the social role of prize fighters, and swords generally, had changed.

Prize fight has been used to explain the duels of challenges that pop up in Shakespeare – readings of the Tybalt and Mercutio duel in *Romeo and Juliet* are particularly strong. But the prize fights were solo challenges, and do not explain how early modern theatres would have tackled group fights or battles – the “alarums and excursions” that make up a majority of onstage combat. More importantly, the prize fight model does not explain how fights were staged prior to the establishment of the Masters of Defense in 1540, although plays such as *Robin Hood* make clear that intricate combat was a theatrical element in folk plays a century before the Masters were a point of reference.

The Pyrrhic Model

It is in these earlier plays that the story turns around and we can follow a different model for choreography beginning in the late fifteenth and continuing to the nineteenth century. Charles Edelman notes how few theatrical combats there are prior to Marlowe and Shakespeare but does not offer more context.⁴⁷ He leaves the suggestion that before Elizabethan interaction between fencers and actors neither the aesthetic nor the necessary skills were present. What Edelman fails to note is that not only are there relatively few sword fights in plays prior to the English Renaissance,

⁴⁷ Charles Edelman, *Brawl Ridiculous* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 11-23

there are very few sword fights in stories up until that point. The challenge to single combat was simply not an activity that most audience members had social or creative access to and could not as easily have an Aristotelian identification with the protagonists. Coupled with a lack of fights in the Biblical or classical source material for so much of medieval drama, it is understandable that sword combat does not feature in classical or early medieval narratives. When personal fights do begin to appear in late medieval stories it is often in a chivalric frame as a metaphorical military combat, as in the knight versus the Turk, or as a challenge for honor. The fight between good and evil, as represented by the good Christian knight against the Turk or Saracen, would be added to folk rites and dances of fertility and the defeat of winter, ultimately emerging as the sword dances of the late medieval period – a performance practice completely overlooked by most scholarship on early modern stage combat.

One of the early records of a sword fight is in the c.1475 fragment *Robyn Hood and the Shryff off Notyngham*. Likely performed by servants of Sir John Paston of Norwich, the brief dialogue includes an archery contest, caber toss, wrestling match, and a sword exchange that leads to a decapitation.⁴⁸ Part of what is so significant about the Robin Hood stories, and eventually the Robin Hood plays, is that the sword fights in the story take personal combat out of a military or chivalric context and into a class-conscious framework, allowing non-aristocratic audiences to identify with the sword-wielding protagonist because Robin Hood is socially allied to them. This

⁴⁸ The other great source of medieval swordplay, the Arthurian legends, do not appear in plays until the 1580s.

coincides with the rise of an English class which wanted the symbols and powers of the aristocracy, including the legal right to bear arms. The sword fight flowered in the early English Renaissance in part because it became an available fantasy.

It is also worth noting that sword fights may have appeared relatively late in storytelling in part because the sword was not a primary weapon of combat. The Bayeux Tapestry, for example, features relatively few brandished swords in favor of the clubs, axes, and spears which were easier to manufacture and more practical to use. It is the unique role that the sword plays in storytelling that has centered the object in our imagination, beyond its actual military or historical function. Scaled especially well to the human body in a theatrical space, the ubiquity of swords in all media: plays, books, video games, movies, films, and toys is ironically because the spectacle of dramatic sword fights have shifted the sword center stage and allowed us to reimagine the object.

Alan Dessen refers to the idea that Elizabethan stage fights drew from an allegorical staging tradition which was already in practice: mock combats. Dessen cites dumb shows of the later sixteenth century such as *The Tide Tarrieth No Man* (1576) which includes a fight with Vice wielding a lathe dagger.⁴⁹ Part of the difficulty in tracing this line of history is that two very different traditions emerged out of their source medieval tournaments, both of which are referred to in academic literature as “mock combat.” One practice refers to competitive sparring under controlled and non-lethal conditions, a physical competition and exhibition that

⁴⁹ Alan Dessen, *Elizabethan Stage Directions and Modern Interpreters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 107

included elements of pageantry, costume, narrative framing, and audience engagement but – like modern mixed martial arts or boxing – was still an athletic competition in which the outcome was unknown. The second mock battle tradition grew alongside the tournaments themselves and became elaborate theatrical spectacle in which the outcome was scripted, and the mock battles were non-competitive performances.

A historiography of stage combat that draws on dance and other performative movement traditions rather than martial movement solves a number of the problems that the prize fight argument creates. It is worth acknowledging a bias in twentieth century scholarship, particularly the work that grew out of the Kernoozers original project, in which more vigorous, martial, and manly interpretations were favored over dance traditions. Elizabethan stage fights as theatricalized prize fights have been the standard historiographic model, but there is an alternative that is worth considering and which links historical practice before and after early modern theatre in a more cohesive timeline. Three roughly simultaneous events occurred in the late fifteenth century that influenced the origins of the stage sword fight: the arrival of gunpowder and the transformation of the tournament, the rebirth of the Pyrrhic dance, and the development of the English folk play. These three performance traditions – martial, dance, and theatre – interwove to become the English practice of staged combat over the next five centuries.

The first significant event is the introduction of gunpowder to the European battlefield. The first English cannons were introduced in 1327 and saw widespread application in the Hundred Years War (1337-1453). Until this time mounted knights

were the most powerful troops on a battlefield, and the legal right to own property, bear arms, and wield social power was tied to the ability to field horses. The word ‘chivalry’ itself comes from the French root *chevalerie*, meaning horsemen. The arrival of gunpowder had a profound effect on English social hierarchies, as it destabilized the social order of chivalry that had given knights enormous economic, political, and social capital. The democratized death of artillery meant that a horse was no longer the symbol of superiority, and knights would have to give up armor, arms, and horses: “the only choice cavalry men had was to adapt via imitation—which is to say, to discard their lances and become pistoleers.”⁵⁰

Theatrically, this disruption in social order changed the performative nature of tournaments. To date, the full theatricality of tournaments has not been studied beyond an acknowledgement of their elaborate, metaphorical staging and their origins in martial competition. Inspired primarily by Roman *ludi*, martial games and competitions, the tournament emerged between the twelfth and fourteen centuries as an intersection of military training, exhibition performance, and social economy as a way for knights to engage in courtly politics and honor. Conceived as a less lethal way to keep knights in practice between military activity, tournaments became a large spectacle with the competitive event built around an audience. A highly charged social environment, knights were competing physically for victory and awards, politically for favor from lords, socially for status honor and prestige, and sexually before an audience of potential partners. The spectatorship of tournaments forms a

⁵⁰ Sheila J. Nayar, “Arms or the Man I: Gunpowder Technology and the Early Modern Romance,” *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 114, No. 3 (Summer 2017), 529

significant narrative of element of plays and stories, including *As You Like It*, *Pericles*, *Richard II*, *The Cid*, the Arthurian legends, and the various *Robin Hood* plays: in each case the act of witnessing (or being barred from seeing) is more crucial to the story than the outcome of the competition.

Originally contests mimicked battlefield conditions, with mounted charges and armed group exchanges on foot, but eventually architectural elements were introduced to create safer contests and reduce the risk of killing knights: a long railing between jousts known as the *list*, and a *barrier* between the small groups of skirmishers. This transition from a military exercise to an athletic competition of both solo and group events increased spectatorship, deepened the interplay between competitors and audience, and introduced narrative or symbolic elements into the event.⁵¹ Steven Muhlberger notes that

In the fifteenth century, tourneys practically disappeared while elaborate theatrical jousts became ever more common. The *pas d'armes*...created a fictional scenario in which a fighter defended a "pass" or "position" against all challengers, who might be supernatural or allegorical figures.⁵²

Knights would wear symbolically decorated armor, emblazon their shields with poetry or mottos, and participate in themed battles with elaborate scenery and fixed outcomes. Martial historical Sydney Anglo has come the closest to tracing the relationship between dance, performance, and tournaments:

⁵¹ Vern Baxter and A.V. Margavio have done an intriguing study of honor as a social currency, which bears on the performative and social value of tournaments as they changed from military exercises to spectacle events. See Baxter and Margavio, "Honor, Status, and Aggression in Economic Exchange," *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Nov. 2000)

⁵² Steven Muhlberger, "A Short History of Tournaments" in *Medieval Warfare*, July/August 2017, Vol 7, No. 3, p. 11

The characteristic of combat which has, perhaps, most suggested a relationship to the dance is the way in which the violence of early tournaments evolved into various forms of mock encounter suitable for court festivals, not only in the lists but also in the banqueting hall or theatre - in entertainments such as disguisings, masques, ballets, *mummerei*, and *intermezzi* - where a battle might resolve some allegorical debate, and where dancing was invariably an essential component at some stage of the proceedings.⁵³

By the sixteenth century tournaments had become part of feast days and court celebrations. Accession Day Tilts were organized sometime in the 1570s to mark Queen Elizabeth's assumption of the throne. Held annually on November 17 until 1602, the Accession Day event featured knights in decorative armor, with mottos written by established poets, competing in both athletic and performative events before an audience of thousands which included royalty and commoners who paid 12 pence to watch from the stands or nothing if they stood on the tournament ground itself.⁵⁴

The arrival of knights to the lists was a significant theatrical moment, and much attention was given to costuming and presentation, as well as proper ways of marching and walking.⁵⁵ Their arrival was announced by the presentation of an *impresa*, a paste-board shield with decorative motifs connected to their costuming and character. The knights and their pages "were disguised like savages, or like Irishmen, with the hair hanging down to the girdle like women."⁵⁶ Special effects borrowed from court masques might be employed, as Sir Philip Sydney reported:

⁵³ Sydney Anglo, "The Barriers: From Combat to Dance (Almost)," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, Vol. 25, No. 2, (Winter, 2007), 92

⁵⁴ Lupold von Wedel, "Journey Through England and Scotland", *Transactions of The Royal Historical Society* Vol IX 2nd Series (1895), 269

⁵⁵ Anglo (2007), 97

⁵⁶ Roy Strong, *Art and Power; Renaissance Festivals 1450-1650*, 1984, The Boydell Press,

Another (knight) came in hidden, both man and horse, in a figure representing the Phoenix, which, apparently, was set on fire so that the knight appeared to rise "as it were out of the ashes thereof." Against this fiery Phoenix Knight there ran a "Frozen Knight" whose armor naturally represented ice, and all his furniture corresponded to this idea.⁵⁷

By the Elizabethan period tournaments had transformed from athletic contests to court performances and helped introduce the idea of symbolic combat: spectator events in which the outcome was pre-determined and the participants were often portraying characters inside a symbolic narrative.

Prior to the 1540 founding of the English Masters of Defense, and the establishment of prize fights, all of the tools for the performance of elaborate choreographed swordfights were already in use in European court performances. Starting in the mid fifteenth century with the dance textbooks of Domenico da Piacenza and Guglielmo Ebreo, notes for Pyrrhic Dances were available to performers, courtiers, and dancing masters.

Setting aside the mythological origins of the Pyrrhic dance, the first visual records appear on Attic vases from the sixth century BCE.⁵⁸ Both male and female dancers are depicted naked with shields and spears, performing both solo and group dances. It is not clear from classical sources whether the ancient Pyrrhic dances were solo or paired exercises, or whether dancers fought each other or moved in parallel.

⁵⁷ Frances Yates, "Elizabethan Chivalry: The Romance of the Accession Day Tilts," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 20, No. 1/2 (Jan. - Jun. 1957), 5

⁵⁸ Alexandra Goulaki-Voutira, "Pyrrhic Dance and Female Pyrrhic Dancers," *RIDIM/RCMI Newsletter*, Spring 1996, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring 1996), 3.

Arising out of Greek military and civic culture Pyrrhic dances were praised by Plato as appropriate for men and women and worthy of state support:

Of the noble kind there is, on the one hand, the motion of fighting, and that of fair bodies and brave souls engaged in violent effort... it represents modes of eluding all kinds of blows and shots by swervings and duckings and side-leaps upward or crouching; and also the opposite kinds of motion, which lead to active postures of offence, when it strives to represent the movements involved in shooting with bows or darts, and blows of every description.⁵⁹

Pyrrhic dancing was popular throughout Greece, including Sparta where it was the first step of formal training for boys starting at age five.⁶⁰ The tradition continued into Imperial Rome with mythologically-themed mock battles between masked male and female performers with wooden swords and shields.⁶¹

Barbara Sparti traces the Renaissance recreations of Pyrrhic dance to the publication of dance manuals in Italy, in particular those by Domenico da Piacenza (c.1455) and Guglielmo Ebreo (1463).⁶² These sources bear very little resemblance to their classical sources, and dance masters seem to have taken written descriptions and interpreted them through the contemporary lens of group social dances. A Pyrrhic dance in the fifteenth and sixteenth century was simply a paired dance with swords.

⁵⁹ Plato. *Laws*, Plato in Twelve Volumes, translated by R.G. Bury. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 815e

⁶⁰ Cole, 45

⁶¹ Ludwig Friedlaender, *Roman Life and Manners Under the Early Empire* (Vol. 2), London 2013 (Original Print: 1913), 108.

⁶² Barbara Sparti, "Antiquity as Inspiration in the Renaissance of Dance: The Classical Connection and Fifteenth-Century Italian Dance," *Dance Chronicle* Vol. 16, No. 3 (1993), 375

As with ‘mock combat,’ here again a distinction must be made between two different dance traditions that have shared a name: sword dance. On the one side were “hilt and point,” or chain dances in which

a group of dancers normally ranging from four or five up to twenty-odd, moves through various figures, minimally lines and circles but often using very complex and demanding movements. The dancers are connected to one another by swords, or sword-like implements of metal and wood, which they usually hold with the hilt in their right hand and the point of the next dancer’s sword in their left.⁶³

The other category were dances which mimicked an actual fight. A single dance may have elements of both movement traditions, and both would be folded into Morris dancing. They were two distinct performance traditions that have often been lumped together despite having very different characteristics. A third category included court dances in which a sword or other prop was held by the dancers, but not used to create mimetic fights. Morris Dancing draws its name from Moorish, a term with a complicated history and problematic legacy. Without sidestepping the colonial and racial implications of the term, the ‘Moorish style’ in dance as it was understood by Renaissance Europe was marked by acrobatic leaps.

McDowell Kenley echoes Sparti’s source of combat sword dances and offers clarification on terminology and history. Both locate the origin of European sword dances in fifteenth century Italy:

Masked dances of battle (sometimes simply called *morescas*), as well as the antics of masked comedians, were occasionally referred to by the more specific designation *matachines*. Thus *matachines* was a name for species of

⁶³ Stephen D. Corson, “The Historiography of European Linked Sword Dancing,” *Dance Research Journal*, Spring 1993, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1

dance belonging to that genre of *moresque* dance. A particular pantomimic dance that exemplified the species was the mock battle known as *Forze d'Ercole*.⁶⁴

Significantly, Kenley points out that the *matachin* covered both comic and tragic characters and scenarios.⁶⁵ Violet Alford traces the linked sword dances back further, noting that “dances already old were being recorded in the 14th century,” but Cossin argues that there are no records of performances by sword dancers in England before the sixteenth century.⁶⁶ There were, however, certainly mimetic mock combats in England as early as the 1470s as the sword fight in the text of *Robyn Hod and the Shryff off Notyngham* makes clear.

Performance records do indicate that choreographed mock combats were established on the continent by the early sixteenth century. The 1502 Lucrezia Borgia married the Duke of Ferrara, Alfonso d'Este. The festivities were marked by was marked by an elaborate dance in which ten dancers employed a variety of weapons to perform a mock battle. This martial display may have seemed like the perfect addition to Alfonso d'Este's nuptials, as he drew political power from the quality of the artillery produced in his foundries. In portraits by both Titian and Dosso Dossi the Duke is posed leaning on the mouth of a cannon.

They danced to the music of pipes and tabors and, with quick movements expressing a determination to kill the opponent, they fell to blows which, like their steps, were in time to the music. The maces broken, they drew their swords, stabbing at each other with great dexterity (forward and backward),

⁶⁴ McDowell Kenley, unpublished 1993 dissertation “Sixteenth-century *matachines* dances, *morescas* of mock combat and comic pantomime,” 2.

⁶⁵ Kenley, 14

⁶⁶ Violet Alford, *Sword Dance and Drama*: Merlin Press, London 1962, 35. And Corrsin, 2

dancing the whole time. At a given signal, they threw down their swords, and taking their daggers, attacked each other. At another musical signal, one half of the number fell down as if dead or wounded, while the others, with their daggers drawn, stood over them. The conquerors then bound their prisoners and led them off the stage.⁶⁷

There are few visual references for these dances, but it is worth noting that multiple weapons could be used by different combinations of dancers while keeping time musically, suggesting a set and repeated choreography that was adaptable to different weapons.

This dance was performed as an interlude between comedies presented in a temporary purpose-built stage in the Palace of Justice. Willaim Gilbert describes

a stage having been built at one extremity of the great hall with a proscenium and scenery complete with raised seats in the form of a semicircle in front for the audience, while behind the scenes were dressing rooms for the different actors, who altogether numbered not fewer than 110 persons. Immediately in front of the stage was the orchestra, behind which were placed seats for the duke, with the bride and bridegroom, while the ambassadors, the nobles, and other guests invited to the performance were ranged according to their rank behind them.⁶⁸

The Pyrrhic dance at Ferrara was performed within the context of five evenings of theatrical events, including the full productions of Plautus' *Bacchides* and *Miles Gloriosus* with interludes between each act featuring the slaying of a dragon, balanced candle dances, shepherds with goat horns, several spear dances, and another danced battle like the one described above.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Sparti, 380. In the same article Sparti describes an earlier 1473 dance battle between Hercules and Centaurs, but this may have been more balletic and symbolic. Her description of the Pyrrhic dance draws heavily from William Gilbert's 1869 biography of Lucrezia Borgia, which discusses further armed dances in the procession.

⁶⁸ William Gilbert, *Lucrezia Borgia: Duchess of Ferrara* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1869), 211

⁶⁹ Gilbert, 211-233

A strikingly similar Pyrrhic dance was also staged in 1548 for the arrival of Henri II into Lyon, a city that was establishing its reputation for military ability. The arrival into Lyon included jousting, mock naval battles, demonstrations of artillery and weaponry, as well as theatrical performances and a complicated sword dance.

Margaret McGowan describes the display, executed by twelve children in which

spears struck two-handed swords; daggers and long oval shields defended attacks from double-swords; different-styled daggers and shields confronted each other; and, throughout the performance, the rhythm of the action was never upset nor was the formation broken even when the first line ceded the frontal defense to the second, the second to the third and so on. The combat was vigorous and destructive: shields and weapons fell about in pieces, and the spectators (ignorant of the skill that was being deployed) were alarmed, and tempted to intervene. Yet, to their astonishment, the lines, furnished with new materials, reformed and the whole process began again ever more furiously: two against one; three against three; six against six; shields clashing with shields and swords; and with daggers and spears threshing the air with such impetuosity and in such apparent entanglement that the spectators were again struck with fear and trembling. The performers, however, as fresh at the end of half an hour's violent activity as at the beginning (so the chronicler claims), wheeled round into their places without losing their measure and turned what was perceived as confusion into graceful and joyful movement.⁷⁰

Lyon had a small theatrical community in 1548, centered around dramatic dialogues written for students at the *College de la Trinitie*, as well as mystery plays, and farces performed for the community in a three-story theatre built out of modified barns in 1539.⁷¹ These were spaces where the small Italian population of Lyon helped spread *commedia dell'arte* to French audiences: “the major impetus for public théâtre in Lyon came from the Florentines, who put on plays and mommeries, the latter

⁷⁰ Margaret M. McGowan, “A Renaissance War Dance: The Pyrrhic” *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* Vol. 3, No. 1 (Autumn, 1984), 30

⁷¹ Maurice Scève, *The Entry of Henry II into Lyon*, 101

involving a procession of actors in costume.”⁷² This cultural exchange was encouraged by the marriage of French Henri II to the Italian Catherine de Medici in 1547. Like the Borgia wedding, the week-long procession of Henri to Lyon featured performances in a temporary “Italian Theatre” installed in the archbishop’s palace, the Palais Saint Jean.

The sword dances at Ferrara and Lyon were both conscious attempts to appeal to military-minded politicians by creating stylized interpretations of Greek and Roman battle through dance. Contemporary commentators at both performances mention the “antique” style of the costumes, as well as their weaponry. Both performances took place within the larger context of the *matachines*, which included mock combats that emerged as an interlude in *commedia* performances. Cesare Negri’s 1604 *New Inventions of the Dance* described a dance with “a thousand bizarre [entertainments], among others a combat with swords, daggers, and another with lances.”⁷³ *Matachine* refers to both the specific dance and the performer: it was an umbrella term that covered a number of performance traditions but included an acrobatic mock combat featuring a blunted sword and often a shield, which could be either comic or tragic, and emerged in Italy in the first decades of the sixteenth century.

A clear description of what these *matachines* looked like is difficult to draw out, made more difficult by the fact that sixteenth century dance scholars do not agree on the borders of terms. What is clear is that a performance tradition had emerged

⁷² Scève, 101

⁷³ Quoted in Kenley *Early Music*, 2012

which satisfies our definition here: performers pretending to be someone else and engaging in a non-competitive physical display with weapons within a narrative with a pre-determined outcome for an audience.

The first dated examples of *matachiens* are publications of music for these dances which appeared in print by the 1540s.⁷⁴ Both the children of Lyon and the Borgia dancers were working in a shared tradition that was appearing in both formal court and common folk dances throughout the sixteenth century. Records of fabric purchased for *matachines* exist in England by 1582-83, and we can assume that by then the exchange of English performers travelling to Europe and Italian and French performers bringing the dance across the channel had provided a possible introduction of dance-based mock combat.⁷⁵ Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* of 1590 includes a description of brawling knights that suggests the dance was known in England:

But *Phalantus* angry of this defacing his shield, came upon the black Knight, and with the pommel of his sword set fire to his eyes, which presently was revenged, not only by the Black, but the ill-appareled Knight, who disdained another should enter into his quarrel, so as, who ever saw a matachin dance to imitate fighting, this was a fight that did imitate the matachin."⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Kenley, 54

⁷⁵ Kenley, 32

⁷⁶ Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pemboke's Arcadia*, electronic transcription by Risa Bear. John Cutts makes the persuasive argument that elements of Shakespeare and Wilkins' *Pericles* (1607) draw directly from Sidney's *Arcadia*, including the dancing of a *matachine*. See Cutts, "Pericles in Rusty Armour, and the Matachine Dance of the Competitive Knights at the Court of Simonides," *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 4 (1974), pp. 49-51

John Webster's 1612 play *The White Devil* also includes a reference to *matachines*, with the character Flamineo declaring "A matachin it seems by your drawn swords. Churchmen turned revelers! (5.6.174-175)"

There is overlap between *matachines* and Pyrrhic dances, with the latter identified as a specific category of dance by the time Guillaume Paradin's 1556 book *Blason des Dances* offered classical sources for the dance, citing both Xenophon and Plato.⁷⁷ The earliest full discussion of Pyrrhic performances is in Thoinot Arbeau's 1589 *Orchesography*, which contains the only contemporary notation. In his guide, paired dancers engaged with a sword and shield in a series of four-person *quadrilles*. Arbeau identifies six basic movements:

- *feinte*, a leaping step without attack
- *estocade*, a linear sword thrust
- *taille haute*, a diagonal slash from right to left
- *revers haut*, a diagonal slash from left to right
- *taille basse*, a rising cut from right to left
- *revers bas*, a rising cut from left to right

The text makes clear that both swords and shields were used for contact, noting "[t]hey dance to a special tune played in double time and accompanied by the clash of the swords and shields."⁷⁸ Out of these six movements Arbeau traces different combinations for a quartet of dancers to be danced in sequence: the Three Cuts passage, Fifteen Cuts Passage, Thrust Passage, Bastion Passage, and the Hay

⁷⁷ Cited in McGowan, 31

⁷⁸ Arbeau, 183

Passage.⁷⁹ The Pyrrhic dance in *Orchesography* is set for four dancers, but the cut and thrust movements could be easily modified for solo, paired, or larger groups as it was for the Lyon performance.

A common element of the Pyrrhic dance for Henri II and the illustrations in Arbeau's text, as well as early records of *matachines*, is the presence of a shield. As theatrical prop the shield was useful for generating sound, which could be struck in time to music or simply attract attention. The shield is a conspicuous part of Early Modern English property lists, appearing repeatedly in Phillip Henslowe's notes on the business and management of the Rose Theatre.

The properties listed in Henslowe's diary date from 1598 and offer an incomplete but informative snapshot of what was in use at the theatre. The most common weapons of the prize fights – the backsword, longsword, and staff - do not appear as items in Henslowe's theatre's stock. It's possible that weapons used on stage were personal weapons of the actors: William Sly left his personal sword to Cuthbert Burbage in his will. There are no references to daggers in the lists although they certainly appear on stage, the Peachum illustration possibly of *Titus Andronicus* shows polearms and swords, while accounts of the actors traveling armed while escorting the timbers of *The Theatre* in 1599 mention weapons not indicated in the prop lists. If the argument is that early modern staging resembled prize fights because the audience was familiar and expected it, that does not seem to have translated to the objects employed. The weapons used in prizefights do not appear in the plays: in

⁷⁹ It is possible that Mercutio's line in *Romeo and Juliet*, "Ah, the immortal passado, the punto reverso, the Hay!" (2.4.26) is a reference to the Hay of Arbeau's sword dances. *Passado* and *punto reverso* were both fencing terms, while Hay or Hey has continued as a basic step in Morris dancing in which performers weave or braid themselves by passing each other on a single track.

Shakespeare a backsword is mentioned only once in *Henry IV, Part 2*, 'long sword' only once in *Romeo and Juliet*, a 'staff' more frequently but rarely as a weapon.

There is also no indication that actors themselves had any personal weapons beyond a single cheap sword: between the fact that there are no records actors competing in prize fights beyond Richard Tarleton, and no record of either playhouses or actors having the variety of weapons employed in prize fights, it seems reasonable to question in what way playhouse fights resembled prize fights.

The prop weapons that do appear on Henslowe's list point in another direction entirely. In addition to a single longsword, eight lances, seventeen foils and Neptune's Trident, the props lists include targets. These were small English shields, either square or circular, and Henslowe invested in them: nine iron, one copper, three wood, as well as a buckler and shield. These were the shields which were frequently used in sword dances and mock combats. Sword and shield were a frequent combination used for some prize fights, but the absence of the other prize weapons suggests it is possible actors may have employed shields for *matachines* or Pyrrhic-style dance rather than sparring. Toy theatre figures from the mid-century frequently feature characters with the variety of shields Victorian actors had for standard combats, suggesting they were a key part of performance. Redington's New Fours Combats, for example, were traced from John Kilby Green's Combats from 1849 and were meant to be cut out and used for small puppet theatres. The scripts for these toy theatres were substantially shortened versions of popular plays, including key dialogue and stage directions on when to swap out puppets or which combat to use.

As Robert Henke ably summarizes in his survey of the literature, Shakespeare and other early modern playwrights were aware of and interacted with the Italian performers who came to London particularly from the 1570s onwards.⁸⁰ Characters, scenarios, and even acting practice were known and exchanged with Shakespeare's early actors, including Will Kemp, Edward Alleyn and Richard Burbage. The *matachines* would have been a part of this cultural exchange, and in this light it may be worth reconsidering the emphasis on actors like Richard Tarleton and Will Kempe's relationship to swordplay and allow that both were equally famous for dance. Articles such as Ian Borden's "The Blackfriars Gladiators: Masters of Fence, Playing a Prize, and the Elizabethan and Stuart Theatre" have emphasized the relationship between actors and fencing as evidence that theatrical fencing must have resembled historical martial arts, in particular the Prize Fights. This attention is at the expense of the actors equal and better-documented relationship to dance and given the strong presence of *commedia* elements in Shakespeare's work it is possible to imagine the *matachines* also found their way into early modern English theatre.⁸¹

Combat in Popular Drama

In addition to the transition of tournaments into elaborate performances and the development of the mock combat, the third element that developed in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and fed the development of staged fights was

⁸⁰ Robert Henke, "Back to the Future: A Review of Comparative Studies in Shakespeare and the Commedia dell'Arte," *Early Theatre*, 2008, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2008)

⁸¹ Ian Borden, "The Blackfriars Gladiators: Masters of Fence, Playing a Prize, and the Elizabethan and Stuart Theatre," *Inside Shakespeare: Essays on the Blackfriars Stage* (Susquehanna University press, 2006), p132-146.

the English folk drama. These Mummer's Plays, from the German *mummer* or "disguised person," date in England to the late thirteenth century but did not take on their narrative form until several centuries later. Small groups of amateur performers wearing costumes and masks would travel from house to house and perform the short plays indoors in return for food, drink, or payment. A single night would include multiple performances in small, indoor spaces by amateur actors using readymade props. Glynn Wickham notes that "there is no evidence that permits us to suppose that women were ever included in the mummers' ranks," although the *matachines* and Pyrrhic dances we have looked at so far have been mixed gender: at some point in crossing the Channel women were removed from the dance.⁸²

The basic formula of the English folk play, as identified by E.K. Chambers, was:

- The arrival of a presenter to announce the performance and clear space
- The arrival of a Combatant (the Hero or Agonist)
- The Arrival of an Opponent, often referred to as a Slasher
- A Combat in which the Hero or Slasher is injured
- The arrival of a Doctor who will revive the injured character
- A group dance
- A request for money or gifts from the audience

Onto this formula could be grafted any number of combinations: the Hero was often St. George, the Slasher could be a Turkish Knight, Captain Slasher, Cuterman Slasher, Swish Swash and Swagger.⁸³ The Doctor sequence could be extended

⁸² Wickham, 135

⁸³ Chambers, 28

into a comic routine or a request for money from the audience to buy medicine, the group dance could involve the audience, and the post-resurrection could involve the arrival or other characters including the Slasher's Daughter, Beelzebub, Big Head, Sweeper, or Jack. It is perhaps worth noting that the basic plot structure of *Romeo and Juliet* follows the formula curiously well: A choral introduction, a Hero (Romeo), a Slasher (Tybalt) whose only narrative function is to fight the Hero, a battle between Hero and Slasher in which the Slasher falls, a Doctor (Friar Laurence) is required to revive a seemingly dead character (Juliet).

An exact timeline for the development of folk plays is difficult to produce, in part because early scholars such as E.K. Chambers ascribed to them an ancient origin rooted in death rituals:

[T]hough the plays differ in many respects, they have a common incident, in the death and revival, generally by a Doctor, of one of the characters. And in virtue of this central incident one is justified in classing them as forms of a folk-drama in which the resurrection of the year is symbolized.⁸⁴

Glynn Wickham concurs in *The Medieval Theatre*, noting that the Mummer's Play's "form is thus constant in essentials, and there is no reason to doubt that the mimetic ritual is of itself of great antiquity."⁸⁵ The extant play scripts, mostly collected in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from throughout the United Kingdom, freely mingle plot elements, characters, and even lines of text. The often-medieval tone of the plays, with references to the Crusades, suggested that these were older works that

⁸⁴ Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 207

⁸⁵ Glynn Wickham, *The Medieval Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 145. Notably on his previous page Wickham notes the difficulty of tracing scripts back before the 18th century, as well as the absence of contemporary references to Mumming or folk plays, so his "great antiquity" cannot stretch further back than the Crusades.

had been passed down orally from folk tale to ballad and finally playscript, and only transcribed late in their history.

Our focus is on the Combat sequence of the performance, and it is useful to differentiate linked sword dances from combats between characters, as scholars of Folk plays often use the two terms often without distinction. In *The English Folk Play* E.K. Chambers notes the ability of performers to extend a performance by adding, looping, or switching combats: a technique that is made much easier by having stock phrase choreography:

Sword-play, more exciting both to performers and spectators than the dialogue, is often extended. Even when there is only one combat, it may be diversified. A pardon is craved and when it is refused, the sword-play continues. The Agonist, wounded and spared by one Antagonist, is taken on and slain by another. The victorious Antagonist is vanquished in his turn by a third combatant.⁸⁶

Michael Preston echoes this interchangeable aspect of the combats, in which fighters could be swapped out, fights could be interpolated into different sections of text, and combat could be extended or shortened based on available space or audience reaction.⁸⁷ These conditions were well suited to employ the simple choreography illustrated in Arbeau's *Orchesography* and certainly known in England by the end of the sixteenth century.

Regardless of the antique origin of the Mummer's Plays, they were common in England throughout the eighteenth century and forged the link between the practice of stage combat in amateur folk drama and the rise of a new form of urban

⁸⁶ Chambers, 59

⁸⁷ Michael Preston, "The Robin Hood Folk Plays of South Central England," *Comparative Drama* Vol. 10, No. 2 (Summer 1976)

commercial theatre that featured swordplay: Pantomime. English theatres had not yet developed the class divisions of culture that would mark the nineteenth century, and Shakespeare still shared a bill with trained dog adventures, artistically posed strongmen, and Morris dances.⁸⁸

English Pantomime was a form of popular theatre that incorporated the physical performance and flexible structure of *commedia dell'arte*, told through a series of episodes featuring sensational special effects, broad comedy, simple lyrics set to popular music, and audience interaction. Seeking to offer “a New Dramatick Entertainment of Dancing, after the Manner of the Ancient Pantomimes,” and also to elevate dance and physical performance, the dancing master John Weaver staged the first show called a ‘pantomime’ as *The Loves of Mars and Venus* following a production of *The Maid’s Tragedy* in 1717.⁸⁹ Weaver employed a mixture of dance, non-textual expressive movement inspired by records of Roman *mimes*, and characters from *commedia dell'arte*.⁹⁰

Pantomime was established as a form by the 1720s, and its growth accelerated in response to the Licensing Act of 1737, which created a theatrical monopoly on spoken drama.⁹¹ Performances which featured songs and physical acts were exempt from the restrictions, and so loose narratives were drawn up that could encompass

⁸⁸ A useful high tide mark for the division of highbrow and lowbrow art in England was the 1867-69 publication of Matthew Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*.

⁸⁹ *Oh Yes It Is*, 15.

⁹⁰ Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English Pantomime is similar to its twentieth century evolution as the Christmastime Panto, but the standard form was still in flux. To distinguish it from the Panto, as well as the many performance traditions described as *pantomime*, I will be capitalizing Pantomime and using that to refer to the specific theatre tradition pre-World War I.

⁹¹ *Oh, Yes It Is* 48

animal acts, acrobatics, songs, water glasses, a rousing “God Save the King,” slack wire demonstrations, costume pageants, gymnastic exercises, juggling, and Combats. Pantomime required extensive scenery and machinery and was poorly suited for touring but appealed to mass audiences, so theatres developed in the growing urban population of industrial centers including Newcastle, Dublin, Birmingham, Southampton, Dover, and London. Pantomime was often the last performance on an evening that could include a Shakespeare or other spoken word play as well as a musical interlude. Playbills are the primary source of evidence and the many thrills the evening had to offer and could take up to two-thirds of the available print space even on evenings of double or triple bills. The Pantomime was clearly the financial draw of the evening, and the Combat was a high point of the Pantomime.

Mumming was the likely source for the most ubiquitous element of standard combat: the basket-hilted sword. Nineteenth century sources clearly differentiate a fencing sword from a stage sword, and the stage swords were likely a variety of straight blades, blunt and bated, wooden or metal, and anywhere from eighteen inches to three feet, with a woven or metal cupped basket around the hand. This basic design is conspicuous throughout stage combat visual records, particularly for pantomime and melodrama. A second style of sword with a very simple cross hilt, was also employed from at least the eighteenth century onwards, but the similar poses of actors with both shapes in toy theatres and illustrations does not indicate that the two styles were used differently.

The basket hilt design is clearly visible in the illustrations for “Speech Day at Merchant Taylor’s School: Performance of ‘Bombastes Furioso’ by the Boys in the

Hall of the School” from *The Graphic* (1891) and “The ‘Terrific Combat’ at St. Stephens: Between the Great Scotch Misunderstandables” from *Punch* (1844).

The Combats would have been assembled from stock routines that most actors were familiar with. William Hobbs discusses them in *Fight Direction for Stage and Screen*:

Going back to Victorian times, when the play demanded that the duel should be played, a number of well-known routines were often used, the most appropriate being selected as nowadays. These were referred to in the profession of that time as ‘The Square Eights,’ ‘The Round Eights,’ ‘The Glasgow Tens’ (known in England as ‘The Long Elevens’), and even one called ‘The Drunk Combat.’ All these routines were made up from a series of cuts – not cuts as we know them today, but rather whacks at the opponents blade. These could be repeated as often as required all over the stage.⁹²

A century earlier Dutton Cook offered a similar assessment:

The orchestra supplied a strongly accentuated tune, and the swords clashed together in strict time with the music. The fight raged hither and thither about the stage, each blow and parry, thrust and guard, being a matter of strict pre-arrangement. The music was hurried or slackened accordingly as the combat became more or less furious. “One, two, three, and under; one, two, three, and over;” “robber’s cuts;” “sixes” – the encounter had an abundance of technical terms.⁹³

This method of choreography was useful in the nineteenth century touring system, in which a star like Edmund Kean would tour a *Hamlet* to regional theatres with very little rehearsal time and parts filled out by the local actors, and, as Tony Wolf notes, “actors playing Macbeth and Macduff might actually have met for the first time on

⁹² Hobbs (1980), 17. Stock routines were used in Pantomime well before Victoria ascended the throne in 1837, but there is a tendency to associate the routines with Victorian theatre. In the Society of American Fight Directors, Dale Girard, H. Russ Brown, and myself have all offered classes entitled “Victorian Stock Phrases.”

⁹³ Dutton Cook, *A Book of the Play, Vol. 2* (London: Sampson Low, Maeston, Searle, & Rivington, 1876), 79-80

the afternoon before their first performance together.”⁹⁴ It is clear from the record, however, that the stock routines were not just convenient and quick. The repertoire of Drury Lane included *Lodoiska* throughout the 1810’s, and the casting a number of Combatants changed each season with a few regulars anchoring each production. Having a stock fight that could accommodate new actors, or which performers could step in and out of quickly, was just as useful as choreography that could be learned in short rehearsals with a new partner. Wolf’s description is accurate, but it has been used as a way of dismissing stock routines as a valid and successful performance strategy that was intertwined with the particular needs and audience response to Pantomime.

Combats were an integral part of Pantomime almost from its beginning, and feature heavily in advertising. They are almost always referred to capitalized as a “Combat,” and it is useful to think of these as a category of performance which existed inside of another performance but could be lifted out intact, much like *matachine*, a Bergamask Dance, or a dream ballet. The Combats appear in two overlapping categories. The first category is their textual description: there are Terrific Combats, Desperate Combats, Drunken Combats, Standard Combat, Desperate Combat, Celebrated Broad Sword Combat, Grand Standard Combat, General Attack, Shield Combat, at least one Desperate Double Combat, Furious Broad Sword Combats, and in 1844 an “unapproachably terrific combat.”⁹⁵ The

⁹⁴ Tony Wolf, *A Terrific Combat!!!: Theatrical Duels, Brawls and Battles: 1800-1920* (Lulu Press, 2009), xiii

⁹⁵ *The Merrie Mystery of King Richard the Third*, with its “unapproachable” combat, illustrates the occasional winking humor of the playbills. Closing out a triple bill with *George Barnwell* and a ballet called *The Dancing Scotchman*, *Richard* features a story breakdown – which spills over two pages –

repetition of these descriptors suggests that they were set pieces the audience would recognize as separate from the host performance. The Drunken and Standard Combats appear in different plays and were clearly recognizable on their own, and the Celebrated fights must have been reused in multiple productions. The descriptors of Desperate, Terrific, Furious may not just be advertising terms but may refer more specifically to types of choreography that included particular stock routines or tropes.

The second category of Combat is the nature of the opponents, which fall into several general groupings:

- Burlesques on existing plays, including *Don Giovanni*, *Richard III*, *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, and *Robin Hood*
- Wild or savage characters, such as *Meg Murnoch*, *Valentine and Orson*
- Historical fights, such as *Lodoiska*, *Robert the Bruce*, *Ivanhoe*, and *Timour*
- Animal fights, including lions, dogs, and bears such as *Smuggler and His Dogs* or *Red Indian* (which overlaps with the below)
- Exotic or Racial contests, such as *Cherokee Chief*, *Three Fingered Jack*, and *Karfa the Slave*
- Fantasies such as *Wizard Skiff*, *Forty Thieves*, and many *Harlequin* adventures

which summarizes: “Richard Richmond Sticketh – Richard to die declineth – Richmond persisteth – several times he stabbeth, and ultimately him killeth”

These combats range from paired duels to a “Combat of Eight” to battles advertised as filling the stage.

Printed advertisements which included Combats began to appear in the late eighteenth century. A 1789 playbill at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden for “A New Grand Serious Pantomime in Three Parts, called, *The Death of Captain Cook*” one of the earliest to advertise a Combat as part of the performance, listing “The Manner of a COMBAT between TWO NATIVES.”⁹⁶ These fights were the first in England to advertise credit to the choreographers. Despite their social visibility and status, the Angelo family’s work as fight choreographers, or their physical location with a school in the Haymarket Theatre building, neither of the fencers seem to have been listed on any surviving theatre advertising or playbills. Regular credits for artists beyond the actors would take until the middle of the nineteenth century for designers to regularly receive printed credit – particularly costume and dresses, machinery and painted backdrops, and music arrangement – but it is striking that the Angelo and Baptiste names were not used to advertise shows. It is possible that actors like Garrick wanted to leave the impression that they were actually fencing, blurring the line between character and performer. In 1876 Dutton Cook related an anecdote in support of this:

“Where shall I hit you, Mr. Kean?” inquired a provincial Laertes of the great tragedian. “Where you *can*, sir,” was the grim reply, for Kean had acquired fencing under Angelo, and was proud of his proficiency in the art. He delighted in prolonging his combats to the utmost, and invested them with extraordinary force and intensity. On some occasions he so identified himself with the character he represented as to decline to yield upon almost any terms.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ British Library Playbill Collection, Playbills 82: Covent Garden 1787-1789

⁹⁷ Dutton Cook, *A Book of the Play*, (London: Crystal Palace Press, 1876), 244

As late as 1889 the duel in Henry Irving's production of *The Dead Heart* was rumored to be improvised each night except for the final touch.⁹⁸

Starting with Weaver in the eighteenth century, the Combat in Pantomime was associated with dance, and offer a continuity of practice with the Mummer's plays and *matachines*. A 1796 playbill for *Merry Sherwood, or, Harlequin Forester* included the "GRAND DANCE of WARRIORS in the FIELD OF COMBAT," with dances "invented by Mr. Byrn."⁹⁹ By 1817 James Ridgway was credited with the Combat & Dances for a Christmas Pantomime. An 1820 playbill for "A new BALLET of ACTION and DANCE, entitled THE MASQUERADE, OR THE FATAL DOMINO" makes clear the connection with a credit for "The Dances, Combat, and incident produce, under the direction of Mr. Jackson, late of the King's Theatre."¹⁰⁰ The Combats were frequently executed by dancers: Celine Celeste, Day, Ridgway, and Charles Farley all choreographed or performed Combats as well as ballets and other dances elsewhere in the evening. Dutton Cook's description of the nineteenth-century clashes makes clear that Combats could be performed in time to music.

What is likely is that two different modes of staging fights existed concurrently on the early nineteenth century stage, with the actors code-switching

⁹⁸ Lopez provides a compelling analysis of this rumor, noting that despite the oft-cited idea that the duel was free fencing every night, there is ample evidence of choreography. See Lopez, 157-170

⁹⁹ James Byrn was a dancer and choreographer who trained under Drury Lane dance master Signior Giorgi before becoming the ballet master at Covent Garden. British Library database lsidyv3fa2ab1b

¹⁰⁰ Theatre of Arts, Lynn Street Swaffham, June 28-29, 1820. British Library Playbill Collection: Playbills 263, Plymouth Theatres 1796-1882

between performative styles. The first was the martially informed style that the Angelos had emphasized, which borrowed from martial or sport fencing for its technique, evaluation, and aesthetic. The second were the stock routines with their own recognizable physical language. One example of these possibly coexisting modes can be found on a playbill for June 2, 1828 for the Theatre Town Hall in Birmingham, which lists a triple bill of *Macbeth*, followed by the “Laughable Interlude” entitled *Manager in Distress, or, The Playhouse in an Uproar!!*, and finally *Valentine and Orson, or, The Wild Man of the Wood*. The theatre manager Mr. Bell and Mr. Carr appeared in all three shows and had two onstage sword fights that night, first as Macduff and Macbeth and then as the title characters in *Valentine and Orson*. There is no special notice given for the fights in *Macbeth*, but the playbill boasts that the “Fight betwixt Valentine and the Wild Man Is Perhaps One of the most Effective Stage Combats ever Witnessed.”¹⁰¹ For the duration of the nineteenth century advertisements for melodrama and Pantomime reliably advertised the Combat sequences, identifying the actors playing Combatants as well as describing the action, while fight direction for these spoken plays is not credited in playbills until the twentieth century, in part because of the work of the Kernoozers.

If Glynn Wickham saw no evidence of women in Mumming plays, the nineteenth century stage offered a return. These roles were often in “breeches parts,” in which women played male roles while dressed in traditionally masculine clothing: Sarah Bernhardt’s *Hamlet* (1899) and Charlotte Cushman’s *Romeo and Juliet* (1846)

¹⁰¹ British Library Playbills Collection, Playbill 285: Stroud-Tullamore 1788-1848

were high-profile examples, but parts such as Stéphano in Charles Gounod's 1867 opera *Roméo et Juliette* were written for mezzo-sopranos and given fight scenes not found in Shakespeare's play. Dublin and Newcastle saw women fighting in 1828 with a broadsword Combat added to the popular Pantomime *Valentine and Orson* and performed by Mrs. Balls, and in 1833 the ballerina Celine Celeste began a run of shows featuring Combats including *Wizard Skiff*.¹⁰²

A caption in William Hobbs *Fight Direction for Stage and Screen* suggests an erotic *frisson* by commenting that "it is easy to appreciate why such plays as *The Fencing Master's Daughter* were written for Victorian Theatre," but when women appear in advertisements for combats there is no difference from men in the way they are billed.¹⁰³ It is unclear what part Mrs. Vining played in the Combat for 1824's *The Spirits of the Moon*, but she is credited along with the other male combatants including J.S. Grimadli, son of the famous clown.

The tension between the martial and stock aesthetics of sword fights in the late Victorian period would become the project of the Kernoozers, in particular Egerton Castle and his collaboration with Henry Irving in the 1890s. By the 1920s a new style of stage combat, as exemplified by the work of Paddy Crean, had taken hold. There were still fragments of stock routines: the 1900 film of Coquelin's

¹⁰² It is possible that Celeste arranged the fights in *Wizard Skiff*, as the show is billed as "Written expressly for the peculiar talents of Mademoiselle Celeste, and the whole produced under her direction." She is partnered by Mr. Dry, who appeared in many other Combats, but with performers sharing the same stock routines the act of choreography was in selecting their order and use: this would potentially make her the first female fight director.

¹⁰³ Hobbs (1995), 18. Lisa Merrill's *When Romeo Was a Woman* gives an excellent analysis of the metatheatrical sexual dynamics of women playing male roles in cross-gender clothing and opposite female love interests, but the combat roles in Pantomime include both drag and heteronormative casting.

Cyrano de Bergerac includes modern fencing but also “an unexpected parry by swiftly passing the sword from the right hand to the left,” as Cook described in 1876. The Federal Theatre Project’s *Macbeth*, with voodoo trappings and Orson Welles’ direction, features a very brief final sword fight with two repeated sequences that look exactly like Arbeau’s notation and would not have looked out of place three and a half centuries earlier.

