**THE SWORD AS A DIDACTIC TOOL ON THE LONDON COMIC STAGE, 1660-1740**

Máire Anna MacNeill

Royal Holloway, University of London

PhD Thesis

Declaration of Authorship

I, Máire Anna MacNeill, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date:

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the importance of the sword to men between 1660 and 1740. I argue that the comic stage had a privileged position as an important contributor to shaping ideas about the sword’s function, operating didactically as a tool to teach Restoration and eighteenth-century playgoers were taught how to read the sword. Using a framework of new historicism to explore theories founded upon Althusserian Marxism, Bakhtinian ideas about the body, and gender studies, I interrogate the texts in order to show how the sword’s use changed over time from being a vital indicator of masculine worth, to a debased, even neutral hand-prop, largely influenced by both the sword’s increased use by unaristocratic men, and attacks on the duel by important culturemakers like Richard Steele. Chapter One argues that cavalier comedies used the sword in order to justify their own position within the social hierarchy. Chapter Two shows that as the sword became (mis)used by a wider range of men, the stage endeavoured to show its ‘correct’ use in men who were also prepared to reason. This knock was then epitomised in The Conscious Lovers, the subject of my third chapter. Chapter Four argues that the stage then turned to mocking the sword by placing it in the wrong hands and at the wrong times. We end at the fifth chapter, in which the sword is celebrated through its use by a woman, representing a divorce from its traditional tie to aristocratic masculinity. By examining comedies from this period, we can analyse the changing role of the sword within a society that was becoming increasingly hostile to private violence.

Table of Contents

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| List of Illustrations | 5 |
| Acknowledgments | 6 |
| Preface | 7 |
| Abbreviations | 8 |
| Introduction | 9 |
| Chapter One: The Ideal of Royalist Conquest, 1648-1680 | 73 |
| Chapter Two: Inventing the Gentleman Officer—and Punishing the Fop, 1688-1715 | 108 |
| Chapter Three: “Sacrifices to Good Manners,” 1709-1724 | 141 |
| Chapter Four: The Burlesque Sentiment, 1730-1737 | 166 |
| Chapter Five: Swordswomen, 1660-1740 | 189 |
| Conclusion | 215 |
| Bibliography | 228 |

List of Illustrations

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Business card for James Figg – William Hogarth | 49 |
| “George I (1660-1727)” – Georg Wilhelm Lafontaine | 51 |
| Frontispiece to “The Beau’s Duel” – Unknown | 133 |
| Detail from frontispiece to the second edition of “The Provoked Husband” – John Vanderbank | 168 |
| Detail from frontispiece to the 1740 edition of “The Provoked Husband” – James Hulett | 168 |
| Detail from “The Opera House or the Italian Eunuch’s Glory” – William Hogarth | 175 |
| “An EPILOGUE intended to be spoken by Mrs Woffington in the Habit of a Volunteer” – Unknown | 192 |
| “Robert Wilks Esqr. in the Character of Sr. Harry Wildair” – James Smith | 205 |
| Detail from “Taste in High Life” – William Hogarth | 208 |
| “Margaret ‘Peg’ Woffington as Sir Harry Wildair in ‘The Constant Couple,’” – A. B., engraving after William Hogarth | 212 |

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisor, Elaine McGirr, for all of her wisdom and advice during the writing of this thesis. I am also very grateful for the support of Alex Aspden and my parents, Dugald and Virginia MacNeill.

Preface

For quotations, I have retained all original spellings, punctuation, and capitalisation in this thesis. However, I have changed the abbreviated character names used in the original playtexts to their full versions for ease of comprehension where relevant: *Will.* becomes *Willmore*; *Bev.* becomes *Bevil*; and so forth. The year is taken to begin on 1st January for all dates, including diaries, newspapers, and periodicals.

The dates of theatrical performances have been taken from The London Stage, 1660-1800 (William Van Lennep ed. vol. I; Emmett L. Avery ed. vol. II; and Arthur H. Scouten ed. vol. III). Dates of playtexts and all other printed material have been taken from the first published edition. Where it is not possible to accurately tell the date, such as when referring to undated printed ballads, I have referred to the date suggested on JISC Historic Texts. I have used the same tactic, where possible, to assign authorship to works that do not have a named author on the title page. Dates, numbers, and quotations for newspapers and periodicals have been taken from the online resource British Library Newspapers and 17th and 18th Century Burney Collection, both available through Gale Artemis Primary Sources.

Abbreviations

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| HL | House of Lords Journal |
| HMC | Historical Manuscripts Commission |
| LS | The London Stage, 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments, & Afterpieces Together with Casts, Box-Receipts and Contemporary Comment Compiled from the Playbills, Newspapers and Theatrical Diaries of the Period. Vols. 1-3. Ed. Emmett L. Avery, William Van Lennep, and Arthur H. Scouten. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960-65. |
| TPM | True Protestant Mercury or Occurrences Forein and Domestick |
| WEP | Whitehall Evening Post |
| WJSP | Weekly Journal or Saturday’s Post |

Introduction

In November 1660, a group of cavaliers attended a performance of William Davenant’s The Unfortunate Lovers (1638), a Caroline revenge tragedy that dramatised the military overthrow, exile, and subsequent restoration of a rightful power, Prince Ascoli. Eschewing large battle scenes, the play instead renders Ascoli’s claim to sovereignty contingent upon royal victory won in two single-combat sword-fights in Acts Four and Five: his loyal general Duke Altophil defeats first Galeotto, the Machiavellian conspirator initially responsible for betraying Ascoli (The Unfortunate Lovers 37), and then the brutish usurper Heildebrand who has been unjustly ruling in his place (46). But Altophil’s provocation to fight is as personal as it is political, for he draws his sword against Galeotto and Heildebrand not just because they are enemies to rightful power, but also because they had conspired to rape his mistress, Arthiopa. In this formula, the men who would challenge Altophil’s private happiness are one and the same as those who overthrew Ascoli’s legitimate government, and deserve the same fate for each crime: defeat and death in a sword-fight. This equation is reiterated forcefully in Altophil’s final confrontation with each man, first delivering the death-blows to Galeotto with the cry, “This for my much wrong’d Prince, this for *Arthiopa*” (37), and then giving Heildebrand’s “plots and policies” that “ruine States” (44-45) human form by showing him Arthiopa, herself now in “ruines” after her rape (45). Altophil’s sword-victories over his prince’s enemies therefore demonstrate that he is not just the better warrior, but the better *man*, whose defeat of Galeotto and Heildebrand effects moral justice and satisfies personal honour. Hereditary power, martial expertise, and romantic love thus coalesce as a triumvirate of the aristocratic privileges that Altophil has the right to uphold and protect through his sword.

The cavaliers in the audience for this particular performance were unimpressed by the stage fights in the final two acts. They afterwards repaired to the nearby Fleece Tavern, where they “drew their swords in jest to show wherein they [the actors] failed” (HMC 5th Report, 200). Although the men in the pit had recognised a version of themselves in Davenant’s fictional heroes, they claimed to be offended by the “failure” of expertise on show and felt that they themselves could produce a better performance. However, this supposition provokes the inference that the actors’ display *was* good enough to establish the intended analogue between character onstage and social type in the audience: the real cavaliers saw a dramatised version of themselves and entered into a dialogic—perhaps even competitive—relationship with their fictional counterpart. At the tavern afterwards, the cavaliers therefore sought to demonstrate a skill and dexterity at handling a sword that was better than that of the actors they had just seen. Swordplay, they insisted, was *their* prerogative.

Before dissecting this particular evening’s theatrical and social performances, we must first situate the swordplay that occurred both on and off the stage within its cultural and political context. Written twenty-two years before the Restoration, The Unfortunate Lovers was a play that inescapably resonated with the cavaliers’ immediate experience. As well as staging the return of the monarchy, Davenant’s characters give their swords totemic value: “Our swords are all our wealth, take those away / And we are left to poverty and shame” (22), one character loyal to Ascoli pleads at the beginning of Act Three when threatened by Heildebrand’s marauding soldiers. This was a potent sentiment during the 1660s: “poverty and shame” was the fate of many royalists who had not been among the beneficiaries of the Indemnity and Oblivion Act of 1660, and had been left without recourse to obtain their pre-war lands. Concurrently, the peerage were still suffering the effects of what Lawrence Stone has described as their “slump in prestige” which had occurred over the first half of the seventeenth century, a collapse attributable to both their own declining economic health, and the respective ascent in value of the social and professional routines of the gentry (Crisis of the Aristocracy 748-49). Now, after the Restoration, their traditional right to social prestige was under threat from men who came from lower social classes, even merchants and business professionals, whose emergent wealth bought favours and credit, as well as estates and expensive lifestyles, that the upper-classes could no longer afford (Hill 200-01).

However, despite their diminished wealth, these embarrassed former landowners could still claim the nobleman’s historical “right to wear his sword and to uphold his personal honour in the duel” (Keen 247), just as Altophil does in the play. Mid-seventeenth-century philosophy held that to engage in combat outside of wartime was to show that one was a formidable combatant *in* wartime, and hence worthy of attaining status and power, thus theorising war as “personal and individualistic” (Manning 141). Thomas Hobbes offered the most succinct summary of this thought when he wrote that, “the Law condemneth Duells; the punishment is made capital: on the contrary part, he that refuseth Duel is subject to contempt and scorns, without remedy; and sometimes by the Soveraign himself thought unworthy to have any charge, or preferment in War” (159): one’s reputation on the private battlefield could define one’s reputation on the wartime battlefield. The contention that victory in private swordplay “elevated reputation to the status of personal worth” (Low 17) was a relic from the first half of the seventeenth century that Restoration culture-makers attempted to revive in order to refortify the ever-weakening framework that provided the upper-classes the same political and social importance of their ancestors. The sword was thus established in Restoration culture as an instrument of authority, celebrated in art, literature, and popular entertainments, as well as being used in private combat and personal dress as a sign that its bearer had a legitimate claim to power.

The fable recounted in the plotline of The Unfortunate Lovers was a mirror for the cavaliers’ own experiences of the preceding decade, staging the perils of exile and championing the clout and vigour of legitimate authority that real warrior-aristocrats had attempted to uphold. The contrast between the theatrical performance and its correction in November 1660 is therefore more than a simple revelation of the difficulties that actors faced when trying to perform the social conventions of the aristocracy in front of men who were legitimately members of that social group. Rather, it provides a fleeting insight into Restoration expectations about what swordplay *should* look like, and exemplifies the rapport between the personated and the real at the start of the Restoration, showing how this was dictated by class-based notions of the relationship between authenticity and action. This is shown if we scrutinise these two instances of swordplay in closer detail, examining them as performances given in response to one other, and intended to project the conceit that upper-class men could be identified by their capable use of their swords. The first performance, the actors’ mimicry of aristocratic swordsmanship in the play, supports the argument from Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait that contends that “the theatre may imitate life (or some ideal), but like a metaphor the representation is always removed from its model, falling short of it” (5). It is obvious that the actors in The Unfortunate Lovers (a serious tragedy) intended the climactic swordplay to move their audience to sympathy or excitement, but in this they failed, provoking (whether justified or not) an informal correction from the very men they were attempting to both emulate and seduce. Rather than awe, the performance trigged only mirth or jealousy, generated by the cavaliers’ recognition and subsequent rejection of the identity that the actors were attempting to reproduce. The cavaliers refused the compliment and snubbed the performance; they had detected an ersatz resemblance to reality and were thus determined to draw attention to its failings, and its unnaturalness.

The enactment of aristocratic masculinity continued in the evening’s second act of swordplay: the cavaliers’ performance in the Fleece Tavern. By drawing their swords “in jest” (that is to say, without genuine intent to fight), the real cavaliers were making a conscious effort to enact the idealised version of swordsmanship that they felt had been misrepresented on the stage, and to assert their right to be recognised as the real version of the personated character. The cavaliers asserted that they performed by nature what the actors did by art—but the replicability of their act erased the distinction that they wanted to draw. Their swordplay was its own type of performance, acted to show themselves as men of honour for an informal audience. This “audience” included the general public, who might eventually hear of the incident and pass judgment; the seconds, or any other people literally in attendance for the action; the other combatant, who was composing his own identity as a man of honour; and finally the constructed self, which it was necessary to appease if personal self-identity was to be sustained. The dual states of theatrical performance and reality thus functioned dialogically as diametrically similar concepts in the operation of a cultural superstructure. This relationship between the real and the represented man would resonate, mutate, and regenerate over the next hundred years as swordplay onstage spoke to and about different masculine ideals.

If the cavaliers’ jealousy over their swords seems disproportionate to the actors’ failure to mimic them, it can be clarified by orientating it within the broader upper-class resentment of the privileges that the middle- and lower-classes were already starting to claim at the dawn of the Restoration. Less than two months after the Fleece Tavern incident, London fell under attack from the Fifth Monarchists, who launched a “bloody insurrection” (Evelyn, Diary 340) on the City in January 1661 in an attempt to remove Charles II and replace him with “King Jesus.” The uprising failed: the Trained Bands and the auxiliaries, fortified by the citizenry, eventually overwhelmed the rebels. Among those civilians who took to the streets with arms was Samuel Pepys, who set forth with his sword “though with no good courage at all, but that I might not seem to be afraid” (1: 140). This is a revealing statement: during civil uproar, Pepys’s chief concern is for his personal reputation, and not fear for the threat of physical force or political instability. Pepys held a lower social status than the Fleece Tavern cavaliers—he had first gloried in being addressed as “S. P. Esq.” only the previous year (1: 39)—and his description of his mental state accordingly shows him as less certain of his claim to the sword. This personal insecurity compelled him to disprove a negative (he is not a coward), rather than the cavaliers’ need to prove a positive (they have the right to use their swords). The two ideas are distinct in that the cavaliers used royalist historical precedent to justify a narrative of sword privilege, while Pepys felt bound to a standard of bravery that imitated aristocratic behaviour. Nevertheless, they both exercise the mid-century incitation for men to find a correlation between their entitlement to honour and reputation, and their prowess with the sword—a dogma that had compelled many men (including prominent culture-makers such as Sir Robert Howard, the Duke of Buckingham, and Charles II himself) to literally fight for the preservation of traditional social hierarchy on the battlefield a decade earlier.

Pepys’s belief that he (a bureaucrat on the ascent, not a soldier) had a personal stake in using his sword to combat civil unrest demonstrates how thoroughly royalist-aristocratic ideology had been disseminated into wider society. We can also see why this may have posed a problem for the aristocratic men who advanced these presumptions. Swordplay functioned as an effective and visceral shorthand for powerful masculinity throughout the seventeenth century; to showcase its use (both on the stage and in public arenas) was to invite participation from other men. This was often acceptable when it was performed by the gentry, men who were of good social standing and who copied the private sword-use they observed among their titled friends and comrades-in-arms. In his study of duelling, V. G. Kiernan has described such men as “useful recruits” to uphold the standards of the “ruling classes” (2-3). It was more problematic, however, when aristocratic sword-use was emulated by men like Pepys—middle-class men who needed to work for a living and whose upper-class connections were primarily professional rather than social. Over the second half of the century, the insistence upon rigid social stratification that the Fleece Tavern cavaliers had advanced was to disintegrate further as mimetic ideal became formal policy: the private citizen’s unofficial function as guardian of the state against civic uncontrol was championed as patriotic duty by the 1689 Bill of Rights, which specifically gave the Protestant citizenry the right to “have Arms for their Defence suitable to their Conditions and as allowed by Law” (1 W. And M., sess. 2, ch. 2, 1689). The divergence between the legal permissions that authorised men to use their swords, and the dominant cultural institutions that taught them how they *should* use them, came into perpetual conflict throughout the Restoration and the early eighteenth century.

This thesis argues that private use of the sword between 1660 and 1740 was an important gauge for measuring a man’s moral worth and personal honour, that its use changed dramatically during these years, and that we can interpret the representations of swordplay on the comic stage which occurred concurrently with these changes as components of a didactic apparatus that attempted to teach audiences how to emulate and identify with the heroes onstage. In undertaking this study, I have concerned myself with swordplay that occurred between the year of Charles II’s restoration and the revival of widespread sword-use in England (Shoemaker, “The Taming of the Duel” 527), and the year that Margaret Woffington first appeared at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden as Sir Harry Wildair in a revival of Farquhar’s The Constant Couple (1699), a theatrical moment in which the sword’s power as an instrument of masculine authority collapsed. These two dates are at either end of eighty years of intense fluctuations in formal regime, civil imbalance, and warmongering on the world stage, which were both compounded by and influenced radical changes in the politics of gender, social class, fashion, and violence. By limiting the study to private acts of swordplay specifically, we can isolate the rules and assumptions which pertained to masculinity’s affiliation with these disparate concerns, while the dialogic relationship between stage and reality—in which the two states claimed autonomy but were intuitively transactional—enables us to analyse the changes to the ideology of masculine behaviour as it occurred during the second half of the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries.

The act of wielding a sword held a changing multitude of sexual and political assumptions extant in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century society. If, as Mary Douglas has asserted, “bodily control is an expression of social control” (74), then we can use the way that the art was shown on the stage in order to reconstruct the unconscious notions of selfhood implicit in their actions, and through the changes of sword use analyse how these notions also changed. I have chosen to focus upon the comic stage specifically because its “social decorum…reflected that of the audience” (Styan, The English Stage 255). Although the allegorical drama in The Unfortunate Lovers that commenced this thesis enables us to see the heroic framework with which actors and playwrights hoped to flatter the aristocracy, postulating that “the nobility have great souls capable of great passion” (Canfield, Heroes and States 60), comedy illustrated this cultural precept with swordplay without employing the profundity of tone and elevated themes of tragedy, basing its plots in the everyday. By examining the comedies that appeared during these years, then, we can use them as a tool to illustrate what swordplay meant, or what playwrights wanted swordplay to mean, to the men whose lives were reflected on the stage.

Although there was by no means any widespread and standardised strategy in advancing theories about the correct use of the sword onstage—Steele’s The Conscious Lovers (1722) is the only play from our period that was explicitly and primarily intended as a comment on swordplay—the gradual but significant metamorphosis that it underwent during these years meant that by the end of this period, the appearance of a sword on the comic stage held profoundly different cultural connotations from its use by the witty rake of the early Restoration. As the comic hero was increasingly domesticated and showed preference for verbal negotiation over violence, displays of swordplay became correspondingly less important to his representation on the stage. Those characters who continued to express a fervour to fight and interest in displaying their swords were increasingly represented as foppish, irrational, and monstrously grotesque, before they were finally neutralised. This thesis follows the shifting codification of the sword and its use, arguing for the privileged position of the stage in framing and reshaping this debate. The official discourse of the state, to follow J. Douglas Canfield’s lead in using the Bakhtinian terminology (Tricksters and Estates 1), is reflected in its cultural outputs, and so if comic mainpieces attempted to reproduce models of contemporary manliness, both serious and satirical, we can refine our understanding of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ideas and expectations about aristocratic male behaviour.

Definitions

I have so far frequently employed three terms that deserve some explanation: “private sword-use,” “swordplay,” and the “aristocracy.” By “private sword-use,” I refer to the sword’s function as a weapon drawn to establish or maintain a personal reputation, as an image invoked in speech or writing, and as part of everyday costume, as well as any other less common uses I encounter. This definition of the private sword distinguishes it from its counterpart used by a soldier on the martial battlefield. I intend the word “swordplay” to denote the same meaning: it describes the sword’s role as a tool used as part of a masculine social performance. This description is not intended to imply that the private sword was an historically less important instrument than its counterpart used in official warfare. The use of a sword in private affairs could define a man’s social reputation and cause the loss of life. As such, the word “sword*play*” accentuates the private sword’s role in the *performance* of masculinity, acting as a reminder that contemporary expectations about its use were neither static nor ingrained, but instead subject to changing ideas about correct behaviour.

In defining “aristocracy,” I employ Canfield’s use of the term, which covers the full range of the upper classes, “from peers to the gentry” (Tricksters and Estates 1)—indeed, Michael McKeon has noted that for many seventeenth-century “contemporaries, the ‘gentry’ were part of the ‘aristocracy’” (159). Although the seventeenth-century gentry largely did not share the peerage’s personal interest in preserving the “privileges of status, the same political club, the same titular rank, the same kinship connexions,” the barriers between the two groups had been slowly erased during early Stuart period as the gentry became landowners and “influential courtiers” (Stone, Crisis of the Aristocracy 63, 746). Furthermore, McKeon has theorised that over the course of the seventeenth century, “status criteria,” that is, the traditional markers of status such as birth and rank, was gradually subsumed by “class criteria,” a preference for defining social groups through an identity composed of behaviours and expectations set by “stylistic choice” (162-63). Following this line of argument, upper-class men who were untitled could still engage in the conventions of aristocratic swordplay because they were gradually united by similar social interests and political attitudes.

There are three further terms that need to be defined in detail before we proceed to the literature review and a discussion of the historical and theatrical backgrounds: “men of honour,” “blade,” and “duel.” These words have a prominent place in literature relating to swordplay in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but their definitions were fluid and broad, rather than fixed and narrow. It is therefore necessary to analyse the changing connotations of these words during this period in order to acknowledge the instability of rhetoric relating to the private sword.

I: “Men of Honour”

Throughout the Restoration, the sword was used as a stabilising tool by gentlemen and aristocrats: swords both preserved their honour and enabled them to define themselves as “men of honour,” a phrase that was analogous to possessing power (social, political, or monetary) and moral righteousness. Noblemen and the highest ranking members of the gentry could inherit honour through lineal privilege, but their right to this was subject to continual maintenance, facilitated by making good marriages, by allowing truth and honesty to dictate their thoughts and actions, and by demonstrating bravery on the battlefield (Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage 74). Honour could also be taken from another man, chiefly by not treating him with politeness; as Markku Peltonen puts it: “A gentleman’s honour and reputation thus consisted of another gentleman’s esteem of him” (38). The practice of honour, therefore, suggested that the quality “could be won or lost by the performance or non-performance of a single act” (Andrew, “The Code of Honour and Its Critics” 418), and throughout the second half of the seventeenth century, conduct books such as Antoine de Courtin’s Rules of Civility (first translated from the French in 1671, with a further six editions published until 1705) and Trotti de la Chétardie’s Instructions for a Young Nobleman (1683) continued to rank recognition as a man of honour as a gentleman’s highest attainment, but one that was dependent upon rigorous preservation through his conduct in his private affairs.

The duel became the superlative expression of male honour during the Restoration because it was a return to the pre-war contention that reiterated that upper-class men were a heroic authority for the state: their swords, like Altophil’s in The Unfortunate Lovers, acted to subdue men who deserved to be subdued. Mervyn James has described the emergence of this contention in the early seventeenth century as a revival of the chivalric code of honour, which taught that violence and honour existed conceptually in close proximity to one another (310-14): a claim to the sword was a claim to respectable lineage. As Stone summarises the advantages of the duel: “The personal challenge deprived the rich nobleman of the advantages of his retainers, and enabled a mere gentleman to demand redress on equal terms” (Crisis of the Aristocracy 245). Contemporary authors like Courtin thus encouraged the myth of the courageous courtier, whose social class displayed honour through soldiery; they were “naturally…a Body of Reserve for the Defence of the Prince and State upon a sudden Emergency” (Courtin 251). Although these works often did not endorse swordplay—Courtin, for example, asserts that a man must not fight a duel if he has been publicly insulted (267)—they uphold the contention that to be a man of honour is to win recognition through physical force. This position was compounded by the implicit exclusion of men of lower social ranking: there was no obligation for a man to fight another whose status was not equal to his. Stephen Banks (6-7), V. G. Kiernan (48), and Frank Henderson Stewart (61-62) have concluded that the bracketing of honour and social class together in this way meant that the lower classes were protected from violent onslaughts from their social betters, as (theoretically) few aristocrats wanted to become embroiled in a commoners’ brawl. Of course, this hardly safeguarded them from all violent attacks: for example, Parliament invoked Buckingham’s history of aggression against lower-class men when they brought proceedings against him in 1673 (Cobbett 633). But these attacks were not the ones imagined when authors wrote about aristocratic acts of physical force. In art and literature, upper-class heroes fought just battles against their social equals; as James puts it, in early modern works “the role of authority is stressed as the fount of honour, and as the sole legitimizer of honour violence” (321).

We can read justifications of aristocratic violence through the lens of Stewart’s theory of “vertical and horizontal honor.” In this argument, Stewart contends that a man’s right to “vertical respect”—for example, the respect that an officer receives from his men—“depended on his right to the horizontal respect”—for example, the respect that an officer receives from his fellow officers. In consequence, “if he was no longer recognized by the other officers and gentlemen as one of their number, then he no longer had a right to the relevant kind of respect from the men” (61). In other words, men who felt that their honour had been abused by a social peer felt obliged to fight in order to maintain their authority over men of a lower status. The fact that swords were traditionally the prerogative of the sword meant that the simple act of wearing one indicated a claim to be a man of honour, and willing to fight if provoked. We must be careful here to note that the post-Restoration use of swords to assert individual honour was not limited to Charles II’s “Merry Gang,” and the commonplace critical contention, expressed most succinctly by Kiernan when he wrote that “[d]uelling formed part of a popular royalist reaction, along with wild drinking and prostitution and the reopening of disorderly theatres” (99), risks leaving the impression that the duel was an essentially hedonistic act. As Anna Bryson notes, however, “many nobles who would have resisted the label ‘libertine’ yet felt bound to defend their honour in combat” (248). Seventeenth-century swordplay thus seems to have been more of a man’s expression of his claim to membership among the aristocracy, rather than his social postures: even Milton, reflecting upon his younger days, recalled his prowess with the sword with personal pride: “I was neither unskilled in handling my sword, nor unpracticed in its daily use…At this day, I have the same spirit, the same strength, my eyes only are not the same” (356). A man who wielded a sword in the defence of his reputation, or the reputation of his family, acted upon a cultural compulsion that equated his behaviour with strength, breeding, and moral virtue, thus enabling him to claim to be a “man of honour.”

Lower down the social hierarchy, honour was also a contentious issue. As men from other social groups began to wield their own social and political powers during the seventeenth century, they also demanded recognition as men of honour (McKeon 150-69). “[L]awyers, officials, merchants, even husbandmen and artisans,” all emerged as “men of honour” in the seventeenth century (James 375); by the middle of Charles’s reign, honour was consistently defined as a quality to which all men should aspire, rather than as the exclusive property of the aristocracy. For example, we have already seen that in The Rules of Civility, Courtin argued that aristocratic honour was expressed through the sword, but he also contended that honour could be exemplified in men of all ranks; it differed merely in how it should be expressed. Thus the monarch should demonstrate that he was honourable by governing the state fairly and according to the laws; magistrates by showing that they were “Upright and Just”; merchants by being honest; workmen by their productivity; the clergy by living “unblemished exemplary Lives”; women by being modest and chaste (250-53). By framing “honour” as a quality accessible to men (and women) of all classes, Courtin’s work reflects a shift in fundamentals of the traditional assumption that only aristocratic men were honourable; however, it still clings to the assumption that only aristocratic men expressed their honour through the sword.

Although the fundamental idea that all men could possess honour proved to be a popular and enduring theory throughout the eighteenth century (Stewart 40), Courtin’s meticulous categorisation of the different expressions of honourable behaviour according to social group unwittingly expounded the other side of that idea: honour was being devalued by being both too loosely defined and applied to too many men. To be a man of honour, one no longer had to be of good birth, nor was there a rigid, universal set of behavioural rules to follow. As Addison complained in a November 1711 edition of the Spectator: “Honours are in this World under no Regulation; true Quality is neglected, Virtue is oppressed, and Vice triumphant” (219). This, combined with the perpetuation of seventeenth-century mores that assumed that personal liberties were the individual’s responsibility and were to be defended as such (Manning 146-47), resulted in the popular contention that men from multiple social groups had the licence to defend their honour in the same manner as the aristocracy. As Kiernan puts it, the “elasticity of social boundaries…opened the door wider to would-be duellists” (171), and Robert Shoemaker contends that a third of all duels fought throughout the eighteenth century involved a military man (“The Taming of the Duel” 540), a distinctive new social group composed of men from a range of social groups.

Allowing “honour” to be accessible to men of other social groups had the practical consequence of the erosion of class boundaries for both crime and punishment. When the actor James Quin was burnt on the hand as a punishment for killing his professional rival William Bowen in a 1718 duel, he was convicted of manslaughter (LS 2: 491, 499); this was in *spite* of his social status rather than because of it: he was not considered to have committed a capital crime in killing Bowen. Rather, according to the seventeenth-century conventions that still dictated punishments for duels, he had been able to prove that he had been provoked, and was acting in self-defence (Banks 14-15). This is symptomatic of a phenomenon in which English society (even unwillingly or unconsciously) was beginning to acknowledge that the relationships between birth, occupation, and behaviour were entangled: a man who worked in a profession traditionally associated with vagrancy could receive a gentleman’s punishment for imitating a behaviour that had historically been that of a nobleman. There is nothing to suggest that Quin imagined himself as the social equal of the men who had wielded swords for centuries; as Anna Bryson writes, “a degree of disassociation from lineage does not necessarily dampen the struggle for honour, and may even intensify it through the pressure on the individual to acquire a prestige not quite presupposed by his name” (235). Rather, the affair elicits the impression that the peripherals of aristocratic culture had been appropriated by men from other social groups.

Although the aggressive, idealised version of honour won through the sword lingered on into the eighteenth century, critics increasingly clashed over what it meant to be a man of honour. For example, the concept disgusted Defoe: in his 1713 treatise against duelling, he complained that honour was but an “airy Nicety,” too insubstantial to have claim upon the sense of a reasonable man (Abolishing of Duels in France 2). Nevertheless, although there may be some truth behind Jacqueline Pearson’s contention that the term “man of honour” is “used ironically more often than straight” after 1700 (35), we must remember that reforming men often attempted to rehabilitate the phrase from its conventional, contaminated meaning, transforming it into “an internal, Christian virtue, as opposed to a quality achieved in the court of public opinion” (Shoemaker, “The Taming of the Duel” 542). For example, in February 1720, Steele contended that “Honour is conscious integrity…Thus he, that is truly a Man of Honour, wants no man’s opinion to make him such” (Theatre 16), deliberately defining the term against the assumptions of his readership. Similarly, the fencing master William Hope argued that wounds that a man earned through a “*Battle* or *Duel*” did not “diminish his Reputation and Value” because “he still keeps up his Character, by his having behav’d himself as a **Man** **of** *True* ***Honour*** *and Courage*, and has done his best; which is all can be expected from the *Greatest* and *most* *Valiant* *Hero*” (172). In Hope’s explanation of the term, a man of honour did not use his sword as an instrument of authority; rather, it is given a somewhat feeble definition, in which the man of honour’s reputation is measured by the effort he put into the fight rather than its real result.

By the end of our period, however, the notion that men of honour possessed no honour at all was a stock counter-argument. A passage in Fielding’s Jonathan Wild (1743) illustrates this well: although honour is “the essential Quality of a Gentleman,” it has “so uncertain and various an Application, that scarce two People mean the same Thing by it” (79-80). Honour, his antihero contends, can’t mean “Good-Nature and Humanity,” for that would exclude military conquerors; it can’t mean honesty, for that would exclude those who “GREATLY and boldly” deprive others of what is legally theirs; it can’t mean truth, for “[i]t is not in the Lie’s going from us, but in its coming to us our Honour is injured”; and it can’t be found in cardinal virtues, for men of honour have none (80). He concludes by arguing: “In what then doth the Word Honour consist? Why in itself alone. A Man of Honour is he that is called a Man of Honour” (80-81). As this passage suggests, attempts to anatomise the concept of honour result in its inevitable debasement and the revelation that the term “man of honour” is a rhetorical tautology. When cultural attitudes permitted men who were liars, thieves, and murderers to describe themselves as honourable, honour lost its moral value: to put it simply, debasement in usage leads to debasement in meaning. And so, while to wear or fight with a sword was once a simple demand for recognition as a man of honour, by the mid-eighteenth century, the artificiality of violent displays of honour had been publicly exposed, if not popularly embraced. When David Hume wrote his 1742 essay on the “Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences,” he disparagingly separated the “man of honour”—i.e. the duellist—”from the man of virtue” (94-95): honour won through the private sword had sunk into a cultural decay.

II: The Blade

The slang term “blade” had been in general parlance since before the Restoration and occurs thereafter in literature throughout the eighteenth century. It is significant to this work because it uses the image of a sword as a synonym for a particular type of man, usually one who was fairly young and who felt (justly or not) that he had some claim to honour. It was used variously as an acclaim or as an affront but its precise meaning varied depending on the modifiers used before and after: for example, a “merry blade” was akin to a quasi-heroic gallant; a “roaring blade” implied a hector or bravo type; a “dapper blade” affected fopperies. Throughout our period, authors also sometimes added geographical descriptors to the noun: “a rough West-Countrey-Blade” (Sanderson 524), “Whitehall blades” (Rochester 41), “*Dutch* Blades” (Wall 333). The modifiers here devalue their targets’ actions and motives by satirising them as fatuous or unsophisticated men who lack the honesty or bravery of true heroism.

The word had its genesis in the sixteenth century: in his 1563 work on The Nobles or of Nobilitye, Laurence Humfrey had likened richly-dressed but ill-bred young men to a “leaden blade out of an yuery scabard.” A generation later, blades were variously “angry,” “cruell,” and “thirsty” in Spenser’s Faerie Queen. Sword-blades appear thus as sentient extensions of their bearer semi-regularly throughout the 1580s and 1590s. Shakespeare occasionally used the word in a way that could be interpreted as either sword or man: for example, in Romeo and Juliet, Mercutio refers to “a very good blade, a very tall man, a very good whoore” (sig. Ev). We first find “blade” used unambiguously as a synecdoche for a young man in 1629, in Ford’s tragicomedy The Lover’s Melancholy—“he’s an honest blade, though he be blunt” (17)—and in Francis Lenton’s conduct book, The Young Gallant’s Whirligigg: “*You tender Blades*” (sig. A3v). These usages depict the blade as a frank and unsophisticated, and perhaps inexperienced, young man. For the first half of the 1630s the blade was jovial, brave, and not given over to introspection, but Shirley provided a darker portrait of this convivial character in his 1637 comedy The Gamester. Here, the blades’ lack of social inhibitions define them as bullies

that roare

In brothells, and breake windowes, fright the streets

At mid-night worse then Constables, and sometimes

Set upon innocent Bell-men, to beget

Discourse for a weekes dyet, that sweare, dammes,

To pay their debts, and march like walking armories,

With Poyniard, Pistoll, Rapier, and Batoone

As they would murder all the Kings leige people,

And blow down streets… (sig. B2v)

But three years later, Edmund Buckler’s “merry blade” once again preferred more peaceable recreations: “Taverns, bowling-alleys, playes, / Dauncing, fishing, fowling, racing, / Hawking, hunting, coursing, tracing, / Took up all his heathfull days” (sig. E7v). Perennially self-serving and irreverent, the blade’s quest for pleasure could thus be parsed as either dangerous or harmless. Puritanical authors certainly interpreted the term using the former definition: Francis Rous wrote with disgust that “our blades name drunkennesse good fellowship; whores, shee-sinners; and niggardise, thriftinesse” (97), and William Harrison warned that “yee merry blades, that spend all your dayes in mirth, and jollity, you will have one day the heaviest hearts of any people under heaven” (350). But blades were not just libertines: by the 1640s the term could be used to describe any man who was responsible for civil disturbance, so in the anonymous work The last, best, and truest Newes from Ireland by a “Gentleman in Dublin,” the Irish coup is attributed to “rebellious blades” (sig. A4r), while “T. L.,” the anonymous author of True Newes from Norwich, ridicules the pretensions of “Cathedrall Blades” (T. L. sig. A2r). The blade’s misbehaviour was garnering political connotations.

On the other hand, references to blades in comic or lowbrow literature usually lacked the sting of more serious works. This is most evident in seventeenth-century drinking-songs: from Roaring Dick of Dover, who drinks “a health to all true blades” in 1632, to the sexual vitality of “a jolly bonny Blade” in The Three Buxome Maids of Yoel almost sixty years later, the blade of popular balladry is appreciated for his ebullient thirst for life’s pleasures. Shakespeare and Fletcher are affectionately referred to as “British blades” in Suckling’s 1646 comic drama The Goblins (35), and Thomas Urquhart used “blade” positively in his 1653 translation of Rabelais: “worthy gentile blades. Blades of heroick breasts” (1: 238); “very honest men, and merry blades” (2: 3);“good honest fellows, true ballokeering blades” (2: 8);“brave fellows and sprightly blades” (2: 156);“jovial blades” (2: 174). Although not aspirational figures, these blades are admired as artless, plain-thinking men, who are defined by their appetites and actions.

From the early 1640s, the blade’s devotion to life’s pleasures linked him to the cavalier. A True Relation Of the apprehension of the Lord Digby, an anonymous puritan poem from 1642, related that “Many demy blades / Amongst their brave Papisticall Comrades, / Advanc’d to Westminster, with Pistols, Swords” (sig. A3r). This association was embraced by the cavaliers themselves at the end of the 1640s, although these blades were characterised by their honesty and loyalty to the crown, rather than by their love of drinking and fighting. Captain Blade is the protagonist in Abraham Cowley’s 1650 pro-royalist comedy The Guardian, while in Brome’s The Damoiselle (1653), the “brave old Blade” is remembered as “the President / Of the Can-quarrelling Fraternity, / Now calld the Roaring Brotherhood, thirty years since, / But now grown wondrous civill, free, and hospitable” (sig. B8r). In prose, George Vaughan’s description of Charles I’s imprisonment informs us that “the speciall charge of waiting upon His Majesty is…conferred on one Captaine *Cooke*…an honest-heartie true Trojan, and an old Blade that of my conscience loves the King wonderfull well” (7). Francis Wortley’s ballad A Loyal Song of the Royal Feast tells us that “But these are well try’d loyal blades / (If *England* ere had any) / Search both the Houses through and through, / Youl’d scarcely find so many.” The merry temperament that drove the blade to the ale-house is parsed as hospitality and heartiness in these depictions, and if he represents a figure of social discord it is only a symptom of his honest, unflinching loyalty to the throne in the face of parliamentarian challenge, rather than bully activity.

Despite the connection drawn between the cavalier and the blade during and after the Civil War, the restoration of the monarchy did not result in a dramatic shift in favour of “blade” being used sympathetically, even among non-puritan authors. In 1668 John Wilkins could still assert in his book of linguistics that the “word…Licentious…will signifie…Royster, Blade” (327), while in 1673 Francis Kirkman wrote dismissively of a “wild young Blade that had nothing but his handsome outside, and a large stock of Confidence” (86-87). However, stage comedies, which were written for the King’s pleasure, flattered the blade’s reputation for good living without implying strong moral consternation. A character in Richard Head’s Hic et Ubique (1663) declares that “I wud keep open house for all roaring Blades, and one part of my pastime shud be to make em drunk” (24); in Secret Love (1668), Dryden describes a “band of Blades, the bravest youths of Syracuse: / Some drunk, some sober, all resolv’d to run / Your fortune to the utmost” (42); Thomas Duffett’s The Spanish Rogue (1673) offers “the most accomplish’d Blade in Town” (25); the Dramatis Personae for Thomas Rawlins’s Tom Essence (1677) lists the rake-hero Loveall as a “wilde Debaucht Blade.” Similarly, a “Song” by D’Urfey describes a “Blade of the Town, / That takes delight in Roaring, / And daily Rambles up and down” (72), while the epilogue to Moliere’s Tartuffe (1670) ventures: “There’s not a Roaring Blade about the Town / Can go so far towards Hell for half a Crown, / As I for six pence” (66). This latter piece was popular enough to be reprinted in different anthologies twenty-one times until the end of our period, often attributed to such notorious rakes as Charles Sedley (as in a 1722 edition of his Works) or Charles Sackville (as in the 1718 W**orks of the Earls of Rochester, Roscommon, Dorset).** These usages are in line with the drinking-ballad tradition: the blade’s open gregariousness signified neither (unequivocal) royalist loyalties nor the anti-social recalcitrance described by Shirley, but rather a sincere appreciation for drink, pretty women, and the social power of the sword.

It was towards the end of the 1670s that the blade once again began to seriously divide understandings. Tom Essence exemplifies this change: Loveall is a desirable rake-hero who is paired with the rich widow Luce as one half of a “gay couple”; nevertheless, his sexual promiscuity identifies him as an objectionable husband from the first scene (1-2), and he is forced to admit that “I have been a very Villain” (65) at the end of the play. Rawlins does not venture to villainise the blade, but Loveall must express regret and reform his past behaviour if he is to marry Luce and win a fortune. In the following decades, the blade increasingly became a man deficient of genuine honesty and sense. In the prologue to Squire Oldsapp (1679), D’Urfey described a foppish and corrupt “*Velvet blade of* Watling-street*, / Bred from his infancy to thrive and cheat*” (sig. A2v)—the “velvet blade” is functionally worthless and appeals only to aesthetic interests. Other blades also have compromised worth: in Sir Courtly Nice (1685), John Crown gives us “an arch Blade” (12); Flush in the anonymous The Bragadocio (1691) is “Of good Parts; but a rambling hot-headed Blade” (sig. A2r); by 1695, Edward Ravenscroft could offer his audience “a Spark of the times; a brisk blade of…about Fifty five Years” (5). The cavalier blade’s advance into maturity was marked by a puerile lack of grace and sophistication.

The idea that the blade was a fop was seized with great enthusiasm in the early eighteenth century: “away with all such Effeminate *Blades*, who think only how to dress and preserve their Complexion,” complained one critic (Treuvé 389), while Isaac Sharpe wryly noted “what pretty Blades we have set up for reforming of Manners” (16). These blades werepretenders to valour: a 1703 translation of Charles Sorel’s French romance The Comical History of Francion describes how “two *Blades* having long talk’d of Duelling and of the Valour of the Age, laid their Heads together at last, and hatch’d a project of Honour, that ought never to be forgotten. Since Fighting was all the Fashion, they resolv’d to Fight too” (40). The journalist Edward Ward frequently used the term throughout his work, always to describe one who was debased, foppish, or otherwise undesirable: in his periodical the London Spy alone we have “a spruce Blade with a pretended Wife” (41); “a Beauish Blade” (64); “a little Red-Fac’d Blade” (97); “the Airy Blades” (160); “Blades…in Antiquated Piss burnt Wigs” (157). Ward’s work corresponded to the increasingly popular idea that many blades were low-born; a typical example from another author describes “an unruly Blade, / An Ass by Birth, an Advocate by Trade; / Poor, proud and formal, obstinate, and dull, / In Faction wise, and at the Bar a Fool” (Schopperus 45). Similarly, Henry Playford’s book of jests notes that “[s]o many Blades now rant in Silk, / And put on Scarlet Cloathing, / At first did spring from Butter-milk, / Their Ancestors worth nothing” (59). These blades’ self-indulgence also made them physically grotesque. A translation of Erasmus had first warned against“such decrepit Blades, as by the Gout have lost the Use of their Fingers” (61) in 1683, but this theme was advanced once again in the 1700s. For example, an anonymous author described “a greasie doubleted old Blade, eating Raw pickl’d **Herring** on a great Lunchion of brown Bread and eating it as heartily till it squeez’d out at both Corners of his Mouth, as if it had been the best Venison Pasty in Christendom” (The French Rogue 184). Similarly, Arthur Blackamore’s “dapper blade” is “pamper’d like a Punchinello, with a *Face* like a *Full-Moon*, and a Belly that discover’d he was not much given to *Fasting*, or any other *Works* of *Mortification*” (66). And the usage was not confined to literary satire: Richard Wiseman noted in his medical textbook that popular cures for gonorrhoea often left the penis “imperfectly Cured, and is, as some of those Blades call it, a weeping” (527). Paraded asthe paradigm of social decay, the blade’s taste for fine-living had also led to his physical degeneration.

After 1715, the blade became particularly linked to the Jacobite cause, used to describe James Stuart’s followers by both his supporters and detractors. Jacobite loyalists themselves used the term sentimentally, recalling the rhetoric of the disenfranchised cavalier, such as in the ballad Revolution upon Revolution (1715), which longed to see the exiled prince “advance the loyal Blades” to victory. Concurrently, anti-Jacobite authors continued to use “blade” as a derogatory term: for example, Robert Fleming described “the Second Council of the Young Blades” who were “brisk and sanguine and deliver’d Cavalierement, viz. That it was below a Prince, to come upon Terms with his People” (101): the Jacobite blade, we see, is unmovable in his dogmatic ranks of authority. But some authors were content to revel in James Stuart’s defeat: a 1717 song ridiculing his supporters proposed a toast to George I and his family who would “cup, / Those bold and daring Blades” who rebelled against Hanoverian rule (Mughouse-Diversion 17). Others were simply dissatisfied by the perceived absence of punishment for the rebels: *“*Sing the Doughty Blades of dauntless Might, / Who late sustain’d a fierce unequal Fight: / Who ventur’d all in Jemmy’s ruin’d Cause, / And soundly kick’d and cuff’d, escap’d the Laws” (Little Preston 5)*.*

There are two important conclusions to be drawn from this overview of the term “blade.” First, although it was used to indicate raucous insouciance throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it also acquired contentious political connotations when the term was both applied to and claimed by Stuart loyalists during times of crisis. This usage appears prominently during and after the imprisonment and execution of Charles I, and after the 1715 Rebellion. For Jacobites themselves, the term implied bravery and honesty; for their enemies it meant plots and civil unrest. In 1727 Ferdinando Altieri’s English-Italian dictionary translated a “notable young blade” as “*un furbo*,” otherwise meaning “sly,” a “stout blade” as “*un bravo*,” and a “cunning blade” as “*un scaltrito*,” otherwise meaning “worldly-wise.” The tender, unripened sinners that Francis Lenton had imagined in 1629, and who had been celebrated (and criticised) for their candid quests for pleasure throughout the seventeenth century, had been replaced in the majority imagination with the machinating, mercenary traitor.

Secondly, although the blade’s tie to his sword is implied in his name—indeed, he is identified *as* his sword—its use is not always explicated. The blade is often seen in libertine postures, particularly in drinking songs—carousing in an ale-house, or seducing a young woman, or promenading in the park—but he is less often shown to be utilising physical force. This may be explained if we assume that the anti-social brutality of Shirley’s bully-blade was accepted as the elemental behaviour of *all* blades (this is certainly often implied in morality literature across our period), and that references to it were redundant. Although authors rarely doubt the blade’s inclination to defend his personal honour, his bravery was often misplaced, arising in private conflict rather than the foreign battlefield: for example, Alexander Bruce criticised the blades who “seemed to contemn and undervalue the greatest Hazards, when nothing was to be imployed but bodily Force, have proven as timorous as Hares when they were put to set their Faces against the Mouth of a *Canon*” (131). What is most evident, however, is that authors across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries felt comfortable enough with the term “blade” to contextually remove it from scenes of violence and station it in scenes of homosociality, seduction, and politics. The blade’s dispersion across social and professional engagements is a testament to the extent of his penetration into society—and, by inference, the presence of the sword.

III: The Duel

Because the aristocracy were so intent on establishing or retaining their reputation as men of honour, the threat of insult was often serious enough to provoke a sword-fight throughout our period. These insults fell broadly into three different categories. The first category was in response to a real attack of physical force on the self, such as in July 1667 when Sir Henry Belasyse gave Tom Porter “a box of the eare,” which led to a duel in Covent Garden (Pepys 3: 207). The second category was performed in order to avenge or to protect family honour. The Earl of Shrewsbury challenged the Duke of Buckingham in January 1668, for example, after Buckingham’s affair with Lady Shrewsbury became common knowledge. Eighty years later, in May 1748, an officer was killed defending his sister when he felt that a knight had behaved dishonourably towards her (WEP 357). Men also sent and received challenges over financial disputes: for example, the fatal duel between Baron Mohun and the Duke of Hamilton occurred over the latter’s claim on one of Mohun’s properties. The final category was the verbal attack that gave offence (real or perceived) to the man’s romantic and sexual relationships, religion, politics, or own sense of self. For example, in June 1695 two gentlemen duelled in Hyde Park, after having exchanged “words” about a gentlewoman at the theatre (Post Boy 19). In Anne’s reign a fatal Bristol duel was instigated in February 1710 after one man drank the health of Dr. Sacherverell (Observator [1702] 12), while in May 1717 it was reported that a gentleman was injured in a duel after he informed an officer that he did not dress as became his family (WJSP 24).

In accepting that a disagreement could be settled through combat, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century society recognised that a duel could save or destroy a man’s reputation for being a man of honour—and honour, rather than a man’s life or worldly goods, was the only principle at stake in the duel. In noting this, we are not diminishing honour but rather heralding its importance for men during these centuries. However, there is nothing to suggest that men who were defeated on the field of honour suffered further material losses from their failure. Jennifer Low explains how the social elite understood the relationship between violence and honour in the early seventeenth century:

Among the aristocracy, losing a duel was said to lead to moral censure, to being widely known as a rascal, to being publicly ignored by acquaintances. In practice, such results were highly unlikely. The loser, while he lost status among men, was still accepted by his community. (17)

These principles are still recognisable later on in the century: honourable violence was a means through which men “engaged in the fight to demonstrate their sense of honour by being threatened with death rather than to achieve a definite result” (Peltonen 2). Although a man who would not fight risked having his name “posted” publicly, with the inference that he was a coward, in practice men who were defeated in duels did not usually lose their social status or friendship circle as a consequence; nor did men who won duels see any significant material benefit come of their victories, except perhaps in minor profits such as the cancellation of a gambling debt. Nevertheless, losing a duel was certainly a disastrous occurrence, not least because the loser risked serious injury or death, but also because it demonstrated his comparative inadequacy as a fighter, and so, by seventeenth-century implication, his incompatibility with authoritative power. Meanwhile, those who declined a challenge had to contend with the humiliating realisation that they lacked the courage and confidence to prove their honour before society.

We must finally note that the word “duel” had a fluid meaning during our period, as it could describe a range of violent reencounters between men of honour. Although the ritualised duel that consisted of the initial insult, the formal challenge, and the surreptitious meeting with two seconds, described by Kiernan in The Duel in European History (135-151) and Robert Baldick in The Duel (32-47), has dominated modern cultural understandings of the practice, Restoration and eighteenth-century writers were not so particular in their application of the word. Shoemaker’s work on the changing nature of the duel throughout this period has demonstrated that strict adherence to duellistic ritual was a later development instigated by the rise of the pistol-duel (“The Taming of the Duel” 532-35). By contrast, earlier sword-duels during the Restoration and the early eighteenth century were often conducted with less formality. Duels could occur quickly after the initial insult (532), and during the Restoration, it was not uncommon for the seconds to join in with the fighting, so that “many duels were actually group battles” (531). For example, in February 1681, one officer killed another in what was reported as a duel, in spite of the absence of a formal challenge, secret meeting, or seconds; the newspaper that reported the incident even emphasised that the fight had taken place immediately and without forethought when reporting that the survivor was found guilty only of manslaughter because “no Malice *prepens’d* appeared, but that it was done all in one and the same Transport of *Passion*” (TPM 18). The word “duel” could still have this meaning almost forty years later: in December 1717 it was used to describe a reencounter that almost occurred at the Strand when two gentlemen became involved in their coachmen’s quarrel (WJSP 53). At a time when the duel was being exploited by men from a range of social groups to contend that they were honourable, newspapers of the period used the word “duel” as a catch-all for a range of displays of physical force with the sword between men who were at least of a middle-class professional status. Accordingly, the word “duel” during this period should not be considered a static mantle used to describe an event which followed a prescribed series of occurrences, but rather a fluid term which was determined by the speaker or writer.

Methodologies, Literature Review, and the Texts

I: Methodologies

This thesis contends that a clear shift in the cultural meaning of swordplay occurred on the comic stage between 1660 and 1740 that directly corresponds with the changing social pressures that dominated society. To this end, I decipher texts relating to the theatre through the lens of new historicism, arguing that contemporary cultural and political events help to contextualise and interpret the London stage. New historicism, which encourages the juxtaposition of a range of texts to draw out the discourse surrounding the field of study, allows me to track the change over time and the interplay between stage and society. As Jean E. Howard wrote in “The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies,” this method enables the critic to see the texts as “some articulation of the discontinuities underlying any construction of reality” (15). The theatrical output in London between the years in question, in this reading, can be explained as the immediate product of a social and literary milieu, and individual works can be analysed with the assumption that they followed consistent structures of plot and character. As such, when attempting to navigate the social assumptions about swordplay as expressed on the stage, the notion, that a text must be read “as if it had already been read” (Barthes 15), is critical to comprehending the implications and meanings of any work from this period if we are to understand the ideology that underpins the text. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, authors drew upon cultural stereotypes and social compulsions to formulate their plots, rather than extending their subjects and themes to alien ideas. Even those authors who were the most self-conscious of their role as public educators (such as Addison and Steele) were guided by instincts born from cultural assumptions. With this in mind, attempts to understand what plays were trying to communicate to their audiences must consider more than words on the page, and contextualise them by considering factors such as social and political events concurrent to the staging, choices made in casting, and even the small quantity of available information about individual performances, for as Peter Holland theorises in The Ornament of Action, the moment of performance itself is an “essential part of the play’s communication of its meaning” (x).

In drawing upon the theory of new historicism, Louis Althusser’s insistence that humans “constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition” (“Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 46) enables the researcher to implicate seventeenth- and eighteenth-century male activities in a cultural configuration that emphasised strength, breeding, and moral virtue. His contention that fictions make us “perceive…the very ideology in which they are held” (“Lenin and Philosophy” 152) is an essentially Bakhtinian concept that presumes perennial change because ideologies are unfixed. Although Althusser and Bakhtin might disagree over how these ideologies are transmitted—for Bakhtin, it is through dialogic communications; for Althusser it is through state apparatuses—both regard texts (for works that are both individual and collated) as the assembly of a cultural imaginary. Althusser’s explanation of how cultural hegemonies achieve domination through establishment institutions (such as schools, churches, and the army) in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” should be applied to the Restoration and early eighteenth-century stage, because, as J. Douglas Canfield has argued in Tricksters and Estates, his analysis of the ideology of Restoration comedy, the stage effectively *was* an arm of the establishment for much of this period, “socially constructed to serve the interests of the hegemonic class” (1). Postulating heroic ancients (particularly the martial conquerors Achilles, Caesar, and Alexander) as the arbiters of masculine ideals, these paradigms were lauded through establishment art and culture—that is, works that were sanctioned either formally or informally by ruling bodies—throughout this period. These were expressed through an assortment of creative outputs—it occurs in the lionisation of martial heroes in the heroic drama of the 1660s, the patriotic military occasional poems of the 1700s, and the formal interiors of Sir James Thornhill, who used epic and Biblical imagery to illustrate recent nationalist history—and were encapsulated in the stylised violence performed by the aristocracy, as advocated in conduct books throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Following the lead of Kiernan in particular, who has used Marxist theory to scrutinise the social power structures rehearsed through the private sword (2-3), I argue that by reading swordplay as one of the establishment cultural outputs designed to advance the patterns of the state’s ideology, we are able to detect the structure of its framework.

The concept of “ideological recognition” not only furnishes us with the ability to interpret the changing spectacle of the sword on the stage, but it also guides our understanding of the impact that these spectacles may have had on their audiences. This latter point is crucial to understanding Restoration and eighteenth-century drama, because (as I explore in greater depth below) there is much to suggest that dramatists from across our period were conscious of theatre’s didactic functions. In Engaging Audiences, Bruce McConachie has called attention to the theatrical spectator’s possession of what he has described as a “[s]ensitivity to and participation in socially generated rhythms”; the spectator is predisposed to empathise and identify with the actor, thus giving the actor immense power over his audience (72-73). In this regard, the actor’s body itself is an expressive instrument that provides visual cues for the audience through its deliberate movements on the stage—cues that, McConachie suggests, might inform the audience’s understanding of the play better than the text itself. The idea that seventeenth- and eighteenth- century drama can (and perhaps, *should*) be interpreted through the spectator’s gaze has been a popular one in recent academic criticism. Aparna Gollapudi provides a particularly good example of this, which has some relevance to my own thesis, in her analysis of Cibber’s 1697 reform comedy, Love’s Last Shift. She pays close attention to the effect that the spectacle of the rake-hero Loveless, “ill-shod and wigless” but still “spouting the rake’s creed” has on the observer. It is the “simultaneous representation of cause and effect of reckless sexual excess…Cibber offers a vision of the beginning and end of Hogarth’s *The Rake’s Progress* collapsed into one spectacular moment” (31-32). Audiences seeing this are led to the (intended) conclusion that external transformation equal internal transformations (33-34).

This theory clearly has great potential to be applied to performances of action. As Edmund Curll wrote perceptively in 1740, the movements of the actor’s body on the stage were “the Reason, that the Attention of the Audience is fixed by any irregular or even fantastic Action, on the Stage, of the most indifferent Player, and supine and drowsy; when the best Actor speaks without the Addition of *Action*” (History of the English Stage 39). *Action*-led acting was a powerful tool for didactic theatre because it had greater mass-appeal than acting without it; it engaged with audiences deceptively, captivating their attention, sparking their cognitive processes, stipulating without verbalising the need for the spectator to observe, process, and deduce the lesson from the performance onstage.

Analysing the dialogic relationship between actor and spectator also reminds us of how this relationship could change within the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century cultural superstructure. Deborah C. Payne has already considered Pepys’s changing attitudes towards the theatre over the course of a decade in her survey of “Theatrical Spectatorship in Pepys’ Diary,” and this must surely be extended to all playgoers across our eighty-year period. Because any performance can hold different symbolic meanings for multiple audience members (Davis and Postlewait 8), we must acknowledge that any two people watching a play must have had varying political outlooks, artistic preferences, cultural touchstones, and senses of humour. This is especially the case when we consider what two different playgoers would have made of a performance of the same play at the beginning and the end of our period. When the real cavaliers recreated the sword-fighting in The Unfortunate Lovers, their response elicited the (intended) presumption that they had had some personal experience in sword-fighting themselves, either on the battlefield or in private combat. But would a town buck thirty years later, who had never been to war, and might have never even fought a man other than his fencing instructor, respond in kind? It is this changing audience that we must bear in mind when analysing how different stages approached the subject of swordplay. By analysing the various sources of information in conjunction with one another, we are able to prove a narrative of the changing nature of swordplay across our period.