Multiple modes of stage combat that coexist: the ballet *Spartacus* (restaged 2019) does not feature the same approach to staging fights as the off-Broadway *Chushingura – 47 Ronin* (2022), and *The Play That Goes Wrong* (2012) requires a parody of the stock phrases from Pantomime. But the standard actor training in professional and university theatre programs will not prepare an actor for any of those three styles because it is trying to provide a standardized, realistic, martially based curriculum. And in that we can see a clear before- and after- for stage combat: Renaissance, Mummer, and Pantomime actors would each have shared a common physical vocabulary for simple, repeatable iterations of choreography that could have generally been performed in any space with any object standing in for a sword.¹⁰⁴ After the Second World War, actor training and professional choreography took a turn towards a very different aesthetic in which actors shared a common set of individual techniques which would be arranged by a professional fight director.

¹⁰⁴ A useful comparison is professional wrestling, in which a shared set of techniques, routines, and specialty moves form the foundation of both training and performance. See Sharon Mazer, *Professional Wrestling: Sport and Spectacle*; R. Tyson Smith, *Fighting for Recognition: Identity, Masculinity, and the Act of Violence in Professional Wrestling*; and Chow, Laine, and Warden, eds. *Performance and Professional Wrestling*.

Stage combat moved away from dance and towards modernist performance theory,
and the Kernoozers were the inflection point.

Chapter 2: The Victorian Duel

The climactic duel has become so commonplace that the phrase can seem redundant – duels are how stories end, and the resolution of the duel is the end of the story. Errol Flynn’s *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *The Count of Monte Cristo* (first filmed in 1913), and the Robert Downey Jr *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), amongst hundreds of other books, plays, and films, end with exciting sword fights which embody “the heroic dreams and romantic fancies that are the heart of the folk tradition of the English-speaking world.”¹⁰⁵ However, none of the original stories upon which the films were based feature a climactic sword fight. Over a relatively short time the duel developed into a new narrative structure. Because climactic fights have been placed into so many different historical contexts – from antiquity through the distant future of science fiction - it is easy to imagine that the challenge to single combat is as ancient as its many narrative settings. However, the ending climactic fight is relatively unknown in English literature and folklore before the sixteenth century. Duels as both theatrical and cultural event had a point of origin, and their intertwined development changed both the structure of stories and how audiences understood characters.¹⁰⁶ This chapter briefly explores the history of the theatrical duel, how the duel intersected with changing ideas of masculinity, and how Victorian

¹⁰⁵ Jeffrey Richards, *Swordsmen of the Screen: From Douglas Fairbanks to Michael York* (London: Routledge, 1977), 1

¹⁰⁶ Outside of the Robin Hood plays there are few theatrical examples, as discussed in the last chapter. The Arthurian stories offer medieval sources, but it would be the later Victorian revival that would invent the first meeting between Arthur and Lancelot as a fight.

artists and audiences may have understood the theatrical idea long after the cultural duel had disappeared.

The duel was a specific form of single combat, although the term is often used ambiguously to refer to any sword fight. The narrowest definition would be an event in which an offense occurs or is claimed between two socially elite men, a challenge is presented, a space and meeting time are arranged, and the characters engage in a fight with an outcome that resolves the original offense. Examples of this include the fights between Hamlet and Laertes in *Hamlet*, or Viola and Sir Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*, but this is a very limited definition. Film, television, and stage adaptation of *The Three Musketeers* are often described as full of dueling, but despite ample swordplay there is not a single proper duel. Not every sword fight qualifies as a duel, so what marks a duel for our purposes is its theatrical importance: armed combat whose outcome determines the relationship between primary characters and are significant narrative events. Duels can serve as inciting incidents, as in *The Cid* (1636); turning points as in *Romeo and Juliet* (1595); or dramatic resolution as in *The Corsican Brothers* (1852). In each of these three examples the outcome of combat affects every character in the play, and substantially changes their relationships to each other. Comedies and musicals frequently place duels at the center of stories, as in *Twelfth Night*, *The Rivals* (1775), or *Newsies* (2011), while adventure, tragedy, and historical plays over the eighteenth and nineteenth century pushed the combat further towards the end of the play until it became part of the narrative conclusion. Single combat which occurs amidst a larger battle, as in Hal and Hotspur in *King Henry IV, Part 1* or Richard and Richmond in *Richard III* should fall under this umbrella as

well: although they are not technically duels, they serve the same function within a play.

The Structure of the Duel

The boundaries of honor changed over time and are a useful metric for tracking ways in which masculinity defined and policed both borders and values. The driving engine of the duel was honor, a relatively new cultural idea in Renaissance England that transitioned from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries from social capital reflecting men's external deeds to an internal quality reflecting character.¹⁰⁷ This is not to say that honor as a social attribute was unknown before the Renaissance, but what is important to this discussion is the idea of honor starting in the sixteenth century:

Men were no longer considered honorable simply by right of birth, nor were they able to claim to be men of honor by producing a long list of heroic deeds. Rather, honor was becoming, by the seventeenth century, a matter of conscience; honorable men needed to seek, in every situation, to behave in such a way as to please both their state and their God.¹⁰⁸

It is useful to think of honor in this time not as a commodity, but as the marketplace itself: one does move around discrete units of honor, but honor could increase or decrease in relation to other people. Men interacted with each other using a code of behavior that guided their actions and interactions to the point of often arbitrary lethal

¹⁰⁷ John Tosh, "Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain 1800-19-14," *Journal of British Studies* (April 2005, Vol 44, No. 2)

¹⁰⁸ Reta A. Terry, "'Vows to the Blackest Devil': Hamlet and the Evolving Code of Honor in Early Modern England," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Winter, 1999, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Winter, 1999), 1071

encounters.¹⁰⁹ Honor only exists in relation to itself: one has more, or less, honor than another person in a situation or because of an interaction with someone else. Honor as the mechanisms of social capital was generally only available to the upper classes, and an important tool for generating, defending, and negotiating honor was the sword.

Sword fights in English culture were bound by gender and class. As discussed in the previous chapter, until Domenico Angelo encouraged women to take fencing lessons in the mid-eighteenth century (and created a space in which it was safe and socially acceptable to do so), swordplay was an almost entirely masculine behavior. Angelo's success was, in part, because he took the danger out of fencing and encouraged study as a path towards "additional strength of body, proper confidence, grace, activity, and address."¹¹⁰ That is to say that students no longer developed physical skills to defend themselves, but that they practiced defending themselves in order to develop physical skills. But Angelo was teaching his male students to fight, and the sword was still a tool to negotiate conflict and honor.

Class striations were also rigidly held, and men were only meant to duel with men in their same social level. This strict class striation can be seen in theatrical sword fights. Setting aside the various servants sent as assassins, plays which challenged the social order by featuring encounters between different classes fell out of fashion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This taboo had originally been

¹⁰⁹ Linda Pollock very usefully extends the marketplace of honor to women, noting that female honor was defined by more than sexuality. My discussion here is not with the whole breadth of Renaissance honor, but the very specific aspect connected to dueling. See Pollock, "Honor, Gender, and Reconciliation in Elite Culture, 1570-1700," *Journal of British Studies*, (Vol. 46, No 1)

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Shoemaker, 530

briefly broken primarily in Jacobean revenge tragedies such as John Ford's *Tis Pity She's a Whore* (c. 1626), in which the servant Vasques is introduced seriously wounding the gentlemen Grimaldi with conspicuous disregard for class:

Grimaldi: Why slave, think'st thou I'll balance my reputation With a Castsuit;
Call thy Master, he shall know that I dare —

Vasquez: Scold like a Cotquean (that's your Profession) thou poor shadow of
a Soldier, I will make thee know, my Master keeps Servants, thy
betters in quality and performance: Com'st thou to fight or prate?

Grimaldi: Neither with thee, I am a Roman. and a Gentleman, one that have
got Mine honor with expense of blood,

Vasquez: You are a lying Coward, and a fool, fight, or by these Hilts I'll kill
thee — brave my Lord, — you'll fight. (1.1.101-112)

Revived in 1661, the play was not professionally produced again in England until 1923 and serves as an example of plays with class-transgressive violence that had short production histories.¹¹¹ The use of intra-class violence in Jacobean drama is another example of the interest in exploring social taboos, and ought to be placed along with discussions of incest, rape, religious violence and transgression. Jacobean tragedy, marked by bed tricks and incest, poisoned skulls and Bibles, lycanthropes and madmen, disguises and deception, had very little room in its moral universe for the earnest contest of a duel between equals.

In addition to gender and class boundaries, the English duel was also racially limited. The age of honor overlapped with the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the duel as a marketplace of honor was largely limited to the white men who were allowed agency and social capital. The image of an armed non-white man was a complex

¹¹¹ Simon Baker (ed.), *Tis Pity She's a Whore* (Routledge, 1997), p. 15. Intra-class fights can also be found in Restoration plays such as Thomas Shadwell's *The Libertine* (1676) in which two Shepherds and Officer are killed in a scuffle, but this is closer to an alarum and excursion than a duel and illustrates the rake's general violence rather than a narrative or character focal point.

intersection of gender, class, and race, as skill in arms – particularly the aristocratic rapier – was symbolic of membership in a social elite as well as martial capability. Non-white figures had appeared in European fencing manuals as far back as Hans Talhoffer's 1467 and Paulus Hector Mair's 1542 German manuals, where African men in European dress are used as models for martial technique: notably, in both books the African men are depicted as both using European fighting styles and winning. The Englishman Richard Ligon's 1657 *True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, offers a record of Caribbean islanders who had learned European swordplay from colonizing Europeans:

Some of them, who have been bred up amongst the Portuguese, have some extraordinary qualities, which the others have not; as singing and fencing. I have seen some of these Portuguese Negroes, at Colonel James Drax's, play at Rapier and Dagger very skillfully, with their Steccados, their Imbrocados, and their Passes: And at single Rapier too, after the manner of Charanza, with such comeliness; as, if the skill had been wanting, the motions would have pleased you; but they were skillful too.¹¹²

Throughout the late eighteenth century there were black fencing masters living in London, including Julius Soubise who trained with Domenico Angelo and was engaged as the fencing instructor to Catherine Hyde, the Duchess of Queensbury.¹¹³

¹¹² Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, Karen Ordahl Kupperman, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2011), 103-104. Stoccado and Imbroccata were terms for thrusts in the Italian school of fencing. Intriguingly, Ligon describes this exchange "Upon their first appearance upon the stage," with the combatants slowly marching towards each other with a serious look before embracing, shaking hands, smiling and returning to their corners before starting to fence. The passage offers no more explanation, and there are layers of deep play that are impossible to decode, but it is possible that Ligon is reporting on a Caribbean performance or a parody of a European performance tradition.

¹¹³ See Ashley L. Cohen, "Fencing and the Market in Aristocratic Masculinity," in *Sporting Cultures: 1650-1850*, Daniel O'Quinn and Alexis Tadié, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018). Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina notes in passing that Soubise's "pampered and protected position in the duchess of Queensberry's household was threatened by his penchant for spending money on women, fashion, and the theater." See "Ignatius Sancho: A Renaissance Black Man in Eighteenth-Century England," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, Autumn, 1998, No. 21 (Autumn, 1998), 107

Soubise's contemporary in France, the Chevalier de Saint-Georges Joseph Bologne, was the fencing instructor to Marie Antoinette and a sparring partner of Henry Angelo: his 1828 *Memoir* included a passage praising Bologne's skill.¹¹⁴

Despite the presence of skilled trans-Atlantic fencers of African descent, there are very few literary examples of any non-white duelists. The titular general quickly subdues his soldiers in *Othello*, and Tamburlaine gets a brief skirmish, and in *Twelfth Night* Sir Toby Belch attempts to intimidate Andrew Aguecheek by boasting that the disguised Viola is a master swordsman and instructor to a Persian ruler: "They say he has been fencer / to the Sophy." (3.4.289-290). Pacific Asian exchange with Europe had begun in the 1580s with diplomatic envoys between Japan and Portugal, but it was not until the nineteenth century that Japanese martial culture made a visual or cultural impression on Europe. Representations of Pacific Asian characters on the English stage are sparse, with wide gaps between Carlo Gozzi's 1762 *commedia dell'atre* adaptation of *Turandot*, Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* in 1885, and Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* in 1904, and none of these featured duels.

The Ottoman Empire was a more pressing political presence for English audiences, and Turkish characters appeared in "nearly thirty operas about the life of Suleyman I the Magnificent in the years from 1753 through 1799 alone; similarly, forty operas about Timur, or Tamerlane, the Turik empire-builder (and/or his nemesis Bajazet, about whom Jean Racine wrote a play in 1672), appeared between 1689 to 1840."¹¹⁵ The possibility of orientalist costume and settings, with an emphasis on

¹¹⁴ Angelo (1828), 327

¹¹⁵ Timothy D. Taylor, "Peopling the Stage: Opera, Otherness, and New Musical Representations in the Eighteenth Century," *Cultural Critique*, Spring, 1997, No. 36 (Spring, 1997), 58

harems in the Suleyman story, did help to explain the fascination with Turkish settings, but combat was rare in these stories. Over the same period folk plays and sword dances featuring a Turkish antagonist to St. George became popular amateur performances in England, but the Turk was only one of many interchangeable antagonists for the English heroes.¹¹⁶

In tragedy the Turk character was largely absent. One exception is William Lower's 1639 *The Phoenix in her Flames*, which features several complicated combats including a duel between Amandus, the prince of Damascus and Perseus, the prince of Persia. Set in Arabia, the play places a love triangle into a complicated territorial and political fight as the King of Arabs, the Princess of Egypt, and a group of bandits intersect with the adventures of the princes. Both princes fall in love with the kidnapped princess, Phaenicias, and are pitted against each other by Alecto, nephew of the King. The fourth act finds the princes unwillingly coaxed into a duel over the princess Phaenicias:

Amandus: Coward, villain,

Art thou my rival in Phaenicias' love?
And do I suffer thee to breathe a minute
To utter these bold words, these defamations,
These lies and slanders: know Phaenicia hates
Thy sight as a pernicious Basilisk.
Here farther, read my mind.

*they draw and fight, Perseus
receives a hurt,*

Perseus: Thou seest my breath

Fails, if thou art a Prince, and nobly minded,

¹¹⁶ A useful study of the relationship between urban professional theatre and the rural amateur folk plays has yet to be written. Scholars following Chambers have generally excluded St. George plays from discussions of eighteenth or nineteenth century theatre, and the dramaturgical role of the doctor has received much more attention than the fights which require his care. Melodrama would bring these combats onto London stages as opportunities for elaborate spectacle, but this intersection is under-researched.

Thou wilt a little intermit the fight.
Amandus: Breathe then a little longer, though I might
Justly deny it, since we are not tied
To any such conditions in a duel:
But wherefore do you cast your fight about?
I doubt some treachery, come, I'll delay
The time no longer, there have at thee Prince.

they fight again

Guard well thy life, it is endangered.
Perseus: This may endanger thine if it hap right.

Perseus falls

I faint and die, hell light upon Alecto,
And all the furies rend his soul in pieces.
False perjurer'd villain. (*dies*)
Amandus: I do smell a plot
Laid for my life, his words betoken something,

*enter Alecto and his
associates*

Alecto: How's this! the noble Prince of Persia slain,
And his bold murderer triumphing o're
His slaughtered body? Come, my noble friend.
Shall not die unreveng'd.

*they fall upon him, he
defends himself and kills
two (Act 4)*

Lower's play is one of the only examples of non-white, Middle Eastern characters who engage in a duel of honor in the Italian mode, but as Samuel Chew notes the play is an English court tragedy reset in an exotic location: "Lower provides the usual oaths by Mahomet and such allusions to caravans and thieves as the story requires. But in general, the 'local color' is of the crudest and most rudimentary kind."¹¹⁷

In the Romantic period of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, just as Joseph Bologne was becoming a celebrity fencer in France, the idea of valor would work to tie the duel to a northern European, purely Anglo-Saxon tradition in

¹¹⁷ Samuel C. Chew, *The Crescent and The Rose: Islam and England During the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), 538

opposition to the French and Italian influence. It would take the exotic locations of melodrama to re-introduce non-white fighters to the stage.

While France could boast notorious swordsmen as late as the Revolution, England had largely given up dueling as a conspicuous activity earlier that century. As it ceased to be a functional tool of warfare the sword became an object to exercise, display, and perform masculinity. This transformation was primarily during the eighteenth century, the last age when gentlemen wore swords for functional rather than ceremonial purpose. On the English stage it is rare to find characters from different classes engaged in single combat, as the sword functioned as a tool for negotiating status within class hierarchies but was socially dangerous to employ between classes.¹¹⁸ Because it was a tool to regulate the social marketplace of honor, engagements which would prompt a challenge rarely took place between different classes: aristocrats did not recognize working class men as honorable, and it was dangerous for an aristocrat to risk their reputation by losing to a commoner. Middle classes do not seem to have adopted the habit of swordplay, and the rational respectability of the bourgeoisie was seen as a bulwark against the irrational behavior of social elites, while working classes preferred boxing and wrestling to resolve conflict.¹¹⁹ Jennifer Low notes that because fencing was associated with Italy, and therefore the well-traveled and internationally minded aristocracy, early modern middle classes saw imported fashions like fencing as a challenge to domestic values

¹¹⁸ A useful comparison in Moliere's *Bourgeoise Gentlemen*, in which Monsieur Jourdain and the maid Nicole have a comical sword exchange, which was represented in an 1864 English print by Charles Robert Leslie.

¹¹⁹ Stephen Banks, "Killing with Courtesy: The English Duelist, 1785-1845," *Journal of British Studies* (July 2008, Vol. 47, No. 3), 528

and masculinity: “the semiotics of aristocratic masculinity became literally foreign to the middling sort. The very pastimes that seemed unmanly to the middling sort appeared refined to the courtier who wished to avoid an antiquated or coarse self-presentation.”¹²⁰

Honor and the Duel

The origins of the duel are often traced back to medieval judicial combat, but the last recorded trial by combat in England was in 1492.¹²¹ Although there are a few exceptions, judicial combat was not a major part of Anglo-Saxon law: single combat as a method to resolve conflict was a learned behavior.¹²² The formal exercise of challenging another man to settle a social dispute through ritualized violence was imported to the English gentry in the 1570s from Italy and France.¹²³ The specific prompt for this may have been the 1550 Italian publication of Girolamo Muzio’s popular *Il Duello*, which set down an ethical code and practical guide for duels.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Jennifer A. Low, *Manhood and the Duel: Masculinity in Early Modern Drama and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 20

¹²¹ Douglas W. Allen and Clyde Reed, “The Duel of Honor: Screening for Unobservable Social Capital,” *American Law and Economics Review* (Spring 2006, Vol. 8, No. 1), 82

¹²² Prior to dueling the idea of single combat occurred either in the context of war (individual heroic feats) or as a challenge between commanders as an alternative to battle – “a means of avoiding the slaughter of those who have no stakes in the game,” as Margaret Ashdown notes. “The Single Combat in certain Cycles of English and Scandinavian Tradition and Romance,” *The Modern Language Review* (April, 1922, Vol. 17, No. 2), 117. This may be the narrative tradition that feeds into *Macbeth*, *Henry IV, Part 1* or *Richard III*, in which champions meet in the midst of a battle and the outcome of their engagements decide the war, but the duel as an idea seems to have emerged with few actual examples to refer to.

¹²³ Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy: 1558-1641* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 133.

¹²⁴ Barbara Holland, *Gentlemen’s Blood: A History of Dueling from Swords at Dawn to Pistols at Dusk* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003), 24.

English aristocrats, scholars and merchants traveled frequently to Italy, and “Italian influences spread from the University to the Court and from the Court to English society in general. The Tudor monarchs surrounded themselves with Italian secretaries, musicians, artists, physicians, riding-masters, fencing-masters.”¹²⁵ The ideas of honor and duels had worked their way fully to England by the publication of Sir William Segar’s *The Book of Honour and Armes* in 1590, followed by the now-necessary practical instruction manuals from the self-titled *Vincentio Saviolo his Practise, in two bookes. The first intreating of the use of the Rapier and Dagger. The Second, of honor and honorable Quarrells* as well as *Giacomo Di Grassi his true Arte of Defence* (English editions both 1594). It was against this Italian influence that the English Masters of Defense unsuccessfully pushed their more native martial arts.¹²⁶

Honor was a relatively new idea in early modern England, “a pagan concept foreign to medieval Christianity.”¹²⁷ The interplay between English and Italian cultures provided the opportunity for new ideas to develop about manhood and its relationship to the state, violence, honor, and ideas of the self. There is no clean or convenient binary between different English and Italian ideas of honor: both cultures were emerging from medieval worldviews, the English conversion to Protestantism

¹²⁵ Cecilia M. Ady, “Italian Influences on English History During the Period of the Renaissance,” *History*, January 1925, New Series, Vol. 9, No. 36 (January 1925), 292

¹²⁶ The tension between Italian and English fencers in the 1590s, particularly George Silver and Vincentio Saviolo, was played out publicly in London and forms substantial subtext for *Romeo and Juliet*. See Holmer’s “‘Draw if You be Men:’ Saviolo’s Significance for *Romeo and Juliet*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Volume 45, Issue 2, Summer 1994

¹²⁷ Paul Siegel, “Shakespeare and the Neo-Chivalric Cult of Honor,” *The Centennial Review*, (Winter 1964, Vol. 8, No. 1), 39

was still recent and fraught, and dueling flourished in the Catholic countries of Italy and France where it was theoretically the most spiritually and legally repressed. Paul Siegel identifies two contrasting modes of honor which are useful for this discussion: the Christian humanist ideal of honor, and the neo-chivalric cult of honor.¹²⁸

In the Christian humanist ideal, “the virtues of the humanistic scholar, learned from the classics and indebted to them, are united with those of the medieval knight.”¹²⁹ The medieval knight in this case was the poetic ideals of piety, austerity, and fidelity.¹³⁰ The Christian patriarchy was maintained, now transferred from a single feudal lord to the apparatus of the state: according to Cicero “glory is praise won by honorable deeds, and great services towards the state, a thing that is approved alike by the testimony of every honest man, and also by that of the multitude.”¹³¹ This shift was marked in the change from medieval “courteous” behavior with its social and etymological roots in the court to the new ideas of “civility,” now connected to the city. Duels and the individual agency they implied did not fit well in this ideal of honor: both religious and legal prohibitions against dueling shifted their arguments from morality to a critique of manhood:

Such as come to the combat upon points of honor, as men do nowadays for the most part, make not any show of their fortitude, but only their strength and ability of body, and of their courage, whereas true fortitude, is to use these gifts well and honestly according to reason.¹³²

¹²⁸ Siegel, 40

¹²⁹ Siegel, 41

¹³⁰ Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, (London: Penguin Books, 1924), 74

¹³¹ Cicero, *Philippic 1* (W.C.A. Ker, trans., 1924)

¹³² Lodowick Bryskett, *A Discourse of Civil Life*, 1606. Thomas E. Wright, ed. (Northridge: San Fernando Valley State College, 1970), 57

But the virtues of the Christian humanist ideal – “generosity, self-control, and humility” – were at stark odds with the ideals of the neo-chivalric mode of masculinity.¹³³

If the Christian tradition placed meaning in spiritual and intellectual virtues, the neo-chivalric ideal was more corporeal. This idea of honor was “concerned with maintaining the reputation for the personal courage and the spirit sensitive to anything resembling a slight.”¹³⁴ This was the form of honor that dueling manuals sought to define and - having created it – defend that idea. Rather than deference to the state or a lord, individuals were obliged to seek personal satisfaction. William Segar, the organizer of Elizabeth I’s Accession Day tilts, argued in his 1590 *Book of Honor and Arms* that a slighted gentleman “ought to ask leave of his Prince, and not obtaining it, shall without license go unto the place of Combat, and with Arms answer the Enemy; for the obligation of honor is to be preferred before all other.”¹³⁵ Dueling was not just outside the law, it was in direct opposition to state authority.

These two positions were ideals to aspire to, rather than accurate descriptions of how people historically behaved, and studies of martial culture bring with them a bias that culture is oriented around the exercise and regulation of violence. The English Renaissance was particularly violent, with the crown having no real control

¹³³ Robert C. Roberts, “Emotions among the Virtues of the Christian Life,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Spring, 1992, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring, 1992), 37

¹³⁴ C.L. Barber, *The Idea of Honor in the English Drama 1591-1700*, (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1957)

¹³⁵ Segar, 36

over an aristocracy that was able to muster its own armies and held massive private armories. These conflicts were often petty, as when Viscount Henry Howard met a sheriff on the road and “repeatedly galloped past him at full tilt in order to splash him with mud, and then knocked his hat into the puddles.”¹³⁶ Even minor slights required some response, often violent, and upper-class culture was rife with opportunity for escalation, and “it has been said that every distinguished family in England lost at least one of its members in duels in the first few years of the [seventeenth] century.”¹³⁷

The more powerful lords served as social hubs: before more widespread schooling the sons of aristocrats were sent to serve and study in the houses of more influential men, where the boys joined the retinue of servants and bodyguards and formed a spiderweb of potential conflict; this is the social world described in the opening scene of *Romeo and Juliet*: Sampson and Gregory arrive bearing the simple swords and bucklers that marked them as working class, interrupted in their altercation by Benvolio and Tybalt’s with their *nouveau riche* and foreign rapiers (identified later in 1.5.61), prompting Citizens to call for “Clubs, bills, and partisans,” which arouses Lord Capulet to call for his long sword, one of only two uses of the term in Shakespeare’s plays.¹³⁸ This rapid escalation culminates in the arrival of the

¹³⁶ Stone, 109

¹³⁷ Waggoner, 304

¹³⁸ Syndey Anglo notes that “sword and buckler play was more the preoccupation of the common man and city dweller than of the knightly classes,” (Anglo, *Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe*, 22) which is borne out in the comic juxtaposition of Falstaff and his small shield, or Hotspur dismissing Hal as “that same sword-and-buckler Prince of Wales” (*Henry IV, Part 1*, 1.3.238.). Joan Ozark Holmer offers an excellent cultural history for rapiers in “‘Draw if you be men’: Saviolo’s Significance for *Romeo and Juliet*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, (Vol. 45, Summer 1994, Number 2.)

Prince, and in just fifty-five lines, from Sampson drawing his blade at 1.1.34 to the Prince's call to "Throw your mistempered weapons to the ground," in 1.1.89, an entire society from servants to rulers have become embroiled in public violence.. The duel helped channel this aggression into interpersonal exchanges, rather than escalating into group conflict. Sword culture created a subtext for the social interactions of men; what is important is the way these ideas framed the way men thought of themselves and the ways in which men used dueling to perform masculinity.

Like all social patterns, participation was mixed: not every knight and yeoman in England subscribed to these ideas or answered an insult with a drawn sword. Shakespeare's plays show an ambivalence towards honor itself, as in Touchstone's burlesque of the intricate rules for navigating a quarrel inspired by Vincentio Saviolo's fencing manual:

Jaques: But for the seventh cause. How did you find the quarrel on the seventh cause?

Touchstone: Upon a lie seven times removed.—Bear your body more seeming, Audrey.—As thus, sir: I did dislike the cut of a certain courtier's beard. He sent me word if I said his beard was not cut well, he was in the mind it was. This is called "the retort courteous." If I sent him word again it was not well cut, he would send me word he cut it to please himself. This is called "the quip modest." If again it was not well cut, he disabled my judgment. This is called "the reply churlish." If again it was not well cut, he would answer I spake not true. This is called "the reproof valiant." If again it was not well cut, he would say I lie. This is called "the countercheck quarrelsome," and so to "the lie circumstantial," and "the lie direct."

Jaques: And how oft did you say his beard was not well cut?

Touchstone: I durst go no further than the lie circumstantial, nor he durst not give me the lie direct, and so we measured swords and parted.

Jaques: Can you nominate in order now the degrees of the lie?

Touchstone: O sir, we quarrel in print, by the book, as you have books for good manners.

As You Like It (5.4.69-94)

The books of civility and dueling manuals set up complicated chains of social dependence, with men often obliged to answer for someone else's honor because of kinship. The tragic chain of events in *Romeo and Juliet* is entirely due to men being affronted on someone else's behalf: Tybalt challenges Romeo despite Lord Capulet's dismissal of the affront (1.5), Mercutio challenges Tybalt on behalf of Romeo, Romeo kills Tybalt on behalf of Mercutio (both 3.1), and finally Paris accosts Romeo on behalf of the Prince (5.3). None of the four men are personally insulted by the person they end up quarreling with, and yet all four end up dead. The final image of the play, with two fathers in a tomb standing over the bodies of an entire generation of children and the end of their hereditary lines, might have seemed to an Elizabethan audience as a warning against the possible outcome of honor that could only be policed by force.

Likewise, chivalric service to a lord may have been suited to knights of the round table, but early modern men were well-aware of the realities of war as contrasted to classical ideals. War did not distinguish between classes: in *King Henry IV, Part I* Falstaff dismisses his mustered troops as "good enough to toss; food for powder, food for powder. They'll fill a pit as well as better." (IV.ii.66-68). Thomas Otway's *A Soldier's Fortune* opens with two former soldiers bickering about being poor because the army brought them no heroics, and deserting the army has left them poor – "Loyalty and starving are all one," quips the hero Captain Beaugard. Before they hatch their plan to improve their financial standing by becoming pimps, the Captain begins a scathing attack on the misfortunes of military service:

Beaugard: A Curse on the Fates! Of all Strumpets Fortune's the basest, 'twas

Fortune made me a Soldier, a Rogue in Red, the grievance of the Nation, Fortune made the peace just when we were upon the brink of a War-, then Fortune disbanded us, and lost us two Months pay: Fortune gave us Debentures instead of ready Money, and by very good Fortune I sold mine, and lost heartily by it, in hopes the grinding ill-natur'd dog that bought it will never get a shilling for't. (1.1)

Otway's disenchantment with the military and the fantasy of valor was well-earned: the playwright had himself served in the Netherlands in 1678 but his unit disbanded before it saw service, were paid in devalued paper money, and abandoned to hitchhike back to London – a journey which took the destitute Otway the better part of 1679.

The ideals of honor may have stayed philosophical debates were it not for a revolutionary change in material culture. Along with the rhetoric of personal honor and dueling, the Renaissance also saw the arrival of a new technology that would suit urban personal encounters better than battlefield swords: the rapier. Developed in the mid sixteenth century as improvements in metallurgy allowed for lighter and stronger blades, the rapier became the physical object through which honor could be negotiated.¹³⁹ These swords were not meant for military use:

A rough classification of swords may be made by dividing them into two sections: - "war swords" and "dueling swords." This division is, however, a little difficult to define accurately, for although "cutting" or "broad-swords" were usually employed in war, "cut and thrust" swords or " rapiers " were frequently carried by gentlemen when on military service. The distinction became more clearly marked as time went on, and in the 17th and 18th centuries the "sword of point" had become the weapon of a gentleman in his private life.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Sydney Anglo offers a useful taxonomy of the word 'rapier,' which was not in popular use even through the early seventeenth century, but which came to cover the category of personal thrusting weapons. See Anglo, 99-102

¹⁴⁰ C.C.S. Parsons, "The Hilt of the Rapier and its Successors," Transactions of the Glasgow Archaeological Society, 1910, New Series, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1910), 178

In interpersonal conflict, the outdated broadsword “allowed the maximum muscular effort and the most spectacular show of violence with the minimum threat to life and limb.”¹⁴¹ The thinner swords excelled at puncture injuries, which were more difficult to treat than many battlefield wounds; the emphasis on thrusting was better suited to busy urban environments rather than an open battlefield; and the lighter blades were faster and did not need to stand up to the sustained impact of warfare.

The rapier became a performative part of everyday wear, as opposed to swords of war which might have stayed in a feudal armory until needed. As a part of this performativity, the visible part of the sword - the hilt - grew in complexity and importance with swept, ringed, crossed, and cup designs all moving in and out of style. These bright hilts were particularly noticeable against the frequently dark background of Elizabethan fashion. The increasingly complex hilts allowed for conspicuous and elaborate displays of wealth:

The decorative techniques used [for swords] during the Renaissance were those also used in other areas of the arts: etching, engraving, nielloing, enameling, carving, chiseling, inlaying, damascening, encrustation, gilding, silvering, and casting in bronze, gold and silver. Precious and semi-precious stones were used too. Materials such as bone, horn, ivory and tooled leather were regularly employed.¹⁴²

Swords for strictly personal protection could be had for cheap: in 1596 the actor Gabriel Spencer was involved in a fatal altercation wielding a sword valued at five shillings – roughly the value of a good pair of gloves.¹⁴³ The decorative aspects of

¹⁴¹ Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 118

¹⁴² Michael D. Coe, et al *Swords and Hilt Weapons*, (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc, 1993), 57

¹⁴³ T.F. Ordish, *Early London Theatres*, (London: E. Stock, 1894), 195. The playwright Ben Johnson would famously stab and kill Spencer in 1598 – with a sword worth only three shillings.

rapiers were as important as their martial function: the development of dueling as a social habit was tied to the materiality of these swords. Wearing a rapier in public was not just a matter of personal protection, but also signified your participation in dueling culture and by extension membership in honorable society.

This performative masculinity and the wearing of swords was widespread among those who could afford it or aspired to status. Despite the vagabond status of the theatre, many of the London playwrights came from privilege and would have had social access to arms: Thomas Heywood, Robert Green, Christopher Marlowe, and Philip Massinger were all university educated, where they would have learned “aspects of dress, swordplay, and comportment.”¹⁴⁴ Thomas Lodge and John Marston were trained in law, while Beaumont and Fletcher were the sons of a knight and bishop respectively. Ann Cook notes that Shakespeare, along with actors Richard Burbage, John Hemmings, and Augustine Phillips all acquired coats of arms, indicating membership in the gentry but not nobility.¹⁴⁵ They had access to personal arms and did carry them: Christopher Marlowe crossed blades with the innkeeper William Bradley in 1589 and the actor Richard Robinson died in a sword fight in 1648. Throughout the court documents on these encounters the men are referred to as ‘gentlemen,’ a designation that is more useful to think of as possessing honor rather than owning land.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Victor Morgan, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2004), 134

¹⁴⁵ Ann Cook, *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare’s London 1576-1642* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 122

¹⁴⁶ For a useful summary see John Lennox, *Stage Combat Swordplay from Shakespeare to Present* (self-published dissertation), 49-56

These encounters are notably rare, but they do indicate that a wide range of men ended up in lethal encounters not because of crime or a need for protection, but because of personal slights. Even Marlowe's death in 1593, stabbed in the eye in a tavern, although likely the result of career in espionage was plausibly explained away at the time as a quarrel over the bill. Honor was a way to regulate the social and political relationships of men, and duels were a method of performing those obligations. Duels introduced a practical path by which gentlemen could settle differences individually rather than through faction warfare or group skirmishes, and outside of official or state channels. This is particularly illustrated in John Selden's 1610 *The Duello, or Single Combat*, which like William Segar's *Book of Honour and Armes* used classical and Biblical examples of single combat to justify duels to settle the "debate of private interests."¹⁴⁷ This appeal to individual autonomy was an important aspect of the duel, as it allowed aristocratic men powerful personal agency as authority and control were increasingly centralized to the state.¹⁴⁸ Robert Shoemaker also notes that

With the development of the urban gentleman, whose status depended on his money, appearance, and conduct, rather than land and a coat of arms, many men, particularly the military officers whose numbers increased so dramatically in the eighteenth century, sought to confirm their membership in elite society-- and the duel provided a means of demonstrating that status.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Cited in Ira Clark, "Writing and Dueling in the English Renaissance," *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 1995, Vol. 7 (1995), 277. While subsequent scholars have attempted to place dueling within an English or Scandinavian legal tradition, writers at the time including Seldon and Segar saw the root in classical – and usually Mediterranean - culture.

¹⁴⁸ David Quint, "Dueling and Civility in Sixteenth Century Italy," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 1997, Vol. 7 (1997), 233

¹⁴⁹ Shoemaker 526

This sets up a central paradox to the practice of dueling: although duels were apparently fought to defend public reputations, they were increasingly fought in private.¹⁵⁰ The whole purpose of a duel was to defend or increase honor, which required recognition from a larger social community, but their secrecy required a method to communicate the provocation, response, and outcome. Duels were essentially performances, and they required an audience to function. This led to a network of print records, published challenges in newspapers, public letter exchanges to present accusation and apology, visual representations and cartoons, accounts in literature and ballads, and theatrical productions which allowed audiences to engage with duels and duelists.

One of these avenues was the theatre, which both hosted prize fights and began to incorporate duels into dramatic action. Italian fencers in London, notably di Grassi and Saviolo, generally avoided prize fights as they were not bound by the guild laws and as expatriates did not have to prove themselves to achieve ranks or operate their schools. Because dueling was a material and cultural import from Italy, and because the English Masters of Defense who hosted the prizes were professionally and ideologically opposed to the new Italian fashion, it is useful to think of the prize fights in opposition to dueling culture rather than as an inspiration for it.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Shoemaker, 536

¹⁵¹ There are no records of prize fights or the Masters of Defense after 1590. This may simply be because the documents are lost to time, or that Elizabeth I was not as interested in supporting civic swordplay as her father. But it may also suggest that the widespread dueling culture that arrived at the end of the century made the older guild's approach to swordplay unfashionable, and without an economic base of students to support them, the Masters closed up shop.

Duels began to appear in dramatic literature in the late sixteenth century, just as they arrived in English culture, when the writers, audience, and characters were all navigating the new ideals of masculine behavior. But duels were not just a political or cultural idea to discuss within plays, they gave a new shape to stories themselves:

Duels, self-contained dramas with a beginning, a middle, and an end, seem particularly hospitable to literature. Writers are drawn to duels, in the interests of discovering something fundamental about human beings and the way they variously organize and delude themselves, the way they face one another, their fears, and, ultimately, death.¹⁵²

In his discussion of late medieval folk plays, Chambers argues that “[m]odern drama arose, by a fairly well defined line of evolution, from a threefold source, the ecclesiastical liturgy, the farce of the mimes, the classical revivals of humanism. Folk drama contributed but the tiniest rill to the mighty stream.”¹⁵³ Chambers may have been right that English renaissance drama owed its narrative and performance structures to the traditions he listed, but none of these three performance traditions featured swordplay, duels, or even mock battles. Part of the rills he mentions were the mock fight of tournaments and the folk combat plays discussed in the last chapter. Chambers and the scholars who followed his model were focused on finding a ritual past for folk plays as metaphors for death and resurrection, and in doing so missed the substantial contribution they made to the creation and development of the stage fight as dramatic device.

¹⁵² John Leigh, *Touche: The Duel in Literature* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2015), 2

¹⁵³ Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, 182

Seneca and Violence

There is a tendency to see the violence of Elizabethan drama as an extension of classical playwrights, and in particular the Roman Seneca, or as T.S. Eliot quipped: “when an Elizabethan hero or villain dies, he usually dies in the odor of Seneca.”¹⁵⁴ B.R. Rees argued that “[t]he influence of Seneca’s tragedies is now a commonplace: it was Seneca, not Aeschylus, Sophocles, or even Euripides, who provided the classical models for Renaissance and Elizabethan Tragedy.”¹⁵⁵ Jessica Winston in turn documents two waves of popularity following English translations of Seneca in the 1560s and again in the 1580s, particularly around the London Inns of Court.¹⁵⁶ It is worth briefly examining Seneca because he is often cited as the literary inspiration for Elizabethan violence. I suggest separating the duel from this explanation, as the arrival of the theatrical duel in between the two great waves of Senecan popularity mark the arrival of a very different influence on English theatre.

Seneca’s influence is often traced to two specific trends, or as Henry Wells laments “Elizabethan drama owes its admittedly worst defects, namely, violence of action and affectation of phrase...to the Roman playwright.”¹⁵⁷ The ten plays attributed to Seneca were in English translation beginning in 1559 with John Heywood’s translation of *Troades*. and all ten plays were collectively published in

¹⁵⁴ T.S. Eliot, “Seneca and Elizabethan Translation,” reprinted in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; 2015), 219.

¹⁵⁵ B.R. Rees, “English Seneca: A Preamble,” *Greece & Rome* (Vol. 16, No. 2; Oct., 1969), 119

¹⁵⁶ Jessica Winston, “Seneca in Early Elizabethan England,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, (Vol. 59, No. 1; Spring 2006)

¹⁵⁷ Henry W. Wells, “Senecan Influence on Elizabethan Tragedy: A Re-Estimation,” *The Shakespeare Association Bulletin*; Vol. 19, No. 2 (April, 1944), 71

1581 in Thomas Newton's *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies*.¹⁵⁸ The descriptive nature of the plays and the emphasis on psychology and character rather than action or spectacle made them particularly suited for staged readings in amateur productions by the lawyers of the Inns of Court, who would have encountered the plays as Latin translation exercises at university.¹⁵⁹ Written in the Roman five-act format, the first English tragedy, 1561's *The Tragedy of Gorboduc*, owes both language and structure to Seneca and helped to set the mold for subsequent playwrights.

Many of Seneca's plays deal specifically with violence or its consequences: *Medea* tells the story of the infanticide of Jason and Medea's children, *Troades* explores the human sacrifices required by the spirit of Achilles following the Trojan War, *Agamemnon* plays out the return of the king from Troy and his murder by Clytemnestra and her lover, while *Thyestes* explores the origin of the curse of Atreus and the meal of Thyestes' own sons served to their unknowing father. Unlike the Greek plays they often emulated, Roman plays placed more emphasis on violence but still did not place that action onstage. *Gorboduc* follows this model of referring to violence without staging it through a symbolic dumb show preceding each act. The final act begins:

First the Drums and Flutes, began to sound, during which there came forth upon the Stage a company of Harquebusiers and of Armed men all in order of Battle. These after their Pieces discharged, and that the Armed men had three times marched about the Stage, departed, and then the Drums and Flutes did

¹⁵⁸ Two of the plays, *Hercules Oetaeus* and *Octavia* are now recognized to not be Seneca's.

¹⁵⁹ Winston, 29. *Gorboduc* had a second performance in mid-January 1561 for Elizabeth I, predating the elaborate competitions and combats at the Accession Day tilts.

cease. Hereby was signified tumults, rebellions, Arms, and civil wars to follow... (Dumbshow before Act 5)¹⁶⁰

The 1561 performance of *Gorboduc* was specifically trying to recreate a very different theatrical tradition than the contemporary folk plays - a class division between the elite education of the Inns of Court and the common roots for Robin Hood and other folk plays.

Although Seneca's plays are noted for their violence, there are two important distinctions. The first is that the violence is entirely descriptive – there is no possibility within the plays to perform the violence, as it is always reported or described by other characters. This is partially a theatrical convention in which classical violence always remains offstage, and partially a stylistic choice: as M.J. Mans notes, “In Seneca's portrayal of the macabre scenes rhetoric clearly played a very important role. The detailed descriptions of terrifying deaths and atrocities accounted for as a tour de force to show off the author's rhetorical dexterity.”¹⁶¹

The second distinction is that violence in Seneca's plays is almost always a form of domestic murder rather than martial contest. The only exception to this in Seneca is *Phoenissae*, which explores the period between Oedipus' blinding and exile and the conflict between his sons Polynices and Eteocles for control of Thebes. The final act of the play is missing and could potentially have included some form of the battlefield confrontation between the two brothers. It is notable that none of the classical stories of single combat: Hector and Achilles, the Horatii, or the sons of Oedipus were adapted into English plays. Classical single combat, or any form of a

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, *The Tragedy of Gorboduc*, Irby B. Cauthen, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 58

¹⁶¹ M.J. Mans, “The Macabre in Seneca's Tragedies,” *Acta Classica*, 1984, Vol. 27, 114

duel, is entirely absent from Seneca and other classical sources. The attribution of Senecan violence to Elizabethan and later Jacobean plays may be true in dialogue, but not in action.

Seneca certainly did influence some aspects of early modern theatrical violence: *Medea* includes the onstage death of one of Jason and Medea's sons, the blinding of *Oedipus* is vividly described as "A hideous shower drenches his face and his mangled brow spouts streams of blood from his bursting veins," while *Thyestes* includes the unwitting cannibalism of Thyestes' sons - moments of staging which would go on to be reworked in *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Titus Andronicus* and Dekker and Middleton's *The Bloody Banquet*.¹⁶² Unlike their Greek inspiration, Roman tragedy did feature onstage violence – the suicide of Jocasta in *Oedipus* and the son's death in *Medea* – but the idea of the single combat was not a classical theatrical idea.¹⁶³

Seventeenth Century Dueling in England

Individual fights in plays arrived in the wake of the new Italian idea about honor, and single combats began to emerge out of stage battles in the 1580s. Many of these early battles were merely processions, rather than staging events, as in *Gorboduc* or when "entrances to battle are exits from the stage."¹⁶⁴ As Charles

¹⁶² *Oedipus* translated by Miller, 1917.

¹⁶³ M. J. Mans, among others, offers that Roman audiences may have had little use for realism in theatrical violence when there were blood sports and executions easily accessible. Mans, 101

¹⁶⁴ Alfred Harbage, *Theatre for Shakespeare*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955), 52

Edelman notes, “most poets...preferred much of their fighting to be done offstage.”¹⁶⁵

Robert Greene’s c.1588 *Comical History of Alphonsus, King of Aragon* features the stage direction “*Enter Flaminus at one door, Alphonsus at an other, they fight, Alphonsus kills Flaminus,*” while *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (c.1589), *The Jew of Malta* (c.1590), and *Orlando Furioso* (c.1590) feature the first rapier fights.

Because stage fights were developing as a theatrical idea in parallel with a nascent social practice, political shifts around dueling were reflected in the plays. Late Elizabethan and early Jacobean theatre feature extensive duels but began to decline in the second decade of the 1600s. Elizabeth I had maintained a wary interest in the vigorous martial culture pushed by her father, and had worked throughout her reign to reduce the military and political power of the aristocracy. Despite this consolidation of state authority over violence, the queen had largely turned a blind eye to dueling: “since Elizabeth found it prudent not to take vigorous action against the nobility except when open rebellion seemed imminent or had actually occurred, she was force to turn a blind eye to much sporadic violence among her courtiers and their followers.”¹⁶⁶ Her successor James I did not share her caution, and turned the machine of state against dueling. His reign saw a shift of legal and court attitudes towards dueling, starting in 1600 when he was king of Scotland with a law making it murder to kill someone in a duel without royal sanction.¹⁶⁷ James became king of England in 1603, and in late 1613 added “A Proclamation prohibiting the publishing

¹⁶⁵ Charles Edelman, 11

¹⁶⁶ Stone, 112

¹⁶⁷ A.W. Renton and M.A. Robertson, *Encyclopedia of the Laws of England*, vide *Duel*, 2nd edition (London, 1907), Volume V, 27-28

of any reports or writings of Duels.”¹⁶⁸ This first edict offered legal, political, and social consequences:

When our Marshals have settled a quarrel it should be regarded as extinct, whereas these writings are but fresh provocations. Anyone putting in writing or publishing anything relating to such a matter will be punished at discretion in the Star Chamber, banished from Court for seven years, and accounted by the King (his heaviest punishment) as a coward whose reputation is but *per emendicata suffragia* among the ordinary.¹⁶⁹

The escalation of criminal action to the Star Chamber was an attempt to reverse the disinterest of Elizabeth and bring dueling under the highest state authority. Men who had used duels to put themselves outside of the royal legal system were now being required to literally ‘beg for approval’ from the state. A second proclamation in February of 1614 brought a full ban on duels in England:

Dueling so much increased, neglecting the Court of Chivalry and the Civil Courts, that no gentleman is esteemed valiant who has not put himself upon proof, ‘either in S. Georges fields, or at Finsbury.’ The King is not ignorant of the excuses, as for example the Lie the most exorbitant of wrongs, yet the law does not give satisfaction for it. Duels must be stopped. After forty days no one is to send challenges.¹⁷⁰

It is unclear why James’ proclamations were successful, but Jacobean dueling did noticeably decline. Lawrence Stone notes that the court became an increasingly popular way to settle personal grievances, rather than St. George’s Fields or Finsbury:

A consequence of the decline of violence was an astonishing growth of litigation. Societies being weaned from habits of private revenge always turn to the law with intemperate enthusiasm, but by any standards the growth of litigation between 1550 and 1625 was something rather exceptional. In the

¹⁶⁸ Robert Steele, ed. *A Bibliography of Royal Proclamations of the Tudor and Stuart Sovereigns and of others published under authority, 1485-1714* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 133

¹⁶⁹ Ibid

¹⁷⁰ Steele, 134. Both named locations were just outside more strict jurisdictions: Finsbury lay just north of the City of London, and St. George’s Fields was in the disputed legal area of Southwark.

common-law courts the number of plea rolls *per annum*...suggests a sixfold increase for the Common Pleas and a doubling for the King's Bench. Cases brought before the Courts of Request and Star Chamber appear to have multiplied at least tenfold over the same period.¹⁷¹

Perhaps the greatest change in James' time was a shift in the rhetoric around duels, and a decline in the neo-chivalric ideal. "The opposition of the King and his general condemnation of dueling – as well as his use of the courts against it – led...to a decline in dueling or, at any rate, to a shift in the nature of public statements concerning the duel by those around the Court and the theatre."¹⁷²

Playwrights noted which way the royal favor was blowing, and theatrical representations of duels changed after 1615. James I was the royal patron of the King's Men acting company, which had previously been the Lord Chamberlain's Men in Elizabeth I's reign. The writers Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher took over primary writing duties for the company, sometimes in collaboration with Philip Massinger. G.R. Waggoner notes that "in all the plays certainly written before 1615 there is no scene in which the duel is unfavorably depicted. In all of the plays written after 1615 when there is discussion of dueling there are pleas made against it."¹⁷³ This assertion is based on the survey done by Baldwin Maxwell, who argues that "Whereas in the early plays the valiant had been quick to draw their swords in defense of their reputation and none but cowardly pretenders sought escape, in these

¹⁷¹ Stone, 117

¹⁷² G.R. Waggoner, "Timon of Athens and the Jacobean Duel," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Autumn, 1965, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Autumn, 1965), 303

¹⁷³ Waggoner, 304

later plays the truly valiant often both condemn dueling and seek to dissuade their challengers.”¹⁷⁴

Examples include *The Lover’s Progress*, in which the character of Lisander manages to halt a duel between Clarange and Lidian by appealing to their friendship rather than honor. Interrupting the pair just as they have drawn and Clarange has cried “Have at your life then,” Lisander offers an appeal to their emotions:

View him, as you reported him; survey him,
Fix on your friendship Sir, I know you are noble,
And step but inward to your old affection;
Examine but that soul grew to your bosom,
And try then if your sword will bite, it cannot,
The edge will turn again, asham’d, and blunted. (2.1)

Lisander does go on to fight two duels of his own, but ends the play with the character’s appeal to patriarchal authority:

...to the king,
To whom I stand accountable for the loss
Of two of his lov’d subjects lives, I’ll offer
Mine own in satisfaction; to Heaven
I’ll pay my true repentance; to the times
Present and future I’ll be register’d
A memorable precedent to admonish
Others, however valiant, not to trust
To their abilities to dare and do. (V.ii)

Lucy Munro’s observes that “Sword-fights are relatively rare in plays written for indoor playhouses,” and this shift in royal rhetoric helps to explain why.¹⁷⁵ As the writers associated with the king’s own company, Beaumont, Fletcher, and Massinger

¹⁷⁴ Maxwell Baldwin, *Studies in Beaumont, Fletcher, and Massinger* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), 102

¹⁷⁵ Lucy Munro, “Actors, Plays and Performances in the Indoor Playhouses, 1625–42: Boy Players, Leading Men and the Caroline Ensemble,” *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 44, Caroline Literature (2014), 60

were unlikely to valorize dueling in the new political climate, but it is worth noting that they were continuing a trend that had started early in James' reign. William Shakespeare had been the leading playwright of the company through the first decade of the century, and his later plays had largely set aside the battles and duels that featured heavily up through 1606's *Macbeth*. Of his nine later works there are only brief armed exchanges in *Coriolanus*, *Two Noble Kinsmen*, and *Cymbeline*.

In addition to the King's Men, the writers for Prince Charles' Men also adjusted their plays to suit the new political climate. The quarto edition of Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's 1617 collaboration *A Fair Quarrel* features an illustration of two men dueling, a reference to the Act 3 fight between Captain Ager and the Colonel. In a series of meetings, the two men repeatedly provoke each other while goaded on by comic seconds, and in doing so poke fun at the various causes of duels. The third act begins with the Captain and Colonel, as well as their Friends, attempting to start a duel without success. The Colonel comically draws and re-sheaths his sword repeatedly as Captain Ager refuses to give him an actual cause, while the seconds constantly interrupt to press the officers to fight. The deadly decorum of plays like *Romeo and Juliet*, only twenty years prior is rendered absurd, and once a fight finally does start the seconds offer confused commentary:

First Friend of Captain Ager: An absolute punto, hay!

Second Friend of Captain Ager AGER: 'Twas a passado, sir.

First Friend of Captain Ager: Why, let it pass, and 'twas; I'm sure 'twas somewhat.

What's that now?

Second Friend of Captain Ager: That's a punto.

First Friend of Captain Ager: Oh, go to, then; I knew 'twas not far off. What a world's this! (3.1.)

The play specifically mentions the 1614 edicts against dueling by James I and Francis Bacon, with the Colonel referring to “an invective lately against fighting” as he weighs how to start a fight with Ager. *A Fair Quarrel* has several sword fights, all of which prove to be caused by misunderstandings, deception, or social pressure. Once the various plots are wound up and Ager is happily betrothed to the Colonel’s sister, the final lines of the play make clear that the title’s ‘fair quarrel’ is not an honorable exchange, but a fortunate outcome:

This day has shown me joy's unvalued treasure;
I would not change this brotherhood with a monarch,
Into which blessed alliance sacred heaven
Has placed my kinsman, and given him his ends:
Fair be that quarrel makes such happy friends.

The play borrows from *commedia* and takes the tragic structure of the duel, with conflict and consequence, and places it into a comic format where the Colonel revives from an injury, fights are replaced by the stability of friendship and marriage, servants teach their masters a valuable lesson, and ‘roaring’ characters are pacified.

Dueling was a male activity, as well as a tool for displaying and performing masculinity, but there were women who transgressed the boundaries of both gender presentation and martial agency. Cross-dressing enjoyed a brief vogue in the early 1600s, and “casual references to the way in which sexual differences were no longer strictly observed in women's dress begin to appear in satires in relation to the popular subject of ‘degree, priority, and place’ in society.”¹⁷⁶ Clothing was a signifier of both class and gender, and the sword was a conspicuous element of that presentation. In

¹⁷⁶ Clark, 161

addition to his edicts on dueling, in 1620 James I had weighed in on cross-dressing and the accompanying bearing of arms with an exhortation to preachers to speak out “against the insolence of our women, and their wearing of broad brimmed hats, pointed doublets, their hair cut short or shorn, and some of them stilettoes or poniards, and such other trinkets of like moment.”¹⁷⁷ That same year the pamphlet *Hic Mulier* criticized the ‘man-women’ of the title for exchanging “for needles, swords.”¹⁷⁸ The contemporary ballad “Will Bagnall’s Ballet” quipped that “They at their sides, against our laws, / With little poniards go; / Which surely is, I think, because / They love men's weapons so.”¹⁷⁹ The goal of this paper is not to dive into the gender or sexual politics of cross-dressing, but rather to note that cross-dressing plays created opportunities for female characters to engage in duels.

Women in Early Modern Duels

Women sword fighters appear in a small number of plays between 1600 and 1640: among them are Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Maid’s Tragedy* and *Love’s Cure, or The Martial Maid*, Heywood’s *The Fair Maid of the West*, Middleton and Dekker’s *The Roaring Girl*, with Shakespeare’s *Henry VI, Part 1* an early outlier in 1591. Of these six plays, only *The Roaring Girl* and *Henry VI* features fights with female-presenting characters; the others are all disguised as

¹⁷⁷ *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, II, 286, cited in Clark.

¹⁷⁸ Anonymous, *Hic Mulier*, (London, 1620). Cited in Matt Carter, “‘Untruss a Point’—Interiority, Sword Combat, and Gender in *The Roaring Girl*,” *Early Theatre*, 2018, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2018), 88

¹⁷⁹ Undated and anonymous, cited in Sandra Clark, “‘Hic Mulier,’ ‘Haec Vir,’ and the Controversy over Masculine Women,” *Studies in Philology*, Spring, 1985, Vol. 82, No. 2 (Spring, 1985), 171

men. Three of the plays, *Twelfth Night*, *The Fair Maid of the West*, and *Maid's Tragedy* all include fights in which the female characters are unskilled, win because of their opponent's unmanly submission, or use the duel as a form of suicide. *The Maid's Tragedy* is the only tragedy, and the only play discussed here to put its duel in the fifth act climax.

Jennifer Low cautions that these examples are not necessarily transgressive: "female dramatic characters who engage in duels are represented neither as transcending their sex nor as violating its nature: instead they seem to accept the female role as a uniquely instructive one, using the combat as a didactic tool."¹⁸⁰ In each case the women enter masculine space and use dueling as a tool to teach men to behave honorably; although the end product of each fight is ultimately to benefit men, the image of women with swords – particularly *The Martial Maid* – did help destabilize the idea of swordplay as a purely masculine behavior.

It is important to note that while modern productions may make use of the erotic visual possibilities of these characters, particularly in the advertising and costuming of the actresses' bodies, early modern female fencers were not generally heteronormatively sexualized. Rather, "her male colleagues or attackers might register surprise at her ability to fight, but once she establishes her martial arts skills they treat her like one of the guys."¹⁸¹ This empowerment does not extend beyond

¹⁸⁰ Jennifer Low, *Manhood and the Duel*, 139. Low's otherwise excellent analysis tends to emphasize an intersex identity rather than exploring the ways in which cross-dressing characters could maintain the presented identity of one gender while maintaining the external codes of another gender: playing with tension between the gender identities rather than androgynous possibilities.

¹⁸¹ Wendy Arons, "Violent Women in the Hong Kong Kung Fu Film," in *Reel Knockouts*, Martha McCaughey and Neal King, eds. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 31

dueling, however: women are not able to leverage the use of arms to higher social status or increased honor, only to make up for lost honor or defend against threats to chastity. Women who fight may have the physical ability, but they are excluded from the marketplace of honor for which dueling is a proxy.

Transvestism and swordplay seem to have been major themes around 1620. The anonymous 1620 play *Swetnam, the Woman-Hater Arraigned by Women* was inspired by the public debate started in 1615 with the publication of Joseph Swetnam's anti-feminist pamphlet *The arraignment of lewd, idle, froward, and inconstant women: or the vanity of them, choose you whether : with a commendation of wise, virtuous and honest women : pleasant for married men, profitable for young men, and hurtful to none*. Swetnam was also famous for a 1617 fencing manual in which he worked to reconcile differences between the thrust-oriented Italian school and the native cut-oriented English school of swordplay. Swetnam's *Arraignment of Women* was a mix of sexist jokes and Biblical examples of the risk women posed to men. The pamphlet was popular enough to be reprinted several times, and *Swetnam, the Woman-Hater* was part of the public discourse surrounding the original document. The play features a fictionalized Swetnam, driven out of England for his rhetoric and calling himself Misogynos – the play is the first use in English of the term 'misogynist.' After a comical setup that has the Swetnam character arguing in court for the moral superiority of men, he is challenged by the missing prince Lorenzo, who is disguised as Atlanta the Amazon. Swetnam of course loses and is then placed on trial himself before an all-female jury.

Swetnam, The Woman-Hater is not a proto-feminist play – it may make fun of Joseph Swetnam the person, and put his ideas on theatrical trial, but the humor is at the expense of the person and not necessarily his ideas. Part of the satire in the character Swetnam's defeat is the comment on the historical Swetnam as author of a fencing manual, and his loss is an attack on his expertise and position, but this is pokes fun at *dottore*-style experts rather than their ideas. The comic subplot of Swetnam first defending men and masculinity, and then being put on trial himself, is placed inside the larger and more conventional narrative of the lost prince Lorenzo restoring his place at court. His disguise as a woman, success at his duel, and later performance in a court masque where he reveals his identity, all incorporate signifiers of gender that can be taken on and off. Lorenzo is of course not a woman, and as Jennifer Low notes that "the Amazon conquers the misogynist—but only, it would seem, because 'she' is a 'he.'"¹⁸² In context of pre-Restoration drama, in which female parts would have been played by boys or young men, the depiction gets substantially more complex: "the actor plays a role that is male on top of his role as a masculine female, neither of which aligns with his own character's identity."¹⁸³

Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*, (c.1607-1610) does feature a female fencer and a proper duel between Moll, the roaring girl of the title, and Laxton who has taken her for a prostitute and propositioned her. The play took advantage of the real life of Mary Frith, who challenged early modern taboos

¹⁸² Jennifer Low, *Manhood and the Duel: Masculinity in Early Modern Drama and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 7

¹⁸³ Chantelle Thauvette, "Masculinity and Turkish Captivity in *Swetnam, the Woman-Hater*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 52, No. 2, Tudor and Stuart Drama (Spring 2012), 440

and laws by smoking, consorting with criminals, and dressing in men's clothes, but the play's duel treats her as a social and martial equal of Laxton. First propositioning her when she is dressed as a woman, Laxton mistakes Moll when she arrives for the assignation dressed as a man: she draws a sword and offers an impassioned defense of women which concludes "Would the spirits / Of all my slanderers were clasp'd in thine / That I might vex an army at one time!" (3.2) as she sets upon him. Her victory is not an accident or played for laughs, and Laxton comments in an aside "Heart, I think I fight with a familiar or the ghost of a fencer! Sh' has wounded me gallantly." (3.2).

Moll is not pretending to be a man – rather, she “has adopted her role not as an interim disguise before she can reassert her femininity in conventional society, but as a way of opting out of this society for good.”¹⁸⁴ The sword in *The Roaring Girl* takes its place with tobacco and clothing as material signifiers of gender - the title page of the 1611 quarto edition shows her with both pipe and sword - but unlike smoking and dressing, dueling requires additional skill that was out of reach for most early modern women. This is separate from women arming themselves: early modern women may have carried weapons for personal protection, as Juliet does in *Romeo and Juliet*, or to commit crime. Moll in *The Roaring Girl* has skill in swordplay, and defeats Laxton on equal footing, but this brings her agency without respectability.

The Roaring Girl is not a Rabelaisian comedy in which the ordered world is turned upside down, but instead is closer to a *commedia dell'arte* piece in which a

¹⁸⁴ Clark, 164

clever servant engages in several comic episodes that lead inevitably to the restoration of the world and the happy fifth-act marriage of an aristocratic couple whose fathers originally objected to their match in the first act. There are useful discussions about the ways in which the play navigates modern ideas of a queer space, but Moll's swordplay functions in the play as a marker of her manliness without any of the honor or benefits that skill in dueling would confer on a man.¹⁸⁵ Rather than offering any benefit, those around her continue to view her as a woman whose manly affectations make her less suitable for marriage, the only social value placed on women in the play.

Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part I* features Joan of Arc besting both Charles the Dauphin and Sir John Talbot, but unlike the other plays discussed here the audience was not likely meant to sympathize with the French champion, and she goes to her death in the fifth act after a dismissive "O burn her, burn her! Hanging is too good." (V.vi.34) One play that did present a female fighter was *Love's Cure, or The Martial Maid*, likely composed around the time James was making his anti-dueling proclamations. Don Alvarez and his daughter Clara arrive home from exile, the latter raised as a boy and appearing on stage in male clothing. A rival aristocrat, Don Pedro de Vitelli arrives in a scene evoking the rival families of *Romeo and Juliet*. Alvarez was exiled twenty years earlier for killing Vitelli's uncle and has been pardoned

¹⁸⁵ Jonathan Goldberg's *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992) usefully challenges the idea of projecting modern constructions of sex and gender identity backwards – on the other side of both Foucault and Butler – and onto a culture that did not recognize the same categories of thought or practice. Nicholas Radel offers a thoughtful response about ways to integrate ideas of queerness that "creates and enforces a closet that may, itself, be in the process of being constructed in Renaissance cross-dressing plays." See Nicholas F. Radel, "Fletcherian Tragicomedy, Cross-dressing, and the Constriction of Homoerotic Desire in Early Modern England," *Renaissance Drama*, 1995, New Series, Vol. 26, Explorations in Renaissance Drama (1995).

because of exemplary valor in battle shown by Clara – disguised as Alvarez’ son.

Announced by the family servant, their homecoming is abruptly interrupted:

Bobadilla: Murder, murder murder, your friend my Lord,
Don Syavedra is set upon in the Streets, by your enemies
Vitelli, and his Faction: I am almost killed with looking
on them.

Alvarez: I’ll free him, or fall with him: draw thy sword
And follow me.

Clara: Fortune I give thee thanks
For this occasion once more to use it. (3.2.91-98)

Clara draws her sword and helps her father stop the fray, but in the scuffle witnesses Vitelli’s courage and both falls in love with him and fights on his behalf against her father. Her martial demeanor briefly threatens to collapse into a conventional romantic plot, in which “cross dressing could be permissible so long as the woman claimed no masculine prerogatives, maintained her feminine honor, was extremely successful as a man, and finally resumed life as a woman in the end.”¹⁸⁶ Clara quickly contrasts her new feelings with her masculine persona:

Clara: Oh leave me living: what new exercise
Is crept into my breast, that blancheth clean
My former nature? I begin to find
I am a woman, and must learn to fight
A softer sweeter battle, than with Swords. (2.2.288-292)

Compounding the gender trouble is Clara’s brother Lucio, whom she has not met. While Clara has been raised in exile as a boy, Lucio has been protected from Vitelli’s vengeance brought up and dressed as a girl. Now that the family is reunited, the children are expected to relinquish their gender disguises and resume traditional

¹⁸⁶ Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 88

gender roles – both reject this anticipated restoration, and Clara fights again in a second scene to protect Vitelli.

The Martial Maid offers a complicated view of gender identity, with Lucio only shedding his feminine performance when he is called upon to defend his father in a fight, and Clara trading her masculine clothing to become Vitelli's wife only after Vitelli agrees to abandon his sexual autonomy and end a sexual affair with a courtesan. The King of Spain, tiring of the public feud between the two families, decrees that they may resolve their conflict with a trial by combat, which is interrupted by Clara, Vitelli's sister Genevora, and Clara's mother Eugenia. The women do not attempt to stop the fight by appealing to mercy, but instead assume the right to participate and arm themselves with swords and pistols. Clara and Genevora then subvert the double patriarchal authority of the duel – both *pater patriae* and *pater familias* - and agree to place their swords against each other's chest, resolving to stab each other simultaneously and end the feud with their mutual suicide.

The presence of female fencers offered a way to blend the binary of neo-chivalric honor, with its emphasis on the individual, and Christian humanist ideal with its reliance on patriarchal order. Women in these few plays are usually fighting to defend their honor or to press male characters into honorable behavior, and in doing so they often appeal to royal authority. This gender anxiety - the idea that women were becoming more masculine, and men were becoming less 'manly' - played a part in the religious objection to the theatre and the closing of the London theatres in 1642. Jonas Barish notes that in William Prynne's 1633 anti-theatrical screed *Histriomastix* the perceived offense fell

obsessively on sexuality and effeminacy, as though to underscore the author's fearful aversion to anything – dancing, love-making, hair-curling, elegant attire – that might suggest active or interested sexuality, this being equated with femininity, with weakness, with the yielding to feelings, and consequently with the destruction of all assured props and boundaries.¹⁸⁷

The closing of the theatres at the start of the English Civil War, and the execution of Charles I in 1649, sent his son Charles II in exile to France. His return in 1660 brought with it a shift from Italian cultural influence to a French *mode*, and it is useful to briefly look at French ideas of theatre and dueling, especially as they may have followed the king home and influenced playwrights following the Restoration in 1660. The most important play in this conversation is Pierre Corneille's 1636 *The Cid*.

***The Cid* and Neoclassical Duels**

Conversations about *The Cid* tend to emphasize the neoclassical objections and the triumph of Aristotelian unities: the events are implausible, the time is impossible, and the characters “beyond belief.”¹⁸⁸ One of the reasons the play was brought up for critique in the first place is that both Cardinal Richelieu and Louis XIII were vehemently and actively opposed to dueling, and the play's use of dueling was a direct challenge to that authority. Dueling in France was endemic in the *ancient regime*, with estimates of fatalities during Henri IV's reign between 1588-1608

¹⁸⁷ Jonas Barrish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 85

¹⁸⁸ *The Opinions of the French Academy*, 1638, cited in Bernard F. Dukore, *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 224

ranging from four to ten thousand.¹⁸⁹ Royal edicts banning the practice were passed in 1602 and 1609 seemed to have little effect, with members of Henry's own guard violating the laws.¹⁹⁰ Louis XIII revived the edicts in 1617 and again in 1624, but the rise of Richelieu to the royal council that year added personal and papal support for the cause. Richelieu's motivations are often cited as his desire to "humble the pride of the lords," but it is possible that his own reasons stem from his brother's death in a duel at the beginning of Richelieu's ecclesiastical career.¹⁹¹ The King and the cardinal joined forces for a 1626 edict that made dueling a crime against the crown.

The Cid is bookended by two offstage duels that initiate and then resolve the central conflict of the play: the love story between Roderigo and Chimene. In the first duel Chimene's father, The Count, has been passed over for a court position in favor of Roderigo's father, Don Diego. The Count suggests that Don Diego does not deserve the post, and Roderigo avenges the insult by challenging the Count to a duel. Having won the duel, Roderigo confesses his crime to his love and is banished, a punishment suspended in the interest of the state so that Roderigo can fight the advancing Moorish army. Upon his victorious return Chimene asks for a judicial combat and a champion to fight Roderigo – the victor will win her hand in marriage.

¹⁸⁹ The number and dates are frequently cited and increase over time, often conflating total duels with fatalities: the source is likely George Mallingen's 1841 book *The history of dueling; including, narratives of the most remarkable personal encounters that have taken place from the earliest period to the present time* (London: Richard Bentley, 1841) argues that "no less than four thousand gentlemen were killed in affairs of honor," 123

¹⁹⁰ Richard Herr, "Honor versus Absolutism: Richelieu's Fight against Dueling," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Sep., 1955), 282

¹⁹¹ Cited in Cohen, 67

Roderigo wins by mercifully sparing his opponent, and the King decrees that after an acceptable mourning period the couple may wed.

As John Leigh notes, “Corneille’s audience (and, unfortunately, his censors) could not fail to be aware that a play set in medieval Spain contained a contemporary analogue.”¹⁹² Despite the many royal edicts against dueling, neither Henry IV nor Louis XIII had been successful at stemming the practice in France, and *The Cid* offered a popular example of the value of dueling in defiance of state power. In the play the king has prohibited duels, and a scene between the Count and the minister Don Arias following the insult to Don Diego directly contrasts personal and state power:

Don Arias: Remember, Kings wish to be absolute.

The Count: The die is cast. Let’s speak not more of it.

Don Arias: Farewell, then, since you cannot be convinced. With all your laurels, fear the thunderbolt.

The Count: I’ll wait for it unbowed.

Don Arias: But not unscathed.

The Count: Thereby we’ll see Don Diego satisfied.

(alone)

Who fears not death is never moved by threats.

My heart’s above the cruelest reverse.

They can reduce me to unhappiness,

But not persuade me to belie my name. (2.2.387-390)¹⁹³

In this passage royal authority is challenged – “kings *wish* to be absolute,” and although he dies the Count is not punished for asserting the right of a nobleman to defend his personal honor. As Ellery Schalk notes, “[t]he central problem of *Le Cid*,

¹⁹² Leigh, 35. Throughout the chapter Leigh refers to Louis XIV, who was not born when *The Cid* premiered but was associated with both Richelieu and dueling through the nineteenth century retelling of *The Three Musketeers*.

¹⁹³ Pierre Corneille, *The Cid*; John Cairncross, trans. (London: Penguin Classics, 1975)

for instance, is whether or not nobles should fight duels, regardless of the king's will, or whether they must bow to that will.”¹⁹⁴

Richelieu had worked hard to push Louis towards increased punishments, stripping noblemen of positions, pensions, and after 1626 executing duelists who defied the royal edicts.¹⁹⁵ These efforts were not successful, but it is within this climate of strong ant-dueling rhetoric and Corneille’s dramaturgical celebration of dueling and personal honor that we might reconsider the direct and pointed involvement of the cardinal in the *Cid* Controversy. The play provoked Richelieu in three distinct ways: it “had (1) glorified dueling, which Richelieu, who had lost his own brother in a duel, had strictly forbidden; (2) exalted private judgement above the state; (3) thrown a halo of romance over Spanish pride.”¹⁹⁶ The tension between individual and state power in the play, a particular focus of the cardinal and king, is played out through the duels and the various characters reactions to them – reactions which both Scudery and the French Academy found violated decorum. The play’s central place in the development of neoclassicism derives directly from the politically volatile use of the relatively new theatrical device of the duel.

¹⁹⁴ Ellery Schalk, “Under the Law or Laws unto Themselves: Noble Attitudes and Absolutism in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century France,” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, (Spring 1988, Vol. 15, No. 1), 290

¹⁹⁵ Herr, 283-4

¹⁹⁶ M. Sedgwick, “Richelieu and the ‘Quarelle du Cid’,” *Modern Language Review*, (April, 1953, Vol. 48, No. 2), 145

The Duel After the Restoration

The Cid is not the first play to use a duel as a narrative set-piece, but in 1636 the device was still a recent narrative innovation. It also set the climate for both duels in masculine culture and dramatic literature for King Charles II of England, who spent his time in exile in France following the execution of his father and the rise of Oliver Cromwell. Duels became increasingly formal events throughout the seventeenth century, rather than sudden exchanges in the moment of insult.¹⁹⁷ This was in part because swords were disappearing as everyday tools. During the Interregnum from 1642-1660 Oliver Cromwell banned both dueling and the wearing of swords by anyone outside of the military, but following the Restoration wearing swords was seen as a sign of support for the monarchy and rejection of Cromwell.¹⁹⁸ It is likely also that Charles II and “the exiled Cavaliers brought back with them the French culture of dueling.”¹⁹⁹ The brief surge in duels following the Restoration overlaps with the transformation of masculine identity through the court of Charles II.

Closed by Puritans during Cromwell’s reign, theatres had reopened for opera in 1656, and generally in 1660. Restoration theatre was not a return to business from before the Civil War, but a series of experiments in what an audience being reintroduced to theatre could collaboratively create with artists who had not practiced in decades.

¹⁹⁷ See Shoemaker (2002)

¹⁹⁸ John Cockburn, *The history and examination of duels, shewing their heinous nature and the necessity of suppressing them* (London, 1720), 349

¹⁹⁹ Richard Cohen, *By The Sword: A History of Gladiators, Musketeers, Samurai, Swashbucklers, and Olympic Champions* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 50

London had only two theatres...[I]n Elizabethan days, when the city was much smaller, it had boasted six. In 1682 the two companies merged but continued to operate just the two playhouses for the ensuing thirteen years. What is more, the Restoration playhouses were small, the Drury Lane accommodating not over 500, the Duke's somewhat more, nor were the plays well attended.²⁰⁰

In this new social the theatrical space the duel took on a new meaning, informed by a very different social taste.

The Italian codes of honor that had arrived in England in the 1570s had largely fallen out of favor outside of a small court circle and been replaced by “a more domesticated, restrained, and polite masculine ideal.”²⁰¹ Over the seventeenth century the fascination with individual honor and offense had cooled: “the crucial new ingredient in English masculinity that encouraged this trend was the notion of civility: men were no longer to be ruled by the tyranny of passion but were to master themselves and subject their will to reason.”²⁰² Robert Shoemaker notes that although pressures to maintain dueling remained,

English gentlemen and noblemen spent increasing amounts of time in the metropolis. With the ‘urban renaissance’ of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, such men enjoyed an expanded range of cultural opportunities, and their conduct came to be judged by new standards of behavior, centered around the notion of ‘politeness.’²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Freund, 134

²⁰¹ Erin Mackie, “Boys Will be Boys: Masculinity, Criminality, and the Restoration Rake,” *The Eighteenth Century*, Summer 2005, Vol. 46, No. 2, 131

²⁰² Pollock, 5

²⁰³ Shoemaker, 526

The Libertine or Rake stood in opposition to this new civility, a masculine identity nostalgic for “a kind of fully approved license already becoming outdated by the late seventeenth century.”²⁰⁴

This behavior broke into three general categories: the ‘extravagant rake, ‘the vicious rake, and ‘the philosopher rake.’ The extravagant rake was “comic, likeable and entertaining, as well as promiscuous, and (often) wild and madcap.” The vicious rake “either wholly eschews marriage, or shows total contempt and disregard for the married state.” And the philosopher rakes “share a courtly smoothness, polish and self-control, together with qualities of wit and intelligence.”²⁰⁵ They were all defined by a manhood that looked backwards to supposedly more free times when men were imaged have unchecked access to sex and violence: “rakish criminality is linked through nostalgic compensation to aristocratic ideals of peerless privilege and through competition to emerging ideals of the polite gentleman.”²⁰⁶ This brief vogue came in with Charles II, imported from France where dueling was still popular despite the efforts of the King and Cardinal.

While dueling may have been popular with a small circle of aristocrats around court, late seventeenth century plays give an indication of how swordplay had fallen out of general favor both as a social habit and as a theatrical performance of acceptable manhood. Theatre itself was an aristocratic amusement in the last decades of the seventeenth century: “The Restoration stage was not, as it had been in

²⁰⁴ Mackie, 129

²⁰⁵ All definitions via Gillian Manning’s Introduction to *Libertine Plays of the Restoration* (London: Everyman Press, 2001), xxiv-xxv.

²⁰⁶ Mackie, 132

Elizabeth's time, a democratic institution. Indeed, on occasion the public was not even admitted."²⁰⁷ This association of dueling with the aristocracy had been true in the Elizabethan era, but the more diverse audience had seen the idea of the duel placed into a range of theatrical settings. But the Restoration stage rake, and the duels he fought, reflected a minority population's idea of both violence and status: their swordplay was volatile and criminal, no longer a behavior to enforce or defend honor. Thomas Shadwell's 1675 *The Libertine* offers a retelling of the Don Juan story, but the various swordfights define the characters as indiscriminately violent. Instead of fighting to avenge a personal dishonor, or to maintain reputation, the protagonist of Shadwell's play and his compatriots simply use violence to enforce their criminal will:

- Don John takes sexual advantage of Maria, then stabs her brother after he discovers them together in bed.
- Don John kills Maria's maid, mistaking her for a man attempting to stop him.
- Don John fights and disarms Maria (disguised as a man) as she attempts to avenge her sexual dishonor.
- Don John's libertine friends Don Antonio and Don Lopez draw on and kill a group of Country Fellows who attempt to intervene in a rape.
- A group fight kills Maria and Don Francisco after the latter tries to kill his own dishonored daughters.

²⁰⁷ Philip Freund, *Laughter and Grandeur: Theatre in the Age of the Baroque* (Peter Owen: London, 2008), 135

- Don John's servant Jachomo, Two Shepherds and an Officer are killed after they attempt to stop Don John from assaulting several women.

For their trouble Dons John, Antonio, and Lopez are swallowed up in the fires of hell: swordplay was associated with criminality and had shifted from being the privilege of a gentleman to protect honor into the tool of a scoundrel to attack the innocent.

There was a brief resurgence in dueling fatalities in the latter seventeenth century, but Robert Shoemaker notes that “[t]he wearing of swords on a regular basis went out of fashion in the 1720s and 1730s in London,” and slightly later outside the capitol.²⁰⁸ Dressing up for London theatres was a way of performing class membership, and swords remained a part of evening dress long after they were not every-day wear: “Not until Victoria’s reign did knee-breeches, silk stockings, cocked hats and dress-swords vanish.”²⁰⁹ Throughout the eighteenth century swords lost both social and martial function, although it’s unclear whether fewer people bearing arms led to fewer confrontations or whether a drop in violence made it safer and unnecessary to carry swords.

Interpersonal violence in England, including duels, dropped profoundly over the long eighteenth century, from a high of nearly 7 homicides per 100,000 citizens in

²⁰⁸ Robert Shoemaker, “Male Honor and the Decline of Public Violence in Eighteenth-Century London,” *Social History*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (May, 2001), 205. A.V. Norman notes that “the sword had been entirely given up in Bath by 1775.” *Rapier and Small-sword: 1460-1820* (London: Arms & Armor Press, 1979), p. 30. John Leigh notes that at the same in in France the Abbe de Saint-Pierre had argued against the wearing of swords at court as an obsolete (and threatening) fashion, and the trend may have migrated. Leigh, 29.

²⁰⁹ Maurice Willson Disher, *Blood and Thunder: Mid-Victorian Melodrama and its Origins*. (New York: Haskell House, 1974), 205

1660 to 2.8 by the end of the 1700s.²¹⁰ This is not just a transfer of violence from the autonomy of individual to the monopoly of the state, as Foucault may argue, but a general pacifying that can be traced in the decline of court cases for indictable offences even as the population increased.²¹¹ Because they were associated with upper class and eventually the military, duels were localized to London and port cities with garrisons.²¹² Over this same period public disapproval pushed duels to become increasingly secret events: “during the Restoration favorite locations included the public squares of Covent Garden and Lincoln’s Inn Fields” but by the mid-1700s duelists had to retire to more private venues or risk interruption.²¹³

The turn of the eighteenth century was defined by a cultural drift away from honor towards valor and a corresponding emphasis on ‘politeness’ as the defining trait of English masculinity. To parallel the drop in duels over the century stage duels became less frequent and were interrupted more often. The neoclassical idea of tragedy driving towards the purgation of pity and fear was giving way to a new concept: in a letter to John Hough, the Bishop of Oxford, the English polymath Joseph Addison argued that *The Cid* had introduced a new form of theatre: “Aristotle...proposes two passions that are proper to be raised by tragedy, terror and pity, but Corneille endeavors at a new one, which is admiration.”²¹⁴ Dobrée notes

²¹⁰ Lawrence Stone, “Interpersonal Violence in English Society,” *Past & Present*, No. 1983, Vol. 101, p.29

²¹¹ Tosh, 334

²¹² Banks, 532

²¹³ Shoemaker, 537

²¹⁴ Joseph Addison to Bishop Hough, quoted in Bonamy Dobrée, *Restoration Tragedy: 1660-1720*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 14

that "the work of an heroic poem is to raise admiration, principally for three virtues, valor, beauty, and love."²¹⁵ This was a stark contrast with the exploration of taboos that marked Jacobean and Carolinian tragedy, or the anti-hero military plays and revenge tragedies of the Elizabethan stage. It also marked a shift from a transactional idea (honor as a social marketplace) to a performative one (valor as an observed but not enacted behavior). It was no longer necessary to actually go through with a duel either on stage or in life, it was now more beneficial to show that you would have.

In 1707 William Hope, deputy governor of Edinburgh Castle and a fencing instructor, published *A New Short and Easy Method of Fencing* that emphasized defense rather than attacking, providing "a fair opportunity, both as a man of honor, of defending himself, and as a good Christian of saving his adversary (honor, as well as religion, obliging him to both)."²¹⁶ Duels could now end "at the first sign of blood, or when an opponent was disarmed, rather than fight until serious injury or death."²¹⁷ The increasingly performative nature of duels is attested by the many strategies employed to guarantee that the outcome was reconciliation rather than injury: demonstrating that you had the courage to answer a challenge, but no longer the need to see it through to fatality. As Douglas W. Allen and Clyde G. Reed note that "after a duel reconciliation was common, and duels were regulated by strict sets of rules;

²¹⁵ Dobree, 18

²¹⁶ William Hope, *A New Short and Easy Method of Fencing: Or the Art of the Broad and Small-Sword Rectified and Compendiz'd* (Edinburgh, 1707), Chapter 3

²¹⁷ Shoemaker, 530

and duel lethality fell over time.”²¹⁸ The transition from swords to pistols as the primary weapon of choice happened much earlier in England than on the Continent, in part because pistols offered more ways to decrease lethality while maintaining the image of valor: rifling was prohibited, sights were removed, aiming and practice were heavily discouraged, and dueling locations with trees were avoided to prevent lining up a shot.²¹⁹

The chivalric duel generally disappeared from the London stage in the 1700s, as it was the action of an outdated idea of manhood. Nicholas Rowe’s 1702 retelling of *Tamerlane* removed what little violence Marlowe had included in his Elizabethan version, and Susanna Centlivre’s comedy *The Beau’s Duel* of the same year features a comic scene in which multiple characters draw on each other out of politeness, with Sir William Mode quipping “I think, Mr. Ogle, you sent me a challenge by Mr, Topper, and having paid the ceremony due to friends and acquaintance, you must draw, Sir, and return my compliment, [*aside*] I’ll be sure to have somebody to part us tho’.” (1.2)²²⁰ Much like Otway’s *The Soldier’s Fortune*, Centlivre’s play concerns aristocrats conspiring to bed and wed, with the conspicuously named Colonel Manly pitted against the foppish Sir Mode. The beaux of the play go out of their way not to actually fight, and late in the play Mode seems to speak for all the men:

²¹⁸ Allen and Reed, 83. Markku Peltonen takes up the issue of the irrelevance of the outcome in *The Duel in Early Modern England: Civility, Politeness, and Honor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.) Labeling the outcome of duels that did not end in injury as ‘irrelevant’ is missing the larger point: an outcome did not necessarily have to be martial or medical to have consequence.

²¹⁹ Kevin McAleer, *Dueling: The Cult of Honor in Fin-de-Siècle Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 70

²²⁰ Centlivre, 30

Right, I think a Gentleman ought to wear a Sharp for a Terror to the Vulgar, and because tis the Fashion; but he shou'd never use it but as an Ornament, and part of his Dress. I hope to see it as much a Fashion to fight with Files, as tis to fence with them. If I was a Member of Parliament, I'd bring in a Bill against Dueling; I'm sure the Clause would pass for there's a Majority in the House of my Constitution.²²¹ (3.3)

The sentimental comedies of the early century had little dramatic use for duels. Tragedies, like George Lillo's 1730 *The London Merchant*, which followed a middle-class clerk who embezzles from his employer to fund his relationship with a prostitute and is ultimately executed after he robs and murders his uncle. The play explores reputation, honor, and manhood, but not in ways which could be solved with swords. It is likely that the growing urban middle class audience was more interested in seeing their own concerns played out on stage, rather than neoclassical ideals of princes. The duels that did exist on stage were increasingly in entertainments like 1726's *Harlequin Gentleman per Force* at The King's Theatre, Haymarket which featured an "Uncommon Duel," or *The Whimsical Battle of the Greybeards* in 1761 with "The odd Resentment of Col. Crackcrown and his whimsical Duel with the purblind Major Blinko," both descriptions which sound like set-piece fights in the style of the 'terrific combats' of the next century.

Duels and Shifting Masculinity

Michèle Cohen offers the valuable reminder of the danger in assuming that the "hegemonic at any particular time is homogenous."²²² As the eighteenth century was

²²¹ Susanna Centlivre, *The Beau's Duel* (London, 1736), 37

²²² Michèle Cohen, "'Manners' Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1750-1830," *Journal of British Studies*, April 2005, Vol. 44, No. 2 (April 2005), 313

marked by a dramatic reduction in dueling - and a reduction in dramatic dueling – different ideas of masculinity were developing. The dominant ideal of the polite gentleman was by no means universally adopted, and the polite gentleman in his wig and hose became associated with stereotypically feminine characteristics: “weakness, softness, delicacy, enervation, cowardice, delight in luxurious food and clothing.”²²³ This produced a strange inflection: as masculinity became more gentle and polite, the more masculine you performed the more effeminate you became.

It is important to note that this effeminacy was often a construction of gender and not necessarily coded as sexual. James Eli Adams reminds us that well into the Victorian period *effeminate* was used “in its older, traditional sense, to refer to a male person or institution weakened by luxury or inactivity.”²²⁴ There were gay characters who expand the intersection of manliness and dueling culture, including David Garrick’s 1747 afterpiece *Miss in Her Teens*. Garrick played the foppish Mr. Fribble, one of several suitors to Miss Biddy Bellair who pits the men against each other to find her true love. Fribble arrives to woo Biddy with an injured finger, which he explains at length:

As I was coming out of my Lodgings, – Says one of ’em to me, *Would your Honour have a Coach?* – No, Man, said I, not now, (with all the Civility imaginable) – *I’ll carry you and your Doll too,* (says he) *Miss Margery for the same Price.* – Upon which, the masculine Beasts about us fell a laughing; then I turn’d round in a great Passion, curse me, (says I) Fellow, but I’ll trounce thee. – And, as I was holding out my Hand in a threatening *Poster*, – thus; – he makes a cut at me with his Whip, and striking me over the Nail of my little Finger, it gave me such exquisite *Torture* that I fainted away; and

²²³ Susan C. Shapiro, “Yon Plumed Dandebrot’: Male ‘Effeminacy’ in English Satire and Criticism,” *The Review of English Studies*, Aug. 1988, New Series, Vol. 39, No. 155 (Aug., 1988), 400

²²⁴ James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 98

while I was in this Condition, the Mob pick'd my Pocket of my Purse, my Scissars, my *Mocoa* Smelling-Bottle, and my Huswife.²²⁵

Rictor Norton offers that “‘Miss Margery’ is an allusion to the word ‘Margery’, which is a slang term for mollies, i.e., effeminate homosexual men. The ‘huswife’ stolen from Fribble's pocket is a pocket-case for needles, pins, thread, scissors, etc., indicating his womanly talents.”²²⁶ In the course of wooing Miss Bidy, Fribble meets one of his rivals, Captain Flash. They challenge each other for her affection, drawing swords but unwilling to actually fight: “*Here they stand in fighting Postures, while Bidy and Tag push 'em forward.*” The arrival of the heroic Captain Loveit does nothing to spur their courage, as “*They both keep their fencing Posture*” and instead pretend to have given each other grievous injuries until Loveit disarms both men and literally kicks Flash off the stage. The scene was popular enough to be made into a print featuring the two men with swords drawn, and the scene illustrates the changes in both masculinity and dueling that had emerged by the mid-century: the gay-coded men who challenge each other do so only as a performance of macho courage, they both claim to be injured despite never fighting, and it is the heroic (heterosexual) soldier who interrupts the duel and never draws himself.

This refusal by Loveit to engage in a fight is a marked change from the similar scene in *Twelfth Night*, written almost two centuries earlier near the start of the dueling era. In both plays two characters are pressured into dueling: the foppish Sir

²²⁵ David Garrick, *Miss in Her Teens*, (London: Tonson & Draper, 1747).

²²⁶ Rictor Norton (Ed.), "The Character of Fribble, 1747", *Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England: A Sourcebook*, 28 February 2003 <<http://rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/fribble.htm>>. Norton does not cite other plays in his exhaustive research, so the homosexual slang of Garrick's fop may be an outlier.

Aguecheek and Viola disguised as a man in *Twelfth Night* and the two fops in Garrick's play. In Shakespeare's version the fight is interrupted by Antonio and Toby who themselves draw and prepare to fight in earnest when their duel is in turn interrupted by officers sent by Count Orsino. *Twelfth Night* offers a code of honor that is not really challenged by Viola and Aguecheek: the two have no meaningful way out of the duel once they have been tricked into fighting and are only rescued through outside intervention by men who subscribe to the very same code but are capable of carrying it out. By the time Garrick was writing the idea of dueling was identified as a way for coded gay characters to consciously perform bravery – the honor of the duel is just as superficial as their lip balm and smelling bottles. Captain Loveit does not engage because his own masculine honor draws from a different well and there is nothing to gain or defend by fighting the fops.

Although an almost identical scene exists in *Twelfth Night*, the 1747 illustration of the play is titled "*The Modern Duel as Acted in Miss in her Teens, at Covent Garden.*" For this to be a "modern duel," something had to be changing in the audience's idea of what a duel was. In part this illustrates an important cultural shift that was happening over the eighteenth century: the changing perception of military men. Before booting Flash, Captain Loveit confronts him over his service with commentary by Flash's servant Puff:

- Capt: Had not you the Misfortune, Sir, to be missing at the last Engagement in Flanders?
Flash: I was found amongst the Dead in the Field of Battle.
Puff: He was the first that fell, Sir; the Wind of a Cannon-ball struck him flat upon his Face; he had just Strength enough to creep into a Ditch, and there he was found after the Battle in a most deplorable Condition.
Capt: Pray, Sir, what Advancement did you get by the Service of that Day?
Flash: My Wounds rendered me unfit for Service, and I sold out.

Puff: Stole out, you mean. We hunted him, by Scent, to the Water-side, thence he took shipping for England, and, taking the Advantage of my Master's Absence, has attack'd his Citadel, which we are luckily come to relieve, and drive his Honor into the Ditch again.

All. Ha, ha, ha!

Frib: He, he, he!

Capt: And now, Sir, how have you dar'd to shew your Face again in open Day, or wear even the Outside of a Profession you have so much scandaliz'd by your Behavior? I honor the Name of Soldier, and as a Party concerned am bound not to see it disgrac'd; as you have forfeited your Title to Honour, deliver up your Sword this Instant.

Loveit strips Fribble and Flash of their symbolic masculinity by taking their swords, but he does not need to fight to do so. The duel faded as a social behavior in part because men could acquire honor through military service, and the exchange neatly summarizes this transformation in culture. Honor in the sixteenth century was a largely personal attribute, but the military provided a collective identity: behavior reflected on the individual, the unit, the branch, and the country.

Until the English Civil War military service was largely by conscription, with officers able to purchase their ranks or buy their way out of danger.²²⁷ As Thomas Otway discovered and Falstaff observed, there was no professional army, and nobles had no obligation to soldiers other than to arm them. As a result, there was no opportunity for social or political advancement for anyone who was not already an aristocrat. The professionalization of the military which started under Cromwell bore fruit over the eighteenth century, leading to a fundamental change in the way military men were perceived culturally and artistically. If the only glory found in Shakespeare's warfare could be claimed by princes, by the early nineteenth century

²²⁷ Forced conscription did continue into the nineteenth century, particularly impressment into the Royal Navy, but it is important to note that this was closer to a wartime draft and existed in addition to the more widespread voluntary service.

the garrison was a socially respectable place for Jane Austen's heroines to find suitors and for men to achieve status.²²⁸ Duels became disproportionately behavior between soldiers, rather than civilians, and Stephen Banks notes that duels were clustered around garrison towns.²²⁹

This militarization of masculinity had political undertones, as effeminacy was increasingly associated with French culture and values in the late eighteenth century. England and France had been in opposition at least since the Hundred Years War in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with military, religious, and economic conflict returning in waves up through the Napoleonic Wars which ended in 1815. This political tension played out with a rejection of French-influenced masculinity, which English authors such as Richard Hurd, the Bishop of Worcester, saw as "an effeminate and unmanly foppery."²³⁰

The alternative proposed by Hurd, and supported by ideas in the Scottish Enlightenment of the 1770s, was a return to a Germanic-influenced chivalry.²³¹ Rather than an interest in clothing, appearance, or gossip boys should aspire to new "traditional" virtues of physical strength and courage, to "cultivate those habits of bodily exertion which can develop and exercise the other powers which nature has

²²⁸ So complete was the transformation that in the 1813 *Pride and Prejudice* Mr. Bennett is landed gentry but cannot keep his land because of legal restrictions, and the rakish character of Mr. Wickham is a surprise because he is an officer.