McConachie’s emphasis on the “immediacy of theatrical engagement” that occurred in a single performance (1) is in many ways a familiar one to Restoration and eighteenth-century scholarship. Not only does it develop Holland’s notion of the “moment of performance,” but it also supports other critical works that place the physical body’s performance under scrutiny. For example, Paul Goring has argued that throughout the period the “spectacle of the body on stage, performing according to innovative notions of proper theatrical expression, became…a means of emblematising polite society and of showcasing modes of polite self-representation” (116), while Terry Castle has argued that “the scope of the body as a medium of expression is limited by controls exerted from the social system” (74). These contentions are not just theoretical, as there is evidence that some seventeenth and eighteenth century critics attempted to analyse both social and theatrical performances by contextualising them through what was *perceived* rather than through what was *done*. For example, in The Rules of Civility, Courtin distinguished between the “corporal Eye” and the “Eye of the Mind” (2), hinting at an awareness of the observer’s cognitive engagement with a spectacle. And indeed, the manifold physical alterations that the swordsman underwent onstage between 1660 and 1740 were deliberate attempts to manipulate spectator perceptions of the figure. His mode of dress, of course, changed with the times, but after the initial Restoration idealised form, we see his physical shape change: he suffers from physical injury; he is an infantilised grotesque; he finally—in Margaret Woffington’s performance of Sir Harry Wildair—even changes his biological gender.

The swordsman’s final developmental stage, the transformation into a woman, reminds us of the importance of gender studies to this thesis: Elizabeth Foyster gets to the crux of the issue when she writes that “[p]hysical strength was an obvious characteristic which distinguished men from women” (152). And so, the historical assumption that masculine power should be asserted through acts of physical force was applied to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century swordplay—but the increasingly persistent querying of this assumption suggests that this utilisation was neither static nor uniform. The insistence that masculine behaviour adjusts over time and in response to social pressures is central to gender studies, implied in statements like Joan W. Scott’s description of gender as “a social category imposed on a sexed body” (1056), or Judith Butler’s contention that gender “is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure” (282). By appreciating swordplay as a form of masculine performance that is “put on,” we are able to dissect the complexities of expectations about male behaviour during this period, and aid our understanding of the cultural work that the comedies accomplished.

Bakhtin, again, is also useful for interpreting ideas about the masculine form. From the very beginning of our period the sword was used to win physical conquest over another man, to “trample him” (370). During the eighteenth century, this idea fades, to be replaced with the grotesque body, which increasingly appears on the stage in connection with the swordsman. Whether scarred by battle, or as an animal, or inhabiting a childlike or woman’s body, the swordsman’s bodily transformations see the comic stage provoking its audience to consider the relationship between body and gender.

II: Literature Review

In spite of the meticulous research that C. L. Barber conducted in 1957, which showed that duels appeared on the comic stage much more frequently in the second half of the seventeenth century than in the first half (272-75), the sword’s use in Restoration and eighteenth-century comic drama has been often overlooked in analyses of historical masculinity. When it is studied, it is frequently placed among the other ‘vices’ of the age: drinking, gambling, whoring. Indeed, the private sword has largely been the victim of an Althusserian obviousness, in that it seems to have mostly avoided critical inspection *because* the sword so elementally informed masculine dress and behaviour during this period. But it is for this very reason that swordplay must be studied. During this period of history, the fact that men wore weapons at their sides as part of their regular dress was not considered remarkable; indeed, during the Restoration, a man who was not wearing a sword could describe himself as “naked” (Behn, The Rover 63). Later, a correspondent to the Spectator in 1712 felt the need to establish early on in his anecdote that he did not wear a sword, a statement that suggests that his choice was by no means a universal standard (268). The widespread acceptance of the fact that men might use these swords to fight and kill one another was also an inherent characteristic of this society, albeit one that was increasingly called into question. For the majority of the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth centuries, the sword and the aristocrat acted as a cohesive pair: as we have already seen in our discussion of the term “blade,” man and sword could literally share an identity. A dissection of the sword’s representation on the stage between 1660 and 1740 is therefore equally a scrutiny of expectations of masculinity during these years.

We may take some of our cues from similar studies that have already been performed upon the relationship between earlier dramaturgical swordplay and English society, such as Charles Edelman’s Brawl Ridiculous, Robert E. Morsberger’s Swordplay and the Elizabethan and Jacobean Stage, Jennifer Low’s Manhood and the Duel, Louis B. Wright’s “Stage Duelling in the Elizabethan Theater,” and to a lesser extent Patricia A. Cahill’s Unto the Breach—all works that give the sword its due attention as an important prop on the stage before the Civil Wars. Low is particularly invaluable for this thesis, as she specifically reads sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century stage and societal swordplay through the lens of gender theory, a critical tactic that, surprisingly, we find otherwise underemphasised in other analyses of swordplay. Although Low strictly limits her study to the duel, thus downplaying other types of performance-based uses of the sword, she uses the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage sword-fight as a correspondent for exemplifying the ideals that underpinned the early modern aristocracy. As she writes, “[c]onsideration of the duel is particularly useful because it can lay bare assumptions about masculinity that were seldom elaborated as such” (4). Building upon this argument, the theatre itself can be read as a vessel for communicating expectations about masculinity throughout our period.

Critical works that attempt an analysis of any type of swordplay that occurred on the comic stage between 1660 and 1740 usually treat the subject in passing, as one specimen within a longer history of duelling, or a wider study on libertine behaviour. Swords are otherwise rarely contemplated beyond their use in the duel; these studies consequently suffer for failing to account for the intended effect of simply *seeing* a sword onstage, or hearing it invoked in speech. Donna T. Andrew’s otherwise-convincing Aristocratic Vice: The Attack on Duelling, Suicide, Adultery and Gambling in Eighteenth-Century England is a typical example of the type of study that ignores the nuances of stage swordplay in order to produce a smoother social history. She seems to rob the early eighteenth-century stage of any relationship with wider culture when she oversimplifies its representations of the duel by describing them as “largely favourable,” stating that “[m]any of the period’s most popular plays, ranging from Centlivre’s The Beau’s Duel to Popple’s Double Deceit, had their heroes cheerfully and without censure so engaged” (45). This account of a theatre inattentive to the social and political changes occurring around it depreciates the significance of the conscious decisions that management made about casting, costuming, and the repertory, as well as making too-broad a generalisation about the content of the plays themselves. Indeed, by emphasising the importance of The Beau’s Duel—an *unpopular* play in its day, in fact, with only two recorded performances in its first two seasons (1701-02; 1702-03) before it was abandoned—at the expense of much more successful new comedies like Cibber’s Love Makes a Man (1700), Centlivre’s The Wonder! A Woman Keeps a Secret (1714), and Steele’s The Conscious Lovers (1722), all works that endeavoured to provide models for ‘correct’ swordplay appropriate for a post-Restoration society, Andrews’s invocation of early eighteenth-century theatrical swordplay understates its subtleties and misreads its intent.

There have, however, been a few critical pieces that engage with how the sword was used onstage during our period. For example, Kathleen Leicht approaches the subject in a short piece, “Dialogue and Duelling in Restoration Comedy,” in which she argues that comedies from this period consciously “addressed audience anxiety” about the increase in duelling following Charles II’s ascent to the throne (268). Although her argument rightly accentuates the importance of the sword onstage during this period, her central aim is to represent theatre as an art-form that primarily reflects society, and thus overlooks its role as an educator—a central part of my thesis. Nor does she seek to investigate the changing stage after the cultural-political shock of the 1688 Revolution. Conversely, John Leigh, in Touché: The Duel in Literature, recognises that duelling was a compelling instrument through which literary works could both interest and instruct readers and audiences, but the scope of his study—which incorporates plays, novels, short stories, and autobiography from Britain, France, Italy, Russia, and America, written between 1637 and 1918—extends far beyond mine. He seeks to create an overarching thesis about the presence of duelling in literature more generally, rather than to perform a study on the special presence of swordplay during a specific period of history.

Restoration and eighteenth-century stage violence *has* been discussed (albeit relatively briefly) with acknowledgment for its immediate cultural context and didactic power by Markku Peltonen in The Duel in Early Modern England, who has used plays by Farquhar and Centlivre to cast light upon contemporary attitudes towards duelling (182-90). However, the work does not aim to describe and analyse the exchange of ideas about swordplay that occurred between the stage and wider society at this time. Instead, his intention is to challenge the popular contention—advanced by Mervyn James and subsequently championed by critics such as G. J. Barker-Benfield (78-80), Peter Burke (37, 46), and Philip Carter (71-72, 133-34)—that an “honour culture” was gradually replaced with a “politeness culture” in England over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, hence the duel’s gradual degradation during this period (Peltonen 10). Peltonen’s argument asserts instead that the duel should be read as an expression of “courtesy and civility” from its introduction into England in the middle of the sixteenth century (13), and that civility was *redefined* (rather than seen to emerge) during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (15). Furthermore, the duel continued to be hailed by many critics, such as Bernard Mandeville and John Oldmixon, during the eighteenth century as “one of the cultural institutions which underpinned the free form of government and the valour of the Britons, their idiosyncracy [sic], and thus their ultimate superiority” (15-16), thus disputing the traditional narrative of a society almost entirely in opposition to the duel during the early eighteenth century.

My intention in this thesis is not to launch a counter-attack against Peltonen’s analysis of his source materials, particularly as he provides a compelling explanation for *why* swordplay generally, and the duel particularly, was tolerated in England for so long. As I discuss below, attempting to untangle the genuine beliefs that ruling bodies had about swordplay is a difficult exercise: many, such as Charles II, made one set of pronouncements but enforced another. Instead, I want to shift the focus of James’s history of civility away from real swordplay, and back onto its representation in art and literature. While Peltonen’s contentions might accurately depict real events in social history, realism (in the broadest sense of the term) was rarely of special interest to the playhouses producing theatrical content. Or, to put this another way, men like Mandeville and Oldmixon may have expounded the genuinely-held beliefs of many men and women at the time of their writing, but their arguments were not entirely consistent with what was on offer at the theatre.

As well as Peltonen’s unravelling of popular understandings of the duel during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, my study is also supported by the work that Stone and McKeon have done on what Stone terms the “crisis of the aristocracy.” McKeon utilises the destabilisation of the nobility in the seventeenth century to explore what he describes as “status inconsistency” in the media of this period. His account of these texts depicts a literary climate in which a “deep and pervasive” conservative ideology (171) was in conflict with an emergent progressive ideology, which valued middle-class values and financial empowerment over aristocratic patrilineage. And indeed focal histories of swordplay, such as the works by Kiernan and Baldick already mentioned, and Roger Burrow Manning’s Swordsmen, tend to defend this narrative, arguing that the sword lost its currency as an instrument of authority as it was adopted by men from a wider range of social classes. Concurrent to this decline, Shoemaker’s articles “The Taming of the Duel,” “Male Honour and the Decline of Public Violence,” and “Reforming Male Manners,” offer an account of swordplay declining as men turned away from physical force to find alternative solutions for resolving disputes.

If Stone and McKeon provide a broader historical framework for embarking upon this thesis, other critics have provided a narrower focus on theatre’s relationship with culture during the Restoration and the early eighteenth century. In doing this, they act as methodological models for reading the stage’s didacticism during these years. For example, in Heroic Mode and Political Crisis, Elaine McGirr has outlined a history that demonstrates how one cultural mode of expression, the heroic, was used as “partisan propaganda” for a theatre that ultimately demonstrated that “arguments about style are bound up in arguments about ideology” (25). In this work, McGirr demonstrates the importance that style and spectacle played in dramatizing politics and culture. Equally useful is J. Douglas Canfield’s Tricksters and Estates, which contends that Restoration comedies “reinscribe Stuart ideology…not only through *language* but through the *body-language* of stage performance, and indeed through *bodies* themselves” (2). In this reading, it is not only the comic playwrights of this period who endeavoured to write material that bolstered establishment conceits that must be taken into account, but also the actors who performed these conceits before audiences. Other critics, particularly Jane Spencer in Aphra Behn’s Afterlife, have conducted their research on the repertory and revivals, investigating the creative decisions (and the significance behind those decisions) that theatrical managers throughout the eighteenth century made when staging older plays. To do this is to provoke an examination into what playgoers expected to see on the stage at different points in theatre history. As Spencer writes, to analyse later productions of Behn’s work “turns on their adaptability to the particular desires of eighteenth-century audiences” (12).

Finally, I have looked at works that have sought to explore the social placement of inanimate objects during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These studies, such as Andrew Sofer’s The Stage Life of Props, largely ignore the sword in favour of other objects they feel are more representative of the times, but they remain useful as reminders that the sword was a real object that was handled regularly throughout our period. Particularly interesting is Sofer’s analysis of prop functions in the Restoration comedy, arguing that “theatre rewards theatricality…Dorimant, Harriet and Young Bellair [from Etherege’s The Man of Mode (1668)] are rewarded with spouses for their appealing performances” (145). This theory has immediate application to the notion that the sword was used in the early part of our period as an instrument of authority. As I will argue in Chapter One, its most “theatrical” employment onstage, defeating other men in combat, both won the hero a marriage to the heroine according to social convention, and taught the audience to admire the hero’s exploits in doing so.

When critics *have* attempted to theorise the cultural significance of the real sword, these subjects are usually treated as case studies to illustrate wider theories of fashion, gender, and social conduct. Joseph Roach’s It is a paramount example of this. Although conscious that that sword could enable the Restoration gentleman to see himself as a “person of substance” (121), he argues that its function was akin to the periwig—that indeed Pepys wore his sword because it was “the fashion of his time, not because the clerk has any intention of defending himself or his honor with it” (42). I do not wish to dismiss the importance of the sword as an article of fashion—and indeed, as I show in Chapter Two, men who regarded the sword as mere decoration were specifically targeted for critique and ridicule—but I do contend that the sword was a unique object among fashion accessories, particularly during the early part of our period. The sword is fundamentally intended to be employed as a violent weapon (even if it was repurposed more *frequently* as an object of self-ornamentation), and its place in regular dress thereby influenced contemporary expectations of masculine behaviour. Indeed, by simply wearing the sword, Pepys *was* engaging in a petty-defence of his reputation, for he was purposefully inviting the assumption that he was a man of honour. By examining the sword as a prop (both onstage and in society), we can begin to understand the value that it held to men during the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries

III: The Texts

We must finally give some consideration to the primary texts themselves in order to appreciate their cultural context. There is a wealth of available sources that mention, describe, or discuss sword use (either directly or implicitly) throughout the period between 1660 and 1740, and so, although published playtexts will be the primary focus of my analysis, I will also draw my discussion from newspaper reports and periodical essays, conduct books, fencing books, moral tracts, biographies, and other printed ephemera, as well as contemporary letters and diaries, to which I will apply the theories of new historicism, Althusserian Marxism, and gender studies. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century efforts to catalogue the theatrical archive also grant the modern historian access to an immense range of materials, and concordances like The London Stage are invaluable references. Primary texts will chiefly be those that are engaged with discussion or commentary on swordplay within the context of London culture. I do not suggest that swordplay in London was synonymous with swordplay elsewhere in the country, although other cities and large towns likely experienced trends that mirrored those in London. Rather, this thesis is specifically concerned with the dialectical relationship between the London stage and London society; accordingly, it is necessary to examine the ideas and expectations about swordplay held by those who lived within that society. By restricting analytical focus to geographical location, we are able to draw more accurate conclusions about the changing ideologies of rituals of swordplay at this time.

In spite of this, I must acknowledge that the primary sources with which I engage do not reflect the thoughts and feelings (unconscious or otherwise) of society in its entirety. I have already referred to the fact that the same play performed at two different moments in history could provoke different responses, but this idea of a non-harmonious, non-universal audience deserves further consideration here. For example, although early eighteenth-century authors in particular claimed to promote “common sense,” dispensed in reaction to “senseless” fashion (Mackie 27-28), their views were consciously partisan and contrived in opposition to fashionable but culturally outmoded debauchery. The very fact that cultural theoreticians like Addison and Steele expended so much effort in justifying their opinions and condemning those who did not conform to them demonstrates their conviction about the need to monitor behaviours (193), and indicates that there was a substantial range of expectations about “correct” behaviour beyond that which was printed in the Spectator. Because of this range, we cannot pretend to predict responses to texts or performances. Modern judgments about a play’s ‘quality’ on the printed page are certainly unhelpful in assessing the reason behind the success or failure of any one play, for especially in the early part of our period, “[p]lays didn’t rise or fall simply by their own merits but also as ‘court’ or ‘country’ gained political ascendency, and depending partly on the allegiances of the playwright and his friends who packed the first night” (Duffy 126). Nor, as we have already observed, was a play’s reception dependent upon the audience’s recognition and approval of the author’s intentions. Famously, Addison’s Cato (1713) was instantly claimed by both Whig and Tory critics as a spirited defence of their own political stances. There is a multiplicity of meanings across any one performance piece, through which we can interpret compound contradictory analyses. This is nowhere more evident than in modern critical literature. Is The Rover a straightforward nostalgic portrait of cavalier culture, as Maureen Duffy has argued (152-156), with Willmore as the seductive lothario and successful swordsman? Or did Behn write a proto-feminist satire in which Willmore is a cruel, drunken oaf (DeRitter 82-92)? These opposing readings (and many in-between) divide modern critics and readers, and it is impossible to know the exactitudes of what attracted an audience to a new play, or what enabled it to remain in the repertory as a popular piece.

Because of the impossibility of predicting why some plays were successes while others failed, this thesis uses plays to map and analyse how the stage represented and attempted to influence the use of swords in society, rather than interrogating the playtexts in order to construct a new reading of the plays themselves, or to instigate a discussion about why audiences attended the theatre. This thesis is concerned with the changes in ritual that occurred on the stage as these ideologies changed over our period. Resources such as Pepys’s diary or essays in the Tatler and Spectator are useful not because of any purported definitive insight into how playgoers responded to the productions they saw, although they often have illustrative use in providing an impression of the polyphony of voices of the age. Rather, they illustrate the ideologies and counter-ideologies about swordplay on and off the stage at various moments throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

A similar problem occurs when engaging with newspapers as primary sources, particularly for reports of duels and other reencounters. Once again, accounts must be taken as responses to social pressures throughout our period, rather than factual reports. Journalists, as James Sutherland has shown in The Restoration Newspaper and Its Development (13-14, 118), frequently appropriated news from other sources, and often exaggerated or fictionalised accounts. In September 1723, a story was published in several newspapers relating a duel between Cornet Baker and Mr. Hare, and it was even reported that the coroner had given a verdict of wilful murder (Daily Post 823). The following week, however, a rival paper revealed that in truth Baker had simply shot and killed a hare (WJSP 455). False information may also have been sometimes deliberately printed to inflate sales. For example, when the Evening Post 2369 reported a bloody duel fought on Hounslow Heath in September 1724, a correspondent quickly wrote a letter to the Daily Journal protesting that the story was entirely false: “*We do assure you that not a Word has been heard here of a Duel, or Re-encounter… [and] the Account…*IS A BASE AND SCANDALOUS IMPOSITION ON THE PUBLIC” (1157). The Daily Journal continued its attack in the following issue, taking the opportunity to accuse the Evening Post of inventing the story for “want of real Intelligence,” and recommended that those in any doubt should appeal to “Surgeons, Physicians, Gentlemen of the Army, Coffee-Men, and others” to prove that the duel had never occurred (1158). Afterwards, the two newspapers were satirised by a third:

Last Tuesday Morning, two Newspapers of Distinction, viz. *The Daily Journal*, and *The Daily Post*, fought a Duel here… [and] the latter is dangerously wounded…There were many hundreds of People Witnesses to this Misfortune, and as we have *named* the Persons, we may venture to insert it, without calling *Surgeons*, *Physicians*, *Gentlemen of the Army*, *and others*, to justify the Truth thereof. (WJBG, Saturday, October 10, 1724).

As this satirical article suggests, newspapers that reported on duels used them as both an instrument for generating sales at the expense of journalistic integrity, and to defame their professional rivals.

The change in social attitudes against duels provided another reason to invent reports of them for the newspapers, in which journalists stretched the limits of credibility to publish stories in which duels were framed as laughable endeavours. While the untrue report of the Hounslow Heath duel at least sounded plausible, other newspaper articles cast doubt on their authenticity by their sheer preposterousness, suggesting that their authors deliberately fabricated stories about swordplay in order to satirise vanity and foolishness. For example, an October 1724 report tells of a dispute in York between two lawyers over which one of them was the more handsome: “the one urged his fine Complexion, and the other the undeniable Charms of a pair of sparkling black Eyes: In a word, the Matter was carried so far, that they went into the Street and fought a Duel,” before they eventually agreed to have the decision made “by the Verdict of a Jury of the Fair Sex” (London Journal 278). Both the tone of the piece and the circumstances it describes are suspiciously burlesque, suggesting a satire either on parochial upstarts who pretended to be men of honour, or on the debasement of honourable violence itself through its use by men from a wide range of social groups. Similarly, the Penny London Post reported two separate fights in 1747 and 1748 which both occurred in Islington after disagreements over the number of hackney coaches running (708; 774). The coincidence of two identical fights happening in so short a space of time is reason enough to doubt the credibility of the reports; the frivolous nature of the two fights’ instigation stretches reasonable belief and again suggests that the duel’s traditional union with honour was being challenged.

It is difficult to accept such news reports as fact, but they are useful points of reference for revealing what journalists believed would engage their readership. Where reports of duels in the late seventeenth century and first two decades of the eighteenth century often presented duels as either performances of heroic valour or tragedy, the comic reports of duels which prevail in newspapers from the 1720s through to the 1740s puncture romantic pretension and suggest a readership willing to entertain the duel as a risible social practice. The occasional responses that newspapers received from their readers also suggest increasing public resistance to duelling. For example, the correspondent to the Daily Journal who complains about the report of the Hounslow Heath duel in the Evening Post castigates such stories as advertisements that incite readers to participate in the “unhappy Custom” (1157). By treating both articles and the responses to them as a form of literary output, we are able to draw parallels with contemporaneous plays and other forms of literature, thus strengthening the narrative of changing swordplay throughout our period.

Historical Context

Understanding Sword Use, 1660-1740

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century governments proclaimed and upheld a culture of honourable violence, in which men were actively encouraged to respond to threats against the state by taking up arms. The provisions that the 1689 Bill of Rights made for bearing arms are the most transparent example of this, but honourable violence received state endorsement in other ways throughout our period. Although fatal duels were acts of murder in the common law (Banks 13-16), and individual monarchs often spoke out against the practice, nevertheless Charles, James, and William repeatedly intervened in individual cases, often pardoning those who had killed another in a duel (Peltonen 206-09; Manning 217-44; Banks 16), for, as Kiernan writes, pardons were “a cheap way of rewarding loyalists, and humouring the Cavalier faction at large” (100). “Judges and juries in this period,” Shoemaker writes, “never viewed duelling as a sufficiently threatening offence to subject duellists to capital punishment” (“The Taming of the Duel” 537). Rather, those who were not pardoned typically received fines, corporal punishment, or imprisonment (Simpson 121-33). We may conclude from this that ruling bodies may have had some genuine sympathy for the private sword: indeed, as late as 1746, George II, speaking “as an officer—not as a king,” expressed the opinion that officers who quarrelled should either “fight or be broke”—that is, duel or forfeit their commissions (Kiernan 101). The failure to punish men who fought one another in the parks and streets of London with fairness or consistency meant that there was no clearly-defined deterrent against duels, fights, and brawls.

Yet although we have already paid considerable attention to the sword in its function as a weapon in combat, we have not yet properly addressed its role as an article of fashion. As Terry Castle has written, “dress spoke symbolically of the human being beneath its folds” (55). Throughout our period, the sword’s physical form shifted as it developed from the long and elaborate rapier that was a relic of pre-Civil War culture, to the broader colichemarde specifically designed for the purpose of duelling, to the smaller and lighter small sword popular in the early eighteenth century (Hutton 184-240). Although frequently deadly, civilian swords were equally intended to be used as fashion accessories as well as weapons, and were adorned with ornate hilts, sword-knots, and other decorative elements which shifted according to the fashions of the time (Cunnington and Cunnington 100). Correspondingly, they were also available for purchase at a range of price points. For example, Pepys purchased one with a silver-gilt handle for twenty-three shillings in 1663 (1: 399), but bought one for his boy Tom Edwards in 1669 for just twelve shillings (4: 163). Wealthier men could afford to spend more money on more glamorous swords, such as the £10 silver sword that Charles II owned (Hayward, “Dressing Charles II”), and the items perhaps reached a pinnacle at a French party in 1670 where Buckingham was presented with a sword covered in pearls and diamonds, worth twenty-thousand crowns (Wilson, A Rake and His Times 139-40). The availability of cheaper swords meant that they were relatively affordable for many men who would not have traditionally used them, while the existence of richly-decorated swords sustained their place as a desirable social prop.

The sword was thus established as a visual and accessible marker of aristocratic worth and inevitably became an object of bourgeois desire. Swords were worn by most fashionable men for the majority of our period, and were thus bound intrinsically into the fabric of daily life, altering the way that men walked, danced, and sat, as well as informing their own self-perception. Both Baldick (69) and Mark Stanley Dawson (133-38) have argued that the playhouse was essentially a fashion arena for young men to flaunt their daring and confidence in their reputation, with Dawson suggesting that “some participants in…playhouse affrays were out to assert their very right to be acknowledged as ‘gentlemen’ in the first instance” (137). And indeed across our period, men reveal themselves to be aware of their swords as fashionable accoutrements. It is unlikely that Pepys ever imagined himself as a duellist, given the condemnation he allowed for such men in his diary; despite this, he is both fascinated with his sword and pleased with his appearance when he is wearing it, regarding it as what Sofer refers to as an “identity metomyny” (21) to signal his demand to be recognised as honourable. As Roach puts it, Pepys’s sword is “a prop to support his performance as he fights his way across the threshold of gentlemanly status and claims the social spaces beyond as his own” (53). So in February 1661, he “first begun to go forth in my coate and sword, as the manner now among gentlemen is” (Pepys 1: 150). Two years later, his sword still impresses him: he spends Easter Sunday at church, where he sleeps through the sermon but is comforted by his “very handsome” new sword (1: 405). An identical satisfaction occurs over fifty years later when the law student Dudley Ryder bought an expensive suit, wig, and sword, and spent the afternoon admiring his new outfit: “I cannot but observe how much I am myself touched with external show; having a new sword on I could not help looking at it several times with a peculiar sort of pleasure” (qtd. Buck 88). Keenly aware of the power of dress as a tool of social discourse, men purchased, wore, and used swords in order to impress upon others their self-conceived notion of their own class.

The assertions of men like Pepys and Ryder were in turn legitimised by a media that actively encouraged men to wear and fight with swords, using figures of power and influence as examples. Knowing how and when to correctly use a sword was an essential component of a genteel education throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: even to wear it badly could provoke contempt from other men. One journalist made a satirical complaint in August

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Business card for James Figg (unknown date) – William Hogarth, British Museum | 1713 about the way that men who wore swords dominated small rooms and narrow streets; they “are as inconvenient as so many Turn-styles, because you can pass neither backward nor forward, till you have first put their Weapons aside” (Guardian 143). Likewise, in July 1741, Lord Chesterfield advised his son that “[w]hen an awkward fellow |

first comes into a room, it is highly probable that his sword gets between his legs, and throws him down, or makes him stumble at least” (9). Whether swords got in the way of their bearers or others, both Chesterfield and the Guardian author imply that there is something knowable about a man by how he wears his sword, that he might be rude or gauche.

Those who wanted to improve their swordsmanship could take formal instruction: during the eighteenth century, as Courtin’s presupposition that the aristocracy were “a Body of Reserve for the Defence of the Prince and State upon a sudden Emergency” began to be ignored with the rise of a professional army, the most usual method of obtaining practical experience with the sword was by attending one of the popular fencing schools, run by masters like William Hope (1660-1724), James Figg (1684-1734), and Domenico Angelo (1717-1802). Displays of swordsmanship were also a popular form of entertainment: during the early years of the Restoration, fencing could be seen onstage at the Vere and Red Bull theatres, while in the early eighteenth century, Figg held regular prize-fights using cudgels, swords, and quarterstaffs in a small but crowded amphitheatre in Marylebone Fields (Borg 35-36). Pepys wrote an enthusiastic diary entry after watching a bloodthirsty prize-fight (3: 137), while a correspondent to the Spectator wrote in February 1711: “You are to know that I am naturally Brave, and love Fighting as well as any Man in England. This gallant Temper of mine makes me extremely delighted with Battles on the Stage” (314). Nor was a taste for stage violence exclusively the domain of men; three years later, Shaftesbury recorded his surprise at the bloodthirsty young ladies who equally enjoyed watching displays of physical force at the theatre: “I have often wonder’d to see our *fighting* Plays become so much the Entertainment of that tender Sex” (271). In these various ways, an interest in swordplay penetrated a range of social groups and was presented to Restoration and early eighteenth-century audiences as a genteel, exciting, and literally profitable enterprise.

Pepys’s and Ryder’s interest in their swords is evidence that sword-ownership was not a frivolous fashion perpetuated by young men with too much money to squander, but rather an essential item of dress that the career-oriented middle-classes wore to establish themselves as men with a right to express themselves as honourable. Indeed, for much of our period, the assumption that the duellist was also a libertine who enjoyed “*GAMING* and *Wine*” (Colman 15) is a partisan opinion that we find expressed most often by the clergy, and seen less often elsewhere. This is suggested by the fact that when reform comedies took hold of the theatres after 1697, only one play in the first twenty-five years of the genre, Steele’s The Lying Lover (1703), attacked a comic hero for the way that he used his sword—and it was “damned for its piety” (Steele, Mr. Steele’s Apology 48). The comedies that staged the “reclamation of flawed individuals” (Gollapudi 1) from vices such as philandering and gambling were often highly popular with audiences—plays such as Cibber’s Love’s Last Shift (1697), The Careless Husband (1703), and The Lady’s Last Stake (1707); Farquhar’s The Twin Rivals (1702) and The Inconstant (1702); Centlivre’s The Gamester (1705)—yet somehow this interest did not extend to plays that confiscated a gentleman’s sword. In fact, as I discuss in Chapter Two, one of the most popular plays of the eighteenth century, Cibber’s Love Makes a Man (1700), couples its aversion to rakes, fops, and bravoes with a storyline in which the hero is taught the *importance* of engaging in swordplay.

This neglect suggests that among the general public, the private sword was largely regarded not as a deviant weapon, or a practice that needed to be eradicated. Sexual licence and drunkenness were difficult to defend, but the private sword still had worth as a badge of honour during the early eighteenth century. As late as the

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1720s, even George I could have his simply-costumed portrait painted with a sword at his side. For Pepys and Ryder, to own and wear a sword was a visual signifier intended to evoke gentility. In the portrait of George, there is a similar intention: monarchy is unified with fashionable gentility rather than warriorship. The presence of the sword is not a visual echo of | https://d9y2r2msyxru0.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/styles/collection_object_bootstrap_carousel_/public/collection-online/7/a/255858-1330621803.jpg?itok=Kzgv2kcb  George I (1660-1727)(1720?) – Georg Wilhelm Lafontaine, Royal Collection Trust |

the earlier militaristic monarchism that Charles, James, and William had often employed in their formal portraits. Although George’s crown and sceptre are afforded a prominent position on the table beside him, the sword of state is missing—replaced by the barely-visible small sword at his side. However, even this new weapon is compromised as an instrument of authority: George’s hands are occupied, leaving him unable to grasp his sword; the little we do see almost blends in with the detail of his coat. This image introduces the King as a man of wealth and taste, who is as prepared to wear his fashionable cocked hat as his crown of state. The sword is interesting here precisely *because* it lacks prominence; the sword is designed to be seen as an unremarkable part of an outfit, with no greater social or political significance than his wig or coat-buttons, rather than its centrepiece.

The sword’s placement within this portrait literally illustrates its societal locus at this moment in the eighteenth century. The Lockean emphasis upon “the need for congruence between thought and action” (Carter 53) meant that conduct literature from this period targets ceremony as “devious self-interest disguised as politeness” (126), and teaches its readership that “true heroism is a passive virtue” (McGirr 134). The ceremonial symbolism of the private sword was suspicious; the implied determination to assert authority through the conquest of other men was untenable. George’s sword is still present, but its irrelevance to the scene, its indistinctness, the fact that it is blocked from view by the man’s body, implicitly reassures the spectator that it is harmless. The sword of state is gone; the crown, the symbol of legitimate monarchy takes precedence during George’s rule. The King’s uplifted arm seems to open out in an unguarded welcoming gesture, to invite the spectator to come forward, to convince his people to acknowledge him as a monarchical authority because he is a ruler identifiable by his geniality and good manners, rather than a tyrant who needs to jealously guard his power with a sword.

The portrait’s rejection of physical force (and its signifiers) in favour of warmth and hospitality is the typical mood of much establishment art and literature in the years around 1720. The Jacobite “blades” had proven their insufficiency in 1715; true authority was known through the fair treatment of other men, symptomatic of the developing expectation that ruling bodies now had defined obligations to their people (Pagden 261-62). Now, men were being taught that to be honourable, that they should resolve their conflicts without violence, and learn “how to harness anger” (Foyster 164). And yet, the private sword continued to be employed throughout the eighteenth century (Shoemaker, “The Taming of the Duel” 536-39). We might attribute the slowness of its decline to a prolonged nostalgia for Charles II’s style of patriotic splendour, or to a society that was increasingly militarised across broader social ranks beginning from William III’s army reforms during the 1690s. But Donna T. Andrew has proposed a sensible reason for why honourable violence was sustained throughout the eighteenth century, which seems relevant to mention here: “Critics of modern honour, while bemoaning the practice of duelling, were themselves unable to offer any positive alternatives” (“The Code of Honour and Its Critics” 420). Indeed, critics were unable to offer any *practical* alternatives: Addison, Steele, Defoe, and the other reforming authors who were anxious to remind their readers of duellists’ moral fallibility never devised workable solutions for responding to challenges. Their common response recommended simply reasoning with the other man, an unsatisfactory and probably unrealistic response. Hope, for example, concludes his critique of duelling rather lamely by allowing that a man may fight without compromising his moral code if he has repeatedly tried and failed to reason with his challenger (37-41). In failing to proffer an alternative to duelling that could still make men feel as though they were performing a heroic role, these would-be reformers failed to implement their coveted reformation of men’s relationship with violence.

During the early eighteenth century, the sword therefore lingered on as an undiscarded relic of Restoration modes of aristocratic honour, a stubborn detail that would not disappear—as it does not quite in the picture of George—still employed in costume by men from across multiple social groups. Modern critics have proposed a range of decades across the eighteenth century for its final outing as a regular article of fashion. The earliest period comes from Stephen Banks, who dates the decline from the mid-1720s (21). Gregory Durston places it slightly later, claiming that the change began “after the 1730s” (84), while Barker-Benfield is more specific: “From 1730, wearing a sword was largely replaced by the malacca cane as the badge of a gentleman” (80). Shoemaker compromises on these two decades, claiming that men began to cease wearing swords in the 1720s and 1730s (“Male Honour” 205), and the fashion historians Anne Buck (57-58) and C. Willett Cunnington and Phillis Cunnington (100) agree. Michael North gives the 1750s as the decade when most men replaced their swords with walking sticks (51); Joan Nunn claims that it was the 1770s (99); while Ewart Oakeshott affords the sword the longest survival in European Weapons and Armour, suggesting that swords were worn up until the 1790s (27-28). Although these dates are clearly wildly disparate, their distribution across the century does suggest that the process of the sword’s disappearance from popular dress was slow and irregular rather than something that can be assigned to a single historical moment.

Even though it is clear that men continued to wear swords throughout the eighteenth century, the compulsion to do so was fading. As swords were increasingly used by a wider range of society, their purpose as instruments of authority dropped. Although wearing a sword could still be acknowledged as a mark of a higher social class in 1715—for example, in a play of that year, Addison’s The Drummer, the gardener asks, “Is he a Gentleman, had he a Sword by his Side?” (22)—the topographical guidelines were shifting, and a decade later there was a “devaluation of the social meaning of sword use as it spread to other social classes” (Shoemaker, “Male Honour” 205). In 1728 James Ralph described young men “who hire their Swords at some neighbouring Cutler’s, in order to appear as Gentlemen there” (140). By 1732, the author John Thomson described the “second-hand sort of Gentlemen” who gathered at eating houses and “when they find a better Sword, Hat or Cane, than their own… [they] make no scruple to bring them away” (54). So had the accoutrements of rank and honour been assumed by the common thief.

The sword’s change in cultural significance can be observed by analysing the violent lives of two figures from our period: George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham (1628-87), and Charles Mohun, 4th Baron Mohun (1675-1712). These two men drew public attention for their duels; however, the tone in which these duels were discussed differed drastically as the cultural meaning of swordplay changed over time.

I: Buckingham

A brief overview of Buckingham’s career affords much reason to recommend him as a seventeenth-century man of honour: he had fought loyally for the Royalist cause between 1643 and 1651; he had gone into exile alongside Charles II; he had made a politically-sound marriage, and (unlike many cavaliers) had had his estates returned to him after the Restoration, and was consequently a man of great wealth. “[W]ith his numerous titles and places, Bucks could outrank anyone but the Duke of York” (Wilson, A Rake and His Times 107)—and even this only due to lineal convention, it seemed. “Buckingham do rule all now,” remarked Pepys in December 1667, “and the Duke of York comes indeed to the cabal, but signifies little there” (4: 333). Augmenting his entitlement to inherited honour with that which was furnished by political loyalty, social connections, and financial prosperity, Buckingham sealed his reputation for honour by committing acts of violence in his private life. The most notorious example of this was his duel with the Earl of Shrewsbury in January 1668, which the latter instigated following his discovery of his wife’s affair with Buckingham. Rumours had circulated about the fight weeks before it occurred, and Charles had even attempted to prevent it from occurring (Wilson, A Rake and His Times 94). The two men met in a clearing in Barn Elms where they fought. Each man had two seconds, who both joined in the fight, in the French style; Buckingham had chosen two professional fighting men. He managed to run Shrewsbury through and then turned to help one of his own seconds (95). Shrewsbury received serious injuries, from which he died two months later, by which point Buckingham had already received a full pardon from the king and returned to his social engagements. After Shrewsbury’s death, he moved the widowed countess into his London home, much to the disgust of his own wife.

Six months after the duel had occurred, it was given mainstream interpretation in Robert Howard’s semi-flattering allegorical piece “The Duel of the Stags,” a poem that celebrates Buckingham’s reputation as a formidable fighter and uses this to justify his possession of social and political powers. The poem is dedicated to Buckingham, “as your grace in your adversity has found the advantage of an unshaken honour” (156), and is a poetical reflection upon his relationship with the king. It concerns a young stag who fights the king of the herd (representing Charles) and is beaten into isolation. The young stag lives in solitude in a remote part of the woods, “[a]sham’d to live, unwilling yet to lose” (160), until he eventually bolsters his spirits to return to the herd for another fight. On this second occasion he sees victory over the king and assumes leadership over the herd in his own right. Although Howard privately insisted that there was no deeper meaning behind the poem (Ward, “An Unpublished Letter of Sir Robert Howard” 119-21), the piece was written in the immediacy of the duel between Buckingham and Shrewsbury, and the readership cannot have failed to make the connection between that incident and the poem’s title and dedication. Nor can they have failed to comprehend the moral implication of the piece: might is right. The young stag “from a subject to a rival grows” (Howard 157), rising to his position of power through the use of private violence. And, although he initially sees defeat, the young stag pulls inspiration to victory from heroic “thoughts of love and empire” (159), while battling psychological torment from the memory of his failure: “And in his dreams again he fights and fears: / Shrinks at the strokes of t’other’s mighty head, / Feels every wound, and dreams how fast he fled” (161-62). By enforcing political ambition and humiliation as concurrent emotions, the stag’s shame of failure in combat is directly connected to his desire for formal power.

“The Duel of the Stags” thus enforces the cultural pressures that linked success and authority with violent assertion: natural law dictates that the young stag should become leader because he demonstrates skill, bravery, and ambition on the battlefield. The passion and martial valour that Buckingham demonstrated against Shrewsbury on the field of honour stand as direct justifications for his social and political power: like the stag, he must “own his title to his victory” (164). The duel is parsed as a dangerous but legitimate method of asserting this power—indeed, it is the instinctive behaviour of noble beasts, for “[i]n passions thus nature herself enjoys” (165)—and is thus reinforced as the expected, even natural, behaviour of ambitious noblemen. The fact that the poem is not really *about* Buckingham’s duel with Shrewsbury underpins this point. Violence was so much an expected part of aristocratic honour during the 1660s that Buckingham’s conduct on the field against Shrewsbury means that he represents a genuine political threat to Charles, an accentuation of the Hobbesian construction of the amalgamated wartime/private sword introduced earlier. Those who proved themselves “men of honour” when fighting their private causes demonstrated that they were worthy rivals to legitimate power.

Although there were undoubtedly some dissenting attitudes towards the duel between Buckingham and Shrewsbury—Pepys, for example, repeatedly describes Lady Shrewsbury as a “whore,” and accuses Buckingham of lacking the sobriety that his political position requires (4: 352)—these were the private reflections of the bourgeoisie rather than the poetic expressions of formal cultural sentiment. The French style of fighting, the gossip circulating in London before and after the duel—from Pepys: “[t]he whole House full of nothing but the talk of this business”; “it is believed” that Lady Castlemayne will intervene for the king on Buckingham’s behalf; “it is said” that Shrewsbury might die from his injuries (4: 352)—the sexual preferment Lady Shrewsbury showed to Buckingham even after he had fatally wounded her husband, and Buckingham’s re-entrance into public life with the full support of the royal court create a narrative of victory through bloody action. Almost a month after the fight, and the day after Charles had pardoned the two duellists (4: 365), Pepys recorded seeing Buckingham sitting “openly” in the pit at the premiere of Etherege’s She Wou’d If She Cou’d, in the company of Lord Buckhurst, Sir Charles Sedley, and Etherege himself (4: 366). Flanked by his friends, the representatives of the peers, the politicians, and the poets who had been responsible for rebuilding the ideology of the royalist state since 1660, Buckingham is perfectly at ease. He has wealth, a hereditary title, political power, sexual appeal, and influential friends. His duel with Shrewsbury was not his downfall, but rather his moment of triumph, the point at which he defended his right to possess these powers, and won: a real confirmation the ideological structures that “reunite the beautiful people with landed estates and the political hegemony they symbolize” (Canfield, Tricksters and Estates 2). Can there be any surprise, then, that less than three weeks after he had successfully protected royalist contentions about the legitimacy of aristocratic governance, he celebrated his victory by appearing at the heart of a Restoration comedy?

II: Mohun

Baron Mohun was born fifteen years after the Restoration and was not a cavalier by anybody’s estimation. Nevertheless, his career of unrestrained violence throughout the 1690s suggests that he was intensely beholden to the same systematic assertion of power through the sword that the cavaliers had espoused. Before the events that led to his death in 1712, Mohun was most notorious for his role in the murder of the actor William Mountfort—yet upon this occasion the romantic model that had served Buckingham so well could not play out as the dominant narrative. Whereas Howard had rationalised Buckingham’s social and political power by arguing that he came to it naturally by his displays of honour through the private sword, in the Mountfort case it is, cruelly, the violent act that is justified by the social position of its perpetrators.

The murder took place on a December night in 1692. Offended by Mountfort’s friendship with the actress Anne Bracegirdle, with whom his friend Captain Hill had a sexual obsession, the two young men drank wine in the street and waited, swords drawn, for Mountfort to arrive home (Luttrell 2: 637). When the night-watch approached them to enquire why their swords were unsheathed, Mohun gave this answer: “I am a Peer of *England*, touch me if you dare” (The Tryal of Charles Lord Mohun 16). Mountfort eventually appeared and was greeted by Mohun and Hill: while Mohun pretended to clasp Mountfort in a drunken embrace, Hill stabbed him. Mountfort died from his wounds the following day and Hill immediately fled to France; Mohun was arrested, but then acquitted of murder by 69 votes for him, versus fourteen against him, with “one peer remarking of the dead man that the fellow was only an actor, and all actors were rogues” (qtd. Macaulay 391).

Although this case shares structural similarities with the duel of literary imagination—in which men of youth, wealth, and notoriety have a violent reencounter over the attentions of a beautiful young woman, after which one dies, one flees abroad, and one is acquitted of manslaughter—the sordid details eclipsed the fantasy. Here the ‘audience’ sympathy is not with the gallant duellist but with the murdered actor, while the lack of formal duelling etiquette—no challenge, no seconds, no fair fight—emphasise the differences between duelling and street violence. Mountfort may have been “only an actor,” but he was a popular stage hero. As such, unlike the duel between Buckingham and Shrewsbury, the murder of Mountfort did not excite romantic imagination. The affair is noted dispassionately in the journals of John Evelyn (Diary 319) and Narcissus Luttrell (2: 637), neither of whom offer any information on the public’s opinion or their own personal response, although Luttrell did follow the case against Mohun over the following year—again, in his usual disinterested style. The trial proceedings were published in 1693, in a volume that lacks any introductory preamble to the case or moral commentary: the readership demanded facts rather than narrative.

If Evelyn, Luttrell, and the publication of the proceedings are our sources, then, public interest was fixed upon Mohun’s trial rather than the sordid details of Mountfort’s murder, or (in spite of the actor’s popularity) articulating expressions of grief for his untimely death. As such, the affair plays out as a black comedy at the expense of Mountfort’s life, in which Mohun rightfully uses his sword without any thought for the effects it may have on those around him, on the grounds that it is his aristocratic birth-right. After the incident, an attempt to intercede on his behalf with William III was met with the response that “‘twas a barbarous act, and that he would leave it to the law” (Luttrell 2: 638). However, Mohun’s position is ultimately vindicated through his acquittal, a narrative compounded by the attitude of his fellow peer, who dismisses the affair’s significance based on popular contempt for Mountfort’s profession. In refusing to recognise Mountfort’s murder as being of much consequence on the grounds that he was an actor, who wore the traditional derogatory labels of his social class, this peer employed a fixed notion about the particular relationship noblemen had with violent behaviour: the justification for the attack on Mountfort stretched the definition of abused honour, but due to their difference in social class, the jury could see their behaviour as explicable and hence pardonable.

Although Mohun had the support of his fellow peers, this Tory narrative was untenable by the 1690s. His social position could not justify acts of violence, and, as we shall see in Chapter Two, men of his type were satirised on the stage as violent mannequins who were more concerned with the appearance of honour than real possession of it. In these plays, in which fops boast of martial excellence but show no discernment in deciding who and why to fight and ultimately reveal their cowardice, the early Restoration social conventions of violence are collapsed. It was not that “might is right” was no longer an acceptable sentiment, for these characters frequently act as foils for those who show genuine bravery through violent activity; rather, the violent behaviour of stage fops (and by extension, the fashionable young men after whom they are patterned) comes in for critical condemnation because of their ignorance of the appropriate moment to use swords. When Buckingham wanted to use physical force against a social inferior (such as Henry Killigrew, who attacked him at Lincoln’s Inn Fields in 1667), he kicked him and took away his sword; he did not use his own sword on him (H.M.C. 7th Report 486). By contrast, Mohun responded to a confrontation from concerned night-watchmen by enthusiastically brandishing his sword at them before assisting in the murder of an actor. Both he and Hill were prepared to consider Mountfort a rival worthy of notice, and Bracegirdle a woman worth fighting over, in spite of their lower social class.

In the absence of either official or colloquial condemnation for violent behaviour, Mohun’s violent activity persisted throughout the 1690s: Luttrell writes that he had fought a duel with Lord Kennedy just two days before he helped to murder Mountfort (2: 636); he attacked the M.P. Francis Scobel in 1694, fought another duel with an officer in 1697, and eventually murdered Hill in a tavern brawl that same year. In 1699 he was acquitted of the murder of Richard Coot (another army officer) in another tavern brawl (Banks 17-18). His final duel, fought against the Duke of Hamilton in 1712, was the last page in a “catalogue of violence from which he had nevertheless always been exculpated” (18).

Since 1701, Mohun had been engaging in a long series of legal battles with Hamilton, who was also his political rival, and, frustrated by his impending financial losses—and, as Banks observes, likely infuriated by Hamilton’s recent political triumphs within the Tory administration (18)—he drunkenly issued a challenge in November, which Hamilton eventually accepted. To Mohun’s dubious credit, this challenge placed him on more equal ground than most of his previous reencounters: although Hamilton was older and had a history of illness, Mohun issued a legitimate challenge and the two men were at least both aristocrats (indeed, Hamilton greatly outranked him). The two men met in Hyde Park and they and their seconds (both army officers) fought. The fight was apparently quick and brutal: Burnet writes that the two men “fought with so violent an animosity that, *neglecting the rules of art, they seemed to run on one another, as if they tried who should kill first*” (1212). Mohun was killed almost instantly but before he died was just able to fatally stab Hamilton through the shoulder. Both men died at the scene; their seconds managed to escape with minor injuries and fled abroad, but George Maccartney, Mohun’s second, was later made into a hate-figure from the belief that he had given Hamilton his death-blow after Hamilton had already killed Mohun (Banks 18-19).

Responses to the duel were insistent on performing a cold dissection of the events and refused to entertain interpretations of its deeper social meaning. Far from expressing cultural sentiments obliquely through allegory or satire, authors pored over its finer details in ballads, elegies, biographies, newspaper articles, and even analyses of the coroner’s report. And, unlike previous responses to earlier sword-fights, it was consistently framed as a tragic event. For Tory journalists in the Examiner and the Post-Boy, the disaster was the result of a Whig plot executed by Mohun and inspired by Marlborough himself; Mohun and Maccartney were the “Two most abandon’d Wretches that ever infested this Island” (5), according to A True and Impartial Account of the Murder, an anonymous piece that expressed sentiments typical of many accounts of the affair. Both of the men responsible for Hamilton’s death were cowards, for in choosing to fight Hamilton they had selected “a Person of Five and Fifty, and very much weakened by frequent Fits of the Gout”; and in spite of this discrepancy in age and health between Mohun and Hamilton, Maccartney was still “forced to keep up his Patron’s Courage with Wine, till within very few Hours of their meeting in the field” (6). Maccartney was particularly abused in the press after Hamilton’s second accused him of stabbing Hamilton, and A True and Impartial Account analysed Hamilton’s wounds in an attempt to prove that Mohun could not have given them (8-10). An Epitaph On His Grace James Duke of Hamilton placed great significance on the fact that Maccartney was Irish, and by association untrustworthy: he fired Mohun into a “frenzy” which Hamilton’s “vig’rous Warmth” overcame until “the *Teague*” murdered him. Maccartney’s nationality and implied social rank is code for his moral character; he intrinsically has no place on the field of honour, a fact that is proven, this account implies, by his murder of Hamilton after the duel had ended.

In spite of the fact that the duel was fought over two claims to legitimate control over a piece of land, pieces written in response to the affair were less interested in investigating the relationship that violence had with real estates than in who Hamilton and Mohun *were*, as men with individual interests, opinions, and families who cared about them. For example, an anonymous biography of the two men (The Lives and Characters of James Duke Hamilton…and Charles Lord Mohun) wrote that Mohun had been “Guilty of many Wild Disorders” and “Licentious Frolicks” in youth, but had since “visibly became more Sober and reserv’d” (7). A True and Impartial Account was dismissive of Mohun, writing that “it is not decent to rake into the Ashes of his Character, any further than to observe, that…his Lordship never being easily provok’d to draw his Sword, unless heated with Wine, or prompted to it” (4). Yet another work, A Full and Exact Relation of the Duel, devotes two pages to praise Hamilton’s life and character, describing him as a “Prince of unquestionable Bravery” who is “universally lamented” (11-12). The description of Mohun’s life, on the other hand, is told in one brief, tactful, and telling sentence: “*Lord* Mohun *is also very much lamented, as being the last Male of his Family*” (13). Depicted variously as a man who had lapsed in judgment in his youth and now learnt better behaviour, or as a hapless drunk manipulated by his friends, material written that supported Mohun was less concerned with defending his character than in framing the event as a personal disagreement between two noblemen rather than a political intrigue.

The seventeenth-century social dialogue in which Hamilton and Mohun were engaged was increasingly difficult to translate into eighteenth-century parlance because the cultural power of sword use had been debased, both by its appropriation by men from other social groups, and the growing suspicion—encouraged by Addison, Steele, and others—that violent acts should be performed only as patriotic feats or in response to real attacks upon the individual and his family. If it was at all possible to save the posthumous reputation of either man, the affair had to be discussed candidly (not mired in allegory or satire), it had to be framed as a tragedy, and as much blame as possible needed to be passed onto Maccartney, an easy scapegoat. As such, all literary responses to the incident create the same essential dichotomy—in which Hamilton is figured as the victim pressured into fighting a duel in which he had no interest, Mohun the debauched youth, and Maccartney the conniving Irish lowlife—which focuses on a clash between characters rather than exploring the social reality of the duel, and thus avoids commenting upon the private sword as an ideological construct. The reluctance to engage in this subject indicates that honour-violence was a contentious issue in 1712, and that many cultural commentators were uncomfortable with it as a form of ideological expression. By performing forensic investigations to discover the true sequence of events, and by stringently maintaining that the deaths of both men were nothing other than a tragedy, works written in response to this duel cannot conceive that honour-violence could be constructed as romantic fantasy.

This same veneration of fact and reason is applied to the private sword throughout the century. When eighteenth-century authors contemplated England’s cavalier past, they preferred to draw pragmatic or commonsense conclusions, and so created their own fictions. Both Pope (66) and Horace Walpole (78-79) ignored the relationship between violence and power in the Buckingham-Shrewsbury duel, preferring to interpret the affair as a love triangle gone wrong: they literally emphasised the role Lady Shrewsbury played by placing her in disguise as a page on the battlefield and afterwards in bed with Buckingham, still wearing a shirt stained with Shrewsbury’s blood. In fact, all contemporary sources indicate that Lady Shrewsbury was in a French convent at the time the duel occurred (Burghclere 194-95). For Howard, the duel defined Buckingham as a credible political leader; for Pope and Walpole it was merely prelude to a sex scandal. And so duelling and other forms of swordplay persisted in spite of their representation as satire, tragedy, and debasement because the cultural superstructure refused to deny (and even actively encouraged) the use of violence in the name of honour. A piece of doggerel perhaps best epitomises the conflicting colloquial attitudes about violence as a means of achieving or asserting power. In 1711, a pamphlet was published in the defence of The Life and Noble Character of Richard Thornhill, Esq; Who had the misfortune to kill Sir Chalmley Deering. Included at the end are some verses from an anonymous “Parliament-man,” who writes in favour of duelling on the grounds that it was an acceptable (even laudable) method of seeing justice done, for it allowed gentlemen to exert control over their private lives and in doing so express the power innate to their social class:

*…if harden’d Insolence*

*Presumes to give a Gentleman Offence,*

*Th’offended Person, tho’ against the Laws,*

*Ought to revenge the Justness of his Cause.* (8)

The author here valorises the intent behind the duel and thus preserves a popular vein of argument that he is entitled to use violent means to assert his social authority. Judging by the continued practice of duelling throughout the eighteenth century it is likely many other men had similar thoughts, although it is impossible to know if they were so coolly conscious of them as this author. What is apparent, however, is that the Parliament-man and those who agreed with him were aware that their contentions were beginning to exist outside of mainstream social acceptability. Few eighteenth-century advocates of the duel signed their name to their work, and duels were increasingly fought in private, rather than public, spaces (Shoemaker, “The Taming of the Duel” 537). Nevertheless, judging by the failure of the 1719 Bill that attempted to ban duelling (Pittis 10-11), it is likely that many men (from a range of social groups) were unwilling to interrupt a custom that, even if they did not agree with its practice, roughly corresponded with their personal posturing about honour: men “still lived in a society dominated by aristocratic values like quality and magnanimity, values which they themselves believed and accepted” (Andrew, “The Code of Honour and Its Critics” 420). Even Burnet, the seventy-year-old Bishop of Salisbury, entered into an implicit apology for honourable violence when he was moved to describe the viciousness of the Mohun-Hamilton duel as “neglecting the rules of art”; duelling was socially disruptive, and akin to murder, but it is likely that he and others felt that lenient social attitudes towards duellists helped to foster a community of men who equated swordplay with honour, and duelling with bravery.

Theatrical Contexts

The Role of the Audience

The majority of this Introduction has been chiefly concerned with presenting the sword in its function as an instrument that real men used between 1660 and 1740 in order to bolster their claims to authority. I have done this in order to explicate the manifold ways in which the sword infiltrated the speech, dress, and modes of negotiation of aristocratic and would-be aristocratic men during the Restoration and early eighteenth century. However, I must also expand upon my earlier contention about the importance of the comic stage as a didactic source. The theatre was held throughout our period of study to be a source of fashion and social pressure, and playgoers adopted, adapted, or otherwise used the modes and mannerisms of the stage in order to fashion their own identities. In the words of Paul Goring, the “spectacle of the body on stage, performing according to innovative notions of proper theatrical expression became…a means of emblematising polite society and of showcasing modes of polite self-expression” (116). Particularly after the Collier controversy in the years following 1698, champions of the stage endeavoured to depict the theatres’ potential for reform. As early as 1687 Behn had written in her dedication to The Lucky Chance that plays “are secret Instructions to the People, in things that ‘tis impossible to insinuate into them any other Way” (sig. A2r); increasingly thereafter her fellow playwrights were anxious to emphasise the fact that the “secret Instructions” found in theatrical offerings were in fact attempts to produce “submission to the rules of the established order” (Althussur, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 6) among their audiences. For Farquhar, “[c]omedy is no more at present than *a well-fram’d Tale handsomely told, as an agreeable vehicle for Counsel or Reproof*” (Love and Business 137), while Steele felt that a play could provoke an ideological transformation in its audience, writing in April 1709 that “a good Play, acted before a well-bred Audience, must raise very proper Incitements to good Behaviour, and be the most quick and most prevailing Method of giving Young People a Turn of Sense and Breeding” (3). Throughout his journalism in the Tatler, the Spectator, the Guardian, and the Theatre, as well as in his preface to The Conscious Lovers, Steele insisted that the relationship between play and audience was entirely transactional: the playwright supplies a moral message that the playgoer, “by a right choice of proper Plays, and the utter Rejection of others” (Theatre 2), then consciously assumes for himself. By the middle of the century actors were widely acknowledged as “civilising tools” (Goring 9).

Throughout our period, comedies were consistently recognised as a form of conduct literature, a theatre that made manners and men. If tragedy offered serious-minded depictions of ruling bodies, whose attitudes and actions demanded veneration as the superlative examples of humanity, comedy typically utilised recognisably ‘real’ figures, whose foibles and fancies guided them towards the objects of worldly human desires: marriage, wealth, and social contentment, things that were achievable, provided one followed the correct set of rules. Accordingly, Dawson has argued that men like Dudley Ryder attended the theatre in order to learn the characteristics of polite behaviour as they were performed on the stage (130-31). Indeed, Carter has used his own observation that “[s]atirical accounts of fops’ daily routine usually included some reference to their regular attendance at the theatre” to argue that it was an “important arena for exhibitionism” (53), but we can equally argue from this example that the fop patronised the theatre in order to learn how to behave. Writing in 1674, Samuel Vincent claimed that the town beau “sits the Play out patiently…where if he observes any thing that is good or ingenious, he turns it into practice” (96-97). The fop’s obsession with becoming well-mannered was disastrous for moralists like Steele, as I discuss in Chapter Three.