²²⁹ Banks, Stephen. "Killing with Courtesy: The English Duelist, 1785-1845." *Journal of British Studies* 47, no. 3 (July 2008)

²³⁰ Richard Hurd, *Dialogues on the Uses of Foreign Travel Considered as a Part of an English Gentleman's Education: Between Lord Shaftesbury and Mr Locke*, (London, 1764).

²³¹ Cohen, 318

entrusted you.”²³² Bishop Hurd offered a nostalgic view of this chivalric vigor: “The youth in general were fired with the love of martial exercises. They were early formed to habits of fatigue and enterprise. And, together with this warlike spirit, the profession of chivalry was favorable to every other virtue. Affability, courtesy, generosity, veracity.”²³³

Unlike the appeals to chivalry that had defined the rise of dueling in the late sixteenth century, this new medievalism was no longer attached to a practice of dueling or individual contest. Stephan Banks notes that “most gentlemen of the first half of the nineteenth century were never challenged and never contemplated issuing a challenge themselves.”²³⁴ While scholars like Banks explore the success of anti-dueling moralists, English masculinity was changing in response to a wide range of factors: the country had become an Empire, offering both adventure and opportunity; a new police and legal structure offered safer ways to resolve conflicts; men with violent tendencies could now find a productive outlet in a professional military; economics and the marketplace had in many ways replaced honor as a source of social value. This new idea of chivalry would exist, like the duel, almost entirely in the imagination.

²³² Kenelm Henry Digby, *The Broad-Stone of Honor, or Rules for the Gentlemen of England* (London: F.C. & J. Rivington, 1822), 549

²³³ Richard Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (London: A. Miller, 1762), 9

²³⁴ Banks, 558

Romanticism and Melodrama

The two forms of dramatic literature that emerged alongside these social changes were Romanticism and melodrama. Jeffrey Richards argues that “the swashbuckler was quintessentially a product of Romanticism,” going on to define the genre’s basic elements as “the past, especially the medieval past, the cult of naturalism and spontaneity, individualism, the occult – but above all the primacy accorded the individual.”²³⁵ John Leigh offers caution on this interpretation, suggesting instead that “Romanticism is not that hospitable to duels,” instead turning to acts of violence that were free of class considerations or social constructs such as honor.²³⁶ Duels such as Mozart’s 1787 operatic confrontation between Don Giovanni and the Commendatore or Goethe’s 1774 *Clavigo* focus less on the violence of the duel, or the fight as conclusion of a narrative, and more on the emotions and spiritual questions that such a confrontation inspire in the characters and audience: In *Clavigo* one of the characters sees the duel not as a contest of arms or a way to settle dispute but as a pathway to a violent ecstasy: “No swords, no weapons! I want to throttle him with my bare hands, so that the bliss will belong entirely to me! And the feeling that I have annihilated him will be all mine.”²³⁷

²³⁵ Richards (1977), 8-9

²³⁶ Leigh, 111. This interpretation leans heavily on European Romanticism, where the conditions of the duel were different than England, but Leigh offers a persuasive argument drawing from contemporary examples rather than later film adaptations.

²³⁷ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Clavigo*, Act 4, in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer 40 vols., (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1993), 487

The aspect of Romanticism that carried the duel forward was its evocation of a lost pre-industrial England, defined in part by an idea of a lost manhood that was physically vigorous, martially skilled, and morally virtuous. By mid-century this would become Charles Kingsley's muscular Christianity: "the ideal of *arete*, 'the fulfilment of one's potentialities in the living of a higher, better, and more useful life,' gave way to *thumos*, 'robust energy, spirited courage, and physical vitality.'"²³⁸ One of the artistic drivers of this new chivalric ideal was the art theorist John Ruskin and his deeply influential pop-medievalism, and this connection between artistic, physical, and political power will be explored in depth in the next chapter. The philosophical austerity of Romanticism may have limited its popular appeal - not every audience member, perhaps, could identify with characters who wanted to strangle someone for the expected bliss. Melodramatic plays that emphasized the physical action, rather than the philosophical ramifications, were helping to reinvent the idea of the duel.

What Romanticism did change in England was the Neoclassical idea that protagonists needed to be high-born. Mid eighteenth-century folk anthologies, including Macpherson's *Ossian* and Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* had "revealed sources from outside of the Classical tradition for the renewal of poetry."²³⁹ This new emphasis on folk traditions and stories offered a new identity

²³⁸ David Newsom, *Godliness and Good Learning: Four Studies in a Victorian Ideal* (London: Cassell, 1961), 197

²³⁹ Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, "Myths of Nation? Vernacular Traditions in Modernity," *Nordic Irish Studies*, 2013, Vol. 12 (2013), 84. Many of these narratives turned out to be invented or put into the service of nationalistic movements; the martial political hero image did not take root in England in the same way that it did in German or Scandinavian theatre.

for the heroic protagonist in dueling scenes, although this idea would lay dormant in theatre for much of the century. English Romantic theatre features few duels: Shelley's 1819 *Cenci* and *Prometheus Bound* the following year have no narrative place for contests of honor, and the dramatic poems Byron's *Manfred* and *Cain* are metaphysical rather than purely physical. Beddoes' 1829 *Death's Jest-Book* includes several fights that resemble Renaissance tragedies, but the play was not produced in his lifetime. As Mark Girouard observed,

Loyalty to a king or leader, however disastrous the result, faithful love, however little requited, readiness to fight for one's honor, however slight the slur on it, or truth to one's word, however rashly given, were qualities which the literature of chivalry singled out for praise, but which eighteenth-century opinion tended to consider stupid rather than noble.²⁴⁰

The disappearance of the duel as a common social custom meant that contemporary plays no longer featured fights. Instead, the literary duel began to appear in historically-set romances.

When Queen Victoria took the throne in 1837, the sword had shifted from a personal sidearm to a historical object. Fashion had eliminated it as an accessory in the early eighteenth century, the development of public police forces had removed its role as personal protection, and advances in military technology had made the sword the object of last resort – when the Light Brigade “flash'd all their sabres bare” in 1854 the sword charge was a nostalgic callback to the imagined glory and honor of chivalric courage that was disappearing as war mechanized.²⁴¹ Although both duels

²⁴⁰ Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 19

²⁴¹ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, 1854

and swords still existed, the object and practice were now separate from everyday life, and in this space a new meaning for both could be constructed.

Two of the intertwined narratives of Victorian theatre are the tension between the working-class theatres and the middle-class west end spaces, and the theatre “as an institution acquiring and maintaining its social respectability.”²⁴² Until 1843 only three London theatres – Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and the Haymarket – had a license to produce spoken-word plays, offering them a monopoly on drama but also pushing the growing urban audiences to seek alternative theatrical forms. The predominantly working-class theatres that were required by law to include musical elements also incorporated dance and acrobatics, animal acts, as well as spectacular scenery and costumes. These attention-drawing elements were certainly a strategy to focus the attention of loud and unruly crowds, as performances that could be enjoyed without hearing the text were a successful strategy for these theatres.

The theatrical form which emerged out of these disparate performance modes was melodrama. The term itself covers a wide range of historical and literary modes, but Marcie Frank offers a definition in line with the Victorian theatre:

The term was first used to signify dramatic speech accompanied by music but quickly came to signify dramatic performances that included dance and pantomime elements, in addition to the musical accompaniment of speech, as well as song, often with spectacular scenery, an exotic setting, and a repertory of plot elements that feature persecuted innocence overcoming apparently insurmountable obstacles and a cast of characters that often included mute, lame, blind, deaf, or simple people and sometimes animals.²⁴³

²⁴² Russel Jackson, ed. *Victorian Theatre: The Theatre in its Time* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1989), 3

²⁴³ Marcie Frank, “At the Intersections of Mode, Genre, and Media: A Dossier of Essays on Melodrama,” *Criticism*, Vol. 55, No. 4, A Dossier of Essays on Melodrama (Fall 2013), 535

Imported into England through translations of the popular plays that René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt and August von Kotzebue had developed in France and Germany, melodrama emphasized exotic locations, moral clarity, triumphant virtue, elaborate visual spectacle, and physical feats. In this genre the duel found a new and welcome home.

The combats discussed in the last chapter were incorporated into melodrama and still bear traces of their possible *matachine* roots. A review of a January 1822 production of *The Temple of Death* noted the

great magnificence both in the scenery and dress, and the disappearance of part of the Temple, with the murderer enveloped in fire through the stage, in the concluding scene, is remarkably well managed. There are also two pretty good combats of six warriors with battle axes, and another of eight youths with swords and shields, but the chief attraction of the whole is a grand trial of skill, alias a “most terrific combat,” which is fought with surprising precision, by Blanchard and Bradley, (unquestionably the best stage combatants in England).²⁴⁴

The two actors named in the review were still memorable in 1848, when John Maddison Morton’s farce *Slasher and Crasher* included a stage direction for the title characters to “*throw themselves into melo-dramatic attitude, and begin to fight, a la “Bradley and Blanchard.”*”²⁴⁵

Frank Rahill notes that the London melodramas were profoundly affected by the adventure plays written in Paris, especially Alexandre Dumas’ adaptations of his

²⁴⁴ Reprinted in *Rambler’s Magazine, or, Fashionable Emporium of Polite Literature*, Vol 1 (London: Benbow, 1822), 79. Different editions of the play were published by H. N. Miller and T.H. Lacy, both in 1821, and a two-act version was published in toy theatre format for Hodgson’s & Company around the same time: the toy theatre features two different fights between Bradley and Blanchard. The 1822 production was at the Royal Coburg Theatre, later renamed the Royal Victoria and today is the Old Vic.

²⁴⁵ John Maddison Morton, *Slasher and Crasher* (New York: Samuel French, 1849), 29

own novels.²⁴⁶ Starting with *The Three Musketeers* in 1845, Dumas helped create a genre of what Rahill calls “cape and sword melodrama.”²⁴⁷ The Musketeers were followed by *The Count of Monte Cristo* in 1848, the story spread out over four plays and two long evenings. These plays crossed to England in part because Charles Kean employed Dion Boucicault as a playwright at the Princess Theatre in 1850, and the Boucicault travelled to Paris to find material to rewrite for English audiences. His first adaptation for Kean was 1852’s *The Corsican Brothers*.

These heroic plays were star vehicles for their lead actors, which perhaps explains why the ensemble-driven *The Three Musketeers* did not arrive in England until the end of the century. Kean found popular success with *The Corsican Brothers*, playing both of the formerly conjoined twins Fabien and Louis. Although separated they share feeling, despite being in Corsica and Paris, and the story follows Fabien’s journey to save his brother after seeing a troubling vision of Louis’ death. Louis has travelled to Paris to pursue the love of Emilie de L'Esparre, and is confronted by his rival Chateau Renaud. Killed in a duel in the second act, Louis dies confessing that his brother will avenge him – which Fabien does in the third act, which is comprised almost entirely of the second combat. Fabien arrives on the famous Corsican Trap, emerging slowly up from the stage while simultaneously gliding towards the audience, and Chateau Renaud at first takes him for the ghost of Louis. This second duel featured two distinct sections:

Fabien and Chateau Renaud fight; during the pause, the latter leans upon his sword, and breaks it. *Fabian*, to equalize the combat, snaps his sword also;

²⁴⁶ Frank Rahill, *The World of Melodrama* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), 75

²⁴⁷ *ibid*

and both then take the broken halves, and fastening them in their grasp by cambric handkerchiefs, *they fight as with knives*. This does not *read* as horrible, perhaps; but to see it on the stage, represented with minute ferocity of detail, and with a truth on the part of the actors, which enhances the terror, the effect is so intense, so horrible, so startling, that one gentleman indignantly exclaimed *un-English!*²⁴⁸

What the review fails to note is that Kean was making the conscious design choice to reference Corsican knife fighting, so that the Fabien could avenge his brother in a suitable and symbolic fashion. Although the review does discuss the idea of *la vendetta*, it is unclear whether the anonymous audience member found the finale so foreign because it was an act of revenge or because it was a more violent fight with knives. The review does go on to note that the fight “was, indeed, gratuitously shocking, and Charles Kean will damage himself in public estimation by such moral mistakes, showing a vulgar lust for the lowest sources of excitement – the tragedy of the shambles!”²⁴⁹

Despite this appraisal, the play was a popular success, running in six different London theatres within a month. Geraint D’Arcy suggests that the popularity of the play had more to do with the effect of the trapdoor than the drama itself, but he is relying on contemporary assessments which took a condescending view of melodrama.²⁵⁰ Michael Booth neatly sums up this bias:

Much nineteenth century theatre was light entertainment. Pantomime, extravaganza, and burlesque comprised a great deal of it, attained heights of popularity, and then suffered severely in the esteem of the critic-historians (including contemporaries), who, if they had to write about what to them was

²⁴⁸ *The Leader*, February 28, 1852, 21.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.* “The shambles” here was likely meant to refer to a meat market or butcher.

²⁵⁰ Geraint D’Arcy, “The Corsican Trap: Its Mechanism and Reception,” *Theatre Notebook*, Vol. 65, No. 1, February 2011

the miserable degradation of nineteenth-century drama, were certainly not going to descend to the darkest depths of popular theatre.²⁵¹

Notably, when Prince Albert commissioned Edward Henry Corbould to paint a scene from the play, it was the emotional Act II duel and not the ghostly encounter that was depicted.

The Corsican Brothers is important because it was part of the transformation of the working-class melodrama's combat towards the more upscale middle-class drama's duel. Kean was manager of the Princess Theatre, where he had overseen a revival of Shakespeare with an emphasis on historical authenticity. The Princess also produced numerous pantomimes and melodramas, and the aesthetics of what had been spoken-word drama mingled with the popular variety forms. *The Corsican Brothers* also helped establish the duel as the resolution of the drama. The play features two different duels, comprising three fights (sword, sword, and knife) between the same two actors, but the story is over once Fabien has avenged his brother. Boucicault and Dumas were borrowing from revenge tragedy but used the relationship between the brothers to create an honorable gloss to the events which reviews found so *déclassé*. Prior melodramas had often placed the fights throughout the play as theatrical events rather than narrative resolution, and they could be moved around in a performance depending on the audience's attention.

Following *The Corsican Brothers* was another Dumas adaptation that helps illustrate the appeal and growing importance of the duel. Two different productions of *the Count of Monte Cristo* appeared in London in the 1860s: Thomas Hailes Lacy

²⁵¹ Michael Booth, *Prefaces to English Nineteenth Century Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 1980), 150

published his in 1860, and Charles Fechter's following in 1868. Alexander Dumas' original sprawling story covers two decades in the life of Edmund Dantès, who starts the book in love with Mercédès. Jealous of Dantes professional fortune, Count Danglars conspires with Fernand Mondego to imprison Dantès, assisted by the judge Villefort. The novel follows these characters over twenty years as Dantès acquires skills and a fortune, escapes imprisonment, and refashions himself as the mysterious Count of Monte Cristo to enact his slow revenge. Numerous adaptations have emphasized different sections of the story, but the source does not include a single duel between the principal characters: Villefort is driven insane, Mondego commits suicide, and Danglars is left alive. The only threat of a fight is between Albert, Mercédès' son with Mondego, and Monte Cristo – but this is prevented by Mercédès' recognition of Dantès.

The book is largely concerned with financial revenge, with manipulations of fortunes at stake. This emphasis on money rather than blood fits into a trend wherein Victorian manhood increasingly became measured by wealth. The earlier identification of fops with materialist aristocrats, as in Garrick's *Miss in Her Teens*, may have appealed to middle-class audiences who "often contrasted their public masculine vigor and private domestic affectivity with what they claimed was aristocratic effeteness and debauchery."²⁵² By the time of *Monte Cristo* materialism and economic status had replaced honor as one of the defining measures of masculinity, and for melodramatic plays in the nineteenth century "the hero's

²⁵² Martin Francis, "The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity," *The Historical Journal*, Sep. 2002, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Sep., 2002) 648

vulnerability was both economic and physical.”²⁵³ John Ruskin’s 1860 essay “The Roots of Honor” helped solidify this transition of value from personal to commercial value by arguing that because merchants provided for the state, they were owed more honor than the soldiers who defended it.²⁵⁴

The two London adaptations of *Monte Cristo* substantially altered the story, cutting much of what Dumas himself adapted into four separate plays encompassing almost twenty hours of stage time. Significantly both English versions inserted a duel, conforming the story to the familiar outlines of revenge tragedy and melodrama. Lacy’s version ends with Mondego killed in a duel by Dantes. Fechter’s version would be the more successful, with Danglers instead the victim of the Count’s sword.²⁵⁵

If the early Victorian stage was dominated by the many varieties of Combats, the late Victorian and Edwardian stages were defined by these duels. The rise of the new historically informed stage fights discussed in the previous chapter arrived alongside new ideological meanings to the theatrical event itself. Audiences, critics, and playwrights understood that a swordfight on stage was bound by a set of social and theatrical conventions, and that it bore a particular set of meanings for the story and the characters who fought them, even as the event of the duel had become a social and legal anachronism. The drive toward a narrative whole in the nineteenth

²⁵³ Kristen Guest, “The Subject of Money: late-Victorian Melodrama’s Crisis of Masculinity,” *Victorian Studies*, Summer 2007, Vol. 49, No. 4, 635

²⁵⁴ Ruskin, “Unto This Last,” published in *Cornhill Magazine*, August 1860

²⁵⁵ Fechter’s adaptation would have the longest life and would be the version James O’Neill appeared in more than 6000 times. Fechter would also receive writing credit for the 1922 silent film adaptation.

century allowed the duel to become a theatrical tool for playwrights: as John Leigh notes, “[t]he duel...illustrates their character and that of the societies they inhabit.”²⁵⁶ But unlike the role of duels in plays like *Romeo and Juliet*, where the duel reflected and responded to an actual social practice, the Victorian duel was a reflection of ideology. Furthered removed by the shift towards pistols that had occurred in the eighteenth century, the sword was an increasingly purely symbolic prop.²⁵⁷

Semiotics of the Sword

Erika Fischer-Lichte notes that “the signs engendered by theatre respectively denote those signs produced by the corresponding cultural systems.”²⁵⁸ In scenes of action or violence material signifiers take on new significations when they are combined with the actions of an actor/character. As one example, Fischer-Lichte refers to a “sword” as a historically neutral object that audiences imbue with *all* possible cultural meanings for “sword:”

...it is of no importance whether the item bears the slightest resemblance to the signified object or not; a medieval sword, for example, can be signified by either a simple club or an exact replica; by an authentic medieval sword – or for that matter, by an old hat. If it is clear from the context that this object is a medieval sword, then it functions as the sign for a medieval sword.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ John Leigh, *Touche: The Duel in Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 2

²⁵⁷ Plays and novels which feature pistol duels often offer more philosophical approaches to dueling, rather than the embodied vigor of sword duels. A dramaturgical comparison between sword and pistol duels is an avenue for further research but is beyond the scope of this project; Andrew Sofer offers cogent analysis in his chapter on the nineteenth-century stage pistol in *The Stage Life of Props*.

²⁵⁸ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Semiotics of Theatre*, Jeremy Gains and Doris L. Jones, trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 9.

²⁵⁹ Fischer-Lichte, 107

This was exactly the process that had governed the pantomime combats of the early nineteenth century, in which actors used a specific sword for fights regardless of the setting. Charles William Smith offered this advice in the 1860s:

The best plan is to keep a sword specially for fighting, a little shorter than a real sword, made of a very good steel, with thick, round edges and tip. It should have a strong guard for protection of the hand and the hilt should be proportioned to the size of your hand. By always using this, you will become accustomed to it, and feel easy and confident in wielding your weapon. The fighting sword should be exchanged for the stage sword and placed in your scabbard before you go on the stage for the scene in which you have to fight.²⁶⁰

Numerous illustrations and cartoons attest to this style of blade appearing throughout the mid-century, and Fischer-Lichte's argument that a generic object carried the semiotic meaning of "sword-ness" breaks down as the century moved on and London audiences were encouraged to appreciate both the specificity of object and gesture.

There is no clean transition between sword fights of the kind Fischer-Lichte imagines - and which the combats of early pantomime and melodrama tend to match - and more realistic fights in which the semiotic meaning of the sword object and gesture were more historically specific, but rather an overlap of practice. Well into the twentieth century productions were still employing combats as separate theatrical events, and the fight director Henry Marshall remembered that

There was another company which employed an actor called a Play Saver. The Play Saver waited in the wings, sword in hand. At the first sign of restlessness from the audience, he would rush on to the stage and say to whoever was there 'Ha, I know what you would but you shall not. Draw and fight.' Then there would be a terrific sword fight that had nothing to do with the plot, but regained the wandering attention of the audience.²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ Charles William Smith, *The Actor's Art* (London, c. 1867), quoted in Jackson, 105.

²⁶¹ *The Sword*, (July 2012), 58

Rather than seeing these interludes as disruptions in a narrative – “nothing to with the plot” as Marshall deems – it is useful to see them as strategies for live performance in a format in which variety acts such as dances, acrobatics, animal acts, or fights could be rearranged mid-performance based on performer availability, space requirements, audience interest, run-time changes, or other changing conditions that musical hall and pantomime theatre were built around.

There are four distinct modes of semiotic meaning that props swords moved through from the popularization of the Italian duel in the 1570s to the mid-Victorian period three centuries later. These modes overlapped, and all four still exist in different performance contexts, but there was a general trend moving from:

- **The stage sword indistinct from a real sword**

In this category we have the stories of actors interacting with audience members, occasionally chasing or fighting with them using stage props as in the anecdote cited above with Richard Tarleton.

- **The stage sword as contemporary object.**

This generally covers the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries when there was no real connection between a play’s time period and the design elements, so a production of *Richard III* like William Smith’s in 1775 could feature a Battle of Bosworth Field with Georgian-era fencing foils. This would also of course include Shakespearean productions like *Titus Andronicus*, as indicated in the Peacham drawing, in which the characters carried Elizabethan rather than Roman weapons.

- **The stage sword as neutral signifier.**

This is closest to Fischer-Lichte's idea of the semiotics of swords as props, and covers the *matachine*-style combats of folk plays as well as the early melodramas in which actors used universal “stage swords” with rounded tips and dulled edges to fight in any narrative setting, and would often use these fighting swords alongside other different historically accurate swords in the same performance.

- **Stage sword as historical object**

This is the mode that would become dominant following Kean’s emphasis on historical settings for Shakespeare, including costume and props, and would over the nineteenth century become the dominant style for London theatre. In this semiotic field the stage sword refers to the historical object for the time and geography of the play’s setting and should visually match the source material.: a foil was no longer suitable for a medieval battle.

In addition to needing to visually match the historical object, productions emphasized historical or culturally accurate movement. This was another theatrical trend which drew from Romanticism, with its emphasis on folk traditions. Rather than actors showing off their fencing to demonstrate practical martial skill or their association with London’s celebrity fencing culture, actors began to perform stage fights using historic martial arts. This movement was tied to a larger discourse of medieval revivalism that was explicitly performative: Walter Scott’s historical novels brought a resurgent interest in chivalry and Arthurian stories; a revival of folk dance meant that “the minuets, pavanés, Morris and country dances in concerts, plays, balls, garden parties, festivals and street pageants, across England was enjoyed and amateur aristocrat and working class dancer alike;” while George IV’s coronation in 1821 had

been executed in “pseudo-Elizabethan cloaks, ruffs, slashed-doublets, hose, and plumed caps.”²⁶²

In 1824 Samuel Meyrick published *A Critical Inquiry into Antient Armor* [sic], which allowed popular access to scholarly analysis of arms and armor. Meyrick’s work would later inspire the creation of two organizations of collectors and fencers: the amateur Kernoozers Club in 1881 and the professional Meyrick Society in 1890. The Meyrick Society was clustered around the military and Prince Edward, but the Kernoozers a gentlemen’s social club of amateur arms and armor antiquarians. It was in this imaginative environment that the stage duel found its current place. Freed from paternalistic aristocratic codes of honor, audiences from children’s toy theatres to the opera house could enjoy dashing heroes in thrilling adventures. No longer complicated by social or legal consequences, duels could become aspirational fantasies for audiences. A finally, the narrative experiment of where to place a duel within a story had settled largely on the climax as an opportunity for (usually) male characters to prove their valor or worth, overcome a threat to domesticity, defend an archaic sense of honor, and often return to a world now restored to balance. Linked to a Romantic fascination with its own cultural history, English literature, art, dance, and drama placed duels into fictional historical settings where it was naturalized, and the very late invention of the climactic stage duel could appear eternal and inevitable.

²⁶² Teresa Jill Buckland, “Dance and Cultural Memory: Interpreting “Fin de Siècle” Performances of ‘Olde England,’” *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, SUMMER 2013, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Summer 2013), 31 and Girouard, 26

Chapter 3: Fencing and Physical Culture

A 1904 print by Frederick Townsend, printed in *Punch* in 1905, helps illustrate the changing role of the sword in pre-war England.²⁶³ A Gibson Girl look-alike, her corset replaced by the similarly flattering fencing jacket, converses with a French gentleman while in the background a densely packed fencing class is in full assault. The punchline is simple and loaded: the man, “hero of a hundred duels,” is taken aback by the girl’s naïve query “have they introduced fencing into France yet?”²⁶⁴

The comic is full of subtext: a subtle critique of French manhood and culture, a poke at athletic fads and fitness, a swipe at the uncultured New Women, a suggestion of the colonial power of sport, a snapshot of Victorian manhood whose swashbuckling fantasies had uneasily diversified, a room full of energetic bodies bound by repressive clothing, the social, political, and sexual emancipation of women and the fear of urban violence. What the image takes for granted is striking: the class is mixed gender, and without obvious superiority by either sex. The class is crowded, observed by a gallery of spectators with the entire front row packed with fashionably dressed women – perhaps the older sisters and mothers of the New Women in the picture but also an engaged audience. In this context, the girl’s question is perhaps not so straightforward as the gag implies: for Edwardian England, fencing was a fashionable, metropolitan, coeducation fitness activity far removed from the

²⁶³ F. H. Townsend, *Punch*, March 8, 1905.

²⁶⁴ *Punch*, (March 8, 1905), 177

Frenchman's concept of fencing steeped in honor, secrecy, and masculinity. The woman does not mean 'fencing' as a martial discipline, but as an athletic activity.

As Robert Darnton observes, "if we can get the joke, we should be able to shed some of our modern worldviews and enter into the alien mental world of ordinary persons who lived...before us."²⁶⁵ Nothing in the visual image would have made sense a century before, and a century later the punchline requires extensive context. The comic's entire meaning – graphically, culturally, and textually – was the product of a radical change in physical culture in England in the nineteenth century. These changes in the ways British citizens viewed their bodies impacted their ideas of empire, identity, history, art, sex, and for this discussion, theatre.

Theatre studies have placed the body at the center of discourse since Aristotle distinguished acting from Homeric storytelling, but in practice that often appears as closed-loop conversations about the semiotics of physical acting systems such as *commedia dell'arte* or Delsarte, or the focused study of specific skills such as stage combat, intimacy choreography, or Alexander technique, which can then become universally and uncritically applied in academic and rehearsal environments. Performance studies approaches, often rooted in cultural anthropology, frequently place the body entirely within the realm of structuralism: "Its habits and stances, gestures and demonstrations, every action of its various regions, areas, and parts – all these emerge out of cultural practices, verbal or not."²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), xviii

²⁶⁶ Foster, 3

This chapter will examine the ways these changing attitudes towards physical culture and sport could help us reexamine Victorian theatre. This requires stepping outside of the histories of theatre and dueling to examine the larger historical and cultural contexts of physical activity. Fencing shifted in the eighteenth century from being primarily a martial art for aristocratic men to being a popularly enjoyed exercise and sport in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Fencing transformed from a deadly practice condemned by kings to the subject of pin-ups, urban gymnasia, and the Master-At-Arms badge for the Boy Scouts.²⁶⁷

To understand fencing transformation, we need to look at the broader fields of sport and fitness. Paul Johnson perhaps overstates the case when he states that “in no respect did the modern age proclaim its arrival more significantly than in the rise of competitive, organized, regulated and mass-directed sports,” but a series of cultural shifts in the nineteenth century did change individual, public, and state attitudes towards the body and exercise.²⁶⁸ Following Hargreaves contention that sports and physical culture “fall within the province of the ‘popular,’ and in so far as they take on the attribute of a dramatic performance they can be said to constitute a form of popular theatre,” this chapter borrows tools from the field of physical culture studies.²⁶⁹ Patricia Vertinsky and Gavin Wheedon offer a useful framework:

The prevailing histories of physical culture take place in Europe and North America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and show how an extended

²⁶⁷ *Master-At-Arms Badge for the Boy Scouts: How to Gain the Badge* (Glasgow: James Brown & Sons, 1926)

²⁶⁸ Paul Johnson, *The Birth of the Modern: World Society 1815-1830* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 704

²⁶⁹ John Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 11

community of American and European actors, dancers, physical educators, health and fitness reformers and physical culture teachers created a spectrum of ‘body cultures’ that responded and contributed to modernity and artistic modernism. These body cultures, though heterogeneous in their form and contexts, collectively crafted and visualized a ‘modern’ body, ready for work, play, war, and self-expression.²⁷⁰

Ideas of physical development and the role of the body in public discourse would frame the Victorian era, from the idealization of classical sculpture in the late eighteenth century to the visual power of the largest physique spectacle event of the century - the first Olympic Games in 1896.

Victorian Boxing

One place to start this journey is with the 1821 boxing championship between Tom “The Gas-Man” Hickman and William Neate. Their fight fell during the golden era of British boxing, at the turn of the eighteenth century, when it was transforming from a test of strength and endurance to the ‘noble science.’ This nickname likely came from James Figg’s 1720 business card, in which he offered instruction in the “noble science of defense,” and by the end of the 1700s boxing had earned royal patronage and the interest of the aristocracy as participants, patrons, and audiences. The language to describe it was elevated, with the colloquial descriptions “noble science” or “noble art” distinguishing it from the lowly corporeal sport or skill. Boxing was likely permitted while dueling was legislated because pugilism rarely left anyone dead: the laws against duels in France had been enacted in part because the

²⁷⁰ Patricia Vertinsky and Gavin Wheedon, “Historicizing Physical Culture Studies,” in Michael L. Silk, David L. Andrews, and Holly Thorpe, eds. *Routledge handbook of Physical Culture* (London: Routledge Press, 2017), 15

victims were upper-class, and there was a fear of a weakened or depleted aristocracy. As dueling fell out of fashion in the eighteenth-century boxing emerged as a way of resolving disputes without the lethality of swords or pistols.

Where dueling suffered from the paradox of needing to have a private event's outcome made public, boxing provided an open and theatrical forum where class differences were sublimated to a shared and robust manly identity.

Prize fighting engendered a male aesthetic. For the fancy, a good bout was an artistic idealization of reality, displaying manliness, fair play, and finely developed physical skills. The ring, it was said, taught Englishmen bulldog courage, fostering a sense of national pride while countering effeminacy. Pugilism elevated honor above money-getting and martial valor over comfort. Equally important, the fancy found beauty in man's sheer physicality.²⁷¹

As essays, sermons, and speeches enjoined against the many dangers of duels, boxing received wider (but not universal) public support. Boxing was a social equalizer where dueling divided classes: Pierce Egan's 1829 *Boxiana* notes that "distinction of rank is of little importance when an offense has been given, and in the impulse of the moment, a PRINCE has forgot his royalty, by turning out to box."²⁷² And princes did fight: George Augustus Frederick, the Prince of Wales and future King George IV trained at the same gym as the Duke of York, the Duke of Hamilton, and Lord Byron. William Cobett's 1805 essay "In Defense of Boxing" lays out the supposed benefits of fisticuffs:

But boxing matches give rise to assemblages of the people; they tend to make the people bold: they produce a communication of notions of hardihood; they serve to remind men of the importance of bodily strength; they, each in its

²⁷¹ Elliot J. Gorn, *The Manly Art* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1986), 27

²⁷² Pierce Egan, *Boxiana*, Vol 1 (London: George Virtue, 1829), 3

sphere, occasion a transient relaxation from labor; they tend, in short, to keep alive, even amongst the lowest of the people, some idea of independence.²⁷³

More than twenty-five thousand spectators came to watch the bout between Hickman and Neate, and William Hazlitt describes it like a fairground or festival: “The crowd was very great when we arrived on the spot; open carriages were coming up, with streamers flying and music playing, and the country-people were pouring in over hedge and ditch in all directions, to see their hero beat or be beaten.”²⁷⁴ While duels were only possible when the participants shared social status and therefore a similar sense of masculine identity, boxing allowed the “arrogant boasts, rugged tactics, and displays of bravura” of Hickman to co-exist in a highly visible social arena with the “gentlemanly comportment and fairness” of Neate.²⁷⁵

Victorian boxing was brutal; grappling was still allowed, bare-knuckle matches emphasized body hits, rounds lasted as long as both men were standing, and a fight was only over when a fighter was unable to continue. Georgian and Victorian fans of boxing were known as The Fancy, a complicated term with gendered and class implications that was already in use by 1807.²⁷⁶ A full etymology of the term is still lacking, but it possibly connects and contrasts the muscular world of boxers

²⁷³ William Cobbett, *William Cobbett's England*, John Derry, ed. (London: Parkgate Books, 1997), 178

²⁷⁴ William Hazlitt, “The Fight” in *Hazlitt: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917), 117

²⁷⁵ Scott J. Juengel, “Bare-Knuckle Boxing and the Pedagogy of National Manhood,” *Studies in Popular Culture*, (April 2003, Vol. 25, No. 3), 102

²⁷⁶ Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella, *Letters from England*, Vol. III, Robert Southey, trans. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown: 1808), 279

themselves with the elegantly dressed gentlemen who formed the audience of the fighters.

Despite the crowds and social interest that prize fights drew, especially by the literate and leisured classes, this did not translate into theatrical representation.²⁷⁷ No major plays of the period featured prize fighting, and there does not seem to have been much appetite despite its popularity. Partially this is because boxing was more difficult to put on stage, as a sword fight could go on for quite a long duration without any touch, but boxing required contact and risk. As discussed previously, the early nineteenth-century London stage generally did not explore or stage violence, but boxing prize-fights were mass spectacle paratheatrical events emphasizing the athletic male body.

If dueling was shrouded in visual secrecy, boxing was spectatorial and a mass-media event. As Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella noted in an 1807 letter,

When a match is made between two prize-fighters, the tidings are immediately communicated to the public in the newspapers; and paragraphs occasionally appear, saying the rivals are in training, what exercise they take, and what diet, for some of them feed upon raw beef as a preparative... When the combat at length takes place, as regular a report is prepared for the newspapers as if it were a national victory the particulars are recorded with a minuteness at once ridiculous and disgraceful.²⁷⁸

He later elaborates:

There is something to be attended to besides science, which is the body: it is expedient to swallow raw eggs for the wind, and to feed upon beef as nearly

²⁷⁷ N.L. Tranter usefully notes that “the number of people involved in sport certainly increased in the course of the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; but as late as Edwardian times sport spectating, and particularly playing, was still the minority interest it had always been.” Tranter, *Sport, economy, and society in Britain, 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 13

²⁷⁸ Espriella, 193

raw as possible: they who do this, and practice with weights in their hands, are said to cultivate the muscles.²⁷⁹

Any conversation about body image needs to acknowledge that ideals are never universal, and that very different ideas about the body's relationship to aesthetics, function, desire, morality, and work do coexist. But the musculature that Espriella made special note of was an increasingly important site of discourse. This muscular body was also a reaction to the Romantic emphasis on decay and feeling: here instead was a vibrant body that engaged in work rather than contemplation.

The Classical Body

The neoclassicists of the Enlightenment had revered not just the philosophy and art of the ancient world, but the bodies that seemed to manifest these ideas. Johann Joachim Winckelmann's 1756 book *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works of Painting and Sculpture* opines that "exercises gave the bodies of the Greeks the strong and manly contours which the masters then imparted to their statues without any exaggeration or excess."²⁸⁰ He continues:

Moreover, everything that was instilled and taught from birth to adulthood about the culture of their bodies and the preservation, development, and refinement of this culture through nature and art was done to enhance the

²⁷⁹ Espriella, 280. 'Wind' here is an intriguing term, as it does not refer to physical aspects such as breath or stamina but rather to the performativity before the crowd: the "vivacity...flourishes and needless gesticulations" of the fighter.

²⁸⁰ Johann Joachim Winckelmann; Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton, trans. *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works of Painting and Sculpture* (La Salle: Open Court, 1987), 7. Winckelmann also introduces ideas of racial purity into his discussions of Greek beauty, and the imagined negative effects of mixing blood, but while his pre-eugenic ideas are problematic, they should here be set aside from his aesthetic conversation.

natural beauty of the ancient Greeks. Thus we can say in that all probability their physical beauty excelled ours by far.²⁸¹

Carlos Heiko Stocking notes that “in modern Europe, Greco-Roman sculpture of the athletic male body had caused a feeling of inadequacy, which simultaneously inspired a deep desire to return to an idealized, hyperreal past.”²⁸² Peter Miller adds that throughout the century, “amid the popularity of Classical ideals and education, critics entranced by the rhetoric of degeneration quickly drew comparisons between the apparently ideal bodies that must have been the models for Classical sculpture and the hurried, sickly, thin, and despairing bodies of the contemporary populace.”²⁸³

Boxer’s bodies were the closest to this ancient ideal, and they “made excellent models for the subject matter very much in demand during an age which was enthusiastically rediscovering the art of classical Greece.”²⁸⁴ This interplay between the visual spectacle of male bodies, the developing discourse of manliness rooted in a muscular frame, and the philosophical ideals of neoclassicism fueled a feedback loop that fed on, and fed in turn, the popularity and social cachet of pugilism. At the center was the athletic male form, and “the thought that the ideal middle-class body,

²⁸¹ Winckelmann, 11

²⁸² Carlos Heiko Stocking, “Greek Ideal as Hyperreal: Greco-Roman Sculpture and the Athletic Male Body,” *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Winter 2014), 67

²⁸³ Peter J. Miller, “The Imaginary Antiquity of *Physical Culture*,” *The Classical Outlook*, Vol. 93, No. 1 (2018), 22

²⁸⁴ Tom Sawyer, *Noble Art*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 34

slender yet muscularly toned, was a clear sign of discipline, self-control, and a well-balanced man.”²⁸⁵

The relationship between working class male bodies and the aristocratic patrons who sponsored fighters and wagered on the match outcomes is problematic, and “it became the fashion for a man of position to keep a tame prize-fighter of his own.”²⁸⁶ In this way London revived the patronage system of Roman gladiators, and the muscular body became another commodity produced by industrialization, bought outright or speculated on. William Boulton recalls that “It was the custom of [Lord Barrymore] to introduce his gladiator to his guests after dinner at Wargrave, where they were allowed to judge the strength of his arm by the whizz of his fist an inch off their noses.”²⁸⁷ The point for this conversation is that throughout the nineteenth century the idealized muscular male body began to work its way up through the classes, driven by militarism and sport, to become a more universal type.

Back at the turn of the nineteenth century, however, “the word ‘sports’ itself was still likely to call to mind the outdoor pleasures of the relatively wealthy ‘sporting types.’”²⁸⁸ One of the first to present a deeper personal and civic value to

²⁸⁵ Louis Moore, “Fine Specimens of Manhood: The Black Boxer's Body and the Avenue to Equality, Racial Advancement, and Manhood in the Nineteenth Century,” MELUS, Winter 2010, Vol. 35, No. 4, The Bodies of Black Folk, 59

²⁸⁶ William Biggs Boulton, *The Amusements of Old London* (London: J.C. Nimmo, 1901), 120

²⁸⁷ Ibid

²⁸⁸ Bruce Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 123

exercise was Donald Walker, whose 1834 *British Manly Exercises* stated the case for fitness:

Exercises insure, in particular, the development of all the locomotive organs; and they prevent or correct all the deformities to which these organs are liable. They are best calculated to produce strength and activity, and to bestow invariable health. They, at the same time, confer beauty of form; and they contribute to impart an elegant air and graceful manners.

They, moreover, inspire confidence in difficult situations, and suggest resources in danger. Their consequent influence on the moral conduct of man is such, that by a courage which is well founded, because it springs from a perfect knowledge of his own powers, he is often enabled to render the most important services to others.²⁸⁹

Almost a century earlier Winckelmann had repeatedly mentioned the nudity of Greek athletes, stressing that “the development of beautiful form would not have permitted the different types and shapes of our present-day clothing, which binds and confines, especially at the neck, the hips, and the thighs.”²⁹⁰ Walker did not quite go so far, and suggested that:

The coat and all unnecessary clothes should be laid aside; and all hard or sharp things should be taken from the pockets of the remaining dress. A very light covering on the head, as a straw-hat is best; the shirt-collar should be open; the breast should be either exposed, or thinly covered; the waistband of the trousers should not be tight; and the boots or shoes should have no iron about them.²⁹¹

This may have been because Winckelmann was addressing visual and sculptural art in his discussions of classical gymnasia, where nudity was an accepted aesthetic, while Walker was proposing practical tips for everyday exercise, but there was still a

²⁸⁹ Donald Walker, *British Manly Exercises*, (Philadelphia: T. Wardle, 1837), 18

²⁹⁰ Winckelmann, 9

²⁹¹ Walker, 20

marked difference between the ideal and the reality, as well as between the images of bare-chested boxers and the fully clothed exercises in Walker's book. The muscular form was still partially imagined.

In 1840 the Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle gave a series of lectures that would draw together threads of physical culture, civic value, and literary criticism. Published in 1841 under the title *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*, Carlyle imagined a range of heroes, including Odin, the prophet Muhammad, Shakespeare, and Oliver Cromwell as all united by a sense of Will. This dynamic quality was manifested in a healthy, developed body which "identified health with an active, vigorous life, and therefore with personal power and self-creation."²⁹² As Girouard observes, "Carlyle's ideal was a governing hero or heroes, or at least a governing class near enough to heroism to rise above self-interest and dedicate itself to governing justly. He saw the ethic of such a governing class in terms of chivalry."²⁹³ This was not a chivalry of modesty, penance, and good deeds but one defined by a willingness to fight, physically or metaphorically: the value of Martin Luther, for example, was not in his ideas but rather "the essential quality of him was, that he could fight and conquer; that he was a right piece of human Valor."²⁹⁴ As Jürgen Martschukat notes: "the 'unalterable rule of right and the eternal fitness of things' of the eighteenth century was superseded by the right and duty to take

²⁹² Haley, 105

²⁹³ Girouard, 131

²⁹⁴ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History* (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1901), 160

personal responsibility, to work on oneself and one's wellbeing, to strive actively and autonomously for happiness and quality of life.²⁹⁵

The Crimean War and Muscular Christianity

These ideas found particularly fertile soil in the 1850s, when England fought the Crimean War. A contest between Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and European allies of the Ottomans, hostilities started in October 1853 when Russia did not accept a negotiated agreement about the treatment of Christians in Ottoman-held Jerusalem. A brief military engagement along the Danube showed the weakness of the Ottoman Army, and both England and France sailed their fleets into the Black Sea in January 1854. The war was the first major military campaign for England since she had clashed with current ally France in the Napoleonic Wars almost four decades earlier, and many officers who led British forces in Crimea were survivors of those wars, or who *The Times* called “the old men of the past.”²⁹⁶ The war was “what we would now call a ‘media war:’ a war that was experienced through cultural documentation not only after the fact but as events were transpiring.”²⁹⁷ There were high profile battles which became famous in England, including the siege of Sevastopol, the Battle of Balaklava, and Inkerman. Of the twenty-one thousand English casualties in

²⁹⁵ Jürgen Martschukat, *The Age of Fitness* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021), 38

²⁹⁶ *The Times*, December 29, 1854, 6

²⁹⁷ Stefanie Markovits, *The Crimean War in the British Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3

the war sixteen thousand were due to disease rather than injury, which would lead to a narrative that the war was mismanaged as well as an increased emphasis on physical education in the second half of the century. All of this affected the London stage: Michael Booth traces a new course in theatre starting the 1850s, which “represent the full flow of theatrical spectacle,” and it is useful to put theatre practice in context with both the Crimean War and its effect on physical culture.²⁹⁸

Before the full cost of the war was known, one its most outspoken champions was Charles Kingsley. The rector of Eversley, he was ineligible for military service, but Kingsley was a champion of the kind of aggressive manliness that Carlyle had advocated. He argued that “round shoulders, narrow chests, stiff limbs were...as bad as defective grammar and arithmetic.”²⁹⁹ He saw religion at the intersection of manliness and empire, and in the pamphlet *Brave Words for Brave Soldiers and Sailors* Kingsley preached power:

For the Lord Jesus Christ is not only the *Prince of Peace*; He is the *Prince of War* too. He is the Lord of Hosts, the God of armies; and whosoever fights in a just war, against tyrants and oppressors, he is fighting on Christ's side, and Christ is fighting on his side; Christ is his Captain and his Leader, and he can be in no better service. Be sure of it; for the Bible tells you so.³⁰⁰

Kingsley's response to Crimea was the 1855 novel *Westward, Ho!* Set in the age of Elizabeth and the Armada it was a celebration of adventure, colonialism, and male bonding. The hero, Amyas Leigh, would help inspire the protagonists of later

²⁹⁸ Michael R. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre: 1850-1910* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 2

²⁹⁹ Quoted in Girouard, 136

³⁰⁰ Charles Kingsley, *True Words for Brave Men* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co, 1878), 204. The editors noted “This was written and sent out to the army Sebastopol in the winter of 1855.”

adventure novels and plays: “his formal education had been limited to reading the Bible, the Prayer Book, the *Morte d’Arthur* and a book on the cruelties of the Spaniards.”³⁰¹ Beginning in Devon, Amvras and three of his friends all fall for the local beauty Rose and pledge themselves as the Noble Brotherhood of the Rose. Abducted by the Spaniard Don Guzman, the four friends follow Rose to South America where they are unable to save her life, and she and one of the Brotherhood are burnt by the Inquisition. The remaining three Brothers then seek and find El Dorado, where they encounter the native Princess Ayacanora, who stows away on Amvras’ ship when he sails home to England. Amvras’ revenge on Don Guzman is interrupted by the arrival of the Spanish Armada. Aboard the good ship *Vengeance* Amvras participates in the fleet’s defeat before changing course to seek Don Guzman’s own ship. As Stefanie Markovits observes, “While Amvras eventually wreaks revenge on Don Guzman, he does so not through honorable hand-to-hand combat, either on the battlefield or in a duel, but rather by driving the Spaniard’s ship of 500 men on to the rocks, so causing all to drown.”³⁰² The native Ayacanora is revealed to be half-English, allowing Amvras to marry her, and the novel winds down with domestic bliss in a conquering nation.

Kingsley wove his enthusiasm for violence throughout the book, using the late chivalry of Elizabethan England to stand as proxy for his ideal nation. Echoing his call for a militarized Christianity in the service of the state, Kingsley wrote

³⁰¹ Girouard, 141

³⁰² Markovits, 75

Well it was for England then, that her Tudor sovereigns had compelled every man (though they kept up no standing army) to be a trained soldier. Well it was that Elizabeth, even in those dangerous days of intrigue and rebellion, had trusted her people enough, not only to leave them their weapons, but (what we, forsooth, in these more “free” and “liberal” days dare not do) to teach them how to use them.³⁰³

His allusion to Elizabeth’s citizen army suggests that service to the state is a moral use of the natural violence of men, and that there is a personal and civic obligation to be ready to use that force.

Amyas was a model of this masculinity, more likely to do than to think or speak. In an early conversation with his friend Frank, Amyas recounts how he “fleshed my maiden sword.” On meeting a Frenchman in a tavern, who proceeds to slander “her majesty’s honor,” Amyas settles the matter without further discussion:

But I didn’t let the cur balk , for I took him by the ears, to show him out into the street Whereon he got to his sword, and I to mine, and a very near chance I had of never bathing on the pebble-ridge more, for the fellow did not fight with edge and buckler, like a Christian, but had some newfangled French devil’s device of scryming and foining with his point, ha’ing and stamping, and tracing at me, that I expected to be full of eyelet holes ere I could close with him.”³⁰⁴

While Amyas fears to be poked full of tiny holes, his response is to behead the Frenchman.

While Kingsley may have wrapped his men in Christian rhetoric, *Westward, Ho!* and its characters saw masculinity in terms of sexual conquest as well. Swords

³⁰³ Charles Kingsley, *Westward, Ho!* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1911), 524

³⁰⁴ Kingsley (1911), 55. Kingsley contrasts the cut-based swordplay of the English with the emphatic thrust of French smallsword. ‘Scryming’ is obscure, but ‘foining’ meant to thrust. Kingsley’s use of ‘ha’ing’ (presumably ‘haying’) with ‘stamping’ suggests that both were footwork, offering more evidence that the ‘hay’ in *Romeo and Juliet* was a step. Kingsley was staunchly Protestant, and his suggestion that the Catholic Frenchman did not fight ‘like a Christian’ was likely not lost on his readers.

were deliberately phallic: “The three-legged man was a tall, meek-looking person, who had bedizened himself with gorgeous garments, a great feather, and a sword so long and broad, that it differed little in size from the very thin and stiff shanks between which it wandered uncomfortably.”³⁰⁵ When Amyas first visits Frank, he calls out to him:

Oh, Frank! Frank! have you come out on purpose to break the hearts of all Bideford burghers’ daughters? And if so, did you expect to further that triumph by dyeing that pretty little pointed beard (with shame I report it) of a bright vermilion? But we know you better, Frank, and so does your mother, and you are but a masquerading angel after all, in spite of your knots and your perfumes, and the gold chain round your neck which a German princess gave you, and the emerald ring on your right fore-finger which Hatton gave you, and the pair of perfumed gloves in your left which Sidney’s sister gave you, and the silver-hilted Toledo which an Italian marquis gave you on a certain occasion of which you never choose to talk, like a prudent and modest gentleman as you are, but of which the gossips talk, of course, all the more, and whisper that you saved his life from bravoës - a dozen, at the least, and had that sword for your reward, and might have had his beautiful sister’s hand beside, and I know not what else, but that you had so many lady-loves already that you were loath to burden yourself with a fresh one. That, at least, we know to be a lie, fair Frank, for your heart is as pure this day as when you knelt in your little crib at Burrough, and said —

“Four corners to my bed,
Four angels round my head,
Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on.”³⁰⁶

For the male characters in *Westward, Ho!*, identity is defined by their bodies and their actions, rather than their beliefs or words. Frank’s deeds in rescuing the Italian marquis affirm his status as gentleman, and his entitled reward is the fawning

³⁰⁵ Kingsley (1911), 57

³⁰⁶ Kingsley (1911), 39. The reference to a vermilion-dyed beard is obscure and could refer to the fashion of dying hair to match Queen Elizabeth’s red locks.

attention of women and the respect of men: 'lady-loves' and treasure are his to collect. His promiscuous affection is presented as the natural state of men, balanced out by his pure heart.

Kingsley's colleague in this rhetoric was his friend Thomas Hughes, whose 1857 novel *Tom Brown's School Days* was its own response to the Crimean War and "helped to inaugurate a discourse of athletic masculinity that emerged in the public schools during the latter part of the nineteenth-century."³⁰⁷ Enormously popular on publication and increasingly through the end of the century, Malcolm Tozer suggests that it "was largely responsible for the tilting of the mid-Victorian ideal of the Christian gentleman towards the physical."³⁰⁸ A semi-autobiographical life at boarding school, team sports such as cricket and rugby were elevated as crucial elements of a boy's maturation. It was also crucially a book which turned a nostalgic gaze at youth, before the boys could grow up to be soldiers.

Dennis W. Allen suggests that *Tom Brown's School Days* was another step in the process by which men could form a shared identity with each other physically in a way that transcended other religious, class, or economic differences: "Arguing against the separation of classes and presenting the body, or at least the male athletic body, as democratic, as the sign of a commonality of all men, Hughes advocates a social ideal

³⁰⁷ Andy Harvey, "Tom Brown's Schooldays: 'Sportsex' in Victorian Britain," *Critical Survey*, 2012, Vol. 24, No. 1, *Sporting Victorians* (2012), 17

³⁰⁸ Malcolm Tozer, "Thomas Hughes: *Tom Brown* versus 'True Manliness'," *Physical Education Review* 12, no. 1 (1989), 44

that transcends class barriers.”³⁰⁹ Allen does note that Hughes problematizes this almost immediately by identifying class differences between village boys and the students, but there was an effort towards a shared identity. The novel also includes an ode to fighting:

After all, what would life be without fighting, I should like to know? From the cradle to the grave, fighting, rightly understood, is the business, the real, highest, honestest business of every son of man.

...

The world might be a better world without fighting, for anything I know, but it wouldn't be our world; and therefore I am dead against crying peace when there is no peace, and isn't meant to be. I am as sorry as any man to see folk fighting the wrong people and wrong things, but I'd a deal sooner see them doing that, than that they should have no fight in them.³¹⁰

For Hughes and Kingsley, the essence of chivalry was corporeal rather than spiritual: adventures, sailing and sport, fighting and sex. As Girouard observes, “they preferred a string man to a clever one, and...they regarded a clever man with instinctive suspicion, unless he could prove himself by following hounds, swinging dumb-bells or taking cold baths.”³¹¹

Both *Westward, Ho!* and *Tom Brown's School Days* are often discussed together, but it was specifically Kingsley's book that prompted the term “Muscular Christianity.” A review of Kingsley's follow-up novel, *Two Years Ago*, in the *Saturday Review* opined:

³⁰⁹ Dennis W. Allen, “Young England: muscular Christianity and the politics of the body in *Tom Brown's School Days*,” in *Muscular Christianity*, Donald E. Hall, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 120.

³¹⁰ Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's School Days* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1890), 335

³¹¹ Girouard, 143

We all know by this time what is the task that Mr. Kingsley has made specially his own – it is that of spreading the knowledge and fostering the love of a muscular Christianity. His ideal is a man who fears God and can walk a thousand miles in a thousand hours - who, in the language Mr. Kingsley has made popular, breathes God's free air on God's rich earth, and at the same time can hit a woodcock, doctor a horse, and twist a poker round his finger.³¹²

Attempting a definition, Donald E. Hall writes that “throughout works written by the muscular Christians, the male body appears as a metaphor for social, national, and religious bodies, while at the same time it attempts to enforce a particular construction of those bodies.”³¹³

Both *Westward, Ho!* and *Tom Brown's School Days* should be read as literary responses to the Crimean War: the former as patriotic encouragement and a reminder of a proud military tradition, and the latter as a nostalgic look at simpler times and tribute to the value of male bonding. Both books use the male body as the discursive site for ideas of empire, colonialism, power, and a specific form of masculinity where “the body is invested with symbolic capital in which the body is a living expression of the hierarchies of social power within the habitus of social class.”³¹⁴

Militarily the Crimean War was a victory for the Ottoman allies, but it came at an enormous and consequential cost. The long siege of Sevastopol led to unrest and anti-war sentiment at home grew throughout 1855; Parliamentary investigations into the casualties led to the resignation of Lord Aberdeen as Prime Minister and the

³¹² T.C. Sandars, *Saturday Review*, (February 21, 1857), 176

³¹³ Hall, 8

³¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, cited by Kath Woodward, *Embodied Sporting Practices* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

election of Lord Palmerston. Soldiers may have been singing *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, but Tennyson wrote it in response to newspaper reports which described the charge as a “hideous blunder.”³¹⁵

Matthew Lalumia ably sums up the outcome:

Battle lost its glorious aspect, support for the traditional military system collapsed, and the nation demanded its reform. This realignment of sentiment took two forms: a widespread sympathy for the common soldiers of the army, and a matching dissatisfaction with what was seen as an incompetent, aristocratic officer corps.³¹⁶

There were many reasons for this discontent and impression that the war had been mismanaged by an aristocratic class of officers at the expense of the working-class soldiers, and the evidence was seen in the war’s casualties. Overall fatalities were at nearly 23% for British soldiers, but of the 22,182 deaths only 2755 were combat related – the remainder were all combinations of disease and poor conditions.³¹⁷

Stationed as a nurse at the Barrack Hospital in Scutari, Florence Nightingale rose to prominence for identifying the disproportionate cause of deaths, helping to institute sanitary reforms, and compiling the statistical data when she returned to England. The body was the problem: if more men had been healthier when they left England, it was reasoned, they would have been able to better resist illness. And if more men had

³¹⁵ John Morton, “The endurance of ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade,’” *Tennyson Research Bulletin*, November 2018, Vol. 11, No. 2 (November 2018), 129

³¹⁶ Matthew Lalumia, “Realism and Anti-Aristocratic Sentiment in Victorian Depictions of the Crimean War,” *Victorian Studies*, Autumn, 1983, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Autumn, 1983), 26

³¹⁷ Lynn McDonald, “Florence Nightingale, statistics and the Crimean War,” *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Series A (Statistics in Society)*, June 2014, Vol. 177, No. 3 (June 2014), 575

been stronger when they left, they would have been more effective soldiers, shortening the war and saving even more lives.

We should be careful when discussing discourse and cultural patterns not to mistake that simply because ideas were in circulation that they were the dominant ideas – or even that they had widespread effect. While the nineteenth century did see a sea change in fitness and physical culture, the Crimean War does not seem to have prepared the boys of England for the next conflict:

Of the 20,000 volunteers for the Boer War [1899], only 14,000 were considered ‘fit’ to join. In particular urban areas men’s bodies were found to be notoriously inadequate as, for example, in the case of Manchester where out of 11,000 volunteers, 8,000 were rejected outright and only 1,200 were accepted as fit in all respects.³¹⁸

This problem would resurface again prior to the First and World Wars when European governments would propagandize sport as a cure against decadence and a pressing national security concern.³¹⁹

The Crimean War was enacted on stage while it was happening. An 1855 review of Astley’s Amphitheatre reads: “With the activity peculiar to the above establishment, the news of the Fall of Sebastopol has hardly reached this country before it is dramatized by Mr. Stocqueler, and represented with due proportion of man and beast, under the auspices of Mr. W. Cooke.”³²⁰ The entertainment, “a series of detached scenes,” told the story of Sebastopol through “a sentimental navvy, who

³¹⁸ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996), 13

³¹⁹ See Joan Tumblety, *Remaking the Male Body: Masculinity and the Uses of Physical Culture in Interwar and Vichy France*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)

³²⁰ *Morning Herald (London)*, (September 25, 1855), 5

goes to Balaklava to seek a runaway daughter, and wreak vengeance on her seducer, but finds her, to his intense surprise, the wife of a general officer, the pink of heroism and honor, and eventually one of the staff of the commander 'in chief."³²¹ The show featured a moment to show off male strength when six horses were shown as unable to pull an artillery piece up a small hill, "but a body of jack tars passing at the moment does that to which the brutes are unequal, and the gun is safely hauled on high, by virtue of a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether."³²²

The great effect, however, is the assault of the Malakoff, which terminates the piece. The soldiers present themselves in myriads, and blaze away vigorously at the canvas fortifications above them. The house is speedily filled with smoke, and resounding with the reports of musketry. When the former has dispersed, the tri-colored flag of France is seen floating over the ruins of the fortress, and the curtain falls in triumph.³²³

Built in 1773 near Westminster Bridge on the south bank, between where today's Waterloo Station and the Imperial War Museum stand, Philip Astley's Amphitheatre was the first performance venue to combine animal acts, clowning, acrobatics into the form that would become the first ringed circus.³²⁴ A former cavalry soldier with the Light Dragoons, Astley was an accomplished trick rider who started an equestrian school but saw the potential of entertainment and opened a variety venue where one could see "rope-dancing, singing, pantomime, wire-dancing, the warbling of

³²¹ Ibid. Navvies were laborers, usually employed to build the railways and canal systems that connected industrial Britain.

³²² Ibid

³²³ Ibid

³²⁴ Marius Kwint offers an informed dissent, but "Astley's Amphitheatre, according to scholarly consensus, was the first modern circus." (Mattfield, 124). See Kwint, "The Legitimization of the Circus in Late Georgian England," *Past & Present*, Feb. 2002, No. 174 (Feb. 2002)

birds, . . . women vaulting on the slack rope, imitations of hounds, organs, and dying wild boars, stage-dancing, buffoonery, mimicry, and agility of all kinds.”³²⁵ In addition, Astley’s produced pageants and plays:

Its stage, however, said to be the largest in England, was described in 1808 as measuring 130 feet in width. In 1818 an adjustable proscenium was installed by means of which the stage opening could be increased in full view of the audience from forty to sixty feet. Immense platforms, running the entire width of the stage and capable of supporting galloping horsemen and even carriages, could be raised and lowered mechanically and were masked by scenery representing battlements, bridges, and mountains.³²⁶

These ‘hippodramas’ involved equestrian acts and other animal acts interwoven into loose narratives such as *The Brave Cossack, or Perfidy Punished* (1807), *The Siege of Jerusalem* (1837), or *Joan of Arc* (1851). Astley’s connection to the military remained strong throughout his career as an entertainer, and he staged historical productions which were “much-needed and famous examples of what truly British and properly masculine men on ideal horses could achieve for their king and country.”³²⁷

The Assault at Arms

Astley’s was also the home of a new genre of entertainment, the Assault at Arms. In some ways a revival of the Elizabethan prize fights, the Assault at Arms

³²⁵ Monica Mattfeld, *Becoming Centaur: Eighteenth-Century Masculinity and English Horsemanship*. (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2017), 121

³²⁶ A. H. Saxon, “The Circus as Theatre: Astley’s and Its Actors in the Age of Romanticism,” *Educational Theatre Journal*, Oct. 1975, Vol. 27, No. 3, Popular Theatre (Oct. 1975), 300

³²⁷ Mattfeld, 141

started as a demonstration of individual martial skill and developed into grand exhibitions with thousands of spectators. The first Assault at Arms in England, however, was for “a numerous and brilliant assembly of ladies and gentlemen of the first distinction in this city.”³²⁸ It was a demonstration of swordplay by Charles-Geneviève-Louis-Auguste-André-Timothée d'Éon de Beaumont, more commonly known as the Chevalier d'Éon. Born in 1728, Charles also went by Charlotte, and was a transsexual man with androgynous physical characteristics who lived as man until 1777 when they shifted and lived as a woman until their death in 1810. The Chevalier worked as a French diplomat and spy, fought in the Seven Years War, and in March 1795 appeared in Chester with the following announcement:

MADEMOISELLE D'EON, formerly known by the name Chevalier D'eon, did yesterday arrive in this town where she intends a GRAND ASSAULT D'ARMES, In the Free Grammar School, With an English Gentleman, a Professor in the Art of Fencing, Saturday the 20th of seven o'clock in the evening. The Chevalier D'Eon being so well known throughout Europe, and this Kingdom in particular, where she has resided above thirty-three years, it will be needless here to make any display her abilities in Fencing. She was unrivalled in history - therefore any other eulogiums on her accomplishments and extraordinary talents, will not be necessary for her introduction to the Favor of the Public.³²⁹

The Chevalier d'Éon made a tour of their show that spring, including stops in Manchester, Warwickshire, Chester, and Gloucester. Sometime in the fall, at a stop in Ranelagh gardens in London, d'Éon performed a duel before the Prince of Wales and many of the royal family, and in September had a benefit played for them at the Theatre Royal.³³⁰ The wording of their performances is ambiguous enough that what

³²⁸ *The Chester Courant* (March 31, 1795)

³²⁹ *Staffordshire Advertiser* (June 20, 1795)

³³⁰ *Gloucester Journal*, (September 14, 1795)

d'Èon may have been performing was a choreographed duel, rather than an exhibition of free fencing. Although dueling had been banned in 1737, at least two men attempted to skirt the law by claiming a challenge was a Grand Assault at Arms in 1799.³³¹

The term reentered currency on June 12, 1820 with a benefit for Edmund Kean at Drury Lane. Kean played the lead in Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserved* before premiering a new piece, *The Admirable Crichton*.³³² Patrick Fraser Tytler had recently published a biography of the sixteenth century swordsman, poet, and lover James Crichton, and Kean "attempt[ed] various accomplishments in which 'the admirable Crichton' is represented to have excelled, including singing, dancing, and fencing."³³³ Kean was joined by a Mr. O'Shaughnessy for the "Assault des Armes," presumably in the farce.

Pierce Egan's 1821 picaresque novel *Life in London* also features an episode with the protagonists Jerry Hawthorne, Corinthian Tom, and Bob Logic:

Logic, according to his promise, kept his appointment to meet our heroes at the Rooms, in St. James's Street, to witness 'the assault' between Corinthian Tom and Mr. O'Shaunessy. Jerry expressed his admiration, and Logic was also loud in his praise, at the superior style displayed by Tom in the *ornamental parade of quarte and tierce*; and also at the coolness and skill exhibited by the Corinthian in the *grand assault*.

...

³³¹ *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, (September 30, 1799)

³³² *The New Times (London)*, (June 9, 1820). This is not the same as J.M. Barrie's 1902 play.

³³³ *Ibid*

Jerry, you really must take a few lessons from Mr. O'Shaunessy before you return to Hawthorn Hall. It is an elegant accomplishment, and no gentleman ought to be without some knowledge of it.³³⁴

Although it was spelled as O'Shannessy in the Cruikshank illustration of the Assault published with the novel, it is very likely this was the same fencer who appeared with Kean the year prior. William Thomas Moncrieff adapted the novel to the stage in 1821, where the fencing scene was replaced with sparring single sticks between Tom and Jerry that very likely was performed as a standard combat.³³⁵ The presence of O'Shaunessy in Kean's farce – where Kean “attempted” rather than “performed” fencing - and his absence in the stage adaptation of *Tom and Jerry* suggests that by the 1820s the term “Assault” was referring to actual fencing exhibitions, as opposed to staged combats.

The genre began to establish its format in 1822 at the Surrey Theatre, another venue for hippodrama in London. Mr. Bengough's benefit performance the evening included a Grand Assault of Arms: “Dan Mendoza, the Nestor of the Ring, will also exhibit his imitations of Big Ben, Johnson, Perrins, Humphries, Molineaux, Dutch Sam, and the peculiar Hit and Fall of Will Ward. The Assault to conclude with a Combat of Twenty.”³³⁶ Daniel Mendoza was a celebrated boxer at the tail end of his

³³⁴ Pierce Egan, *Life in London; or, The day and night scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, esq., and his elegant friend Corinthian Tom in their rambles and sprints through the metropolis*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1821), 288. Egan was also the author of the exhaustive *Boxiana*. An adaptation of *Life in London* premiered at Astley's Amphitheatre in September 1821, one of five different stage versions.

³³⁵ W.T. Moncrieff, *Tom and Jerry, or, A Life in London, an Operatic Extravaganza in Three Acts*, (1821), Act 3, scene 1. Moncrieff's version was the first to break 100 performances in London.

³³⁶ *Morning Herald (London)*, (August 26, 1822). Daniel Mendoza was a prominent Jewish boxer who caused some stir amongst anti-Semitic members of the boxing audience. See Randy Roberts, “Eighteenth Century Boxing,” *Journal of Sport History*, Fall 1977, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Fall 1977)

career, and the subject of his imitations were other famous fighters – including the black American Tom Molineaux (also spelled Molyneux).

In 1828 the Assault at Arms stepped out of the theatre when a benefit for Matthew Coulon, featured an exhibition of fencing at the Argyll Ball Room.³³⁷ This started to shape the Assaults as demonstrations of weapon skill by a group rather than d'Éon's touring show or Kean's theatrical display. This event was so successful that a second benefit was arranged two weeks later. This new model – a demonstration of fencing exercises or free play – began to be added to theatrical performances in the 1820s and '30s, and in 1839 the Assault took its next formal step by becoming attached not to a theatrical event, but a contest hosted by the Swimming Society.³³⁸ From this point forward Assaults at Arms were connected to physical exhibitions. Often these Assaults were fundraisers for military groups, fencing schools, and increasingly in the mid-century, gymnasiums.

The physical fitness that Walker had presented in 1834 were generally outdoor exercises such as swimming, running, and riding, to which he added that “the necessary fittings-up of an exercising ground, are a leaping stand, a vaulting horse, a balancing bar, a climbing stand, with ladders, poles, and ropes.”³³⁹ By 1858 a two-story, purpose-built gymnasium was erected at Oxford University which included spaces for fencing, rope climbing, ladder exercises, free weights and Indian clubs, and

³³⁷ *The Morning Herald* (June 11, 1828), frontispiece

³³⁸ *Weekly True Sun* (August 4, 1839), 8

³³⁹ Walker, 21

spectators. Military versions did not predate the civilian institutions by very long, appearing at the Royal Military Academy by 1849, suggesting that this was a broad cultural trend. Tony Wolf notes that

The original assaults-at-arms in England had been partially inspired by the gymkhana contests undertaken by British soldiers serving in India in the early decades of the 1800s. The word “gymkhana” is actually an Anglo-Hindi portmanteau, from “gym” as in “gymnastic” and ghendkhana,” which means “a place where games are played.” Indian cavalymen traditionally trained in large public arenas, and their feats with lance and sword attracted large, appreciative audiences.³⁴⁰

The gymnasium, a public space for exercise, had taken hold in Europe in the early nineteenth century, and Walker’s book was joined by Ernst Gustav’s *The Portable Gymnasium* in 1861 and Professor Harrison’s *Indian Clubs, Dumb Bells, and Sword Exercises* (c.1888).

As events, the Assaults at Arms expanded in the second half of the century, seeing their heyday in the 1880s – just as the children of Crimean veterans would be coming of age for military service. An event in 1859 featured self-defense lectures, single stick and long sword fights, exhibitions of saber against bayonet, boxing, foil fencing matches, an interlude of clog dancing, and sharp cutting demonstrations of a lead bar and Sergeant Taylor “at one blow cut through the body of a sheep suspended by its hind legs.”³⁴¹ The standard Assault included all the preceding events as well as quarterstaff, solo and group gymnastic routines, efficient artillery movement and disassembly, firefighting rescue demonstrations, and historical fencing and took place

³⁴⁰ Wolf, *Ancient Swordplay* (Wheaton: Freelance Academy Press, 2012), 27. Wolf’s timeline in the book is often incorrect, but the Indian inspiration is a useful contribution.

³⁴¹ *Kentish Independent* (November 12, 1859), 5

in large public venues such as Royal Albert Hall, the Theatre Royal in Liverpool, and the parade grounds at the Aldershot Garrison.

Harold B. Segel notes that “the institutionalization of physical culture was inevitable, certainly once the compatibility of its aims with nationalist objectives and military preparedness were discerned.”³⁴² Hughes’ *Tom Brown’s School Days* had helped establish youth athletics as a key component of both education and maturation, creating that reality as much as reflecting it through the popularity of the book, and the Assault took its final and most institutionalized form as the Grand Military Tournament and Assault at Arms, held over six days in June at the Royal Agricultural Hall in Islington. Now fully a celebration and endorsement of military culture, the Royal Tournament included a series of fencing matches between members of the armed services, and was endorsed by the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Connaught, the Duke of Cambridge and Prince Edward of Saxe-Weimar.³⁴³ A financial failure for its first two years, the Tournament found its footing in 1883 when it added more performance to balance out the competition, among them military bands, mass synchronized equestrian events, and a Balaclava melee, “in which teams of mounted troopers armed with sticks had to knock the plumes off each other’s helmets.”³⁴⁴ Now a spectacle more in line with the hippodramas and other theatrical fare at venues

³⁴² Harold B. Segel, *Body Ascendant* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 5

³⁴³ *The Times* (June 11, 1880)

³⁴⁴ Martin Polley, *The British Olympics: Britain’s Olympic heritage 1612-2012* (Swindon: English Heritage Books, 2011), 43. The Battle of Balaclava was a curious reference point, as it had been a French and English defeat as part of the Siege of Sebastopol in 1854, in part because of the failure of the Light Brigade in their cavalry charge.

like Astley's Amphitheatre, the Tournament became popular social event and in 1884 received Victoria's blessing and became the Royal Tournament.

This modern incarnation of the medieval tournament inverted the value system of the event: while jousts and lists had been an opportunity for individual knights to gain honor and status, in the Victorian tournament transferred that distinction to the military and nation. Individual men still earned awards – Egerton Castle took gold at the event in 1882 – but the overall frame was that their success was a demonstration of the training, skill, and effectiveness of the military writ large.³⁴⁵

Discussions of the Victorian physical culture post-Foucault and Butler have placed the body into interpretive networks of hegemony and power, and the Assaults at Arms were venues to explicitly link physical fitness and military power. While discussions of the Assaults frequently list the various weapons or equipment used, such as bayonet, vaults, or foil, this insistence on imagining and archiving the event through the material objects obscures the fact that the Assaults were exhibitions of bodies: the swords were the “conventional props” which amplified and signified heroic masculinity.³⁴⁶ Alfred Hutton put forth that “everything...is useful to the Art of Fence which tends to create an interest in it, and certain it is that such contests as ‘Rapier and Dagger,’ ‘Two hand Sword,’ or ‘Broadsword and Handbuckler,’ are a very great embellishment to the somewhat monotonous proceedings of the ordinary

³⁴⁵ Wolf (2012), 3

³⁴⁶ Tamar Garb, *Bodies of Modernity*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 28

‘assault of arms,.’” but Hutton assumes that what the audience had come to see were the objects and their history - because that is what Hutton was interested in. These objects put the body in strenuous (and sensuous) motion and turned the audience’s focus on the muscle rather than steel.³⁴⁷

Spectacle Theatre

Spectacle has been a key element of theatrical performance since antiquity, when the crane of the *deus ex machina* flew performers over Greek stages, but in the latter Victorian period it became its own genre of theatre. Norman Klein traces this to the Baroque stage machines of designers like Nicola Sabbatini, whose *Manual for Constructing Theatrical Scenes and Machines* was published in 1638, and Giacomo Torelli’s work in the 1640s.³⁴⁸ Sabbatini’s book included instructions on “How to make Mountains and Other Objects Rise From Under the Stage,” or “How to make a Cloud Descend So That It Will Gradually Move from the Extreme End of the Stage to the Middle of the Stage, a Cloud, Moreover, with Persons in it.”³⁴⁹ Torelli began work for the Paris opera in 1645, where he made mountain vanish, vases sprout flowers and spurt water, and zephyrs that chained Andromeda to rocks.³⁵⁰ Philip Steadman argues that

³⁴⁷ Hutton, *Old Sword Play*, ii

³⁴⁸ See “Scripted Spaces and the Illusion of Power, 1550-1780” in Norman M. Klein, *The Vatican to Vegas: A History of Special Effects* (New York: New Press, 2004)

³⁴⁹ See A.M. Nagler, *A Source Book in Theatrical History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), 86-102

³⁵⁰ Nagler, 167-172

the common factor in all this variety of entertainments was that they depended on machines, or, to use an anachronistic term, technologies. The fountains relied on elaborate systems of water control: aqueducts, reservoirs, pipes and nozzles. Animal and human automata were worked by concealed hydraulic, pneumatic and mechanical apparatus. The machinery of the Renaissance theatre brought celestial personages down from the clouds ('gods from machines') and brought characters from the Underworld up from below. Scenery was rotated, slid, rolled and replaced using yet more mechanical devices. Sets were built and painted to create realistic illusions of depth using the 'technology' of perspective.³⁵¹

I suggest instead that the common factor for much of Victorian spectacle theatre was the thrill of watching bodies, and the various special effects functioned exactly like the climbing apparatus or the Assault at Arms or the boxing ring: they put focus on the muscular body at work.

Not all actors fit this mold, and not all theatre was judged by a need for spectacle. Henry Irving had a notably awkward frame: Gordon Craig remembered that

Unlike the Japanese actors Irving was not athletic. He could on occasion bound across the stage, when it was imperative, but he did not seek for opportunities to display the agility that was in his wiry frame; Harlequin had done that for so many years, and done it to perfection.³⁵²

William Storm adds:

he was critiqued and even satirized, in print and in illustrative caricature, for a range of perceived abnormalities and eccentricities having to do with his walk, tempo, vocal inflections, and range of expression and gesture—that is, for the most fundamental elements of an actor's instrument, physicality.³⁵³

³⁵¹ Philip Steadman, *Renaissance Fun* (London: UCL Press, 2021), 3

³⁵² Craig, 79

³⁵³ William Storm, "Impression Henry Irving: The Performance in the Portrait by Jules Bastien-Lepage," *Victorian Studies*, Spring, 2004, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Spring, 2004), 399

Irving's specialty since the beginning of his career had been complex psychological characters, as I will examine in the next chapter, but the splendor that he pursued at great expense at the Lyceum was also in this mode of excess, using the costumes and scenery to scale up the actors.

Irving emphasized spoken word plays like Shakespeare and historical pageants at his theatre, and there was a gulf between this pictorialism and the more movement-based forms such as melodrama and pantomime, even when they shared the same stage and performers. As Michael Booth observes:

Melodrama was spectacular from its birth. The law itself, decreeing that the spoken dramatic word was the property of the patent theatres, forced early melodrama at the Royal Circus in the 1790s to evolve as dumbshow with extensive musical accompaniment. The presence of mime and wordless physical combat, and the heavy reliance on emotional semiology to carry content and moral point of view meant that from the beginning melodrama was strongly and stereotypically visual.³⁵⁴

One of these spectacular forms was the naumachia, or nautical drama. In April 1804 the theatre at Sadler's Wells built a water tank below the stage which allowed for a whole range of effects that employed actual water, as opposed to plays that were set in nautical environments but did not need practical elemental scenery. In the long eighteenth century Jack Tar had become a stock nautical character, appearing in songs, illustrations, joke-books, and plays, but his stories generally did not need actual water to make dramaturgical sense.³⁵⁵ Sadler's Wells offered theatre in which the effect was as important as the story. William Pinks noted the event:

³⁵⁴ Booth, 60

³⁵⁵ See Julianne Elizabeth Reineke, "Three Sheets to the Wind: The Jolly Jack Tar and Eighteenth-Century British Masculinity," (unpublished dissertation, Carnegie Mellon University, 2018). Reineke

An immense tank was constructed under the stage, and extending beyond it, which was filled by a communication with the New River, and could be emptied again at pleasure. On this aquatic stage, the boards being removed, was given a mimic representation of the Siege of Gibraltar, in which real vessels, of considerable size, bombarded the fortress, but were subdued by the garrison, and several of them in appearance burnt.³⁵⁶

Once the tank was built Sadler's Wells became known as the Aquatic Theatre, and

Among the apparently perilous and appalling incidents exhibited were those of a female falling from the rocks into the water, and rescued by her hero-lover; a naval battle, with sailors escaping by plunging into the sea from a vessel on fire; and a child thrown into the water by a nurse who was bribed to drown it, but rescued by a Newfoundland dog.³⁵⁷

Again, while the technology is impressive the emphasis in each of these events was on the bodies: falling, plunging, and rescued.

By the 1850s the dynamic body had become the focal point of London theatre, and much of the machinery and spectacle of the stage was put into effect to emphasize the risk or athleticism of bodies: on-stage effects included full cavalry charges in *Timour the Tartar* (1811), an exploding mill in *The Miller and His Men* (1813), the eruption of Vesuvius in *Masaniello* (1829), and sinking ships in *The Loss of the Royal George* (1835).³⁵⁸ Unlike the Baroque spectacles that Klein discusses in his history of special effects, for many of these performances the performers interacted with the physical world. Without diminishing the incredible technical achievement of this scenography, it would be a mistake to see spectacle theatre only

offers an excellent analysis of the character and the ways in which meaning was contested in the sailors' bodies, particularly from the lens of disability studies.

³⁵⁶ William Pinks, *A History of Clerkenwell* (London: Charles Herbert, 1881), 427

³⁵⁷ Pinks, 428

³⁵⁸ Booth, 61

as a response to an increasingly mechanized world or as a development in stage scenery without human context. Battles, industrial explosions, natural disasters, and shipwrecks were put on stage to watch human bodies in extreme situations.

Stage fights were fully interactive with the play's physical world, and made all the more exciting by the scenery and props. In *Humanity; or, a Passage in the Life of Grace Darling*, an extraordinary choreographed fight "was unlike any staged anywhere before."³⁵⁹

The Earl now goes to Silvani's apartments at Hempstead to demand the return of his money, and a fearful struggle ensues. A chair is dashed through a window; the furniture is smashed; the fire-irons are thrown about; pistols and decanters are used as weapons; and, to end with, there are a struggle upon and the fall of a staircase, the death of the combatants, and the righting of Grace.

...

The spectators never take their eyes off the combatants, but follow their deadly strife with the greatest eagerness, and when the staircase falls with a crash and leaves the villains struggling upon the floor, each seeking the life of the other, the effect is nothing short of thrilling.³⁶⁰

John Douglass, the manager of the Standard Theatre, choreographed the fight, invented the India-rubber champagne glasses, and devised the effect by which the staircase broke away from the wall and collapsed into the room (onto hidden sofa springs) while the two actors continued to battle upon it as it fell.³⁶¹ Likewise, while some scholars have dismissed standard combats for their simplicity, it is worth noting the context in which they were often performed.

³⁵⁹ Allan Stuart Jackson, *The Standard Theatre of Victorian England* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1993), 260

³⁶⁰ *The Era* (April 10, 1882)

³⁶¹ Albert Douglass, *Memories of Mummies* (London: Era Books, 1924), 94

During the ‘fight scene’ in the pantomime at some of our theatres, upwards of a dozen traps of various kinds are often ‘open’ from which it may be inferred that the position of the actor having to pick his way between them, as he combats the sprites springing up or diving below on all sides, must be more than ordinarily dangerous.³⁶²

The aquatic dramas that had started at Sadler’s Wells were adopted and copied by other theatres: “originality has not been an overriding concern in popular theatre.”³⁶³

An 1897 illustration in *The Illustrated London News* describes a scene that would still be thrilling seventy years later in James Bond films:

The White Heather at Drury Lane Theatre: The Submarine Duel

The most realistic and sensational scene ever devised for a Drury Lane autumn drama. Lord Angus Cameron, the villain, disguised as a diver, is confronted at the bottom of the sea by a humble admirer of the heroine. The two men wage a desperate conflict, which ends in the villain’s death by asphyxiation, his adversary having severed the air-tube of his diving dress.³⁶⁴

Scholarship of modernism generally date the shift towards an avant-garde late in the nineteenth century, but I suggest that the forms that draw focus – Brecht’s *gestus*, Meyerhold’s biomechanics, the erotic violence of the Grand Guignol, for example - are continuations of an interest in physicality that started at the beginning of the century: a critique of the passive body is perhaps more important as a historical arc than a critique of the well-made play. Bert Cardullo insists that “modernism implies historical discontinuity, social disruption, moral chaos, and a sense of

³⁶² Leopold Wagner, *Pantomimes and All About Them* (London: John Heywood, 1881), cited in Booth 151

³⁶³ Schechner, 6

³⁶⁴ *The Illustrated London News* (October 2, 1897), 462

fragmentation and alienation.”³⁶⁵ Peter Gay goes further, arguing that “if, after mid-nineteenth century, a single cultural institution urgently needed an infusion of fresh thinking it was the stage.”³⁶⁶ He continues:

Lower-class and petty bourgeoisie audiences had their melodramas, operettas, and variety shows; the better educated could resort to well-made society comedies – though many of them, too, found the amusements offered to a working-class public entertaining enough. Only a narrow elite of cultivated consumers of high culture, spirits that feed avant-garde discontent everywhere, found reason to grumble.³⁶⁷

The salvation of the elite came in two forms. On the one side was the naturalism and social issues of the New Drama which George Bernard Shaw dated to the arrival of Ibsen’s drama in London. For Shaw, “modern literature and drama had an interest which even Moliere had not, owing to the change from a superficial quarrel with certain abuses to a fundamental quarrel with society.”³⁶⁸ On the other side of the modernist revolution, Harold Segal argues, was a high modernist “disenchantment felt by many educated people, particularly in central Europe, who had come to believe that their society had for far too long placed too great a value on words.”³⁶⁹ This in turn gave birth to the near-obsession with physical form in modernist theatre: the human puppets of Craig and Jarry, the experimental language of Maeterlink and Tzara, the electric tension between Petipa and Fokine in ballet and the modern dance

³⁶⁵ Bert Cardullo, “En Garde! The Theatrical Avant-garde in Historical, Intellectual, and Cultural Context,” in Cardullo and Robert Knopf, eds., *Theatre of the Avant-Garde: 1890-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 4

³⁶⁶ Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2008), 335

³⁶⁷ Ibid

³⁶⁸ *The Times* (November 10, 1911)

³⁶⁹ Segal, 15

of the Denishawn and Graham companies, the fairground acrobatics of Meyerhold, the ritual of Artaud, and the fracturing of bourgeoisie theatre into the -Isms of the twentieth century.

There certainly is an observable shift across European theatre practice in the *fin-de-siecle*, but it is worth questioning how much of this was new, how much was a renaissance in a minor key, and how much was actually a continuity of practice which looked radical because the “narrow elite” had adopted popular forms as their own. Segal’s argument, that the late century modernist shift was a rejection of language, assumes that language was the hegemony being disrupted.

Audiences did not necessarily come to the Grand Tournament in 1883 because of an interest in fencing or historical combat, but because the Assaults at Arms borrowed the sensational effects of theatre and deployed those performance tropes in accessible theatrical forms. They could do so by borrowing the semiotics of the body which theatre and athletic culture had already developed. Spectacle theatre and physical culture developed in tandem in the Victorian mid-century, with social spaces as diverse as fencing schools, gymnasia, Assaults at Arms, melodrama, Shakespeare, and nautical performances all serving as “places of performance which generate social and cultural meanings” and where the body was both the medium and the message.³⁷⁰

³⁷⁰ Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 2

Victorian Women and Fencing

Although this chapter has emphasized the changing discourse around the male body, the same cultural forces were employed on and through women's bodies, generating a cultural parallax view in which female bodies were physically changing just as the ideological framing changed with them. Two modes of physical activity have been discussed in this chapter: self-improvement exercises that could be collaborative, and competitive sports such as boxing or fencing. Building on Carlyle's idea of the useful body, Donald Walker had added that "were training generally introduced, instead of medicine, for the prevention and cure of diseases, its beneficial consequences would assuredly prolong life, and promote its happiness."³⁷¹ As a follow-up to his *British Manly Exercises*, in 1836 Walker wrote *Exercises for Ladies; Calculated to Preserve and Improve Beauty and to Prevent and Correct Personal Defects Inseparable from Constrained or Careless Habits*. While Walker does offer suggestions for Indian clubs and dumb bells, the activities suggested for women are walking, running, leaping, and dancing. Extensive discussion is given over to problems of deportment in standing, sitting, sewing, writing, drawing, sewing, guitar-playing, harp-playing, riding, and lying in bed. Walker's does suggest the benefits of exercise for personal health, but his gender roles are clearly demarcated.

Jennifer Hargreaves usefully lays out the gender boundaries between competitive sport and personal improvement:

The 'cult of athleticism' aptly describes the exaggerated status given to games in these schools, and the close association with specifically Victorian images

³⁷¹ Walker, 273

of masculinity, embodying physical prowess, gentlemanly conduct, moral manliness and character-training. Games-playing in the boys' public schools provided the dominant image of masculine identity in sports and a model for their future development in Britain and throughout the world. Sports constituted a unique form of cultural life; they were overwhelmingly symbols of masculinity and chauvinism, embodying aggressive displays of physical power and competitiveness. In the nineteenth century there was no question that sports were the 'natural' domain of men and that to be good at them was to be essentially 'masculine'.³⁷²

Without the expectation of preparing for war, the rhetoric around women's exercise was trapped between the expectations of conventional beauty and the promise of liberation that fitness could offer. It was in this moment that fencing reemerged as an exercise.

The "reemergence of dueling in the early nineteenth century was unquestionably due to the militarism encouraged by the long wars," and it is important to recognize that a minor increase and a few notable challenges must be measured against the almost wholesale disappearance of duels and its unique masculine culture.³⁷³ This had helped lead to fencing becoming partially de-gendered in the eighteenth century: the sword had been stripped of many of its social markers, and was no longer a fashion, a primary military technology, or a weapon for settling personal disputes. While *salles* continued to be primarily male spaces, Domenico Angelo's fencing academy had opened tuition for aristocratic women in the mid-eighteenth century, and the Bertrand Academy continued this tradition into the early nineteenth century.³⁷⁴ Again the Crimean War seems to have been a watershed

³⁷² Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: critical issues in the history and sociology of women's sports*, (London: Routledge Press, 1994), 43

³⁷³ Johnson, 467

³⁷⁴ See Cohen (2018)

moment, as Mr. G. Moore began to run advertisements for “Hygienic Exercises for Women,” including fencing, in 1854.³⁷⁵ Catriona Parratt observes that “by the late 1880s, an organized and comprehensive system of physical education was a central component of the curriculum in the girls' public schools, and by the late 1890s, they had also embraced competitive sports and games.”³⁷⁶ By the end of the century the magazine *Womanhood* advocated fencing as a competitive activity not just suitable for women, but an emancipatory skill. It could be seen as a form of radical resistance to masculine norms, a part of Victorian counterculture: “an effort to change by negation and inversion the conventionalized instructions for performance as redundantly uttered in the public culture.”³⁷⁷

Women studied fencing to improve deportment, for physical fitness, and for protection. In the late 1900s, self-defense training for women “emerged from a concern for women's safety as they stepped out of the protected domestic sphere and into the public sphere of the city. Rapid immigration, urbanization, and industrialization fueled anxieties about shifting social and gender norms.”³⁷⁸ In the

³⁷⁵ *The Brighton Gazette*, (January 5, 1854), 4

³⁷⁶ Catriona M. Parratt, “Athletic ‘Womanhood’: Exploring Sources for Female Sport in Victorian and Edwardian England,” *Journal of Sport History*, Summer, 1989, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Summer, 1989), 143

³⁷⁷ Morse Peckham, “Victorian Counterculture,” *Victorian Studies*, March 1975, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Mar., 1975), 270

³⁷⁸ Wendy Rouse and Beth Slutsky, “Empowering the Physical and Political Self: Women and the Practice of Self-Defense, 1890-1920,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, October 2014, Vol. 13, No. 4 (October 2014), 481. Japanese jiu-jitsu was often the martial training provided, as it emphasized leverage and was advertised as a way to mitigate the strength advantage many men had. There is an important conversation to have about the ways in which Asian bodies were gendered (and often feminized) in Victorian discourse, complicating the conversation about jiu jitsu offered to women as a response to “manly” aggression.

later Edwardian era, martial arts became tied to the protests around voting rights for women, and “women explicitly pursued jiu-jitsu to protect themselves and [Women’s Social and Political Union] leaders from assaults not by criminals but rowdy anti-suffragettes and the police.”³⁷⁹ Actresses in the late eighteenth century had learned some swordplay to perform breeches parts, including Charlotte Goodall in *The Battle of Hexham* (1789), Dorothea Jordan in *She Would and She Would Not* (1790). Perhaps most famous was Esme Beringer, who will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

As an instance of women entering a traditionally male sphere where power was explicitly deployed, there was a specific resistance to women studying fencing by sexually objectifying them. Images of women in fencing outfits were part of erotic visual culture as far back as the 1840s, when *The Exquisite* featured Mrs. Nisbet in a fencing jacket mingled in with “hints about venereal diseases, features on saloon singers, erotic fiction, translations from Du Chatelet and Montaigne, and reports of famous sex trials.”³⁸⁰ Esme Beringer had risen to fame first in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* across from her sister Vera in 1888, and the pair returned as Romeo and Juliet in 1896. Charlotte Cushman had played Romeo fifty years earlier across from her own sister Susan,

Theatrical costume flagrantly violated the dress codes of the street and drawing room, flaunting the ankles, calves, legs, thighs, crotch, and upper torso. Cross-dressing as males was sometimes the pretense, but even as animals or inanimate objects female performers were costumed as gendered

³⁷⁹ Rouse and Slutsky, 488

³⁸⁰ Tracy Davis, “The Actress in Victorian Pornography,” *Theatre Journal*, Oct. 1989, Vol. 41, No. 3, Performance in Context (Oct. 1989), 297

objects of display. In the Victorian theatre, adult female performers were never sexless: sex was always apparent in gendered costume, whether through tights, breeches, skirts, corseted silhouettes, hairstyles, or headgear. Cross-dressing highlighted sexual difference, it did not disguise it. Femininity was intractable, and the point was to reveal, not disguise it.³⁸¹

Davis' scholarship is useful, but can be reductive. She identifies Nisbert as wearing a "man's fencing jacket," but gendering protective jackets is more difficult than Davis assumes.³⁸² A red heart on the left breast of jackets did develop as a visual motif in the Victorian period, but it was non-gendered: the 1843 *New System of Broad and Small Sword Exercise* stated that "it is usual, in academies, to have a spot or heart on the left side of the breast of the waistcoat."³⁸³ The Cruickshank illustrations from *Life in London* set Tom and Jerry apart from the other fencers by the heart motif, but over the later century the red heart on a fencing jacket became identified with female fencers and was a trope in pinups well into the 1950s.

Eugen Sandow and the Commercialized Body

No discussion of Victorian physical culture would be complete without some mention of the Prussian strongman, Eugen Sandow. While his contributions and influence have been discussed in depth elsewhere, a brief biography is useful. Born Friedrich Müller in 1867, Sandow began lifting weights in his teens and developed an extraordinary physique. It is worth remembering that Sandow's exercise goals

³⁸¹ Davis, 298

³⁸² Davis, 298.

³⁸³ Thomas Stephens, *A new system of broad and small sword exercise*. (Philadelphia: I.R & A.H. Diller, 1843), 96

existed before there was a cultural theory to place them into: it is hopefully not too much of a great-man historiography to observe that Sandow helped create the discourse that would be used to analyze him.³⁸⁴ At the time body building was purely a side-show or variety act, demonstrating feats of strength or inviting challenges from the audience. Sandow secured the title of strongest man on earth in 1889, and went on to establish exercise schools, give lectures and exhibitions, publish the monthly magazine *Sandow's Magazine of Physical Culture*, and was named Professor of Scientific and Physical Culture to King George V. As Constance Crompton notes

Sandow's success was not simply the result of great impetus on his part; his bodybuilding rhetoric allowed white, middle-class males to ground their sense of physical superiority through both art and science. Sandow blurred the distinction between culture and nature by exhorting middle-class men to artificially build "natural" muscle in gymnasia in an attempt to emulate ancient Greek statuary. Sandow's performance of muscled masculinity soothed fin-de-siècle concerns about gender variance by wresting the meaning of men's corporeal beauty from the aesthetes.³⁸⁵

Sandow's significance here was that he helped push the idea of physical fitness from function to aesthetics. Walker's *British Manly Exercises* had emphasized the healthy value of exercise and was overwhelmingly concerned with movement and deportment rather than the aesthetics of the body: the illustrations inside were fully clothed figures. Even his sequel, *Exercises for Ladies, Calculated to Preserve and Improve*

³⁸⁴ As Bieke Gils points out, Sandow's idealized body was also framed as an example of white racial superiority. See Gils, "Flying, Flirting, and Flexing: Charmion's Trapeze Act, Sexuality, and Physical Culture at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Summer 2014)

³⁸⁵ Constance Crompton, "Eugen Sandow (1867—1925)," *Victorian Review*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring 2011), 38

Beauty, discussed beauty as a largely abstract concept. For Sandow, however, the aesthetic display was the point.