It is also possible that the stage provided men with brief, impersonal fencing lessons: Leigh has made the interesting proposal that would-be duellists relied on depictions of sword use in novels in order to know how to conduct themselves in a duel (3). This theory cannot be proved or disproved, but the stage *was* a better tutor than the novel or conduct book, as it held far greater potential for popular appeal: it was a social occasion to flirt and mingle, to see and to be seen. And, importantly, its lessons were rarely explicated as such, but rather shown through allegory. The stage’s didactic properties thus ensured that close study of swordplay taught audiences when and why to wield swords, not just how.

\*

Theatrical Productions: What Was Seen

It is also necessary to acknowledge the actor’s use of the sword onstage, i.e. what spectators actually saw. A difficulty emerges almost immediately when we consider the fact that there is more primary material available that furnishes us with spectator responses to swordplay—ranging from Collier’s outraged attack on the stage duels that promote “false Reasoning and ill Practice” among audiences (283-84), to the variety of responses that Bevil’s rejection of the private sword in The Conscious Lovers in 1722 (Loftis 195-213)—than there are records of what private sword-use looked like on the Restoration and eighteenth-century stage. Stage directions in published playscripts are usually brief: “They draw and fight.” Nevertheless, there are enough resources available to produce a reasonably faithful, if incomplete, picture of common conventions of theatrical swordplay. We must first acknowledge that action likely slanted towards the inauthentic: Edelman writes that “a realistic swordfight would (and does) look out of place in a declamatory production behind a proscenium arch” (4), while J. L. Styan assures us that “any effect of stage illusion was impossible” (Restoration Comedy in Performance 11). While fights in heroic and tragic drama were staged as exciting battles in which justice was served—as Louis B. Wright has argued, fights helped to sensationalise early modern drama, and Elizabethan actors had striven to perform “realistic” sword-fights (156-69)—duels in comedies had the additional function of showing men how they ought (or ought not) to behave in their private lives.

Although “dramatic imperatives” directed sword-fights to occur with implausible frequency (Low 93) and with predetermined blocking, passes, and outcomes, comic characters rarely suffer serious injury from swordplay, and never death. Leicht writes that Restoration representations of reencounters are “lighthearted”; the stage “portrays the often deadly activity as just one of the many hazards and amusements that constitute fashionable life” (267). The rare occasions of bloodshed in comedy typically occur offstage, such as in Behn’s The Rover (1677), when Willmore and his friends fight a group of Spanish bravoes off the stage, and Willmore then re-enters with a bloody shirt (23): the moment of penetration is hidden from the audience. Otherwise, they are played as comic scenes—such as in Vanbrugh’s The Relapse (1697), when Lord Foppington rushes at the hero Loveless with his sword and incurs a “little prick, between the Skin and the Ribs,” before being carried out in a chair (31-33)—or as opportunities to impart a lesson to the audience. The paramount example of this occurs in Cibber’s Love Makes a Man (1700), where the fop Clodio gives the bravo Don Duart a serious injury (43), which almost kills him and instigates an ideological change in his attitude towards fighting (48). On these rare occasions, “wounds were imitated by dollops of fresh sheep’s blood, applied to the face or body by a well-soaked sponge tied inside the player’s hand or contained in a bladder against his body, to be broken by the blow” (Wilson, A Preface to Restoration Drama 15). The absence of bloodshed in the majority of comedies performed during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries suggests that playwrights were most interested in swordfights that could pique audience attention but did not distract from the main plot by wounding or killing the participants.

In terms of structure, swords could clash at almost any point in the play, although it was uncommon for them to occur in the first or the last scene. The fourth act was a very common place to locate a swordfight, particularly if it was either a formal honour duel or the only swordfight in the play. Behn’s The Rover (1677) is a typical example of this: in the abundance of swordfights that occur throughout the play that are very short on the page, Behn devotes the entirety of Act Four, Scene One to the duel between Belvile and Pedro (50-52). More decisive than the play’s other reencounters, the result of spontaneous rivalries, the fight is intended to decide whether or not Belvile has a real claim to marry Pedro’s sister Florinda. Other notable examples of plays which have Act Four fights include Etherege’s The Comical Revenge (1664) and She Wou’d If She Cou’d (1668), Davenant’s The Man’s the Master (1668), Shadwell’s The Squire of Alsatia (1691), and Cibber’s Love’s Last Shift (1697). This convention was sometimes exploited by later authors: for example, in Farquhar’s The Constant Couple (1699), Colonel Standard and Sir Harry Wildair meet to duel in Act Four, Scene One, but Wildair is uninterested in fighting—“I am a baronet, and have eight thousand pounds a year. I can dance, sing, ride, fence, understand the languages—Now I can’t conceive how running you through the body should contribute one jot more to my gentility” (33)—and convinces Standard to find satisfaction in a safer way. Similarly, Steele upturned the convention in The Conscious Lovers: “the whole was writ for the sake of the scene of the fourth act, wherein Mr. Bevil evades the quarrel with his friend” (Steele, The Conscious Lovers 5). This “quarrel” is in fact a duel: Bevil is sent a challenge by his friend Myrtle, but the scene ends with the two men making the enlightened decision *not* to duel: here, verbal negotiations deliberately replace the Act Four combat. I should make clear that the placement of the swordfight in the fourth act was not a firm rule, particularly in later comedies: notable exceptions include Cibber’s Love Makes a Man (1699; fights in II.iv and III.iii); Farquhar’s The Inconstant (1702; fights in III.i and V.ii) and The Recruiting Officer (1706; fight in III.ii). Nevertheless, the Act Four fight occurred often enough for it to be noticeable through scrutiny of the plays’ structures, and taken advantage of in later works for comic or dramatic effect.

Beyond the playtexts themselves, we can also learn something about the stage sword-fight by analysing historical record. As the actors in The Unfortunate Lovers discovered, it was not always possible to give an authentic-looking performance of swordsmanship that would satisfy an audience trained in the art of fencing. Even attempting to apply the word “authentic” to stage business leads to confusion, for theatrical records from across our period of interest imply an oddly fragmented degree of realistic detail in stage props, speech, and movement. As stage props, swords were made by master sword-cutlers—for example, in 1727 Lincoln’s Inn Fields procured weaponry from George Moody, the king’s sword-cutler (Egerton MS 2265)—but they were blunted in order to minimise the risk of genuine injury done to the actors during fights. Accidents did occur during theatrical performances, but these only very rarely: in September 1662, Theophilius Bird broke his leg fencing onstage at the Vere playhouse (LS 1: 55); at the Duke’s Theatre in November 1666, William Smith accidentally killed another actor (LS 1: 97); at Dorset Gardens in August 1673, Henry Harris stabbed Phillip Cademan in the eye with a foil (LS 1: 207); in April 1723, an actor named Redshaw was killed at Moorfields by being run through the eye (LS 2: 718). These four incidents represent the sum of all recorded injuries from theatrical sword-fighting on the London stage between 1660 and 1740, suggesting that they were carefully choreographed and successfully performed so as to cause minimal injury to the actors.

\*

Structure

This thesis moves chronologically, using case studies of representative performances and the debate surrounding sword-use at that time. This is not a teleological argument, but a documentation and explication of the shifting significance and performative value of sword use on the London stage. For this reason, revivals are as important to me as new plays: performance choices can highlight cultural shifts even more explicitly than new plots. Furthermore, in choosing the subjects of my analysis, I have given preference to plays and performances where there is some evidence for their popular esteem: my case studies are not outliers but rather some of the core works produced during the Restoration and eighteenth century, and are hence archetypes of the different modes of representation of the private sword during these years.

In Chapter One, “The Ideal of Royalist Conquest,” I argue that from the beginning of Charles II’s reign, the dominant culture used its creative outputs to formulate the sword as a decisive instrument of authority, a tool for bringing about peace and fertility after Cromwellian devastation. This was especially relevant on the comic stage: in a genre in which the domestic plots hinge upon the social prescriptions, such as enforced (or forbidden) marriages, swordplay functions as a tool through which disenfranchised men could compete against men who possessed other powerful social currencies, such as money and political connections. My case studies, Etherege’s The Comical Revenge (1664), Davenant’s The Man’s the Master (1668), Behn’s The Rover (1677), move chronologically through the Restoration and chart how the stage first championed cavalier swordplay, then defended it as dissatisfaction about Charles’s government set in, before finally returning to its former exultant illustration of an idealised masculine identity: assertive, competitive, and indomitable. By analysing forms of swordplay as active (i.e. performed through brawls, duels, and other sword-fights) or passive (i.e. swords worn as part of costume or mentioned in conversation), I argue that sword use was encoded in comedies written and performed in later Stuart reigns to affirm the attitudes of cavalier culture: sword use is the accepted and even expected behaviour of men to show that they are honourable, and thereby worthy of political leadership.

The idea that men who demonstrated excellence in their private sword-use warranted a place at the head of government was challenged in the 1690s and early 1700s, through increasing displays of sword misuse. In Chapter Two, “Inventing the Gentleman Officer—and Punishing the Fop,” I pay attention to political upheaval in Britain which problematized the Stuart aesthetic, and the wars against France between 1688 and 1713 which exacerbated traditional anti-French sentiment. The drastic change in cultural thinking from the reigns of Charles and James to the reign of William and Anne meant that the politics of violence espoused by the previous generation could no longer be maintained. The new comic hero appeared onstage, the gentleman officer, and the cavalier character was rewritten, frequently by employing the charm of the actor Robert Wilks in order to show audiences how a man could be both polite and brave. As real men of fashion like Mohun, Beau Fielding, and others used honour to justify their violent activities, their behaviour was satirised on the stage. Swords are put into the hands of variously deficient character-types, such as the Frenchified fop and foreign bravo, to puncture the easy equation of sword-use with heroics. Comic heroes, although they still fight, are less belligerent than their Restoration counterparts, and, in plays like D’Urfey’s The Marriage-Hater Matched (1692) and Baker’s Tunbridge Walks (1703), are expressly conscious of the difference between *being* brave and *seeming* brave. Cibber’s Love Makes a Man (1700) makes my final point, as a play that shows the problematic relationships that three men—a bravo, a fop, and a scholar—have with sword use. These plays do not reject sword use, but call it into question. Cibber is especially scathing about those who adopt the sword as a fashionable accessory, and both critique the assumption that merely wearing a sword makes a heroic man.

Duelling and duellists became an obsession for the domestic press in the 1710s and 1720s. In the third chapter, “Sacrifices to Good Manners,” I situate an analysis of The Conscious Lovers within the context of the anti-duelling literature produced in the first decades of the eighteenth century, particularly looking at the interest that Steele and other authors had in “unmanning” the swordsman. I focus on Steele’s presentation of a binary opposition with action versus thought and vanity versus reason. This pivotal play marks a radical departure from the ‘gay blade’ of Restoration comedies. The elevation of reason and reflection over action refigures the masculine ideal. ‘Might’ is not synonymous with power, but with bestial urges that must be domesticated to be useful.

In Chapter Four, “The Burlesque Sentiment,” my focus changes to the burlesques of the 1730s. Unlike other forms of comedy, there is no point at which burlesque drama reflected (or pretended to reflect) social mores; burlesque is defined as “*formal* parody” which “makes fun of artistic pretensions” (Trussler viii); that is, it parodies the clichés and formulas of literary forms. During our period, burlesque drama acted as a distorting mirror to reflect the stage itself; its use of swords makes it a particularly interesting case study for this thesis because it serves to show that the sword’s significance had been inverted. Rather than being a synecdoche for heroism, it was bathetic. Significantly, while swords were common on the burlesque stage, they had almost disappeared from new comic mainpieces. This suggests that the private sword was by this point more closely linked to fantasy than reality; it was no longer a signifier of elite masculinity but of quixotism. The burlesquing of cavalier-style sword use reverses its signification and teaches audiences that sword use was entirely out of place on the modern stage and in modern society.

The final chapter, “Swordswomen,” turns to Peg Woffington’s successful performance of Sir Harry Wildair in the 1740 revival of The Constant Couple. I contextualise Woffington’s interpretation of the character by first examining the stage history of The Constant Couple with particular attention paid to previous casting patterns and changes in the dialogue. I then discuss the precedent for women using swords, using both historical examples, such as Hortense Mancini’s public fencing displays during the 1670s and Charlotte Charke’s public cross-dressing in the 1730s and 1740s, and female sword use in plays, including Bellamira and The Rover. Woffington’s gender, I argue, was integral to the success of the revival, for the witty rake character’s nonchalant attitude towards violence and admiration for fashionable dress is made palatable by reassigning the part to an actress. By concluding my study at this point, I am able to show that by 1740, sword use had acquired social connotations that linked it to mid-century expectations about feminine, rather than masculine, behaviour. The sword had ceased to function as a synecdochal representation of mankind and had been rewritten as no more than an outmoded and unfashionable accessory.

The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century comic stage was privy to all kinds of sword use: formal duels of honour, spontaneous street brawls, and fops showing off their sword knots all appeared before audiences, just as they intruded upon daily life. Although the class connotations of sword use eroded during and after the Restoration, would-be swordsmen were equipped with an understanding of its social meaning and the successful play capitalised upon its audience’s knowledge of a “cultural code” (Barthes 20), using both material (costume, prop, physical form) and immaterial (speech, gait, gesture) signifiers in order to articulate meaningful utterances. Douglas has argued that “a symbol only has meaning from its relation to other symbols in a pattern” (11); from the behaviour of men who used swords during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is apparent that their attitudes were determined by their social and material environments and were not limited by individual philosophies or preferences. By analysing the decline of sword use on the comic stage and in society, we are able to determine the course of these attitudes and uncover hidden assumptions about contemporary expectations of class, gender, and honour.

Chapter One: The Ideal of Royalist Conquest, 1648-1680

I now take the *Sword* in hand, which is the third Instrument of the King…nothing concernes his honor more both at home and abroad; the *Crown* and the Scepter are but unweildy and impotent naked indefensible things without it. There’s none so simple as to think there’s meant hereby an ordinary single sword, such as ev’ry one carrieth by his side, or som imaginary thing or chymera of a sword; No, ‘tis the polemical publique sword of the whole Kingdom, ‘tis an aggregative compound sword, and ‘tis moulded of bell-metall; for ‘tis made up of all the ammunition and armes small and great, of all the military strengths both by Land and Sea, of all the Forts, Castles and tenable places within and round about the whole Ile: The Kings of England have had this sword by vertue of their royall signory from all times, the Laws have girded it to their sides, they have employed it for repelling all forren force, for revenging all forren wrongs or affronts, for quelling all intestine tumults, and for protecting the weal of the whole body politike at home.

James Howell, The Instruments of a King: or, A Short Discourse of The Sword. The Scepter. The Crowne (1648), 5

James Howell’s The Instruments of a King is a protracted defence of monarchical supremacy, in which he advances the royal sword of state as central to maintaining harmonious rule and just laws. He grants this object totemic power: it is the instrument through which the king provokes “reverence and awe,” it confers honour upon the deserving through its use in formal adoubement ceremonies, and it “shields and preserves all his peeple,” thus enabling them to live in peace (7). Throughout the work, Howell continually drifts between insisting that the sword of state is a physical object that is “moulded of bell-metall” (5) and literally used to protect the “transcendent…unforfeitable…untransferable” powers of royal authority (2), and describing it using metaphor. In the above extract, for example, the “aggregative compound” sword is also composed of all of the artillery of all the forces in Britain. This slippage illustrates how supporters of Charles I and his sons had a blurred perception of the sword, invoking it as both a physical object and as a symbolic device: the sword’s material power as an instrument of combat automatically translated it into a weapon of allegorical power. The King’s royal crown and sceptre, which symbolise a declaration of the right to rule and the authority to make laws (2-5), are “but bables” without it (1): the sword is an essential indicator of authoritative masculinity, and to wield it lawfully is to wield it well, and *vice versa*.

Reverence for the sword’s real and symbolic powers moulded royalist perceptions of the object’s cultural significance throughout the Interregnum. Supporters of the Stuart cause were particularly enticed by the notion that the parliamentarian sword was oppressive and unstable because it was not wielded legitimately—as Howell claimed, “‘tis all one to put the sword in a mad mans hand, as in the peeples” (5). The idea that the sword of state was especially volatile in the hands of the parliamentarians gave rise to the lore of what General Monck described in 1659 as the “intollerable slavery of a sword Government” (Clarke 153)—or, as the royalist clergyman John Gauden put it more dramatically the following year, “Cromwell’s Bloody Slaughter-house.” As Diane Purkiss argues, royalist depictions of Cromwell indicate that he “knows nothing of the art of peace, or even of any arts. His tyranny is signified…by an absence of *civilit*é” (144). For example, the anonymous play **The Famous Tragedie of King Charles I (1649) attacks Cromwell by maintaining that his power is “maintain’d by Strength, not Law.” As one of his supporters in the play contends, “The Sword that cut a passage to our Sphere / ‘Tis that alone must secure us there” (22).** Other works, such as the 1648 play Craftie Cromwell (4) and the 1660 monograph The English Devil (4), alluded ominously to the Sword of Damocles to illustrate the precariousness of Cromwell’s usurped power.

During and after the Civil War, royalists distinguished their own “righteous” sword-use (i.e. that which was wielded legitimately because it was done so in the service of the Stuart kings) from Cromwell’s by characterising their own swords as celebratory tools to be used to bring peaceful unity and fecundity to the nation. Howell’s king uses his so that “ev’ry one may sit quietly under his own Vine, sleep securely in his own House, and enjoy sweetly the fruits of his labours” (7): a fertile, peaceful land is one ruled by its rightful monarch. In “To Lucasta, Going to the Warres,” Richard Lovelace establishes romantic love and martial honour, the latter represented by a “sword, a horse, a shield,” as running in parallel to one another: the “chaste” union between man and woman is replaced by the “stronger” “embrace” between man and battle, his “new mistress” (3). Other representations of the sword as a symbol of union and potency were cruder: one royalist banner during the Civil Wars depicted a naked man with both a drawn sword and an erect penis, alongside the motto “*In utrumque paratus*” (“Prepared for both”; Estienne 74), a visualisation of the concept that the cavalier sword was an instrument for conquest, pleasure, and fertility. Royalists also prided themselves on their ability to recognise when a sword was *not* needed, thus proving that they possessed the “*civilit*é” that Cromwell so lacked. In “Amarantha, a Pastorall” Lovelace could envisage a renunciation of the sword stimulated by chivalric idealism: when Alexis returns from war and is allowed to join his lover in a rustic arcadia, Lovelace assures his reader that he at once “[h]is armes hung up and his Sword broke” to live thereafter as a shepherd (163). Lovelace is not here impugning the sword’s power but rather representing the delights of pastoral romance as the martial hero’s deserved reward. If the Cromwellian sword was destructive and sinister, its royalist counterpart yielded stability and (re)generation.

The royalist appraisal of their own blades and those of their enemies during the 1640s and 1650s was responsible for shaping establishment discourse about correct swordplay in the 1660s. Pre-Restoration writers like Howell and Lovelace described fertility and unity under royalist authority by invoking the sword in its function as a martial weapon of state. When their Restoration successors employed similar rhetoric to uphold the supremacy of royalist government, the swords to which they referred were used not on official battlefields, but in triumphant spectacle that celebrated the state, as “the Restoration was a social and aesthetic phenomenon as well as a political event” (McGirr 82). For example, when Charles II rode back into London in May 1660 after his exile, he was accompanied by “20, 000 horse and foot, brandishing their swords, and shouting with inexpressible joy” (Evelyn, Diary 332). These royalist swords displayed in adoration of Charles represented a unified nation rather than one subjected to the terror of parliamentarian rule. England was being won not through physical force, but with the renewal of a peaceable and legitimate government of a sword that reunited the crown and sceptre. The horse and foot who flourished their swords did so to flaunt the fact that Charles had managed to reclaim his sword of state with little bloodshed relative to the parliamentary victories of previous years, demonstrating that, unlike Cromwell’s “Slaughter-house” style of rule, the royalist sword brought a fair and festive peace to the kingdom.

Charles’s re-entry into London combined sword, spectacle, and monarchy as the touchstones of the new regime, producing something of a Bakhtinian festive spirit that celebrated costume, sexuality, and rebirth. This spirit is one of “ambivalent” carnival laughter: “it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives” (Bakhtin 11-12). We can see something of this laughter in an undated poem from Samuel Butler, “The Cavalier,” which offers the lines:

Hey for *Cavaliers*,

Hoe for *Cavaliers*,

Drink for *Cavaliers*,

Fight for *Cavaliers*… (30)

This verse is a variation on the royalist contention that their swords are enmeshed in the festivities of royalist celebration—here, however, Butler draws on this literary idea to produce a picture of a sword that is not just royalist, but of a blunt cavalier aesthetic. The lines are of interest because they are essentially an exercise in style: the cheers and promises of drink in the first three lines are designed to raise the listener’s spirits, before the final instruction to “Fight for *Cavaliers*.” Their swords are not weapons for violence—indeed, they are not even weapons to be used *against* an enemy, but rather raised *for* the cavaliers, leaving the impression that the cavalier sword represented an establishment ideal that needed to be upheld and defended. In these lines, we see the kernel of the idea that Etherege and Behn were to explicitly employ in The Comical Revenge and The Rover: that to be royalist *was* to bea cavalier.

Other works that cited the royalist sword after the Restoration boasted of its victory while ridiculing its parliamentarian counterpart, legitimising royalist rhetoric about their own swords’ power and their enemies’ swords’ weaknesses. As Dryden wrote with reference to the name of the ship that brought Charles back to England: “The *Naseby* now no longer *England*’s shame” (Astraea Redux 12): here, Dryden transforms the site of decisive parliamentarian victory into the vessel for royalist peace. Cavaliers congratulated one another that their “*Heart and Sword so long maintained the* Royal Cause” (Crouch sig. A2v), and celebrated the fact that “the King enjoyes the sword again,” as a refrain from one royalist ballad put it (“A Country Song” 248-50). They also reflected upon their enemies: Evelyn echoed Howell’s 1648 description of the “mad man” parliamentarian swordsman when he characterised Cromwellian rule as “putting the sword into the hands of furies” (“A Panegyric to Charles the Second” 4). When royalists now reflected back on the Civil Wars, it was with the satisfying knowledge that triumph had ultimately been theirs. By interpreting ‘correct’ swordplay as the exclusive property of those who were entitled to power, Charles’s supporters were able to utilise the established literature on the virtuous royalist sword in order to justify his restoration.

Charles’s ceremonial bombast upon entering London utilised the techniques that he would subsequently exploit in the theatre to dictate his vision of kingship; the stage that he re-established in the same year as his return to power he wielded as an instrument of authority as much as his sword. “Charles saw the drama as a political instrument,” writes Susan Owen (11), while Elaine McGirr has dissected the court’s efforts to produce a theatre that elevated royalist history and tastes “for propaganda and public relations” (20). Just as the royalist sword was idealistically imagined as a symbol of freedom against the terror of Cromwell’s bloody blade during the Interregnum, Restoration authors framed Charles’s institutional changes as liberties that defied the puritanical government that he had replaced. As J. Douglas Canfield has argued, plays written for and by Charles’s supporters advance the “natural right of the English aristocracy—from peers to the gentry—to rule because they are superior in intelligence (wit) and natural parts, and because they have been bred to rule” (Tricksters and Estates 1). In this argument, Charles’s royalists were the rightful inheritors of England because they were the only men capable of bringing peace and stability to the nation. Across Restoration comedy, rightful inheritance is literally won through the staging of swordplay, performed by the young heroes who fight their way across the stage to win power and fortune. Stage swordplay was only symbolic, but it falls into a category of royalist discourse that rested upon sign and gesture rather than physical force. Symbolic swordplay was demonstrated through visual media in the form of a hand-prop (on the stage; in portraiture; through displays of real swords in public venues such as in streets, parks, taverns, and among theatre audiences), as well as in verbal communications (i.e. referring to one’s sword in speech and writing).

As we have seen in the Introduction, the moral symbolism with which the royalists invested the sword became particularly important for those of Charles’s loyal supporters who had not been reimbursed for the loss of their estates after their return from Continental exile. Royalist victory, Charles’s artists and historians implied, had been contingent upon swords rather than cash: the royalist sword had endured poverty and exile yet still remained a vivid symbol of rightful government. The perpetuation of this contention had the immediate effect of teaching men to manage their own private affairs in a similar way. Seventeenth-century “subjects were placed by their difference from the imitative ideal of the aristocratic body” (King 55), and the royalist sword was duplicated in the individual swords that gentlemen and aristocrats used to assert their own honour. Indeed, Charles and his brother James were personally responsible for introducing the fashion for wearing small swords to Britain from the Continent after 1660 (Oakeshott 236). If knowing how to use a sword legitimised Charles’s claim to authority, then it should perform a similar function for other men. Accordingly, real swordplay, and particularly the duel, emerged into Restoration society as men sought to use the sword to claim recognition for their personal honour.

Both forms of private swordplay, the symbolic and the real, were performed in aid of staking a claim for an individual’s entitlement to honour and respect from other men. Because of this, symbolic swordplay should be regarded as “passive” rather than simply “aesthetic”: the public visibility that a man could expect to claim through wearing a sword had a recognised social value. We can describe both types of private swordplay during the early years of the Restoration as representing an informal social authority—”informal,” because the state did not acknowledge private swordplay as a legal claim to honour; “social,” because the private sword was utilised within public spaces such as streets and parks, and its use in combat was the product of social encounters; “authority,” because even in the absence of legal recognition, private swordplay could still identify a man as honourable among those who knew him. The man who wielded the private sword therefore contended that he was entitled to be recognised as a man who held legitimate power, in mimicry of the king’s use of the sword of state.

In interpreting perceptions of the private sword as a drive to establish and maintain a position of informal social authority, swordplay during the early Restoration does not differ radically from that described by Jennifer Low in her work on how the sword was used at the beginning of the seventeenth century. As she concludes: “If it [the duel] has a single element, it is its association with the conquest of others” (170). The absence of a dramatic ideological shift in sword-use between early Stuart and Restoration England is hardly alarming: many of the men who used the private sword during and after the 1660s, such as Davenant, Buckingham, and Charles himself, had also used it before and during the Civil War. As Anna Bryson has written, the Restoration duel was “a practice as it were ‘left over’ from a period in which the private settling of dispute by violence was in general legitimate” (274). By acknowledging that Restoration swordplay shared with its antecedent manifestations a common objective to dominate other men within a social arena, we argue that its later expression was not consciously radical but rather an effort to restore the private sword’s utilisation to pre-Interregnum sensibilities about royalist claims to power.

If one idea emerges from this chapter, then, it is that establishment portrayals of swordplay throughout Charles’s reign were consistently and intrinsically tied to the idea of re-establishing an arena in which upper-class masculinity was accepted as the dominant social power. Royalist rhetoric publically glorified noblemen for their martial prowess in times of war, and privately applauded them for their violent endeavours among themselves in defence of their own honour. This aesthetic was not uniformly libertine, but it did endorse a culture of misdemeanours which were treated as expressions of a romantic cavalier ethos. This is expressed most consistently in the London theatres, where audiences received instruction on how to read the sword and the men who wield it well: by repeatedly yoking successful swordplay to romantic and financial success, audiences were taught to admire cavalier swords.

*The Comical Revenge* (1664)

The Comical Revenge is a Restoration morality tale, designed to impart the political stance that Charles’s cavaliers deserve to be rewarded for their honour and bravery, while their enemies—a Restoration ‘other’ who are represented as opportunistic Cromwellian knights and parliamentarian loyalists—should be punished for their respective corruption and deviousness. The play, first performed at Lincoln’s Inn Fields in the spring of 1664, stages the normative and aspirational cavaliers against the social and political deviants by offsetting the cavaliers’ correct swordplay with the sword’s misuse by their nemeses, leading his audience to draw the conclusion that cavalier swordsmanship is the corrective to Cromwellian folly. Additionally, by offering up four heroes who are all identified as cavaliers, Etherege also implies royalist politics are also an aesthetic. Beginning with scenes that stage violence as light comedy before escalating to a decisive confrontation that dramatises the differences between the roundhead and cavalier sword, Etherege’s work exemplifies the early Restoration attitude towards expression of and entitlement to power.

We first encounter the cavalier sword in the second scene of Act One, in which Jenny (a whore’s maid) complains to the young cavalier Sir Frederick Follick about his behaviour the previous evening:

*Maid.* These were not all your Heroick actions;

Pray tell the Consequence, how you march’d

Bravely at the rere of an Army of

Link-boys; upon the sudden: how you gave

Defiance, and then wag’d a bloody war with the

Constable; and having vanquish’d that

Dreadful enemy, how you committed a general

Massacre on the glass-windows: Are not these

Most honourable atchievements, such as will be

Registred to your eternal Fame, by the most

Learn’d Historians or *Hicks*’s Hall.

*Sir Frederick.* Good sweet *Jenny* let’s come to a Treaty;

Do but hear what Articles I’le propose.

*Maid.* A Womans heart’s too tender to be an enemy

To Peace. [*They whisper.* (6)

Frollick’s misdeeds should label him as an heir to Shirley’s gamester-blade from the Introduction, who also breaks windows and assaults constables. However, he is not a villain but rather a “Lord of Misrule,” as Michael Neill puts it (125). Etherege’s employment of reportage means that the destruction caused by Frollick’s tumultuous evening on the town is already allayed by the fact that the audience does not have to observe real chaos. Furthermore, rather than damaging Frollick’s reputation, Jenny’s sarcastic account of his “Heroick actions,” “bloody war,” and “eternal Fame” serves to diminish the severity of his offences. A gang of drunken cavaliers is hardly an “Army”; shattering some windows is hardly a “Massacre”; by overstating the severity of Frollick’s nocturnal transgressions, Jenny only succeeds in demonstrating their triviality. His behaviour upsets none but the servant classes—hardly regarded as a serious voice of dissent in 1664—who immediately undermine themselves in their haste to surrender to Frollick’s flirtatious charms. Far from an antisocial menace, this scene establishes the cavalier as a seductive, gregarious model of upper-class masculinity.

Etherege transforms the light comedy of the first act into farce by the third, by placing swords into the wrong hands in a mimicry of serious rituals “for laughter’s sake” (Bakhtin 5). In the fifth scene of Act Three a duel over a gambling debt occurs between Sir Nicholas Cully (a Cromwellian knight played by James Nokes) and Palmer (a gamester played by Cave Underhill). Cully is convinced that he will be killed and wants to hasten “to the next house to make my Will, / For fear of the worst” (40). He is convinced to stay, but still tries to delay combat by “fumbling” with his clothes when the men strip to fight, for the feminine reason that he “will not rend the buttons from my Doublet for no mans pleasure” (40)—training up the audience for the fop of later decades. Eventually, he and Palmer come to an agreement: rather than fighting, Cully will pay the money he owes, and the scene ends with Cully admitting his shame: he “would not have this known for a Kingdom” (42). Physically unimposing, the Cromwellian knight is shown to be cowardly (in his fear of the fight) and vain (in his desire to preserve his clothes): his failure to utilise the sword properly demonstrates the spuriousness of his claim to power. Palmer is only a little better: although he is willing to fight, he is equally content to receive his money instead. The two men met to prove their honour; by the end of the scene, they only succeed in showing that they lack any at all.

Acts One and Three thus introduce us to swordplay as comedy, offering up the comparison between correct and incorrect swordplay. A clue to interpreting these two scenes lies in how the play was cast. Frollick was played by Henry Harris, who fraternised in the London coffee-houses with Dryden “and all the wits of the town” in 1664 (Pepys 1: 277). His public persona was one of sociability and cheer; an audience sensitive to this could connect Frollick’s over-exuberance to Harris’s convivial allure.[[1]](#footnote-1) Conversely, Nokes was best known for playing female roles at this stage of his career, such as the title role in the 1661 revival of Fletcher and Rowley’s The Maid in the Mill. Setting the two actors, and the roles they were best known for, against one another, we can see clearly that the casting helps the audience to locate themselves: the attractive Harris is the figure for emulation, rather than the feminine Nokes.

But if the first half of the play treats the sword lightly, Etherege suddenly becomes serious in the fourth scene of Act Four. Here, Cromwellian sword-use is followed immediately by its royalist remedy. The scene is set on a field and begins with five masked assassins, all still in thrall to political ideas of the Interregnum, who are hatching a plot to attack and kill the play’s hero, Colonel Bruce (played by William Smith):

*1 Man.* Let pity be a stranger to your breasts.

*2 Man.* We have been bred, you know, unacquainted with compassion.

*3 Man.* But why, Colonel, shou’d you so eagerly

Pursue his life? he has the report of

A gallant Man.

*1 Man.* He murder’d my Father.

*3 Man.* I have heard he kill’d him fairly in

The Field at *Nasby*.

*1 Man.* He kill’d him; that’s enough; and I my self

Was witness: I accus’d him to the

Protector, and subborn’d Witness

To have taken away his life by form

Of Law; but my Plot was discover’d… (55)

These thirteen lines of dialogue accomplish several things. They first remind the audience of Cromwell’s reputation for merciless butchery, by the assassins’ scorn for “pity” and “compassion.” They then evoke memories of cavalier wartime heroism: the leader of the assassins reveals that Bruce was present at the Battle of Naseby and managed to kill a parliamentarian whose death was significant enough to trigger Cromwell’s attention. Finally, Etherege shows the parliamentarians as both irrational—their leader will not recognise Bruce’s reputation for “gallantry” and is instead blinded by his own desire for revenge—and easily corrupted by bribery. When the assassins conclude their exchange by “drawing their swords” and leaving the stage to lie in ambush for Bruce, the audience by that point cannot consider these men’s weapons as anything other than instruments for executing a plan of unreserved villainy.

Once Bruce arrives with his friend Louis (played by Henry Norris), the assassins reappear and launch the attack, but are surprised by the entrance of two more cavaliers who also join the affray: Lord Beaufort (Thomas Betterton) and Sir Frederick Frollick. As Beaufort puts it, Bruce’s “blood’s too good to grace such / Villains swords” (56). These reinforcements bring victory to Bruce’s party and we last see the five assassins absconding from the cavalier swords; Bruce justifies their escape with the words, “They are not worth pursuit” (57). This battle is, we deduce, a second Naseby, in which Cromwell’s forces still outnumber the cavaliers, but this time the correct side wins—and is content to settle their victory without inflicting corporeal injuries on their enemies, rather than pursuing them for bloodthirsty vengeance as the parliamentarians had done. Once again, royalist forces are the ones who know when to use their swords and when to show clemency.

However, the union of cavaliers against men loyal to the Commonwealth does not ensure harmony in their private affairs. Before the assassins’ attack, the four cavaliers had arrived on the field in order to fight a duel among themselves, for Bruce and Beaufort are rivals for the hand of Graciana. We note that while Cully fights over the contentious cause of money, the cavaliers fight for romantic love, linking them back to the Interregnum ideal that linked the sword to tranquil union: to correctly use a sword, a man must also be sure that he is wielding it for a just cause. Bruce is initially unsure that their fight should proceed after they have defeated the assassins together—is it honourable to fight a man who has just saved one’s life?

*Bruce.* My Honour is dis-satisfi’d; I must,

My Lord, consider whether it be just

To draw my Sword against that life which gave

Mine, but e’en now, protection from the grave.

*Beaufort.* None come into the Field to weigh what’s right;

This is no place for Councel, but for Fight.

Dispatch.

*Bruce.* I am resolv’d I will not fight. (57)

But Beaufort is adamant that they must fight, and reminds Bruce of the importance of why they agreed to meet on the field, the romantic ideal of “Graciana’s eyes.” Through Betterton’s performance of the cavalier peer—drawing on his past roles as the voice of legitimate authority usurped, of Hamlet and Love and Honour’s Prince Alvaro—we are taught that honour cannot be decided through verbal negotiation: only the sword can settle conflict. Thus prompted, Bruce strips “hastily,” admitting: “My scrup’lous Honour must obey my Flame.” Unlike Cully’s terrified attempts to leave the field of honour, the cavaliers are both confident in their ability to win the fight, and assert their contentions viciously: Beaufort tells Bruce, “I hither come to shed thy blood,” while Bruce admits, “No thoughts have power streams of blood to stem” (57). They fight and “after many passes” Beaufort disarms Bruce (58). Beaufort is content to allow Bruce to live, but Bruce, in despair at losing Graciana, falls upon his sword “and is desperately wounded.” Before he does so, however, he makes a long speech, during which he asserts:

‘Tis easier to destroy then to subdue.

Our bodies may by brutish force be kill’d;

But noble Minds alone to Virtue yield. (58)

These lines summarise the royalist narrative of the sword, in which Cromwell’s “easy” violence is “brutish,” while the cavaliers abstain when they can, raising their swords in bloodless honour to celebrate Charles II’s return to power. “Noble Minds,” legitimate governments, utilise “Virtue” rather than senseless violence. And so, although the duel scene ends in tragedy, The Comical Revenge is not a manifesto against private sword use. Indeed, the fact that real duels imparted serious injuries is downplayed when we consider that the only blood spilt in this scene occurs when Bruce attempts suicide—a wound from which he later recovers and even finds new love before the final scene, providing an ending to the play that shifts it from tragedy into the classically comic. Cavalier sword-use is honourable because it invokes the royalist sword of state as a symbol of legitimate authority: to duel is to “Conquer bravely” and to show “Courage” (57). The victor’s prize of Graciana’s hand bestows an estate upon its rightful owner: once again, the “virtuous” royalist sword is the orchestrator of unity and peace.

Degeneration, 1668-1677

Despite the fact that the sword had been central to the creation of his own myth of kingship, Charles had lukewarm feelings about its use among his people, particularly when used for private combat. After pardoning Buckingham and Shrewsbury for their 1668 duel, Charles declared that thereafter the “strict Course of Law shall take Place in all such Cases” (HL 12: 6 April 1668). However, this proclamation was ultimately toothless; as Markku Peltonen notes, subsequent legislation “carefully provided satisfaction for a gentleman’s injured honour” (207). The actions that Charles took against duellists seems to have been dictated more by what was expedient at that moment rather than with a view toward sustaining a consistent policy. As such, Sir William Coventry was stripped of his offices and sent to the Tower of London for merely sending a challenge to Buckingham in 1669 (Manning 227). The formal charge was plotting the murder of a member of the Privy Council, but it is equally probable that Charles was anticipating disaster in Buckingham’s participation in another duel so soon after Shrewsbury’s death, which would force the King to either impose consequences on his favourite or repudiate his word. Conversely, the duels that Lord Mulgrave fought with a Mr. Felton in 1671 and a Captain Kirke in 1673 did not elicit punishments for any of the men involved, even though Mulgrave was injured in both of them (Wilson, Court Satires of the Restoration 269-70), while Sir Pope Danvers received a pardon for killing a William Jackman in a 1678 duel, despite the fact that a coroner’s inquest had ruled it wilful murder (Macnamara 477-78). As one frustrated anti-duelling author put it in 1680, “we must Accriminate [Charles] with absurd and incongruous contradictions in his actions” (Honours Preservation Without Blood 19): Charles treated the duellists he encountered with a capricious inconsistency.

More significantly than his erratic anti-duelling policy, however, Charles did not attempt to interfere with the sword’s use in everyday costume, but rather continued to sanction its presence on the stage and in society. He himself had a large collection of swords—in “Dressing Charles II,” Maria Hayward notes that the King received twelve new swords within the first two years of his reign—and he always wore one as part of his own personal dress (Roach 52). He also continued to implicitly endorse the theatrical sword by having comedies that performed swordplay staged at court, such as Dryden’s Marriage a la Mode (performed in November 1671), Shadwell’s Epsom Wells (performed in December 1672), and Behn’s The Rover (performed in February 1680). As such, the symbolic private sword triumphed even as Charles made efforts to control the real private sword. Struggling to balance what was probably a genuine belief in the centrality of sword-use to upper-class identity with a desire to have his noblemen pledge their obedience to him by submitting to his ordinances, Charles periodically made public statements against the private sword while continuing to authorise its veneration among men of honour.

Although Charles’s conflicting sentiments towards the sword go some way towards explaining why sword-use persisted throughout his reign, they also reflected wider social feelings of discomfort from the end of the 1660s. As the gleam of Charles’s early rule began to tarnish, parliamentarian swords were remembered more fondly, particularly in the immediate aftermath of England’s humiliating June 1667 defeat by the Dutch in the Medway. Pepys claimed to speak for informed society when he wrote the following month that “every body do now-a-days reflect upon Oliver, and commend him, what brave things he did, and made all the neighbour princes fear him,” while Charles’s strategy of cultivating “love and prayers and good liking of his people…hath lost all so soon” (3: 187). Cromwell’s swords were beginning to be remembered, not as blades in a “Bloody Slaughter-house,” but as professional tools that he used to carve out a reputation in Europe. Concurrently, critics began to take notice of courtiers’ incessant libertine displays, and to worry about the sword’s widespread use in resolving minor private quarrels (Peltonen 201-06). Pepys, whose conviction that he could present himself as “brave” by simply wearing a sword we saw in the Introduction, also became more openly cynical at the end of the decade, condemning the 1668 duel between Buckingham and Shrewsbury when he heard of it (3: 351), and lamenting that duelling had become “kind of emblem of the general complexion of this whole kingdom at present” (3: 206). Although the sword of state remained fixed as the instrument through which legitimate authority was maintained, the private sword began to be censured as a branch of rakehell behaviour that they linked to drunken debaucheries. As one anonymous author lamented in 1669, “what rubricks the nefariousness of our Times, is to be drawn from drunkenness, which draws more swords and blood of our Nation in one year, than any one battail spends in the same compass of time” (An Address To the Hopeful Young Gentry of England 45). Cavalier swordplay was under attack.

We see the tension about the private sword crystallised in the ideological clash between the real swordplay of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, and the symbolic swordplay that he invoked in his poetry. Rochester was one of Charles’s courtiers who had been too young to fight in the royalist army but nevertheless projected himself into the historical picture of the sword-wielding cavalier throughout his life. After he had won victories for Charles against the Dutch in 1665 and 1666, he was directly implicated in at least eight sword-fights in the last eleven years of his life. He was second to the Duke of Richmond in the Spring of 1669; a principal against the Earl of Mulgrave in November 1669; exchanged passes with Dick Newport at Drury Lane in January 1672; was a principal against Viscount Dunbar in March 1673; seconded Henry Savile in December 1674; helped to initiate a brawl at Epsom in 1676; was accused of stabbing a tavern cook to death in 1677; and finally seconded the Earl of Arran in March 1680. Of the duels, the King usually prevented them before they occurred, although Rochester himself famously called off his 1660 duel against Mulgrave on the field of honour, claiming to be “weak with a certain distemper” (Mulgrave 9). Rochester’s biographer Jeremy Lamb concludes that his “readiness to take part in duels in later years shows a desperation on his part to recover his reputation,” but these efforts were in vain because he had “lost much of his hunger for pride” (146-47). He later adds that the failure of any of these fights to proceed “if not his fault, was somehow still reflective of his half-hearted approach to the whole question of honour” (161).

Lamb’s argument is derived from two lines from Rochester’s “Satyr against Reason and Mankind” (written 1675/6), which read: “Merely for safety, after fame we thirst, / For all men would be cowards if they durst” (100). This, Lamb contends, is evidence that Rochester was entirely cynical about the nature of power conferred upon the duellist—that even the very concept of honour was a highly dubious notion (Lamb 146-61). Reading these lines as an attack on upper-class honour, with their allusions to “safety,” “fame,” and “cowards,” Rochester seems to be undermining honour’s popular manifestation (i.e. through the private sword), satirising the ill-guided “reason” that drives men to act to establish or preserve it in themselves. Yet at the same time—and what Lamb does not truly acknowledge—this cynical posture is dependent upon Rochester’s accommodation of the idea that private swordplay was an inescapable routine in upper-class society. The poem is an invective against “mankind” as much as it is against “reason,” and in these two lines Rochester attacks the weaknesses innate to human nature. Consequently, many of his poems from throughout the 1670s can be read as repeating a cycle of “thirst” for reputation earned through the private sword, followed by a contempt for the social framework that inculcated these desires. We see this in his poem “To the Postboy” from 1676, structured as a brief dialogue between lord and servant, in which he expresses a resentful contrition about his role in the Epsom affray, which had resulted in the death of his friend Captain Downs; among a litany of debaucheries, he reflects: “Frighted at my own mischiefs I have fled, / And bravely left my life’s defender dead” (131). But even contempt for his actions, and cognizance of the enormity of their consequences, cannot revolutionise his manners, and so he continues to seek the “readiest way to hell” (131).

Rochester’s professed ambivalence about private swordplay is elsewhere transformed into grotesque horror and disgust. No longer an instrument of unity and fertility, he fashions the royalist sword into an object that has degenerated and putrefied. For example, one poem from the early 1670s, “The Imperfect Enjoyment,” compares his premature ejaculation to a “rude, roaring hector in the streets / Who scuffles, cuffs, and justles all he meets, / But if his King or country claim his aid, / The rakehell villain shrinks and hides his head” (39). “To the Postboy” describes his syphilitic ulcers as “heroic scars,” before referring to his failure to fight (130-31). Across these poems, Rochester’s sword symbolises interrupted union (impotence or premature ejaculation) and rot (sexual disease): the royalist sword, which had been brandished with the assurance of joyful conquest, had become corrupt and decayed.

Despite the cynicism he expresses in these poems, Rochester’s persistent employment of the private sword in his personal life throughout the 1670s suggests that at the very least he felt obliged to use it as many men did during the Restoration: to establish and maintain a position of social authority, just as royalist rhetoric had taught them to during the 1640s and 1650s. Certainly his engagements at Drury Lane in 1672 and at Epsom in 1676 suggest that Rochester was willing to draw his sword when sufficiently roused, even if his formal duels rarely came off, and he was known as “ye Court Hector” (Barker-Benfield 47). If we take Mulgrave at his word (something that is admittedly difficult to do, given the long rivalry between the two men), “no man had a better reputation for courage” in the late 1660s than Rochester (9). At the same time, the degraded sword that he depicts in his poetry indicates his disillusion about its function as a weapon of honour. These sentiments are not radical; Rochester is consistent in his assumption that sword-use is central to masculine identity, and does not attempt to formulate alternative concepts of expressing honour. Indeed, the “brave admiral” in the 1675 poem “The Disabled Debauchee” is intoxicated when he watches a new battle from a distance and finds that “each bold action to his mind renews / His present glory and his past delight” (116). They do, however, indicate that he was conscious that his blade was not the instrument of utopian stability that royalists had contended—and if the royalist blade, the symbol of their victory over Cromwellian politics, was corrupt, then the fundamental precepts of royalist power were undermined.

Rochester expressed his scepticism about private swordplay in poetry across the 1670s, a decade flanked by two periods of intense anti-duelling criticism in the late 1660s and throughout the 1680s (Peltonen 208-09). His refusal to fully accept the traditional royalist rhetoric about the sword combined with his unwillingness to commit to reform meant that he probably held a more nuanced position than many men at this time; however, his poetry manages to isolate the discontent felt by both champions and critics of the private sword. However, neither camp was passive in their assertions. While opponents of swordplay expounded their beliefs in sermons and pamphlets, its sympathisers hit out through the stage in a move that echoes Lawrence Stone’s description of the aristocratic response to attacks on their powers and privileges during the first half of the seventeenth century: “In face of the mounting criticism…the nobility were foolish enough to attempt to mount a counter-attack, the most visible feature of which was an overweening arrogance symptomatic of their basic insecurity” (Crisis of the Aristocracy 750). Playwrights loyal to the royalist cause continued to deploy the private sword onstage during these years, with renewed vigour for the rhetoric that lay at its core. By looking at two plays from the beginning and end of this period, Davenant’s The Man’s the Master (1668) and Behn’s The Rover (1677), we can see the different approaches that establishment authors took to depict the sword—and, by implication, right to rule. Although the two plays are different in setting, subject-matter, and even the sword’s appearance onstage, they have this in common: for all their efforts to depict sword-use as a diverting aspect of everyday life, these scenes of light comedy were in fact strictly utilising the sword’s stage presence as an instrument for asserting the legitimacy of Charles’s government.

\*

*The Man’s the Master* (1668)

The Man’s the Master, an intrigue comedy set in Spain, is an exercise in illustrating how London social politics could be employed in situations beyond familiar scenes of court and town. The result is a drawn-out defence of the ideology of private swordplay, which Davenant identifies as an upper-class, rather than specifically English, rehearsal of honour. And so, behind the comic exchanges about the prudence of men who fight duels that dominate Acts Four and Five—”Suppose that with a Sahagun, or with a Rapier of *Toledo*, I were pierc’d like a Cullender, or suppose that with a *Syrian* Scemiter, or a Backsword-blade of *Houndslough*, I were minc’d into a Py; how would my Brother, or my Sister be the better for it?” asks the comic servant (57)—lies a stern critique of attacks on the private sword, which firmly excludes men who are unable to comprehend its value from the upper classes. First performed by the Duke’s Company at Lincoln’s Inn Fields in March 1668, barely two months after gossip about Buckingham and Shrewsbury’s duel had had a chance to subside, the play undermines critics of the private sword by placing their complaints in the mouth of a comic servant. The plot concerns a gentleman, Don John (played by the urbane Harris), who switches places with his servant, Jodelet (played by Underhill), who is then presented as the legitimate suitor to the beautiful heiress Isabelle. Unfortunately, Jodelet makes a terrible gentleman: Davenant mines comedy from the clash between upper-class values and servant logic as Jodelet’s manners offend everyone around him and demonstrate his inability to comprehend aristocratic reasoning.

Unlike The Comical Revenge, The Man’s the Master prefers to employ the sword in dialogue rather than through stage-combat, a choice that means that means that Davenant can afford to be more explicit in his didacticism than Etherege by literally explaining (rather than simply showing) the value of the private sword. The two plays also differ in how they represent lower-class engagement with the sword: Etherege’s shows the servant-girl Jenny briefly outraged and then seduced by Frollick’s social discordances; The Man’s the Master uses the image of the uncomprehending servant as the basis for its final two acts. This denouement is initiated in the fourth scene of Act Four, when Isabelle’s father, Don Ferdinand, brings the disguised Jodelet a challenge to duel from Don Lewis, a man who mistakenly believes that Don John murdered his brother. But while Etherege’s sexualised maid is easily seduced by cavalier ardour, Davenant’s valet is harder to satisfy. Misunderstanding Ferdinand’s veiled allusions to “meeting in the field,” Jodelet interprets the challenge using unsophisticated servant logic that undermines aristocratic notions of honour:

*Jodelet.* Sir, if, without resistance, I am contented to go peaceably into the Field, why should any man who meets me there be angry? especially when, perhaps, his being pleas’d would at that time better agree with my disposition?

*Ferdinand.* I know not what you mean.

*Jodelet.* I am sorry for’t: I held you to be an old Gentleman of a long understanding: but to speak plainly, why should a man take the pains to walk a mile to meet another who is of a different humour?

*Ferdinand.* Have you been bred to ask that question?

*Jodelet.* *Don Ferdinand*, you seem sometimes not very wise. I doubt that in your youth y’have been inclin’d to this foolish way of invitations to the Field, and have been hurt in the head. I say your reason at present is not exceeding sound.

*Ferdinand.* Come, Courage *Don John*; and first let me know, why you inferr I am not wise?

*Jodelet.* Because you come to tell me of a quarrel which I knew not, nor did not perhaps desire to know. (55)

It is important to understand the tone of this scene. Cave Underhill typically played fools like the Clown in the 1663 revival of Twelfth Night and Trinculo in the 1667 Dryden/Davenant adaptation of The Tempest; we have also already briefly seen him in the guise of Palmer, the sharp-witted gamester in The Comical Revenge who misuses the sword to exploit Sir Nicholas Cully. If Jodelet is of this same lineage, his dialogue is likely spoken not with naïveté but rather insolence; his responses to Ferdinand are spoken with the knowledge that the older man is referring to a duel, and a desire to evade it. But although Jodelet might be witty rather than stupid, his servant rationale does not make him *right*, and he certainly does not succeed in toppling aristocratic *virt*ù. Although the arguments he makes against duelling foreshadow some early eighteenth-century diatribes against the practice, in The Man’s the Master Davenant’s objective is to demonstrate lower-class incompatibility with aristocratic modes of conduct, thus rendering the social classes distinct from one another. As such, although Jodelet’s ideas about honour do not appreciate the royalist sword, he does not represent a genuine challenge to the authority that it represents. His prolonged attack on the sword is tolerated because, unlike Cully in The Comical Revenge (who is contemptible because he sincerely believes that his knighthood from Cromwell places him next to the cavaliers), Jodelet’s sentiments are not politically objectionable. Unlike Cully, Jodelet is *aware* that he is only playing the part of the gentleman. Rank has been briefly suspended, and with the knowledge that Jodelet’s failure to read the royalist sword correctly will not permanently change its interpretation by the upper-classes, the servant can safely verbalise his incomprehension because he is only a temporary gentleman.

In contrast to Jodelet, Ferdinand valorises the precepts of honour and reputation that stimulate the duel, much like Etherege’s cavaliers, even as he acknowledges that it will generate personal tragedy. His demand, “Have you been bred to ask that question?” rehearses the royalist contention that upper-class behaviours and understandings are the result of birth and breeding. Just as Howell had insisted in 1648 that “‘tis all one to put the sword in a mad mans hand, as in the peeples” (5), Davenant repeats a similar sentiment through Jodelet: one cannot furnish a servant with a sword and expect him to use it correctly. This is reaffirmed when Jodelet, still disguised as Don John, meets Don Lewis (possibly played by Philip Cademan).[[2]](#footnote-2) Describing himself as a “Man without Manhood” (65)—thus inferring that the true cavaliers *do* possess “manhood” and thereby linking their swords to sexual union once again—Jodelet attempts to delay the duel by filibustering. Like Etherege’s cavaliers, however, Lewis prefers combat to conversation, asking him: “Do you take me for a Talker when I come to be in action?” (65) Frustrated with the conversation, he eventually turns on Jodelet:

*Don Lewis.* I have attended to see your sword out; and Honour taught me that patience: but now I’ll trust you with no more time— *He draws.*

*Jodelet.* Bless me! what a long spit he draws? I have been a raw fellow at fighting, and now am like to be roasted. (65-66)

The servant thoroughly established as belonging in the kitchen rather than on the field of honour, the play ends with Don John and Jodelet switching back to their true identities: correct hierarchy is restored and honour is vindicated. The aristocratic characters do not succeed in convincing Jodelet of the expediency of the duel, but that is not what the play sets out to do. Jodelet cannot be convinced; his frames of reference are minced pies and spits for roasting meat rather than expensive rapiers. Davenant does not want to convert his audience but rather to lay out a claim for the intrinsic nobility of the private sword, and to explain that an ability to understand why men fight—even if it apparently goes against base reason—is what distinguishes masters from men.

*The Rover* (1677)

“The banished cavaliers! a roving blade!” Behn’s epilogue to The Rover opens with a laudatory line designed to prey upon her audience’s sense of imagination and wonderment. With these words she reshapes history in order to style Charles and his followers not as pitiful outlaws but as defiant heroes in control of their own destinies: they have not been “banished” but rather “rove” in search of adventure. Demanding order and autonomy in a world that Stuart enemies demark as intrinsically violent and chaotic, Behn reclaims control for the cavaliers through their swords once more in a “victory over fear”: no longer subjected to the laws and histories of their enemies, her heroes experience “simultaneous uncrowning and renewal, a gay transformation” (Bakhtin 91), for to be banished, to have physically departed from the violent state is to possess ultimate freedom. And so, while Etherege subtly and Davenant explicitly used the private sword to justify royalist authority over dissenting Others, Behn largely discards this defensive framework and instead revives and augments the theatricality of the cavalier sword, posing it as the consummate celebration of royalist authority.

The Rover was first produced for the Duke’s Theatre in Dorset Gardens in 1677, the year before disaster struck Charles’s reign in the form of the Popish Plot. Maureen Duffy has described the play as a “rallying for the faithful when the first romance of the King’s return had worn thin and the country was again divided into factions” (145). Similarly, Jane Spencer has described it as a play that “flattered the Restoration court with a nostalgic image of its cavalier past” (188). Mining a pre-Restoration play, Thomas Killigrew’s Thomoso: or the Wanderer (1654), to elicit exact royalist sentiments about the sword, Behn transforms her friend and patron Rochester, the cynical, decaying cavalier, into Willmore, the brave and virile adventurer, who stakes his claim for legitimate wealth, power, and love through his sword. Elin Diamond summarises the key arguments for doubling Willmore with both Rochester and Charles II: the similarity of his name to “Wilmot”; the casting of Rochester’s mistress Elizabeth Barry in the part of Hellena; the attention paid to Willmore’s buff leather, the same costume worn by both Charles and James as they escaped England in 1651 (528). To this we can add the fact that Willmore captains a ship in parallel to Rochester’s own experience fighting bravely against the Dutch at sea in the mid-1660s. And like the cavaliers, Rochester had also known exile (both voluntary and involuntary) and reprieve: from his decision to go to sea in 1665 until his forced removal from court in 1676, the earl was caught up in a cycle of perpetual banishment and amnesty.

Set in Naples during the years of cavalier exile, the play’s action unfolds during carnival time, legitimising the freedoms and roleplay, but also inviting restoration of order. The play’s high plot traces the efforts of the English Colonel Belvile (played by Betterton) to marry the Spanish Florinda (Mary Saunderson), against the wishes of her brother Pedro (Matthew Medbourne), which reaches a climactic formal duel of honour at the beginning of Act Four. Conversely, the low plot—that is, the love-triangle between the English Willmore (Smith), the Spanish Hellena (Barry), and the Italian Angellica Bianca (Anne Quin), and the farcical social and sexual blunders of Blunt (Underhill)—demonstrate a wider range of practical and representational swordplay than in the high plot: swords are used in brawls, to draw lots, and to make fashion and status statements. In both plots, swords are also alluded to in conversation as a way of arguing in favour of a man’s bravery and daring, and thus intrinsic worth. Despite the differences in tone, the play’s plots—much like life at Charles’s court—are connected by overlapping factions, and these factions’ attempts at forging new social connections in order to strengthen their own positions. The cavaliers themselves form a one faction, in which Blunt, the country squire, is ridiculed for his attempts to remake himself as a cavalier. Pedro’s attempts to marry his sister to Antonio represents an attempt to further strengthen his own ties of friendship to the Italian nobility.

We last saw Smith playing the Colonel Bruce, the reluctant semi-tragic duellist in The Comical Revenge. As Willmore in The Rover, however, he no longer needs convincing to draw his sword. The play stands out among other Restoration comedies by reason of the sheer number of fights that it offers its audience—seven, including one formal honour duel—which enables us to delve more deeply into the portrayal of combat than many comedies might allow. In the play, the sword is a regular tool of a gentleman’s private life, to which Behn continually returns as a device through which she can stake a claim for the cavalier’s dominant position within society. The play’s emphasis on sword use invites the audience to consider its tactical importance in determining matters of state. Men who are good swordsmen—like the English heroes Belville and Willmore—are physically strong (and therefore good warriors), highly-trained (and therefore educated), tactical (and therefore intelligent), and young (and therefore virile). Hellena and Florinda define honour as a gallant—and explicitly combative—response to female distress, and it is the very source of masculine appeal. Wealth and connections, as Hellena makes abundantly clear in the play’s opening scene, lack the romantic (and sexual) pull of a young cavalier’s eyes, heart, and honour (The Rover 3): the play teaches us that it is ultimately, swordsmanship, not blood or even political loyalties, that determines alliances and unites the factions.

High Comedy: “I can boast of nothing but a Sword”

Far from the “roving” adventurer of Willmore’s self-fashioning, Behn introduces audiences to a man who is “Banisht his Countrey, despis’d at home, and pitty’d abroad” (4). Lacking both financial and political capital, Willmore and his friends have few of the traditional preserves of the ruling class to present to the marriage marketplace. What can he offer Florinda, Belvile wonders, compared to “the Vice-Roy’s Son…a Man of Fortune, a *Spaniard*, and her Brother’s Friend” (7)? But by the play’s final scene he is able to produce an answer, and responds to Pedro’s similar question—”[W]as’t not enough you’d gain *Florinda*…but your lewd Friends too must be inricht with the spoyls of a Noble Family?” (81-82)—with the justification: “[M]y Friends are Gentlemen, and ought to be Esteem’d for their Misfortunes, since they have the Glory to Suffer with the best of men and kings” (82). The cavaliers’ loyalty to Charles II means that although they are cash-poor, they are heirs to the “estate of England,” and hence worthy matches for Pedro’s female relatives (Canfield, Tricksters and Estates 43). By re-fashioning his banishment as “Glory” and demanding “Esteem” rather than “pitty,” Belvile identifies himself as a man who is self-sufficient.

Belvile’s reasoning does not fully convince Pedro—”What’s this to the maintenance of her Birth and Quality?”—but Willmore silences him on this subject with his own response: “I can boast of nothing but a Sword which does me right where e’re I come, and has defended a worse Cause than a Womans” (Behn 82). Willmore’s final statement directly echoes an assertion that he makes upon his first meeting Hellena: “I have been bred in dangers, and wear a Sword, that has been employ’d in a worse Cause, than for a handsome kind Woman” (11). The sword might be the cavalier’s only jointure, but it is also the only one that he needs; it is a sentiment that evokes the similar lines from Davenant’s The Unfortunate Lovers, “Our swords are all our wealth, take those away / And we are left to poverty and shame” (22). In Behn’s play, however, the cavalier is not making a plea for clemency but a boast of his own abilities. Willmore’s poverty is something of a boon to his manly reputation in a play that consistently equates the possession of fabulous wealth with men who lack integrity, such as the grotesque Don Vincento, who “may increase [Florinda’s] Baggs, but not her Family” (The Rover 3) or the foolish Blunt who refused to fight in the Civil War and now acts as the cavaliers’ “Banker” (14). Willmore’s reliance on his sword specifically sets him apart from these characters and demonstrates that all of his own successes are attributable to martial conquest rather than money—in Restoration comprehension, he has asserted genuine rights to power and honour. When the bawd Moretta recognises that Willmore and his battered naval “buff” “have been acquainted ever since he was beaten at *Worcester*” (25), this is a cue for the audience to realise that his loyalty to the crown extends beyond his own comfort or fashion sense. Just as Hellena’s true quality is hidden beneath her gypsy disguise, Willmore’s mangled uniform that masks his worth simultaneously reveals it.

The repetition of the cavalier’s sword having defended a “worse Cause than a Womans” frames the play and centralises swordplay as the key to the promise of the return of right rule and the reestablishment of “natural” hierarchy from the carnivalesque inversion of the 1650s. It also effectively ensures that the cavaliers’ sword-use can be regarded as an extension of their serious and genuine belief in the idea that aristocratic values needed to be preserved. When Pedro asks to know how Willmore intends to support Hellena in the final scene, Willmore’s assertion of his experience on the battlefield reframes the question: suddenly the conversation is about lauding masculine bravery at war over financial security at home; the fact that he “can boast of nothing but a sword” is a point of pride. Violence performed in the defence of romantic love is the driving force behind the play’s high plot. Belvile’s schemes to marry Florinda may be fairly typical examples of Restoration comic trickery—Behn offers us an elopement in the dead of night and a duel fought in the guise of another man—but his worth is as incumbent upon his political fortitude as his ingenuity in dodging Pedro’s scrutiny, a political fortitude that has been proven by his experience on the battlefield, which shows his loyalty to Charles II.

A “woman’s cause” might be dwarfed by memories of the Civil War, but this martial context informs the direction of the play’s high plot of romantic love. On a very literal level, Belvile’s professional and personal lives are constantly confused throughout the play, through the other characters’ perpetual use of his military title “colonel,” often ahead of or even in place of his own name. For Hellena he is “the fine English Colonel…*Don* *Belvill*” (1); Pedro wishes to be esteemed equally with “the English Coll. *Belvile*” (3); the first scene with the cavaliers begins with the question, “what the Devil ails the Coll.” (6); Willmore first receives him with the greeting, “dear *Belvile*! noble colonel!” (8). Belville is defined not by land or family but by his status as a cavalier, as a man of honour. His bravery, gallantry, and experience of war are the first things we learn of him, for he is introduced to us first by Florinda in her description of his bravery at the Siege of Pamplona:

I’le not deny I value *Belvile*, when I was exposed to such dangers as the Licenc’d Lust of common Souldiers threatned, when Rage and Conquest flew through the city—then *Belvile* this Criminal for my sake, through himself into all dangers to save my Honour and will you not allow him my esteem? (3)

This appraisal of Belvile’s character and actions repeats itself within the play: when Willmore drunkenly attacks Florinda in Act Three, Scene Three, Belvile arrives to prevent the rape, drawing his sword to re-enact his role at Pamplona in the private sphere (43). When navigating his private life, Belvile’s behaviours are patterned after those he learnt on the battlefield, and culminate in a duel against Pedro. This duel comes about in a backwards way: earlier in the play Pedro challenges Antonio, for he feels that Antonio has not shown Florinda her due respect by paying his attentions to Angellica. However, after Antonio is injured in a street brawl with Willmore, who he mistakes for Belvile, Belvile is brought to Antonio’s apartments in the first scene of Act Four, where Antonio admires Belvile’s prowess with the sword, in spite of the fact that the two men had fought one another: “[‘T]was with so much Courage you offended, / I cannot see you punisht” (47). Antonio then informs Belvile that he prevented his arrest on the condition that Belvile fight Pedro on his behalf: Belvile exclaims: “I’l do’t—I’l fly to do it!” (48) Belvile’s enthusiasm for the fight affirms his bravery and gallantry—that he might refuse to participate never occurs to either him or Antonio. Looking back the royalist rhetoric of the 1640s and 1650s, it is the natural response for a gentleman of his class and experience.

When Belvile meets with Pedro to fight in the following scene, it is one of confusion: Pedro believes that he is fighting Antonio, while Belvile believes that he is fighting a rival for Florinda’s heart. The comic staple of disguise and the absence of bloodshed ensure that the scene is not tragic; nevertheless, the tone is one of aggressive fatalism, spoken in verse to accentuate the seriousness of their combat, and there is nothing particularly comic about it. It is a scene of tragicomedy or romance rather than pure comedy. The reencounter begins by establishing that there is a good “reason” for duelling: Belvile is confused that Pedro refers to the courtesan Angellica rather than the noblewoman Florinda as the object of contention:

*Pedro.* You’ve the advantage of me in *Angellica*.

*Belvile.* *Angellica!* or I’ve mistook my Man! or else *Antonio*.

—Can he forget his Interest in *Florinda*,

And fight for common Prize? [*aside.*

*Pedro.* Come, Sir, you know our terms—

*Belvile.* By Heav’n, not I. [*aside.*

—No talking, I am ready, Sir. (50)

The two men are then interrupted by Florinda, who begs Belvile not to proceed with the duel. Her concern for her brother’s safety underscores the danger to the fight, but it is also an implicit reminder of her femininity: duelling is an essentially masculine activity, and Pedro must forcibly remove her from the battlefield before the fight can proceed. Eventually, Belvile disarms Pedro, and his dialogue with Florinda reaches a fatalistic peak. The fight is over, and only now are the men able to pay attention to feminine pity; at Florinda’s word, Belvile drops his sword and professes obedience to all that she commands:

*Florinda.* Who are you, Sir, that dares deny my Prayers?

*Belvile.* Thy prayers destroy him, if thou wouldst preserve him,

Do that thou’rt unacquainted with and Curse him.

[*She holds him.*

*Florinda.* By all you hold most dear, by her you love,

I do conjure you, touch him not.

*Belvile.* By her I love!

See—I obey—and at your feet resign

The useless Trophy of my Victory.

[*Lays his Sword at her feet.*

*Pedro.* *Antonio*, you’ve done enough to prove you love *Florinda*.

*Belvile.* Love *Florinda*!

Does Heav’n love Adoration! Pray’r! or Penitence! Love her! here, Sir,—your Sword again.

[*Snatches up the Sword and gives it to him.*

Upon this truth I’l fight my life away. (50)

This section of the scene then apparently draws to a happy conclusion for all parties: Pedro is reconciled with “Antonio,” while Belvile and Florinda are poised to be married immediately:

*Pedro.* No, you’ve redeemed my Sister, and my Friendship!

[*He gives him* Flor*. and pulls off his Vizard to shew his Face and puts it on again.*

*Belvile.* *Don Pedro!*

*Pedro.* Can you resign your Claims to other Women,

And give your heart intirely to *Florinda*?

*Belvile.* Intire! as dying Saints Confessions are

I can delay my happiness no longer.

This Minute! let me make *Florinda* mine. (50-51)

Pedro’s acquiescence to this demand would seem to conclude this part of the plot, although the scene thereafter devolves into low comedy with the entrance of Willmore, who accidentally reveals that Pedro has fought Belvile and not Antonio. Pedro, furious, refuses to allow the marriage to go ahead. Although Belvile afterwards struggles to reclaim the scene for high drama—telling Pedro: “You know I ought to Claim a Victors right. / But you’re the Brother to Divine *Florinda*, / To whom I’m such a Slave” (52)—the cavaliers leave the scene on a note of low comedy, when he runs at Willmore in anger.

Although this fight has all the markers of being a “woman’s cause”—Florinda is, after all, the contested ‘property’—it is apparent that feminine involvement is minimal and that the duel is really a male play for power. Unwanted by Florinda, who vainly begs the two men to stop, the duel responds to masculine needs and interests: Pedro’s claim that “Antonio” has “redeemed my Sister, and my Friendship” indicates that the actual purpose of the fight is to redress the balance of stable masculine relationships. Florinda, the “Prize,” represents the spoils of war, but possession of her is not the main objective. She is not welcome on the battleground, and her appeal for armistice goes unheard until after the fight is over—her feminine “kindness” interferes rather than placates. Her response to the duel is typical of a comic heroine from the Restoration period—she looks back to Graciana in The Comical Revenge, who mourns: “With what success can this strange Combate end? / Honour with Honour fights for Victory, / And Love is made the common enemy” (59). Well-behaved heroines do not orchestrate duels between two love rivals. The bloodthirsty young ladies who do become excited by the prospect of swords drawn over them are empty-headed fools—like Narcissa in Cibber’s Love’s Last Shift (1696), who ecstatically registers that “Love’s a pleasant thing, when the Men come to the cutting of throats once: O Gad! I’d fain have them fight a little…Methinks *Narcissa* wou’d sound so great in an expiring Lover’s mouth…” (19-20).

In this tradition, a female presence on the private battlefield indicates that there is a biological distinction in the sexes’ respective appropriate attitudes towards the sword. The presence of Florinda, the good heroine who fears what consequences the rule of the sword might bring about (even as she respects the masculine control that perpetuates it), means that the sword has dual meaning within this scene. When Belvile presents Pedro’s sword to Florinda, it is “[t]he useless Trophy of my Victory”; by relinquishing it he provides her briefly with a totemic power. However, when his attention is drawn back to Pedro, he “Snatches” it back up and declares, “I’l fight my life away,” in order to prove that he loves Florinda. Going from a “useless” object to the means through which he must defend his life and reputation within the space of a few lines, the sword is both nothing and everything. This division at first seems simply gendered depending upon who has Belvile’s attention—on a very literal level, a woman effectively has no use for a sword, whereas a man without a sword is “naked”—but in reality it is an acknowledgment of the sword’s status as both vital tool and allegorical motif during the Restoration.

To read the first two scenes of Act Four is to realise the extent to which honourable violence was encoded in the social interactions of upper-class men; the sword itself was the tool through which they resolved their differences. Pedro is driven to challenge Antonio to a duel when he shows an interest in Angellica, but equally amenable to resuming their friendship after “Antonio” has proven that he loves Florinda in a duel. Similarly, Florinda’s plea to Belvile that he spare Pedro’s life has no force until after the fight has already been won. Behn insists on this form of violence as being exclusively the rightful part of upper-class life: Belvile is confused by Pedro’s reference to Angellica—duels are fought over noblewomen, not prostitutes—and after he has defeated Pedro, he then uses the feudalistic reasoning that he has “won” Florinda, and that she is now his “property.” Pedro seems to concur, for he “gives” Florinda to him.

Despite the anger that the two men express both verbally and physically, we should not use this scene to underplay the importance of personal relationships to the duel. As we have seen in the Introduction duels were generally not fought randomly but rather over a relationship gone sour. In the aftermath of the fight, Pedro’s line, “[Y]ou’ve redeemed my Sister, and my Friendship!” places these two developments on a level of equal importance. Their fight was an essential part of re-establishing their friendship, because it afforded them near-proximity and physical contact. In the process, the sword becomes an instrument of power, through which the two men can assert and validate their claims to honour.

Low Comedy: “Tilting for the Wench”

The Rover balances heroic status with comic interludes that reinforce the sword’s status and the cavalier’s value. These scenes affectionately burlesque the romance of the high drama through the use of farce and clowning, including drunkenness, prostitutes, and fools. These scenes are not limited to moments of violence; instead, the sword is an instrument for fashion, communication, and an extension of the phallus. What becomes apparent in this reconceptualization is that sword use was entrenched within an upper class masculine identity, through which it drew its meaning. Willmore represents the raucous, Rochesterian side of the cavalier myth; a man capable of expressing deep romantic sentiment but is principally identified with his debauches. Like Belvile, Willmore is a soldier, but he is linked to the court rather than the battlefield; where Belvile has spent his exile fighting as a foreign mercenary, Willmore has spent his in the company of Charles II. This is its own brand of loyalty, of course—this narrative posits that the cavaliers at Charles’s side were as necessary for upholding the cavalier myth as those who enacted chivalric scenarios at war abroad—but the storylines are correspondingly less concerned with showcasing ludic battles. Sword use, when it occurs in scenes connected to Willmore and Blunt, is spontaneous.

The different values espoused in the high and low plot are shown in the difference between the fights associated with Florinda (the noblewoman) and Angellica (the courtesan). Whereas a duel is fought over Florinda, the fights over Angellica are only street brawls—three of them in the first scene of Act Two. We first see Pedro against Antonio: both men have expressed an interest in Angellica, but when Pedro realises that Antonio is his rival, he becomes incensed at his infidelity to Florinda:

*Antonio.* Prithee begone, I shall grow angry else.

And then thou art not safe.

*Pedro.* My Anger may be fatal, Sir, as yours;

And he that enters here may prove this truth.

*Antonio.* I know not who thou art, but I am sure thou’rt worth my killing, for aiming at *Angellica*. [*They draw and fight.*

*Enter* Willmore *and* Blunt*, who draw and part ‘em.*

*Blunt.* ‘Sheartlikens, here’s fine doings.

*Willmore.* Tilting for the Wench I’m sure—nay gad, if that wou’d win her, I have as good a Sword as the best of ye. (21-22)

Angellica is the audience for Willmore’s swordplay—her approval teaches audiences how to view Willmore and to regard his success as poetic justice. Willmore’s dexterity with his sword—his masterful use of it in multiple registers—marks him as the ideal hero, worthy of Hellena’s love and fortune.

After Willmore has parted them, Pedro and Antonio agree to meet early the following morning to duel over Florinda. Willmore then admires Angellica’s picture and decides to take it down to keep himself. This angers Antonio, who demands that Willmore return the picture to the wall—

*Antonio.* Or leave your life behind.

*Willmore.* Death! you lye—I will do neither.

*Angellica.* Hold, I command you, if for me you Fight.

*They Fight, the Spaniards joyn with* Ant.*,* Blunt *laying on like mad. They leave off and bow.* (23)

Although Angellica is furious with Willmore’s “insolence,” he flatters her beauty and she allows him to keep the portrait, much to Antonio’s rage:

*Antonio.* You shall first ask me leave, and this.

[*Fight again as before.*

*Enter* Belv. *and* Fred. *who joyn with the English.*

*Angellica.* Hold! will you ruine me!—*Beskey*—*Sebestian*—part ‘em.— [*The Spaniards are beaten off.* (23)

Willmore re-enters, flush from his victory and covered in blood, and is then invited to enter Angellica’s house to explain himself. The scene, which had begun on a note of sexual anticipation over the prospect of purchasing Angellica’s company, thus ends on a note of sexual promise when Willmore enters it with no money to offer her.

These three fights, fought in quick succession over the course of the scene, are very different to the formal eloquence of the duel. Where the duel had a clearly-defined endpoint with the defeat of Pedro, these series of brawls are fragmented and overlap: despite the fact that the second fight ends with the men bowing to one another, the third fight seems to simply continue where the previous one had ended. There is also no obvious victor, a fact that does not concern any of the characters. Antonio and Pedro are satisfied to delay their fight in favour of a decisive duel the following day, while Willmore manages to fight the Spaniards offstage but still incurs a bloody wound in the process. Although this scene has many of the hallmarks of the duel—Willmore gives Antonio the lie; Angellica’s horrified response to the second and third brawl anticipates Florinda’s later objections to the duel, as does the men’s decision to ignore her protests—these brawls are distinct from the formal type of violence because they occur spontaneously. Even the language is coarser: when Antonio makes it explicit that he and Pedro will be fighting over Angellica (rather than Florinda), his speech slips from verse into prose, while Willmore both debases and legitimises the brawl by using the faux-chivalric language, “Tilting for the Wench.”

This notion of “Tilting for the Wench,” invoking a joust rather than a duel, and a courtesan rather than noblewoman, sums up a great deal of the tone of the low plot, and also connects Willmore back to Rochester. This is an old-fashioned turn of phrase, recalling a medieval joust more than a seventeenth-century street fight. Willmore’s remark, “nay gad, if that wou’d win her, I have as good a Sword as the best of ye,” once again returns to the cavalier confidence in the power that his sword gives him. Nor is this self-assurance misguided: Willmore is indeed the victor in combat and manages to attract Angellica’s sexual interest—something that Pedro and Antonio, who both pay the necessary thousand crowns for a month of her time, are unable to do. Willmore’s sense of the importance of public displaying his sword and his ability to use it well is directly connected to the ideology of seventeenth-century power structures: his sword’s deployment is a signifier of his entitlement to honour and power, and he is hereafter rewarded with sex with Angellica, and marriage with Hellena.

Willmore’s casual attitude toward violence is a constant throughout the play: he is drawn into two further unplanned fights beyond the three that occur in this scene. In Act Three, Scene Three, Willmore drunkenly attempts to force himself on Florinda but is interrupted by Belvile and Pedro; Behn gives the stage direction: “They Fight, and Ped. Party beats ‘em out” (43). In the following scene, Willmore (still drunk) mistakes Antonio for “a picaroon going to board my frigate” and draws upon him; the two men fight and Antonio falls (45), which sets up Antonio’s reason for needing to have Belvile fight the duel against Pedro for him. If the duel is about settling masculine affairs, then the brawl is the reason why these affairs are disrupted in the first place. The public setting is a backdrop for male posturing: this is not Florinda’s lover and brother settling a serious affair of honour, but rather a multitude of men heatedly contending for the sexual rights over a courtesan.

The sword as an aesthetic device is represented through Blunt. Although he is a wartime coward who “had more Grace than to forfeit my Estate by Cavaliering” (8), he willingly draws his sword for a street brawl and fights alongside the cavaliers—although the comment that he is “laying on like mad” suggests that his fighting style is characterised by sheer enthusiasm rather than practiced skill (23). Blunt is perhaps more keen to have notice taken of his bravery than he is to fight for a proper cause: his hypocrisy is such that although he scorns the royalist values that the cavaliers accept as common sense, he is still anxious to appear as one of their number. When the whore Lucetta makes off with his belongings, there is an element of what Canfield might call “natural justice” at work. Blunt’s subsequent instinct is to find new clothes that correspond to a masculinity that is styled after the cavaliers; not wishing to be “naked,” he puts on “an old rusty Sword, and Buff Belt”—a costume that makes him look like a “Rope-dancer, or Fencing-master” (63-64). His name suggests both a coarse nature and an underused sword; indeed, when he does strap his sword on, it is old and rusty from disuse.

As well as operating as both weapons in street brawls and fashionable accoutrements, swords could function as more mundane everyday items—such as a makeshift door-knocker when Antonio visits Angellica’s house and raps on her door with “the Hilt of’s Sword” (45). But the sword achieves its most unique representation in Restoration comedy in the first scene of Act Five, where Belvile, Willmore, Blunt, and Pedro use their swords to “draw cuts” to decide who is entitled to “rights” over Florinda (70).

*Willmore*. Damn propriety—then we’l draw cuts,— [Belv. *goes to whisper* Will.] nay no Corruption good Col, come the longest Sword carries her—

*They all draw forgetting* Don Pedro *being as a Spaniard had the longest.*

*Blunt*. I yield up my int’rest to you Gentlemen, and that will be, revenge sufficient.

*Willmore*. The Wench is yours— [*to* Ped.] Pox of his *Tolledo*, I had forgot that. (70)

Although Florinda (the high comedy heroine) is the body under question in this scene, rather than Angellica or Hellena (the low comedy heroines), the tone is bawdy rather than serious, for Pedro and Blunt believe Florinda to be a prostitute. This low tone is due to the heavy presence of Willmore and Blunt, and it again shows how moments of sword-use are entirely dominated by masculine needs, while little attention is paid to women. Given that this sequence represents a group of men deciding which one of them is entitled to have sex with Florinda by virtue of which one of them has the longest sword, it is tempting to simply read this as a blue joke on Behn’s part. But Pedro’s victory sees him (unknowingly) win his sister back from the danger of sexual violation: this is a victory for paternalistic authority over female relatives.

This interpretation is bolstered by our understanding of the sword’s function in this scene. Nowhere else in The Rover do the cavaliers’ swords fail them, but nowhere else do they rely on chance rather than their skill. To draw cuts is to gamble; the cavaliers’ fortunes are founded upon their divine right to conquer with the sword. And so, despite their loss to Pedro here, this is not a comment upon the cavaliers’ swordsmanship. The earlier scenes of violence—the duel, won by Belvile, and the brawls, won by Willmore—have acted as a pre-emptive corrective to this scene: although the cavaliers might have bad luck, their conquests are won through predicated righteousness.

Conclusion

There emerges from The Rover a sense in which the legacy of pre-Civil War expectations of aristocratic will to power continued into the Restoration. The value and emphasis that drama and society placed upon physical displays of honour through swordplay was understandable, considering both the court’s interest in continental fashions and the necessity of demonstrating loyalty to the values of the restored crown. In the case of the sword, I have suggested that its use was both practical and symbolic: loyalty could not be quantified, but its spirit could be performed through swordplay, which provoked a sense of class loyalty and exclusivity among those who practiced it. Producing a narrative of contemporary representations of cavalier honour, The Rover imagines the politics of aristocratic manliness which must be framed through ritual and conquest, and draws a connection between masculine contestations of social and political power, and expressions of sexual desire, ending on a couplet that combines the terror of war with the prospect of married life: “Lead on, no other Dangers they can dread, / Who Venture in the Storms o’th’ Marriage Bed” (83). By giving her cavaliers the power of the sword, Behn rights the wrongs of the Civil Wars; the topsy-turvey world of the carnival is corrected and ‘natural’ order restored.

Charles, for his part, continued to demonstrate inconsistent policy regarding sword-use. In 1680 he made another proclamation against duelling; two years later, however, he authorised a duel to proceed over “abusive words” spoken against the Duchess of Norfolk by the seneschal of Mons (Manning 228). Swords continued to dominate his conception of how power was wielded. But at this point in his reign, the cavalier presumption that their swords gave them the right to rule was being increasingly challenged (Peltonen 201). We have already seen in the Introduction that “blade” was becoming an increasingly contested term—a precursor to the changing status of the sword at the end of the century. As the soldier’s social role transformed from the defence of kingly authority to the defence of an entire nation, as “blades” became faceless, the lines between sword violence performed for private and public reasons became progressively more brittle as cultural commentators began to query the notion that ability to wield a sword should bequeath power to an individual.

Restoration stage comedies upheld the royalist contention that the royalists, the legitimate rulers, conquered states joyfully through their swords. Although this notion appeared relatively organically in its earlier forms, later efforts were more unapologetic in their attempts to justify it. When Rochester died at the age of thirty-three, Bishop Gilbert Burnet was at his bedside to provide spiritual relief and proclaim final restoration to the Christian faith, which he would later make public in a series of recollections of the Earl’s life and death. The new narrative of excess repented of (rather than revelled in, and eventually constrained) captured the emerging public mood. Audiences were ready to re-evaluate the “gay blade” trope and were open to a more nuanced equation of swordplay and heroism. As the next chapter suggests, the cultural climate that William III helped to create entirely revised expectations of aristocratic violence, which fragmented the ritual and shifted its main concern from conquest to maintaining stability, collapsing and reconstructing the precepts behind sword use as a transmitter of an elite male culture.

Chapter Two: Inventing the Gentleman Officer—and Punishing the Fop, 1688-1715

Great Revolutions Crown this Wondrous Year,

And Scenes are strangely turn’d, abroad, and here;

A Year mark’d out by Fate’s Supream Decree

To set the *Theatre*, and *Europe* free…

(Farquhar, The Prologue Spoken by Mr. Wilks, At the opening of the Theatre in the Hay-Market, October the 15th, 1706, ll. 1-4)

Through these fatalistic lines of anticipation for both British theatre and Europe at liberty, Farquhar’s 1706 prologue for Dryden’s tragicomedy The Spanish Fryar (1681) predicts that such freedoms will be won through dramatic change. Flanking the word “Revolutions” with the word “Crown,” Farquhar thus launches Dryden’s play with a tacit reminder of Britain’s own revolution of eighteen years previously, inviting the conclusion that this had been a moment of righteous glory for the country and furthermore legitimising the ongoing unrest in Europe and the theatres. Farquhar’s verse fundamentally alters the play’s framework and capsizes its meaning. Whereas the original, pre-Revolution prologue had introduced The Spanish Fryar by way of a critique of capricious playgoers, the stage’s “fickle Sovereigns” (Dryden sig. A4r, l. 6), the audience is now furnished with an argument *favouring* the liberties that cultural and political change beget. Under Farquhar’s new terms, instability is not a sign of fickleness but rather indicative of progress, and to pursue freedom is to accept the necessity of upheaval.

The Spanish Fryar was a problematic play to perform after 1688, as David Roberts has discussed (151-152). Its high plot is driven by the dilemma that Torrismond (played by both Thomas Betterton and Barton Booth in 1706) faces when he discovers that his new wife, Queen Leonora (Elizabeth Barry), had usurped the throne of Aragon from his father. This tale of a wrongly-exiled king who is returned to power at the end of the play reads like a Jacobite fairy tale. Although Dryden interspersed this with a mildly anti-Catholic comic plotline about an acquisitive friar (William Bullock), even this was tempered by the lesson that a papal costume could mask a cavalier heart: in Act Three, Scene Two, the young soldier Lorenzo (Robert Wilks) disguises himself as a priest but is exposed when, as a stage direction tells us, “*his Habit flies open, and discovers a Sword*” (56). To stage this play in the reign of Anne, who occupied a throne still held by many to belong to her Catholic half-brother, had the potential to be a political disaster. Indeed, during a 1690 performance of the play, the audience’s hostile reaction to the sentiments espoused onstage had caused Anne’s sister Mary to “hold up her fan” over her face in embarrassment (Dalrymple sig. K4r). In order to produce this play that rehearsed Jacobite myth, it was necessary to change how it was staged. No longer could it exhibit the heroic quandary between love and honour; instead, it had to become a bold defence of the disorder that prefaced the legitimacy and freedoms that (Farquhar claims) characterised Anne’s rule.

The new prologue’s preoccupation with righteous revolution attempts to soften the blow of the play’s ending. Delivered by Wilks in his first performance at the Queen’s Theatre in October 1706, it twins London’s theatrical politics with a European theatre of war.[[3]](#footnote-3) The “Damn’d Dragoons of Song and Dance” at Drury Lane (l. 15) are paralleled with the French Louis XIV, both of whom “boldly push’d, to make the World their Prey” (l. 8)—attempting to monopolise British theatre and Europe respectively. Both Queen’s and Britain, Farquhar predicts, will alike “Combate” the autocratic endeavours of their rivals (l. 17) and thereby deliver freedom to the London and the continental stages. But to do this, Wilks contends, is impossible without the governance of Anne and the collaboration of the London audience. As he concludes:

A Female Reign gives Liberty to Man,

And Tyrants vanish at the Name of *ANNE*:

Our State, and Stage must Liberty pursue,

When rul’d by *ANNA*, and Maintain’d by you. ll. 23-26

Farquhar’s prologue teaches the audience several things. First, opera and dance is foreign “Fa, la, la” (l. 19) froth, unlike the British “Sense” (l. 17) found in the legitimate drama performed at Queen’s: the British heroic identity is therefore contingent upon a particular national mode of self-expression. Secondly, although the assumption that liberty will spring from “Action” (l. 22) and will be thereafter “Maintain’d” is thematically similar to the cavalier contention that their swords were able to unify and pacify the nation, there is a clear difference in intent. Farquhar’s relentless allusions to the “Tyrants” in France/Drury Lane are signposts for the audience to read the martial efforts of Britain/Queen’s as a defence of liberty rather than an unprovoked attack on legitimate government/theatre. This liberty must be maintained—kept and paid for—by the general public through *their* maintenance of the Queen’s Theatre. An affirmation of the glory of female rule, the new prologue attempts to colour the play so that the final scene, which celebrates the marriage between Torrismond and Leonora (now exonerated after the Act Five discovery that Torrismond’s father is alive) no longer enacts successful Jacobite restoration but rather hails a contested crown pacified through happy union.

More significantly, however, the new prologue confers dramatic focus onto Wilks from the very start of the evening’s entertainment: the audience is seduced by his witty attack on the Drury Lane theatre, which then leads into his performance as Lorenzo, the captivating young soldier whose adventures dominate the low plot. That the heroic Wilks (rather than the comic Bullock or the tragic Barry) was given the occasional prologue filled with allusions to war and revolution indicates that it was his role that Queen’s wanted to promote. Indeed, Wilks’s performance seems to have struck the audience’s fancy. Although The Spanish Fryar was not a remarkable hit—it was performed on four non-consecutive nights in the 1706-07 season—as its Jacobite undertones were perhaps too obvious to be as easily glossed over as Farquhar had hoped, the new prologue was printed on its own, separately from the rest of the play, which suggests that its reception in October 1706 was positive enough to expect profit from its publication. As such, we can draw two conclusions from this evening’s performance: first, that performances of Restoration plays were still considered viable on the post-1688 stage, even if they had to be given new contexts; secondly, Wilks’s theatrical persona was such that he could be spotlighted as an inspirational patriotic figure even off the stage/on the page.

The attention that Wilks received in his role as the soldier Lorenzo is typical of many of his parts at the beginning of the eighteenth century. During its first decade he repeatedly starred as elegant army officers and was celebrated by critics and audiences for his portrayal of genteel martial grace (Highfill et. al. 119-22): as Steele wrote in a May 1709 edition of the Tatler, Wilks’s characters modelled the “irresistible force of proper action” (19). His appeal lay in his ability to portray a version of masculinity that was both polite and sensual without being foppish: John Downes described Wilks as “Proper and Comely in Person, of Graceful Port, Mein and Air; void of Affectation; his Elevations and Cadencies just, Congruent to Elocution…The Emission of his Words free, easy and natural; Attracting attentive silence in his Audience” (51). These qualities won him both admirers and imitators: “Persons of the First Rank and Taste, of both Sexes” would befriend him, “without any Stain to their Honour or Understanding: And indeed, Mr. *Wilks* was so genteelly elegant in his Fancy of Dress for the Stage, that he was often followed in his Fashion” (Chetwood, General History of the Stage 235-36). Wilks defined himself against his constant co-star, Colley Cibber. Wilks was the ideal to Cibber’s deviant: Wilks was Othello to Cibber’s Iago, Dorimant to his Fopling Flutter, and Loveless to Cibber’s Foppington, and decades of stage partnership established Wilks’s characters as preferable. As Steele wrote in June 1710: “Wilks has a singular talent in representing the graces of nature: Cibber the deformity in the affectation of them” (Tatler 182).

Off-stage, Wilks balanced a reputation for bravery with one of refined ability and education. In the early 1690s he had served as a soldier in the army but functioned as a clerk (Chetwood 231); he was associated with two duels but neither appears to have been fought. In 1699 John Dunton reported that some years previously Dublin had been flooded with rumours that Wilks had been killed in a duel, which were only disproven after he arrived in the city in full health (341-42). This is less interesting as a report about Wilks’s celebrity reputation as a fighter than as an anecdote that anticipates the relationship that many of his stage characters had with violence: the narrative hook lies in the glamorous celebrity caper of death and resuscitation, rather than the decisive battle for honour. A second story of violent posturing comes from Cibber: in 1703 Wilks’s theatrical rival George Powell challenged him to a duel, “but the next Morning he was cool enough, to let it end, in favour of *Wilks*” (Apology 138). As in Dunton’s report, this is not a relation of Wilks’s prowess as a swordsman; it is a story in which Wilks prospers *in spite* of the outcome of a fight. As he was to demonstrate to a generation of playgoers, it was the circumstances surrounding a duel, rather than the implied moral outcome of a duel itself, from which we are to draw our conclusions. His experience in the more learned ranks of the Williamite army assisted in establishing his reputation as an articulate, cultured gentleman, but his early career reencounters portrayed him as both intrepid and lucky. Wilks blended the gentleman with the soldier; moreover, he taught his fans that reason and eloquent self-expression trumped brute strength.

The shift in tone that brought Wilks’s style of refined masculinity to public attention as an ideal model for male behaviour was the end result of the 1688 Revolution, which had produced a society that regarded itself as superior to its predecessor, “pitting Stuart licentiousness against the moral uprightness of ‘true’ Protestants” (Gollapudi 111). Although William III disliked the theatre and other popular entertainments (Claydon 93), and was uninterested in using them as vessels for communicating his manner of rule in the style of Charles II, the reformations that he instigated in other state apparatuses—particularly the army—bled into the popular comedies produced during his reign. These plays presented gentleman officers who wielded their swords with more forethought than their Restoration predecessors and are explicitly identified with their profession in the playtext’s *dramatis personae*.[[4]](#footnote-4) These characters were defined against both the rake hero and the fop, both of whom were excessive and selfish characters. When these new heroes appeared in Augustan comic drama, their duty was to communicate to their audiences the changes in how gentlemen were expected to behave: whereas the rake had fought as an expression of his private passions, the gentleman officer fought for king and country, and his honour was found in collective victory as well as personal bravery.

This chapter focuses on the comedies that were produced between 1688 and 1715, works that complicate the Restoration assumption that to wield a sword well is to wield it lawfully. In these later plays, “correct” swordplay is as reliant on situation as technical ability. The sword is no longer a royalist/upper-class birth-right, as comedies in Charles’s reign had contended, but rather idealised as an English instrument of war. These plays teach that correct swordplay was something that men learned rather than were born knowing, an idea that originated from apologists for the post-Revolution monarchs, who argued that Englishness pivoted upon behaviour and belief rather than blood lineage (McGirr 134). Using a sword for the right reasons—previously only a minor consideration—became the core issue at hand. When we find early eighteenth-century theatrical productions trafficking in nostalgia for the cavalier, he is rewritten as a jovial advocate for the royalist (not Jacobite) cause, or updated in the guise of the gentleman officer. The use of conversation rather than combat to settle conflicts is not derided or seen as unmanly. Instead, these new soldiers are valued for their ability to stay their weapons: swordplay after the Revolution looked to defend liberty rather than to assert a claim for rightful power.

The Gentleman Officer: Imagining a Masculine Ideal

In order to embark upon an analysis of the gentleman officer whose merits were grounded in eloquent self-expression rather than strength, it is first necessary to provide some historical context for his increased prominence on the stage. The moral revolution that took place during the 1690s, in which William III sought to suppress the vice and debauchery that he felt had polluted court life (and by extension, society) since the Restoration, was a movement as artistic as it was political or religious. If the most ardent Williamites attempted to make a “virtue out of his lack of interest in the arts” (Potter 184) and endeavoured to “mend manners through law” (Claydon 161), establishment poets and playwrights did their best to conform to William’s moral ideals by using their art to emphasise the importance of national unity against an enemy Other—often represented as pitting good (Whig) Protestants as the victors against bad (French or Jacobite) Catholics (161-62). As Elaine McGirr has argued, William’s writers played out these hostilities as the triumph of “strength of character (rather than physique)” (136), teaching the public that—as Steele subtitled his 1701 treatise on patriotic morality The Christian Hero—”no principles but those of religion are sufficient to make a great man.”

Among these celebrations of a moral, rather than martial, revolution, the sword (so central a symbol to Charles II’s own mythmaking in the middle of the century) naturally drew critical interest. Steele, for example, was careful to compliment the warrior who “never drew his **Sword** but with a design to serve his Country” (The Christian Hero 15). Accordingly, the sword still had totemic powers in its post-Restoration incarnation, but, when wielded correctly, it symbolised freedom rather than conquest. William’s practical changes, such as insisting upon the standardisation of military uniforms and the moderation of soldiers’ behaviour at home and abroad, were aimed at dispelling the adoration of the Restoration’s pleasure-seeking, individualistic warrior and replacing him with a dedicated guardian of civic responsibility (Childs 4-33). If the cavalier pacified and unified England through his sword, the gentleman officer performed a similar role in Europe—but unlike the cavalier, he avoided using his sword outside of the martial battlefield. When the soldier now drew his sword, it was therefore not in triumph but to liberate, not to assert an entitlement to rightful power but to defend it: “‘Tis Britain’s care to watch o’er Europe’s fate, And hold in balance each contending state, / To threaten bold presumptuous kings with war” (10), wrote Addison in his 1704 verse “A Letter from Italy,” a flattering reflection on Whig politics. Other authors explicitly construed British martial endeavours as a defence of Britishness: Farquhar was particularly fond of comparing the British army to historical underdogs: in the prologue at Queen’s in 1706, Britons are “Poor Distressed *Camisars*” (l. 13) who must learn to stand their ground; in a Pindaric on General Schomberg, the leader is Moses, “with Sword, instead of Wand” (Love and Business 2).

The gentleman officer was thus developed onstage and in literature as a figure whose primary care was for his nation, against the twin social threats of rakish and foppish narcissism. This new, peace-loving officer’s behaviour was further refined and regulated through conduct and instructional books, such as The Compleat Gentleman Soldier (1702), The Art of War (1707), and The Soldier’s Monitor (1715). In these works, the gentleman officer was idealised as a man of “Virtue, Equity, Sobriety, Generosity, and Gallantry” (Slush 44), who was a “Good Christian, Discreet and Prudent in his Words, Temperate in Eating and Drinking, and in short a true Man of Honour” (The Art of War 2), and, far from the rake’s solipsism, felt for his brother officers “in the strongest manner, the force of the confederating Charm” (Shaftesbury 112). These works seek to emphasise both the officer’s temperance—unlike the Restoration hero, who revels in excesses and instant gratification, who had been proud to draw a parallel between his sword and his penis on a wartime banner (Estienne 74)—and his patriarchal care for those around him. “Bravery,” an essential heroic quality won only through combat, by Restoration understanding, is now hinted at only obliquely, in “gallantry” (a term that equally implies chivalric courtesy) and “man of honour,” which is redefined as a descriptor for men who demonstrate consideration and self-restraint. Both terms are used to idealistically suggest that the soldier’s work was rooted in the protection of others: he is fighting for a community (and the community’s ideals), rather than for himself. Shaftesbury goes further, abandoning the idea of bravery altogether and putting his full emphasis on the importance of “confederacy.” His ideal soldier is primarily one who achieves victory by colluding with his fellow officers, to whom he shows staunch loyalty: soldiering is a brotherhood rather than a quest for autonomy. Furthermore, the fact that Marlborough and Sir Cloudesley Shovell had risen from the lower ranks of the gentry to establish themselves as powerful figures in war, politics, and society taught culturemakers to value a more meritocratic army. As Josiah Woodward wrote in The Soldier’s Monitor: “the meanest Person that truly answers the Character of a *Good Soldier*, deserves the Name of a *Gentleman*” (7): behaviour, rather than bloodline, was now the essential qualifier for attaining power, conduct authors taught.

In these contentions lie early hints towards a theme that existed during the reigns of William and Anne, and accelerated in the years preceding George I’s assent to the throne: the idea that Englishness could be learned, and that character was more important than genealogy (McGirr 133-35). Self-expression was a vital component of this. In Steele’s journalism, for example, his officers are excellent dinner companions: in an August 1711 edition of the Spectator he wrote that men who could relate scintillating tales of warfare, “derive their Courage and Magnanimity from Thought and Reflection,” and were not over-polished in their speech: “There is a certain irregular Way in their Narrations or Discourse, which has something more warm and pleasing than we meet with among Men who are used to adjust and methodize their Thoughts” (152). But as this latter point hints, to possess too polished a vocabulary could be a contentious issue, and those who incorporated foreign idioms into everyday speech and writing fell afoul of patriotic pens. The following month, Addison warned in the same newspaper that

Our Warriors are very industrious in propagating the *French* Language, at the same time that they are so gloriously successful in beating down their Power. Our Soldiers are Men of strong Heads for Action, and perform such Feats as they are not able to express. They want Words in their own Tongue to tell us what it is they Atchieve, and therefore send us over Accounts of their Performances in a Jargon of Phrases, which they learn among their Conquered Enemies. They ought however to be provided with Secretaries, and assisted by our Foreign Ministers, to tell their Story for them in plain *English*, and to let us know in our Mother-Tongue what it is our brave Country-Men are about. (165)

It was no longer enough to hope that British soldiers surpass all others on the battlefield; they must now also learn how to express themselves correctly. “Plain English” is a crucial element of polite communication, and faced with the prospect of soldiers’ missives filled with Frenchified “Jargon,” Addison would rather silence them and replace them with men who had been trained to write rather than fight. For other authors, what was most troublesome about an army of educated men was not their foreign pretensions but their capacity to formally express their discontent. Farquhar poked fun at the growing literacy among soldiers in The Recruiting Officer (1706): “a Fellow that can write, can draw Petitions,” Captain Plume worries (3). But this view was not shared by all authors. Steele’s officers have a natural, unrefined mode of narration that is “warm and pleasing,” while John Pomphret was proud to claim in 1700: “Whate’er assistance I had power to bring / T’oblige my country, or to serve my king, / Whene’er they called, I’d readily afford, / My tongue, my pen, my counsel, or my sword” (16). Later on, Defoe, in his preface to Memoirs of a Cavalier (1720), insists that his character excels at expressing himself on the page as much as in combat. Writing of the descriptions of the famous Civil War battles, Defoe claims: “He that has read the best Accounts…will be surprized to see the Particulars of the Story so preserved, so nicely, and so agreeably describ’d; and will confess…that the Story is inimitably told” (sig. A3r).

Addison’s grumblings about the infiltration of foreign words into the British language were, of course, one aspect of his distaste for the Francophilia that he felt was endemic within polite society. As Michèle Cohen has shown, the man who embraced French culture was the behaviour pleasure-seeking fop (44-61); the true British hero pondered foreign lands with an eye to enforcing an imperial British identity overseas and monitoring European freedom. And so, while the Restoration rake had fought private duels and was then forced into exile on the Continent, the gentleman officer was peaceable at home and unsheathed his sword abroad. Where the duellist then had to sneak home surreptitiously, the soldier returned as a national hero. The soldier’s bravery was thus explicitly understood as an active participation in foreign conflict: men who claimed to be strong, hardy, and desirable proved themselves by engaging militarily in the Continent. Moreover, when the British officer could no longer find employment within his native army, he must still go abroad to fight rather than loiter at home. For example, in Farquhar’s The Constant Couple (1699) Colonel Standard cannot afford to stay in London after his regiment is disbanded, and so resolves to go to fight in Hungary. The life of a mercenary is a last resort, but it is preferable to the suggestion that he stay at home to be kept by Lady Lurewell. “The Man that sells himself for Gold is the worst of Prostitutes” (9), he tells her when she suggests that he remain in England with her support. In The Rover, Willmore had no such qualms about relying on Angellica Bianca’s money, but for the Williamite soldier, self-sufficiency is a prerequisite of masculine autonomy. The unspoken assumption, that Standard can only sustain heroic credibility by honour gained through selling his body as a foreign mercenary, rather than honour lost through selling his body as a kept man at home in London, is indicative of the esteem that playwrights during these decades held for martial valour conducted abroad by their own officers, and the contempt that they felt for men who depended on feminine charity—whether this was in the form of either Lurewells or the British state.

Canfield has written that the Restoration stage showed audiences how “the perfect, potent bodies of Cavalier rakes dominate over the imperfect, impotent bodies of the Cits” (Tricksters and Estates 2). In the early eighteenth century, however, the hero’s body became less physically perfect—while, as I discuss below, the pampered foppish body was suspect. If British imperial endeavours were an assertion of British manliness, it followed that those soldiers who incurred wounds on the battlefield had the greatest proof of their manhood and were correspondingly deemed to be the most attractive to women. The “Bold Hero” described in the prologue to Centlivre’s The Beau’s Duel (1702) returns from war “with Bleeding Wounds adorn’d, and Glorious Scars” (ll. 19-20), while the soldiers in the prologue to Steele’s The Funeral (1702) “think their Wounds Addition to their Dress” (l. 19). In The Constant Couple, Standard has won a “pretty cross Cut over [his] Eye” (3) in a campaign, and in Addison’s The Drummer (1715) Sir George Truman is recognised by “the very Wound of which he dy’d” (55) on the battlefield. Off the stage, Ned Ward admired soldiers’ “Marshall Faces…adorn’d with Weather-beaten Wrinkles, cross’d with Hacks and Scars, those rugged Beauty Spots of War, which they wore as true marks of their Undaunted Bravery” (The London Spy 198). This theme was still current in the early 1720s, when William Hope argued that “SCARS and *Wounds*, when received in a just and honourable Cause, such as the *Defence* of a Man’s *Religion, Country*, or *Life*, are so far from being reputed *Blemishes* and *Imperfections*…that they are rather look’d upon…as so many *Ornaments*, and, as it were, *Badges* of True Worth and Value in the Person who carries them” (171-72). These uglifying injuries are proof of a man’s selfless service to Britain, and are therefore beautiful.

But just as a man’s ability to speak French did not make him a master of communication, the mere presence of wounds won through combat were not proof alone of a man’s bravery and honour. In Vanbrugh’s The Relapse (1697), Lord Foppington’s hysterical response to his “little prick, between the Skin and the Ribs,” incurred when fighting the hero Loveless, is comically overblown: for this slight flesh-wound a doctor is summoned and Foppington solemnly forgives Loveless for the injury as he is carried offstage on a chair (32-33). Similarly, Swift reports an incident that took place in the 1690s: “Beau *Fielding*, at fifty years old, when in a quarrel upon the stage, he was run into his breast, which he opened and shewed to the ladies, that he might move their love and pity; but they all fell a laughing” (115). The circumstances through which men sustained injuries was as important as the injuries themselves, and Fielding, a beau engaging in the youthful posturing of the young buck about town, was (like Foppington) an unconvincing picture of masculine honour.

\*

The Cavalier: *The Rover* Revisited

Although The Rover had found favour among Charles II and James II, Behn’s play was unpopular immediately after the Revolution owing to the author’s efforts to make a hero out of the mid-Stuart kings. Addressing James in her dedication to the play’s sequel, Behn is transparent in establishing Willmore as his double: “I presume to present my faithful Soldier…who was driven from his Native Country with You, forc’d as You were, to fight for his Bread in a strange Land, and suffer’d with You all the Ills of Poverty, War and Banishment, and still pursues Your Fortunes” (sig. A4r). In view of this statement, it is not surprising that theatrical managers neglected The Second Part of the Rover after its first pre-Revolution run. The Rover was little better: like The Spanish Fryar, the play’s “image of the king in exile took on dangerously Jacobite connotations” after 1688 (Spencer 188). But it was not simply that the play was a thematic minefield. Audiences strongly objected to the political loyalties of William Smith, the actor who had played Willmore since the play’s first performance. Smith “was zealously attached to the Interest of King *James* the Second, and serv’d in his Army as a Volunteer” (Chetwood 96), and when he returned to the theatre after James’ defeat, he chose The Rover to re-establish his reputation. However, although the performance began well, his entrance onstage in Act One, Scene Two was met with strong antipathy from the playgoers: “the Storm began…the Curtain dropp’d, and the Audience dismiss’d” (96). During the 1690s, the play was acted only once; a Jacobite actor who espoused Jacobite sentiments on the stage presented an unsurmountable obstacle under the reign of William III.

While Smith’s Willmore was impossible to perform after the Revolution, other cavaliers appeared onstage and in print during the 1690s and 1700s as honest loyalists to a rightful cause. Authors attempted to depoliticise the cavalier’s activities after the Restoration, writing him as a character who was blunt rather than witty, and a plain-dealer rather than an ambitious statesman. According to this new history, assisting Charles’s return to power was the last time that the cavalier became involved in affairs of state before he rejected party disputes for a life of convivial pleasures. Steele’s Roger de Coverley, who first appeared in print in Spectator 2 in March 1711, is the perfect example of this character, a man whose youth was a series of festive debaucheries, but whose current politics were perfectly attuned to post-Revolution sensibilities. De Coverley is introduced in the second issue of the Spectator as a gentleman whose youthful exploits exemplified the glamour of Restoration society: he had been “a fine Gentleman, had often supped with my Lord *Rochester* and Sir *George Etherege*, fought a Duel upon his first coming to Town, and kick’d Bully *Dawson*.” But (as the references to these long-dead London icons firmly establish) this libertine behaviour is part of the distant past. Now older, de Coverley’s “Singularities proceed from his good Sense, and are Contradictions to the Manners of the World, only as he thinks the World is in the wrong.” His past delinquency was a typical, if not especially laudable, form of self-expression in a wilder age that can be regarded with affectionate tolerance; de Coverley is not a political enemy so much as a social contrarian who wears old-fashioned clothing and calls the servants by their first names. He is a gentleman of strong, old-fashioned patriotic sentiment, and despite his idiosyncrasies, he has a reputation for both knowledge and reason; he “fills the chair at a Quarter-Session with great Abilities, and three Months ago, gained universal Applause by explaining a Passage in the Game-Act.”

Although this modified cavalier’s manners might have been bluff and unfashionable by early eighteenth-century standards, his refusal to follow petty fads and insistence on speaking his true mind was useful for writers like Addison and Steele who loathed the artifice and ceremony that they felt had corrupted English society. The cavalier also served as a template—and a caution—for the generation of new young officers. In the same issue, we are also introduced to the young officer Captain Sentry, “a Gentleman of great Courage, good Understanding, but Invincible Modesty,” whom Steele admires for his “frankness” and “candour.” We are told that Sentry stands to inherit de Coverley’s estate, a birth-right that is one of character as much as property: in Sentry, de Coverley’s plain-speaking honesty is born again. But while de Coverley is “rather beloved than esteemed” due to his “mirthful” self-conduct, Sentry has an “even regular Behaviour” and his contributions to conversation are composed of tales from the martial battlefield. If there were any underlying doubts about de Coverley’s contrarian postures, they are cured in the image of the brave young patriot.

The juxtaposition of the old cavalier and the young soldier was persistently exploited throughout the 1690s and 1700s. The relationship between Major-General Blunt (played by Lee) and his son-in-law Young Hackwell (Powell) in Shadwell’s The Volunteers (1693) is an early example of this. Described in the character list as an “old Cavalier Officer, somewhat rough in Speech, but very brave and honest, and of good Understanding, and a good Patriot” (sig. A4v), Blunt is no polished Restoration libertine or sinister Jacobite loyalist, but rather a man of patriotic allegiance and who scorns nonsense and deception in all its forms. His soldiering days long behind him, Blunt finds his modern-day counterpart in Hackwell, “an understanding wise young Fellow…of great Honour, in great Favour with the King; he has done Wonders in the War of *Ireland*; he has gotten much Reputation…he is as brave a Fellow as my self” (5). Indeed, the old cavalier volunteers himself as an adoptive father for the young officer, telling him that “it shall be a Mortal Quarrel between us, if you send not your Goods and Servants hither, and make my house your own” (7). The identities of the old and the young soldier are thereafter intertwined; Young Hackwell eventually marries Blunt’s daughter and the cavalier’s lineage and patriotic common sense are thus perpetuated into the next generation.

The Blunt-Hackwell and de Coverley-Sentry heredities not only usher in the gentleman officer as the heir to the rake, but also contribute to the rewriting and whitewashing of the rake-hero, a man who is now represented as rough and brave, but also a true patriot—not a selfish pleasure-seeker. This brings us back to The Rover. As Smith’s experience in attempting to perform Willmore on the post-Revolution stage had shown, London audiences were sensitive to the political allegiances of the actors onstage. In order to create an acceptable performance of The Rover in post-Revolution London then, it was imperative to rid Willmore of his residual Jacobitism. The character thus needed to be reconstructed as a loyalist soldier—in eighteenth-century parlance, a gentleman officer whose reputation for honour was engineered through his practiced skills and capacity for reason as much as through his daring exploits and claim to hereditary fortune.

When The Rover was revived at Drury Lane in 1708, Wilks, building on his successful performance as the womanising, sword-flinging Plume in The Recruiting Officer (discussed below), was the ideal actor to play Willmore. He had already rehabilitated one of Smith’s original roles two years previously: Lorenzo in The Spanish Fryar. Already notorious for the sexual swagger that was the foundation of the part, Wilks’s experience in the Williamite army additionally gave him the political credentials that Smith had so obviously lacked. The aggressive, bull-headed comic hero still had currency as a crowd-pleaser, provided that he underwent a plausible makeover and “left off the buff leather of a seventeenth-century cavalier and wore the red coat that indicated an eighteenth-century English soldier” (Spencer 188-89). As Steele shrewdly observed of audience receptions to Wilks’s acting in July 1710: “There is a Fault also in the Audience…that is, the figuring to themselves the Actor in some Part wherein they formerly particularly liked him, and not attending to the Part he is at that Time performing” (LIB 4: 53-54). Wilks used this “fault” to Willmore’s advantage in the restored Rover and his performance of the raucous young cavalier was a revelation to playgoers. We can get some idea of his success by paying attention to the changes made to the play’s advertisements in the Daily Courant during the first decade of the eighteenth century, which show that Willmore rises in prominence to become the play’s main draw. Between 1703 and 1707, John Verbruggen played Willmore on six nights (never consecutively), but the wording of newspaper advertisements suggests that Richard Estcourt’s portrayal of Blunt on these occasions was the star turn that the audiences loved. For example, an announcement for a performance at Drury Lane in January 1705 reminds the reader that the “Part of Ned Blunt to be perform’d by Mr. Estcourt,” but provides no other details about the cast (860). In April 1708, after Wilks had taken the part of Willmore, the Daily Courant printed a full list of the cast, headed by Wilks—Estcourt got second billing (1928). The advertisement was further revised in May the following year; it now read that the “part of the Rover to be perform’d by Mr. Wilks. And the parts of Coll. Belvill by Mr. Husband…” (2360). By April 1710, the rest of the cast had been forgotten: “The part of the Rover by Mr. Wilks” was the only casting listed (2647).

Wilks made an excellent Willmore because it was a part he could play using the same model of sharp humour that he had become known for as Wildair and Plume. In this production, Willmore’s dexterity with his tongue (particularly when engaging with female characters) is as integral to the plot of The Rover as his skill with the sword: “His words go through me to the very Soul,” the jaded Angellica Bianca admits (Behn, The Rover 26). Rather than watching a Jacobite actor make a nostalgic appeal to rightful kingship, the audience in the revival were shown an attractive man who had both the breeding and the experience to play a gentleman officer who was both brave and eloquent. Willmore was both a gentleman and a soldier, rather than a roving adventurer. Like Blunt and de Coverley, the refashioned Willmore’s politics were that of a patriot rather than specifically cavalier/Jacobite. Now that Willmore was a professional soldier rather than a pampered aristocrat, his behaviour now no longer signified the royalist/Jacobite ideal that Behn had imagined in the Duke of York. So successful was his performance that he played it regularly for the following twenty-five years. By the early 1730s, the play’s political sensibilities were considered to appeal more to tradesmen than to ruling bodies: in 1730 the play was performed with “a new Prologue address’d to the Merchants of Great Britain” (Daily Post 3429). By sacrificing the political associations of the original text Willmore descended the social ranks: he became one of the people, rather than a fantastical ideal of their ruler.

The Gentleman Officer: *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) and *The Wonder! A Woman Keeps a Secret* (1714)

While the cavalier was being rewritten to be palatable for post-Revolution audiences, the gentleman officer was also being developed on the stage as a new type of comic hero, who was defined by his rejection of the excesses and impulses of the rake and the fop. Two plays, Farquhar’s The Recruiting Officer (1706) and Centlivre’s The Wonder! A Woman Keeps a Secret (1714), model this rejection clearly. The Recruiting Officer cast Wilks and Cibber opposite one another as Captains Plume and Brazen, two rival army officers both anxious to have the most new enlistments. For Wilks, this was one of his typically boisterous, light-hearted roles: having escaped capture abroad, he reports that he is physically well and has been left with “an excellent Stomach for roast Beef” (5)—his appetite continues English. Like Willmore, Plume measures masculinity through a man’s performance in combat. His sexual expectations follow the “Rules of War”: lecturing his friend Worthy on an unsuccessful courtship, he advises: “You shou’d have redoubled your Attacks, taken the Town by Storm, or have dy’d upon the Breach” (6)—the erotic innuendo of this conquest is painfully obvious.