Florenz Ziegfeld had recruited Sandow for the 1893 World's Exhibition in Chicago, where instead of feats of strength Sandow moved through a series of dynamic *tableaux*: "Sandow's posing introduced a revolutionary concept: that of the live display of a male body in the public arena, as an object to be admired solely by virtue of its advanced muscular development."³⁸⁶ This formed the basis of Sandow's stage performances, in which he moved through a sequence of dynamic tension poses in front of a black velvet background that showed off his muscular definition. These poses of a nearly nude Sandow were in turn reproduced throughout a print culture of photographs, postcards, magazines, posters, and books, which were folded into an emerging discourse of "secretly erotic 'craving,' one that is homoerotic for worshipping specifically the nude muscular male body while pretending at an interest only in health and athleticism."³⁸⁷ It is with Sandow that exercise and musculature became explicitly erotic, for both male and female gaze.

In these print reproductions of Sandow's poses many threads of the chapter finally come together. Sandow was consciously emulating the idealized form of classical art: "Sandow's comparison of his own body to sculpture is said to have inspired him to pioneer the practice of modern body building."³⁸⁸ That imitation of a

³⁸⁶ Kenneth Dutton, *The Perfectible Body* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 122

³⁸⁷ Jesse Matz, "Masculinity Amalgamated: Colonialism, Homosexuality, and Forster's Kipling," *Journal of Modern Literature*, Spring, 2007, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Spring, 2007), 35

³⁸⁸ Stocking, 60

(neo)classical aesthetic was then photographed or put on theatrical display, where it could be compared directly to the source material. Like the boxers who started this chapter, Sandow worked as an artist's model in addition to his postcards and prints, and the final mode of Victorian body culture came into play: the commodified body.

Cigarette cards and postcards became ways to mass-circulate images of specific, celebrity bodies. Starting in the 1870s, tobacco companies printed illustrated and photographed images on the cardboard used to stiffen cigarette packages. These quickly became collectibles, and companies such as W.D. & H.O. Willis and Players & Sons printed images in series to encourage more sales. Many of these series featured athletes, actors, and actresses. Just as in the sexualized images of athletes in the late twentieth century, after a century of physical culture the Victorian aesthetic had become sporty: “sculpted features, chiseled waistlines, well-appointed curves, dreamy eyes, administered hair, and an air of casual threat are the currency of the day.”³⁸⁹

For actors their personal aesthetics could now personally engage with the public sphere in a new way, using the strategies of print marketing that had commercialized the erotic appeal of athleticism. Where previously actors had appeared either as themselves in portraiture, illustrations in newsprint, or as illustrations of specific moments in character, the new print culture allowed them to participate in crafting their own image. Esme Beringer, famous for her fencing roles in the 1890s, appeared in an oft-reproduced postcard for *At the Sword's Point*, and

³⁸⁹ Toby Miller, “Spectacular and Eroticized Bodies” in Silk, et al, 246

while film actors like Douglas Fairbanks often get credit for being the first action star, Victorian performers like Lewis Waller appeared in numerous postcards with a sword as way to market themselves using the iconography of fencing. Swordplay had shifted from a way of defining masculine identity and honor to an activity that was part of an athletic lifestyle. Like the girl in the *Punch* illustration that opens this chapter, fencing and physical improvement became a thing you could acquire. The sword was no longer a symbol of honor, but of fitness and athleticism.

Chapter 4: Henry Irving and the Kernoozer's Club

On July 18, 1895, Henry Irving was awarded knighthood, the first actor to receive the honor. The event was a marker of how far English theatre had come in social respectability from the Puritan prohibition of the seventeenth century to the moment the usually silent Queen Victoria dabbed Irving on the shoulder with a sword and said, "I am very, very pleased!"³⁹⁰ Irving, perhaps, saw it more as a personal rather than professional achievement, and his protégé Edward Gordon Craig recalled Irving's self-deprecating quip that "they'll knight no other actor after me."³⁹¹ In his *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving*, his longtime manager and friend Bram Stoker offered several anecdotes about the knighting, beginning with an unusual parallel:

Irving used to tell a story of Haase, the German actor, who was a great favorite with the Kaiser, William I. During a performance the Kaiser sent for Haase, who put on his dress coat with all the decorations given to him by various States and Bodies. The Emperor noticed them and said: "Why, Haase, what a lot of orders you have! "To which the actor ventured to reply: "Your Majesty, there is only one which could make me happy." "And what is that, Haase, what is that?" "One given at the hand of your Majesty!" "No! no! Haase," he replied quickly, "you must not think of that! That can never be! An actor can neither give nor receive a challenge!"³⁹²

Of all the objections to actors crossing the cultural barrier of respectability and acquiring a title, their ability to respond to a duel seems an unlikely choice to amuse Irving. But in the years leading up to his knighting Irving seemed particularly preoccupied with swordplay: his Lyceum Theatre hosted lectures and demonstrations

³⁹⁰ Bram Stoker, *Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving* (London: W. Heinemann, 1906), 390. Stoker would base the physical appearance and mannerisms of his own Count Dracula on Irving.

³⁹¹ Edward Gordon Craig, *Henry Irving*, (London: J.M. Dent, 1930), 88.

³⁹² Stoker, 239

of historical swordplay in 1891, he commissioned the short play *Saviolo* about the Elizabethan fencing master, and the theatre remounted *Romeo and Juliet* in 1895 with Forbes Robertson and Mrs. Patrick Campbell taking over the leads from Irving and his longtime muse and acting partner Ellen Terry.

The common element in his late-career productions was an association between Irving and the Kernoozers Club. Founded in 1881 as a gentlemen's club of arms and armor antiquarians the Club's members included a cross-section of privilege: artists Seymour Lucas and Robert Hillingford of the Royal Academy; celebrated antiquarian Baron de Cosson; Captain Alfred Hutton of the King's Dragoons; popular romance author, noted sword historian, and Olympic fencing coach Egerton Castle; the translator, journalist, and medievalist Wentworth Huyshe; Walter Withall, executor of Mary Shelley's will; Oxford law professor Sir Frederick Pollock and his brother Walter, editor of the *Saturday Review* and translator of Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le Comedienne*. A small and socially elitist organization, the Kernoozers represented a disproportionately powerful intersection of art and culture with widespread and enduring influence.

Egerton Castle arranged the fights for *Romeo and Juliet*, Castle and Walter Pollock co-authored *Saviolo*, while Castle and Pollock were joined by Alfred Hutton and others for the 1891 lecture and demonstration on Elizabethan fencing. The Kernoozers, with their interest in historical swordplay, came to work with Irving at a pivotal moment at the end of his career when the actor was crafting his legacy. The Kernoozers had worked to build both appetite and understanding for historical fencing, "Irving, however, especially in the final phase of his career, presented

himself in such a way as to promote a different access to history in the event and a different access to presence in the history.”³⁹³ Just as the Kernoozers were changing the way that fights were staged, Henry Irving was looking back at his career, and he used his collaborations with them to literally make history.

Irving had begun his own study of fencing early in his acting career, and at the age of fifteen “he applied earnestly to the task of preparing himself for his profession. He learned a vast number of characters; studied, and practiced; even took lessons in fencing... This accomplishment, often thought trifling, was once an important branch of an actor’s education; it supplies an elegance of movement and bearing.”³⁹⁴ Austin Brereton adds that

During those hard-working years of his youth in London he had also taken lessons in dancing, and, for a long time - two years - he went twice a week to Shury’s school of arms, in Chancery Lane, where he studied and practiced fencing. This practice, it may be well to note in this place, he never allowed to lapse until he had become one of the best swordsmen on the theatrical boards; he continued his practice in fencing when in Edinburgh under a well-known master of the art. Captain Roland, and, in London, at Angelo’s.”³⁹⁵

At the age of eighteen Irving had started his career in theatre with the purchase of properties and accoutrements of an actor: “wigs, buckles, lace, feathers, sham jewelry and, last of all, three swords.”³⁹⁶

³⁹³ W.D. King, “When Theater Becomes History: Final Curtains on the Victorian Stage,” *Victorian Studies*, Autumn, 1992, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Autumn, 1992), 59

³⁹⁴ Percy Hetherington Fitzgerald, *Sir Henry Irving – A Record of over Twenty Years at the Lyceum* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1895), 4

³⁹⁵ Austin Brereton, *The Life of Henry Irving* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co, 1908), 19. In 1853 when Irving was there it would have been Henry Charles Angelo, the third generation of teacher at the school.

³⁹⁶ Laurence Irving, 61. Laurence identifies both a court and fencing sword, for costume and for use. The third sword was likely the familiar basket-hilted stage combat sword in wide use in the mid-century.

Irving's first acquaintance in the Kernoozers was likely Walter Herries Pollock, whom Irving met in 1871 while rehearsing *The Bells*, the play which launched him to stardom and which he played more than a thousand times over his career.³⁹⁷ An adaptation by Leopold David Lewis of an 1867 Erckmann-Chatrian play entitled *The Polish Jew*, the story followed Matthais, a burgomaster who had murdered and robbed a Jewish merchant in order to pay off his own debts. Haunted by the murder, Matthais hallucinates the bells of the merchant's snow sledge. Driven to distress by the bells, which only he and the audience could hear, Matthais imagines his own trial and condemnation, and dies of a heart attack as he acts out his own hanging.

The Bells would set the tone for Irving's career, and he would excel at these types of parts. Brereton repeatedly refers to his acting as "dignified," that with *The Bells* and its follow-up *Charles I* Irving had shown "he could impersonate one of the most dignified characters ever drawn for the stage with a lofty mien and yet in such a manner as to show the human heart beating beneath the kingly robe."³⁹⁸ Walter Pollock observed Irving's affinity for "living, thinking, feeling beings to enlist sympathy, study, penetration whereby the actor might call up their semblance as in a mirror to the very best of his power."³⁹⁹ These were also roles that appealed to the aristocratic crowd Irving would cultivate, and whose values he embodied.

³⁹⁷ Walter Herries Pollock, *Impressions of Henry Irving* (London: Longman's Press, 1908), 3

³⁹⁸ Brereton, 179

³⁹⁹ Walter Pollock, *Impressions*, 67

Soon after meeting Walter Pollock, Irving also met his father, Sir William Frederick Pollock, 2nd Baronet. The senior Pollock was master of the Court of Exchequer and moved in esteemed literary and artistic circles. At Cambridge he had been an acquaintance of Tennyson, and his close friendship with William Macready led to being one of the executors of the actor's estate: after the funeral Pollock noted that "as the coffin sank slowly through an opening in the floor one could not avoid being reminded of the appliances of the theatrical stage."⁴⁰⁰ H.B. Irving, the actor's son, wrote that Henry Irving was a longtime friend of the influential family: "Lady Pollock, was one of the first to encourage, by the warmth and sincerity of her admiration, the hopes and aspirations of the young actor, who in his earlier years was ever a welcome guest at Sir Frederick Pollock's house."⁴⁰¹ It was Lady Pollock who recommended the partnership with actress Ellen Terry that would define Irving's professional career at the Lyceum.⁴⁰²

Sir William Frederick Pollock had three sons, two of whom were members of the Kernoozers and would be a part of Irving's career. The elder son, Frederick Pollock, followed his father into law but followed his younger brother Walter into a passion for fencing. Walter became a journalist and later editor of the *Saturday Review*, but his most significant interaction with Irving would be in 1883 when Pollock published a translation of Diderot's *Paradox of the Actor*. Originally

⁴⁰⁰ Sir Frederick Pollock, "*Personal remembrances of Sir Frederick Pollock, second baronet, sometime queen's remembrancer*," (London: Macmillan, 1887), 251

⁴⁰¹ Preface to Pollock, 1908, v

⁴⁰² Ellen Terry, *The Story of My Life* (London: Hutchinson, 1908), 147

published in France in 1830, Diderot's book was the most influential discussion of acting in the 19th century, and Pollock invited Henry Irving to write the Preface. Irving would use the opportunity to critique Diderot and offer a defense of the acting profession.

The Preface to *The Paradox*

The ideas in Diderot's book had been circulating between England and France throughout the eighteenth century, and primarily concerned the role of *sensibility* for the actor: did an actor need to feel or experience the same emotions as their character in order to portray them?⁴⁰³ Diderot famously decided that actors were technicians, in control of their emotions and not subject to them:

On the stage, with what we call sensibility, soul, passion, one may give one or two tirades well and miss the rest. To take in the whole extent of a great part, to arrange its light and shade, its forts and feeblés [sic]; to maintain an equal merit in the quiet and in the violent passages ; to have variety both in harmonious detail and in the broad effect ; to establish a system of declamation which shall succeed in carrying off every freak of the poet's—this is matter for a cool head, a profound judgment, an exquisite taste;—a matter for hard and for long experience, for an uncommon tenacity of memory.⁴⁰⁴

Henry Irving took the unusual tack of rejecting Diderot's whole thesis on the first paragraph of his Preface:

⁴⁰³ James Harriman-Smith has traced the many texts and ideas that Diderot was in dialogue with, offering a fuller picture of the *Paradox* in context. Beyond Diderot's analysis of David Garrick, the English actor John Hill substantially contributed to the intellectual framework of the argument. See "Comédien"—Actor—"Paradoxe": The Anglo-French Sources of Diderot's "Paradoxe sur le comédien" in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (March 2015). The larger point is that Pollock's translation was significant, but Irving was likely familiar with the argument before 1883.

⁴⁰⁴ Denis Diderot, trans Pollock. *The Paradox of the Actor* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1883), 95-96. 'Forts and feeblés' echo parts of a sword: the forte and foible are the stronger base and weaker tip of a blade.

It is the nature of a paradox that it should deal with extremes. Diderot's entertaining work is an apt illustration of this truth, having persuaded himself that sensibility should have no part in an actor's functions, he goes on to prove that it is one of the misfortunes, and even one of the vices, of the human mind.

...

The basis of his speculation is the character of actors, and as he is sufficiently inaccurate in painting this, there is no necessity to follow him through all the variations of his theme.⁴⁰⁵

Irving then proceeds to use the Preface to reframe Diderot's text and mount a moral defense of actors. Interwoven into his response to Diderot's thesis are a series of arguments where Irving uses Diderot to establish the domesticated social status of actors in Victorian theatre:

Diderot had the highest opinion of acting as an art. The great actor, he said, was even a more remarkable being than the great poet. Yet the actor was in some respects a worthless creature, without character or even individuality, and wholly lacking in moral sense. The actors of Diderot's day were not only devoid of sensibility on the stage; they had not a particle of sentiment in private life. They were often seen to laugh, never to weep. They were 'isolated, vagabonds, at the command of the great,' and had 'little conduct, no friends, scarce any of those holy and tender ties which associate us in the pains and pleasures of another, who in turn shares our own.' This picture may have had some truth then; nobody will pretend that it is true now.⁴⁰⁶

In this passage Irving is specifically responding to Diderot's suggestion that actors are able to assume all roles because they lack a certain human sensibility and depth.⁴⁰⁷

Irving does respond to the acting theory, proposing that rather than being emotionally detached, "the mind should have, as it were, a double consciousness, in which all the

⁴⁰⁵ Preface to Diderot, ix-xi

⁴⁰⁶ Preface to Diderot, xi

⁴⁰⁷ Diderot, 63

emotions proper to the occasion may have full sway, while the actor is all the time on the alert for every detail of his method.”⁴⁰⁸

Irving spends the whole of his Preface undermining Diderot’s argument, creating a lens through which to read the book by rejecting its main ideas. It is a curious Preface, offering no comment on Pollock or the value of Diderot’s book beyond “amusement.” There is no sense that Pollock translated Diderot to offer him up to bemused rejection, and Pollock offers special thanks to Irving in his Translator’s Note. A full analysis of Irving’s thoughts on Diderot is worth future research, but Irving may have had a goal beyond discussing acting theory.

Joseph Roach notes in *The Player’s Passion* that Henry Irving “accused Diderot, not without some justice, of voicing his general philosophical complaints about human nature while using the actor as sole exhibit and scapegoat.”⁴⁰⁹ For Irving, the problem of the *Paradox* was not necessarily the acting theory it laid out but that it presented an obstacle to the social acceptance of actors. If Diderot offered “an ungrudging admiration for the protean cunning, the existential sleight of hand whereby an insignificant magician could manage his trifling body into sublime illusion,” Irving was seeking respectability.⁴¹⁰

Irving further argued that Diderot’s ideas were only applicable to continental Neoclassicism: “It will be observed that Diderot lays great stress upon the divorce between Nature and the Stage. He was thinking of the stage of Racine, and not of the

⁴⁰⁸ Preface to Diderot, xvi

⁴⁰⁹ Joseph Roach, *The Players Passion*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan press, 1993), 136

⁴¹⁰ Roach, 137

stage of Shakespeare.”⁴¹¹ There is a class argument along the national divide in Irving’s critique, setting the working-class English actor of Shakespeare against the elite world of Racine, and in doing so Irving argues that an English actor was capable of the whole range of human sensibility that Diderot denies them: ”The whole soul of an actor may be engaged in Hamlet’s revenge upon Claudius, but he need not on that account feel any desire to slay the excellent gentleman who enacts the king.”⁴¹²

Bram Stoker remembered that the same year he wrote the Preface, Irving had his first conversations about an eventual knighthood:

In 1883, before Irving’s visit to America, I was consulted, I understood on behalf of a very exalted person, by the late Sir James Mackenzie, as to whether the conferring of knighthood would be pleasing to Mr. Irving. It has never been usual to confer the honor on an unwilling recipient—any more than it has been to allow any “forcing” to be effective. I asked for a day to find out. Then I conveyed the result of my veiled inquiry into the matter. At that time Irving thought it was better that an actor, whilst actively pursuing his calling, should not be so singled out from his fellows.⁴¹³

Haldane Macfall adds some nuance to this conversation, noting that the exalted persons were John Duke Coleridge, the Lord Chief Justice of England, and Prime Minister William Gladstone:

[T]he Coleridges prompted Gladstone to send in Irving’s name to the Queen, on the Prime Minister replying that, before he did so, the Queen must be assured that Irving would accept the honor, Lord Coleridge's son, Stephen, had to report Irving's refusal. " His strength as a manager and power as an actor lay far more in the suffrages of the plain folk of the pit, than in the patronage, however lofty, of great people. He disclaimed any false pride in the matter; he did not affect to despise such an honor, and was very grateful.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹¹ Preface to Diderot, xvii

⁴¹² Diderot, xix

⁴¹³ Stoker, 390

⁴¹⁴ Haldane Macfall, *Sir Henry Irving* (London, T.N. Foulis, 1906), 90. It is perhaps worth acknowledging that Irving joined the Freemasons in 1882: fellow members Gladstone and the future

Irving's modesty was tempered by the acknowledgement that "if Wyndham and Bancroft had been offered their knighthoods at the same time, he would have accepted it."⁴¹⁵ Squire Bancroft was the actor-manager of the Prince of Wales Theatre, where he was pioneering more modern drama, and Charles Wyndham specialized in farce at the Criterion Theatre.

There is no way to know if the 1883 conversation between Prime Minister Gladstone and Lord Coleridge would have led to a knighthood, and as Queen Victoria was not approached there is no record of her inclination. It does show that shortly after Irving took over management of the Lyceum Theatre in 1878, he had powerful political friends. Stoker noted that in addition to the Queen's favor, Irving was a close associate of the prince, who "was always a most gracious and generous friend to Irving. Throughout the whole management of the Lyceum and to the time of Irving's death, King Edward, both as Prince and King, extended to him the largest measure of his approval."⁴¹⁶ William Gladstone, Prime Minister from 1868 to 1894, "became a regular backstage visitor at the Lyceum and later had a chair kept just for him in the wings to hear the performances better."⁴¹⁷

Irving's contemporaries frequently cite Irving's reluctance for personal honors, which was the reason given for declining knighthood in 1883: as quoted

Edward VII were both friends of Irving, and Coleridge's arms are used today as the emblem at Coleridge Lodge 1750 in Clevedon, Somerset.

⁴¹⁵ Macfall, 91. Bancroft was knighted in 1897, Wyndham in 1902.

⁴¹⁶ Stoker, 391

⁴¹⁷ King, 135

above Stoker claimed that “Irving thought it was better that an actor, whilst actively pursuing his calling, should not be so singled out from his fellows,” while biographer and art critic Macfall added that “Irving's whole passion was for his art, and for the dignity of his calling. He saw that that calling could not be raised to dignity until the members of it won social equality with those of the other arts — and that without such dignity it must remain in the gutter, ashamed and destitute.”⁴¹⁸

In an address to the Royal Institute in the winter of 1895, Irving completed the project that he had started in the Preface to Pollock’s translation – the acceptance of actors as a group and on their own merits. “Official recognition of anything worthy is a good, or at least a useful thing,” he argued. “Systems and courts, titles and offices, have all their part in a complex and organized civilization, and no man and no calling is particularly pleased at being compelled to remain outside a closed door.”⁴¹⁹ Bram Stoker later wrote that “after his death a statement was made that he had by a lecture at the Royal Institution compelled the Government to give him knighthood.”⁴²⁰ This was likely a response to George Bernard Shaw, Irving’s frequent critic, who had written an editorial entitled “Why Not Henry Irving?” soon after the 1895 address.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁸ Macfall, 89

⁴¹⁹ Speech to the Royal Institution, February 1, 1895. Quoted in Jeffrey Richards, *Sir Henry Irving: Theatre, Culture and Society: Essays, Addresses and Lectures* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 93

⁴²⁰ Stoker 241

⁴²¹ See King, 132-134 and John H.B. Irving “Shaw Settles His Quarrel with Sir Henry Irving (Introduction, Afterward, and Notes by Margot Peters),” *Shaw*, 2009, Vol. 29 (2009)

But Irving's campaign was successful, and his knighthood was the personal success and broad acceptance of acting as a respectable field.

Pollock did have a last word on Irving's acting theory. The actor defiantly rejected Diderot's suggestion of a detached technician, arguing instead that actors brought their double consciousness to their work. It was in fact this emotional engagement that gave them the same dignity and artistic merit as poets, sculptors, and painters. Pollock does not comment in his *Impressions of Henry Irving* about the Preface but does note Irving's thoughts on the subject. He then goes on to relate a backstage anecdote:

But to return, one curious instance of the double personality in Irving's case comes back to me from *The Corsican Brothers*. It may be remembered that at one point of the masked ball scene the Parisian twin, Louis, has to cross the stage with a moody and preoccupied air at the back of the noisy crowd of masks and rots. Just before this I had been with him in his dressing room, eagerly discussing some matter quite unconnected with theatrical affairs. When we were getting to a crucial point he was called to make this traverse. He gave a slight movement of impatience and then, "Come on," he said, "or we may forget this. We shall just have time to finish it going down and crossing the stage." So down the stairs and across the stage we went, Irving, the moment his foot touched the boards, assuming an air of profound melancholy the while he continued with me a conversation which was perfectly cheerful. And he had timed it exactly; the point at issue had been cleared up just as we reached the opposite wing.⁴²²

If Irving had used his Preface to critique Diderot's social views on actors through an attack on the acting theory, Pollock quietly offers that in practice Irving occasionally followed Diderot's model.

⁴²² Pollock, 47. Irving added Boucicault's adaptation to his repertoire in 1880.

Historical Spectacle at the Lyceum

As a showcase for his acting, Irving gravitated towards the spectacular historical dramas for which the Lyceum became known. Irving's son Laurence offered this explanation for Henry's draw towards elaborate productions:

With no choice of entertainment other than the all too robust melodramas and the everyday realisms of the Bancroft school, the public, who sighed over the pre-Raphaelites and whose dreams were realized by [Edward] Burne-Jones, found little to satisfy them in the theatre. Suddenly there had appeared at the Lyceum a man who embodied the very spirit of romance, who brought to life the engraved pictures which hung upon their walls, and in whose every word and gesture their ideal of the long-awaited romantic actor.⁴²³

Irving's acting was built around this pictorialism. He excelled at what he referred to as "by-play," the small physical details of performance that Irving found "more than anything else significant of the extent to which the actor has identified himself with the character he represents."⁴²⁴ Examples included selected which coin to give to a beggar, or lacing up shoes as a truth is revealed, or Mephistopheles' laughter as Valentine is frustrated by the devil's invisible antics.⁴²⁵ As Martin Meisel observes,

In the inherited drama, the building block of the play was transitive and rhetorical. It was a unit of action, involving one or more persons, in which something had to be said and done, or a unit of passion in which something had to be suffered and expressed.

...

In the new dramaturgy, the unit is intransitive; it is in fact an achieved moment of stasis, a picture. The play creates a series of such pictures, some of them offering a culminating symbolic summary of represented events, while others substitute an arrested situation for action and reaction.⁴²⁶

⁴²³ Laurence Irving, *Henry Irving: The Actor and his World* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 221

⁴²⁴ Henry Irving, *The Drama Addresses* (Boston: Joseph Knight Company, 1892), 80

⁴²⁵ These examples were drawn from *Guy Mannering*, *The Bells*, and *Faust*.

⁴²⁶ Meisel, 38

Edward Gordon Craig singled out these to highlight Irving's gift for memorable acting moments:

So then the applause came down like thunder as Irving appeared in the doorway with the ordinary cry: "It is I."

...

Once in that position – motionless – eyes fixed ahead of him and fixed on us all – there he sat for the space of ten or twelve seconds, which, I can assure you, seemed to us all like a lifetime, and then he said – and said in a voice deep and overwhelmingly beautiful: "Oh, you were talking of that – were you?" And as the last syllable was uttered, there came afar off the regular throbbing sounds of sledge-bells.⁴²⁷

For Craig these moments were closer to the stylized stillness of Japanese Nōh, rather than the authenticity of Stanislavsky. Irving was building his performance towards these moments of stillness when the whole stage picture came together in a character's emotional climax. As he noted in his essays in *The Drama*,

It is most important that an actor should learn that he is a figure in a picture, and that the least exaggeration destroys the harmony of the composition. All the members of the company should work towards a common end, with the nicest subordination of their individuality to the general purpose.⁴²⁸

While it is true that subordinating to a common purpose usually still had Irving center-stage, his approach to acting and making theatre involved sacrificing individual focus for a pictorial wholeness.

This involved collaborations with celebrated visual artists, and "[t]he peak of his collaboration with professional artists appears to have been the 1890s during which period he worked with John Seymour Lucas to stage the 1890 production of *Ravenswood*, Ford Maddox Brown, whose sketches inspired the designs produced for

⁴²⁷ Craig, 54 & 58.

⁴²⁸ Irving, *The Drama*, 82

the scenery and costume used in the 1892 production of *King Lear*, and Edward Burne-Jones, who was responsible for designing the set and costumes used in the 1895 production of *King Arthur*.⁴²⁹ This collaboration went beyond designing material elements: Irving based his by-play and physical poses while playing King Lear on Brown's illustrations from 1843-44.

Irving's collaboration with John Seymour Lucas brought an emphasis to the material history of his subjects. Lucas was a founding member of the Kernoozers Club and a collector of historical arms and costume. His celebrated 1884 painting *After Culloden, Rebel Hunting*, features the interior of a forge, with three muscular blacksmiths in the foreground around a glowing horseshoe, while four Royalist soldiers enter through a doorway to left.⁴³⁰ The two groups face each other, both mid-action, and there is a tense ambiguity about whether the troops have found their men. The painting was singled out for its attention to detail in both the Royal uniforms and the blacksmiths' working wear, and it was this interest in historical clothing that led Lucas towards a career in theatrical costuming. Throughout the Club's history he attempted to expand both membership and the subjects of discussion, but to little avail: "Mr. Lucas suggested that Kernoozers of other forms of

⁴²⁹ Veronica Isaac, "The art of costume in the late nineteenth century: highlights from the wardrobe of the 'painter's actress'," *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film* (Vol. 39, Issue 1) Summer 2012, 93. Isaac usefully notes that Ellen Terry had a knowledge of and relationship with artists and was responsible for much of these later collaborations with these designers, although Irving is often credited.

⁴³⁰ The title refers to the 1745 battle where Bonnie Prince Charlie's Jacobite army of Highlanders fell to and English forces under the Duke of Cumberland. Tension between Scotland and England was still volatile a century later, but a series of visits to the north by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert helped to lead both to thawing relations and a surge of tourism and interest in Highland culture – Lucas' painting notably does not depict conflict between the parties.

bric-a-brac besides armor be admitted to the Club but after some conversation this proposition was withdrawn.”⁴³¹

Irving likely first encountered Seymour Lucas when he commissioned that painter to do two watercolor paintings at 360 guineas apiece – a large sum that Lucas’ rising star could command. Lucas was made an associate member of the Royal Academy in 1886, and the following year Henry Irving engaged him to design the costumes for a benefit production of Lord Byron’s 1828 play *Werner*. The story was a natural match for Irving: An emotionally tortured father is unaware that Ulric, his son, is the leader of a gang of bandits, and finds himself unable to either rob or kill the villain Stalenheim. Ulric is revealed to be the son of Count Siegendorf, there is a brief duel in the fourth act between Ulric and the insurgent leader Gabor, and “at the close of the tragedy, after confessing to the murder of Stralenheim and so breaking his father’s heart, Ulric unrepentantly rushes out to join his band of outlaws.”⁴³² The play had been a success for Macready in the 1830s, and Irving remounted it for a single performance on June 1, 1887 as a benefit for Dr. Westland Marston.

Marston was a poet, playwright, critic, and acting teacher, and between 1870 and 1879 he lost his wife, two daughters, and son. The June benefit raised nearly a thousand pounds for Marston, and Irving bore the expenses himself, which helps to explain why the Lyceum was constantly in financial peril. Lucas had been approached as early as March to design the production, and sketched a dozen historically-researched costumes to highlight the play’s setting in Bohemia,

⁴³¹ Kernoozer’s Club minutes, January 15, 1883

⁴³² Kathleen M.D. Barker, “The First English Performance of Byron’s *Werner*,” *Modern Philology*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (May 1969), 343

employing cut velvet, red damask, and figured leather.⁴³³ Irving employed Lucas again in 1889 to design costumes for *Ravenswood*, for which Lucas was paid £500 - half of what was raised for Marston's benefit, and substantially more than Dickens' Mr. Macawber's twenty pounds annually in 1850. Lucas received the same sum for his work on the 1892 production of *Henry VIII* at the Lyceum. In between these two productions for Irving at the Lyceum, Seymour Lucas lent his historiographic design to the 1888 tricentennial play *The Armada* at Drury Lane, which featured "the processional thanksgiving visit of Queen Elizabeth to St. Paul's" as well as a fully-staged "Sea-Fight off Calais."⁴³⁴

With his exhaustively researched and custom-built costuming, Lucas was continuing a form of theatrical antiquarianism that had begun with William Capon who had designed a historically accurate *Macbeth* for John Philip Kemble in 1794, and J.R. Planché who had provided "historically accurate designs for Charles Kemble's *King John*" in 1823.⁴³⁵ Charles Kean had provided the next link in this chain with "meticulous antiquarian settings" in the 1850s, while William Poel had kicked off an interest in Elizabethan staging with "no vestige of scenery" in an 1881 production of the uncut First Quarto of *Hamlet*.⁴³⁶ Irving rejected Poel's historical

⁴³³ The original sketches and fabric swatches are held at the Folger Shakespeare Library. The Victoria and Albert Museum has both the jacket Lucas used as inspiration for Irving's Werner and the coat the actor wore, suggesting that Lucas' elaborate designs were used rather than serving as expensive suggestions.

⁴³⁴ Booth, 65 and *The Graphic* (October 8, 1888), 361

⁴³⁵ Alicia Finkel, *Romantic Stages: Set and Costume Design in Victorian England* (Jefferson: McFarland Press, 1996), 9 and George Taylor, *Players and Performances in the Victorian Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 1989), 14

⁴³⁶ See Taylor, 18 and Robert Speaight, *William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival* (London: Heinemann Press, 1954), 52

minimalism in favor of scenic and costumed spectacle, and showed little interest in producing the realistic plays of the New Theatre for which his acting was better suited. Instead, Irving did not alter “his policy of reviving melodramas for the fifties and sixties,” nationalistic epics from Tennyson, or the Shakespeare that had made him a star.⁴³⁷ Jeffrey Richards notes that Irving “also saw the publicity value in drawing on the services of established artists who were both revered by the intelligentsia and also had popular appeal.”⁴³⁸

There were two different ideas of “historical accuracy” at work on the Victorian stage. The first were the antiquarian recreations, which attempted to recreate the historical setting of the play. Richards sums this world up:

The particular form of history dominant was...the antiquarian picturesque. The fusion of the antiquarian and the picturesque had been achieved in the works of Sir Walter Scott, who was both novelist and historian and whose books were regularly adapted for the stage. These works, both on page and stage, highlighted a strong sense of the visual and a concern for the authentic detail of everyday life in the past.⁴³⁹

The second model of historicizing staging was going for something very different. Based on the idea that Shakespeare’s plays were written for a very particular stage and worked best when put into that physical and visual world, a stripped-down alternative to the spectacle of the Lyceum. Poel wrote in 1913:

Shakespeare could not have failed to recognize that by employing the existing conventions of his stage he could the more readily bring the public to his point

⁴³⁷ Taylor, 156

⁴³⁸ Richards (2009), 156

⁴³⁹ Richards (2009), 27. Richards notes the difference between the amateur antiquarians of the early century and the professional historians after the 1850s, but the aesthetic was similar enough to be grouped together here.

of view, since its thoughts were not being constantly diverted and distracted by those outward decorations and subordinate details which in our day so greatly obliterate the main object of dramatic work.⁴⁴⁰

For this second school of thought, the key was to place the show in the time period in which it was written, regardless of the setting of the play.

Irving favored the former approach, and his emphasis on collaborations with painters shifted the aesthetic frame of a performance. Unlike Poel's experiments in stripping away pictorialism and emphasizing both actor and text, Irving's stage strove for a visual completeness:

In order to promote and preserve the idea of reality in the minds of the public, it is necessary that the action of the play be set in what the painters call a proper *milieu*, or atmosphere. To this belongs costume, scenery, and all that tends to set forth time and place other than our own.⁴⁴¹

Denis Bablet observed that "from the simple fact of the collaboration of painters, the *mise en scène* became a *mise en scène* of lines and colors, and the composition of the 'tableau scénique' obeyed preoccupations of a pictorial, rather than of a theatrical order."⁴⁴² The crowd scenes for which Irving and Macready were so famous worked not because of their theatrical drive, but because they looked like moving paintings.⁴⁴³

For example, in his 1896 Lyceum production of *Richard III*,

when the funeral procession of King Henry VI came on, Irving had tried to realize some of the great effect of the great picture by Edwin A. Abbey, R.A. Here the tide of mourners seems to sweep along in resistless mass, with an

⁴⁴⁰ William Poel, *Shakespeare in the Theatre* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968), 8

⁴⁴¹ Henry Irving, *The Drama* (London: Darf, 1989), 161

⁴⁴² Quoted in Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 404

⁴⁴³ It is possibly this idea of actors being subjects in a painting that informed a little of Edward Gordon Craig's idea of the actor and the uber-marionette, as Craig was the son of Ellen Terry and a frequent actor on Irving's stage.

extraordinary effect of the spear-poles of royal scarlet amidst the black draperies.”⁴⁴⁴

Martin Meisel notes that Irving’s commitment to visual spectacle over time helped to develop three important trends that would anticipate theatre design and practice in the twentieth century: an emphasis on architectural rather than pictorial definition of a stage, the use of light to define areas of focus, and the integration of all design elements into a conceptual whole.⁴⁴⁵

Building a unified design is not an adequate description, as Irving was interested in overwhelming designs. The 1888 production of *Macbeth* featured the extraordinary dress designed by Alice Comyns Carr for Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth, which featured over 1000 beetle shell casings stitched into the dress to create an iridescent shimmering effect.⁴⁴⁶ Carr’s “intention was to design a costume for the first scene that would look as much like soft chain mail as possible and at the same time give the appearance of the scales of a serpent.”⁴⁴⁷ The dress has become famous in part because of John Singer Sargent’s portrait of Terry in the production, but in addition to that look “there were 408 Anglo-Saxon costumes...including 165 soldiers,

⁴⁴⁴ Stoker, 126

⁴⁴⁵ Meisel, 417. Wagner had already proposed the *gesamtkunstswerk*, or ‘total art work,’ in his 1849 *The Artwork of the Future*, but the work of Irving and the Lyceum and Tree at the Haymarket helped put the idea of a unified production into a traditional theatre context.

⁴⁴⁶ Carr was the wife of art critic Joseph Comyns Carr, a strong advocate of the Pre-Raphaelite movement who also wrote the stage adaptation for Irving’s 1895 *King Arthur*.

⁴⁴⁷ Finkel, 141. While Irving preferred to rotate through several scenic and costume designers, Terry had consistent personal designers: briefly with Patience Harris and then Alice Comyns Carr.

40 lords and ladies, and 16 ladies-in-waiting, plus 80 costumes for ‘the flight of the Witches’ and extensive changes for the leading players.”⁴⁴⁸

Irving’s theatrical pictorialism included special effects, and in 1885 he combined his interest in fencing with visual splendor in William Gorman Wills’ adaptation of Goethe’s *Faust*. In the third act Faust creeps through the street to the garden of Margaret, but her brother Valentine has just returned home from the war that night and stumbles across an invisible Mephistopheles - played by Irving - plucking a lute to help Faust woo Margaret. The lute is smashed, Valentine challenges Faust and the two begin a duel in the street with the invisible devil intervening.

With the help of George Edward Gouraud, a Civil War veteran and Thomas Edison’s agent in London, Irving arranged an occasionally dangerous but spectacular effect:

Two iron plates were screwed upon the stage at a given distance so that at the time of the fighting each of the swordsmen would have his right boot on one of the plates, which represented an end of the interrupted current. A wire was passed up the clothing of each from the shoe to the outside of the India rubber glove, in the palm of which was a piece of steel. Thus when each held his sword a flash came whenever the swords crossed.⁴⁴⁹

The importance of this duel here is not that Irving had developed an early electrical special effect, but that the effect had come out a vacation trip to Germany in the

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid. By way of comparison, the Broadway production of *The Phantom of the Opera* had 230 costumes.

⁴⁴⁹ Stoker, 114. Finkel adds that it was a 90-volt intermittent current (85). A future consideration of the fight choreography of this scene is worthwhile, as other productions had simply made a three-person swordfight with the convention that Valentine could not see Mephistopheles or his sword, but all contemporary records of Irving’s *Faust* make clear that only Valentine and Faust wore the insulated rubber gloves to avoid shocks. Lewis Morrison’s American production of the play also appears to have used the electrical effect, with all three swords touching in publicity posters.

summer of 1885 to research design ideas for *Faust*. “Hawes Craven, his set designer, was summoned from London, and together, scenic artist and manager explored and recorded the architectural gems they observed in the winding, narrow streets” of medieval Rothenberg.⁴⁵⁰ Irving built the design for the street scenes in act 3 around both the architectural inspiration and the way the fight would sit into that scenery. Unlike previous productions, in which Faust, Valentine, and Mephistopheles fought in front of painted scenery, Irving placed his fight within a realized three-dimensional street scene with close walls and two deeply ornate arched Gothic doorways that would reflect and shadow the light from the swords. While Bram Stoker and later historians have emphasized the technical apparatus, it is important also to note the effect Irving was going for – not sparks that highlighted the swords, but what Pollock clarifies as “an eerie, lambent, blue flame” meant to also illuminate the set.⁴⁵¹ This unity of design elements – staging, acting, props, scenery, and costumes, was why “Henry Irving’s Lyceum Theatre flourished as a Temple of Art.”⁴⁵²

From the beginning of his career Irving had fashioned himself as a Romantic leading man, and he used the resources of the Lyceum to bring together the scenic and costume elements, his acting, and the swordplay. The pictorial splendor of artists like Seymour Lucas were on the cutting edge of technology but were aesthetically conservative, and Irving favored ancient and medieval plays that could be staged following the Gothic taste of John Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites. Irving brought

⁴⁵⁰ Finkel, 84

⁴⁵¹ Walter Pollock, *Impressions* 44

⁴⁵² Meisel, 402

this curiosity about the dramatic possibilities of historicism into his staging of fencing scenes. The most significant relationship Irving had with the Kernoozers Club was with Egerton Castle and Alfred Hutton, who were pioneers in the brief but influential “revival of Elizabethan fencing in Victorian London.”⁴⁵³ Both men served as stage fight directors at the Lyceum and elsewhere and engaged in demonstrations of historical fencing sponsored by Irving. Because they collaborated so often it is useful to treat them together.

Historical Swordplay on Stage

It was possibly in an 1882 performance of *Romeo and Juliet* that Egerton Castle saw Irving put his fencing skill to use.⁴⁵⁴ Castle had studied fencing at Cambridge, and while still in the army had won a gold medal at the Royal Tournament and Assault at Arms. He had recently resigned his commission in the Royal Engineers and married Agnes Sweetman, and found himself looking for a new career. In June of 1883 Castle attended the lecture “The Forms and History of the Sword,” given by Frederick Pollock at the Royal Institute.⁴⁵⁵ Pollock was the older brother of Walter Herries Pollock, who would collaborate that same year with Irving on the *Paradox*, and it was Frederick’s lecture that seems to have spurred Egerton Castle on to produce what was at the time “the definitive book on the history of

⁴⁵³ The phrase serves as subtitle to Tony Wolf’s *Ancient Swordplay*, and Wolf usefully notes that the influence of the Kernoozers did not survive beyond the First World War. See Wolf, xii

⁴⁵⁴ Tony Wolf dates the production to 1878, but this is likely conflated with the *Hamlet* that year. Castle may have seen that show, but the *Romeo and Juliet* was the well-documented 1882 production with Ellen Terry as Juliet. *Ancient Swordplay* (Wheaton: Freelance Academic Press, 2012), 1

⁴⁵⁵ Frederick Pollock, *Oxford Lectures and Other Discourses* (London: Macmillan, 1890), 260

combat in Europe”: the 1885 *Schools and Masters of Fencing*.⁴⁵⁶ At the age of twenty-six Castle would be a recognized expert in the emerging field of historical combat.

Egerton Castle’s colleague in this project was Captain Alfred Hutton. Although J.D. Aylward claimed that “not a combat was played on the boards of a London theatre but Baptiste Bertrand had arranged it,” Irving had started working with Captain Alfred Hutton to arrange historically accurate combats in his 1878 production of *Hamlet*.⁴⁵⁷ John Dover Wilson’s commentary on the play offers an insight into how choreography was being integrated into acting choices:

At the end of the bout, one of the judges, as was the custom, extends a rapier or staff between the fencers, to show that they must break off. Ham. does so; but Laer. - so I understand [Shakespeare’s] intention - seizes the opportunity for a treacherous attack, shouting ‘Have at you now!’ as he lunges. Thus, I am told by fencers who remember Irving’s performance at the Lyceum in 1878, the scene was played under the direction of Alfred Hutton, the well-known and learned fencer.⁴⁵⁸

Alfred Hutton also came from a military background, having served in the 75th Cameron Highlanders. Castle and Hutton seem to have started conversation, if not yet collaboration, in the early 1880s, and both served as instructors to Esme Beringer. By the mid-decade four promoters of historical fencing – Hutton, Castle, and the Pollock brothers – were all circulating around Henry Irving.

The idea of rooting stage combat training and practice in historicism was a Victorian idea and remains the dominant pedagogic and performance model today.

⁴⁵⁶ Lopez, 112

⁴⁵⁷ Aylward, 247

⁴⁵⁸ John Dover Wilson, *Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), 256

The Kernoozers and Henry Irving's Lyceum were at the center of this development in theatrical practice, but it is difficult to untangle exactly how audiences or artists responded to the change. Partially this is because reviews at the time and scholars of stage combat today have used 'historically accurate' as a separate aesthetic category - such that costumes or setting or movement could be deemed good or bad based on their accuracy - but this was not necessarily the same aesthetic frame that actors like Irving, or his contemporaries were using. Irving's lectures on acting, as well as his Preface to the *Paradox*, make clear that his emphasis was on the double consciousness of actors: the emotions of both performer and character were the primary focus and task of the craft of acting. For Irving, "passion or intensity sweeps all before it."⁴⁵⁹ His productions had an educational component:

[The theatre's] progress in the past half century has been the means of teaching to millions of people a great number of facts which had perhaps otherwise been lost to them. How many are there who have had brought home to them in an understandable manner by stage-plays the costumes, habits, manners and customs of countries and ages other than their own; what insight have they obtained into facts and vicissitudes of life - of passions and sorrows and ambitions outside the narrow scope of their own lives, and which yet may and do mold the destinies of men. All this is education.⁴⁶⁰

Although Irving described his productions as historical and educational, designs were always employed for dramatic and emotional effect. Historical combat, too, seems to be something Irving employed occasionally for effect but did not wholly subscribe to.

Contemporary reviews began to emphasize the historical accuracy of stage fights as a separate category, often as a tool to critique the older practice of standard

⁴⁵⁹ Henry Irving, "The Art of Acting" lecture from 1885, reprinted in *The Drama* (London: Heinemann, 1893)

⁴⁶⁰ Irving, *The Drama* (1989), 150

combats. The term “accuracy” can imply a right or wrong, but it’s not clear that the Kernoozers were concerned with changing practice so much as adapting it to accommodate historical props and movement. Hutton offers brief commentary on stage fights in his 1892 *Old Sword Play*, where he provides a set of drills and combinations that could then be looped in performance:

As soon as a knowledge of the parries and facility in performing the moulinets has been acquired, the following, combinations should be carefully practiced; they will be found useful as a form of “set play” in stage combats or assaults of arms, and, indeed, the weapons are so dangerously heavy that on such occasions “set” is more to be recommended than “loose” play.⁴⁶¹

Lopez argues that “It is crucial to point out that he does not advocate using standard combats. Instead, he recommends using a set combination based on historical fighting techniques,” but this is a distinction without a difference.⁴⁶² The patterns in Hutton’s drills are not substantially different than Arbeau’s descriptions of Pyrrhic dances in *Orchesography*, which were themselves martial movements adapted for dance performance. Hutton’s drills are just another form of standard combat, where even if the techniques were more martially grounded, they were still physical routines could be looped, repeated, or rearranged. The only meaningful difference is that the shapes created specifically evoked Elizabethan swordplay, but this is only because audiences in *fin de siècle* London had been trained through Hutton, Pollock, and Castle’s lectures and demonstrations to receive them as such. In a 2009 interview the actor Douglas Campbell described the stock routines still in use at the Guthrie

⁴⁶¹ Alfred Hutton, *Old Sword-Play* (London: H. Grevel & Co, 1892), 6-7

⁴⁶² Lopez, 99

Theatre in Minneapolis in 1963, which are kinesthetically identical to the drills Hutton outlined in his book.⁴⁶³

Andres Lopez proposes that Victorian audiences underwent a shift in their visuality, the “continuously constructed historical phenomenon that encompasses dominant modes of seeing (i.e. vision) and understanding to create various scopic regimes which, in turn, dominate different time periods.”⁴⁶⁴ The idea of a scopic regime was first formulated by film theorist Christian Metz, who discussed the different power structures that frame visual signification in theatre and film, but the term has shifted in meaning to refer to dominant or hegemonic ways of interpreting visual culture.⁴⁶⁵ For Lopez, the work of Hutton and Castle was a process of educating audiences to reject the older stock phrases and embrace the new historically accurate fighting as ‘correct.’