Cibber also played a role for which he was well-equipped: Brazen is a Frenchified fop who wears extravagant costume—a feathered hat (sig. A2v) to Plume’s “plain” dress (38)—and thinks himself irresistible to women while weaving meaningless slang into his conversation: “split me,” his character’s catch-phrase from his own earlier play Love Makes a Man (1700), reappears here (34). Listed together as “Two Recruiting Officers” (sig. A4v), Farquhar offers up Wilks and Cibber as competing forms of masculinity and challenges the audience to discover which model deserves to be the definitive title character, the solo recruiting officer. Although Plume’s sexual appetite and aggressive temperament rivals that of Willmore, his actual sword use onstage is a conscious departure from the quasi-chivalric Restoration ideal. The play The Recruiting Officer sets two officers, Plume and Brazen, played by Wilks and Cibber, against each other. The play’s challenge to audiences is to Brazen’s failure to understand the new age’s/stage’s ideal masculinity is understood in an on-stage fight scene that invokes and inverts The Rover:

*Plume*. You lye, and you’re a Son of a Whore.

[*Draws, and makes up to* Brazen*.*

*Brazen.* [*Retiring.*] Hold, hold, did you not refuse to fight for the Lady?

*Plume.* I always do, but for a Man I’ll fight Knee deep, so you lye again.

[Plume *and* Brazen *fight a Traverse or two about the Stage…* (39)

Plume appears to echo Willmore in his aggression and use of “honour” terms and abuse—”you lye,” he tells Brazen twice—but these lines upturn The Rover’s contentions that a woman is a worthy subject of combat. Unlike his Restoration predecessor, Plume’s sword-use is confined to that which directly relates to his public duty: Wilks was teaching the nation that when modern men of honour plunge into a “Knee deep” fight, it should be an extension of a man’s stake on the battlefield, not private passions. Conversely, Brazen reveals: “I always fight with a Man before I make him my Friend; and if once I find he will fight, I never quarrel with him afterwards” (39); his casual misuse of the sword reveals his cowardice. The heroine Sylvia, disguised as a young male recruit, is the object of the fight. As in The Rover, she is the lens through which the audience gauges Plume and Brazen against one another; her union with Plume at the end of the play is a confirmation of the legitimacy of his sword-use.

In 1714 Centlivre’s comedy The Wonder! A Woman Keeps a Secret provided audiences with an insight into how a modern Willmore might be written. The play is a forthright boast of British imperial glory and home-grown rectitude; dedicated to Prince George of Hanover, the future George II, whom she flatters by praising both his prowess on the battlefield and his efforts to learn English, she is unabashed in acknowledging the British habit of foreign expropriation, informing the Prince that “Britain *shall from henceforth claim your* HIGHNESS *intirely as her own*.” This is the play’s intended lesson: the foreigner who is willing to be taught British manners and behaviours may be rewarded by having Britishness bestowed upon him: national identity was “a set of beliefs rather than bloodlines” (McGirr 134). This forced Anglicisation, Centlivre insists, is a compliment, which she supports in the play’s first scene: one foreigner remarks admiringly, and apropos of little, that “[t]he *English* are by Nature, what the ancient *Romans* were by Discipline, courageous, bold, hardy, and in love with Liberty” (2). These fine qualities, we are to conclude, make up the very essence of Englishmen, and are the envy of the Continent. They are exhibited in the play’s protagonist, a heroic British officer, whom we track through Lisbon as he antagonises local men and romances local women. The glamorous depiction of the British soldier marauding through a foreign, Catholic nation mirrors the plot of The Rover; like the earlier play, The Wonder was even written by a woman at the peak of her reputation. Placed side by side, the two plays provide dual pictures of patriotic fervour as it appeared almost forty years apart. But if Behn’s play offers an affectionate recollection of cavalier misbehaviour in Naples, Centlivre’s is a prim reminder of the importance of upholding British values abroad—and establishing them where they do not yet exist.

In The Wonder!, Wilks played Don Felix, a character who strongly resembles Willmore: a man of genteel birth who has spent time in exile, and is characterised by both his infatuation with his lover (a heroine who, like The Rover’s Hellena, was resisting family pressure to become a nun) and his quickness to draw his sword. But this character is not the play’s protagonist—in fact, he is not even British. Wilks plays the hero’s foil, one of the idle rich whose disrupted days are spent in the pursuit of his passions. And, rather than Willmore’s efforts to bed as many women as he can, he is constant to his lover, Violante; his vice is his predisposition to violence. Before the play has even begun, he has injured another man in a duel and has fled Lisbon; the plot is initiated by his secret return home in the first act, after which he must hide from justice and meet secretly with Violante. Although Felix is a likeable rogue who is pardoned and married at the end of the play, this is only after his violent outbursts have been chastened by the British officer. This new Willmore showed London audiences that a man who recklessly engaged in swordplay could be redeemed but could never be a hero. Wilks’s status as a leading man gave Felix’s character greater visibility—that this leading actor was displaced into a supporting role emphasises the need to displace the anticipated character of Willmore and bring forward new blood, new ideals.

Felix’s part is bested by the gentleman officer, Colonel Britton (played by John Mills), identified as a “Scotchman” in the dramatis personae (sig. A4v). Britton is a portrait of the paramount anglicised Scot. Like Prince George he is not English by blood; like George, we infer, this fact should not sway us against him. Britton is a suitable hero for London’s comic stage because his personal qualities are specifically English—he *is* the Englishman who is “courageous, bold, hardy, and in love with Liberty” referred to at the beginning of the play. Britton also replaces Felix in rakish lasciviousness. Where Felix begins and ends the play faithful to Violante, Britton enjoys fantasies of “Troops of soft, plump, tender melting, wishing, nay willing Girls” (6) and boasts that “Soldiers are not over stock’d with Money.—But we mark ample Satisfaction in Love” (49). His inevitable commitment to one woman at the end of the play comes after long-established cynicism about marriage: “I shall never be able to swallow the Matrimonial Pill, if it be not well Gilded” (7), he tells his servant, later expressing his disgust at a “Matrimonial Hint” (49). His fruitless attempt to sleep with Felix’s lover Violante is played for laughs: if there is a lesson in The Wonder!, it does not rest upon its hero rejecting the cavalier’s sexual licentiousness.

The major shift, then, seems to occur in the comic hero’s approach to swordplay. Instruction on how it should be performed comes about in the first scene of Act Five, when Britton and Felix come to believe that they have fallen in love with the same woman. Without waiting for an explanation for the misunderstanding, Felix accuses Britton of villainy and draws his sword. Britton boldly responds: “Tho’ fighting’s my Trade, I’m not in Love with it, and think it more honourable to decline this Business, than pursue it” (64). A man of eighteenth-century sensibilities, the modern gentleman officer brandishes his sword for “trade” rather than private passions. Just as the cavaliers in The Rover now began to find their social equals in merchants rather than aristocrats, the modern gentleman officer interprets his duties as those of a working professional: like Young Hackwell in The Volunteers, his sword is a utilitarian tool, wielded for “business.” Yet despite Britton’s insistence that greater honour is found in walking away from the fight than participating in it, Centlivre remains anxious to ensure that the audience does not think that he has refused the challenge because he is a coward. When responding to Felix’s challenge, Britton instantly refers to his army career as proof that he is brave. When Felix continues to press him to fight, Britton eventually announces that he refuses to be “bully’d” and he draws his own sword (65). Although the agreed-upon duel never occurs—for the misunderstanding is resolved through non-violent negotiation—in this scene Britton has proven that he is reasonable enough to first consider non-violent methods of conflict-resolution before agreeing to fight, but is also brave enough to contest persecution and rational enough to hesitate.

The Wonder! is a bridge between old Restoration comedy and the more modern sentimental comedies that were to become popular in the next few decades (see Chapter Three). Once Felix’s challenge is rescinded after the two men eventually realise that they are in love with two different women, and the matter is resolved without violence. Later on, in The Conscious Lovers (1722), Steele’s young heroes could meditate on the foolhardiness of duellists, but Centlivre affords no such space for her own characters to do the same: she shies away from explicating reasons to employ or avoid the sword and instead shifts focus away from the male characters—even the play’s title concerns feminine rather than masculine business. As a result, the play wavers when it comes to providing a conclusive solution to the problem of sword-use. It does not suggest that private violence between gentlemen is either morally repugnant or socially inappropriate—Britton, after all, does eventually draw his sword after much provocation from Felix. The ideal male must not back down from the threat of swordplay, even if “tilting for the wench” is no longer heroic.

Centlivre’s depiction of Felix relies on both stereotypes of violent irrational Catholics and the tyrannous cavalier, but the behaviour that Felix exhibits is only incorrect as far as it deviates from that of Britton. Felix is still a positive Other, reformed, but not humiliated, while Wilks’s good looks and sound politics removed the sting from his continental impulsivity. The role is not grotesque, but neither is it central. Wilks is not the title character and not allowed to address the audience in the prologue—given to Mills/Britton. And in spite of his notoriety as a bravo, the men he injures recover, he has no real comeuppance, and even settles into a happy marriage with a rich young lady at the end of the play. Sword-fights between two gentlemen, this play teaches, should not be *encouraged*, but they should also not be regarded with the same moral alarm assigned to cold-blooded murder. When honour is roused, it is acceptable (and even commendable) to commence fighting—but it is only the English (or anglicised) officer who is able to determine when this is the case.

Foppish Mimicries: Deviating from the Masculine Ideal

The plays, novels, newspapers, and pamphlets that contemplated the army thus purposed the institution as an arm of imperial glory, representing it as a breeding ground for heroes who drew their swords for the public good. From the mid-1690s, the army was increasingly advocated as a solution for young men’s lethargy and insubordination, for it was believed to inaugurate bravery, moral discipline, and a love for one’s country. As the Governor puts it to his belligerent nephew in Cibber’s Love Makes a Man (1700): “For shame leave off these senseless Braules; if you are as Valiant as you wou’d be thought, turn out your Courage to the Wars, let your King and Country be the better for it” (25). Although it would be untrue to contend that the army and navy enjoyed universal popularity during the reigns of William and Anne, the dominant atmosphere of the time was vocally supportive of both institutions. Indeed, Charles Carlton has argued that the near-absence of complaints about taxation to support foreign warfare during these years suggests that they were generally regarded as a patriotic necessity (218-19). This is corroborated by the saturation of military ephemera throughout wider London culture. As well as celebrations of the officer hero on the comic stage, we find other examples of a society increasingly in thrall to the romance and excitement of the army: fashionable Londoners played cards with decks that depicted British victories, learnt dances that were named for military commanders (such as Mr. Isaac’s “The Marlborough”), and took their clothing cues from the styles of dress worn by officers. Just as cavalier-style clothing became fashionable immediately after the restoration of the monarchy, civilian men wore red coats in imitation of soldiers at least through to the early 1700s, as well as military-style high-tongued shoes and high-brimmed hats with cockades (Cunnington and Cunnington 72-85).

If gentlemen began to resemble officers in dress, and officers were understood to be genteel, it was implicitly understood that both sets of men would come to express themselves in similar ways. As such, the body of martial literature published at this time was written for public consumption as much as for soldiers. For example, the preface to the anonymous The Art of War insists that to be knowledgeable of army affairs was to be conversant with modern politics and society and demands that the civilian reader consider:

Is it not very Commendable in Discourse to talk pertinently and properly to the Subject in Hand? And what greater Subject of Discourse at present than the Martial Exploits perform’d abroad? How then can he talk aptly and judiciously of Military Affairs who has neither seen or read them? (sig. A4r)

Unsurprisingly, the poems, plays, and pamphlets that offered an idealised and sanitised version of the gentleman officer were often far wide of reality. The idea of a fully meritocratic army was confounded by the practice of buying officer commissions, as well as the practice of permitting army ranks to be “given to the offspring of senior or distinguished officers as a form of reward” (Childs 43-44). There was a practical reason for this: Charles Carlton has noted that “[p]urchase was not only an insurance that the army would never take over the establishment: it morphed into a vast system of outdoor relief for the titled classes that meshed with their gentlemen’s code of honour,” resulting in a real rise in the number of officers who came from aristocratic backgrounds (185). Furthermore, popular calls for young men to join the army by appealing to their thirst for honour had resulted in an influx of vain and stupid gentlemen (and would-be gentlemen), who demonstrated vanity, not patriotism, by parading their uniforms and flashing their swords at the theatre and in the London parks, rather than taking themselves to the theatre of war. Despite William III’s attempts to deliver long-term military reform, John Childs’s study of the army at this time has shown his officers to be “arbitrary, arrogant, overbearing, childish, quarrelsome, and regarding themselves as above the law” (36). Officers frequently and deliberately separated themselves from their men, who ran wild and went undisciplined (27). Violence was at epidemic levels within the profession: the low wages common across all ranks meant that looting was encouraged as a morale-booster (Carlton 65-66), while officers were notorious for sending challenges and fighting duels (Childs 44). Even though moralists insisted that bravery should be defined by the circumstances in which men used their swords, these works still presupposed that masculine honour was dependent upon the individual’s capacity and desire for personal autonomy.

We thus see a trend in instances of private fights between soldiers throughout the 1690s and 1700s. Baron Mohun and Captain Hill, the two men who had been responsible for William Mountford’s death, both had careers as army officers. “Beau” Wilson, whom John Law killed in a notorious 1694 duel, had served in Flanders; a contemporary cynic remarked that it was unknown “whether the Trenches were too cold for his Constitution, or that he did not like Fighting” (Gray 6). “Handsome” Fielding and Sir Henry Colt, who fought a 1696 duel with one another, had both held military ranks as captains (Hayton et. al. 1: 655). Readiness to engage in swordplay off the battlefield remained a mark of honour and bravery within the ultra-masculine army environment, in spite of the idealistic glosses given to soldiers on the stage and in print. As Robert Shoemaker has observed: “Forced with the obligation of leading their men into battle, officers’ courage had to be beyond question. An officer who refused a challenge was ‘sent to Coventry’ by his brother officers” (Shoemaker, “The Taming of the Duel” 540).

Critics blamed individual corruption for the failure of soldiers from all ranks to satisfy the standards set by literary ideals. At best, high-ranking soldiers had coupled their bravery with political insidiousness: in March 1711, Steele lamented in the Spectator that the army was a “Way of Life in which no Man can rise suitably to his Merit, who is not something of a Courtier, as well as a Soldier” (2). Ward took a blacker view, describing how vanity and a base desire for glory seduced many men into the army: “A Foot Soldier is commonly a Man, who for the sake of wearing a Sword, and the Honour of being term’d a Gentleman, is Coax’d from a Handicraft Trade” (The London Spy 189). This personal vanity then resulted in a less effectual battlefield, for these men “are always more expensive of their Powder, than of their Lead” (Mars Stript of His Armour 10). The potential for meritocratic rise and for imitation confused social hierarchies and the ability to read status through the sword. Nor were the playwrights who produced stage portraits of idealised officers oblivious to the corruption and misconduct in the army and navy. Those officers whose martial intentions fell outside of bravery and honour were termed acquisitive hypocrites. In D’Urfey’s The Marriage-Hater Match’d (1692), the reluctant Lieutenant Callow, who is as inexperienced as his name, is chastised thus: “Your Commission like your Scarf fits close t’ye, your Sword too of good dimension, but I am told your heart is loose in th’ hilts, and tho’ you wear the King’s name in your Pocket, you herd with those that hate his Government” (4). But these complaints were made in vain. By the end of the seventeenth century, “[w]ar had become a gentleman’s profession, not an ideological, theological, or patriotic passion” (Carlton 231).

Given the public attention awarded to Mohun, Hill, Wilson, and other fashionable young officers, it is natural that we should find many theatrical examples of fops who wear officers’ uniforms—the seventeenth-century *miles gloriosus*.[[5]](#footnote-5) These parts are unforgiving portraits of vanity and ignorance: these fops understand their costume to be a pronouncement of their bravery and honour, and feel no obligation to prove either further by going to war. Their claims to the title are frequently either false, like Dick Amlet in Vanbrugh’s The Confederacy (1705) and Bownceby in Dilke’s The Pretenders (1698), or derive from holding office in a local militia rather than having fought in a foreign battle. Here, stage agreed with society that the militia was a contemptible claim to bravery. For example, in D’Urfey’s Love for Money (1691), Amorous contrasts “the Courage of a Brave Officer bred in a Camp and a sneaking Captain of the Country Militia” (2), while in Baker’s Tunbridge Walks (1703), Reynard and Loveworth argue that Captain Squib might “justly merit the Title of an Officer” and so better *appear* to be a “Man of Courage” if he fought in a campaign (6). Squib himself remarks that “‘tis only for your swarthy ill-looked Rogues to go to War; we spruce Officers stay at home to guard the Ladies, fight Mock-Sieges upon *Bunhill*, and storm the Outworks of a Venison Pasty” (6). These comedies aim to reproduce the vanity and folly of men who hold officer ranks in order to take advantage of the fantastic uniform and sexual appeal to women, and to then expose them as entirely lacking in true bravery and honour. As early as 1693, Bluffe in Congreve’s The Old Batchelor “wears the habit of a Soldier, which now a days as often cloaks Cowardice, as a Black Gown does Atheism” (9). In Tunbridge Walks, Squib has bought a commission in the London militia because he has found “how irresistible a red Coat is amongst the Ladies” (5). In Cibber’s The Double Gallant (1707), Captain Strut offers his glory and his sword as a marriage settlement, but frankly admits that the first lies “in the *Gazette*” while the second is at the pawn-brokers (10).

Those who had not performed military service were no less enthusiastic to make known their claim to honour, and duelling continued unabated outside of military circles, symptomatic of a culture that continued to idealise the soldier’s sword-use as a symbol of honour. Despite the increasing availability of sophisticated pistols after 1685, due to the migration of Huguenot gunsmiths to London, the first London duel to utilise pistols did not occur until 1711, in a fight between Sir Cholmeley Dering and Robert Thornhill and swords remained the most popular weapon for formal honour duels until the 1760s (Banks 126). Critics assigned this pretence to the soldier’s honour to the town’s fashionable young men. For example, the anonymous author of The Character of the Beaux (1696) emphasises the fop’s love of attention and identifies the “Bully-Beau,” who is known for “drawing his Sword and quarrelling with every Body; but to be sure, either in the *Park*, at the *Play-House*, or some other open populous place, where he knows he shall be parted” (21-22)—a cowardly move, but all the better for drawing public notice to his purported masculine honour. Ward made the same point in verse: “*So Cowards often do their Swords Unsheath, / But cow’d and daunted with the feat of Death, / Thus tamely show their Blades, as fearful Curs their Teeth*” (The London Spy 125). To draw one’s sword within a public space was to unsuccessfully impersonate a man of true honour and bravery.

In his pursuit of the illusion of masculinity, the fop is unable to appreciate the sword’s use outside of its function as a social prop, and, although he understands that it holds symbolic value as a badge of honour and social class, he is alarmed when he is required to use it as a weapon. For example, in The Beau’s Duel, Sir William Mode remarks after his abortive fight that “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” (29). His attitude towards combat means that he operates as a pathetic relief to the comic hero. The

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| frontispiece to the 1715 edition of the play shows the two fops in the foreground, their flailing arms and scared expressions suggesting that they are scared to go beyond the gates of the house to use their swords as weapons, while their skirts emphasise their confused attitude towards violence. It was expected that men should fight for women, but this was achieved in accordance with male stylings: femininity was present on the battlefield as a set of metaphorical values, not in the combatants’ dress. Their | Detail from frontispiece toThe Beau’s Duel (1715) – Anonymous |

hesitation is contrasted with the depiction of two men engaged in combat midfield, while in the far distance two stags approach one another, perhaps also to fight.

The fop’s reluctance to fight has meant that he has sometimes been read as essentially harmless or non-violent. For example, Robert B. Heilman has argued that “the fop is not dangerous, vicious, or evil” (364), and that the “fop’s gift to the world is his abstention from the intense competitiveness which means that for every winner there is a sad or disgraced loser” (392), while Susan Staves claims that “fops…were advocates of non-violence” (421). This argument is misleading, for it implies that fops were consciously pacifistic. While it is true that the fop of literary imagination most typically exhibited the danger he posed to English society through his mastery of “Frenchified” conversation rather than through outbursts of physical aggression, Heilman’s and Staves’s remarks strongly imply that fops did not participate in sword-fights. Yet as well as the false officers of whom we have already taken note, the theatre after the Revolution showed an intense sequence of theatrical fops who draw their swords, agree to duel, or otherwise show a proclivity towards violence.[[6]](#footnote-6) Although as with Sir William Mode the fop usually does not enjoy fighting and often withdraws from an altercation prematurely, his reasons for doing so are never grounded in moral reasoning and always stem from selfish cowardice. He will agree to fight and even draw his sword because he has a terror of losing face: it is vital for him that others should see him as a man of honour. When subsequently faced with the obligation to fight, the fop’s thoughts are often immediately drawn to the effect that contact with a sword will have on their physical appearance; unlike the heroic gentleman soldier, the fop cannot imagine that physical injury will beautify his appearance. In The Beau’s Duel Sir William Mode despairs at the thought of his face being “spoilt,” and informs his opponent that he “had rather be run thro’ the Guts than you shou’d touch me with your dirty Apron, ‘twill daub all my Clothes” (23-24). Similarly, the eponymous Sir Courtly Nice from Crowne’s 1685 play worries that if his opponent’s “filthy Sword shou’d touch me, ‘twou’d make me as sick as a dog” (40). When the fop goes to war, he must have two laundresses with him, like Sir Nicholas Dainty in Shadwell’s The Volunteers who informs an old cavalier that “you are for your old fashion’d slovenly War, War’s another thing now; we must live well in a Camp” (19). And soft-living in camp could translate to cowardice on the battlefield: in The Constant Couple Colonel Standard recalls a fellow officer who “to save his pretty face for the Women, he always turn’d his back upon the Enemy,” and speaks with disbelief of an ill-kempt lieutenant who was “asham’d to own that he wanted a Dinner, but beg’d eighteen pence of me to buy a new sheath for his Sword” (3). In wider literature, the fop may become disfigured with the lesions of sexually-transmitted disease—such as the blades with “weeping” wounds we saw in the Introduction (Wiseman 527)—but this is a consequence of vice, not bravery.

The foppish terror of dirt and defilement can only be symptomatic of their cowardice when compared to the true hero’s disfigurements earned through warfare. But despite his aversion to lacerating his face and clothes, the fop may operate under the belief that he is an excellent swordsman—to comic effect. For example, when the French beau Le Prat in Love for Money expresses his dismay at losing a skirmish, “de first time dat ever de French were foil’d,” Amorous makes the reply: “Oh, Sir, you are ill read in History I find” (32). In The Volunteers Sir Timothy Kastril is thrilled to have won a sword-fight against a sharper, exclaiming: “It’s an admirable Exercise! I intend to use it a Mornings instead of Tennis” (41). Flushed with victory, he picks a fight with Welford (described in the dramatis personae as a “brave Young Gentleman, a Volunteer…who has gotten much Honour in the late Wars”), who disarms him at once. The fop’s triumph over a lowlife does not prepare him for a reencounter with a gentleman trained in combat. Moreover, in interpreting a sword-fight as an exercise equivalent to tennis, Kastril demonstrates fashion’s failure to understand the moral connotations of combat. Unlike the comic hero, the fop is unable to distinguish appearance from reality, because for him, appearance *is* reality; he believes that the sword he wears as an ornament is a guarantor of his manly reputation. This wrongheaded reasoning leads to him drawing his sword in an attempt to *appear* brave, rather than actually *being* brave.

The Fop: Love Makes a Man

This chapter has so far focused mostly on analysing the gentleman officer’s use of the sword for public rather than private cause. The idea that there is a time and place in which it is acceptable for gentlemen to draw their swords upon one another is the central theme in Love Makes a Man, a comedy that shows how the rules of the polite officer were applied to the polite gentleman. Although first performed in 1700, before many of the other plays we have looked at in this chapter, it became an “increasingly popular” piece over the following decade (Viator and Burling 483)—according to George Winchester Stone, Jr., it was in fact the seventh most popular comedy from between 1660 and 1747 (qtd. Styan, Restoration Comedy in Performance 258)—a fact that I suspect is attributable to its focus on the politics of violence, just as other comedies were beginning to do the same. This play, which heavily engages with different character ‘types’ and their relationship with violence, showed Wilks play a scholar character, Carlos, and embodying the early eighteenth-century masculine ideal: well-born, intelligent, reasonable, and fully capable of wielding a sword. Cibber acted opposite him as his younger brother Clodio, who unites foppery and rakishness: “*The Fool, Beau, Wit, and Rake, so mixt he carrys*” (Prologue, l. 17). Clodio adores swords for both their aesthetic value and their use in combat: “Why this Sword would make a Coward fight,” he exclaims as he practices his thrusting (4). This violent posturing shows pretension, not spirit, and the play goes on to show the extent to which he is wrong in how he uses his sword.

When he initially appears onstage, Carlos is entirely unlike the sanguine parts that typify most of Wilks’s career: he wears unfashionable clothes, devotes himself to scholarship in lieu of witty conversation, and has never shown a sexual interest in women. Peter Holland has speculated that “the audience must by this stage have been wondering when Wilks would change” (92), but this is not necessarily true. In 1700 Wilks was best-known for his Wildair—a charming rogue, but one who pursues just one woman and refuses to duel—and the fighting, philandering parts in which he excelled (Willmore, Plume, Archer) were still ahead of him. However, once Angelina first appears in Act Two, we begin to understand what Wilks was able to bring to the part of Carlos. She is told: “[Y]ou’re a Lovely Young Creature, and ought to have an Handsome Man Yok’d to you, one of Understanding too” (15). As in The Volunteers, “understanding” is a vital component of genteel masculinity, with the added implication of “intellect” as well as good political sense. Accordingly, the play pairs her with Carlos—a character who needs Wilks’s handsome face and strong politics to prevent him from being an intellectual milksop.

Carlos’s “understanding” is countered by Clodio’s frivolity. Never great friends, the two men’s resentment towards one another quickly builds after Clodio becomes engaged to Angelina, with whom Carlos has fallen in love. At the climactic moment of the play Carlos seizes a sword to fight Clodio for Angelina’s hand; Clodio, although he has no romantic affection for Angelina, agrees to fight because Carlos has called him a coward:

*Carlos. (Snatches* D. *Lewis’s Sword)* Win her, and wear her; for on my Soul unless my Body fail, my Mind shall never yield thee up a thought in Love.

*Don Lewis.* Gramercy *Charles*! To him Boy! I gad! This Love has made a Man of him!

*Carlos.* This is the first good Sword, I ever pois’d in Anger yet; ‘tis sharp I’m sure, if it but hold my putting home, I shall so hunt your Insolence!—I feel the fire of ten strong Spirits in me. Wer’t thou a Native Fencer, in so fair a Cause, I thus shou’d hold thee at the worst defiance.

*Clodio.* Look you Brother, take care of your self, I shall certainly be in you the first thrust, but if you had rather de’e see, we’ll talk a little calmly about this Business.

*Carlos.* Away Trifler! I wou’d loath to prove thee a Coward too!

*Clodio.* Coward! Why then really, Sir, if you please Midriffd’s the Word, Brother you are a Son of a Whore—*Allons!*

[*They fight, and* Clodio *is disarm’d.* (22)

This scene is important—within the play, but also as a representation of masculinity in the early eighteenth century—because it reiterates the popular conceit that gentlemen, even those scholarly ones who did not go to war, should be allowed to engage in private combat in order to prove their masculinity. Just as Wilks’s experience in William’s army validated his claim to genteel soldiering onstage, Carlos’s abrupt sword-use not only affirms his masculinity but also suggests that his claim to sword-use has merit *because* he is a man of “understanding,” whose years of study at home have taught him reflection. Carlos, unlike Clodio, possesses self-restraint that enables him to only fight over matters of genuine importance; he is not a rakish blade who “tilts for a wench” when confronted with any attractive woman, but a man who selectively chooses to fight when he risks losing the woman he loves forever. Although Carlos has not wielded a sword in anger before, the righteousness of his cause has given him the “spirits” for victory. Clodio, whose cause is the vain indignation of being called a coward, must lose. His last-minute resort to French affectation is a hint towards the inevitability of the fight’s outcome: Clodio’s style of combat is reliant on Gallic flourishes, but Carlos is inspired only by his natural passion. When the two philosophies are pitted against one another, from the battlefields of Blenheim to private meetings between two gentlemen, it is the plain and uncorrupted—that is, *English*—method of fighting that must surely win victory.

Because we are shown the “graceful” Wilks best the “affected” Cibber in combat, we might conclude that the play encourages gentlemen to reconcile their differences through sword use. Certainly Clodio’s entreaty to his brother that they should first “talk a little calmly about this Business” before fighting is a request that seems to anticipate the similar one made by Britton to Felix in The Wonder. However, it is not the well-reasoned argument of an experienced soldier that we see in the later play, but merely the desperate plea of a fop about to be defeated by the manly, reasonable Wilks-character. But this fight is not the final statement on private violence in the play. The two brothers flee separately to Italy and Clodio finds himself in a reencounter with Don Duart, a bravo who seeks to invent a reputation for bravery by challenging anyone he encounters on the street. Clodio gladly takes up the challenge—only to seriously injure Duart, forcing him into hiding. Duart is believed to be dead until the play’s final scene, but the audience know otherwise when he enters at the beginning of Act Four, fully recovered:

*Don Duart.* May I venture yet abroad, Sir?

*Surgeon.* With safety, Sir; your Wound was never dangerous: though from your great loss of Blood, you seem’d a while without all signs of Life.

*Don Duart.* Sir, do you know, if the Gentleman that Wounded me be in Custody.

*Surgeon.* He was never taken, Sir, nor known, that I cou’d hear of.

*Don Duart.* I am sorry for’t; for cou’d I find him, which now shall be my earnest care, I wou’d with real Services acknowledge him my best of Friends, in having prov’d so fortunate an Enemy: he has bestow’d on me a second Life, which from a clearer insight of my self, will teach me now to use it better too. (35)

Duart’s “clearer insight” gives him the power to recognise the folly of spontaneous sword-fighting. His drive for violence, stimulated only by the appeal of being thought brave by others, has no social benefit, and he must be corrected. At the beginning of the play his relationship with violence is similar to Clodio’s flippancy—but Clodio, unlike Duart, cannot learn the moral lesson. Even as he is being arrested for Duart’s murder, he cannot appreciate the seriousness of the situation: “I did Pink him, and I am sorry for’t; but it was none of my Fault, Split me” (74). While Duart eventually realises the folly behind his wilful sword-use, “clearer insight” is beyond Clodio, whose understanding never dips below the material surface.

Duart’s new appreciation for life and reason (and the folly of duelling) does not include a desire to see Clodio punished for nearly killing him; we gather that the polite response to escaping death is to extend a cordial branch of friendship. Just as Centlivre did not issue a blanket condemnation for duelling in The Wonder, neither of the two fights in the play produce a permanent material changes for any of the characters. As playwright, Cibber teases his audience with allusions to exile, imprisonment, and death, but the only enduring shifts are philosophical: Carlos and Duart (and perhaps Clodio) learn that there are appropriate and inappropriate moments to fight. Duart’s experience anticipates the value of Shaftesbury’s “force of the confederating Charm” as he learns to value friendship over private resentments—a lesson he takes so much to heart that he encourages Clodio to marry his sister in the final scene—while Carlos is shown the value of applying his reason to his private passions. Using these dual morals, Love Makes a Man contends that the polite gentleman must learn to follow the soldierly example and live a life directed by eloquence, passion, and patriotic reason.

.

Conclusion

Playwrights during the 1690s, 1700s, and 1710s expressed conflicted feelings about the use of the sword onstage. The gentleman officer, the hero of the Nine Years’ War and the War of the Spanish Succession, was an obvious heir to the cavalier as a comic hero, but the omnipresent sword at his side was now more difficult to celebrate. The popularity of this character also risked breaking the distinction between worthy and vulgar; to combat this, playwrights sought to distinguish unruly soldiers’ vainglory by showing that the *miles gloriosus* infiltrated both the army and polite society, using their swords to mask cowardice, not to show virility, thus discrediting private sword-use. Dramatic representations of the private sword now showed that the honour won in a fight was defined by the context in which it occurred. Whether they relied upon Wilks’s reputation for combining refined gentility and charismatic sex appeal in order to play Willmore, or set up stricter boundaries for when it was acceptable to draw swords, after 1690 the stage sword was wielded with greater consideration paid to the question of *why* a fight was necessary. Might did not make right and reason triumphed over passion: the excesses of the cavalier were reined in and his character rewritten as a loyal soldier fighting for the public good.

By the end of these plays, the playwright has shaped heroic action to teach the audience when sword-use was necessary: it was now acceptable to resolve private disputes through verbal agreement rather than combat, as was impossible in The Comical Revenge at the beginning of the Restoration. However, these plots were reluctant to fully condemn all private sword-use, and very often heroes, such as Plume in The Recruiting Officer, Britton in The Wonder! and Carlos in Love Makes a Man, ultimately draw their swords, even if they had previously expressed a preference for other modes of resolution. As such, the stage did not insist upon complete restraint: a true hero could (and did) beat a rake or a fop in combat. As Chapter Three shows, it was not until the 1720s, and Steele’s demand for total self-control in the face of extreme provocation, that the sword’s utility in daily life was truly questioned.

Chapter Three: “Sacrifices to Good Manners,” 1709-1724

In 1724 William Hope published A Vindication of the True Art of Self-Defence, a book that is part work of conduct literature, part justification for tuition in fencing, and part denunciation of the “mean and naughty Persons” (6) who presumed to use their training to provoke fights with others. Hope, who had maintained a long career as a master of the French style of fencing and advertised himself as a “true Sword-Man,” contends that duelling is sinful because it is the product of an “Unchristian Temper” that causes men to “Ungentlemen themselves” (ii). The differences between the “true Sword-Man” and the duellist are substantiated thus:

True Sword-Men have for the most Part more of Temper, and know better than such hot fiery Persons, how to make their Art and Dexterity subservient to them in an Engagement for Life: Likewise there is a vast difference betwixt Transport, or a too violent Passion, and an useful Degree of it, whereby one’s Vigour is excited to a greater Activity, by a more lively and brisk Agitation than ordinary of the Animal Spirits. The First is a Degree of Fury, or Madness…The Latter is an Assistance, and as it were, a Spur to one’s Strength and Vigour, and yet has a Kind of Restraint put upon it by Art. (13-14)

Hope here argues that the duellist’s fire lacks controlled passion—and by extension, “Art”—and is therefore absent of the valour, justice, or honour of the true swordsman. Passions could be parsed as either good or bad in the eighteenth-century imagination—they were typically regarded as “natural components of human physiology which had the potential to cement—but also to disrupt—harmonious social relations” (Goring 39)—tight regulation of them was imperative. As Donna T. Andrew puts it: “Social order could only be based on the recognition and proper channelling of men’s greatest passions and needs” (“The Code of Honour” 413). In describing the true swordsman’s cerebral disposition, Hope employs the word “temper,” a term that is also used in reference to the quality of a sword-blade’s composition, leading his reader to conclude that the man with the better nature also has the better sword—a usage reminiscent of the commonplace deliberate confusion between blade and man, as discussed in the Introduction. A sword with a good temper is one that has been refined and cooled, has had its natural purities brought out by careful craft; similarly, a man with a good temper is one who has been polished and perfected by the careful application of “Restraint” to his native “Strength and Vigour.” Hope’s usage accentuates the shift from the assumption that a gentleman was naturally elite (i.e. the cavalier), to the post-Revolution contention that he was highly trained (the gentleman officer) that we have already seen in Chapter Two. We have here a definition of ‘Restraint’ that is essentially Foucauldian, in that the tight regulation of natural inclinations is key to exercising authority: it is discipline that makes a hero. As Mary Douglas has written, “the more value people set on social constraints, the more the value they set on symbols of bodily control” (xxxv). Applying this to our text, while the blade had been the impoverished cavalier’s promise and portion in the seventeenth century, and was even judged capable of “roving” independently in Behn’s drama, Hope’s weapon is “subservient” to and restrained by the true swordsman. Hope’s final emphasis upon masculine restraint establishes swordplay as a controlled art and specifically distinguishes it from the duellist’s “Animal Spirits”: a lust for fighting is not a legitimate pretext for engaging in a sword-fight.

The true swordsman is defined against his counterpart, the “hot fiery Person,” one who is unable to cool the flames of his “Animal Spirits,” who has been “Ungentlemanned” and now lacks markers of both gender and class. Hope explains that the latter character’s drive to use his sword to conquer and humiliate other men is misguided and entirely removed from correct swordplay: a sword drawn in a passion is the unmanning of rather than the making of the man. In this he did not insist that men should *only* use their swords in order to defend themselves. Hope had already allowed that there are “no hardier and braver Men” than prize-fighters (5): the fact that correct swordplay could still include ludic performances that were staged for the general public heightens the impression that swordplay was a learned “art.” And so the art of fencing, he contends, is comparable to other genteel, sociable skills like dancing and riding, which, “if frequently but moderately plied, and without Excess of Diet in either Meat or Drink,” can do him no harm (175-76). Thus cast as a symbol of civility and self-restraint, Hope’s ideal swordsman embodies the manly sensibilities of the early eighteenth century that moralists like Addison and Steele sought to represent onstage and in print.

Hope’s eagerness to rewrite correct sword-use as the “art of fence” while simultaneously debunking the notion that duellists had any civility at all was in fact one of many works published during the first three decades of the eighteenth century that demonised the duel. According to Markku Peltonen’s research, although arguments against duelling had been in circulation since the 1580s (85-86), the second decade of the eighteenth century saw the “most intensive” campaign against the practice in its history thus far (210). Nor was this campaign without provocation. The Introduction acquainted us with Baron Mohun’s career of pugnacious disorder, engaging in seven sword-fights over the course of two decades. Mohun may have been in the public eye more often than most other duellists of his generation, owing to his involvement in the deaths of William Mountfort and the Duke of Hamilton, eminent figures in theatre and politics respectively, but his violent inclinations were characteristic of men of his age and social class. Indeed, G. J. Barker-Benfield paints a verbal portrait of late seventeenth-century aristocrats and their “minions” participating in a ceaseless parade of public outrage and violence: “bystanders could be bitten on the buttocks, have their limbs broken, be stabbed, or have their teeth knocked out” (47). The contemporary effort to modify male manners and eliminate public violence was a slow and largely unproductive endeavour, not least because criticism of duelling simply resulted in men being more surreptitious in their approach towards utilising physical force, taking to fighting their battles in increasingly private arenas. Writes Shoemaker: “This was not just because duelling was illegal; it was also because public opinion increasingly condemned it, and duellists did not want to be interrupted and prevented from carrying out their ritual” (“Male Honour and the Decline of Public Violence” 206). In the absence of appealing alternatives to the private sword for settling disputes, men who would have themselves thought of as honourable continued to use their weapons as instruments of authority.

The compulsion for men to assert and maintain power through the sword remained entrenched within society throughout the early eighteenth century. We have already reviewed the post-Revolution lionisation of the gentleman officer, the hero of a society that was proud of its military endeavours, and seen that the leading comic playwrights like Cibber, Farquhar, and Centlivre found new ways to justify the sword’s continued existence on the stage rather than eliminating it entirely. During the century’s first few decades, the emotions that propelled men into using violence to assert their power and claim to honour were widely accepted on social levels that reached as high as Prince George, the future George II, who was linked to a challenge against the Duke Newcastle in 1717 (Jesse 6-7). Meanwhile, three bills proposed for stronger punishments for duellists failed between 1713 and 1720, and the idea was dropped for a century, demonstrating both public concern about duelling, and its entrenchment in society. William Pittis wryly suggested that the failure might be attributed to the fact that “the Majority of the House of Commons were Young Men, and possess’d of too much Spirit, to give their consent to a Bill that would disable them from showing their Resentment” (10-11). Even Steele—who, as we will see, was one of the most outspoken of the anti-duelling campaigners—had fought a duel as a young man in the army (Baldick 180-81), revealing that lines between duellists and opponents to duelling were more blurred than many critics would like to have admitted. Condemned as a moral wrong in popular periodicals like the Tatler and the Spectator, duelling was simultaneously a socially-sanctioned, perhaps necessary, and “even desirable” practice for much of the eighteenth century (Andrew, Aristocratic Vice 66). The only way to counter this stalemate was to use cultural pressure such as stage comedies to re-educate audiences and reposition the duellist. Steele was one of the most indefatigable in his attempts to portray swordplay as neither admirable nor emulable, contending that swords should only be drawn out of necessity, and in service to the public—rather than personal—good.

Building upon the contention that well-behaved men should learn to stay their swords, reformist journalism from the latter half of Anne’s reign regarded the seventeenth-century sword with apprehension. Steele, who had so effortlessly aged the old cavalier Sir Roger de Coverley into the eighteenth century, concocted a delicate argument to explain the prevalence of swordplay during the Restoration that enabled him to laud the bravery of the cavaliers and lampoon the “Modishes and the Smarts” who copied their patterns of duelling. In a dialogue written for Tatler 39 in July 1709, Steele explained that the cavaliers had a reputation for duelling because “gallantry and mode, which glitter agreeably to the imagination, were encouraged by the Court, as promoting its splendour,” while Parliamentarians considered duelling as “disreputable, and as great an impediment to advancement in the Service,” in order to “recommend themselves to the public for men of serious and solid parts.” Steele acknowledges cavaliers as men of “bravery and gallantry” who set the standards for masculine behaviour at the beginning of the dialogue, but the rest of the piece is mostly dominated by a comic anecdote that serves to debase the men who follow blindly transitory fads: the duellists “stripped to their shirts…and the morning being frosty, major Adroit desired that the other second…would try a thrust or two, only to keep them warm.” The fashionable duellist here is not a man of impressive power, but rather a shivering, half-naked young fool.

Authors usually preferred to read the Restoration duel as one branch of the age’s excesses—excesses that it was the present age’s responsibility to critique and correct. John Cockburn wrote in 1720 that Charles II’s court had generated a “Corruption of manners” that “gave continual occasion to Quarrels, which produced as often Duels” (351-52). Likewise, Addison described the (possibly fictitious) “mischievous” Duelling Club of Charles’s reign in a March 1711 edition of the Spectator. This bloodthirsty society held as a rule that “none was to be admitted that had not fought his Man” (9). In general, these descriptions avoided an overly-derogatory portrayal of the cavalier, instead preferring to characterise Restoration swordplay as faddish or as a cultural outlier, rather than a centrepiece. For Steele, the cavalier who duelled simply joined in with Charles II’s “glitter”; it was an activity that added to court mythos rather than lay at its heart. He would later comment in Spectator 14 that the men of “five and twenty Years ago…tho’ in those Days they neglected their Morality, they kept up their Good Sense.” The problem lay with the cavaliers’ imitators, who made clowns of themselves. Similarly, Cockburn found that the problem was one of bad manners, not bad politics. Meanwhile, Addison’s Duelling Club ceased existence after a few years, “most of the Members of it being put to the Sword, or hanged” (Spectator 9)—cavalier violence was disorganised and swiftly dealt with.

In 1713, the Duelling Club’s modern variant was the “Terrible-Club,” as described in a Guardian essay in August of that year. The more tactful descriptions of the cavaliers, who had at least wielded their swords on the battlefield in an effort to maintain legitimate authority, are entirely absent here, and the author’s tone is entirely derisive. The Terrible-Club are described as a society of young men who walked the streets of London with “long Sword, and the swaggering Cock” (143) in order to “affect a Military Air.” But the author assures us that this is a mark of their cowardice rather than their bravery, for

their very Dress tells you, that they are surrounded with Fears, that they live in *Hobbs*’s State of Nature, and that they are never free from Apprehensions. I dare say, if one were to look into the Hearts of these Champions, one should find there a great Tendency to go cased in Armour, and that nothing but the Fear of a stronger Ridicule restrains them from it. A brave Man scorns to wear any Thing, that may give him an Advantage over his Neighbour; his great Glory is neither to fear nor to be feared. (143)

Rather than demonstrating his virility, the “long sword” and “swaggering Cock” of the “Terribles” signify the opposite: they call attention to a lack, rather than an excess, of masculinity. Like Hope’s “hot fiery Person,” the “Terrible” has unmanned himself through conspicuous swordplay. And so, unlike the Restoration swordsman, this new social type has no legitimate claim to valour; martial bravery impresses him, but his only immediate experience with physical force is in private combat. This scathing description is indebted to the satire on the timorous *miles gloriosus* already familiar to us from the previous chapter, but by the mid-1710s the martial emphasis had faded. Army fashions were still blamed for the widespread popularity of sword-use—for example, in 1712 the clergyman Edmund Chishull accused “Men of Birth” of affecting a “Military Character” (9), while twelve years later Hope was confident that the popularity of duelling would be universally discredited “if once laid aside by Military Men” (69)—but the specific accusation that men who followed these fashions were fops had been largely abandoned by Steele, Addison, and other authors who claimed responsibility for shaping English manners.

In these Augustan appraisals of the private sword, we find an increasing attempt to define it as the unreasonable and vulgar outbursts of unpolished men, rather than hyper-fashionable and therefore suspect. Indeed, Steele, one of the “watchdogs of fashion,” as Erin Mackie has put it (12), had been so careful to balance his evaluation of seventeenth-century swordplay that he had positioned it as symptomatic of Restoration splendour that nonetheless categorically had no place within the rules of eighteenth-century polite conduct. His preference for realising politeness through obeying a dogmatic behavioural code might have left him open to a counter-attack—after all, “the man who has, precisely, followed the prescriptions for achieving politeness” is the affected, ridiculous fop (Cohen 51)—but Steele neatly writes himself out of this predicament by firmly insisting that the “Modishes and Smarts” that he satirises in the Tatler are the immediate forebears of “[o]ur very pretty fellows…[who] think a quarrel so little fashionable, that they will not be exposed to it by any other man’s vanity” (39). In this formula, it is the modern fop, the successor to the Restoration duellist, whose revulsion for swordplay is the result of a petty desire to be thought fashionable, allowing Steele’s truely polite gentleman to object to the private sword because, as he wrote in Tatler 25, it “neither has its foundation from true reason, nor solid fame; but is an imposter, made up of cowardice, falsehood, and want of understanding.” Legitimately polite behaviour, in Steele’s construction of the term, was contingent upon morals rather than modes.

As the notion that the fiery swordsman needed “tempering” to become refined gained ground, critics now framed their arguments as conduct literature, bent upon shaming young men into good behaviour—often literally: in a June 1711 issue of the Spectator, Addison recommended pillorying young men who drew their swords in a passion (99). Far from the men of power celebrated in the seventeenth century, newspapers and pamphlets repeatedly characterised swordsmen as cowardly social degenerates whose notion of courage can only be regarded as “unmanly” (Chishull 5), “false” (Theatre 26), or non-existent, as the author of the Guardian article would have it (143). The onslaught against the duellist’s character is ceaseless: Defoe contends that they “have no compassion for themselves, for their Families, for their Posterity” (A Strict Enquiry 4-5). Another critic, who titled himself a “Gentleman of Wales,” argued that the duellist’s “heats and Starts, and Sallies of *every Headstrong Lust and Passion*” recalled the rakehell at his worst (12). Indeed, William Darrell, whose anti-duelling conduct book A Gentleman Instructed in the Conduct of a Virtuous and Happy Life went through four editions during the 1710s, found that the duellist was akin to the man who “whines away at a *Harlot’s* Feet, his Estate, his Health, and his Soul too,” and the man who “drowns his Reason in *Claret* and *Canary*” (6-7). The hallmarks of cavalier excess—wine, women, and swordplay—are presented as the *unmaking* of a man. Of the three, swordplay is the most castigated because it was the most problematic.

Most devastatingly, the duellist’s failure to exert self-control was ultimately his failure as an English gentleman, as evidenced by the contemptuous descriptions that these critics gave to them. We have already seen Hope’s depiction of the fiery men who “Ungentlemen themselves” through their violent activities, but other writers summon up the full force of their wrath to express their condemnation: Steele addressed the duelling “Goths and Vandals” in the audience in his preface to The Conscious Lovers (5); Darrell likened swordsmen to Roman slaves (7); Defoe described them as “Tygers” who “in a Beastly manner…Gore, Kill, and Destroy” their “Fellow-Creature[s]” (Abolishing of the Duels in France 5, 2); an anonymous letter to the Spectator noted that “[t]he manners of Indian Savages are not becoming Accomplishments to an English fine Gentleman” (5: 15-16). The word “Chimerical” recurs throughout anti-duelling literature across the decade, in the Tatler, in Defoe’s Account of the Abolishing of the Duels in France, and in the Gentleman of Wales’s The Humour of Duelling, Considered, invoking the fire-breathing hybrid-monster of classical mythology. Far from being assertion of power and a demand for honour, the duellist’s decision to reject modern polite behaviour by sending or accepting a challenge marked him as an animal or a “savage.” “Man by Nature is half Beast,” argued Darrell (155), and it was necessary to refine him, to draw out his natural merits and discipline his passions, if he was to escape the shame of debased, inhuman frenzy. By interpreting their behaviour as that of “savages” and animals, men who fought could be dismissed as unworthy of respect or interest, slaves to an “Unchristian and Inhuman Custom” (Defoe, Abolishing of the Duels in France 3). As one correspondent to the St. James’s Journal in 1722 wrote: “They who generally fall by these Engagements are a sort of Ill-bred People…so that the loss of them ought not to be considered of such ill consequences; especially considering them as Sacrifices to Good Manners” (30). Ill-bred people are not gentlemen and should not be mourned—and certainly should not be held up for admiration and emulation.

Journalists and pamphleteers who accused duellists of barbarity and inhumanity expressed what Jennifer Low has described as a “fear of uncontrol” in their writing (101). This phobia was partly derived from a worry that the persistence of duelling would result in a decrease in monarchical power over the people—one anonymous critic described the duel as a “complication of all the highest Crimes a Subject is capable of; Felony, Murder, Treason, and Rebellion,” for “‘tis taking out of the Government’s Hand, the Right of Life and Death” (An Account of the Damnable Prizes in Old Nicks Lottery 19)—as well as the notion that duellists were usurping divine prerogative over dispensing judgment: “*Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord*,” Chishull reminded his readers (3). But critics were also concerned about the effect that the duel would have on the individual. Both Chishull (14) and Defoe (An Abolishing of the Duels in France 2; A Strict Enquiry 4) agreed along with Hope that a gentleman who participated in a duel descended into an unrestrained passion and could lose his life. Accordingly, anti-duelling rhetoric was concerned with both the effect that the activities of the individual could have on the spirit of the nation, and the consequences that a nation that tolerated sword violence to the degree that Britain did would have on the individual.

Given this preoccupation with the relationship that the swordsman had with his country, critics pressed a comparison between the enthusiasm with which the English gentleman picked up his own sword in comparison to the French honnête *homme*. As a correspondent to the Weekly Packet wrote in March 1720: “As we have imitated the follies of France almost to our Ruin, there are some Hopes of our following that Nation in the one Thing that is Praise-worthy…it being Death in that Kingdom either to give or accept a Challenge” (404). In fact, the success of the French ban was dubious; as the Flying Post 3786 pointed out in 1716, duelling was still practiced in spite of the strict laws. The anonymous author of A True and Impartial Account of the Animosity, Quarrel and Duel Between the late Duke of Hamilton and the Lord Mohun explained that “*Duels* are still fought in *France* and elsewhere, under the Disguise of Rencounters”; likely these followed the pattern described by Jean Gailhard in 1678: “If one sends or makes a challenge to another, he will receive this answer, Sir, I dare not answer you, because *Duels* are forbidden at present: but I use to walk in such places, and if you fall upon me, I wear a Sword to defend my self” (128).

Nevertheless, France’s failure to properly enforce its laws against duelling did not matter to British moralists, who viewed even France’s success in passing a nominal ban as humiliating evidence that Britain was unable to govern its own people. The sanction was so envied that Steele addressed his preface to Defoe’s Account of the Abolishing of the Duels in France to the English reader, while in a June 1711 edition of the Spectator, Addison noted that it was to Louis XIV’s credit that he had been able to suppress duelling in “so vain and lively a People as those of *France*” (99). Defoe was especially persistent throughout his career in his insistence that Britain should replicate France’s laws. His earliest effort was a newspaper, Review of the Affairs of France (1704-05), in which, like Addison, he praised the French king for having “Conquer’d this Destructive Humour” in that “*Passionate Nation*” (17). Duelling was the direct consequence of weak leadership, he argued, and only a Britain united against the practice could truly be considered France’s equal (16, 23). Following on from these early efforts, Defoe published two books in the 1710s which emphasised the wildness of the French people before anti-duelling laws had been implemented—worse even than Britons now—with the implied message that it was a matter of national shame that Britain was unable to do otherwise.

What quickly becomes apparent from reviewing this literature is that these critics sought to emphasise the sword’s use as an instrument of violence, while largely ignoring it as a symbol of social power. We have already seen an manifestation of this trend in the Introduction, in our analysis of Lafontaine’s portrait of George I. Seventeenth-century cavaliers had placed the sword of state at the king’s side as his principal “Instrument” for “protecting the weal of the whole body politike” (Howell 5), and personal swords in their own hands, brandished to assert the legitimacy of their own powers. George, however, has no sword of state in his portrait of kingship, while his personal sword is painted as indistinct and unimportant. It is afforded some space as an accurate reflection of contemporary male costume, but has been purged of meaning and importance. Real employment of the private sword was morally objectionable; the passive sword found in dress and speech, described in Chapter One, was trivial and had negligible symbolic value.

We can see how the erasure of the passive private sword’s meaning occurred by looking at those commentaries that *did* acknowledge that men drew their swords in order to be appreciated as “men of honour.” These critics insist that this honour is “Imaginary” (Defoe, Account of the Abolishing of the Duels 5); the swordsman’s belief in honour through his sword is evidence of his senselessness. When critics did recognise that the sword’s appearance changed with the times—such as in Steele’s “Modishes and Smarts” dialogue, which contains the disinterested observation that “swords of those days [i.e. pre-Revolution] being pretty long…” (39)—it is usually within the context of an anecdote about the brevity (and hence by implication, triviality) of aesthetic fads. The swordsmen in the Guardian’s “Terrible-Club” essay similarly fall into the trap of believing that their swords make them fearsome—when in fact all they do is provoke the author to suspect their courage (143). Yet similar examples are sparse among the great volumes of anti-duelling literature published between 1709 and 1724: in order to sap the private sword of its totemic power, most critics ignored its purpose in dress. No longer a badge of honour, an instrument of authority, or a positive signifier of masculinity, the sword was simply an object that could be wielded well (in battle) or badly (in private combat). Contemplating this, Steele, Addison, Defoe, and other critics were unable to justify the prolongation of private swordplay when it did not transparently assist state concerns. And so, while Restoration duellists were met with acknowledgments of the victorious swordsman’s power, in the early eighteenth century these responses shifted to alarm.

The Conscious Lovers

Although Steele was highly critical of the continued toleration of duelling in Britain throughout the 1710s, he was consoled by the state of British theatre—particularly comic mainpieces, which he and Addison celebrated over the course of their journalism for the freedoms they were permitted. Their affection for native drama arose partly from nationalist sentiment in opposition to the popularity of Italian opera, to which we will turn in the following chapter: as Steele wrote in his 1720 prologue to Delarivier Manley’s Lucius (1717), investment in British theatre was the key to keeping Britain free from “foreign Bonds” (Theatre 10). However, the British stage was genuinely experiencing a brief rejuvenation: the King’s opera house closed in 1715 due to a lack of funds, which waylaid Italian opera’s domination of the British stage until the Royal Academy of Music began a new operatic season in April 1720. The near-absence of *opera seria* from the London stage during these five years dovetailed with a revitalised comic scene: during these years Addison and Centlivre both wrote lucrative comedies, The Drummer (1715) and A Bold Stroke for a Wife (1717), both of which had long runs in the repertory; Cibber returned to authorship with The Nonjuror, the smash-hit anti-Jacobite comedy of the 1717-18 season; minor successes appeared from the pens of Charles Molloy, Charles Killigrew, and Christopher Bullock; and Steele began serious development on The Conscious Lovers, finally staged at Drury Lane in 1722.

Although loosely based on Terence’s second-century play Andria, no comedy better demonstrates the full scale of early eighteenth-century Whig interests than The Conscious Lovers: Steele scrutinises the manners of gentlemen within a plot that sets up the interests of the traditional landed gentry against those of the *nouveau riche* mercantile class, in order to formulate a potential middle ground that yields a literal and metaphorical marriage between the two groups. Steele purposefully and explicitly wrote with the intention to induce a moral transformation in its audience, first previewing a version of the play in his Theatre newspaper in March 1720, over two years before it officially premiered. In spite of some material differences from the finished product, his fundamental intent, which was to demonstrate the folly of duelling through the young heroes’ decision to refrain from fighting one another, was the same. Anti-duelling rhetoric abounds throughout the Theatre article, and Steele plainly hopes that his message will transform his audience’s behaviour: “We see young Men are hardly able to forebear imitation of Fopperies on the Stage, from a Desire of Praise, how warmly would they pursue true Gallantries, when accompanied with the Beauties with which a Poet represents them…?” (Theatre 19) These were sentiments that he was to repeat two years later, in his prologue to The Conscious Lovers, revealing that he expected an audience to be alert, attentive—indeed, “conscious.”

While earlier comic heroes usually relegated moral reflection to the end of the play, Steele’s young hero Bevil makes solemn pronouncements on the proper conduct and interests of gentlemen, teaching us that reading is invigorating, that the opera is enjoyable but shallow when compared to English drama, and that duelling is merely a practice that “Custom has impos’d upon every Man, who would live with Reputation and Honour in the World” (The Conscious Lovers 63). His secondary characteristic is his indecision: for the duration of the play he is torn between pleasing his father by marrying the wealthy Mr. Sealand’s daughter Lucinda, and pleasing himself by marrying the impoverished Indiana. His choice is ultimately made for him with the discovery that Indiana is the long-lost daughter of the rich merchant Mr. Sealand, enabling them to marry. The actor who played Bevil therefore had to be capable of both delivering moral assertions with sincerity, and portraying his indecision as a personal quandary between love and duty, rather than as evidence of an absence of moral conviction. Cibber, who was in charge of casting the play, chose Barton Booth to play the part: although Booth had some experience acting comic leads, playing Captain Worthy in The Fair Quaker of Deal, and Dorimant in The Man of Mode, he was chiefly known as a tragedian—famed for his Cato, Tamerlane, Lear, and Othello—which likely lent the part some gravitas. Through Booth, Bevil’s indecision could be played as weighty thought, and his moral proclamations had plausible force behind them.

Bevil’s friend and foil, Myrtle, was played by Wilks. Myrtle lacks some of the behavioural impulses of a typical Wilksian character: he is a romantic rather than a great wit; his sexual appetite is limited to his desire to marry Lucinda; he places great value upon masculine friendship. Nevertheless, he shares with Willmore, Plume, and many of Wilks’s other earlier roles a sensitivity to personal injury and a contention that the proper way to make reparations is through the sword, which he does by sending a challenge to Bevil. In this (Steele contends) he is misguided, and just as Carlos in Love Makes a Man needed to be taught that there were occasions when it *was* appropriate to fight, Myrtle needs to learn when to leave his sword in its sheath. However, where these earlier plays had allowed their audiences to draw their own conclusions about when and how swords should be used by abstaining from placing explicit moral commentary in Wilks’s mouth, Steele is anxious to stress the point that the man who sends a challenge has had a lapse in reason. Myrtle, he makes clear, is not wicked, but temporarily misguided—it is possible that Steele’s own experience as a duellist guided his thought-process here—but he had to be *shown* why he was wrong. For these reasons, Wilks was ideal for the part, because his characters were so regularly known for their heats and impulses, while his celebrity persona made him sympathetically appealing to the audience.

The Conscious Lovers has been the subject of much recent discussion for its presentation of trade and the (female) body: Brett D. Wilson, for example, has analysed Cimberton’s anatomisation of Lucinda in Act Three, Scene One, and Myrtle’s examination of Lucinda through glasses and a magnifying glass in Act Five, Scene One, to conclude that the play is an attempt to bolster the body politic (497-518). J. Douglas Canfield has read the play as enacting control over women’s bodies (“Shifting Tropes of Ideology” 221-23), while Nicole Horejsi had discussed the motif of Indiana as a commodity, arguing that Steele (through his characters) equates her with the bracelet that identifies her at the end of the play, and concludes that Steele thus emblemises “imperialist guilt” through her person (12-14). Although these critiques offer enlightening insights into the *unconscious* assumptions of early Georgian society that the play employs, these postcolonial and feminist lenses say little about the conscious intention of the author, and have often been adjusted to the disadvantage of the central scene in which Bevil and Myrtle almost fight a duel before deciding to reason out their disagreement, which is frequently overlooked in analysis. Steele himself felt that this was the most important scene in the play—as he claimed in the prologue, “the whole was writ for the sake of the scene of the fourth act, wherein Mr. Bevil evades the quarrel with his friend” (5)—and he used it to show how men should prioritise reason and self-restraint over the fashionable but deadly modes of honour. Taken by itself, the scene appears to stand in isolation within the play, with no reference to the failed duel either before or afterwards—a fact that was noted at the time: “[W]hat Connexion there is between that and the other Incidents, or where the Subordination of it lies to the entire Moral, is not so easy to comprehend,” wrote one contributor for the Freeholder’s Journal in December 1722 (50). What this anonymous journalist failed to see—indeed, what subsequent critics have not acknowledged—is that the play is entirely concerned with the negotiation of power: to realign the play’s focus onto the opening of Act Four is to contextualise the play’s mercantilism, social hierarchies, and domination over female bodies, for Steele intended his favourite scene as a final confrontation of the seventeenth-century assertion of power through the sword.

Fashion and Genteel Behaviour in *The Conscious Lovers*

Before embarking upon an analysis of the failed duel scene, it is worth first exploring Steele’s complicated interpretation of the practice of correct gentlemanly behaviour, as he uses this as a reliable model of moral values. Although the embodiment of the gentlemanly ideal is distinct from merely behaving like a man of fashion—a symbolically portentous construction that runs in dialogue with the polite gentleman throughout the play—the overlapping qualities of fashion, conduct, manners, and politeness make individual definitions difficult to decipher, and Steele is rarely forthcoming about the precise properties of each. Within his journalism “[f]ashion and style are often negatively evaluated as at best empty and at worst deceptive, signs, with no necessary, and often an illusive, relation to ethical referents” (Mackie 20). Indeed, Steele’s ambivalent attitude towards fashion in his journalism is well-documented. Philip Carter has observed that “both the Tatler and the Spectator were notably unspecific in their instructions for day-to-day refined male conduct” (53), while Mackie has rightly argued that Steele’s credibility as a fashion-sceptic is confounded when he claims to speak for fashionable society. As we have already seen in the anecdote about the “Modishes and the Smarts,” Steele was careful to orientate his attempts to dictate polite behaviour around the popular contention that polite men were fops. In order to deduce what Steele meant when he wrote on fashion and polite behaviour, we must therefore acknowledge that we are relying on contexts rather than an explicit set of rules.

Steele extended his understanding of politeness and fashion as two interrelated but distinct constructs into his play. Although Bevil and his friends attend *de rigueur* social events such as masquerades and the opera, they are insistent that they are “never partial to the Fashion” (The Conscious Lovers 41). As in his journalism, this is not a decisive condemnation of fashion: although Steele associates it with superficiality and caprice, fashion is not (necessarily) inherently sinful, perhaps employing Addison’s contention from Spectator 16 that “Foppish and fantastic Ornaments are only Indications of Vice, not criminal in themselves,” and anticipating a sentiment from Lord Chesterfield in 1745, who was sure that “dress is a very foolish thing, and yet it is a very foolish thing for a man not to be well dressed, according to his rank and way of life” (13). And so, Elaine McGirr has analysed the scene in which Bevil and Indiana contemplate the London stage (164-65): Steele heralds Indiana’s ability to enjoy the opera as a “pretty nothing” while acknowledging a preference for British theatre as evidence of her worth (The Conscious Lovers 41). The young people’s interest in modish events is essentially harmless, as long as it is clear that it is not a consuming preoccupation. Nevertheless Steele does insist that there exists a cognitive dissonance between being fashionable and being polite: a gentleman must couple his participation in popular social activities and modes of dress with the understanding that these same factors are not the definitive channels for measuring his politeness. Politeness is largely cerebral, and demands that the individual apply his own learning and taste to how he occupies his time.

We can apply Steele’s cynical attitudes towards fashion to his representation of the changing nature of violence, which he undertakes in the first act through a visual comparison between Bevil and his father. In the first two scenes, Steele shows first Sir John representing Augustan conceptions of the old, surface-oriented fashions of the late Restoration, and then Bevil representing the new, introspective manners of the present day. The play begins with the patriarch at his dressing-table—a place of vanity, where only the outer self is reflected—contemplating his youthful wildness and “freedom” (12). Dramatic contrast comes in the next scene, which opens with Bevil reading and contemplating that this activity “sets the Spirit for the Vicissitudes of the Day, better than the Glass does a Man’s Person” (23). Bevil’s preference for contemplative thought over surface reflection, contrasted with his father’s stubborn loyalty to a transitory exterior—such as his dogged efforts to identify Mr. Sealand’s lineal heritage—is a constant theme throughout the play.

The first act also provides two contrasting examples of violent behaviour as performed in Sir John’s youth and in the present day. In the first scene, Sir John relates a story that ostensibly serves to reveal that he knows about his son’s affection for Indiana, but has the additional advantage of representing Bevil in a heroic act. The narrative concerns a masquerade that Sir John had recently attended; he had worn a costume in imitation of the fashions of his own father’s generation, which caught the attention of a young man dressed as a clown who decided to harass him:

Ay, he followed us, till the Gentleman who led the Lady in the *Indian* Mantle presented that gay Creature to the Rustick, and bid him (like *Cymon* in the Fable) grow Polite, by falling in Love, and let that worthy old Gentleman alone, meaning me: The Clown was not reform’d, but rudely persisted, and offer’d to force off my Mask; with that, the Gentleman throwing off his own, appear’d to be my Son, and in his Concern for me, tore off that of the Nobleman; at this their seiz’d each other; the Company call’d the Guard: and in the Surprize, the Lady swoon’d away: Upon which my Son quitted his Adversary, and had now no Care but of the Lady. (13-14)

Although this story is fairly straightforward, there is a minor uncertainty with regards to the form that the fight actually took. That Bevil and the Clown “seiz’d each other” suggests that they were throwing punches, but the severity of the other characters’ reactions—guards are called to separate them and Indiana faints—alternatively implies that swords were drawn. It is even unclear whether Bevil or the other male characters wear swords. I suspect that Steele’s obscurity here is deliberate, for while a fist-fight suggests a common brawl, an earlier sword-fight would undermine the later anti-duelling rhetoric. Similarly, a sword strapped to Bevil’s waist would acquire ominous or ambiguous significance in a play so critical of violent activity. The audience is therefore permitted to resolve the ambiguity to their individual satisfaction. By remaining vague and refusing to address the sword other than obliquely in dialogue, its symbolic power is thus stripped of its totemic power and is only used as an instrument for pursuing dangerous male passions. Significantly, this affinity is described, not staged, and the ambiguity cannot be dispelled through performance.

Despite the uncertainty of whether or not a weapon was used in this fight, Steele uses this speech to develop a definition of genteel male violence that is permissible under certain circumstances. Sir John’s narration is uncomplicated and casts Bevil in a heroic role, firstly by attempting to convince the insolent Clown to “grow Polite” and replace his boorishness for love; and secondly by responding to the clown’s threat to use physical force on Sir John with an attack. The story thus describes how an insult could progress to a justified fight: Steele is careful to have Sir John note that his son first attempted to pacify the Clown, and then launched his attack only after the Clown had threatened to “force off” Sir John’s mask. Thus Bevil, like Colonel Britton in The Wonder!, is both reasonable enough to seek peaceable methods of conciliation at first, and brave enough to fight when faced with a real threat.

Bevil returns his father’s compliment in the following scene, offering up a story he has heard about the violent engagements in which Sir John participated during his own period of courtship. However, unlike Sir John’s smooth narrative that shows the evolution of an insult into a justified reencounter, Bevil represents his father’s behaviour as an unfocused clamour:

You have, Sir, found the Inconvenience there is, when a Man weds with too much Love in his Head. I have been told, Sir, that at the Time you married, you made a mighty Bustle on the Occasion. There was challenging and fighting, scaling walls—locking up the Lady—and the Gallant under an Arrest for fear of killing all his Rivals. (25).

The “Time” Sir John married refers to his experience specifically, but also suggests modes of courtship during the seventeenth century. Bevil’s use of the continuous tense here (“challenging,” “fighting,” “scaling,” “locking,” “killing”) is a jocular summation of the Restoration libertine’s perpetual “heats and starts,” as Chishull would put it. Sir John had “too much Love in his Head”—a significant criticism in a play that places considerable dramatic impetus upon Bevil’s dilemma between love and duty—and this love that provokes his passion also makes him lose his self-control. This speech is less a critique of Sir John specifically—who is chastised as over-fond of the codified behaviour of his youth, but is still distinct from featherbrained beaux like Lord Foppington—and more of an attack on libertine fashions for thoughtless violence. The cultural recollection of the Restoration gentleman sees him repeating these same fantastical adventures *ad infinitum*, repeating a pattern of stock character types—Lady, Gallant, Rivals—whose adventures are light-weight.: Bevil uses comical understatement in describing the “Inconvenience” of the “mighty Bustle.” Libertinism, and the imprudence Bevil associates with it, is a relic of the previous generation, and can be lightly dismissed.

The Duel

By comparing the two opposing descriptions of violence from the first act, we have begun to create a picture of how Steele felt that physical force should correctly interact with fashion and genteel behaviour. According to this understanding, a man might reasonably draw his sword when confronted by an immediate threat or insult, but the “mighty bustle” of “challenging and fighting” that characterised Restoration violence has become stock low comedy. Steele expands upon this theory in the first scene of Act Four. Always jealous of Bevil’s friendship with Lucinda—he is both suspicious when he thinks that Bevil intends to marry her according to Sir John’s wishes, and then angry when Bevil talks of escaping the match—Myrtle sends Bevil a challenge to fight, and in doing so replaces Sir John as the gentleman who acts with “too much Love in his Head.”

The scene commences with Bevil opening the challenge and expressing his disbelief and concern. If Bevil is to be believed—”I have often dared to disapprove of the Decisions a Tyrant Custom has introduced” (64)—he has never been a duellist, and he is initially reluctant to fight. Although he is concerned before his meeting with Myrtle that the other man will think him a coward (“He’ll, forsooth, call it, or think it fear, if I explain without fighting”), he nevertheless still denounces the practice of “[d]uelling, which Custom has impos’d upon every Man, who would live with Reputation and Honour in the World” (63). However, his response changes when Myrtle arrives and rebukes his friend’s “cool manner” (64), pressing the necessity of the duel. His passion, Myrtle reasons, is evidence of his love for Lucinda, and so when Belvile objects to Myrtle’s heat and attempts to cool him, he disagrees: “Is the Woman one loves, so little an Occasion of Anger?” (65) He goes on to attack Bevil’s treatment of Indiana; she is Bevil’s “Foreign Trinket, for your loose House…your Rambling Captive, your *Indian* Princess, for your soft Moments of Dalliance.”

Despite these offensive reflections on his relationship with Indiana, Bevil does not draw his sword. Instead, he responds: “You have touch’d me beyond the Patience of a Man; and I’m excusable, in the Guard of Innocence (or from the Infirmity of Human Nature, which can bear no more) to accept your Invitation, and observe your Letter.” Bevil’s manner of accepting Myrtle’s challenge is in alignment with the treatment that Steele gives to polite behaviour. Even as Bevil agrees to participate in the “Tyrant Custom,” he rationalises his assent by explaining that because Myrtle has insulted him, he must respond in accordance with the cultural standard. If Steele’s hero agrees to fight a duel, he must articulate his reasons; he must show that he is still a cognitive thinker and has not (yet) become one of the animalistic duellists feared in print.

But after further consideration that occurs while the two “sullenly” await a coach to take them to their battlefield, Bevil recalls his “Obligations” to his father and to Lucinda and elects to explain to Myrtle the platonic nature of his friendship with Lucinda by showing him a recent letter he had received from her (59-60). Myrtle professes himself ashamed, and the two men reconcile with one another, vowing that the recollection of their near-duel will make them “Dearer Friends than ever” (60). The scene concludes with a set of heroic couplets, to accentuate the perils of duelling:

Betray’d by Honour, and compell’d by Shame,

They hazard Being, to preserve a Name:

Nor dare enquire into the dread Mistake,

‘Till plung’d in sad eternity they Wake. (61)

Myrtle’s verse here articulates the discovery that although the mind’s ability to reflect is a more genteel quality than the body’s ability to act and pose, the body still retains its own worth that is in some ways more important: it is transient; it communicates good manners and morals. After all, if the body has no importance beyond existing as a vessel for the mind, then why should the violent activities of the libertine or the self-ornamentation of the fop become the subject of moral debate? Steele partly addresses this in Bevil’s attitude towards Indiana in this scene—he cannot be satisfied with just the knowledge that Indiana is a woman of honour and virtue; there is an imperative to “prove” it to the world by agreeing to fight Myrtle—but explores the quandary more fully in the relationship between Bevil and Myrtle themselves, as the two men realise the necessity of the eighteenth-century drive for “congruence between thought and action” (Carter 53). In particular, Wilks, playing his usual elegant gentleman, needs instruction in how to temper his good manners with true politeness. The foppish Cimberton, the real rival for Lucinda’s hand, is a useful point of contrast here, for Cimberton “is excessively contemptuous of the body and its senses, yet also immersed in carnality” (Wilson, “Bevil’s Eyes” 506). Cimberton’s debauchery is directly symptomatic of his failure to exert rational self-control over his body, and it is this lack of discipline that makes him an unfit model of genteel behaviour. And so, viewed as a revelation of the importance of a responsive connection between body and mind, and focusing upon Bevil’s rejection of gentlemanly virtues, the first scene of Act Four brings conduct into the foreground of the play.

The complexities of selfhood are further illustrated in two of Bevil’s lines: after reconsidering the duel and deciding to show Myrtle his correspondence with Lucinda, he feels that he “had time to recollect my self” (66), suggesting that in accepting the challenge he had been thrown into an unnatural state of passion. On the other hand, in a subsequent line he admires his and Myrtle’s “escape from our selves” (67). Here, selfhood *is* savage and unrefined, and can be disastrous if left unchecked. As such, Steele offers two oppositional interpretations of selfhood. Is the ‘true’ self found in the man who acts with reason and love for his friend, or the one who acts according to his passion? The disparity between these two lines in part reflects the playwright’s difficulties in creating a coherent and likeable character—throughout the play Steele struggles to show Bevil’s behaviour as both warm and engaging but also calm and dispassionate—and so authentic selfhood, which ought to be a central conceit of polite conduct, goes undefined. It also draws attention to a central conflict common to much conduct literature: if man in his natural, belligerent form—the Goths and Vandals in Steele’s audience—is the true self, then his polite, educated counterpart behaves with artifice. The Conscious Lovers does not provide a wholly satisfactory resolution to this dilemma, but the dual use of “self” indicates that genuine polite conduct lies somewhere between the two extremes of heatedness and coolness. This is consolidated by a further comment that Bevil makes, once he and Myrtle have been reconciled: “Alas! what machines are we” (67). Here, the cold automaton is levelled as the instigator of savage impulse. Although the two metaphors seemingly have opposite meanings to one another—exemplifying human progress at its most and least advanced stages—they share a commonality in that they both act without thought to what they are doing. Bevil’s reference to machines here clarifies that Steele does not intend his audience to assume that elite conduct should be absent of feeling.

The failed duel scene teaches us that gentlemanly conduct is developed and demonstrated through relationships that are founded upon equality and not competition. To affirm this new revelation, Bevil and Myrtle make constant reference to friendship in the scene’s final exchange of dialogue: “my friend,” “how many Friends have died, by the Hands of Friends,” “Dearer Friends,” “Friendly Conduct” (66-67). The repeated emphasis that Steele uses at the end of the scene is intended to underscore the fact that Bevil and Myrtle have resolved their disagreement through discussion, rather than through the conquest of one over the other. Like the cavalier hero, Bevil endorses male social relations founded upon conviviality—but unlike the cavalier, male relations are expressed through reason and conversation. Although Behn’s cavaliers had a sense of a mutual ‘cause’ in their loyalty to Charles II, and a common understanding that masculine behaviour was largely directed by the pursuit of libertine pleasures, they do not have or expect much loyalty from one another in when negotiating personal relationships, and even resolve their disagreements through the sword, as when Belville chases Willmore offstage at the end of the first scene of Act Four—an action that Willmore (judging by his failure to object) does not apparently regard as unjust. Such a relationship between friends was untenable in modern comedy. In ending the scene with a reaffirmation of the men’s friendship and disgust for the duel, Steele distinguishes the warmth of camaraderie from the warmth of anger. Much like Hope’s distinction between “too violent Passion” and manly “Vigour,” Steele posits that commendable gentlemanly behaviour is derived from ability and readiness to show spirit; to successfully navigate society, Steele contends, the gentleman must put down his sword and begin to negotiate.

Conclusion

Steele provides a homosocial happy ending for Bevil and Myrtle—but this does not solve the problem of whether Bevil should please his father by marrying Lucinda, or himself by marrying Indiana. In order to settle this issue this, we must turn to another character in the play: Lucinda’s father Mr. Sealand, the rich merchant. A man who takes pride in his unaristocratic lineage—when Sir John questions him about his “Genealogy and Descent” in the marriage negotiations, he offers a list of cockerels that his father had kept for fights (68)—his social background is nevertheless not harmful to his worth. In fact, he advances the theory that merchants are a sort of natural aristocrat, ones who have established their worth through hard work and perseverance: “[W]e Merchants,” he tells Sir John proudly, “are a species of Gentry, that have grown into the World this last Century, and are as honourable, and almost as useful, as you landed Folks, that have always thought your selves so much above us” (69).

Sealand’s lack of pretension regarding his descent extends to an absence of sentiment over his name. On the brink of contracting Bevil to marry Lucinda, he by chance discovers that Indiana is his long-lost daughter. Their separation arose, Sealand tells her, “when my Misfortunes drove me to the *Indies*…I chang’d my name of *Danvers* into *Sealand*” (88)—a name that evokes the appropriate imagery of distance and travel, and unites trade with estate, sea and land. Danvers/Sealand, we conjecture, is not one of those men whom Myrtle criticises in Act Four, who would “hazard Being, to preserve a Name.” It is difficult to imagine Behn’s cavaliers (whose “Misfortunes” also drove them abroad) divorcing themselves from their native identities in this manner. The “use” that merchants have as vital members of society (especially when compared to the traditions and affectations of the landed gentry), coupled with their refusal to exploit their name as social capital (one of the main assets of the landed gentry), accentuate Steele’s contention that power is won through negotiation and not competition.

Although The Conscious Lovers “dares” to defy fashion by rejecting the duel, it is not a radical play, in that it does not resist an ending that marries wealth to quality, to everyone’s satisfaction. Steele has simply changed the surface conventions of achieving power, rather than the definition of power itself. When analysing The Rover, we found that the power bought by money was less reliable than the power won by the sword; in The Conscious Lovers we find the opposite. Some earlier comedies do, of course, acknowledge that money is a useful lubricant when convincing cantankerous elders to approve of a marriage, but The Conscious Lovers is the first play to explicitly protest the gross and inexcusable failure that duellists make when they choose to make war rather than forge mutually-beneficial alliances. In Steele’s play, money ultimately conquers all—and for all that the young people belittle its importance in marriage compared to mutual love and affection, the discussion of wealth certainly dominates most of the dialogue in the final scene. With the discovery that Indiana is Lucinda’s sister and, Steele pointedly emphasises, “an undoubted title to half [of Sealand’s] Estate” (91), the two women are now of equal ‘value,’ Bevil is now free to choose Indiana as his wife. And so Indiana rejoices in the “bounteous hand” she can bring to her marriage (89), while Bevil regards the realisation that Indiana’s new fortunes means that he is free to marry her without objections from his father as a way of reaffirming an alliance: “I hear your mention, Sir, of Fortune with pleasure only, as it may prove the means to reconcile the best of Fathers to my Love” (90). Similarly, Myrtle and Lucinda’s final exchange of dialogue tacitly acknowledges financial discussions as essential to marriage negotiations. Although Lucinda is pleased to find that “I love you more because I bring you less”—because half of her inheritance is now Indiana’s—and Myrtle delights that her dented wealth “has contributed to the discovery of our real Inclinations to each other” (91), this greater love is a direct consequence of the frank revelations about their financial circumstances.

Bevil and Myrtle’s discovery that dialogue defeats duelling sets up this final scene as a celebration of the power of trade: negotiation permits both men to retain their joint social propinquity as well as to acquire their initial objectives. The final scene also offers a more levelled view of relationships than offered in earlier comedies. The structures of Restoration comedy typically meant that the final scene centred on a primary couple, allowing a secondary couple to fade into the background: in The Rover, for example, the play ends with the negotiation of Willmore and Hellena’s marriage, resting upon a final exchange between the two that contemplates “the Storms o’th’ Marriage Bed” (Behn, The Rover 83). Belvile and Florinda, the couple established as the dramatic focal point in the play’s first scene, receive no attention—indeed, Florinda’s sole line of dialogue in the final scene is the exclamation, “*Hellenah!* [sic]” (81), while Belvile’s only speech is made in praise of Willmore: “‘tis true, he’s a Rover of Fortune, / Yet a Prince” (82). Conversely, in The Conscious Lovers Steele splits dramatic attention as easily as he does Sealand’s fortune, allowing equal time for settling the marriages of both Bevil and Indiana, and Myrtle and Lucinda. So fair is this division that the final exchange concerns a fraternal, rather than romantic relationship:

*Bevil*. *Myrtle!* No longer Rivals now, but Brothers.

*Myrtle.* Dear *Bevil*! you are born to triumph over me! but now our competition ceases: I rejoyce in the preheminence of your Virtue, and your Alliance adds Charms to *Lucinda*.

(Steele, The Conscious Lovers 91)

But although this exchange nominally acts as a reaffirmation of the friendly relations between the two, it is also a final jab at the rivalries inherent in traditional methods of gentlemanly negotiations. Myrtle’s speech is a conclusive puncturing of those male relationships that are characterised by mutual “competition” and struggle for “triumph”; these versions of gentlemanly conduct, we are told, are inferior to an “alliance” that ties together two equal “brothers.” The duel is coded as an ungentlemanly activity, not from any moral stand-point, but because there are easier (i.e. pacifistic) ways of negotiation that yield results that are better (i.e. more beneficial to a greater number of people). As one contemporary critic from the the London Journal put it, cynically, but correctly, Bevil is not “so much shock’d at the Duel, as a Crime before Heaven, but as a Breach of Friendship” (344). With his final speech, Myrtle expels the ghost of seventeenth-century manipulations of power through the sword in favour of the benefits that can be sourced from eighteenth-century confederacy born of pure reason.

Chapter Four: The Burlesque Sentiment, 1730-1737

In order to show how Restoration and eighteenth-century comedies attempted to use swordplay to educate audiences and refashion young men who were encouraged to emulate and identify with the comic stage’s genteel heroes, I have placed the most emphasis in the previous chapters on clues found in the plays’ dialogue in order to formulate my argument. Through this reading, Willmore’s assertion that he “can boast of nothing but a Sword” (Behn, The Rover 82), and Bevil’s reflection that he has “often dared to disapprove of the Decisions a Tyrant Custom has introduced” (Steele, The Conscious Lovers 64) are central statements in their respective plays which, by connecting them to the actors who spoke them, enable us to draw conclusions about theatrical intent. While this line of argument engages heavily with how variables could impact a production—for example, I have discussed the significance of placing Willmore’s dialogue in the mouth of the Williamite Wilks rather than the Jacobite Smith in the 1708 production of The Rover—I have focused on the employment and exploitation of language in order to judge how the comic stage endeavoured to mould playgoers’ ideas about sword-use.

For the remaining two chapters, I shift focus from the linguistic dimensions of theatrical productions and give new prominence to the sword’s appearance on the stage as a hand-prop. The visual impression that a specific actor brought to a part is central to theorising the sword’s significance on the stage from the late 1720s—particularly if that actor was cast to add a new dimension to a character, such as to provoke mirth or erotic interest from the audience. This is particularly the case in travesty roles such as Miss Jones’s performance of the title role in Tom Thumb from 1730, and Margaret Woffington’s performance of Sir Harry Wildair from 1740. This new focus is partly possible because it becomes easier to discuss stage business that occurred during and after the 1730s due to a greater availability of theatrical source material than existed in previous decades (such as theatre records, actor portraits, stage biographies and retrospectives, and contemporary analyses). Its significance, however, is connected to burgeoning mid-century efforts to reconfigure the English hero. Patriotism was “the most popular literary theme of the 1730s and early 1740s” (Smith 182); by analysing the visual rather than the verbal cues that this decade’s productions provide within the context of a theatre that was attempting to standardise English heroism in response to ongoing cultural threats, we are able to consider the final stages of the sword’s development on the comic stage.

To commence an analysis of the sword on the comic stage during the 1730s, however, we must first review how it was managed during the previous decade. The impact that The Conscious Lovers had on theatre during the 1720s is apparent in a number of lesser works that employed its moral guidelines to construct their own plots. For example, Charles Johnson concluded his Love in a Forest (1723) with an epilogue that proposes: “*Wits, and Bullies are not on Record, / As Fools, and Cowards, till they draw the Sword: / Yet both pursue an empty Sound, a Name, / And bleed, and are ridiculous for FAME*” (71, ll. 3-6). Likewise, Act One, Scene One of William Chetwood’s The Lovers Opera (1729) originally staged a fight between two rivals over the beautiful Clara (11), but this was changed before the play’s second edition to show the two men’s realisation of the folly of duelling: “No more my Rival then, but Friend for ever,” remarks one after they have reasoned out their quarrel (12), while Clara herself opens Act One, Scene Seven with the question: “Into what a World of Misfortunes does this false and inconsistent Notion of Honour plunge Men?” (22) Like Bevil and Myrtle, the young heroes taught audiences that friendship was better than rivalry, while Clara compounded this by adopting the heroine’s task of showing the audience how to interpret swordplay.

Throughout the 1720s, actors probably continued to wear swords on the comic stage to silently sign to audiences that they were playing polite gentlemen. However, we begin to see a change in the following decade, in which swords were no longer consistently a prerequisite for genteel male characters, a fact that is illustrated by two pictorial representations of a scene from Cibber and Vanbrugh’s The Provoked Husband (1728). This comedy is a useful lens through which to consider the visual changes that occurred during this decade because it does not engage with swords in any meaningful way: no character draws a sword to fight, or makes reference in dialogue to “swords,” “blades,” “steel,” “challenge,” “duels,” “bravoes,” “hectors,” or any other word commonly associated with the sword. “Honour” is often mentioned, but is used with direct reference to its place in marital life, e.g. “*Love*, *Honour* and *Obey*” (9); “the Dishonour of a Husband” (79); “the Honour of my Bed” (81).[[7]](#footnote-7) By comparing two depictions of the same

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| scene at the beginning and the end of the 1730s, we can therefore be reasonably confident that the differences between the two illustrations can be attributed to an external change rather than something that was considered problematic in the playtext itself.  The first illustration is John Vanderbank’s frontispiece to John Watts’s 1729 edition of the play, which exemplifies the type | | Detail from frontispiece to “The Provoked Husband (1729) – John Vanderbank | | |
| Detail from frontispiece to “The Provoked Husband” (1740) – James Hulett | | have seen throughout the study: the swords occur as details in the gentlemen’s costumes to help to convey an impression of genteel masculinity, but are otherwise unused. This same illustration was used again as a frontispiece to a 1735 edition, also published by Watts. A change occurs in 1740, however, when |

an anonymous publisher produced a new edition with a frontispiece by James Hulett. This new picture was a reversed copy of Vanderbank’s original, but although Hulett duplicated the actors’ blocking, gestures, clothing, and even the dramatic lighting with only minor variations, he did not reproduce the swords. This new edition may not have reflected a recent production—the text is not advertised as being as “Acted at the Theatre-Royal” as the title pages of Watts’s editions had done, nor are there records of a new production of the play outside of the regular repertory performances[[8]](#footnote-8)—but it is still significant for examining changes in sword-use on the stage because it is indicative of a deliberate decision about contemporary ideas about how stage business should be represented. And so, even if Hulett was not updating Vanderbank’s original in order to reflect a real absence of swords in a performance of The Provoked Husband at the end of the 1730s, he was silently eliminating the sword because he felt that its presence was not useful for (or even detrimental to) his illustration of how the comic stage portrayed genteel masculinity. In either case, we may draw the same conclusion: something had happened over the course of this decade that had prompted Hulett to conclude that the swords of the 1729 illustration were no longer needed in this scene.

By erasing the swords, Hulett entered into the ongoing debate about their correct usage on the stage, echoing the changes that were part of a still-wider cultural disillusionment with the sword: as we have seen from the introduction, we can date the sword’s slow disappearance from everyday dress from at least the mid-1720s. This may partly be a product of the criticism of the private sword that stemmed from The Conscious Lovers; that is, swords may have been silently removed from real theatrical costumes for performances in which they were not put to active use because they were regarded as unnecessary within a cultural sphere that was increasingly denouncing the propriety of sword-fights. However, the sword’s disappearance from the scene from The Provoked Husband in 1740 is distinctive not simply because its presence no longer guaranteed that its bearer was a man of honour; it is also the end-product of a decade of theatrical productions in which the sword came to be recognised as an object of ridicule.

This chapter focuses on four burlesque plays from the 1730s, Fielding’s Tom Thumb (1730) and The Tragedy of Tragedies (1731), and Carey’s Chrononhotonthologos (1734) and The Dragon of Wantley (1737), in part to investigate the ways in which these plays treated the sword with derision, which helps us to understand its erasure from widespread use, but also to show that didactic theatre was not confined to regular comic mainpieces but rather extended to works that exercised lowbrow humour and heroes who were not intended as authentic models of genteel masculinity that the audience should copy. Highly popular throughout the decade—The Dragon of Wantley was performed sixty-nine times to a “pretty full” house during the 1737-38 season (Wentworth Papers 539)—these works were the new English comedies that exploited swordplay during this decade, at a time when the most popular regular comic mainpieces, such as Fielding’s The Modern Husband (1732) and his translation of Moliere’s The Mock-Doctor (1732), shifted focus away from men’s relationship with the sword and onto their domestic lives. By attending to the new English comedies that still made the sword into an object of dramatic focus, this will help us to elucidate why swords began to be removed from even their function as passive objects on the stage during the 1730s.

The Threat from Opera

Before analysing the three burlesque comedies from the 1730s in greater detail, we must first review the condition that the London stage was in during the late 1720s and 1730s in order to provide some historical and cultural context to explain this chapter’s shift in focus from regular comic mainpieces to satirical burlesques. This can partly be explained relatively simply by acknowledging that by the late 1720s many playwrights “were keenly aware that the traditional plots and techniques of regular comedy…had run their course” (Rivero 2-3). The third volume of the London Stage (which covers the years between 1729 and 1747) makes it apparent that for the first half of this period, the productions that found the most consistent success fell into three categories: Italian *opera seria*, ballad opera (which drew its comedy from “low” plots and characters, and its format from high *opera seria*), and burlesque satires, all of these augmented by revivals and repertory favourites. Although Fielding managed to produce some new successful regular comedies outside of the burlesque genre during the decade, these were very different from the polished, sentimental dramas for which Steele had campaigned. Moreover, Fielding was in poor company for producing new regular comedies: not only had D’Urfey, Centlivre, Vanbrugh, and Steele—authors and managers who had been consistently involved in the stage’s development during the first two decades of the eighteenth century—all died in the 1720s, none of the new generation of comic playwrights were able to produce successful comedies outside of opera and farce. Likewise, the actors and actresses who had been responsible for showcasing polite conduct to London audiences during the same period were beginning to disappear from the stage. Deaths included Thomas Doggett in September 1721, Margaret Bicknell in May 1723, William Pinkethman in 1725, Anne Oldfield in October 1730, Wilks in September 1732, and Booth in May 1733, while Cibber had largely left the stage in the early 1730s. The loss of these actors—particularly Wilks, Cibber, and Oldfield, who had been the chief mouthpieces for communicating the differences between genteel and vulgar conduct to audiences for the first three decades of the century—meant that the face of comedy changed permanently at the beginning of the 1730s.

The drain on established talents over a relatively short period of time happened to coincide with both Steele’s dramatic reconfiguration of private sword-use, and the revival of *opera seria*, which occurred after the King’s Theatre was re-opened in the early 1720s. Despite being vividly different in tone to regular comedy—relying on histrionic plots and dramatic devices that tie it to the heroic tradition—sword-use in *opera seria* resembles that which occurred in the Restoration comedies that we have already discussed. When the operatic hero drew his sword, it was as the Restoration hero had done: it was a symbol of celebratory conquest as much as it was a tool through which he could confidently showcase his own combative skill. Thus Senesino, playing Cesare in Handel and Nicola Francesco Haym’s Giulio Cesare in Egitto (1724), leaves his palace to fight the rebels in Act Two, Scene Eight with the lines:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Col lampo dell’ armi*  *Quest’alma guerriera*  *Vendetta fara.*  *Non fia che disarmi*  *La destra guerriera*  *Chi forza le da.* | *This conquering Sword shall do me right*  *And glut my just Revenge;*  *Nor shall the Fair, that gave me Strength,*  *My martial Rage abate.* (52-53) |

The music accompanying this aria is fast-paced and florid; the effect is to re-inforce Cesare as a dominant and forceful male lead who uses his sword to seize personal and political control. During this scene he turns from Cleopatra (who is begging him to stay in bed with her) and, wielding his sword, announces his intention to her and the audience that he must fight those who threaten Rome’s power in Egypt. However, although the nominal incentive for him to fight is framed as the prospect of winning victory for Rome, it is Cesare’s personal desire to “glut” his bellicosity that truly drives him afield. Cesare’s fantasies of conquest are wholly solipsistic—it is *his* right, *his* revenge, *his* martial rage—and intimately linked to the private sexual passion that he holds for Cleopatra, which gives him inspirational “Strength.” Nevertheless—like Richard Lovelace, who three-quarters of a century earlier had admitted to his Lucasta: “I could not love thee (Deare) so much, / Lov’d I not Honour more” (“To Lucasta, Going to the Warres” ll. 9-10)—Cesare’s true passion is for his sword. Like the seventeenth-century hero, this weapon is both an instrument of authority and an arbiter of justice—wielding it “shall do me right,” Cesare declares. Cleopatra herself functions in a role similar to that of Graciana in The Comical Revenge or Angellica in The Rover: Cesare’s infatuation with his sword both excites and upsets her, and the more that he states his intention to fight, the more she demands that he stay with her (Haym 52-55). By defining Cesare’s formal position as Rome’s martial leader and his sexual relationship with Cleopatra against his sword’s use as a tool to pursue his own bellicose desires, Haym employs a rhetoric that had last been seen in regular comedy during the Restoration: the hero’s zeal for private sword-use is made legitimate because the passions that impel him to fight for his own honour have the same root as those that send him onto the battlefield for his country.

As Cesare’s adoration of his sword indicates, opera was a theatre of dramatic spectacle as much as it was of music: Sarah McCleave has suggested that the most successful of Handel’s London operas were those in which “stage action” had a prominent role (71), implying that it was the prospect of visual entertainment that drove audiences to King’s. Certainly active sword-use thrived on the operatic stage. Reviewing Handel’s body of work alone, honour duels appear in four of the librettos for which he wrote music between his arrival in London in 1712 and his retirement from opera in 1741—Amadigi di Gaula (1715), Flavio (1723), Scipione (1726), and Alcina (1735)—while stage-battles occur in all of the rest. Coupled with sensational librettos from his frequent collaborators Haym, Giacomo Rossi, and Paolo Antonio Rolli, Handel’s operas were works that prolonged the postures of glamorous seventeenth-century sword-use into the 1720s and 1730s.

From the analysis that we have performed on the sword’s changing significance on the stage during the first decades of the eighteenth century in Chapters Two and Three, it should be obvious that Handel’s theatre of conquering passion should upset reforming critics. In addition to the outrage that a foreign theatre populated by foreign performers provoked—their salaries usually far outstripped those of native actors for most of the century (Milhous and Hume 26-83)—the prolongation of visuals that depended upon aggressive sword-use was equally offensive. As early as 1711, Arthur Bedford had lambasted the “frequent Examples of *Murder* and *Revenge*, with which almost every *Opera* is full” (121): the bad moral standards that opera modelled were endemic within the genre and could be traced back to the rampant abuse of the sword. And so, while the classical form of comedy employed by Italian opera had a different (heroic) tone to that of regular comic mainpieces, the two genres were represented as direct rivals for the audience’s attention. Elaine McGirr has read anti-operatic literature from the 1710s and 1720s as a specific attack on opera’s failure to reform audiences at a time when regular comedy was attempting to do just that, analysing Steele’s work as particularly critical of “[o]pera’s sensual attractions”; his Conscious Lovers shows opera as an entertainment that “diverts its spectators…and distracts them from public affairs” (147). Applying this to the sword’s presence on the London stage, opera perpetuated Restoration patterns of sword-use while Steele and his fellow reformers were attempting to modify and restrict these same patterns in their own works. The impassioned lives of Cesare, Ottone, Tamerlano, and the other protagonists of *opera seria* celebrated a style of heroism based on the sword’s unassailable power to conquer all.

From the critical fire of literature written in opposition to *opera seria* arose a sub-genre of anti-operatic satire, which lampooned the medium’s stars and their appearances on and off the stage. Of these, it was the castrato, the star who played Cesare and other sword-bearing heroes, who was subject of the most contempt, as they were “both ridiculous, because impotent, and threatening, because Catholic” (McGirr 147). Emasculated and even feminine in appearance—the biological effects of castration meant that castrati had “fat deposits localized in the hips, buttocks, and breast areas (some castrati developed large fatty breasts that looked like female breasts)” (Peschel and Peschel 582)—the popularity of opera with its unmanly yet sword-bearing heroes was a nightmare for reforming critics. Furthermore, while men were being placed under increasing pressure from the stage and periodicals to use language and speech to defend themselves, what were they to make of the castrato’s “squealing languishing Voice” (Ancillon 8)? As Michèle Cohen has suggested, the Addisonian model for achieving gentility by becoming a “man of conversation” had already been problematized by the realisation that such a man was very often the Frenchified fop, who “seeks the company of ladies, whom he resembles,” and “risked forfeiting [his] identity as *English* and as a *man*” (50-51). Similarly, Shoemaker writes that as men were encouraged to verbalise their quarrels rather than use physical force, critics were “worried that men were taking up a female vice, and that in the process gender boundaries were dissolving” (“Reforming Male Manners” 145). The castrato, whose voice was as high-pitched as a woman’s, was the embodiment of these concerns. Finally, although eighteenth-century fears that women might take castrati as lovers to avoid pregnancy were probably unfounded—despite the scandal that Giusto Ferdinando Tenducci’s elopement with a young Irish gentlewoman would later generate in 1766, castrati were almost certainly impotent—satires on opera express a persistent worry that the admiration for castrati meant that “the male is rendered superfluous: he is neither needed for gratification nor is he the exclusive object of female desire” (McGeary 79). The grotesque image of the castrato wielding an antiquated symbol of masculine power—and the concern that female playgoers might find this figure sexually compelling—upset all modern notions that sword-use was a relic of the seventeenth century, that needed to be replaced by newer practices for claiming power.

In his 1735 satirical depiction of The Opera House or the Italian Eunuch’s Glory, Hogarth brought together contemporary English concerns about castrati in one picture, where the grotesque opera singers, depicted as dogs, bears, and other beasts, perform to a captive audience; around the picture is a “List of the rich Presents Signior Farinello Italian Singer Condescended to Accept off of the English Nobility & Gentry for one Nights Performance.” The verse motto beneath laments: “Our Home Spun Authors, must forsake the Field, / And *Shakespeare* to the Italian *Eunuchs* Yield.” Uniting the popular denunciations of the Italian castrato’s (unjustified) acquisition of English wealth with the concerns that foreign *opera seria* was displacing native drama on the London stage, these criticisms constitute the framework for the essential complaint: castrati are grotesque hybrids, half man and half wild animal, not simply emasculated but unmanned as well. Like the swordsman who rejected reform in the previous chapter, the castrato has lost his claim to gentility, or even humanity, through his fiery mode of self-expression; the fact that Hogarth employed this allegorical comparison in his satire indicates the extent to which it had permeated society beyond moral reformers by the mid-1730s. Simultaneously, as the castrato took a seventeenth-century private pleasure in using his sword, and therefore revealed himself as unpolished, as inhuman, he is underscored as the figurehead for *opera seria*; the foreign theatre, already suspect, is contaminated by association. The castrato was therefore a caution against the dangers of decadent, foreign pleasures: embrace them too heartily, Hogarth warns, and these beasts are your heroes.

|  |
| --- |
|  |
| Detail from The Opera House or the Italian Eunuch’s Glory (1735) – William Hogarth |

Henry Carey, the author of two of the plays analysed in this chapter, seems to have been responsible for a large bulk of the verse satires on opera throughout his poetical career, in which he too argues that a castrato is not a true man, or even human. For example, in his satirical poem Mocking is Catching (1726), a woman describes the unhappiness that comes from her love for an avaricious castrato who has left her to pursue celebrity and wealth: her sorrow is “neither for Man or for Woman… / …But ‘tis for a Singer so charming and sweet” (ll. 13-15). Another poem, The Grumbletonians (1727), is a fable about a pair of “Currs” who made “such a confounded Din” (l. 51) outside a farmhouse that they were eventually allowed in, after which, “having fed to Hearts desire, / They stretch’d themselves before the Fire” (ll. 73-74). Blundrella (1730) is another satire, this time on an English woman renowned for her poor taste exhibited through her love of *opera seria* and her misguided belief that “*Italians* were the only men” (l. 85). Across these poems, the moral changes—Carey variously criticises the greed of castrati, the invasion of a foreign theatre into an English domain, and the absence of artistic discernment among the general public—but the mode of criticism remains the same: *opera seria* is a worthy subject for abuse because its heroes are not real men.

The “poverty of comic spirit” on the regular stage in the 1720s and 1730s “presented not so much a *target* for burlesque as an opportunity for it—along with other less regular forms of entertainment—to corner the theatrical market in laughter” (Trussler X). The process for operatic satire (as opposed to pure criticism) did not begin on the London stage until 1728 with the premiere of John Gay’s The Beggar’s Opera, which spawned a spate of imitations such as Charles Coffey’s The Beggar’s Wedding (1729) and The Devil to Pay (1731). But although Gay and other authors lampooned operatic devices, Thomas McGeary has noted that none of these ballad operas had “the indictments of opera’s great expense, effects on native drama, vicious ridicule of castratos, and denunciations of its effeminacy found in other genuine attacks on opera” (119). However, these whimsical productions—as well as other irregular entertainments such as Samuel Johnson’s bizarre fantasy piece Hurlothrumbo (1729), French pantomimes, and Tony Aston’s ever-changing variety show—prepared audiences for the bawdy humour captured in the burlesque satires that dominated the stage during the following decade.

Satires on popular entertainment were of course not new to the London stage. Simon Trussler points to Francis Beaumont’s The Knight of the Burning Pestle (1613) as an early example of a burlesque on chivalric romance, attributing its failure to an audience unable to recognise the sophistication of the work (viii). Later in the century, Buckingham’s The Rehearsal (1671) performed a sustained satire on the heroic drama that had been popularised by Dryden and Davenant in the late 1660s. But although these plays provided some critique on the sword, they were isolated productions within the long history of the burlesque stage, rather than pieces within a body of work that was developed during a short, definable time period. Comprising eleven pieces altogether—Fielding’s Tom Thumb (1730), The Tragedy of Tragedies (1731), Tumble-Down Dick (1736), and Eurydice (1737); Gay’s Achilles (1733); Haywood’s The Opera of Operas (1733); Carey’s Chrononhotonthologos (1734), The Dragon of Wantley (1737), and Margery (1738); and the anonymous Jack the Gyant-Killer (1730) and Robin Goodfellow (1738)[[9]](#footnote-9)—this combination of mainpieces and afterpieces drew upon classical and British source texts while utilising ‘high’ heroic premises in mimicry of Italian opera—feudalistic settings, ludic battles, and overblown dialogue—which then provided an ironic counterpoint to the ‘low’ humour. By examining these pieces as responses to interest in the resurrected, reworked seventeenth-century style of sword use, we are able to see how the comic stage adapted to the fashions of the time.

Tom Thumb and the Tragedy of Tragedies

Three related plays about Tom Thumb appeared onstage between 1730 and 1733: Tom Thumb (a burlesque afterpiece by Fielding), The Tragedy of Tragedies (a revised and expanded mainpiece based on Tom Thumb), and The Opera of Operas (an operatic variation on The Tragedy of Tragedies, with further additions by Eliza Haywood and William Hatchett and music by Thomas Arne). All three pieces shared a similar plot and many of the same cast-members; because of this, I am going to focus on the first two plays, written by Fielding alone, using elements from both of them to make my argument because they are so similar. Combat is at the heart of the story, a burlesque that contends that the titular hero is an exemplar of manly heroism in spite of his physical appearance, satirising the castrato heroes that do the same. The play rests upon the dramatic irony that the chapbook character Tom Thumb represents a cynosure of masculinity, despite the fact that he is played by a female child dressed in armour. By exploiting the implausible reality of the castrato hero as famed lover and formidable soldier, Fielding, using Miss Jones’s body as an instrument, demanded that his audience recognise that a plausible hero required a heroic body. Forced to reassess the imaginary heroic body, Tom Thumb becomes an object of ridicule to the audience.

Analyses of the Tom Thumb plays have tended to focus on Tom Thumb as a satire on the tragic or operatic hero; for example, Peter Elfed Lewis has described Tom Thumb as parodying the hero who is “superhuman and therefore dehumanised” (Fielding’s Burlesque Drama 118). Fielding’s representation of the sword within the play typically falls under this umbrella, as a method of signifying a debased and trivialised heroism, but this ignores the idea that the sword was a particularly unique instrument of masculinity. The size of the sword alone, in comparison with the actress’s height, produces visual humour. The farcical displays of a female child actor as an agent of heroic valour turns heroic swordplay into child’s play. We can learn something about Fielding’s intentions for the character from a paragraph from the satirical preface that he gave to The Tragedy of Tragedies upon its first publication in 1731:

“But,” says Mr D—, “how well doth the character of Tom Thumb, whom we must call the hero of this tragedy, if it hath any hero, agree with the precepts of Aristotle, who defineth ‘Tragedy’ to be the imitation of a short, but perfect action, containing a just greatness in itself, etc. What greatness can be in a fellow whom history relateth to have been no higher than a span?” This gentleman seemeth to think, with Sergeant Kite, that the greatness of a man’s soul is in proportion to that of his body, the contrary of which is affirmed by our English physiognominical writers. Besides, if I understand Aristotle right, he speaketh only of the greatness of the action, and not of the person. (sig. A3r)

Here, Fielding proposes that his reader might feel that there is a disparity between his hero’s spiritual “greatness” and his height. In a dichotomy that is similar to Steele’s contention that conduct can be used to estimate the quality of genteel character, Fielding uses Aristotelian cod-philosophy to argue that a man’s actions enable a spectator to measure the extent of his greatness. Playing upon the double meaning of “greatness” to mean both “moral worth” and “size,” Mr. D— might feel that Tom Thumb is an unconvincing hero due to his lack of physical greatness, but Fielding facetiously maintains that an audience cannot depend upon visual signifiers, such as the hero’s physical build, to reliably assess him as a heroic figure. The Tom Thumb plays thus instigate the final collapse of sword use on the comic stage through their critique of the stage body.

Fielding’s attack on the castrato mines its satire from the responses that other characters give to Tom Thumb. All accept him as a hero who is a plausible subject of feminine desire, but significantly they do not praise him for traditional signifiers of masculine allure, such as muscularity or a handsome face. Instead, Tom Thumb derives his appeal from qualities that rob him of masculine structure, and even feminise him: he “has not a Bone / Within his Skin, but is a Lump of Gristle” sighs one admirer (The Tragedy of Tragedies 4), while to another he is such a “Creature of that charming Form” that “[t]he Dove is not so gentle to its Mate” (22). Tom Thumb himself is terrified by the prospect of experiencing sexual contact. These descriptions, we infer, are indicative of his moral worth, but they do not mean that Tom Thumb is an unimpressive soldier:

Let *Macedonia*, *Alexander* boast,

Let ***Rome*** her *Cesar*’s and her *Scipio*’s show,

Her Messieurs *France*, Let *Holland* boast *Mynheers*,

*Ireland* her *O*’s, her *Mac*’s let *Scotland* boast,

Let *England* boast no other than *Tom Thumb*. (4)

The king’s list of worthies slowly descends into farce as he moves chronologically from the classical grandees to eighteenth-century nameless imitators (Messieurs, Mynheers, O’s, and Mac’s), before concluding with Tom Thumb as a final debasement of genuine heroic might. In cataloguing examples of authentic heroism alongside their latter-day farcical replications, Fielding satirises the modern age’s inability to distinguish a genuine hero from a modern mimic who is incapable of reproducing Alexander, Caesar, and Scipio’s might. When Tom Thumb draws his sword onstage, he does so in act of personal revenge rather than out of patriotic valour. Following a Bailiff’s attempt to arrest his friend Noodle for failure to pay a tailor’s bill, an outraged Tom Thumb rushes to attack the Bailiff and his Follower:

*Thumb*. Dogs! Arrest my Friend before my Face!

Think you *Tom Thumb* will swallow this Disgrace!

But let vain Cowards threaten by their Word,

*Tom Thumb* shall show his Anger by his Sword. [*Kills the Bailiff.*

*Bailiff.* Oh, I am slain!

*Follower.* I’m murdered also,

And to the Shades, the dismal Shades below

My Bailiff’s faithful Follower I go.

*Thumb*. Thus perish all the Bailiffs in the Land,

‘Till debtors at Noon-day shall walk the Street,

And no on fear a Bailiff, or his Writ. (20-21)

This exchange is the first point in the play at which the audience is provided with the visual humour of a child attacking an adult with a sword, and defeating him. Fielding uses heroic bombast here to contrast the severity of the sword-fight with the meaninglessness of its cause, drawing particular attention to the Augustan conflict between “words” and “swords.” In this case, the sword is proof of the man’s ability to defend what is right. Tom Thumb subsequently pronounces the deaths “just”—which they are only within the play’s logic.

An outlandish hero needs an outlandish way to die: Tom Thumb is eaten by a cow offstage but returns as a ghost, only to be killed for a second time. The play ends on a note that seems inspired by Hamlet, as each character in the play kills another in “revenge”:

*Ghost. Thom Thumb* I am—but am not eke alive.

My body’s in the Vow, my Gbost is here.

*Grizzle.* Thanks, O ye Stars, my Vengeance is restor’d

Nor shalt thou fly me—for I’ll kill thy Ghost. [*Kills the Ghost.*

*Huncamunca.* O barbarous Deed!—I will revenge him so. [*Kills* Grizzle*.*

*Doodle.* Ha! *Grizzle* kill’d—then Murtheress beware. [*Kills* Huncamunca*.*

*Queen.* O wretch!—have at thee. [*Kills* Doodle*.*

*Noodle.* And have at thee too. [*Kills the* Queen*.*

*Cleora.* Thou’st kill’d the Queen. [*Kills* Noodle*.*

*Mustacha.* And thou hast kill’d my Lover. [*Kills* Cleora*.*

*King.* Ha! Murtheress vile, take that. [*Kills* Mustacha.

And take thou this. [*Kills himself, and falls.* (35-36)

Hunter has suggested that Fielding’s intention was to draw attention to poorer plays that (mis)used Shakespeare’s genuinely tragic plots (Occasional Form 30), works that presume that tragedy is solely contingent upon a high body-count in the final scene. Fielding demonstrates why these other authors are mistaken: the surfeit of onstage corpses is a comical excess, disconnected from any form of legitimate tragedy. The spectacle of the slain body thus becomes debased and obscured. He stresses this point in the epilogue to Tom Thumb, spoken by Miss Jones and beginning: “Tom Thumb, *twice dead, is a third Time Reviv’d*.” This argument has a close relative in regular comedy: at the end of The Conscious Lovers, Bevil and Myrtle make a similar plea to their audience to remember the *human body* that uses the sword. Fielding, of course, treats the topic satirically by using looking-glass logic, forcing his audience to interpret the social and even biological conventions of bodies as meaningless: courtiers kill royalty, women kill men, men kill ghosts. As a tool for conquering enemies, the sword is remarkably lacking in formidability: not only does it produce mirth rather than terror, but (as Miss Jones’s epilogue reveals), it cannot even impart permanent death.

The Tom Thumb plays travesty sword-use but (unlike regular comedies like The Conscious Lovers) do not propose an alternative method of resolving disagreements between men; his satire on the sword is not necessarily an endorsement of using “words” instead. As V. G. Kiernan has observed, Fielding “was fond of reducing the duel to caricatures, yet recognition of the self-respect and integrity that ought to be its mainspring somehow remains” (173). The very fact that Fielding uses the warrior-leaders Alexander, Caesar, and Scipio as masculine standards against which he measure the modern imitators implies an appreciation for the martial valour that they represented.

Fielding is preoccupied with demonstrating that sword-use in the 1730s is effectively a relic of another age. When he returned to the subject in his 1734 mainpiece Don Quixote in England, Quixote’s presence resembles that of the good cavalier at the beginning of the century: his style of expression might be outmoded in Georgian Britain, but the other characters view him with affection and he ends the play as a hero of sorts, initiating the happy ending for the young English lovers. Quixote is not so much a warning of the danger of sword-use as he is what has been described as a mouthpiece for Fielding’s social criticism (Borgmeier 48-49). Throughout work, and particularly in his Tom Thumb plays, sword use is amusing as an antique, but it lacks the danger of a serious social threat—like a child playing at martial valour.

Chrononhotonthologos

While most of the popular heroic travesties of the decade took their sources from English folksong and fairy tale, others invented fantastical worlds inspired by the pseudo-classical settings of Italian opera. In Chrononhotonthologos, this was Queerumania. Henry Carey’s play may be less systematic in its satire than the Tom Thumb plays, as Lewis has argued, and the satire at the expense of aristocratic violence is consequently less pointed (“Henry Carey’s ‘Chrononhotonthologos’” 130). Nevertheless, while Fielding drew recurrent attention to the sword on the stage by having his hero perpetually wield it, or producing opportunities for the other characters to *talk* about how he wielded it, Carey was more interested in *how* the sword was used on the stage: namely, the circumstances of action and its fundamental ridiculousness. Although Bombardinion is a famous general—he plays a role within the play akin to Buckingham’s Drawcansir—the other characters do not spend the same amount of time relating his heroic acts, as they do for Tom Thumb in his plays. As such, an analysis of this play must acknowledge that the sword has a less prominent place on the stage than in Fielding’s play; because Carey does not divert attention towards it until the final two scenes, it is a visual detail for most of the play.

As such, while Tom Thumb’s body is a central component of the comedy in his own play, King Chrononhotonthologos is apparently a man of ‘normal’ form. His actor, Richard Winstone, was in his mid-thirties (unlike the child-actress playing Tom Thumb) and usually played statesman or soldier roles, such as the Governor in Love Makes a Man or Cassio in Othello. The actor who played Bombardinion, Isaac Ridout, mostly had minor roles in farces and ballad operas—he played Ben Budge in a 1733 revival of The Beggar’s Opera, for example—but likewise does not appear to have been cast in comedic contrast to his character. For both of these heroic leads, acting choices rather than physical grotesqueries drove the comedy. This, coupled with the nonsense-words that abound throughout the play, implies that Carey’s interest lay more in wordplay than visual travesty.

While the fights that occur in The Tragedy of Tragedies are sometimes prompted by legitimate threats—in the final scene, for example, the characters use the sword in retaliation against an immediate act of violence—and are justified as such, in Chrononhotonthologos violence consistently only occurs suddenly over trivial matters, which are then immediately regretted. In Carey’s play, unlike Fielding’s, the sword is acknowledged as a weapon that can be used against its bearer’s best interests. The best example of this occurs in the final scene, which begins with a banquet at which the king and his general are the only guests. The occasion quickly becomes volatile when Chrononhotonthologos learns that Bombardinion intends to feed him cold pork. The king hits his general, and in a speech worthy of Drawcansir, Bombardinion cries out:

*Bombardinon*. A Blow! Shall *Bombardinion* take a Blow?

Blush! Blush thou Sun! start back thou rapid Ocean:

Hills! Vales! Seas! Mountains! All commixing crumble,

And into *Chaos* pulverize the World:

For *Bombardinion* has received a Blow,

And *Chrononhotonthologos* shall Die. [*Draws.*

*King.* What means the Traytor? [*Draws.*

*Bombardinon.* Traytor in thy Teeth,

Thus I defy Thee!

[*They fight, he kills the* King.

—Ha! What have I done? (26)

Distraught, Bombardinion finds a doctor, whom he then kills for his inability to revive the king to life, before then killing himself with a vow of renewed loyalty to Chrononhotonthologos: “Your Faithful *Bombardinion* comes: / He comes in Worlds unknown to make new Wars / And gain thee Empires, num’rous as the Stars” (27). The length of this scene is very short on the page—less than fifty lines—and it satirises the quick-changing passions of heroic drama. The fight between the King and his general occurs after a sudden escalation of a nonsense argument, motivated by selfish and unrealistic applications of honour to everyday situations.