It is true that Hutton and Castle in their 1880s books note the problem of historical inaccuracies on stage, both using the duel in *Hamlet* as their example. For Castle, “one sees Laertes and Hamlet with the utmost sangfroid going through a ‘salute’ which...was only established in all its details some fifty years ago.”⁴⁶⁶

Hutton uses the exact same dramatic moment as an example:

We get to the stalls, and what do we see? We see Osric or somebody bring in a bundle of highly-nickeled French fencing swords of the most up-to-date pattern, of which the Hamlet and Laertes select one each, and they commence

⁴⁶³ Hosted by Canada’s Theatre Museum site on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ikr8kpFSW3U>

⁴⁶⁴ Lopez, 20

⁴⁶⁵ Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981)

⁴⁶⁶ Castle, 3

operations by going through, rather indifferently, the thoroughly modern performance of what is known as the ‘Academy Salute.’⁴⁶⁷

Significantly, both Hutton and Castle refer to the choice of object and the salute before the duel: neither addresses the fight itself in their complaint, and it is worth questioning the framework of a scopic regime: the only difference for an audience between a mid-century stock combat and a late-century historical stage fight may have been the choice of prop, and not the quality of movement. That Hutton still needed to make the same argument as Castle twenty years later suggests that London audiences had not seen the need for fights to be accurate for them to be theatrically compelling, and that other modes of choreography and performance were still in play.

This is not to say Hutton and his contemporaries were putting new wine into old wineskins, or that there was no difference between modes. The horizontal fencing lines of the filmed duel in Sarah Bernhardt’s 1900 *Hamlet* are clearly different shapes than the diagonal and vertical lines of Coquelin’s *Cyrano de Bergerac*, filmed the same year. Bernhardt was employing historical rapier and dagger with its back-and-forth linear attacks, while Coquelin showed the broader performance of stock routines that moved through larger planes. But both fights could be taken as examples of ‘historically accurate’ fights, as Coquelin took old routines and modified them to include specific parries like those found in Hutton’s book. The point, ultimately, is that the stock phrases of pantomime and *matachine* dances could be done with historical attacks and parries because the movements

⁴⁶⁷ Hutton presented this in a 1902 lecture to the London Playgoers Club, reprinted in Wolf (2009), 103

Hutton and Castle employed were specific static points, while standard combats were a structure of transitions between those steps.

Hutton had arranged the fights for the *Romeo and Juliet* that helped launch Esme Beringer's career, as well as the *The Prisoner of Zenda* in 1896 at the St. James Theatre and *The Musketeers* for the 1898 season at Herbert Beerbohm Tree's Her Majesty's Theatre.⁴⁶⁸ Although Hutton, Castle, and the Pollock brothers were all circulating around Irving in the 1890s, it is not clear that Irving employed their ideas of historical combat so much as he provided a venue for them to explore those ideas independently.

In 1891, Castle led a lecture and demonstration of historical swordplay. Percy Fitzgerald offers a thorough summary of the event:

The manager once furnished a pleasantly piquant afternoon's amusement for his friends on the stage of his handsome theatre. Among those who have done service to the stage is Mr. Walter Pollock, lately editor of the *Saturday Review*, who, among his other accomplishments, is a swordsman of no mean skill. He has friends with the same tastes, with whom he practices this elegant art, such as Mr. Egerton Castle, Captain Hutton, and others. It is not generally known that there is a club known as the Kerneuzers [sic], whose members are amateurs *enragés* for armor and swordsmanship, many of whom have fine collections of helmets, hauberks, and blades of right Damascene and Toledo. Mr. Egerton Castle and others of his friends have written costly and elaborate works on fencing, arms, and the practice of *armes blanches*, and at their meetings hold exciting combats with dirk and foil. It was suggested that Mr. Castle should give a lecture on this subject, with practical illustrations; and the manager, himself a fencer, invited a number of friends and amateurs to witness the performance, which took place on February 25, 1891. This lecture was entitled "The Story of Swordsmanship," especially in connection with the rise and decline of dueling. And accordingly there was witnessed a series of combats, medieval, Italian, and others, back-sword, small-sword, sword and cloak, and the rest. Later the performance was repeated at the instance of the Prince of Wales.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁸ "Chat with Captain Alfred Hutton, F.S.A., the Distinguished Swordman," in *The Sketch*, (May 2, 1900), 84

⁴⁶⁹ Fitzgerald, 116

This lecture has become a frequently-cited event in stage combat histories, in part because it was well-documented: it was announced in the *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, reviewed in the *Leicester Daily Post*, *Illustrated Sport and Dramatic News* and *Morning Post*, while illustrations of the evening appeared in *The Illustrated London News* and *The Graphic*.⁴⁷⁰ This should not be seen as a turning point towards historical combat on the Lyceum stage, or even an endorsement by Irving. As late as 1895 George Bernard Shaw described Irving in his epic production of *King Arthur* “going solemnly through a Crummies combat with great beauty of deportment in a costume designed by Burne-Jones.”⁴⁷¹ While Shaw was often critical of Irving, he was an exacting reviewer, and his description is worth considering at face value.

***Saviolo* and Esme Beringer**

Henry Irving did return to work with Egerton Castle again in 1895 with the play *Saviolo*, which is frequently cited but without context. There were two separate plays entitled *Saviolo* that appeared in London around the turn of the century, and discussions of the period frequently interpolated the two. Vincentio Saviolo was an unusual theatrical subject, as the Italian fencing master had helped challenge the monopoly of the Masters of Defense in 1595 and had authored the “only English treatise on the rapier-play of the sixteenth century.”⁴⁷² Beyond a brief disparaging

⁴⁷⁰ *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, February 23, 1891; *Leicester Daily Post*, February 27, 1891; *Illustrated Sport and Dramatic News*, March 7, 1891; *Morning Post*, February 26, 1891; *The Illustrated London News*, March 7, 1891; *The Graphic*, March 28, 1891

⁴⁷¹ George Bernard Shaw, *Our Theatre in the Nineties: Vol. 3* (London: Constable & Company, 1932), 193, citing his review from July 17, 1897 in *The Saturday Review*.

⁴⁷² Castle, 79.

anecdote in Gorge Silver's 1599 *Paradoxes of Defense* nothing biographical was known of Saviolo beyond his manual. It is likely that his implied connection with Shakespeare, overlapping in time and geography and with Saviolo's manual explicitly quoted in *Romeo and Juliet*, made him an interesting subject for the vogue of historical combat. There seems to have been an impression that Saviolo was the fight director for Shakespeare's plays, as he is described as "Shakespeare's master of sword play."⁴⁷³

Working backwards, the second chronological *Saviolo* was a duologue "presented before H.R.H. the Duchess of Fife, at a bazaar held at the Hotel Great Central, under the direction of Mr. George Alexander, and [Castle] with her again appeared again in June at the Assault of Arms given by the Foil Club at M. Bertrand's Fencing Academy in Soho."⁴⁷⁴ The director, Alexander, had played opposite Irving as Laertes, Macduff, and Faust – all roles requiring fight scenes. The play's format was a conversation between the instructor, Vincentio Saviolo himself, and his student Luke – this mirrors the Socratic dialogue of Saviolo's own 1595 manual between Vincentio and Luke. In the Victorian duologue Castle played the instructor and Beringer played Luke as a breeches role: actresses cross-dressed as male characters, of which the most famous is the long tradition of women playing *Peter Pan*. Beringer

⁴⁷³ Edwards, 1062. This idea may have taken root because Victorian fencers who arranged theatrical fights, like Pollock, Hutton, and Castle, assumed that Elizabethan fencers must have done the same.

⁴⁷⁴ G. Spencer Edwards, "Concerning Esmé Beringer," *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, Vol 55, No. 1 (August 31, 1901), 1062. Edwards offers that the presentation at the bazaar was "last year," or 1900, but it is more likely that the correct date was 1899 and that the named bazaar was the Streets and Squares Bazaar held in June 1899 to mark the opening of the Grand Central Hotel [sic] adjacent to the new Great Central Railroad line in Marylebone at which Princess Louise, the Duchess of Fife mentioned above, was present. The hotel is today the Landmark London.

recalled that “During our engagement at the Palace we were asked to appear in the piece on behalf of the Actors ' Benevolent Fund, which we did, as also later at Drury Lane, the Lyceum and the Alhambra, at Bristol, Brighton, and Oxford.”⁴⁷⁵

To complicate the timeline, Beringer also appeared in a second “fencing sketch,” both at the Palace Theatre in 1901 and she played opposite George Silver in both productions. Silver had taken over the role of Saviolo in that play and took on the role of Savarino in *At the Sword's Point* with Beringer once again playing a breeches role but this time a character named Geoffrey intent on avenging his sister's honor.⁴⁷⁶ A frequently reprinted postcard by Tuck & Sons of Beringer with sword and dagger raised above her head is occasionally ascribed to *Saviolo* but is credited in 1901 to this second play: Beringer embarked on an American tour in 1905 and appeared the following year in New York as *At the Point of the Sword* on the vaudeville circuit.⁴⁷⁷ The authorship of *At the Sword's Point* is unclear: Andres Lopez credits it to Castle, while *Womanhood* in 1901 that the author “modestly conceals his name, though one is inclined to attribute it to Mrs. Beringer herself.”⁴⁷⁸

No text or visual record of the *Saviolo* duologue exists, but Castle did offer an illuminating summary:

⁴⁷⁵ Kaufman C. Spiers, “Fencing and the Stage, in *The Playgoer*, Vol III, November 1902 to November 1903, 218

⁴⁷⁶ *The Sketch*, September 18, 1901, 345

⁴⁷⁷ The play titles in London and New York may have been the same, with an editing error in one of the two contemporary sources. Some auction sites list the postcard as an image from *Peter Pan*, but there is no record of her playing the part. The postcard is part of Rafael Tuck & Sons series 5016 – “Stage Favorites,” which dates from 1904 – a full decade after *Saviolo* but just before her American debut. See Johnson Briscoe's *An Actor's Birthday Book* (New York: Moffat, Yard & Co, 1907), 200

⁴⁷⁸ Ada S. Ballin, ed. *Womanhood*, Vol. VI June to November 1901, 433

Saviolo is discovered in his Academy, situate in Warwick Lane, near St. Paul's, the period being 1599. To him, with many salutations, enters Luke, a young courtier anxious to learn the mysteries of the art of 'coming to the point' in manners of honorable difficulty. 'Fain would I learn,' says he, 'how to fall into a sweet, comely guard; how the manner and difference of all good wards and foynes, feints, and passes; so that in the end I may count the points on mine enemy's doublet,' and so on.

Saviolo consents to a lesson, which begins with single rapier play and moves on to rapier and dagger. After a number of exchanges, including dialogue delivered with "philosophical relish," Saviolo allows a touch:

Foreseeing in him a creditable pupil, Saviolo gives him heart of grace by failing to parry a *punta lunga* and receiving it fairly on his doublet. 'An apt, good scholar!' cries the Master. 'A hit, by St. Paul!' And the curtain falls on a hearty handshake of the adept and the novice.⁴⁷⁹

Beringer herself described this as "quite unlike the usual prepared stage fight," noting that it was performed with heavier historical weapons and "ordinary costume of the period."⁴⁸⁰

Audiences no doubt saw a version of the theatrical "haunted body," in which the characters of Saviolo and Luke were layered on top of the people playing them, Castle and his real-life pupil Beringer.⁴⁸¹ Marvin Carlson refers to this idea as "ghosting:"

In a traditional and basically stable theatrical culture in which actors are employed and cast according to certain culturally defined *emplois*, or types, or lines of business, even a young actor never before seen by the audience will appear onstage already ghosted by the expectations of the role type in which he appears. As time passes, however, and the audience experiences them in a

⁴⁷⁹ Edwards, 1062

⁴⁸⁰ "Miss Esme Beringer," *Boxing World and Mirror of Life*, (September 11, 1901), 8

⁴⁸¹ See Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan press, 2003). Beringer credited Alfred Hutton with the bulk of her education and commented in interviews that Egerton Castle was "not her only Saviolo," but Castle was the celebrity voice of historical fencing following the publication of his 1888 *Schools and Masters of Fencing*.

variety of roles, most actors begin to develop audience expectations about their particular approach...Before many appearances most actors, consciously or not, develop associations with particular ways of portraying even the most codified *emplois* and so appear in new roles with a double ghosting, the cultural expectations of the *employ* itself overlaid with those of the actor's own previous appearances.⁴⁸²

The *emploi* at work was the swashbuckling breeches part, of which Beringer was the rising star. But Castle was disrupting this idea of ghosting by taking the familiar setting of stage sword fight and presenting an entirely new style of movement inside of it. The audience was likely familiar with both Castle and Beringer individually, and their relationship as teacher and student was publicized in newspapers. On top of a familiar stage situation, and through performers the with whom the audience already had familiarity, Castle called attention to the historical fencing which looked sufficiently different from either stock combats or "the usual prepared stage fight."

The purpose of both plays was to present historical combat in a theatrical context, and the scenarios of both *Saviolo* and *At the Sword's Point* were arranged to showcase the fights. The fact that both plays had radically different plots – the student seeking knowledge and the defense of a girl's honor – but could both end with the same two actors on the same stage engaging in two rapier and dagger bouts offers counterpoint to Henry Marshall's dismissal of stock combats as having nothing to do with the plot. For these plays the fights drove the narrative and were somewhat interchangeable, like *lazzi* in *commedia dell'arte*. The fight was the theatrical event: in the case of *At the Sword's Point* the duel reportedly took up thirteen minutes of the play's twenty-three-minute run time.⁴⁸³ Referring to the plays as *duologues* is a bias

⁴⁸² Carlson, 59

⁴⁸³ Sime J. Silverman, "New Acts of the Week: Murray Carson and Esme Beringer," *Variety*, Vol. 3, No. 10 (August 18, 1906), 8

that emphasizes the text at the expense of the movement, which was the primary purpose, as if the ringmaster's speech before the show should be taken as the official record of a circus.

Both of these fight sketches contrast with the original *Saviolo*. The first play by that title was written by Egerton Castle and Walter Pollock and commissioned by Irving in 1893, when it was "printed for private circulation at the offices of the *Liverpool Mercury*."⁴⁸⁴ Other than the script and Bram Stoker's record of Irving having paid a £100 fee to the authors, there is no evidence of the play having ever been performed, even for a private benefit.⁴⁸⁵

Like its 1899 successor, the play begins in Saviolo's Fencing Academy in Warwick Lane, by St. Paul's in 1599. Greene is practicing solo sword exercise under the supervision of Heronymo, an instructor in the school and attendant to Saviolo. Enter Edward Strange, a young courtier who mocks the Italian swordplay but who has spotted Francesca and fallen in love with Francesca, the daughter of Saviolo whom the fencing master is keeping locked away and secret from the world.

Francesca has also seen and become smitten with Strange, and once the studio clears out, she creeps in to play the lute, sing a brief song of love and meditate on her predicament. A letter and roses are tossed through the window, and she discovers his returned affection, but must retreat when the "Smithfield Swashbucklers" Robin Strongitharm and Nichol Hardpate burst in looking to challenge Saviolo. Heronymo

⁴⁸⁴ Egerton Castle and Walter Pollock, *Saviolo* (Liverpool: Liverpool Mercury, 1893). The copy in the National Library of Dublin is likely the only extant version of the play.

⁴⁸⁵ Stoker, 137. On May 24, 1893, Castle wrote a letter to Irving granting him rights to the play for the above fee.

intercepts them after some rowdy boasting, but are silenced when the master himself arrives:

They stare open-mouthed at SAVIOLO, who stands, framed in the doorway, with the sunlight falling upon him from the window. HERONYMO walks up to his master to take his gloves and stick. After a pause SAVIOLO comes slowly forward, looking steadily at the Swashbucklers, who manifestly grow uneasy. (Scene 6)

The swashbucklers then present a challenge to Saviolo, demanding he prove his worth in sword and buckler, sword and dagger, short sword against long sword, paired swords, single falchion, paired falchion, halberd, pike, and flail. The Italian master rebuffs them by saying “I have left behind me the practice of giving *unfee’d* lessons in public,” and offers them wine before they sheepishly exit.

The challengers dispatched Saviolo confronts his daughter and discovers the roses that she received through the window. Assuming that she has secretly been seeing a lover, Saviolo sends Francesca to her room, and asks “Who can the villain be that’s led so fair a soul from its allegiance? Heaven send him to my hand!” At that timely moment Strange arrives through the door with another rose. Strange assumes that Saviolo has kidnapped the girl he has seen, and Saviolo assumes that Strange has been courting his daughter. A verbal confrontation escalates into a duel, and “[*With three flipping cuts he severs successively the points on STRANGE’S doublet...Parries another stroke and cuts another ribbon on STRANGE’S sleeve.*]” Strange responds with dexterous skill and, seeing the earnest intent in the Englishman, Saviolo resolves to end the fight before an injury: he disarms the gallant with a cry of “’Tis done.”

Francesca overhears this cry and, fearing her paramour lies slain, bursts into the

room. A brief two-page denouement sees the truth revealed, and the lovers are united with Saviolo's blessing, Strange having proven his valor and value.

Remarkably, the play only includes a single fight. The opening sequence with Green and Heronimo is an exercise, rather than sparring, and while the arrival of the Swashbucklers offers an excellent opportunity for a three-person brawl it ends without incident. Unlike the later *At the Sword's Point*, the duel in this first *Saviolo* is scored to text, with the Italian master speaking through the duel and covering barely half a script page before the disarm finale.⁴⁸⁶ Despite being a play specifically about a fencing master, set in his fencing studio, with three separate scenes involving swordplay or challenges, written by two men famous for their fencing demonstrations and fight choreography, Egerton Castle and Walter Pollock only wrote a single fight into the play.

It is difficult to see why Pollock and Castle did not take advantage of the opportunity and write a longer play to exhibit the historical fencing they were championing. Irving commissioned the first *Saviolo*, but it was apparently never publicly produced at the Lyceum and Pollock does not even mention it in his 1908 *Impressions of Henry Irving*. It may have been an experiment in short dramatic form for two writers who had worked in other formats, but Pollock had already done the English translation of Diderot's *Paradox of the Actor* in 1883, for which Irving provided the preface, and written *The Ballad-Monger* for the 1887 season at the Haymarket Theatre. The dialogue is charming, the plot is tight, the characters are

⁴⁸⁶ Lopez contends that "since this occurs at the end of the scene, it can carry on as long as Castle wishes to showcase this historical fighting style," (111), but the fight clearly overlaps with a short piece of dialogue and there is less flexibility in time than the open-ended stage direction "*they fight.*"

clear, and the play's outline seems easy to expand into a full-length tragedy, melodrama, or comedy. It contains the familiar elements of a romantic pair separated by a father's demands, rivals threatening the father, a protagonist and his best friend, servant to the father, and a richly invoked historical setting in which to play. *Saviolo* has all the ingredients of the historical romance novels that Egerton Castle would spend his life writing with his wife, but the play disappeared from both the archive and the repertoire almost immediately. We are left with the script of a play that may never have been produced, and the long production histories of two other plays for which there is no record of their scripts.

It is useful then to see the 1893 *Saviolo* in conversation with the 1901 *Saviolo* and *At the Sword's Point*. There are three elements that the original play lacked that the subsequent productions employed: a fencing female character, an expanded emphasis on the fight as the purpose of the show, and popular performance venues. There was undoubtedly an appeal to Beringer wielding the phallic sword, but Beringer was a popular actress in a wide range of roles and seems to have been popular even without considering her erotic draw.⁴⁸⁷ The emphasis on the fight shifted the theatrical framework from a fight *within* a play, where the fight might be a minor consideration against the pictorial or narrative goals of the manager, and towards more popular forms (in the sense of a "people's theatre") like acrobatic acts or rope dancing where the physical virtuosity was the central theatrical event.

⁴⁸⁷ See "Costuming the Erotic Topography" in Tracy Davis, *Actresses as Working Women* (London: Routledge, 1991), 108-114. Kiki Loveday does not consider the sisters Esme and Vera Beringer, but many of her ideas could apply to their *Romeo and Juliet*. See "Sister Acts: Victorian Porn, Lesbian Drag, and Queer Reproduction," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Fall 2019)

Finally, *Saviolo* was first played outside at an open-air bazaar, outside of a formal theatre venue. This provided a less self-selected and broader audience - although certainly a well-heeled enough audience to be shopping at the bazaar - and helped to build advertising for its eventual production at the Palace.

All three plays were intended to disrupt the practice of staged fights as they were currently performed by offering theatrical evidence for the value of historical fencing. While the 1893 *Saviolo* was likely never produced, the duologue's intent was to demonstrate how historical combat would look on the Lyceum stage, in the context of a formal play. It's possible that Irving did not want or need this evidence, or that he was not interested in learning new skills at the end of his career, and that the fighting roles were generally behind him: it is also possible that Castle was not interested in the theatre as an avenue to promote either his chivalric ideas or his interest in historical combat, as there is little record of him performing outside of the 1901 *Saviolo*. The plays do serve as a milepost in the ways that stage combat itself was undergoing a slow aesthetic revolution.

Beerbohm Tree and Actor Training

There are two dominant arguments about stage combat in the Victorian period: John Lennox suggests that most actors were trained in fencing, and that standard combats were a minor part of the repertoire until they were replaced altogether by the modern stage combat curriculum in a direct line through the Bertrand Academy sometime in the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁸⁸ Expanding from

⁴⁸⁸ See Lennox, Chapter 6 and Conclusion.

William Hobbs, Andres Lopez argues a linear path from standard combats to historically accurate fights through a process by which Victorian audiences acquired the education to recognize martially-rooted fights as better theatre.⁴⁸⁹ Both conclusions are narrow and problematic, as neither scholar includes choreography outside of spoken-word West End theatre, and both assume a more linear progression than the evidence allows. My own chapter has generally omitted the work of Felix Bertrand, who was the leading fight director of London's major theatres throughout this period. This is not to diminish Bertrand's contributions, only to acknowledge that his work has been more fully considered elsewhere. While Castle and Hutton were not as prolific as Bertrand, and did not fundamentally shift the stage practice at Irving's Lyceum towards realistic fights, the Kernoozers did have a profound impact on stage fights. To understand this change, it is useful to leave Henry Irving and the Lyceum and turn to his rival and successor Herbert Beerbohm Tree at Her Majesty's Theatre.

Jeffrey Richards writes that the "twin colossi of the late Victorian and early Edwardian stage were Sir Henry Irving (knighted in 1895) and Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree (knighted in 1909)."⁴⁹⁰ Martin Meisel expands to note that "[In] their theatres, the likes of Irving and Tree were both high priest and visible god, the heroes of every occasion; and theatres and productions were designed to magnify their impact."⁴⁹¹

Fourteen years Irving's junior, Tree was an actor-manager in the same mold but with

⁴⁸⁹ See Lopez, Chapter 2

⁴⁹⁰ Richards (2009), 152

⁴⁹¹ Meisel, 228

a forward gaze. Irving managed the Lyceum at the eastern end of London's theatre district, and in 1887 Tree took over management of the Haymarket Theatre at the western edge. Irving tried to build a theatre that specialized in classical works, historical pageants, and the Romantic vehicles that suited his persona; Tree produced Shakespeare, literary adaptations, and championed the socially conscious, political, and experimental New Theatre productions of Maeterlink, Shaw, Ibsen. Like Irving in *The Bells*, Tree had an enormous financial and critical success with the 1895 *Trilby*, for which Tree originated the role of the mesmerist Svengali. Also, like Irving, Tree collaborated with fight directors, including Felix Bertrand in his 1892 *Hamlet* and Alfred Hutton for the 1898 *The Musketeers*. Between these two productions Tree started to move towards a more formal training system for stage combat.

At the time there were two different ways that actors studied stage fights: either fencing instructors like the Angelos or Betrands, or fellow actors taught them standard combat routines as part of their informal apprenticeship. There were no formal actor training programs or schools of drama, but Beerbohm Tree was forming the idea for one. In an 1892 speech he proposed a dramatic society, to which he added:

My idea is that an important department of this Society might be a school - shall I call it a conservatoire? - in which the young actor and actress could acquire those implements of their art, the want of which the playgoers of today cannot but sometimes deplore in watching the performances presented in our theatres. I mean a school of fencing, dancing, and elocution.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹² Quoted in Max Beerbohm, *Herbert Beerbohm Tree* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1920), 78

This was the first suggestion of a public school specifically for stage fencing since Henry Angelo's school was housed in the King's Theatre, the opera house in Haymarket in 1782.⁴⁹³ The school at the opera house was likely used to teach fencing to performers, but Angelo himself was looking for military clientele and "respectfully informs the Nobility and Gentry (particularly those of the Army and Navy) that he has engaged with the Trustees for the use of the Great Room over the entrance of the Opera-house Hay Market which he has opened as a fencing academy."⁴⁹⁴

The first new steps towards fencing specifically for actors came in 1899, when *The Era* published:

A Club has been formed to promote an interest in fencing amongst the members of the theatrical profession. The movement has met with considerable success, thanks to the efforts of Mr. Seymour Hicks. It has been named the Foil Club. Mr. Pinero is the president, Mr. A. Aynesworth the secretary and treasurer, and other interested in the experiment are Mr. W. Pallant, and Mr. Forbes Robertson.⁴⁹⁵

It is interesting to note that *The Era* describes this effort as 'an experiment,' suggesting that there was something new about it. Felix Bertrand's work in the theatre was not a secret, and although it was not widely publicized or credited in programs Spiers described his academy as "the most famous *salle* in London, and

⁴⁹³ Angelo was the third instructor at the fencing school: Rigaut (possibly?) taught before being replaced by M. Picasse who was himself relocated by 1781. See Michael Burden, "London's Opera House in Colour 1705–1844, with Diversions in Fencing, Masquerading, and a Visit from Elisabeth Félix," *Music in Art*, Spring–Fall 2019, Vol. 44, No. 1/2 (Spring–Fall 2019). The opera house burned in 1789, and it does not appear that Angelo returned.

⁴⁹⁴ Burden, 31

⁴⁹⁵ *The Era*, (November 11, 1899), 14. The named members were Arthur Pinero, who had worked at the Lyceum under Irving before becoming a playwright; the actor Seymour Hicks, who specialized in comedy but may have had a sword fight with his wife Ellaline Terriss in *Little Jack Sheppard*; Allan Aynesworth originated the role of Algernon in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and Forbes Robertson had been in the 1895 *Romeo and Juliet* at the Lyceum. W. Pallant is unknown.

perhaps Europe.”⁴⁹⁶ The Foil Club appears to have been attempting something different than the standard combats or the sport fencing that Bertrand offered. In 1903 Spiers wrote that the membership of the Foil Club had grown to include the leading players of the Edwardian stage, including:

Miss Julia Neilson, Miss Maud Jeffries, Miss Maud Danks, Miss Violet Vanbrugh, Miss Ellaline Terris, and Miss Marie Tempest, Beerbohm Tree, Forbes Robertson, Lewis Waller, FR Benson, Seymour Hicks, Arthur Collins, Frederick Harrison, [Walter] Brandon Thomas, Kyrle Bellew, Ben Greet, Wilson Barrett, HV Esmond, George Giddens, Harry Warner, Cosmo Stuart, and Fred Wright.⁴⁹⁷

Many of these performers associated themselves with swords in a more visually prominent way than their predecessors: Francis Robert Benson, Lewis Waller, and others appeared on tobacco cards and publicity postcards as their swashbuckling characters, and Waller especially built a career out swashbuckling roles in *The Three Musketeers* (1895), *Monsieur Beaucaire* (1904), and *Brigadier Gerard* (1906).

The Foil Club still taught competitive fencing, as well as theatrical combat. In 1900 *The Stage* reported on an “invitational display” hosted by Bertrand’s academy, which featured “a competition between six members of the Foil Club v. six members of M. Bertrand’s Academy.”⁴⁹⁸ There does not seem to have been animosity between the two organizations, as articles cited Bertrand’s cooperation with the Foil Club. But it was a separate organization, primarily for actors, and continued the momentum of

⁴⁹⁶ Spiers, 214

⁴⁹⁷ Spiers, 212

⁴⁹⁸ *The Stage*, (May 3, 1900), 19. The match was won for the Foil Club by Lucas D’Oyly Carte, son of the Richard D’Oyly Carte – the impresario who produced Gilbert and Sullivan.

pulling actors out of sport fencing academies and into pedagogic spaces specifically dedicated to theatre.

When Tree took over management of the newly-constructed Her Majesty's Theatre in 1897, he added a private space with a small studio. "For Tree, Her Majesty's was indeed a residence. Two rooms on the topmost floor of the theatre underneath the large cupola facing the Haymarket formed a private dome apartment for Tree who used them to entertain, study and sleep."⁴⁹⁹ By 1903 Tree was using this small space to host his own foil club to train actors.⁵⁰⁰ Felix Bertrand and his sister Helene were the instructors for these classes, but the focus of these foil clubs was something that Bertrand's own Academy did not provide.⁵⁰¹ The goal was explicitly to move away from standard combats, and "the old style of 'one, two, three, four' cut up and cut down principle is now dead to all save the 'barnstormer' or the pantomime villain."⁵⁰²

The announced death of the standard combat was again premature, but Beerbohm Tree and the other members of the Foil Clubs were moving towards a new idea. There does not appear to have been a second invitation between Bertrand's fencing students and his actors, and by 1904 Tree had established a whole new home for theatrical fencing.

⁴⁹⁹ David Schulz, "The Architecture of Conspicuous Consumption: Property, Class, and Display at Herbert Beerbohm Tree's Her Majesty's Theatre," *Theatre Journal*, Oct. 1999, Vol. 51, No. 3, Theatre and Capital (Oct., 1999), 236

⁵⁰⁰ Spiers, 212. The timeline of which Foil Club came first is unclear: Spiers claims that Tree started first

⁵⁰¹ "The Foil Club," *Uttoxeter Advertiser and Ashbourne Times* (January 14, 1903)

⁵⁰² *Daily Telegraph & Courier (London)*, (April 27, 1900), 6

Back in his 1893 speech, Tree had noted that “[t]here are, of course, many teachers of elocution, there are many fencing masters, there are numberless dancing academies, but it would be a considerable boon if a recognized school, at which the various teachable branches of theatrical art were taught, could be established.”⁵⁰³ His idea was not just the consolidation of all training under a single roof, but specialized training for actors. That idea came to fruition in 1901 when the Guildhall School of Music began to offer classes in fencing, “one of the most useful physical exercises for singers, especially operatic singers, for besides helping the body retain its fitness, it gives ease of movement and action on the stage.”⁵⁰⁴ Beerbohm Tree founded the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in 1904 with fencing a part of its core curriculum.

There seems to have been a divide between the Bertrand and Kernoozer camps, as they never appeared at each other’s events and had decidedly different views on stage fights. When Egerton Castle wrote in 1882 that “actors...generally dispose of all questions relative to fighting by referring them to the first fencing-master at hand,” he was likely referring to the Bertrand Academy.⁵⁰⁵ Both Hutton and Castle were critical of the Bertrand family’s work, and the evidence suggests that the various incarnations of the Bertrand Academy, Foil Club, and Royal Academy training was in contemporary sport - rather than historical - fencing, as the invitational match between the Foil Club and Bertrand’s Academy did not feature any

⁵⁰³ Beerbohm, 79

⁵⁰⁴ “Fencing as an Aid to the Stage,” *Yorkshire Evening Post*, (November 23, 1908), 4. Advertisements for the school advertise fencing much earlier – see *Tower Hamlets Independent and East End Local Advertiser*, (October 19, 1901), 7

⁵⁰⁵ Castle, 3

weapons except the foil competitions, and demonstrations of foil and court sword rather than the much broader range of medieval, renaissance, and Enlightenment weapons that the Kernoozers presented.

The Bertrand family were more successful practically, and as Victorian died and Edward VII took the throne in 1901 the Bertrands held a near monopoly on instruction in both public and private institutions. I suggest, however, that the Kernoozers were ultimately more successful on the pedagogic and theoretical front, and that our modern practice of stage combat owes its lineage to their work. The Kernoozers shifted the point of reference for stage fighting to external ideas and images, rather than evaluations based on the actor themselves. For actors like Henry Irving, you were a good stage fencer because you were a good fencer – contemporary articles and reviews conflate the two, and tout Irving’s fencing training as evidence of his skill as an actor. This was often placed in opposition to “the old style” of the “pantomime villain,” which was more an conscious and imposed distinction between the highbrow work of the Lyceum and the implied lowbrow combats pantomimes. The aesthetic point of reference for Irving, like it had been for eighteenth century actors, was whether a stage fight looked like a fencing match as taught in the elite metropolitan spaces of celebrity fencing *salles*. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the often-quoted idea that for the sword fight in his 1889 *The Dead Heart* only the final hit was choreographed, but “the duel up to that point was as keen a contested display of swordsmanship as the most enthusiastic swordman could wish.”⁵⁰⁶ In truth the scene had been rehearsed for two weeks, but much like Charles Kean’s quip to hit

⁵⁰⁶ Spiers, 215

him “Where you can, sir!” the idea of sword fights being unrehearsed fencing bouts helped emphasize the star power of the leading actor. A 1913 editorial in the Dublin *Evening Herald* goes so far as to mourn the passing of an age when actors themselves were caught up in real violence, when “tradition has it that within the space of two years [actor-manager Dick Daly] fought sixteen duels, three with the small sword and the remainder with pistols.”⁵⁰⁷

The other aesthetic frame the Kernoozers were pushing against was the communal education model of the standard combats, where an actor joining the profession would begin with non-speaking ‘walking roles,’ and slowly work their way through the repertoire by playing increasingly large roles. Along the way they would acquire the skills of an actor, including elocution, deportment, dancing, and stage combat. Charles William Smith offered the following advice:

In stage fighting and fencing, skill in the use of the broadsword and foils, although of great service when backed by a knowledge of stage effect, is of comparatively little use without it. Perhaps the best way to become proficient is, to first take lessons from a good teacher of Fencing and Broadsword; practicing as often as you can with those who are skillful, and avoiding practicing with novices who may lead you into bad habits; and when you have acquired considerable knowledge of the capabilities, and skill in the use of your weapons, to take a few lessons from a good stage swordsman and fencer; who will instruct you in stage effect, fighting attitude and gestures.⁵⁰⁸

Victorian actors clearly differentiated stage and practical swordplay, but the distinction was whether you went to a fencing teacher or an actor for your education.

⁵⁰⁷ *Evening Herald (Dublin)*, (December 13, 1913), 6

⁵⁰⁸ *The Actor's Art: its Requisites, and How to Obtain Them; its Defects, and How to Remove Them*; quoted in Russel Jackson, *Victorian Theatre: The Theatre in its Time*, (New York: new Amsterdam Books, 1994), 108

The Kernoozers proposed a third model, which was more in line with what the designers on Irving and Tree's stages were doing: historically researched material arranged for theatrical effect. This mode upended both the pedagogic and aesthetic frames that had been in operation for at least the prior two centuries. Prior to the Kernoozers, a stage fight signified either the skill of the individual actor or the idea of a sword fight which was interchangeable from production to production and could be inserted into any moment of a play. In both cases the choreography mattered less than the event. Through the frame of 'historical accuracy' what the Kernoozers really introduced was the idea of the *specific*, that there was a way to approach fight choreography that was appropriate to the pictorial or narrative emphasis of a single production. Now instead of the reference point being the individual skill of a fencer or the communally agreed vocabulary of stage fights, the point of reference for both performers and audiences was something outside of the play or performer. This could be achieved through training in historical swordplay, as Castle advocated, or by updating the repeatable routines of standard combats to be more martially-sound, as Hutton presented.

This bifurcation of stage combat practice continued throughout the twentieth century, with theatre schools continuing to offer "to young trainee actors what was, from all accounts, the modern sport and not techniques and an approach which was directly applicable to theatre."⁵⁰⁹ But the Kernoozers had created the framework for a new form of theatrical which blended martial technique with theatrical theory. The Lyceum and the endorsement of Henry Irving allowed the Kernoozers access to a

⁵⁰⁹ William Hobbs, *Fight Direction: For Stage and Screen* (London: Heinemann, 1995), 20

sophisticated audience beyond the general crowds of an Assault at Arms; the critical and popular success of Esme Beringer's collaborations with Egerton Castle showed the possibility and popularity of historical stage combat, and Beerbohm Tree helped move fencing into formal and institutional performer's education. But none of the Kernoozers were theatre professionals, and they did not see their work with theatres as more important than their partnerships with museums, galleries, private collections, or their own professional pursuits outside the Club.

The romantic conclusion to this story, therefore, occurred long before these successes. On the night of August 4, 1895, at the fashionable Queens Hotel close by the Crystal Palace, the newly knighted Henry Irving enjoyed an evening celebration of his recent honor. The actor provided amusing anecdotes and after dinner indulged in some performance, including Thomas Hood's *The Dream of Eugene Aram*. The poem evoked Irving's early days when recitations of the poem earned him his first acclaim. According to the minutes of the evening, the hotel party broke up at 11:20 and reassembled at Irving's lodging in Grafton Street "until an early hour of the morning." Although the Club had elected him an honorary member in 1891, there is little to suggest that Irving ever met or collaborated with any of the Kernoozers after that August dawn.⁵¹⁰

⁵¹⁰ Kernoozer's Club minutes, April 29, 1891

Chapter 6: Conclusion

There is no stage combat version of the cry of “*Merdre!*” that brought down the house at Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu Roi*, or the chaos of Stravinski’s *Rite of Spring* – that is to say, there is moment to point to and say, “that was when it all changed.”⁵¹¹ In some ways, the research for this dissertation shows that rather than replacing an old style with a newer one, stage combat in the nineteenth century simply added combinations. At the start of the Victorian period there were likely two modes of staging fights, regardless of the setting or style of play: something that resembled fencing contemporary to the period, and repeatable and interchangeable standard combats. By the Edwardian era historically accurate combat had been added, but it mingled freely with the other two styles. There is evidence for choreographed historical combat, modern sport fencing in a medieval setting, live sparring on stage, looped standard sequences, historically accurate stock phrases, actors trained in both sport fencing and historical martial arts, or any combination.

Looking backwards through theatre history and attempting to understand an aesthetic is a different task than trying to appreciate an aesthetic, and stage combat moves in and out of different fashions. Likewise, what an audience considers “realistic” is a moving target. A fight scene that was thrilling to a movie audience a decade ago may seem stiff and awkward today: one clear example is the lightsaber fight in the original 1977 *Star Wars: A New Hope*, which inspired thousands of

⁵¹¹ Thomas Postlewait’s observations on *Ubu Roi* are well-taken. My point here is that pedagogy often encourages reducing history to clear moments of change, while historiography can be murkier. See Thomas Postlewait, *The Cambridge Guide to Theatrical Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 60-87

backyard adventures and more than a few careers but today feels almost comically dated. Even if we were to see Shakespeare's fights as they were staged, we might find them stiff, unheroic, likely brief, and unequal to the mythology we have built up around his language and theatricality. But to a contemporary audience they could have been both realistic and thrilling.

As a historical and aesthetic field, stage combat remains remarkably unstudied. The goal of this dissertation has been twofold: to offer more context and research to several historiographic arguments that have been made about both early modern and Victorian staged fights, and also to sketch the barest outlines of the many forms of theatricalized fight scenes as they were in the process of changing on the Victorian stage. The study of stage violence often takes an aerial view, looking at the dramaturgy of Martin McDonagh or Sarah Kane, or placing Shakespeare's soldiers into a larger Elizabethan geopolitics. At the other end of the extreme it tends to zoom in on the granular, producing textbooks on technique and safety protocols which are meant to be universally applied. What is missing is a discussion of what did stage fights look like, who did them, how were they created and rehearsed, how did choreographers work, how did design elements affect execution, and how did audiences respond? What is missing is theory.

When I started this project, I had hoped that the Kernoozer's Club would be the entire subject, and that I could center my research on their work. As work proceeded two things became clear: first, that to tell the story of how the Kernoozers fit into the history of stage combat I would first need to write that history; and second, unfortunately, that the Kernoozers turned out to be elusive. There are still stories to

be told about the Club, and their history would make a fascinating historical project on its own. Their interaction with theatre was important, but it was brief and tangential. It was difficult, for example, to find any place to put Sir Richard Burton, translator of the *Arabian Nights* and the *Kama Sutra* and the first European in Mecca. Despite his magnetic presence in Victorian and Orientalist studies, and the fact that his 1884 *The Book of the Sword* may have been even more influential on sword culture than Castle's *Schools and Masters of Defense*, Burton barely moved through the theatrical world I explored here and appeared only at a few scattered meetings of the Kernoozer's Club. Likewise, it was difficult to find space for John Ruskin, the most influential art theorist and critic of the Victorian period, whose love of all things Gothic helped solidify medievalism as the dominant aesthetic and who was also an avid theatregoer. Future research should look at his role in linking many of the ideas discussed here.

As an organization the Kernoozers barely outlasted the First World War – the average age of members at their last meeting in 1922 was over 60, and their records indicate an active search but no success in finding new members. Their final meeting was on February 21, 1922, and the minutes speak to a world that had moved on:

The President stated that the present meeting was held in consequence of representations which had been made to him that owing to the diminished number of members by death & resignation & the increasing difficulty of ensuring fully attended meetings & the prevailing obstacles to the acquisition of armor and other items of art and antiquity, it was obvious that the primary object of the Club's formation was no longer attainable, and for those reasons it was desirable that it be dissolved.⁵¹²

⁵¹² Kernoozers Club Minutes, February 21, 1922

Their romantic vision of the chivalric duel did survive the social and ideological upheaval of the Great War and would lay the foundation for the swashbuckling films of the silent era onward. This rebirth, however, would be in an America less tested by the trauma of the First World War. Joanna Bourke reminds us that in England the idea of the body was ruptured: “Between 1914 and 1918, more and more bodies of young, healthy men were at risk of frighteningly new ordeals of mutilation. All were forced to face their fears of physical destruction.”⁵¹³

There are numerous avenues for further research. The most pressing and most personally interesting opportunities are the vast number of performances in the early nineteenth century which featured “terrific combats,” and which to date have received almost no scholarly attention. One of the greatest surprises of researching this paper was discovering how much material still exists which has not been catalogued or discussed. In Historiography classes we often lament how many stories are lost to time and scholarship forever, and the many things that we can never know, but in the case of the stage combat and other practices of melodrama and pantomime we have simply chosen not to know. The British Library provided a file with three terabytes worth of scanned playbills, which include documents for almost two centuries of stage combat: dates, productions, theatres, playwrights, casts, weapons, descriptions of fights, changes over time, and credited fight directors who have been completely overlooked. Had I known these resources existed when I started preparing this dissertation, I would have focused only on them and had a rich history to untangle. A future book project would focus on these materials.

⁵¹³ Bourke, 31

One of the reasons this subject has been overlooked is that the visual records have been scattered. Online sites like Tumblr, Pinterest, and Instagram are full of images of historical theatrical combat, but they have been separated from each other and stripped of their sources and context. One valuable contribution would be to simply start to collect available records into a single online source that could provide annotation. An immediate use would be in stage combat classrooms: I have taught theatrical swordplay professionally for the last twenty years and have taught hundreds of fights that require scenes for the stage combat certification process. I have been asked for scene ideas by a wide range of students, and I have had some options to provide. The Society of American Fight Directors also maintains an online source of suggestions, but in preparing this dissertation I uncovered more scenes, in more combinations, for a wider range of performers and characters than the Society currently has in its entire database.

I have suggested in this paper that there is bias amongst both academics and stage combat professionals regarding popular entertainments and stage violence. For the former, there is frequently an elitist rejection of ‘low’ forms: they are treated as whimsical distractions on the road to the high-minded seriousness of Ibsen and Shaw or the more edgy corners of the avant-garde. For the stage combat community, the practice as it currently exists was created to pull pedagogic order out of the seeming chaos of the standard combats, and to establish an economic and creative field of specialization. The borders of contemporary stage combat are enforced in opposition to the choreographic theory of standard combats: modern practice exists because it is not *that*. Notably, there is a rejection of anything that looks like dance.

As a stage combat practitioner with thirty years of exposure to the community, I believe that this bias is threefold. The first element is a logical fallacy that proposes:

1. I am a fight director.
2. I choreograph fights in Shakespeare's play.
3. Shakespeare's plays have fights.
4. Someone must have choreographed the original version.
5. Therefore, Shakespeare must have had a fight director like me.

And so, we arrive at the "it was always so" argument, seeing the past through the lens of the modern. This is very striking in many "original practice" Shakespeare companies who bring in fight directors to stage the brawl in modern or "historically accurate" ways; we cannot know what Shakespeare's fights looked like, but they almost certainly did not look like modern stage combat.

The second thread of this bias is a desire to infuse theatre with a certain macho energy, which draws from martial arts and manly competition. Martial ability is often how fight directors establish credibility in a rehearsal or classroom: not by malicious intent or bullying, but simply because an actor or student asks how a stage technique really would work if you did it 'for real.' The economic engine and professional development of stage combat teachers is built around specialized classes which tend to favor content beyond the shared curriculum of certification. This means that the featured guest faculty at regional workshops are often historical martial artists or military and law enforcement agents, and classes skew towards martial art concepts applied to stage. I was always struck that we rarely brought in

guest instructors from the world of theatre, and so I took classes in police handcuffing, riot batons, military drills and formations, and knife sparring, rather than Japanese *kabuki* swordplay, Chinese opera choreography, or Indian *kathakali* stick.

Stage combat is also frequently used as an enticement to get boys interested in youth theatre programs, and so the gender bias begins early. There are by far more fighting roles written for male performers, and the parts written for women are frequently victims, building a cycle where the stage combat classroom is a masculine-dominated space studying a male-coded historical activity where performers are graded on their ability to rehearse violence against women. This is not always the case, of course: classrooms are often majority female or non-binary, and productions today frequently cast a female ‘Mercutia’ or Macduff, but generations of jokes about gangs snapping their fingers and doing a Jerome Robbins *jete* make clear that for many theatre students fighting is not dancing, and dancing is not macho.

Finally, I believe there is a genuine naivete about the history of stage combat amongst practitioners and colleagues: we simply didn’t know and did not have the research tools to find out how it was done in the past. As a physical art form stage combat is temporary, and unlike dance it has resisted the idea of a repeated repertoire that could be learned or documented. The idea of recreating the fight choreography of an older *Romeo and Juliet* in a new production has almost no precedent. As I was working on this paper I collaborated with director Timothy Douglas on his production of *The Color Purple* at Signature Theatre, which originated at the Portland Stage Center and went from DC to the Denver Center for the Arts. All three productions shared the same set, designed by Tony Cisek, but the violence was staged anew for

each show. Likewise, for a recent production of *Hamlet* for the 60th anniversary of the Guthrie Theatre we briefly discussed the possibility of researching and restaging the original 1963 fight that Douglas Campbell arranged, but because it was composed of standards combats there was no record to recreate. Because it is so ephemeral, stage combat is subject to the lure of the anecdote.

I hope to see an expanded idea of what stage combat could be, informed by research into historical theatre practice, work its way into stage combat classrooms. To date that has meant that historical martial arts have been taught, rather than historical theatre techniques. I know my interpretation of nineteenth-century sources differs from some of my colleagues, and I hope that our conversation can enter a public academic forum where the ideas can be presented, discussed, and put into practice, rather than the fiefdoms of our private classrooms. This project began, after all, because the rousing tales I was being told about the past didn't seem to make sense when you tried to put them into practice – the body had a different story to tell.

Appendix:

Saviolo

An Entirely New and Original Play, in One Act

Written for Mr. Henry Irving,

By

EGERTON CASTLE

And

WALTER POLLOCK

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Printed for private circulation at the office of the "Liverpool Mercury"

1893

Dramatis Personae

VINCENT SAVIOLO, an Italian nobleman, many years settled in London, where, to mend his fortune, he teaches the new art of Rapier Fence

FRANCESCA, his daughter

EDWARD STRANGE, a young Courtier; in love with FRANCESCA

GREENE, his Friend; a pupil of Saviolo

HERONYMO, of Bologna, Fencing Instructor, and Attendant to Saviolo

ROBIN STRONGITHARM and NICHOL HARDPATE, Two Swashbucklers

SCENE: *Saviolo's Fencing Academy in Warwick Lane, by St. Paul's, London*

TIME, 1599.