Recognising that after the death of one ruler, another must come to take his place, Carey turns his dramatic attentions to Queen Fadladinida in the final scene. She is distressed upon hearing the news that her husband has died, as she is still a virgin, and decides to choose a new husband from two of her courtiers, Aldiborontiphoscophornio and Rigdum Funnidos. The latter immediately assumes that he will be her choice:

*Rigdum*. Never talk of Mourning, Madam,

One Ounce of Mirth is worth a Pound of Sorrow,

Let’s bed to Night and then we’ll wed to Morrow.

I’ll make thee a great Man, my little *Phoscophorny*.

[*To* Aldiboronti *aside.*

*Aldiboronti*. I scorn thy Bounty! I’ll be King, or nothing.

Draw Miscreant! Draw!

[Rigdum *runs behind the* Queen*.* (28-29)

Before the fight between the two can commence, however, the Queen subdues both courtiers by declaring that she’ll “make the Matter easy” and “have” them both (29): Fadladinida is more interested in the sexual possibilities of having two husbands simultaneously than in them fighting. In coming between the two men, she initiates a sequential break from a traditional display of masculine power: the spoken word from a sovereign authority overwhelms the sword as a method of producing a satisfactory outcome. “King, or nothing” might be the rivals’ ambition, but it can only be put into place through the Queen’s power.

While Tom Thumb and The Tragedy of Tragedies ridiculed the use of the sword even as Fielding employed it as a convenient arbiter of masculine identity, Chrononhotonthologos refuses to acknowledge this. The two fights in the latter play are both red herrings, designed to amuse the audience while implicitly enforcing the arguments that moral critics had employed for years: success in combat only has as much power as those in a group choose to give it; by giving it none, Fadladinida casts it as ineffective. While not overly didactic, Chrononhotonthologos nevertheless derides the idea of finding anything of worth in an individual fight.

The Dragon of Wantley

Moore of Moore Hall, the hero of The Dragon of Wantley, is a very different protagonist to those represented in earlier mock-heroics, as his behaviour is typical of the properties of libertine heroism. We have seen profound discomfort about sex from earlier heroes, which feminises them despite their prowess with the sword: Tom Thumb admits that “at the Thought of Marriage, I grow pale” (19), and Chrononhotonthologos’s death leaves his widowed queen still a virgin: these two men lack the drive for sexual adventure that the traditional stage heroes in both British comic mainpieces, Italian opera, and heroic drama possess. The phallic symbolism of their swords means that these subsume the penis as a masculine signifier. By contrast, Carey shows Moore in the thrall of excesses reminiscent of cavalier vice: feasting, drinking, and romancing two women at the same time, one of whom is pregnant by him. Unlike the previous heroes, his reasons for fighting are not to preserve a moral or national ideal, but to further his own sexual conquests:

The only Bounty I require is this,

That thou may’st fire me with an ardent Kiss;

That thy soft hands may ‘noint me over Night,

And dress me in the Morning e’er I fight. (21)

Margery, like heroines enamoured with belligerent men before her, is employed in an instructional role—but rather than instructing the audience to read Moore as heroic, her part is comical because she finds the wrong sort of man attractive. This is because the recurrent allusions to Moore’s sexual rapacity are confounded by the acting style: Moore’s vocal parts are sung in a falsetto, in imitation of the (impotent) castrato. Moore was played by Thomas Salway, who often manipulated his tenor voice into a falsetto to play female or feminised comic roles: he had originated the title role in Achilles (in which Achilles is disguised as a girl for most of the opera), and Princess Huncamunca in The Opera of Operas. The villain was played by the bass Henry Reinhold. The play was advertised for its first (very brief) run at the Haymarket with a puff-piece which boasted that the performance “keeps up strictly to the Italian Taste, the Notes being full of Grandeur and Harmony, and the Words full of low Nonsense” (qtd. LS 3: 672). If related material—such as the 1675 ballad upon which the play is based, and John June’s 1744 engraving—corresponds to the play’s staging, Moore later changes into a comically exaggerated version of medieval armour, which is covered in steel spikes which make people take him for “some strange out-landish Hedge-hog” (Wantley 10).

Wantley is interesting because it is a play that *should* use the sword—its climactic scene has (i) a battle (ii) between a dragon and a mock castrato dressed as a hedgehog (appropriately animalesque swordsmen, by 1730s reckonings) (iii) who are both engaged in visual spectacle—but it purposefully doesn’t. Wantley uses both elaborate visual effects—such as Moore’s spiked armour and the dragon’s costume—and the dissonance between Moore the handsome and purportedly virile hero and his mock-castrato voice. “*He’s a Man ev’ry Inch, I assure you,* / *Stout, vig’rous, active and tall*” (18) begins one aria. Like Haym’s Cesare, Moore is impatient to leave for battle while the heroine Margery drags him back—but while the star of *opera seria* puts stock in his strength and ability to use a sword, Moore dismisses its power: “I scorn Sword, Spear, or Dart; I’m arm’d compleatly in a valiant Heart” (29). He plans to wear his suit of spiked armour, “which, when I’m equip’d, my *Madge* shall see, / I’ll scare the Dragon, not the Dragon me” (26). When he reaches the field of honour, the fight quickly descends to farce. Moore “dares” the dragon to fight him in song and the dragon roars in outrage. Moore switches to recitative, saying: “It is not Strength that always wins; / Good Wit does Strength excel” (22), and hides in a well, before jumping out and killing the dragon with a kick to the backside. Moore’s sword is invisible and impotent on the battlefield: the power of the sword has been completely subsumed by the hero’s “wit.”

The fight between Moore and the dragon has been used to suggest that Wantley is a satire on Handel’s failure Giustino, an opera from the same year (Sadie 290; Trussler 235): based on the Greek myth of Perseus and Andromeda, the second-act slaying of the sea-monster to save the beautiful heroine presumably offered opportunity for parody. However, there is little in the dialogue or story to lend credence to this claim, other than the presence of a fantasy beast: Handel’s monster does not have the same prominent stage role that Carey gave to his dragon (in fact, the sea-monster does not even have any dialogue), and the fight between Giustino and the monster occurs mid-play rather than in a climactic final scene. If there was a visual satire in the costume design then the details have been lost. As Arthur V. Berger has noted, “there were other dragons…for Carey to ridicule” on the London stage of the 1730s (101). Carey’s own stated wish in his dedication to the play was “to display in *English* the Beauty of Nonsense, so prevailing in the *Italian Operas*” (3). “Beautiful nonsense” in this case is more than simply verbal. The Dragon’s death in the original ballad is grotesque—”First on one Knee, then on Back tumbled he, / So groan’d, kick’d, sh—t, and died” (13)—and it is possible that the image was recreated for the stage: the stage directions read simply that “*Moore gets out of the Well, encounters the Dragon, and kills him by a kick on the Back-side*” (31).

Wantley upturns sword-use through Carey’s decision to entirely remove the sword from the stage. In replacing a traditional sword-fight with a kick to the backside, the narrative makes the heroic vulgar. Moore’s argument, that “Good Wit does Strength excel” (31), and his subsequent triumph, is (like The Tragedy of Tragedies) an inversion of the moral in The Conscious Lovers. Reason is elevated over strength. By discarding the sword and claiming victory with a death-blow to the dragon’s behind, The Dragon of Wantley delivers a death-blow to the plausibility of a gallant, sword-wielding hero.

Conclusion

The body on the stage is a vessel for communication, emitting a common vocabulary to the audience through its movements. When the sword was shown on the Restoration comic stage, its use was half-symbolic, operating as a cue for the audience to understand its bearer’s rightful claim to honour and power. Seventy years later, the sword is useless: its symbolic value as an instrument of authority is robbed in The Tragedy of Tragedies and Chrononhotonthologos, and discarded entirely in The Dragon of Wantley. If Steele treated swords with trepidation, burlesques show them as lacking in function. In The Tragedy of Tragedies, they do not work as weapons. In The Dragon of Wantley they simply do not exist. Comedy works through its use of hyperbole and superlatives; burlesque comedy deliberately subverts the symbols behind the superlatives. If Steele treated swords with trepidation, burlesques show them as lacking in function. In The Tragedy of Tragedies, they do not work as weapons. In The Dragon of Wantley they simply do not exist. These subversions utilised the sword precisely according to its primary function as a weapon—but if this was to be done, Fielding, Carey, and other satirical authors suggested, it was impossible to locate the sword outside of the fantastic. By literalising (and quotidianising) heroic hyperbole, they make the super simply ridiculous. Recognising that external signifiers could be misleading, Fielding and Carey reduced the sword’s visual worth to ridicule by restricting its use to children and emasculated men.

As the didactic comedies of the London stage moved swordplay down the ‘great chain of being’ from hero, to “hot fiery person,” to the unmanned and female children, swordplay was also moved off the stage (and out of illustrations) of mainpiece comedy. During the 1730s, its locus was to be found in the theatrical margins: the afterpieces, burlesques, and ‘Little’ theatre at the Haymarket.  Burlesque misuse of the sword did not eradicate private sword use, either on the comic stage or off it, but it did further damage its credibility as a tool for asserting power. In the following decade, Lord Chesterfield despised Achilles as a hero, because “animated by private resentment only, he went about killing basely” (92): the 1730s’ triumph was to undermine the hero’s private violence by painting it as base within a theatre that garnered widespread popular appeal outside of critical circles. It was not until the end of the decade that a comic hero could once again plausibly wear a sword—which was achieved not by producing a new drama for a handsome actor, but by putting the sword into the hands of a woman.

Chapter Five: Swordswomen

Our findings have suggested that swordplay was perpetually staged as a male activity because aristocratic manliness could be determined through the private sword for much of our period. We must also note that up until the castrato hero from *opera seria* began to be remarked upon, swordplay was regarded as a consistent indicator of biological gender. Duellists and brawlers were usually men, and swords were fashionable accessories for male dress and discourse. Fights were framed as instruments to resolve male concerns: to assert masculine honour, to establish power dynamics, to correct sexual discontent, and to settle disagreements deriving from homosocial interactions, such as gambling debts or drunken quarrels—they did not belong in the drawing or the dressing room. Throughout our period, swordplay was universally spoken of as an activity that related to men, and whether it was being commended or critiqued, it was a commonplace that “nothing recommends a man more to the female sex than courage” on the field of honour (Spectator 99). Moreover, the language relating to sword use appeals to serious masculine abstractions, such as violence, death, and fatalism. Jennifer Low has even argued that duelling “serves to consolidate homosocial bonds and to render women peripheral” (94). And so, while the moral economists from the end of the seventeenth century and later increasingly advocated the use of conciliatory methods to resolve conflict, Michèle Cohen has shown that they still struggled to convince men that pacification could be a “manly” pursuit: “politeness and conversation, though necessary to the fashioning of a gentleman, were thought to be effeminating because they could be achieved only in the company of women (47).

Although allegorical females like Justice and Britannia were allowed swords, real women were denied swords and achieved their ends through the feminised weapons of politeness and conversation. So at the beginning of the Restoration period Margaret Cavendish contended that “our Sex holds no Sword in their Hands to cut off Offences, yet they hold as sharp a Weapon in their mouths, to cut off good Fame” (letter 21; 39); almost fifty years later a correspondent to the Spectator held that “Women are armed with Fans as Men with Swords, and sometimes do more Execution with them” (102); while in 1758 Samuel Johnson took it as given that the “prejudices and pride of man have long presumed the sword and spindle made for different hands” (Idler 5). When physical altercations between women occurred throughout our period, these disputes were most associated with women “beyond the pale of respectability” such as the “disorderly poor” (Capp 219), whose armouries consisted of cudgels, tongs, sticks, and fists—essentially, any weapons that were immediately available, rather than swords. Given the gendered representation of swords and the codified gender roles excluding women from sword use, what, then, are we to make of swordplay when it is performed by women?

The female swordplay that occurred both on and off the stage throughout our period colours assumptions about an activity that was traditionally seen as inherently masculine, but does not fundamentally alter them. Women used swords in both spheres in order to fulfil their professional and sexual ambitions, a fact that was acknowledged in the (chiefly male-authored) newspapers and pamphlets, but were not considered anything other than transgressive social deviants. Hortense Mancini and the Countess of Sussex, for example, famously practiced fencing in St. James’s Park “with drawne swords under their night gownes, which they drew out and made fine passes, much to the admiration of severall men that was lookers-on in the Parke” (qtd. Sergeant 212-13). A more comical example comes from a 1725 newspaper report which tells of two “Ladies of Pleasure” who fought a duel over a “Gallant”; one “was so wounded with a Sword, that her Life was despair’d of for some Days. But however, she is now so well recover’d, that she may, in a little Time, be able to serve and fight again” (British Journal 132). From the jocular tone, one senses that the incident was an amusing curiosity rather than real cause for anxiety. But neither of these examples represent ‘normal’ female behaviour. The image of the woman in combat, sometimes in a state of semi-dress, demands attention as a spectacle of vice. Whether this woman is the French mistress or the common whore, she is situated as an erotic body who tests the extremes of female sexuality and becomes the antithesis of the good woman.

Of course, these two examples are not an exhaustive representation of female sword-use during our period. In Warrior Women and Popular Balladry Dianne Dugaw has gone so far as to suggest that public displays of female duelling in the early eighteenth century were a common occurrence (125-26); in addition to this, swordplay may have occurred silently when women disguised themselves as men—an activity that was commonplace enough for Addison to express his “Dislike of this Immodest Custom” (Spectator 435). Nevertheless, concrete examples of women using swords in daily life are still exceptional and still transgressive. A woman who used a sword only found some approval when she disguised herself as a man in order to join the military: as a courageous patriot, she was “exemplary, a model of womanhood” (Dugaw, “Female Sailors Bold” 37). Yet once again, although critics like Dugaw, Julie Wheelwright, Guyonne Leduc, and Fraser Easton have conducted thorough investigations on the cultural representations of these women and have suggested that their lives were recorded with interest and admiration, nothing indicates that the behaviour of women soldiers from lower middle-class backgrounds like Christian Davies and Hannah Snell (the daughters of a brewer and a hosier respectively) was usual, expected, or even particularly desirable for most women, and particularly women of a higher social ranking. As Easton writes in “Gender’s Two Bodies: Women Warriors, Female Husbands and Plebeian Life,” an investigation into the relationship between lower-class women, travesty, and work in the long eighteenth century, “a picture emerges of the woman warrior as a bold, lower-class woman on the make” (143). The heroism ascribed to the female soldier and sailor in eighteenth-century celebrations of individual women should not be read as a literal call to arms to all women, and as with other examples of female swordplay, part of the attraction was the novelty of a woman participating in male acts of violence and ritual. The very fact that Snell appeared onstage to perform military drills to a captivated audience (something that no male soldier had ever done) suggests that part of the appeal was the anomaly of a woman staging an act that was merely perfunctory if performed by a man.

Snell’s faux-masculine performance on the mid eighteenth-century stage was part of a wider trend of this time: the female-to-male travesty of rapacious masculinity. She drew directly upon Margaret Woffington’s own successful performances of male characters throughout the 1740s and 1750s, and anticipated the careers of Anne Barry and Dorothea Jordan. Disguised as men, these women flaunted their sword-use in order to produce an intended masculine effect. Audiences certainly regarded travesty entertainers like Woffington and Snell as women, but they were also accepted as legibly masculine. So while Snell provided an exhibition of formal sword-use under the billing “the Female Soldier,” Woffington was “esteemed *both* for her elegance as a fashionable gentleman rake *and* for her skill in conveying that a woman’s body lurked below the masculine clothing” (Nussbaum, Rival Queens 218). Her performances resisted staging the male failures who composed the majority of comic travesty parts at the beginning of the century: characters who were foppish (Charlotte Charke as Foppington in The Relapse), youthful (Mary Kent as Young Fashion in The Relapse), or otherwise aggravated constructions of ideal masculinity (Susanna Verbruggen as Bayes in The Rehearsal). As we shall see, Woffington’s performance of Sir Harry Wildair from Farquhar’s The Constant Couple (1699) registered her ability to convincingly perform bold and rakish masculinity and to inspire sexual attraction in playgoers of both genders (Rival Queens 222; Brooks 76). Far from suggesting deviancy, Woffington’s travesty assigned her to roles notable for their honour and patriotism. But at the same time, just as Snell capitalised on her gender throughout her career (culminating with a foray into innkeeping with a pub named “The

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| An EPILOGUE intended to be spoken by Mrs Woffington in the Habit of a Volunteer (1746) – Unknown artist | Female Warrior”), Woffington performed as a “Female Volunteer,” isolating her gender as the source of her public appeal. Sexual innuendo also infiltrated into Woffington’s work: when she boasted: “*I believe Half the Men in the House take me for one of their own Sex*,” she received the reply from a fellow-actress: “*It may be so; but, in my Conscience! the other Half can convince* |

*them to the contrary*” (Chetwood 252). Woffington’s talent for giving a convincing performance of masculinity does not confer upon her legitimate maleness: stripped of her male gesture and costume, she is entirely female and penetrable. Woffington’s Female Volunteer wears sword and codpiece, the symbols of martial and sexual conquest, but the theatrical mask her sword points towards reminds us that this is only an act.

The discourse on women who used swords on the stage consistently used these archetypes of borrowed male dominance which was subsequently exposed and exchanged for female submission, and this fostered a politics of womanly acquiescence and sexual spectacle. In order to establish why this occurred, we must turn to look at sword-wielding roles for women prior to the 1740s. By positioning them as sexually receptive beings, plays and novels reclaimed the deviant woman so that her sovereignty was driven by a need for masculine completion rather than by personal desire.

Breeches Roles, Masculinity, and Sexual Innuendo

Breeches roles accent external signifiers as the primary devices for distinguishing gender—before exposing these sign-vehicles as unreliable. Lawrence Senelick has pointed out that as early as 1672, a new epilogue to Dryden’s Secret Love (1668) proposes that the “attributes of masculinity are dismissed as a mere congeries of gestures and pose which may with practice be assumed by a woman” (The Changing Room 214). Movement and stance, as well as sword and breeches, were masculine signifiers that could suggest but not guarantee consummate maleness. In addition to these adoptable traits, authentic manliness demanded possession of both a penis and a masculine interior: a man should be brave, innovative, and rational. And while the fop’s attempts to model authentic manliness miscarried through his inadequate semblance of this interior, the woman in breeches failed for the opposite reason: her only phallus was prosthetic, the sword. Both characters are thus presented onstage as deficient variants of the comic hero, although the first is a petty-villain while the second is a heroine. Defiant women who wear a sword and breeches apply self-censorship by consciously rejecting their borrowed masculine freedom and seeking matrimony and a return to petticoats. Conversely, fops who actively seek to remedy their defective interiority are rare creatures on the Restoration stage; unlike the breeches-wearing woman, he is unaware that his behaviour requires correction. Because of this, the feminised man is contemptible in a way that the masculinised woman is not.

Traditional interpretations of these roles therefore position them as women in defiance of social conventions, thus conveying upon them a proto-feminist independence: for example, both Low (156-62) and Heidi Hunter (108-11) have proposed that by assuming male costume, women appropriated phallic power. J. Douglas Canfield has provided the most extreme interpretation of a breeches role: commenting upon Mirida in James Howard’s All Mistaken (1665), he argues that she “threatens patriarchal control” (Tricksters and Estates 153). But although breeches characters utilise swords to engage with male characters using masculine social language, their purpose is not to topple masculine power, but rather to affirm it. By temporarily replacing the feminine power of the tongue, fan, and spindle with the masculine sword they establish their respect for the politics of male power-dynamics, and hint that they will be amiable, tolerant wives. This does not necessarily mean that “[t]hose women who trespass far into masculine cultural domains are generally forcibly returned to their proper feminine spheres” (Gill 195). On the contrary: nothing is more sensible to the cross-dressing woman than that she will marry and conform to the expectations of her gender. Even Florimel in Secret Love, who threatens that she will continue to wear breeches after she and Celadon marry (54), proposes that they refer to themselves by the heterostatic terms of “Mistress and Gallant” (65). Breeches roles represent women as appealing and energetic “mad girls” who nevertheless ultimately jettison masculine dress in favour of a marriage structured upon mainstream upper-class gender behaviour. Their activities do not signal moral danger so much as spirit, negotiation, and receptivity to sexual attention.

As Florimel’s blithe attitude towards the formalities of love and matrimony suggest, the cross-dressing woman is a viable heroine because her moral character and physical outline are patterned as a slighter version of the comic hero. Most female characters are described as “youths” when disguised in male costume: they have slight forms, high voices, and have “ne’re been under the Barbers hands yet” (Secret Love 52), thereby emphasising their immaturity in contrast with the larger, mature hero. In these roles, youth thus becomes a synonym for womanhood: weaker, lacking skill and experience, and unable to penetrate. And unlike the fop, the qualities of the woman in breeches are essentially variant feminine ‘degradations’ of masculine qualities: for example, she possesses pluck rather than bravery. Similarly, she enthusiastically plots to lose her virginity—Florimel mourns her perpetual “Maidenhead” (51) while in The Rover Hellena longs to “spoil [her] devotion” (160)—but is more conservative about her sexual conquests than the hero, restricting them to after matrimony.

The low plot of Dryden’s Marriage a la Mode (1672) (and Colley Cibber’s 1706 adaptation The Comical Lovers) utilises the most common tropes of the breeches role. Doralice disguises herself as a youth in order to regain the love of her inconstant husband and attracts the attention of a group of drunken bravoes who engage her in combat, forcing her husband (who does not recognise her) to come to her aid (Marriage a la Mode 54-55). She is unable to defend herself and reports afterwards that she is “exceeding ill, with the fright on’t” (55). The encounter prompts her to abandon her male costume, but she is finally able to successfully intervene in a fight at the end of the play, when she terminates a brawl between Rhodaphil and Palamede through vocal protest. In navigating this plot, it is obvious that it reaffirms basic expectations of appropriate male and female behaviour. In pursuing her husband by using a sword, Doralice shows deference to male modes of negotiation. Similarly, by revealing more of her body she demonstrates that she is a sexual being. Together, these qualities prove that she is a desirable wife. Nevertheless, this posturing cannot penetrate beyond the surface: she depends upon him to intervene and navigate the violent power dynamics that dominate male interactions, and her own experience leaves her shocked and unwell: she is susceptible to penetration. This scene poses women as respectful of male terminology while remaining reliant on them as heroic saviours. Yet Doralice is not without her own power, for the thrusts of female power (as Cavendish proposes) come from the tongue rather than the sword. Doralice may be incapable of contending with real men on masculine terms when she uses the borrowed power of the sword; to finish a fight she must stage a vocal intervention.

In Doralice we see that the breeches-wearing woman is an inadequate competitor within combative masculinity. In Secret Love, Florimel also ends a fight with words rather than swords: “Out upon fighting; ‘tis grown so common a fashion, that a Modish man contemns it” (52). These words profess wit rather than cowardice, for she presents herself as a younger romantic alternative to Celadon’s mature masculinity, trading on foppish signifiers to generate the disciplines of masculine behaviour. In performing false masculinity, she resolves to “set my Hat, shake my Garniture, toss about my empty Noddle, walk with a courant slurr, and at every step peck down my Head:—if I should be mistaken for some Courtier now, pray where’s the difference?” (50) This foppish posturing outrages Celadon, who accuses him of lacking manliness and attacks him as a “young raw Creature” (51-52), but delights Olinda and Sabina. The two women fall in love with Florimel out of narcissistic enjoyment of her behaviour: like them, she prefer dancing to fighting and they are “just of an humour” and “just of an age” (52). Olinda and Sabina value Florimel as a mirror for their own interests and behaviour, rather than admiring him as a masculine authority. The young courtier’s affectations are traits that are identifiably feminine. But Florimel is not a tenable long-term rival for Celadon’s genuine manliness: her biological gender is too easily exposed, by literally removing the external signifiers that defined her as male. The scene exposes and corrects the adoption of masculine signifiers by men who are insubstantially male; as Sabina laments: “Well, if ever I believe a man to be a man for the sake of a Perruks and Feather again—” (54)

If an “empty-Noddled Courtier” is approximately as manly as a woman in breeches, Florimel anticipates later breeches roles in which the breeches-wearing woman appears onstage with the fop, creating a dichotomy designed to maintain a hierarchy of masculinity—in which the fop is at the bottom. This is conveyed through fight-scenes: women who wear breeches invariably win victory over fops in combat. For example, in Behn’s The Town Fop (1676), when Celinda draws her sword before Sir Timothy Tawdry and his cronies, they “*run into several Corners, with signs of Fear*” (29). This scene is not included to suggest that the heroine is overly masculine but rather to demonstrate that Tawdrey is so lacking in manly qualities that he can be physically violated by a woman. We are reminded that “one’s manhood was linked to the derogation of another man’s” (Low 72); Tawdrey’s defeat by one who is not biologically male is a humiliation. However, this rule only applies when the heroine is wearing breeches. The woman who attempts to seize masculine power by wielding a sword *without* donning male costume risks being seen as comically unstable. Mrs. Flareit in Cibber’s Love’s Last Shift (1697) illustrates this in the most striking way. Crossed in love, she “Snatches Young Worthy’s Sword, and runs at” Sir Novelty Fashion, who in turn “Draws, and stands upon his Guard” (71). When Young Worthy reclaims his sword and holds her back, her subsequent speech is described in the stage direction as “raving.” In Flareit we see that the woman who wields a sword while wearing female dress has been driven mad. Fops may also ‘win’ a fight when their opponent is an actress in travesty. In The Relapse, Young Fashion (played by Mary Kent) demands that Lord Foppington draw, but Foppington rejects his proposal: “Your paverty makes your life so burdensome to you, you would provoke me to a quarrel, in hopes either to slip through my lungs into my estate, or to get yourself run through the guts, to put an end to your pain” (42). Although Foppington’s tactics are feminine, for he ends the fight with words rather than with his sword, they enable him to maintain hierarchical mastery: he refuses to fight (rather than cowering like Tawdrey) and archly reminds his brother of their disparate social spheres. The effeminacy of Foppington and Young Fashion (acted by Cibber and natural for Kent) becomes a struggle for power.

Unlike the fop, the heroine who wears a sword and breeches remains mindful of her true gender (unlike the fop) and refuses to abandon her ultimate objective of matrimony. Her reasons for disguising herself are pragmatic rather than pleasurable (Howe 59), and she always resumes normative gender dress and roles through marriage or another form of long-term sexual partnership at the play’s end, relinquishing her sword and thus literally surrendering power to her husband. This persistence is important because, in dramatic contrast to the real-life woman who uses a sword, it means that she cannot be read as a social deviant. *She* remains—even when she uses a sword for personal advantage. In Secret Love, Florimel boasts that her disguise will “out-do this mad *Celadon* in all his tricks, and get both his Mistresses from him; then I shall revenge my self upon all three, and save my own stake into the bargain; for I find I do love the Rogue” (50). Male costume is only the means for Florimel’s end-objective of revenge and marriage. Even a play like Charles Sedley’s Bellamira (1687), which is cynical about marriage and male honour, does not challenge this basic notion. In the play, the disguised heroine assumes a pattern of violent and intimidating behaviour inaccessible to her as a woman as a way of enacting revenge. This main plot is underscored by its inversion in the subplot, wherein a pretended eunuch, a self-described “Shadow of a Man” (25), spends most of the play indoors in the company of women for he lacks the physical masculinity that Bellamira metaphorically claims. Yet ultimately Bellamira (like other comic cross-dressing heroines) relinquishes her sword in favour of domesticity: a common-law marriage to a wealthy fool is preferable to borrowed masculine power.

The congenial marital partnership that swordswomen promise is consolidated by hinting at their potential for positive sexual companionship. It is a critical commonplace that these parts from the early part of our period were “designed to show off the female body” (Howe 56) by exposing the actress’ legs and the contours of her hips and pelvis; J. L. Styan even contends that “most” breeches roles were exposed in the plot with the reveal or fondling of the actress’ breasts (Restoration Comedy in Performance 93). The addition of a sword to this body is highly significant. Andrew Sofer argues that stage props hold significance through an “imaginative contract” proposed by the actor. As he puts it: “[I]f an actor decides that what has up until now been a walking stick suddenly represents a sword, the spectator will either eventually ‘get it’ and accept the semiotic shift, or else refuse to suspend disbelief, thereby rejecting the contract” (57). These shifts can vary, depending upon the character, the context of the scene, and of course the gender of the person using the prop. Costume that ordinarily occurs as part of the normal dress for one gender takes on very different connotations when used by the other. When women used swords, the sword is transformed from a straightforward symbol of masculine heroism and power to phallic suggestion. The erotic vision of the actress revealing her body is compounded by the aptitude she shows for handling swords, foreshadowing her handling of the penis. Again, female swordsmanship is not *better* than that of the male characters, except for the fops; to be more skilled at handling the phallus than the hero would hint at promiscuity. It is significant that the cross-dressing heroine of Bellamira—who repeatedly defeats men in combat situations—is a prostitute. For most breeches characters, it is enough to show that they show willingness and some skill with utilising a phallic object before entering the marriage state. This technique was made most explicit in Mary Davys’s novel The Accomplish’d Rake (1728). In an interlude in the story, a “little Gentleman,” described as a “Tom-Tit” and a “Pigmy” (91)—recalling the “youth” of Restoration breeches roles—challenges the hero Sir John to a duel. When he demands that his challenger unmask, he is revealed to be a “Woman of Distinction” who is desperate to provide her husband with an heir; the two then “retired to a more private Apartment,” where Sir John impregnates her (93-96). The Woman of Distinction uses masculine social conventions to initially attract Sir John’s interest before the bodily penetration associated with the duel is then replaced by sexual penetration.

Common to all of these parts is the sense that sword use, when enacted by a woman, provokes no serious challenge to masculine authority—unless (as with the fop) the masculine has already been feminised. Yet the sexual aspect of the swordswoman extends beyond the breeches role and into the language of some heroines who do not cross-dress. The duels of wit between young lovers in Restoration comedy are obviously the counterparts to the literal duels in which the heroes engage, and recall the assumption that conversation was the feminine equivalent to the sword; but we see far more literal examples of sword-use in female dialogue. In Dryden’s The Assignation (1672), Hippolita joins Ascanio in using language of the duel in order to plan their secret meeting: hands and lips are their “weapons” (11-12), and Ascanio reminds her that “according to the Laws of Duel, the next thing is to strip, and, instead of seconds, to search one another” (20). This subplot, which concerns the willing seduction of Hippolita from a nunnery, uses the language of the duel to imply that it is dangerous and illicit, but also that duelling is romantic and desirable. Wycherley continues the comparison between sex and swordplay in The Plain Dealer (1677): Varnish discovers his wife alone with Fidelia, who is disguised as a boy, and demands that she draw her sword. Fidelia promises to “satisfie” his honour and tells him that she is a woman; Varnish gropes her and Fidelia protests: “I hope you are so much a Man of Honour, as to let me go, now I have satisfi’d you, Sir” (75). Wycherley repeatedly plays on the double meaning of the word “satisfaction” to show satisfaction of honour transformed into sexual satisfaction when a woman uses a sword.

Similarly, challenges and love-letters are occasionally confused. In Shadwell’s Epsom Wells (1672) the rake-heroes Bevil and Raines receive a letter that they at first assume is an invitation to a secret tryst, but upon opening it discover that it is a challenge: “If you fail [to attend], you shall not fail of being posted. ‘Till you meet us, you shall not know our names, but know that we are worth the meeting” (16). Bevil and Raines duly attend the appoint meeting-place, only to find that the invitation actually was a rendezvous with two beautiful women. Their gender transforms the threat of social shame (“you shall not fail of being posted”) to sexual shame, and the assurance of martial glory (“we are worth the meeting”) to erotic promise. A similarly misleading letter is sent in Wycherley’s Love in a Wood (1671), when the heroine Christina deliberately phrases a lascivious note like a challenge, leading Ranger, its recipient, to look forward to “dying at her feet” (64). In reverse, the rake-hero of Granville’s The She-Gallants (1695) sends a formal challenge to duel to his lover, who has been disguised as a boy. Finally, Centlivre confounds the formula in The Beau’s Duel, where the fop Sir William Mode believes a challenge to be an invitation to a romantic assignation (14-15). The high passion, penetration, and intimate nature of a sexual encounter and a duel create obvious points of comparison, while the oppositional emotions of each (lust and affection in a tryst; fury and belligerence in a duel) make the link appropriately ironic. These examples show that women can be men’s equals when they harness the imagery of sword-use in their speeches: they use feminine vocal power to evoke masculine physical power.

Heroines who used swords during the first half of our period (whether by donning breaches or invoking them verbally) were tied to seventeenth-century conceptions of female desire. Woffington’s performance of Sir Harry Wildair on the London stage from 1740 recapitulates many of the assumptions about female travesty from earlier in the century, using the semiotics of masculinity to perform while retaining her femininity—although as Nussbaum recognises, the exact exhibition of her femininity in her performance is ambiguous. Her execution of the part is important in performance history because she reinterpreted a part that had long been associated with a single (male) actor, Robert Wilks, with such success that thereafter a male Wildair was eschewed in favour of a female one. As such, this performance has frequently been analysed as a conveyer of gender identity in the mid-eighteenth century, by critics including Nussbaum, Brooks, and Senelick, but their analyses do not stretch to uncover the significance that lies in Wildair’s sword-use. Yet before we can analyse Woffington’s assumption of the role in more detail, we must first attempt to reconstruct Wildair as he appeared before audiences at the beginning of the century when played by Wilks. It is important to establish this first representation because it was this part that gave Wilks “Immortal Reputation” (Curll, Life of that Eminent Comedian 12); at as late a date as 1756 Theophilus Cibber was using Wilks’s performance in Two Dissertations on the Theatres (along with Booth as Pyrrhus and Betterton as Othello) as one of the great spectacles of the English stage. That Wilks’s performance survived in theatrical memory a quarter of a century after his death is a testament to the respect it garnered during the eighteenth century; Wilks is therefore critical to understanding how Wildair was received by audiences.

The Constant Couple

The spectre of Restoration sword use dictates the narrative thrust of The Constant Couple’s first three acts. The audience is constantly reminded that Wildair has fought and won several duels, and has even killed a French count. When asked if he would fight another duel for his mistress, he agrees, for he has “Mony enough to bribe the Rogues with” should he be put to trial afterwards (6).[[10]](#footnote-10) Similarly, Colonel Standard, the play’s other hero, does not explicitly have the same experience of private combat, but believes it a disgrace to “wear the Livery of my King and Pocket an / Affront! ‘twere an abuse to his Sacred Majesty,” and that “a / Souldier’s Sword…should start of it self to / Redress its Master’s Wrong” (22). He also frames his romantic speeches to Lady Lurewell in a martial context: “[I]n war, Madam, we can be relieved in our Duty: but in Love who wou’d take our Post, is our Enemy” (8). He and Wildair are rivals for Lurewell’s love, and so when in Act Two, Scene Three Vizard reflects upon his plan to set the two men “a tilting, where one cuts t’other’s Throat, and the Survivor’s hang’d” (16), a violent altercation between the two bloodthirsty heroes seems inevitable. Yet when the men meet, the duel fails to occur. Standard’s demand that Wildair “draw” is met with a refusal, as Wildair explains that his sword is not a weapon but rather “the prettiest Blade you have seen” (32). He later declines to fight Colonel Standard: “Fighting’s your Trade; And I think it down-right Madness to contend with any Man in his Profession” (32). Duelling (he explains in an earlier scene) is acceptable behaviour in France, but it cannot be tolerated in England: he would not fight a duel in London, for “a Thrust ith’Guts, or a *Middlesex Jury*, is as ugly as the Devil” (6).

Wildair’s attitude towards sword use is similar to that of many other romantic male leads of the 1690s and 1700s that we analysed in Chapter Two. Killing a French count is acceptable in a stage hero, for foppish French aristocrats whom the audience never sees are expendable. By contrast, a fight with a British officer would undermine the dictates of reason and confederacy that Whig soldiers employed when choosing to fight a duel: just like in The Fair Quaker of Deal and The Wonder Farquhar assures the audience of the comic hero’s able swordsmanship through dialogue rather than display. Yet although he would seem to fit into this character-type, critics have long complicated his literary categorisation. So great is the confusion surrounding Wildair that he has variously been characterised as a “penitent rake” (Berkeley 223-33), a “Gallicized beau” (Cope 447-93), and a hero who is simply “believably human, young, fallible, and funny” (Kenny 30), while Markku Peltonen, the only critic to engage with Wildair’s sword use in any critical depth, has classified him as a fop (184-85). There is some evidence in the text to support this last assertion. If, as Thomas A. King has suggested, foppishness became a problem of “self-sufficiency” (229) over the eighteenth century, in which deviant men snubbed participatory social networks in favour of a mirror, Wildair fits this trait as a gentleman of pleasure. Wildair is described in the list of characters as an “airy Gentleman affecting humorous Gaity and Freedom in his Behaviour,” and the words “airy” and “affecting” have a particular connection to foppery. Within the play itself he describes himself as a beau (6, 32), while Lurewell dismissively refers to him as a fop (8, 10), Standard assumes that he is a fool (3), and Clincher identifies him as a fellow fop who can impart advice on fashion and foreign travel (24-25). Even his name is an ambiguous combination of the rakish “wild” (similar to Willmore), suggesting personal sovereignty and the love of life, and the foppish “air” (similar to Sir Fopling Flutter), suggesting whimsy and insubstantiality. His social status might also place him at the end of a line of other late seventeenth-century foppish stage knights such as Sir Martin Mar-all, Sir Fopling Flutter, Sir Courtly Nice and Sir Novelty Fashion, as might his pursuit of the popular entertainments of the idle rich: theatre, dancing, singing, gossip, seduction, taking snuff. Wildair is undoubtedly a man who values modish living; during his stay in Paris he “had half a dozen Intreagues, bought half a dozen new Suits, fought a couple of Duels” (4). This speech, in which the duel is united with France, fashion, and flirtation, might have been spoken by any late seventeenth-century beau.

And despite his braggadocio, Wildair consistently refuses to fight on-stage. The abortive duel in Act Four, Scene One, which leads to Wildair’s comment about his “pretty blade”—an attitude reminiscent of the fops in She Would If She Could (1668), Love Makes a Man (1700), and even the fop Clincher in the same play, who admires Wildair’s sword-knot as it is “most / Ornamentally modish, and bears a foreign Mein” (7)—is only a precursor to what comes at the end of the play. Between the first and second editions, Farquhar rewrote the first scene of Act Five. In its first performances, it was a romantic discovery scene between Wildair and Angelica: she makes it clear to him that she is *not* a courtesan and, appalled by his blunder, Wildair immediately proposes marriage: “If chastest, purest Passion, with a large and fair Estate, can make amends, they’re yours this Moment.—The matrimonial Tye shall bind us Friends this Hour” (48). Angelica happily accepts, but asks him if he will continue to get drunk on Burgundy wine; he assures her: “Fear not, sweet Innocence; Your Presence, like a Guardian Angel, shall fright away all Vice” (49). But marital bliss and moral reformation are omitted in all subsequent performances of the play: when Angelica tries to convince him of her purity and pleads to his better nature, he makes fun of her: “A Million to one now, but this Girl is just come flush from reading The Rival Queens” (43), and he begins mimicking the histrionic dialogue of a heroic drama. The comic misunderstanding is prolonged during the scene, with Angelica becoming increasingly angry as Wildair continually offers her a hundred guineas to convince her to sleep with him. When he realises that he has been hoodwinked, he does not pronounce his regret but rather “*looks foolish, and hums a Song*,” before making the self-pitying remark: “Oh poor Sir *Harry*, what have they [sic] angry Stars design’d?” (45) Angelica reminds him of the delicacy of female reputation and so, rather than fight her male relations over her injured honour, Wildair chooses to marry her, although he makes her no promise to change his behaviour.

Even Wildair’s common-sense refusal to duel Standard on the grounds that Standard is a professional soldier loses conviction when it comes after his assertion that his own military experience in Flanders was gained for “the same Reason that I wore a Red Coat: because ‘twas Fashionable” (32); Peltonen uses this as evidence for his foppery, arguing that he does not understand the theory behind duelling (185). Standard, who is highly conscious of his personal and professional honour and willingly draws his sword in defence of both, has received a facial disfigurement in battle, and scorns a fellow officer who to “save his face for the Women, he always turn’d his back upon the Enemy” (3). Conversely, Wildair has a popular reputation as a brave fighter but repeatedly balks before a demonstration.

Nevertheless, if Farquhar intended his audience to understand Wildair as a fop, he is unlike any other fop on the stage at this time. Although his character has the typical solipsism of a fop—a tendency that Lawrence Senelick notes is shared by the Restoration rake (“Mollies or Men of Mode” 47)—he rejects a poetical framework for his behaviour, denying that he fought “bravely” in Landen, and dismissing his participation as “the fashion” (3). This sets him apart from the fops in The Old Bachelor (1693) and Tunbridge Walks (1703), who desperately lie about their bravery in order to be recognised as men of honour, only to be revealed as imposters. Similarly, Wildair’s social rank derives from a legitimate inheritance from his father (14); it is not purchased, like Lord Foppington’s, or invented, like the low-born fops who pretend to gentility in The Beau Defeated (1700) and The Confederacy (1705). Unlike the “ostensibly heterosexual” fop, whose romantic interest in women is habitual rather than genuine (King 236-39), Wildair has an intemperate interest in sex and his marriage at the end of the play upends the traditional fop narrative. Ordinarily when the fop considers matrimony, his bride is stolen from him, as in The Relapse and Love Makes a Man, or he is tricked into marrying a servant or whore, as in Behn’s The Lucky Chance (1686) and Congreve’s Love for Love (1695). Wildair’s relationship with Angelica is the material opposite of these, in that throughout the play he believes her to be a whore and only in the final act discovers that she is a well-born heiress.

But more importantly than these textual clues, Wildair was not normally considered a fop role by eighteenth-century audiences. To quote a 1732 biography of Wilks: “He enters into the Part of *Wildair*, with so much Skill, that the Gallantry, the Youth, and Gaiety of a young Man with plentiful Fortune, is looked upon with as much Indulgence on the Stage, as in real Life” (Curll, Life of that Eminent Comedian 1). Wilks’s success in the part meant that he quickly became known as a romantic lead (Highfill et. al. 111), eventually originating other Farquharian heroes such as Archer and Captain Plume and assuming traditionally masculine parts like Willmore. Wilks’s sexually-compelling performance is attested to in a 1732 etching that contends that “Sir Harry Wildair, when by him display’d / Each Nymph no longer wish to be a Maid.” Conversely, fop parts in the 1690s and 1700s were usually played by the same few actors, such as Cibber and Boman, who rarely extended their range to play romantic parts. Most problematically, a biographical sketch of Farquhar in a 1775 collection of his Works supplies a firm rejection of Wildair the fop by reviewing the play’s performance history. When Wilks played Wildair, he “so animated it by his gestures and vivacity of spirit, that it is not determined whether the Poet or Player, received most reputation by it” (vi). After Wilks’s death in 1732, no one attempted the part again until Theophilus Cibber,

|  |
| --- |
| Robert Wilks Esqr. in the Character of Sr. Harry Wildair (1732) – James Smith |

“but instead of giving the real likeness of the fine gentleman, it proved a fop, which must be considered as a caracatura” (vi-vii). Wilks’s stage presence ensured that Wildair was read as virile, charismatic, and male—qualities that Cibber was never able to achieve. As for the direct textual accusations of his foppery, they are directly countered by both the prologue, which admits “‘Tis true, he has a Spark just come from *France*, / But then so far from Beau—why he talks Sense!” (ll. 15-16), and a speech given by Vizard to Standard, who is unconvinced that the flippant Wildair might have fought valiantly in the Low Countries:

Do’st think Bravery and Gaiety are inconsistent? He’s a Gentleman of most happy Circumstances, born to a plentiful Estate, has had a genteel and easy Education, free from the rigidness of Teachers, and Pedantry of Schools. His florid Constitution being never ruffled by misfortune, nor stinted in its Pleasures, has render’d him entertaining to others, and easy to himself— Turning all Passion into Gaiety of Humour, by which he chuses rather to rejoyce his Friends, than be hated by any… (3-4)

Wildair embodies the late Stuart notion of “ease,” a term applied to the character in the 1745 poetic essay on “The Art of Acting” (545), and in “Robert Wilks Esqr. in the Character of Sr. Harry Wildair.” This quality was an affable artlessness which is continued in the character of Sir Charles Easy in Colley Cibber’s The Careless Husband (1705) and foreshadows John K. Sheriff’s “good-natured man” of later on in the century, a man who “lacks perception of social realities, but…embodies a set of values and evokes our admiration” (23). This ease is contrasted with affected foppery—both in the play (through the beau Clincher) and out of it, in Theophilus Cibber’s Dissertations, where with “careless Gaiety” he unequivocally rejects “Fribble-like” masculinity (20). It is also partly a wishful fantasy about the ability to live a leisured life; mocking the toil and unhappiness of statesmen, soldiers, and scholars, Wildair contends: “I make the most of Life, no hour misspend, / Pleasure’s the Means, and Pleasure is my End” (21). He expounds the philosophy of the rake, before his eventual reformation and marriage at the end of the play. Although Wildair’s brand of ease did not convince everyone that he was not a fop—a remark made about Lord Foppington in The Careless Husband, “Women now begin to laugh With him, not At him: For he really sometimes rallies his own Humour with so much Ease and Pleasantry, that a great many Women begin to think he has no follies at all” (10-11), might be a snide reference to how Wilks as Wildair romanticised a character who might have been a beau in the pen of a different playwright—Wilks’s success in the part confirmed that audiences felt that Wildair was a hero who was authentically male and sexually desirable.

Margaret Woffington as Wildair

I have been at pains to determine that Wildair was not originally represented as a fop in order to establish that his appearance and behaviour was enclosed within the bounds of acceptable masculinity for the early eighteenth-century comic hero. If by the middle of the century Wilks’s interpretation had entered theatrical legend and ranked alongside the major tragic roles performed by Booth and Betterton, any post-Wilks attempts at acting the part were performed with his performance in living memory. Parallel to the methodological casting of Restoration actors to create a sense of internal theatrical consistency over several plays—for example, Colley Cibber playing Lord Foppington in three comedies, or Elizabeth Barry playing Willmore’s love interest in both parts of The Rover (Holland 65-69)—comic actors rarely used their talents to drastically reinterpret the parts they assumed. The implication in the critique of Theophilus Cibber’s failure to perform Wildair with success is that it was attributable to a change in the meaning of Wildair’s costume, movement, gesture, and manner of speaking, rather than a conscious attempt to reinterpret his character-type. And although part of the blame might be placed on Cibber’s acting ability, his botched performance coincides with two cultural developments that had arisen since the play’s first performance at the end of the seventeenth century. Firstly, as we saw in the in Introduction, the sword was gradually falling out of regular dress, and being replaced by canes and clubs (Cunnington and Cunnington 101). Men who continued to wear swords in the 1740s were commonly satirised as over-dressed fashion victims, such as in Hogarth’s “Taste in High Life” in which the beau is adorned extravagantly with sword, cane, wig, bow, hat, cuffs, muff, and teacup. For Hogarth, the danger is not in what the isolated object represents, but rather in what it fails to represent. The sword is lost among his jumble of ornaments; he could not draw it even if he

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| wanted to, and so it is no more than another pretty, decorative possession and its presence has little significance other than to add to the overall frenzy of his personal embellishments. Here, everyday sword-use cannot symbolise masculine daring and power (as in The Rover), affected belligerence (as in Love Makes a Man), or moral danger (as in The Conscious Lovers), but it is rather reduced to grotesquery—as in The Tragedy of Tragedies. The threat of the sword had reached a cultural moment in which it was not even an acceptable teatime | Detail from Taste in High Life (1742) – William Hogarth |

accessory. With Hogarth’s beau in immediate view, we must recall the 1732 etching of Wilks as Wildair. The similarities between the two characters’s mode of dress are overwhelmingly obvious, particularly with regards to the multitude of possessions both wear, but the social meanings suggested by each picture are in dramatic opposition to one another. Wildair’s stylish clothing could be the costume of a sexually-desirable man when played by Wilks; for Hogarth a decade later it could only suggest the extravagances of a fop.

Changing attitudes about the “correct” use of swords could possibly be ignored. Certainly other seventeenth-century comedies, such as The Rover, were staged throughout the eighteenth century with minimal alterations to the scenes in which sword-use was unavoidable, with high success: The Rover’s brand of Toryish “royalism could easily shade into a kind of general patriotism perfectly well suited to the years of Whig ascendency” (Spencer 188), while, as we have seen in Chapter Two, Wilks transformed Willmore when he took on the part in 1708. But in The Constant Couple, the complications of using a sword in a play before an audience for whom swords were neither aesthetically fashionable nor morally desirable was compounded in the middle of the century by the burgeoning understandings of a connection between behaviour and a consistent gender identity. To play Wildair in the 1740s was to play him against Garrick’s revolutionary style of “natural” acting which “restored nature, ease, simplicity, and genuine humour” to male characters (Davies 43), gravitating towards an aesthetic Real and a rejection of superficial posturing. To prolong the tradition that Wildair was a genuine comic hero, and not the exaggerated fop that Theophilus Cibber made him, the actor must somehow make Wildair’s ostentation, faddishness, and penchant for trickery palatable for a modern audience.

While Wildair’s effeminate qualities are not as pronounced as some other eighteenth-century fops (such as Maiden in Tunbridge Walks or Fribble in Miss in Her Teens), both Nussbaum (The Limits of the Human 70-71) and Mark Stanley Dawson have argued that men did not have to reach the excesses of Maidens and Fribbles in order to be thought of as effeminate in the popular understanding, for the “fop’s ‘effeminacy’ referred instead to a lack of correspondence between signifier and signified” (Dawson 168). In other words, in a society whose moral ancestry was heavily influenced by the Spectator, the fop’s mistake was to believe that his status-symbols guaranteed his ‘quality’; for this reason his claim to authentic masculinity failed. Preferring debate to duelling does not (necessarily) make Wildair effeminate, but his claim that he can “dance, sing, ride, fence, understand the Languages. Now, I can’t conceive how running you through the Body shou’d contribute one Jot more to my Gentility” (Farquhar, Constant Couple 33)—a line that is either foppish flippancy or genial common sense, depending on how it is delivered—is necessarily coloured towards the former by his appeal to his sword’s “prettiness” and insistence that he joined the army “because ‘twas the Fashion.” As Kristina Straub argues: “Femininity seems more comfortably naturalized as an object of display than a masculine exhibitionism just beginning to be seen as problematic” (162).

Wildair’s claim to be a “man of pleasure” further complicates his claim to mid-century masculinity. His joyful pride in avoiding the “spleen” and “trouble” of toil (21) and his enjoyment of the town’s pleasures, and admiration of pretty ornaments resonates with the popular image of middle- and upper-class wives as “idle drones” who “passed their time in such occupations as novel-reading, theatre-going, card-playing, and formal visits” (Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage 247). Conversely, upper-class men were increasingly encouraged to seek fulfilment through industry, enterprise, and good works. “Deprive a man of all business and serious occupation,” wrote Hume, and “he runs restless from one amusement to another; and the weight and oppression which he feels from idleness, is so great, that he forgets the ruin which must follow him from his immoderate expences” (71). The difference is implied through the dramatic legacy: while in The Conscious Lovers Myrtle could make the ironic remark that “We never had one of our Family before, who descended from Persons that did anything” (70), the hero of the play’s spiritual sequel, William O’Brien’s The Duel (1772), is descended from both trade and nobility. Industry, this latter play teaches, “has so often been the creation of our nobility” and denotes “integrity—honour—virtue” (32-33). At a mid-century transitory point, Wildair’s refusal to work and pursuit of pleasure unmanned him.

Concurrently, Wildair’s sword (which we have seen from Restoration breeches roles was used at the time of Farquhar’s writing as an emblem of masculine power) remains undrawn and had been transformed into a symbol of foppish impotence. Sword-use could not be written out of the play as it is integral to both plot and dialogue, but Wildair’s blithe attitude towards sword-use—which does not resonate with the carefree irresponsibility of Willmore, the provoked anger of Carlos, or the reasoned refusal of Bevil—was difficult to reconcile with mid-century ideas about how men should fight. Clearly the nuances of Wilks’s performance (as well as the fact that he regularly played the part for over thirty years) enabled playgoers to remember his Wildair with affectionate admiration, but changes in the semiotics of dress, manners, and morals impeded younger actors from reconstructing his performance. No wonder that, shortly after Wilks’s death, his biographer Daniel O’Bryan pronounced that hence, “no man can act Wildair” (18) to equal satisfaction.

No man, perhaps—a woman, however, might equal and even exceed Wilks’s reputation in the part. The changes that had occurred in social meaning of masculine conduct did not dictate the casting of Margaret Woffington in the role of Wildair eight years later—she had been popular in the role on the Dublin stage and John Rich assumed (correctly) that her success would transfer over to Covent Garden—but they do explain why she triumphed in the part where Theophilus Cibber had failed. Although casting an actress to play a romantic male role already at risk of being condemned as effeminate might seem counterintuitive, Woffington’s assumption of the part definitively rejected early eighteenth-century fashionable masculinity as currency and adjusted it to the feminine domain. We can see this through the critical fascination with her biological gender that dominated discussions of the role after 1740. Woffington did not possess Wilks’s manly stage presence—as Pat Rogers writes, “it was central to the effect that the actress’s femininity showed through” (256)—but she was nevertheless praised for her avoidance of effeminacy (Life of Mr. James Quin 67). In the words of Paul-Gabriel Boucé: “Despite the references to ‘ease’ and ‘elegance’” in descriptions of her performance, “one cannot escape the impression that the novelty and *outre* quality are what matter” (256). Negative evaluations of her work followed the same line of reasoning. In an analysis of John Hill’s The Actor, a Treatise on the Art of Playing (1750), Senelick writes: “Discomfort arises from the actress’ inability to convey a ‘natural’ eroticism. Either she conjures up a flaccid image of impotence or stirs up nauseating fancies of lesbianism” (Senelick, The Changing Room 215). In the production, the audience’s attention is therefore entirely directed towards Woffington’s gender, and Wildair’s attitude towards sword-use is ignored. His reluctance to fight is not foppish or unmanly because Woffington’s gender has already eliminated him from being seen as authentically male.

The stage could therefore retain Wildair as a successful comic hero rather than a feminised man, even though he was “addicted to certain petty vices” (Kenny 30), because through Woffington’s casting, playgoers’ expectations had been adjusted: they were not expecting to see a man playing the part. Wildair was an inauthentic man because he was played by an inauthentic man. Nussbaum has argued that she was successful because there is “something inherently amusing in a woman’s daring to become a sexually aggressive man” (Nussbaum, Rival Queens 225); we might equally argue that audiences were entertained by a woman utilising a sword. When Woffington admires her “pretty sword” and shows an aversion to duelling, she is not behaving like a fop: she is a woman expressing female interests and exhibiting female attitudes towards using a sword in combat. There were other factors that contributed to a sense of slippage between Woffington’s own gender and that of her male characters: the fact that she also played parts like Sylvia and Hellena—as well as Lurewell in some productions, as Helen Brooks has pointed out (70)—and the fact that she performed traditionally-masculine social roles in her personal life, such as becoming president of the male-dominated Beefsteak Club.

The costume that Woffington wore for the part undoubtedly had a large influence in her success. Although her Wildair was certainly fashionably dressed, probably wearing the expensive waistcoat made for her part of Sylvia in The

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Margaret ‘Peg’ Woffington as Sir Harry Wildair in ‘The Constant Couple’ (1875) – A. B., after William Hogarth | Recruiting Officer (Nussbaum, Rival Queens 208), Hogarth’s portrait of her in costume as Wildair reflects the simpler mid-century male fashions. Unlike Wilks’s costume, there is nothing that would suggest the fop to 1740s audiences; she is not a woman playing an effeminate man but rather a woman playing a comic hero. She wears no obvious accessories other than a turban-style cap, although she presumably used a sword for the part as well. And although most playgoers were conscious of her religion—the Gray’s Inn |

Journal wrongly suggests that her 1753 conversion to Protestantism was prompted by professional integrity “to qualify herself to wear a Sword in the Characters of Sir *Harry Wildair* and *Lothario;* which she could not safely attempt as a Papist, it being highly penal in this Kingdom for any one of the *Romish* Communion to carry Arms” (104)[[11]](#footnote-11)—it had no meaningful impact in how they received the part. Nussbaum has argued that Woffington’s work combined the masculinity of the English with the effeminacy of the French—thus enabling an Irish Catholic actress to become a symbol of English patriotism. Any Catholic or effeminate threat she might bear is “quashed” because it is locked inside the external depiction of the masculine English soldier (Nussbaum, Rival Queens 208). The image of the masculine warrior and the female actress coexist in the figure of Woffington, but the immaturity and inexperience implied in her role—she is a volunteer rather than an officer—precludes her from wielding any real power. Her sword, a pretty object, is as impotent as her codpiece.

As Wildair, Woffington neutralised the image of a woman wielding a sword. The incident at the Fleece Tavern in 1660, in which the cavaliers exerted their violent critique of the swordplay in The Unfortunate Lovers, could not be replayed in 1740: sword-use was no longer a guarantor of manliness. The importance of authentic sword-use on the stage—that is, that swords should be used by the “right” person in the “right” way for the “right” reasons—had been reduced in a society where the fact that sword-use was no guarantee of honour was accepted common sense. Yet this does not mean that the erosion of the significance of sword-use eliminated the dynamics of power between the genders. A recurrent sentiment that appears from the end of the seventeenth century is that while it was acceptable for women to appear onstage as men, it was risible or disgusting for men to appear as women (Senelick, “The Changing Room” 210). This is true most obviously for characters like the fop—who transformed from a would-be rakish wit at the height of the Restoration to an effeminate fashion doll by the early eighteenth century—but it is also obvious in characters like Sir John Brute, whose assumption of female dress is a debasement and a source of mirth.