SAVIOLO'S Fencing Room: a large hall, lighted on both sides by tall diamond-paned windows; that on the right letting in the June sun. (The sun's rays should travel during the course of the play so as to fall on a doorway facing the audience; by the time that Saviolo appears on the scene for the first time.)

The ceiling is supported by pillars, round which hang trophies of fencing weapons (chiefly long rapiers) and numerous escutcheons, bearing the coats of arms of Saviolo's pupils. At a convenient height on each pillar should be represented a "target," or practice pad, at which the scholars practice the art.

On the prompt side is the window alluded to in the play.

Two doors, facing the audience; one the door of the School; the other, smaller, and reached by two or three steps, leading to Francesca's apartments.

A dresser, with black-jack and pottles; also flagons of wine and glasses.

Benches round the wall. A large oaken table.

SAVIOLO

SCENE 1.

GREENE, practicing at pillar, under Heronymo's tuition.

Greene. Good Heronymo, a truce, a truce! 'Tis fully a score of such straining passes with point reverse. I shall rest.

[Draws himself up and lowers his foil.]

Hero. Rest! Holy Cavaliero St. George! *[Aside.]* Soft sinewed, panting puppies, all alike! *[Aloud.]* And pray, young master, hope you ever to master the noble mystery of arms?

Greene. I' fackins, do I not! See how I sweat.

[Brushes sweat off his brow.]

Hero. Always sweating! All alike; oozing ever, even as your cursed skies, that show but a fair day in twelve-lest perhaps we forget what we have lost in coming so far to teach you what you will never learn.

Sweat! do I sweat?

Greene. Ay, and thou shouldst on such a day, an thou wert not such a dried herring!

Hero. *[Stamping his foot and raising Greene's blade with his foil.]* Come, master, to your ward! Perhaps the great Saviolo may not remain so long among ye that ye can e'en yet reach the last link of his precious chain of passes and finctures. Higher the fist, sir! As I ever besought you, higher!

Greene. At least, good Lieutenant, bring forth some fresh link to hammer at—
Methinks I have worn this one thin.

Hero. *This* ward I say! Know you not full well the noble Saviolo forbids that I should instruct further than his own last lesson. I pray you, sink on the hams. So. Verily this pass is of all the most precious to make hand and foot seek in true concert the mark chosen of your eye. Know it but truly, and ye shall count the buttons on your enemy's doublet, as it pleases you.

[*They play.*]

SCENE 2.

Enter STRANGE.

Str. Now, even as I thought! Still at your foreign antics, at the scratching and the ramping with your what-shall-call-it, your imbrocade reverse, inverse, perverse—foh! apish tricks, man, that never yet stopped an honest, English, right-down blow; and this on a burning day when sol Apollo rides high and glorious! [*Apart to GREENE.*] I would speak with you.

Hero. [*Aside, and scowling.*] This fluttering pop-jay again, who ever sneers at Italianate fence, even at the great Saviolo himself! [*To GREENE.*] To work, young sir. This is no Paul's walk for meetings and greetings and idle chatterings. St. George forgive me for mentioning such a place in compare with Saviolo's Academy! [*Passing in front of STRANGE and speaking over his shoulder.*] We have business, sir, if you have none.

Greene. [*Hanging his foil on the pillar and drawing his handkerchief*] Nay, worthy Janitor of the long science, though life be short, yet I'll no more to-day. My hand and foot in concert [*mimicking Heronimo's actions*] crave a truce; mine eye would fainer seek the mark of some red lattice, and count the hoops of a fair ale-pot than the buttons on the paunch of my bitterest enemy—Give us leave, brave Heronimo.

Hero. [*Aside.*] All alike! To thy wash! Swill and gorge: time and grace were lost on thee. All alike!

[Retires up stage, growling.

Greene. [*Dressing himself.*] How now, friend Strange, and strange friend, what dost thou here in the school of the frog-pricking stranger, as thou call'st him; in the sanctum of the new fangle meretricious rapier? Ah! Hast Forsworn thy abhorrence and contempt for the gentleman from Italy?

Str. [*Interrupting.*] Hush, I have indeed strange news indeed...Dost mind the fair race, the star-like eyes which shot such mischief to this heart that, cleft in twain by their twin barbs, it beats ever since in double anguish? Dost mind her of the divine form, the milk-white throat, who, with Hebe's grace, yet Juno's dignity, and Venus's own loveliness—

Greene. [*Breaking in with a laugh.*] Ho, ho! How now: the pretty wench at the window next door? Why yes, some merchant's Moll or shipmen's Sue. Why, Ned, 'tis thy brain that's cleft in twain. Yet I grant ye she was a comely quean enough. [*Kisses his hand*] I have never seen her since, yet do mind her well.

Str. A truce to jest, good friend. I want your help. Yea, coz, I am indeed in burning earnest. [*Draws his friend by the arm, looking over his shoulder at HERONYMO, and whispers*] The lady is of this house. I have seen her at yon window.

Greene. Fantasy! Both sun and moon have told upon thy pate; thou'rt indeed stark, and thy visions double like as thy poor cleft heart. Why, 'twas two windows off, or three, and at the back. Saviolo hath no woman-kind. He's wedded to his rapier, and, by her, father to half a score of handsome offsprings, well christened too, and in right proper names as thou knowest. There is the fair Mandritta Saviolo, and Stoccatta the nimble, and Rinversa the sly; the sturdy Passadosotto Saviolo, also Falsomanco, and Caricado Saviolo! Ha! ha! He needs no other family.

Str. [*Impatiently.*] I tell you she was there. 'Twas from that window, 'twixt those green tendrils that fluttered against her fair bosom, I saw her lean out, rare in her beauty as the virgin moon from the star-strewn skies, fresh as a rose bathed in early dew, no later than this morning. 'Twas as the bell of Paul's gave seven. I had paced the lane from dawn, watching the casement you wot of—and there—there it was where least expected, that my life's light shone forth. Ah! methought she looked most piteous and forlorn; and for sure she sighed. [*Sighs lugubriously.*] Here rested her little hand, white as first snow-flake on grimy earth.

[*Kisses the sill.*]

Greene. Heigho! poor Strange! Nay, then, and thou wilt not believe me, thou must satisfy thyself. [*Calls.*] Heronymo, here!

Hero. [*Aside.*] What now, screeching owlets? [*Advancing close.*] Yes, masters, Heronymo is here.

Greene. Then hear, Heronymo. What young and fair damsel [*HERONYMO starts*] is't that haunts these male-sacred purlieus, and rests her snowy arms on yonder window-sill; bends a face beautiful as the virgin moon; blushing as the dewy rose? [*To STRANGE.*] 'Tis rightly said so?—from the casement of a morning?

Hero. [*Aside.*] Plague on ye for prowling night-cats! What devil's mischief's afoot now? [*Aloud.*] You please to be merry, master. There are no women here.

Str. [*Hotly.*] Thou liest, sirrah!

Hero. Master, it may seem right in your country to fling offence to an honest man, who by his service can make no defence; yet by the Holy—

Greene. [*Interposing.*] Peace, honest Heronymo, my coz is stark, knows not what he sayeth, e'en as he seeth what cannot be. Answer me now, I pray. Hath thy master wife, sister, or daughter?

Hero. By all the blessed saints, my noble master hath none. [*Aside.*] Forgive me, ye Holy ones, I am here most necessarily forsworn.

Greene. Hearest, Ned? [*To HERONYMO.*] And thou ?

Hero. I, master? I would not have a slut of them about. Nay, we have no women here troubles enough without. We have none here, not a patten, not a farthingale. Tis I and an honest lad from Padua who wait upon my master's wants. We have no woman here; nor ever shall.

Greene. I do believe thee. That mug of thine alone would fright the little doves away!

Str. [Apart to *GREENE*.] Here is some mystery. [To *HERONYMO*, haughtily.]

Who then, honest man, stood at that window this very morn at the stroke of seven?

Hero. [Doggedly.] Master, at that time I was strewing the rushes. None but myself was here.

The window was oped. I may have looked forth. I'faith, I mind me now I did.

Greene. [Laughing.] Here, then, is the mystery solved. Sweet coz, behold the rosy moon. Ha! ha! feast thine eyes on the virgin beauty. Kiss the snow-flake hand.

[Holds *HERONYMO* by the shoulders.

Str. [Stamping his foot.] Damnation!

Hero. [Angrily freeing himself, aside.] Malediction! [Aloud.] Nay, by St. George, I have no time for such idle jests. 'Tis close on twelve. Good masters, I pray you.

[Significantly points to the door.

Greene. [Gently hustling *STRANGE* out.] Come, coz, the old man's right.

Str. I tell thee there *is* mystery. [Striking his breast.] My heart cries out there is a foul wrong done here I must be even with!

Greene. [Striking his stomach.] And I tell thee there is hunger here. My emptiness cries out: there is a fair joint done there [points to the street] I must and shall be even with.

[Pushes *STRANGE* out.

[Exeunt, *GREENE* laughing, *STRANGE* still protesting.

SCENE 3.

HERONYMO, alone.

Hero. I must to my master instantly. The little jade! May I be pardoned that I should so speak of Saviolo's flesh and blood!—but, ay, they're all alike, all alike!

[*Exit.*]

SCENE 4.

Enter FRANCESCA; *she opens the door cautiously, and peeps in. Gradually emerges, and steps daintily on tip-toe into the room, looking from right to left.*

Fran. All silent. All empty—school over, scholars gone to play. And both the masters out! 'Tis strange, so early—yet I'll not complain! [*Looks back at the door.*] And Mistress Julia sleeps in faith, my lucky star is on the rise! The dame nods much this drowsy weather,—yet not *over* much, for, by the Madonna, 'tis livelier for Francesca when Mistress Julia nods than when she wakes, and prates, and chides, and weeps, and prays. Oh! [*stretches herself and skips across the stage.*] 'Tis good to be free for the nonce; honey is sweet though it be stolen! [*Stops, sighing.*] Yet 'tis but a larger cage when all be said and done!

[*Takes her lute, and sings.*]

“Come to me when the summer's heat

Is strong the breeze of spring to kill;

When gardens are with perfume sweet, And when the languid moon is still;

Come, when the opened buds disclose The glory of the full-blown rose;

[*Interrupts herself, and sighs.*] Ah me! I sing a merry song, yet my heart is heavy.

[*Thoughtfully.*] I marvel who he be. He hath a comely look. . . .his hair is like our corn-fields in the late summer, though, when he doffed his cap with such an humble

grace, the early sun struck from his bared head such rays of gold as corn-fields never yield! I wonder what colour his eyes be. . . . I know they burn. [*Covering her eyes with her hand.*] They dazzled me this morning, so that I could not look upon their colour. [*Walks over to window.*] 'Twas here I stood. . . . I love this window, there is so fair a view—of the street; . . . all *I* may see of the world, since even my casement looks on eyeless walls, on side. alley where never a passer passes. . . . save he, indeed, whom some pitying saint hath sent across my loneliness. And when he passes, plague of it! scarce may I cast a glance out on him but Mother Julia—God bless her old blind eyes!—must needs hang on my skirts with a "Fie!" and a "For shame, a modest maiden looks not out of window!" To-day, for the first time, mine eyes beheld him well. He seemed so near, as there he stood below, that, had not Heronimo broken in upon me thus untimely, I trow we could have conversed in soft whispers. Good Heronimo! , . . . Bad Heronimo, thou didst tell on me. I'll bear that friendly act in mind; also the chiding look thou didst procure me of my father. Ah, my lord and father, would you rule her more by trust and reason, and less by this strange jealous rigour, Francesca would never dream to thwart your will! Poor father, he would not let the little mice peep at me an he could help it And as for a whiskered rat, oh 'twere shocking un-seemly! [*Laughs.*] I must be cloistered like a nun, although none; watched like the crown jewels-'tis true, he calls me his crowning jewel; hemmed in, guarded, none in this island may even guess Saviolo hath a fair daughter. Alas! 'tis his doting fondness; but, sure, 'tis senseless. Am I a winter's icicle to be all melted and undone by the first sun-gleam of a spring-gallant's smile; or yet some subtle essence that needs be corked and bottled

lest the very air should draw it to itself and carry it away? And so for fear of love, through love I am a prisoner; and, being caged by love, against love, can scarce, for love of love, rebel. Woe is me! 'tis heavy loneliness. Francesca made a maid would be as other maids, would laugh and sing, and dance and weep -but not alone; no, not alone! [*Pauses near window.*] I would look out, yet I the daring lack; warm noon is here, soon comes the master back. [*Takes up lute.*

“Come most of all when warmth is lost, When autumn to stern winter yields;

 Come when the bitter edge of frost

 Nips all the verdure of the fields;

 Come when all else is dark and drear,

 Thy presence then is doubly dear!”

[Verse of song is taken up from the street, in man's voice. FRANCESCA pauses to listen, half startled, yet smiling.

Man's voice: “And come when opened buds disclose

 The glory of the full-blown rose.”

Fran. What echo's this which mocks my maiden's voice in manly notes? My heart misgives me!

[Song ceases, she steals over to window, and peers out.

Oh, this is fearful! My father would spit him like a rabbit, an he came on him thus!

[She looks up and

down the street.] All's safe as yet! [*Off stage.*] Depart, depart, I beseech you.

[*Listens.*] No, no, kind sir [*sadly*], 'twas no angel sang; naught but a poor caged bird!

[*Much agitated.*] Oh, my lord go; 'tis veriest madness! [*Withdraws from window*

apart.] I love a man of courage. How brave he stands his ground. [*Looks out again.*]

How now! Gone! Fleeting down the street—a hare, a hare, a frightened hare? A paltry fellow! Not even a hound in sight to set his heart a flutter. And 'tis this knight of the light heels that would seek Francesca's smile! I hate a craven!

[*Comes into middle of room, stamps her foot, snatches her lute, and strikes it fiercely.*]

Ah me, this odious land!—Poor Francesca, that she should be used so!

[*A posy of red roses, is flung through the window, and falls at her feet. She steps back with a suppressed scream, then comes cautiously up to it. Clapping her hands.*]

Fair god of love, forgive! 'Tis he, again: 'tis he! [*Picks up posy, and examines it.*] Yea, even such tinted points he wears. [*Presses roses to her lips,*] How now? Pricked by a thorn? [*Starts back.*] Nay, nay, no thorn, but Cupid's arrow sweet, that wounds in love, and, wound-ing, heals all woe.

[*Unfolds letter, drops posy, and reads.*]

“Most noble lady, and most beauteous goddess,
Who, wrapt in veil of envious mystery

Like to a star upon a night of storm”

[*Aside.*] Ah!

[*Reads on.*

“Hast flashed athwart the restless circumstance
And lightless blank of my uncoupled life
Thy beams divine, leave me not lost, I pray,
Not lost in nether darkness of despair.”

[*Aside.*] How beautiful!

[*Reads on.*

“Let at thy feet the humblest of thy slaves
His homage lay. O grant me, sovereign maid,
One moment's speech with thee, one moment's grace,
Lest, by the sharpness of my longing slain,
'Neath thine unopening window I expire!
I fain would live that I might fight for thee,
Or, if I die, would die for thy sweet sake.”

[*Aside.*] Poor youth!

[*Reads on.*

“To be so lovely and to be unkind
Were, with fair flow'rs and living springs, to kill.
Nature is not of such uncertain mind,
And her sweets, culled, do greater sweets distil.

Thus, if I sin, in sending thee love's token,
By thy fair lips be absolution spoken,
And if by thee, this loving fault be shriven,
So shall the unrepentant enter heaven."

My heart is strangely moved. [*Distant noise without.*] Holy Mother, who comes? I am surely mad! . . . no maid could him resist who doth so subtly plead. I'll see him. . . .

Poor prisoner, where? Why here, when next the room is free. He need but watch, kind Heaven will favour me! And what shall be the signal?

Ah! [*Picks up the posy.*] This fragrant messenger of love can double duty do.

*[Fumbles for pencil, and writes on back
of note against the pillar, and reads as
she writes.*

"Your words are sweet and glowing as the flowers that brought them. I cannot say you nay. Francesca will admit you to her presence who'er you be, for her heart tells her a true heart speaks in you. Watch, watch; if this posy falls from the window of the school then know that ye shall find her within. Yet, beware! oh, beware how you venture, for should the dread Saviolo aught of this discover, all would, in very truth, be undone! So be prudent if, indeed, you love the poor caged bird; her gaolers watch her keenly."

*[Great clanking in the street below,
murmurs of voices. She cautiously looks
out whilst folding the letter.]*

'Tis but some brawlers passing. How noble and scornful he stands unmoved his ground. Faith, 'tis a proper youth! *[Great knocking at the door.]* Sweet Saviour, save us!

[Runs to window, drops the note, kisses her hand and flies.]

SCENE 5.

[Renewed knocking and clashing. The door is thrown open.]

Enter two outrageous Smithfield Swashbucklers, half intoxicated, roaring for

SAVIOLO

Nicol. Hallo! hallo! Saviolo! Devil, oh!

Robin. Nay, I am the elder. I will at him. *[Thumps with his sword on his buckler.]*

Come forth, thou Italian fox; for here be two good gentlemen and tall men of their hands have come to test thee, master.

Nic. Master, forsooth? Whom call'st thou master? Is he of the Corporation that thou darest to call him

Master?

Rob. *[Loftily; propping himself up on his sword.]* Pish! Good Nicol, I am too subtle for thy hard pate.

'Twas wit, irony, I gave him.

Nic. Irony? [*Taps his sword.*] 'Tis steel I'd give him, by these hilts! Honest, downright steel!

[*They both roar with laughter.*]

[*Bawls.*] What ho, within! [*Joined by ROBIN.*] Saviolo! Saviolo! Why, the fox has sped to his hole. I have a fox in here [*taps his scabbard*] shall more than match him. I'll swear he was here but now. [*Sniffs.*] The foreign scent of him doth offend mine honest English nostril.

[*Lurches against the pillar.*]

Rob. Touch not those toys of his [*chuckles*], or ye'll break them! Bodkins! bodkins!

Nic. [*With drunken gravity.*] Bodkins they are—damned bodkins! But mark me, Robin Strongitharm, for one sewing lesson with these same most outrageous and damnable bodkins the fellow receives more broad pieces than an honest gentleman like you can turn by his prettiest, most slicing and gory stage-fight—wholesome sight—e'en though thou givest the seers their very fill of honest English blood.

Rob. [*Roaring.*] Body o' me, a burning crime! I'll show him how an honourable gentleman—

Nic. [*Interrupting.*] Thou'lt show him? 'Tis Nicol Hardpate hath come here to draw the vermin out.

Rob. Nay, then, we'll both at him! An a man would prove his tricks which, if they were true, as held, would ruin our trade, brother [*nudges him*], 'twere meet he should be well met. [*Scornfully.*] Perchance my lord's at Court. Ay, ay, he's teacher to the Court, forsooth, while you and I,—what Court do we teach in? Toad-in-the-Hole—

Queenhithe—Ugh?—'Tis the mirror of the time. All's good that's outlandish—all's bad that's downright homely.

[Shakes his head mournfully.]

Nic. Thou say'st right, brother. An he have man's blood we'll draw it. Brother, I grow parched with anger. My choler rises, and 'tis a very drying heat. *[Plaintively]* Would I could draw a pot of small ale!

Rob. Out of my mouth dost thou speak. Were I laid in pickle I could not more cry out for drink. *[Furiously.]* And 'tis the skulking coward that keeps me from my well-earned draught! Let him beware, for this same Rob in pickle will prove the very rod in pickle for him wherewith he shall be chastised! Ay, and in public too, for all the world to see which is the better man, this same Vincent Saviolo, or good, honest, thirsty Robin Strongitharm! *[Hastily, seeing NICOL make an indignant movement.]* I speak for both, brother. *[Bawling, and immediately joined by NICOL.]* Saviolo! Saviolo! come forth!

[They clash sword and buckler together.]

SCENE 6.

Enter HERONYMO, looking blackly round.

Hero. *[Aside.]* What devil's clatter's this?

Rob. *[To NICOL.]* Hist! the fellow's here! Why, 'tis a little man. I feel the wrath of the lion rising in me. I am a very furnace of passion. I shall do great deeds anon. By the jawbone of an ass I'll parley with him first! *[To HERONYMO.]* Art thou Saviolo? *[Ironically.]* Master Saviolo?

Nic. [*Passing in front.*] Let me speak. Master Saviolo!

[*Snaps his finger under HERONYMO's nose.*

Hero. [*Aside.*] Whom have we here? By Saint Georgio, methinks I know the gentry! Bullies, by this poisonous breath of theirs. Casks of stale ale; bladders of empty threats! All alike. [*Aloud.*] Masters, no master am I, but proud to call master the most noble and redoubtable Signor Saviolo, whose poor henchman and assistant I am. [*Bows.*] Well, sirs, what would ye with him?

Rob. [*Loftily.*] We are two gentlemen, haunchman, who have business of deep moment with this same [*ironically*] noble and redoubtable Signieur of thine.

Nic. To the point, for we are here to discuss point—aye, and edge too: where is the foreigner?

Hero. My noble master gives a lesson in arms to a good friend of his, my Lord of Essex. [*Aside.*] Would I could find him or knew where he be!

Rob. Hearest thou, brother Nicol? Even as I told thee. Does't not make thy very marrow boil, brave Nicol, to think that this Italian scullion, with his goose spit on his hip, should be preferred to the like of you and me? [*Exploding, and turning to HERONYMO.*] Now, tell us, fellow, what manner of man be this laggard master of thine that, an we meet him, he may not 'scape our wrath. And mind, sirrah, speak the truth, for I am a very stern lover of the truth! Thou'lt not come round me with tales how he has a wondrous tall and commanding presence, an eye like an eagle 'fore which even tall men quail—pooh!

Nic. [*Passing in front.*] And hands like a duchess—pah!

Hero. [*Who hears door opening.*] Sirs, judge for yourselves!

[They stare open-mouthed at SAVIOLO, who stands, framed in the doorway, with the sunlight falling upon him from the window. HERONYMO walks up to his master to take his gloves and stick. After a pause SAVIOLO comes slowly forward, looking steadily at the Swashbucklers, who manifestly grow uneasy.]

SCENE 7.

Sav. *[Bowing.]* Good-morrow, gentlemen! *[Pause.]* May I crave, whence comes it your honourable presence thus illumines my poor house to-day?

Rob. *[Takes a step forward.]* Saviolo! *[Coughs, and retreats and nudges NICOL.]*
Explain our errand,
brother.

Nic. *[Edging away.]* Nay, nay, it was agreed and set down in my memory's tablets that thou shouldst spokesman be.

Rob. Nay, by my point, that thou shouldst! Come, to work! Art feared of the Italian?

Nic. Said any other man the like to me—! but, in truth, I am overtaken by a sudden hoarseness.

[Clears his throat.]

Rob. [*Taking courage.*] Master Vincent Saviolo. [*Hums.* SAVIOLO advances, ROBIN retires.] Worthy Master Saviolo.

[ROBIN retires behind NICOL, and mops his brow with his sleeve.

SAVIOLO looks with an interrogative smile at HERONYMO.

Hero. [*Coming forward decorously.*] Sirs, my master hath scant leisure. Your business, an it please you.

[NICOL and ROBIN nudge each other; then both together, whilst ROBIN produces a scroll.

Nic. and Rob. Why then, Sir, it is thus [*hastily*] no offence meant, all in good honest homely fashion!

[HERONYMO takes scroll with a disgusted expression. Bowing low, hands it to his Master, who unrolls it at arm's length.

Sav. Now, by St Anthony of Padua, a very lengthy brief. A most imposing document. [*Reads.*] “Know thou, Vincent Saviolo, that callest thyself the one Master of Fence in

the world, that would teach Englishmen the new and traitorous fight of rapier, to the undoing of all the manly arts of our forefathers, that boastest to touch any man on any button of his doublet in thine own time, that we Nicol Hardpate of Coventry [*repeats*] Nicol Hardpate? [*and looks at NICOL, who at that time is scratching his head*] and Robin Strongitharm? [*looks at ROBIN who rubs his nose with his elbow*] Robin Strongitharm, well known in Queenhithe, hold thee for no master till thou hast proved thyself to us with thy tuck against true men's weapons; videlicet:

Sword and buckler.

Sword and dagger.

Short sword against long sword.

Case of swords.

Single falchion.

Case of falchion.

Halbert, pike, and flail.

[*Repeats.*] Halbert, pike, and flail, most gentlemanly weapons!

[*Reads on.*

Brownbill, club, and battle-axe. [*Aside.*] In faith, a very perfect list for who listeth enter on such lists. [*Reads on.*] And we shall wait for thee this following day on the scaffold at the Bear-garden nin Southwark. [*Aside.*] On the scaffold; 'tis very honest writ, why e'en now it waits the gentlemen. At the Bear-garden! An they have not but lately 'scaped from thence, a most meet meeting-place. [*Continues reading.*] At the Bear-garden in Southwark, where if thou failest to-morrow noon thou art no tru man. Vivat Regina." [*Here SAVIOLO takes off his cap with a grace*] Death of my

life, a most proper cartel. [*Rolls up the scroll. To Swashbucklers, haughtily.*] This then is your business with me, gentlemen. I pray you pardon, if I fail to answer you in terms as choice and at such ample length as your favour here to me. [*Hands it to HERONYMO.*] But with that courtesy your modest demands demand, I would inform you that 'tis long since I have left behind me the practice of giving *unfee'd* lessons in public. [*They start angrily, but he quells them with a look; they step back a pace.*] But if perforce such honour is thrust upon me, then have these same lessons been known to cost the scholar dearer than he could live to pay.

Nic. [*Crestfallen.*] Oh, sir, 'twas, so to speak, a matter of speech.

Rob. Our homely way of greeting your worship.

[They make gradually for the door.]

Sav. Why, then, that's well. [*Seeing them slink away he raises his voice.*] And being so, it shall not be said that such honourable and courageous comrades of the noble science should call on Saviolo and leave unentertained. [*The Swashbucklers halt.*] What though we play at different weapons, and, no doubt, with different skill [*bows*], that shall be surely no reason why we pledge not each other in a nooning cup? Heronymo, a draught of ale for the gentlemen. [*HERONYMO goes to the blackjack and pours out a large pottle. They look thirstily at it and doubtfully at SAVIOLO.*] Nay, sirs, do not wait for me. Your English ale is somewhat clogging for my Southern blood. [*At a look from SAVIOLO, HERONYMO brings him a dainty flask and glass.*] So, gentlemen, to your health, and to all our better acquaintanceship with the queen of weapons. [*They drink, the two bullies, greedily, SAVIOLO with mocking*

courtesy.] And now I crave your gentle leniency. Affairs of other import wait for my attendance. Good den to ye.

[Exeunt, shown out by HERONYMO.]

Hero. *[Whispering.]* What, ye midden cocks, you would come and crow in Saviolo's house! Have we cut your combs for ye, that ye go so crestfallen ? all alike!

Sav. *[Laughing.]* Poor ignorant knaves! My cap, Heronymo, and cloak. Good player, Will Shakespeare, my friend, awaits our coming.

Hero. *[Humbly.]* Master, may I go forth alone to the gentleman?

Sav. How now?

Hero. Master, should the shepherd leave the fold when the wolf has marked the whitest lamb in the flock?

Sav. *[Bending his brow.]* Speak plainly, man.

Hero. I have sought you, master, over half the town. There were gallants here in your absence who would ply me with pert questions—anent some lady they saw at yonder window. They drew no news from me, but, mark you, master, they were very ruffling gallants.

Sav. Tush, fool, my cap! The sight of Saviolo's staff would make all prowling beasts their distance keep. My one ewe lamb is folded in father's love, and loves her shepherd well. This mutual love keeps foul suspicion out. I'll not doubt her.

Hero. *[Half aside.]* Nay, I'll speak plain. Master, your lamb's a maid, and maidens are *[angry look from SAVIOLO]* all alike, all alike.

[Sound of lute and verse of song.]

“Weak are words, and song is weak,

Heart to heart can silence speak;
If I miss that promised token,
Then my breaking heart is broken.

“Near as glove to falconer's finger
I would have you by me linger;
True as falconer's hand to glove,
Hap what may, will be my love”

[SAVILOLO *listens. His face darkens;*
throws his cap on the table. To

HERONYMO.

Sav. Go forth alone. I'll bide.

[*He leans against the pillar in shadow.*
HERONYMO *departs. Sound of outer*
door closing. Clock strikes one. Enter
Francesca boldly.

SCENE 8.

Fran. My father come and gone, without a word to me! 'Tis against all custom—in faith I'd pick a quarrel with him. And yet—ah me—deceiving maid that fears her father's eye! I would I had been wiser, and yet—by my heart I do not, I do not.

[Comes slowly forward with downcast eyes, toying with roses.]

Come, my posy, raise your drooping leaves. *[Kisses them.]* Fair book, in which my love hath writ his vows on every page, shalt now act page to me and carry back to love a message sweet.

[SAVIOLO slowly emerges from behind his pillar. She walks almost into his arms, looks up and screams.]

Sav. *[Gently.]* Daughter, what dost thou here?

Fran. *[Much flurried. Dropping her hand with the posy behind her.]* I know you do forbid me to come here, and and so you see, father—why—thus *[laughing nervously]* I am ever your dutiful daughter—yet I came.

Sav. Faith, a most excellent argument, and of most convincing clearness!

[Looks searchingly at her.]

Fran. *[Aside.]* Here be a pretty trap! How shall I out of this? *[Aloud.]* Look you, father, the day is passing hot. *[Aside.]* I would not lie an I could help it *[aloud]*, and the room here strikes pleasant, cool, and fresh.

[Fans herself.]

Sav. True. *[Putting his hand on his daughter's shoulder.]* Dost tremble, my child? I grudge thee not, God. knows, the cooler air. But, mark me, I would keep thee to thy rooms; ay, to the other house. There's danger lurks here, thou wot'st nothing of.— Even as a mother guides her yearling's steps and snatches him in wiser arms from pretty, leaping fire; or banks of treacherous stream; or yet withholds from him the

tempting poison of the hart's tongue's bead—hus do I guard thee, daughter. Wouldst fain rebel? [*pulling her ear gently*] So screams the pretty innocent that knows not what he's spared. [*In lighter tones.*] Yet cheer thee, sweet one, Saviolo works for thee. Each stroke of his white steel rings out red gold for fair Francesca's dower. The day is dawning, when, in our own fair land, we'll take true place again amid our kin, and then from among the nobles of our blood shall I thy father seek fit mate for thee. Then shall my jewel shine in proper setting. Canst not have patience, child? ‘

Fran. [*Pouting.*] Alack, father, patience is hard of practice, and present silver gleams fairer than future gold.

Sav. Tut! I have spoilt thee. My pretty babe, I'll hold thee yet in the leading strings for all thy little feet would fain run alone. [*A pause.*] Poor motherless one. Thou canst not mind thy mother, Francesca. Thou wast in nurse's arms when she was taken.

Fran. Alas! my father!

[*Takes his hand and kisses it.*]

Sav. [*Retaining hold of her hand, places it within his arm, and slowly paces the stage with her.*] Hast seen a cloudlet on a fair blue sky; a speck upon its radiance, spread as the hours go by into a fearsome pall, swallow the sun and darken all the land. 'Twas thus misfortune came upon me. Ay, in the very morn of life, quenching my light and darkening all my ways. The morning of that day thy mother stood beside me, as fair in delicate vigour as a June lily, just breaking into bloom. At noon she drooped. [*A pause.*] There was a very envious fever about the land, such as our climate breeds in sultry weather. At eve, my child, she raved, and before dawn again—[*softly beats his daughter's hand and pauses once more; then hurriedly*]—all leeches were in vain,

and prayers. Before she passed, to her sick brain sweet sense returned again; she spoke—already death had laid his thrall upon her tongue—but as I knelt beside her, she said thrice: The child. Then, as death’s finger froze her speech, still spoke her straining eyes, until her sweet soul fled and left them sightless. And in those ears that could no longer hear me, clasping that hand that once was eager to my touch, and now lay—[*pause*—as cold as did my heart, I vowed by all our love God helping to take her place by thee. [*Stands and faces his daughter; takes her face ‘twixt his hands.*] Look at me. Nay, I cannot bear to see a tear in those sweet eyes, from which, methinks, thy mother looks at me again. [*Kisses them.*] Vision of my past happiness, my, comfort and my pride, I would not cloud thy brightness by a shade. ‘Twas not to make thee sad, daughter, I’ve told thee so much, ‘twas but I would not thou should’st think me harsh that I do thus seclude thee. It is but for thy peace and for thine own sweet sake until better days. Thy mother would have watched thee an she’d lived, beneath maternal wing guarded thy ignorance.—I must out and work.

Fran. [*Remorseful.*] All thou dost is well.

Sav. [*In more cheerful tones.*] Canst scarce remember either, daughter, that turn of Fortune’s wheel, that brought me from great wealth to poverty. Hast forgotten our early home?

Fran. Ay, but as a bright dream of soft air and sunlit marble, and strange scents of lime and orange trees.

Sav. I’d still one treasure left [*pats her head*] and swore to keep it safe. So I bethought me of my skill at fence: was held well-nigh a marvel then, in distant Tuscany. So left we lands and palace, no longer

mine, to seek this pale, yet not unkindly clime. We twain, thy faithful nurse and good Heronymo. And

here, in the cold lap of an alien town, built I thy nest afresh, as warm as love could make it. Heaven hath blessed this arm. And Saviolo, once known by fame of wealth, and blood, and land, now rules by skill. The gold flows in, and English gold rings true as English honour. We'll soon return to Padua.

Fran. [*Aside.*] Now I'd be base indeed, could I bring grief to such a father. [*Half turns away and*

speaks to her posy.] Wither my roses, droop and fall, leave but the thorns to mind Francesca of her dream of love. [*Turns round, flings her arms, with the posy, round her father's neck.*] I'll ever be thy faithful daughter.

Sav. When have I doubted thee? [*Then in a lighter tone.*] Thy roses have a sweet smell, daughter. Whence came they?

Fran. [*Aside.*] Oh, Lord, now this is a very telling question. But, sure, I'll not lie.

[*Aloud.*] Indeed and I

know not, father.

Sav. [*Suspiciously.*] What riddle is this? how came they to thy hand?

Fran. [*Earnestly.*] I swear I'll not deceive you. I—I found them.

Sav. [*Sarcastically.*] Found them. Culled them here? Perchance blooming among these blades or planted in yonder fields.

[*Points to swords and coats of arms on pillar.*]

Fran. [*Aside.*] He waxes angry, angry with *me*! Oh me! poor maid, that love's torch should have led me into this quagmire! But indeed I'll speak the truth. [*Aloud.*]

Father, I'll never lie to you, and, in faith, why should I lie? The story is a plain one; the flowers did lie there [*pointing to the boards under the window*], and there I picked them up.

Sav. [*Snatching the flowers from her hand.*] Now, by the Lord of lies, I thought thou hadst more wit! Canst find no likelier tale? [*Tears the points off the posy.*] Why, girl, these tags do whip thee untrue to thy face. Oh, Francesca, I did trust thee, I'll not ask thee further. Thou know'st not to what gallant point these points; thou couldst not tell, *forsooth*, thou knowest him not !

Fran. [*Taking out her handkerchief*] In faith, father, you say true, although you mean it not. I know naught of the lace or the gallant. [*Aside.*] A plague on him that he must so point his tale.

Sav. Get thee to thy room. I would not speak to thee now, while choler is my master, lest I should be rough with thee.

[Flings bouquet out of window. She screams, and would in vain stop him.]

Fran. [*Aside.*] Now, blessed Mary, help! the fire is indeed in the thatch!

Sav. [*Sternly.*] To thy room!

[Exit FRANCESCA.]

SCENE 9.

Sav. I would be calm, but I am struck—struck to the heart, in spite of all my guard. Francesca's false, 'tis plain! Who can the villain be that's led so fair a soul from its allegiance? Heaven send him to my hand!

*[Door opens. Enter STRANGE, pressing
posy to his lips, SAVIOLO looks at him
for a moment in silence. STRANGE
stares blankly back.]*

SCENE 10.

Sav. *[Aside.]* I thank, thee Heaven. *[A pause.]* The robbing kite I'd seek doth even seek me. Now shall I pluck him first before I wring his neck. *[Recognizes him.]* How now! This, Master Strange? my pupil's kinsman! By his noble house I deemed him too well born to play so foul a trick!

Str. *[Aside.]* What's this? 'Twas surely the signal.

Sav. *[In a tone of fierce bantering]* How now, Sir Gard'ner, art come to plant more roses on oaken boards? 'Tis there I hear thou'dst fain make them take root. Or perchance *[looking keenly from young man's doublet to the points he still holds in his hand]* art come, sirrah, to fetch these silken points of which I see thy coat is bereaven *[coming a step closer; STRANGE haughtily holds his ground.]* Thou wilt owe thy tailor a heavy grudge that he did stitch thy bravery so ill before I'm done with thee! Or yet, again, art come to seek a lesson of the juggling foreigner? Now, by my soul, 'tis like to take with thee the shape of seasoned wood! *[STRANGE puts his hand on his sword pommel. SAVIOLO, in a ringing voice.]* Hand down, young man, for I will speak, and thou shalt answer first.

Str. *[Involuntarily obeys first; then furiously and clenching his fist.]* 'Fore God, you are right, You have

to speak, and even hear me speak. What I came here to seek, that you know well. We are somehow betrayed, and you have lured me with my lady's own dear signal.

Sav. [Aside.] Have I? In faith, then, I've more cunning than I wotted of. What, signals and assignations? Shame! . . . Oh, my white bird, couldst wing so low a flight? [To STRANGE, with mocking voice.] Why, good young sir, you rave. This is a school of arms, and not a lady's bower.

Str. [With solemn earnestness.] Since Heaven hath willed it so that you and I should meet thus face to face, I'll not misuse the hour with idle talk. Truth shall out the mystery to the light. What! have these eyes seen her distress, have these ears heard her sighs? Have I a heart? Should I be man an I refused man's aid to this most beauteous maid? Ay, Signior Saviolo, I know you have nor wife, nor child, nor sister! All the world knows this. But you have a prisoner you've hid well. She's guarded, and she's watched; but there's a God above to help the helpless! Be I this day His most unworthy instrument, and, strong in righteous cause, avenge the wronged.

[As SAVIOLO listens, his face grows
wondering, but somewhat less angry.]

Sav. [Aside.] What fantasy is this? The truth shall out indeed, and from this braggart's lips! . . . [To STRANGE] Thou rollest forth a very mighty sound, yet to my dullard ear but little sense. Pray tell me, an thou canst, in plain words, where didst material glean for this thy piteous tale? For in my hearing it runs as the very babble of madness.

Str. [Between his set teeth.] This subterfuge shall not avail with me. I know thy secret. When first I

saw her pale beauty gleam behind her grated casement from that back hidden alley where, God knows what strange impulse first guided my feet, now but a week ago—was not my heart so moved within me, I could not eat, nor sleep, nor rest?—Three times I saw her at the casement as I passed and ever looked she out more beautiful. Consumed by love I watched with ceaseless patience till this day, this very day when she did twice elude your vigilant ward for my adoring gaze. [SAVIOLO *starts.*]—Ah ! have I hit you, master?—Why, hark you, then—first, 'twas at early morning for but a brief sweet span, here, [*looking at him with emphatic meaning*] here, at this window, where, as I stood beneath, I heard her sigh. Then was your secret mine—then did I know her of this house! You've trained your minions well, sir; your rascal lied to me—swore you'd no women here—he knew not what I meant! I saw by his face he lied, and, by my heart's true love, I scented cruel wrong!

[SAVIOLO *has been listening with strained attention, grows visibly relieved as STRANGE proceeds.*

Sav. [*Gaily*] A very midsummer madness! Hast seen some wench in the window and forthwith Saviolo's an ogre, who keeps tender maidens in durance to eat them up at his leisure! What now, my Amadis of Gaul—go, right thee other wrongs, for here indeed thou'lt waste thy derring-do. [*Aside.*] An I spur not every shred of the truth from him

Str. Now do I brand you liar! For, by St. Paul, was 'twas but at noon this day I stood again out yonder, to hear her sing, even as the sweet birds of the air will sing, in cages harsh, a song most pitiful in blitheness. And then, as I would have speech with

her, did she, in fearful accents, conjure me to go, so great her dread of her hard gaoler's wrath. [SAVIOLO *smiles.*] Then, for love will ever find a way, cast I these roses at her feet wherewith in hidden scroll I craved a meeting. And this she promised [SAVIOLO *sighs and frowns*] so she could evade the watch set on her. She knows not e'en my name, but I do feel she trusts.

Sav. [Fiercely] Enough! [Aside.] I've been o'er wise with her and thus am proved a fool. She spoke no lie, poor maid, but half the truth, yet she would blind her father. Oh, that she'd but told all! I'd not have chidden. Were't feared, Francesca? Alas, I fear me I did frown on thee. Curse this madcap boy and his imaginings! [To STRANGE, *haughtily.*] And who art *thou* that wouldst thus pry into my privacy? Who art thou that would dare come between Saviolo and whosoe'er it pleases Saviolo keep from all the world? Silly boy, get thee horse, get thee to thy mother—it will be best for thee. Ay, and for her, an she love thee. But mark me, sirrah, forget thou'st seen—Saviolo's prisoner.

Str. Not so, by my father's sword! Your frowns abash, your threats affright me not. Could I indeed forget her whose image is stamped for ever on my soul; could I desert her field without one blow, then truly were life wasted on me and death too good for such a craven liver! Come, sir! I challenge you to combat before God. And as God judges all, so rule He now the fight! Am I to die? Why then my heart's blood's spilt in the best cause for which a man could shed it, and from each drop shall spring—for God's a God of justice—a better champion still to fight His fight and hers!

Sav. [Aside.] The cockerel croweth loud, but croweth to good purpose! Bearded in my own house! and by this stripling! Yet he's a gallant lad; I'll try him further.

[*Aloud.*] And prythee, sir champion, before thou smitest me with that mighty sword of thine, answer me first one question. To what high estate wouldst thou raise this poor captive lady? To what wouldst hold her meet when thou hast conquered me, and thus delivered her?

Str. [*Furiously.*] It wanted but this to fill the measure of my righteous hate. I read your meaning on that sneering lip, and I would strike it dumb for such a blasphemy. God pardon me that I should drag my lady's name across so foul a doubt! Oh, man, whatever guilt towards her, besides thy most unnatural cruelty, may lie upon your soul, to me she'll ever be—all stainless. What would I with thee, most sweet, suffering soul? I'd make thee queen of all I have—my life, my heart, my fortune, and my lands. Bound by the circlet of a golden ring, e'en as that ring our love should be unending. And by my quenchless hearth, my lady and my wife, wealthy, honoured, beloved, I'd teach thee to forget thy prison bans and—all thy other wrongs!

Sav. [*Aside.*] I'll swear I've not yet met so true a knight in honourable England! Ay, I know him of good blood, but deemed not the Court life had left it so untainted. He speaketh well. Yea, but brave speech and leeds may well be twain. I'll test him to the uttermost.[*To STRANGE.*] A noble flow of words, indeed. Art a most brave youth—in words. And Saviolo—though he means keep his own yet as his own—will credit thee with valour. Go forth, I'll spare thee for thy youth's sake.

Str. [*Drawing furiously on SAVIOLO and stamping his foot.*] No more! draw or beware the stroke of my avenging blade.

[SAVIOLO *well pleased, draws composedly, and falls back on guard.*]

Sav. [*Fencing.*] Methinks I mind me thou hast a very homely scorn for the new-fangle rapier and its apish tricks! Despite all shalt yet thou take lesson of Saviolo. [*Parries STRANGE's furious lunge with his left hand.*] Now, about these points of thine, it offends mine eye to see thee thus shorn of one! 'Twere neater to have none—or so it seems to me. [*With three flipping cuts he severs successively the points on STRANGE's doublet.*] These twain upon thy sleeve—they have a lonely look. [*Parries another stroke and cuts another ribbon on STRANGE's sleeve.*] Yet shall I leave thee that poor brace upon thy left, lest thou wouldst match the ribbons—They are of pleasing colour.

Str. [*Beside himself with rage.*] Strike like a man, Saviolo, draw blood, wound, kill, but leave these devil's pranks!

[Makes another furious stroke at him.

Sav. [*Aside*] His metal's true. Now must I end the fray, lest he do hurt himself in spite of all my art. [*Steps aside and disarms STRANGE, then flings both swords aside with great clangour.*] 'Tis done.

Str. [*Reeling back under SAVIOLO's rush, and clawing at his breast, maddened.*] Ah!

SCENE 11.

Enter FRANCESCA at the sound, rushes into the room towards STRANGE

Fran. 'Tis done! Great Heaven, my father's slain him, and my soul bears the guilt. [*Stops short seeing STRANGE uninjured, and with grateful revulsion of feeling would fling herself into SAVIOLO's arms.*] Father!

[SAVIOLO *gently restrains her and passes her to the other side, away from*
STRANGE.

Str. [Aside.] Father! [Strikes his forehead.] Blind fool! This then's the mystery. No plot, no wrong, but a most simple tale—Oh, simpleton! Her father! [His hand meets his empty scabbard.] To draw upon her father! Outrage her father! Ah, now may I give up all hope indeed! [Advances. SAVIOLO meanwhile still holding his daughter at arm's length and regarding her steadily and reproachfully. FRANCESCO droops her head.] Thou fairest maid, must I thus first behold thee sufficient near to mark all thy beauty and all thy virgin sweetness but to know that I have lost thee by headstrong fantasies!

[Hangs his head.

Sav. [To FRANCESCO.] So, daughter, wert planning an escape from cruel gaoler and from prison bars? [FRANCESCO clings to his hand and looks up with tearful eyes, SAVIOLO looks from her to STRANGE. Aside] Poor lovers, all weighted by their crime! [Looks again from one to the other.] And yet 'twas pardonable—a very venial crime ! [To FRANCESCO.] I forgive thee, child. [To STRANGE.] Nay, never hang your head, brave champion of the persecuted fair; defeat's inglorious only when it falls through lack of heart

Str. [Respectfully and humbly.] Ah, Signior Saviolo!

Sav. [To his daughter, who, seeing him no longer angry, begins, with smiles and tears, to edge herself into his embrace.] What, dost blush for thine unskilful lover?

Fran. [*Laughing at STRANGE over her father's shoulder.*] In truth, the gentle youth seems something out of gear! [*Seriously.*] And yet, why should I blush to see him thus proclaim at every point my father's skill and magnanimity? [*Kisses her father's hand, then lifts her head proudly.*] Nor need he blush, for 'tis no cur would beard the lion in his den nor yet a weakling with whom Saviolo crosses swords.

[*STRANGE raises his head and looks eagerly, FRANCESCA pleadingly, at SAVIOLO.*

Sav. [*Lightly.*] But mind you, daughter, there is a noble youth or two in Padua.

Fran. [*Demurely.*] 'Tis a far way to Padua, father.

Sav. I was once young myself, and felt all lover's anguish. The youth's a gallant youth! [*To STRANGE, after a pause, anxiously watched by both.*] Good Son, I have misused you much to-day. Thereto your once brave raiment gaping witness gives—but here's a hand [*taking his daughter's, and bringing her to the other side*] would mend more tattered fortunes still.

[*STRANGE falls on his knees and rapturously kisses FRANCESCA's hand: Enter, HERONYMO, who stares in amaze.*

CURTAIN.

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