Additionally, we must not presume that Wildair was recognised as a woman in all mediums immediately after Woffington’s London debut. The traditional stage history of the part from 1740 onwards goes that Woffington played him “night after night, for weeks, and Wilks was forgotten” (Doran 209). Yet the Victorian critic’s hyperbole downplays the affection and respect that Wilks still inspired long after his death: as late as 1760, Wilks was always listed as Sir Harry Wildair in the cast lists of the published editions of the play but Woffington never was. A change only occurred in 1766 when Bell’s edition listed James Dodd in the part. The first signs of slippage began to occur in 1777, when the edition of that year listed Dodd in the cast list while using a picture of Anne Barry in the part as a frontispiece. The first edition to acknowledge in the cast list that a woman played the part did not appear until 1791, and listed Dora Jordan at Drury Lane, Mrs. Achmet at Covent Garden, and Charlotte Goodall at the Haymarket. As a symbol of masculine ease and potency, Wildair was incomprehensible for late eighteenth-century readers. An edition from the following year even found it necessary to provide a bemused explanation for his behaviour at the beginning of the play:

It may be no incurious matter, to refer to the being termed the fine gentleman of the last, and beginning of the present, century; for the character is utterly extinct…His pursuits and his appearance were humorously in contrast…He made it his pride, to be as ready for fighting as wenching; liberal and licentious, politeness and prophanity went together; he thought, and appeared desirous to hide that he did so. (v)

Wildair’s simultaneous function as comic hero and figure of excess was inconceivable at the end of the century, while his role as a “fine gentleman” and interest in fighting and whoring is framed as a bizarre and contradictory combination found only in the distant past. Nevertheless, he has still managed to avoid the accusation of effeminacy: even though he is played by a woman, his behaviour is still not marked as anything other than a variant, if antiquated, version of masculinity.

Conclusion

In the body of theatrical works that utilised the sword in a significant way between 1660 and 1740, we should understand that the dominant themes with which it engaged—particularly honour, social class, and fashion—implicitly intersected with one another to create a broader picture of idealised masculinity. This result was entirely intentional: throughout the Restoration and early eighteenth century, the theatre was a strong claimant for being a cultural authority through its reproduction and anatomisation of lives founded upon the aristocratic principles that were gradually being subsumed by the middle classes. To read the sword on the comic stage during these years and analyse its diverse representations—heroic, spirited, risible, undesirable, archaic, neutral—is to understand how theatre writers and actors wanted their audiences to interpret these different themes. Whether representations of the sword were largely intuitive, as was the case in earlier works, or attempted systematic analyses of its use and the implications thereof, the theatre specialised in offerings that showcased this most unique of accoutrements in everyday use.

But it is not only the dramatic intentions underlying the sword’s stage representation that are under evaluation. Contextualising these performances within a theatrical tradition also helps to cast light upon how playgoers themselves understood the themes that related to the sword. The historical framework that has informed this study has provided us with the means to trace and analyse the sword’s transition from an essential tool that men of honour wielded to a widespread article of fashion. For Althusser, “[i]deology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (“Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 36). Applied to the sword onstage, such a perspective permits a reading of the shift of its potency as a symbol of an individual’s social and political power: very strong in the middle of the seventeenth century, but in decay by the middle of the eighteenth. An audience that is engaged with a spectacle of stage swordplay—or, in the case of some later works, the *absence* of swordplay—is processing the visual representation and (consciously or not) deducing specific conclusions about the right and wrong ways of using a sword, and, in doing so, learn about the correct application of the sword to their own lives.

As power accumulated through commerce supplanted cavalier presumptions of hereditary social and political control, the sword lost its potency as a symbol of masculine honour: by the middle of the century it was no longer necessary for a man to wear a sword for him to be considered a man of honour. Because of this, the contemptuous reaction that the cavaliers had had to the performance of swordplay in The Unfortunate Lovers in 1660 was not replicated when Margaret Woffington wore her sword as Sir Harry Wildair eighty years later. A man who wielded a sword in a public arena did not have to be a member of the aristocracy or the landed gentry; he did not have to have a reputation for moral fortitude; he did not have to be a skilled swordsman; he did not even, in the case of Woffington, have to be biologically male. This erosion of the rigidity of the sword’s meaning meant that its dramaturgical representations permitted wider variety in the types of masculine-presenting sword-users, such as the children and the comic-grotesques in burlesques, and the wave of breeches actresses who appeared onstage after Woffington; it also meant that these representations became less explicit in attempting to find meaning in the sword.

Off the stage, the sword lingered on for another thirty years as the main weapon used in the honour-duel. One of the last duels of this type occurred in January 1765, when Lord Byron (1722-98) fought his cousin William Chaworth (1726-65) after a quarrel at the Star and Garter Tavern in Pall Mall over an argument about game on their respective estates. Chaworth died the following day and Byron was subsequently tried by the House of Lords, found guilty of manslaughter, and given no punishment (Kiernan 137). Byron showed no apparent repentance, thereafter keeping his sword on display in his bedchamber as a trophy of his victory, according to his nephew the poet (209). Items about the reencounter and Byron’s trial appeared regularly in the newspapers throughout these months, largely expressing moral concern about duelling (Andrew, Aristocratic Vice 50-51). Wrote one correspondent to the London Evening Post: “Legislature must forbid all (save military) men from wearing swords…I am sure that the advantages resulting from wearing swords, are far short of countervailing the various mischiefs that attend the use of them” (5848). Rather than accepting the sword as proof of Byron’s right to be seen as a man of honour, it was now a weapon of social disruption when placed in the wrong hands.

The author of the letter to the London Evening Post had no need to wait for the government to intervene with a ban on swords, however. As the sword’s reputation as a symbol of honourable gentility was increasingly tarnished, it was gradually eliminated from everyday dress. Although the sword retained ceremonial status within the military and as part of formal court wear, in the 1760s the art of fence was unknown to many young men (Banks 127). As we have seen in the Introduction, civilian fashion had largely discarded the sword altogether by the end of the century. There are a cluster of explanations for this change. Everyday male costume at the middle and end of the eighteenth century inclined towards the understated; David Kuchta has linked the “glide” of the male costume “from formality into ease” during this period with the contemporaneous reformation of male manners, in the sense that “inconspicuous consumption” informed both aesthetics and etiquette (166). This preference for plainer clothes implies that there was a less pressing urge for a man to wear a sword to be recognised as honourable. Concurrently, a new form of conflict resolution for men replaced the swordfight: the verbal invective. Robert B. Shoemaker has observed that the first half the century experienced a rise in the “use of insults to attack and defend commercial reputations” (“Reforming Male Manners” 142); the preference for verbal weapons over physical force meant that men had a less pressing need to wear a sword at their sides. Moore’s conviction that “Good Wit does Strength excel” in The Dragon of Wantley (31) verbalised an authentic contention that was acquiring mainstream appeal by the middle of the century, as men preferred to use reason rather than violence to resolve their problems. Those who were still disposed towards violence were also able to discard the sword as gun manufacturers made significant improvements in pistol accuracy over the eighteenth century (Shoemaker, “The Taming of the Duel” 532), which meant that duellists could fight with better weapons. By the 1770s, specialised duelling pistols were being manufactured (Kiernan 143). With these new methods of staging disputes, a man who quarrelled with another no longer had a need to wear a sword

On the stage, the development from sword to pistol as the weapon of choice was articulated in Sheridan’s The Rivals (1775), a comedy that sought to ridicule the practice of duelling. In this play, firearms assume the prominence that the sword formerly held, taking verbal manifestation through Sir Lucius O’Trigger who lives at Blunderbuss Hall—no Blunts or Hackwells in this play. New weapons also provided an opportunity for new dramaturgical exhibitions. Setting the play in Bath, where men were prohibited from wearing swords in public—something to which the play makes explicit reference (Sheridan 56)—created a new stage-space that was both literal and symbolic. For the first time onstage gentlemen explicitly did not have swords at their sides for most of the play. When a sword finally appears onstage in Act Five, Scene Two, Captain Absolute hides it under his coat, and later drops it (88-89); it is a comic prop rather than a tool for instigating dramatic tension. Notably, Absolute’s mishandling of the sword is not intended as a reflection on his bravery or his skill as a soldier, as it may have done at the beginning of the century. Similarly, when O’Trigger draws on Absolute in the following scene, and Absolute responds likewise, the tension is immediately diffused by Absolute’s father, whose contrarian questions back and forth between the two men transform the scene into verbal farce (97). Pistols, rather than swords, dictate the stagecraft in the final scene, which shows the duellists pacing out the number of steps they need to fire at one another at a distance (91): the duel that created a physical connection between its combatants through the clash of their swords has been replaced with a pistol duel that necessitates a literal void between the two men.

Absent from the stage for most of the play, the sword exists chiefly in comic allusions in dialogue: for example, we are told that Achilles and Alexander “drew their broadswords” to fight, “and left the lazy sons of peace to settle the justice of it” (56). No longer a suitable spectacle, the sword had been steadily displaced from the comic stage following Steele’s efforts to divorce it from polite behaviour, and the dearth of staged swordplay during the 1730s. These imaginary weapons are located in the abstract and thus lack the tangible danger that real swords held to audiences in the 1770s. Unlike Lord Byron’s murderous blade, the sword in farce or allegory posed no actual threat to civil society, and could therefore continue to signify masculine honour. John Leigh has proposed that the textual references function as a way to “classicize and dignify” the pistol duel (62), but the repeated mishandling of the sword and the comical references to it in dialogue suggest not dignity but risibility: as a weapon, the sword is not classical so much as comically outdated. Civilian dexterity with the sword was no longer the signifier of a gentleman, let alone an aspirational hero, but rather marked the professional bravo.

Newer plays could abandon the sword in favour of the pistol, but revivals of older plays had to balance the original plots with new sensibilities. Restoration and early eighteenth-century plays had relied on swordplay as a mean of advancing plots, but managers could add, eliminate, and rewrite lines to resonate better with a modern audience. We have already examined closely the impact of the revival of The Rover in 1708 with Wilks as Willmore, and the revival of The Constant Couple in 1740 with Woffington as Wildair, and similar adaptations occurred during the rest of the century. For example, a 1789 production of Love Makes a Man omitted most of the Governor’s lines, particularly those that pertain to his penchant for instigating sword-fights. Sword-fighting was not as prevalent at the end of the century as it had been in 1700, and the diminution of his role, which in Cibber’s original functions as a moral voice to sermonise against Duart’s reckless violence, implies that it was unnecessary to explicate the play’s moral to an audience at the end of the century.

Rewriting historical cultures and older plays has been a common theme throughout the works analysed in this thesis. Because revivals and reminiscences so clearly defined the history of the sword on the stage between 1660 and 1740, I want to end by considering two comedies from later on in the century, which both bear strong resemblances to earlier works: William O’Brien’s The Duel (1772), and John Philip Kemble’s Love in Many Masks (1790). The first builds upon the failed duel scene in The Conscious Lovers and uses it to drive the play’s dramatic thrust; the second is a sanitised adaptation of The Rover. Neither play was greatly successful: The Duel was performed only once; Love in Many Masks was performed eight times in its first season and once thereafter. This might suggest that their non-satirical interrogations of honour and violence were outmoded for the comic stage; certainly Donna T. Andrew, in her analysis of two late-century plays that utilise sword-duels at their climaxes has argued that the comic stage of the 1780s produced a “new, sentimental male hero, one who, while not completely abjuring the duel, renounces the murderous and revengeful impulse which was its signature” (Aristocratic Vice 70). However, they are consequential to the history of the sword on the stage because each play attempts to erase the sword onstage. Whether by adapting an existing play that centres on the sword (as was the case with Love in Many Masks) or utilising older devices to produce a work that was new to English audiences (The Duel), late eighteenth-century theatre afforded distinct space for the sword, in which it was divorced from personal honour and wielded as a patriotic weapon.

*The Duel*

The Duel is nominally a straightforward drama on the subject of honour violence, as the directness of its title suggests. Like The Conscious Lovers, it shows a young man brought to the point of duelling, dramatizing the horror he feels at his impulses; *unlike* Steele’s play, the hero eventually attends the appointment, although the duel is cancelled before it can occur. Unambitious in both style and structure, nevertheless two new themes emerge from the play’s handling of the private sword: an explicit rejection of the cavalier ethos, and the connection between the duellist and the Jacobite. Through these subjects, the audience is taught to associate the duel with ‘deviant’ masculinity, and to understand that these deviants represent only failed models of authority. As such, O’Brien does not just extend the anti-duelling rhetoric of The Conscious Lovers—it also unwrites The Rover.

To summarise the plot of The Duel in brief: Young Melville, an officer and the son of a rich merchant, has a heated encounter in a coffee-shop with a fellow officer who has insulted commerce. He consequently finds himself challenged to a duel, which is to take place the following morning, just before his sister is due to be married. Concurrently, his father divulges that as well as the prosperity he found in commerce, he also secretly holds the title to a Scottish earldom, which had fallen into disgrace due to both the old earl’s support of James Francis Edward Stuart in 1715, and Old Melville’s own participation in a duel which caused him to flee Scotland for London. Hearing this, Young Melville confesses his predicament to his father, who, although dismayed at his son’s foolhardiness, nevertheless encourages him to keep the appointment as a point of honour. Young Melville and his adversary meet the following morning, but Young Melville shoots his pistol in the air and apologises for taking insult and the two men are reconciled to one another. The play concludes with a warning against the perils of the duel, a “desperate act that may plunge your parents into the depth of affliction, or carry misery into another family, that never injured you” (100). The play was a loose translation of Michel-Jean Sedaine’s 1765 comedy Le Philosophe sans le savoir (“The Philosopher Without Knowledge”), a play that had won popularity in France in its championing of bourgeois sentiments about honour. For a British audience, William O’Brien altered the hero’s surname from Vanderk to Melville (a homophone for The Conscious Lovers’ Bevil), relocated the situation from Paris to London, and peppered the subplot of the patriarch’s secret aristocratic background with allusions to a (regretted) Jacobite upbringing. He also shifts the emphasis from the father onto the son: Sedaine’s work posits Vanderk *père* negotiating the balance between his daughter’s wedding and his son’s duel; O’Brien’s conflict is, as in The Conscious Lovers, drawn from Young Melville’s dilemma of whether or not he should fight.

The sword has an almost silent presence within the play, existing to be seen rather than to be used. The audience is never shown a naked blade, and references to the sword in dialogue are factual rather than allegorical: for example, Old Melville tells his son that it was his victory in a sword-duel that compelled him to flee Scotland (31). The only stage-direction that indicates sword-handling onstage occurs in the first scene of Act One, when Old Melville is shown “[*l*]*aying down his Hat and Sword*” (11) once he enters his house from the street: his weapon is abandoned once his crosses the threshold of domesticity. Other than this moment, the sword’s presence is unacknowledged: Young Melville’s profession demands that he be costumed in military uniform with a sword as a constant presence at his side, but it operates not as an interactive tool, but as a visual prop, perpetually reminding the audience of the themes of violence and honour. His attitude towards his sword is typical of the presumption that the sword had chiefly ceremonial status by this point in the century: guns are his immediate reference for private violence. When his father relates the story of his own duel, he asks if it was fought with pistols (31). When he fights his own duel, he and his opponent choose to fight with pistols, despite the fact that, as officers, they both have swords immediately to hand (96). Young Melville’s sword helps to distinguish him as a military hero, but it is not the tool that he uses to defend himself in formal affairs of honour.

O’Brien’s neglect of the sword is accentuated by its replacement, not by the pistol, but by the pen in the hands of a merchant. It, unlike any other object, is an instrument of authority—authority that is not just over another man, but global, for the merchant with “one stroke of his pen, makes himself obeyed from one end of world to the other” (32)—a far greater achievement than the duellist could ever do with one stroke of his sword. Negotiating these new forms of honour, Old Melville insists to his son: “If you think my having been in trade is a stain to our nobility, remember how incumbent it is upon you to efface it; but in an age so enlightened as this, what has so often been the creation of our nobility, can never tarnish it” (32). In fact, the “stain” comes from the nobility itself, for O’Brien associates hereditary honours with the duel, and the duel with the collapse of stability. According to Old Melville’s narrative, it was a duel that instigated his flight from his ancestral home to poverty in London, and now, like the hereditary title that is also his, he interprets the duel as a sort of mark of Cain: “Oh, yes, I do consider my own guilt, and find that Heaven is always just; it punishes my misdeeds in you” (61), he cries when he discovers his son’s plan. Like the cavalier fleeing from England to the arms of Europe, Old Melville is an exile from his own country. But unlike the cavalier, his own play blames him for his circumstances: the cavalier narrative is explicitly coded as Jacobite, the men who “kindle wars” are “traitors to mankind” (33). Read this way, Old Melville’s profession is the rehabilitation he must undergo to become respectable; the fact that (as in The Conscious Lovers) he has learnt to love trade is a far greater sign of his worth than a title or a sword.

The scene that defines the play’s construction of honour occurs in the second scene of Act Two, which opens with Young Melville spending a sleepless night in anticipation of the duel, reflecting upon his actions and regretting his recklessness:

*Young Melville.* Into what a situation have I brought myself—Oh precipitating passion! whither has thou hurry’d me?—The more I reflect, the more I find myself culpable—How can I answer this to my family?—I cannot bear the sight of them. [*Walking about in violent agitation.*] Their chearfullness, their joy and happiness upon my sister’s marriage, gives me the most exquisite torture—I, whom they all love so much—shall I be the base destroyer of their peace?—Upon my sister’s wedding-day to fight a duel!—And that through my own folly and rashness!—My father too! I see all his distress—his agonies of grief—my poor fond mother’s despair—my sister’s—that sweet girl, my dear Maria! I scarcely knew how much I loved thee till to-night—I am sure she loves me too—the whole family to be thrown into distraction!—O heavens! if I could only put it off for a day—one single day—but even that cannot be—Ha! my father here!— [*Affects an air of gaiety.*

*Enter* MELVILLE*, from the inner room.*

*Melville.* George! what’s the matter? what means all that violent emotion? Talking to yourself!—what’s the matter?

*Young Melville.* Nothing, Sir; I—I—was declaiming to myself—repeating a few heroic sentiments, that was all. (27-28).

One hundred years earlier, Young Melville’s crisis would have been unimaginable: to fight would be to prove that he is a man of honour. Even seventy years earlier the man who feared the pressure to fight was a fop, such as Sir William Mode in The Beau’s Duel. In The Duel, O’Brien uses Young Melville’s dread to draw a different conclusion: his terror of inflicting tragedy upon his family’s celebrations to show his true worth. “Heroic sentiments” draw him inwards towards domesticity, rather than outwards towards the battlefield. But like his predecessors, Young Melville still feels the social pressure to attend the appointment. Indeed, when he finally confesses his dilemma to his father, Old Melville is devastated but convinced that his son cannot do otherwise than fight. He laments: “I can’t divert you from what you ought to do—you are in the service of your king, in the service of your country—O cruel, cruel honour!” (58) Young Melville’s professional position as a military officer compels him to attend the appointment: he must show bravery in his private affairs if he is to uphold his country’s honour in public affairs. This construction of honour is very similar to that which existed one hundred years previously—as exemplified in the cavaliers’ confidence that their private swordplay helped to define them as legitimate figures of authority—but Melville and son absorb this construct as tragic rather than heroic.

The anti-duelling message at the play’s conclusion helps to define how O’Brien wished society to see the practice: social convention and professional practice still necessitated the acceptance of a challenge, but this is both a personal and a national tragedy. The play’s didactic message, then is not to offer an attractive model of heroism to emulate, but rather to press for change so that more heroes like Melville are not potentially lost to the nation or to their families.  The play is questioning the social mores it acknowledges are still too strong to resist, at least for military men. This marks the last phase in the progression traced through this thesis, as first private, and now professional men are being encouraged to resist the tyranny of swordplay.

Love in Many Masks

After a thirty-three year absence from the stage, The Rover returned to London theatres in 1790 as Love in Many Masks, with marginal changes by John Philip Kemble who also starred as Willmore. Critics have typically described Kemble’s alterations as an intentional deviation from Behn’s bawdiness: he eliminated many of the references to rape and sexual intrigue, and the dynamic (but respectable) noblewoman Hellena displaces the sincere (but disreputable) courtesan Angellica in prominence through a series of strategic dialogue cuts (Spencer 213-19; Copeland 55-63; Backscheider 99). But as well as curtailing the original play’s sympathetic portrait of cavalier abandon, Kemble also gave Willmore a professional transformation that raised him from soldier of fortune to naval captain. There are no references to exiled princes, nor is Willmore’s boast to Hellena that he has “been bred in dangers, and wear a Sword, that has been employ’d in a worse Cause, than for a handsome kind Woman” (The Rover 11) carried over into Kemble’s text. In Love in Many Masks, Willmore still claims honour through his sword, but he wears it not as an adventurer but in the service of king and country.

The changes that Kemble instigated drew upon and amplified the decisions made for the 1708 production. When Wilks first assumed the role, his success exploited both his reputation for playing handsome and charismatic comic figures, and his plausibility as a national hero based on his personal experience in the Williamite army. Kemble did not have Wilks’s military training, and he was better known for his weighty tragic roles, such as Macbeth, Lear, and Orestes, than light comedy. Because of this, “the vivacity Wilks had brought to Willmore was probably not a key feature of his performance” (Spencer 201). Nevertheless, Kemble’s proficiency in performing serious, flawed heroes may have lent itself to a depiction of Willmore that was less flippant than his predecessors. In this respect, Kemble’s interpretation attempted a similar operation to that of Wilks’s eighty years earlier: to make Willmore an appealing character, his loyalty towards the recognised government had to be re-established.

The new behaviour that Kemble introduced to the play extended to how the sword was used onstage. Many of The Rover’s sword-fights are necessary to the plot, but Kemble made alterations wherever possible by removing any mention of swords that he could without having to compose an entirely new scene. Whereas in Behn’s original Antonio “*knocks with the hilt of his sword on the door*” (Behn, The Rover 45) to announce his presence to Angellica, this is changed to “*Page knocks at the door*” (Kemble 39). The sword-fight that occurs in Act Three, Scene Four of The Rover, when Pedro discovers Willmore intruding on his property, no longer takes place; Pedro simply shouts at Willmore to leave rather than drawing his sword. When Willmore chases the Spaniards offstage in the first scene of Act Two, he is no longer aided by Blunt (a private gentleman who has no claim to wear a sword in 1790), and he no longer reappears onstage covered in blood, indicating that the fight is less violent. Finally, Kemble precedes Willmore’s attack on Antonio at the end of Act Three with a warning that he is about to draw his sword: “Draw, Sir—here’s one chafe gun for you” (40), and once Antonio falls, instead of the callous line, “How! a Man kill’d! then I’ll go home to sleep” (Behn, The Rover 46), Willmore instead says: “How! kill’d! I hope not—but I had best get out of the way” (Kemble 40): his solipsism has been somewhat relaxed.

Belville’s new assertion in the final scene that Willmore is “a private man, yet every Captain in the British navy is himself a King aboard his little wooden world” (71) is the key to interpreting Kemble’s version of swordplay. This line comes just before Willmore’s speech carried over from Behn’s original, “I can boast of nothing but a sword, which does me right where’re I come, and has defended a worse cause that a woman’s,” and throws it into a new context: Willmore’s sword-use represents an arm of the state, rather than his own private honour. The fact that this is the first explicit expression of this thought in the play simultaneously lessens its impact. At the same time, his behaviour is not typified by the more spontaneous attacks that occur in the original script. Kemble’s changes to The Rover result in a hero who is more conscious of his sword’s power than he had been when William Smith or Wilks acted the part. Rather than presenting a nostalgic picture of cavalier culture thriving abroad, Love in Many Masks instead illustrates the glory of British imperialism operating overseas. The audience is shown that men who use swords are in the explicit employ of legitimate government, rather than subject to the uncertainty of fortune and forced to fight to defend their own individual honour. This imagery found visual fruition in the changes Kemble made to Willmore’s costume—his “old buff” cavalier costume is replaced by the neat blue uniform of the Royal Navy—and is verbalised in Willmore’s closing couplet. No longer does he allude to providence; Behn’s original, “Lead on, no other dangers they can dread, / Who venture in the stormso’th’marriage bed” (The Rover 83) is changed to a promise of fidelity and an allusion to his “heart in chains” (Kemble 73).The play’s continued use of the sword might recall past dramaturgical customs and link it to a tradition in which might means right, but the change in context means that the only correct sword ‘might’ is that which has been formally approved by the British government.

\*

When private swordplay was at its epoch in the seventeenth century, when cavaliers constructed plots and schemes that placed them in supreme positions of power, and fought duels to prove that they were entitled to this authority, swordsmen

belonged to a nameless order of chivalry, owing ideals incomprehensible to an encroaching world of egotism and materialism. In their ceremonial sacrifice to these ideals they went beyond both private retaliation and public principle. Winning or losing, and however deep their animosity, the two opponents, and their seconds, could still feel that they breathed the same air and shared the same creed. (Kiernan 159)

This is the world that Behn and her cohorts wrote for; this is why in The Rover Belvile can “win” Florinda by duelling her brother; why Jodelet in The Man’s the Master cannot participate in the rituals of the private sword; why in The Comical Revenge Beaufort is driven to convince Bruce that they must fight, in spite of the fact that he has just saved his life from another. What followed onstage over the decades afterwards was a gradual debasement of the sword’s value as an instrument of authority. As it was confiscated from fops, restricted to a professional use by the soldier, rejected by the reasonable gentleman, and finally became the plaything of children, grotesques, and women, men increasingly struggled to justify using a sword. Over time, they gave up. During the eighteenth century, the sword was discarded as a part of regular dress, and the duel became increasingly ritualised (Shoemaker, “The Taming of the Duel” 528). Lacking the base knowledge of the “nameless order of chivalry,” that is, the aristocratic ideology woven into the cultural touchstones of Restoration society, eighteenth-century men attempted to consolidate the framework of a societal structure long vanished—to provide their own interpretations of the private sword that, like Love in Many Masks, failed. We can, however, attend to the theatre of the Restoration and early eighteenth century and interpret its comedies’ role as an apparatus for teaching men how to construct their expectations of honour, their claims to power, and the formulation of themselves *as men*, through the use of their swords.

Bibliography

**UNPRINTED SOURCES**

BL Egerton MS 2265.

**INTERNET SOURCES**

“1 W. And M., Sess. 2, Ch. 2, 1689.” Bill of Rights [1688]. Web. 09 Sept. 2015. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/aep/WillandMarSess2/1/2/introduction>

Gale Artemis Primary Sources. Gale Cengage Learning. Web. 22 September 2016. <http://gdc.galegroup.com/gdc/artemis?p=GDCS&u=rho\_ttda>

Hayward, M. (2015). “Dressing Charles II: The King’s Clothing Choices (1660–85).” Apparence(s) (6). Web. 11 Sept. 2015. <http://apparences.revues.org/1320>

Historical Texts. JISC. Web. 22 September 2016. <https://historicaltexts.jisc.ac.uk>

“House of Lords Journal Volume 12: 6 April 1668.” Journal of the House of Lords: Volume 12, 1666-1675. London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1767-1830. 215-216. British History Online. Web. 29 August 2016. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/lords-jrnl/vol12/pp215-216>

**PRINTED PRIMARY SOURCES**

An Account of the Damnable Prizes in Old Nicks Lottery, For Men of Honour Only. London, 1712.

Addison, Joseph. The Drummer, or The Haunted House. London, 1715.

—————— “A Letter from Italy.” Poetical Miscellanies: The Fifth Part. London, 1704.

An Address To the Hopeful Young Gentry of England. London, 1669.

Altieri, Ferdinando. Dizionario Inglese ed Italiano. London, 1727.

“The Art of Acting.” The Harleian Miscellany. Vol. V. Ed. Samuel Johnson and William Oldys. London, 1745. 543-49.

The Art of War. London, 1707.

Baker, Thomas. Tunbridge Walks: or, the Yeoman of Kent. London, 1703.

Bedford, Arthur. The Great Abuse of Musick. London, 1711.

Behn, Aphra. The Rover, or, the Banish’t Cavaliers. London, 1677.

—————— The Lucky Chance, or an Alderman’s Bargain. London, 1687.

—————— The Second Part of the Rover. London, 1681.

—————— The Town Fop, or Sir Timothy Tawdrey. London, 1676.

Blackamore, Arthur. The Perfidious Brethren, or, the Religious Triumvirate. London, 1720.

The Bragadocio, or, The Bawd turn’d Puritan. London, 1691.

Brome, Richard. The Damoiselle. London, 1652.

Bruce, Alexander. The Institutions of Military Law, Ancient and Modern. Edinburgh, 1727.

Buckler, Edmund. A Buckler Against the Fear of Death. London, 1640.

Burnet, Gilbert. A History of My Own Time, Vol. II. London, 1734.

Butler, Samuel. “The Cavalier.” The Cavalier Songs and Ballads of England from 1642 to 1684. Ed. Charles Mackay. London: Griffin, Bohn, and Co., 1863. 28-31.

Byron, George Gordon. Byron’s Letters and Journals: The Complete and Unexpurgated Text of All the Letters Available in Manuscript and the Full Printed Version of All Others. Vol. 10. Ed. Leslie A. Marchand. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1980.

Carey, Henry. Blundrella: or, the Impertinent. London, 1730.

—————— Chrononhotonthologos. London, 1734.

—————— The Dragon of Wantley. London, 1737.

—————— The Grumbletonians. London, 1727.

—————— Mocking is Catching. London, 1726.

Cavendish, Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle. CCXI Sociable Letters; Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle. London, 1664.

Centlivre, Susanna. The Beau’s Duel; or, A Soldier for the Ladies. London, 1715.

—————— The Wonder! or, A Woman Keeps a Secret. London, 1714.

The character of the beaux, in five parts…to which is added, The character of a Jacobite. London, 1696.

Chesterfield, Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of. Letters to His Son and Others. London: Everyman’s Library, 1986.

Chetwood, William. A General History of the Stage, From its Origin in Greece Down to the Present Time. London, 1749.

—————— The Lovers Opera. London, 1729.

—————— The Lovers Opera. The Second Edition, With Alterations. London, 1729.

Chishull, Edmund. Against Duelling. London, 1712.

Cibber, Colley. An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian, and Late Patentee of the Theatre-Royal. London, 1740.

—————— The Careless Husband. London, 1705.

—————— The Double Gallant: or, the Sick Lady’s Cure. London, 1707.

—————— Love Makes a Man; or, The Fop’s Fortune. London, 1700.

—————— Love’s Last Shift, or, The Fool in Fashion. London, 1696.

Cibber, Colley and John Vanbrugh. The Provok’d Husband; or, A Journey to London. London, 1740.

—————— The Provok’d Husband; or, A Journey to London. The Second Edition. London, 1729.

Cibber, Theophilus. “Second Dissertation.” Dissertations on Theatrical Subjects, As they have several Times been delivered to the Public (With General Approbation) By Mr. *Cibber*. London, 1756.

The Clarke Papers. Volume IV. Ed. C. H. Firth. London: Longmans, 1901.

Cobbett, William. Cobbett’s Parliamentary History of England. From the Norman Conquest, in 1066, to the Year 1803. Vol. IV. London: T. C. Hansard, 1808.

Cockburn, John. The History of Duels. London, 1720.

Collier, Jeremy. A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage. London, 1698.

Colman, Benjamin. Death and the Grave Without Any Order. London, 1728.

Congreve, William. The Old Batchelor. London, 1693.

“A Country Song, Intituled the Restoration.” The Cavalier Songs and Ballads of England from 1642 to 1684. Ed. Charles Mackay. London: Griffin, Bohn, and Co., 1863. 248-50.

Courtin, Antoine de. The Rules of Civility; or, the Maxims of Genteel Behaviour…Newly done out of the *Twelfth* Edition in *French*. Trans. Anon. London, 1703.

Cowley, Abraham. The Guardian; A Comedie. London, 1650.

Craftie Cromwell: or, Oliver Ordering Our New State. London, 1648.

Crouch, John. A Mixt Poem, Partly Historicall, partly Panegyricall, Upon the Happy Return of His Sacred Majesty Charles the Second, and his Illustrious Brothers, the Dukes of York and Glocester. London, 1660.

Crown, John. Sir Courtly Nice: or, It cannot Be. London, 1685.

Curll, Edmund. A History of the English Stage. London, 1740.

—————— The Life of that Eminent Comedian Robert Wilks, Esq. London, 1733.

Darrell, William. A Gentleman Instructed in the Conduct of a Virtuous and Happy Life. London, 1704.

Davenant, William. The Man’s the Master: A Comedy. London, 1669.

—————— The Unfortunate Lovers: A Tragedie. London, 1643.

Davies, Thomas. Life of Garrick, Vol. 1. London, 1780.

Davys, Mary. The Accomplish’d Rake: Or, the Modern fine Gentleman. London, 1727.

Defoe, Daniel. An Account of the Abolishing of Duels in France. London, 1713.

—————— Memoirs of a Cavalier: or a *Military Journal* of The *Wars* in Germany, and The *Wars* in England; From the Year 1632, to the Year 1648. London, 1720.

—————— A Strict Enquiry Into the Circumstances of a late Duel. London, 1713.

Downes, John. Roscius Anglicanus, or an Historical Review of the Stage. London, 1708.

Dryden, John. The Assignation, or Love in a Nunnery. London, 1672.

—————— Astraea Redux. London, 1660.

—————— Marriage a la Mode. London, 1673.

—————— Secret Love, or the Maiden-Queen. London, 1668.

—————— The Spanish Fryar. Hague, 1710.

Duffett, Thomas. The Spanish Rogue. London, 1673.

Dunton, John. The Dublin Scuffle. London, 1699.

The English Devil: or, Cromwel and his Monstrous Witch. London, 1660.

An Epitaph On His Grace James Duke of Hamilton. Edinburgh, 1712.

Erasmus. Witt against Wisdom, or A Panegyrick Upon Folly. Oxford, 1683.

Estienne, Henry. The Art of Making Devises. Trans. T. B. London, 1648.

Etherege, George. The Comical Revenge, or Love in a Tub. London, 1664.

Evelyn, John. The Diary of John Evelyn. Vol. 1. Ed. William Bray. London: M. Walter Dunne, 1901.

—————— APanegyric to Charles the Second. London, 1661.

The Famous Tragedie of King Charles I. London, 1649.

Farquhar, George. The Constant Couple; or, A Trip to the Jubilee. London, 1700.

—————— The Constant Couple; or, A Trip to the Jubilee. London, 1792.

—————— The Constant Couple; or a Trip to the Jubilee…The *Second Edition*, with a New Scene added to the part of *Wildair*. London, 1700.

—————— Love and Business. London, 1702.

—————— The Prologue Spoken by Mr. Wilks, At the opening of the Theatre in the Hay-Market, October the 15th, 1706. London, 1706.

—————— The Recruiting Officer. London, 1706.

—————— The Works of Geo. Farquhar. Vol. I. Dublin, 1775.

Fielding, Henry. Miscellanies. The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great. Vol. III. London, 1743.

—————— Tom Thumb. London, 1730.

—————— The Tragedy of Tragedies. London, 1731.

Fleming, Robert. The History of Hereditary Right from Cain to Nero. London, 1717.

Ford, John. “The Lover’s Melancholy.” The Dramatic Works of John Ford. Vol. 1. Ed. William Gifford. London: John Murray, 1831. 1-121.

The French Rogue: or, the Life of Monsieur Ragoe de Versailles. London, 1704.

A Full and Exact Relation of the Duel Fought In *Hyde-Park*, on *Saturday*, *November* 15. 1712. Between His Grace *James*, Duke of *Hamilton*, And the Right Honourable *Charles*, Lord *Mohun*. London, 1713.

Gailhard, Jean. The Compleat Gentleman. London, 1678.

Gauden, John. Cromwell’s Bloody Slaughter-house. London, 1660.

Gentleman in Dublin. The last, best, and truest Newes from Ireland. London, 1641.

Gentleman of Wales. The humour of duelling, considered. London, 1720.

Granville, George. The She-Gallants. London, 1695.

Gray, Mr. The Memoirs, Life and Character of the Great Mr. Law and his Brother at Paris. London, 1721.

The Gray’s-Inn Journal. In Two Volumes. Vol. I. London, 1756.

Harrison, William. Two Treatises. London, 1639.

Haym, Nicola. Giulio Cesare in Egitto. London, 1724.

Head, Richard. Hic et Ubique, or, The Humors of Dublin. London, 1663.

Hobbes, Thomas. Leviathan: Or, The Matter, Forme, and Power of a Common-wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill. London, 1651.

Honours Preservation Without Blood. London, 1680.

Hope, William. A Vindication of the True Art of Self-Defence. London, 1724.

Howard, Robert. “The Duel of the Stags.” A Select Collection of Poems: With Notes, Biographical and Historical. The First Volume. Ed. J. Nichols. London, 1780. 154-165.

Howell, James. The Instruments of a King: or, A Short Discourse of The Sword. The Scepter. The Crowne. London, 1648.

Hume, David. Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects, Vol. II. London, 1760.

Humfrey, Lawrence. The Nobles or of Nobilitye. London, 1563.

Johnson, Charles. Love in a Forest. London, 1723.

Kemble, John Philip. Love in Many Masks. London, 1790.

Kirkman, Francis. The unlucky citizen experimentally described in the various misfortunes of an unlucky Londoner. London, 1673.

Lenton, Francis. The Young Gallant’s Whirligigg. London, 1629.

The Life and Noble Character of Richard Thornhill, Esq; Who had the misfortune to kill Sir Chalmley Deering. London, 1711.

The Life of Mr. James Quin. London, 1766.

Little Preston: An Heroi-Comick Poem, Upon the Late Action at Holywell. London, 1717.

The Lives and Characters of *James* Duke *Hamilton* and *Brandon*, Master of the Ordinance, and Knight of the Garter. And *Charles* Lord *Mohun*. London, 1712.

Lovelace, Richard. “Aramantha, a Pastorall.” Lucasta: Epodes, Odes, Sonnets, Songs, &c. London, 1649. 145-64.

—————— “To Lucasta, Going to the Warres.” Lucasta: Epodes, Odes, Sonnets, Songs, &c. London, 1649. 3.

Luttrell, Narcissus. A Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs from September 1678 to April 1714). Vols. I-III. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1857.

Milton, John. The Prose Works of John Milton; Containing His Principal and Ecclesiastical Pieces, With New Translations, and an Introduction. Vol. II. London, 1809.

Moliere. Tartuffe: or, the French Puritan. Trans. M. Medbourne. London, 1670.

Mughouse-Diversion: or, A Collection of Loyal Prologues, and Songs, Spoke and Sung at the Mug-Houses. London, 1717.

Mulgrave, John Sheffield, Earl of. The Works of John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, Marquis of Normanby, and Duke of Buckingham. Volume II. London, 1723.

O’Brien, William. The Duel. London, 1772.

O’Bryan, Daniel. Authentic Memoirs or, the Life and Character of that Most Celebrated Comedian, Mr. Robert Wilks. London, 1732.

Pepys, Samuel. Diary and Correspondence of Samuel Pepys, F. R. S. Secretary to the Admiralty in the Reigns of Charles II and James II. The Diary Deciphered by the Rev. J. Smith, A. M. from the Original Shorthand MS. in the Pepysian Library. Vols. 1-4. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1855.

Pittis, William. The History of the Third Session of the Last Parliament. London, 1713.

Playford, Henry. Wit and Mirth; or, Pills to Purge Melancholy. London, 1705.

Pomphret, John. “The Choice, or, the Pleasures of a Country-Life.” The Pleasures of a Single Life, or, the Miseries of Matrimony. London, 1709. 13-16.

Pope, Alexander. Epistles to Several Persons. London, 1744.

Rabelais, Francois. The first Book Of the Works of Mr. Francis Rabelais. Trans. Thomas Urquhart. London, 1653.

—————— The Second Book Of the Works of Mr. Francis Rabelais. Trans. Thomas Urquhart. London, 1653.

Ralph, James. The Touch-Stone. London, 1728.

Ravenscroft, Edward. The Canterbury Guests; or, A Bargain Broken. London, 1695.

Rawlins, Thomas. Tom Essence, or, The Modish Wife. London, 1677.

Revolution upon Revolution: an Old Song made in the Year 1688, Revised in the Year 1715. London, 1715.

Roaring Dick of Dover. London, 1632.

Rochester, John Wilmot, Earl of. The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. Ed. David M. Vieth. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

Roscommon, Wentworth Dillon, Earl of, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, and Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset. Poems on Several Occasions, By the Earl of Roscomon, &c. Volume II. London, 1718.

Rous, Francis. Archaeologiae Atticae Libri Tres. Oxford, 1637.

Sanderson, William. A Compleat History of The Lives and Reigns of Mary Queen of Scotland, And of her Son and Successor, James The Sixth. London, 1656.

Schopperus, Hartm. The Crafty Courtier: or The Fable of Reinard the Fox. London, 1706.

Sedley, Charles. Bellamira, or, the Mistress. London, 1687.

—————— The Works of the Honourable Sir Charles Sedley. London, 1722.

Shadwell, Thomas. Epsom-Wells. London, 1672.

—————— The Volunteers, or the Stock-Jobbers. London, 1693.

Shaftesbury. Characteristicks of men, manners, opinions, times. London, 1714.

Shakespeare, William. An Excellent Conceited Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet. London, 1597.

Sharpe, Isaac. Plain English Made Plainer. London, 1704.

Sheridan, Richard Brinsley. The Rivals. London, 1775.

Shirley, James. The Gamester. London, 1637.

Slush, Barnaby. The Navy Royal: or a Sea-Cook turn’d Projector. London, 1709.

Sorel, Charles. The Comical History of Francion. London, 1703.

Spenser, Edmund. The Faerie Queene. London, 1590.

Steele, Richard. The Christian Hero: An Argument Proving That No Principles but Those of Religion are Sufficient to Make a Great Man. London, 1701.

—————— The Conscious Lovers. London, 1723.

—————— The Funeral; or, Grief A-la-mode. London, 1702.

—————— Mr. Steele’s Apology for Himself and His Writings. London, 1714.

Suckling, John. “The Goblins.” Fragmenta Aurea. London, 1646.

Swift, Jonathan. The Works of Dr. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick’s, Dublin. Volume XVIII. London, 1766.

T. L. True Newes from Norwich. London, 1641.

The Three Buxome Maids of Yoel. London, 1690.

Thomson, John. The Tricks of the Town: Or, Ways and Means for Getting Money. London, 1732.

Treuvé, Simon Michel. The Spiritual Director for Those Who Have None. London, 1703.

A True and Impartial Account of the Murder of his Grace the Duke of Hamilton and Brandon, by Mr. Mackartney. London, 1712.

A True Relation Of the apprehension of the Lord Digby. London, 1642.

The Tryal of Charles Lord Mohun Before the House of Peers in Parliament, for the Murder of William Mountford. London, 1693.

Vanbrugh, John. The Relapse; or, Virtue in Danger. London, 1697.

D’Urfey, Thomas. Love for Money: or, the Boarding School. London, 1691.

—————— The Marriage-Hater Match’d. London, 1692.

—————— “Song.” Poems on Several Occasions, By the Right Honourable, the E of R—. London, 1680. 72-73.

—————— Squire Oldsapp, or, The Night-Adventurers. London, 1679.

Vaughan, George. A true and certaine Relation Of His Majesties sad Condition in Hurst-Castle. London, 1648.

Vincent, Samuel. The Young Gallant’s Academy. London, 1674.

Wall, William. A History of Infant-Baptism. London, 1707.

Walpole, Horace. A Catalogue of the Royal and Noble Authors of England, With Lists of their Works. Vol. II. Twickenham, 1758.

Ward, Edward. The London-Spy Compleat, In Eighteen-Parts. London, 1703.

—————— Mars stript of his Armour: or, the Army Display’d in all its true Colours. London, 1709.

The Wentworth Papers, 1705-1739. Ed. James J. Cartwright. London, 1883.

Wilkins, John. An Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language. London, 1668.

Wiseman, Richard. Eight Chirurgical Treatises. London, 1705.

Woodward, Josiah. The Soldier’s Monitor. London, 1715.

Wortley, Francis. A Loyal Song of the Royal Feast. London, 1648.

1 W. And M., sess. 2, ch. 2, 1689.

Wycherley, William. Love in a Wood, or, St. James’s Park. London, 1671.

—————— The Plain Dealer. London, 1677.

**REPORTS AND CONCORDANCES**

Fifth report of the royal commission on historical manuscripts, Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, 4 (1876).

Seventh report of the royal commission on historical manuscripts, Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, 6 (1879).

The London Stage, 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments, & Afterpieces Together with Casts, Box-Receipts and Contemporary Comment Compiled from the Playbills, Newspapers and Theatrical Diaries of the Period. Vols. 1-3. Ed. Emmett L. Avery, William Van Lennep, and Arthur H. Scouten. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960-65.

**SECONDARY SOURCES**

Althusser, Louis. “Lenin and Philosophy.” Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001. 11-42.

—————— “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation).” On Ideology. Trans. Ben Brewster. London: Verso, 2008. 1-60.

Andrew, Donna T. Aristocratic Vice: The Attack on Duelling, Suicide, Adultery and Gambling in Eighteenth-Century England. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.

—————— “The Code of Honour and its Critics: The Opposition to Duelling in England 1700- 1850.” Social History Vol. 5 (1980): 409-434.

Backscheider, Paula. Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

Baldick, Robert. The Duel: A History of Duelling. New York: C.N. Potter, 1965.

Banks, Stephen. A Polite Exchange of Bullets: The Duel and the English Gentleman, 1750-1850. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010.

Barber, C. L. The Idea of Honour in the English Drama, 1691-1700. Gotebörg: Gotebörg Studies in English, 1957.

Barker-Benfield, G. J. The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Barthes, Raymond. S/Z: An Essay. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.

Berger, Arthur V. “The Beggar’s Opera, the Burlesque, and Italian Opera.” Music & Letters 17 (April 1936): 93-105.

Berkeley, David S. “The Penitent Rake in Restoration Comedy.” Modern Philology Vol. 49, No. 4 (May, 1952): 223-33.

Borg, Alan. “The Monarch of Marylebone Plains: James Figg’s place in 18th-century British Art.” The British Art Journal Vol. 5, No. 3 (Winter, 2004): 35-36.

Borgmeier, Raimund. “Henry Fielding and His Spanish Model: ‘Our English Cervantes.’” Cervantes in the English-Speaking World: New Essays. Ed. Dario Fernandez-Morera and Michael Hanke. Kassel: Reichenberger, 2005. 43-64.

Boucé, Paul-Gabriel. Sexuality in eighteenth-century Britain. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982.

Brooks, Helen. Actresses, Gender, and the Eighteenth-Century Stage: Playing Women. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Bryson, Anna. From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Buck, Anne. Dress in Eighteenth-Century England. London: HarperCollins, 1979.

Burghclere, Winifred. George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham (1628-1687). London: J. Murray, 1903.

Burke, Peter. “A Civil Tongue: Language and Politeness in Early Modern Europe.” Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas. Ed. Peter Burke, Brian Harrison, and Paul Slack. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 31-48.

Butler, Judith. “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Femininist Theory.” Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre. Ed. Sue-Ellen Case. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990. 270-282.

Cahill, Patricia A. Unto the Breach: Martial Formations, Historical Trauma, and the Early Modern Stage. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Canfield, J. Douglas. Heroes and States: On the Ideology of Restoration Tragedy. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015.

—————— “Shifting Tropes of Ideology in English Serious Drama, Late Stuart to Early Georgian.” Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theater. Ed. J. Douglas Canfield and Deborah Payne Fisk. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995. 195-227.

—————— Tricksters and Estates: On the Ideology of Restoration Comedy. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015.

Capp, B. S. When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Carlton, Charles. This Seat of Mars: War and the British Isles, 1485-1746. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

Carter, Philip. Men and the Emergence of Polite Society: Britain 1660-1800. Harlow: Longman, 2001.

Castle, Terry. Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in English Culture and Fiction. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1986.

Childs, John. The British Army of William III, 1689-1702. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.

Claydon, Tony. William III and the Godly Revolution. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Cohen, Michèle. “Manliness, Effeminacy, and the French.” English Masculinities, 1660-1800. Ed. Tim Hitchcock and Michele Cohen. Harlowe: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999. 44-61.

Cope, Jackson I. “The Constant Couple: Farquhar’s Four-Plays-in-One.” ELH Vol. 41, No. 4 (Winter, 1974): 477-93.

Copeland, Nancy Eileen. Staging Gender in Behn and Centlivre: Women’s Comedy and the Theatre. Farnham: Ashgate, 2004.

Cunnington, C. Willett and Phillis Cunnington. Handbook of English Costume in the 18th Century. London: Faber and Faber, 1972.

Dalrymple, John. Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland From the Dissolution of the last Parliament of Charles II. until the Sea-battle off La Hogue. Volume II. London, 1773.

Davis, Tracy C. and Thomas Postlewait. Theatricality: An Introduction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Dawson, Mark Stanley. Gentility and the Comic Theatre of Late Stuart London. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

DeRitter, Jones. “The Gypsy, The Rover, and the Wanderer: Aphra Behn’s Revision of Thomas Killigrew.” Restoration Vol. 10 (1986): 82-92.

Diamond, Elin. “Gestus and Signature in Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*.” ELH Vol. 56, No. 3 (Autumn, 1989): 519-541.

Doran, J. Their Majesties Servants. London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1865.

Douglas, Mary. Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology. London: Routledge, 1996.

Duffy, Maureen. The Passionate Shepherdess: The Life of Aphra Behn, 1640-1689. London: Phoenix Press, 2000.

Dugaw, Diane. “Female Sailors Bold: Transvestite Heroines and the Markers of Gender and Class.” Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920. Ed. Margaret S. Creighton and

—————— Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650-1850. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Durston, Gregory J. Whores and Highwaymen: Crime and Justice in the Eighteenth-Century Metropolis. Hook: Waterside Press, 2012.

Easton, Fraser. “Gender’s Two Bodies: Women Warriors, Female Husbands and Plebeian Life.” Past & Present No. 180 (Aug. 2003): 131-74.

Foyster, Elizabeth. “Boys will be Boys?” English Masculinities, 1660-1800. Ed. Tim Hitchcock and Michele Cohen. Harlow: Longman, 1999. 151-165.

Gollapudi, Aparna. Moral Reform in Comedy and Culture, 1696-1747. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013.

Gill, Pat. “Gender, Sexuality and Marriage.” The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre. Ed. Deborah Payne Fisk. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 191-208.

Goring, Paul. The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Hayton, D. W., Evelyn Cruickshanks, and Stuart Handley (eds.). The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1690-1715. Volume III. London: Boydell and Brewer, 2002.

Heilman, Robert B. “Some Fops and Some Versions of Foppery.” ELH Vol. 49, No. 2 (Summer 1982): 363-95.

Highfill, Philip H., Kalman A. Burnim, Edward A. Langhans (eds.). A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800. Volume 16: W. West to Zwingman. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993.

Hill, Christopher. The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714. London: Routledge, 2002.

Horejsi, Nicole. “(Re)Valuing the ‘foreign trinket’: sentimentalizing the language of economics in Steele’s Conscious Lovers.” Restoration and 18th Century Theatre Research Vol. 18, No. 2 (2003): 11-36.

Holland, Peter. The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Howard, Jean E. “The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies.” English Literary Renaissance XVI (1986): 13-43.

Howe, Elizabeth. The First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660-1700. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Hunter, Heidi, ed. Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993.

Hunter, J. Paul. Occasional Form: Henry Fielding and the Chains of Circumstance. Balitmore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975.

Hutton, Alfred. The Sword Through the Centuries. Newton Abbot: Dover, 2002.

James, Mervyn. Society, Politics and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Jesse, John Heneage. Memoirs of the Court of England from the Revolution in 1688 to the Death of George the Second. Vol. III. London: Richard Bentley, 1843.

Keen, Maurice Hugh. Chivalry. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

Kenny, Shirley Strum. “Humane Comedy.” Modern Philology Vol. 75, No. 1 (Aug. 1977): 29-43.

Kiernan, V. G. The Duel in European History: Honour and the Reign of Aristocracy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

King, Thomas A. The Gendering of Men, 1600-1750, Vol. 1: The English Phallus. Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 2004.

Kuchta, David. The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England, 1550-1850. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Lamb, Jeremy. So Idle a Rogue: The Life and Death of Lord Rochester. Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2005.

Leduc, Guyonne. “Women in the Army in 18th Century Britain.” The Invisible Woman: Aspects of Women’s Work in Eighteenth Century Britain. Ed. Isabelle Baudino, Jacques Carre, and Cecile Revauger. London: Ashgate, 2005. 75-88.

Leicht, Kathleen. “Dialogue and Duelling in Restoration Comedy.” Studies in Philology Vol. 104, No. 2 (Spring 2007): 267-280.

Leigh, John. Touché: The Duel in Literature. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015.

Lewis, Peter Elfred. Fielding’s Burlesque Drama: Its Place in the Tradition. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1987.

—————— “Henry Carey’s ‘Chrononhotonthologos.’” The Yearbook of English Studies Vol. 4 (1974): 129-39.

Loftis, John. Steele at Drury Lane. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952.

Low, Jennifer. Manhood and the Duel: Masculinity in Early Modern Drama and Culture. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Macaulay, Thomas Babington. The History of England: From the Accession of James the Second, Vol. II. London: Longmans, Green, Reader, & Dyer, 1871.

Mackie, Erin. Market a la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Macnamara, F. N. Memorials of the Danvers Family (of Dauntsey and Culworth). London: Hardy & Page, 1895.

Manning, Roger Burrow. Swordsmen: The Martial Ethos in the Three Kingdoms. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

McCleave, Sarah. Dance in Handel’s London Operas. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013.

McConachie, Bruce. Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

McGeary, Thomas. “Verse Epistles on Italian Opera Singers, 1724-1736.” Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle 33 (2000): 29-88 .

McGirr, Elaine. Heroic Mode and Political Crisis, 1660-1745. Newark: Delaware University Press, 2009.

McKeon, Michael. The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

Milhous, Judith and Robert D. Hume. “Opera Salaries in Eighteenth-Century London.” Journal of the American Musicological Society Vol. 46, No. 1 (Spring, 1993): 26-83.

Morsberger, Robert E. Swordplay and the Elizabethan and Jacobean Stage. Salzburg: Institüt fur Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1974.

Neill, Michael. “Heroic Heads and Humble Tales: Sex, Politics, and the Restoration Comic Rake.” The Eighteenth Century Vol. 24, No. 2, A Special Issue on Restoration Drama: Theories, Myths, and Histories (Spring 1983): 115-39.

Nicoll, Allardyce. A History of English Drama 1660-1900. Volume I: Restoration Drama 1660-1700. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952.

North, Michael. Material Delight and the Joy of Living: Cultural Consumption in the Age of Enlightenment in Germany. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008.

Nunn, Joan. Fashion in Costume, 1200-2000. London: The Herbert Press, 2000.

Nussbaum, Felicity. The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

—————— Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

Oakeshott, Ewart. European Weapons and Armour: From the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012.

Owen, Susan J. Restoration Theatre and Crisis. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Pagden, Anthony. The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Payne, Deborah C. “Theatrical Spectatorship in Pepys’ Diary.” Review of English Studies Vol. 66, No. 273 (February 2015): 87-105.

Pearson, Jacqueline. “Flinging the Book Away: Books, Reading, and Gender on the Restoration Stage.” Theatre and Culture in Early Modern England, 1650-1737: From *Leviathan* to Licencing Act. Ed. Catie Gill. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2010. 33-50.

Peltonen, Markku. The Duel in Early Modern England: Civility, Politeness and Honour. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Peschel, Enid Rhodes and Richard E. Peschel. “Medical Insights into the Castrati.” American Scientist 75 (1987): 578-583.

Potter, Lois. “Politics and Popular Culture: The Theatrical Response to the Revolution.” The Revolution of 1688-89: Changing Perspectives. Ed. Lois G. Schwoerer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 184-97.

Price, Curtis. “The Critical Decade for English Music Drama.” Harvard Lib. Bull. 26 (1978): 38-76.

Purkiss, Diane. Literature, Gender and Politics During the English Civil War. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Rivero, Alberto. The Plays of Henry Fielding: A Critical Study of His Dramatic Career. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989.

Roach, Joseph. It. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007.

Roberts, David. Thomas Betterton: The Greatest Actor of the Restoration Stage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Rogers, Pat. “The Breeches Parts.” Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain. Ed. Paul-Gabriel Bouce. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982. 244-58.

Sadie, Julie. Companion to Baroque Music. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998.

Scott, Joan W. “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.” The American Historical Review Vol. 91, No. 5 (Dec. 1986): 1053-75.

Senelick, Laurence. The Changing Room: Sex, Drag, and the Theatre. London: Routledge, 2000.

—————— “Mollies or Men of Mode? Sodomy and the Eighteenth Century London Stage.” Journal of the History of Sexuality Vol. 1, No. 1 (Jul. 1990): 33-67.

Sergeant, Philip Walsingham. My Lady Castlemaine: Being a Life of Barbara Villiers. London: Hutchinson, 1912.

Sheriff, John K. The Good-Natured Man: The Evolution of a Moral Ideal. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1982.

Shoemaker, Robert B. “Male Honour and the Decline of Public Violence in Eighteenth-Century London.” Social History Vol. 26, No. 2 (2001): 190-208.

—————— “The Taming of the Duel: Masculinity, Honour and Ritual Violence in London, 1660-1800.” The Historical Journal Vol. 45, No. 3 (Sept. 2002): 525-545.

Simpson, Antony. “Dandelions on the Field of Honour: Duelling, the Middle Classes, and the Law in Nineteenth-Century England.” Criminal Justice History Vol. 9 (1988): 99-155.

Smith, Ruth. Handel’s Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Sofer, Andrew. The Stage Life of Props. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003.

Spencer, Jane. Aphra Behn’s Afterlife. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Staves, Susan. “A Few Kind Words for the Fop.” Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 Vol. 22, No. 3, Restoration and Eighteenth Century (Summer 1982): 413-28.

Stewart, Frank Henderson. Honor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Stone, Lawrence. The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965.

—————— The Family, Sex and Marriage In England 1500-1800. Abridged edition. London: Penguin 1979.

Straub, Kristina. Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth Century Players and Sexual Ideology. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Styan, J. L. The English Stage: A History of Drama and Performance. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

—————— Restoration Comedy in Performance. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Sutherland, James. The Restoration Newspaper and Its Development. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Trussler, Simon, ed. Burlesque Plays of the Eighteenth Century. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Viator, Timothy and William J. Burling (eds.). The Plays of Colley Cibber: Volume One. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001.

Ward, Charles E. “An Unpublished Letter of Sir Robert Howard.” Modern Language Notes Vol. 60, No. 2 (Feb. 1945): 119-121.

Wheelright, Julie. Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed Like Men in Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness. London: Pandora Press, 1989.

Wilson, Brett D. “Bevil’s eyes; or, How crying at *The Conscious Lovers* could save Britain.” Eighteenth-Century Studies Vol. 45, No. 4 (Summer 2012): 497-518.

Wilson, John Harold. Court Satires of the Restoration. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1976.

—————— A Preface to Restoration Drama. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968.

—————— A Rake and His Times: George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham. London: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1954.

Wright, Louis B. “Stage Duelling in the Elizabethan Theater.” The Seventeenth-Century Stage: A Collection of Critical Essays. Ed. Gerald Eades Bentley. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1968. 156-169.

1. Harris’s reputation for good fellowship is suggested by the ease with which he made friends all over town throughout the decade: from 1667 he was a frequent guest at Pepys’ parties, and was also one of the rakish “ballers” who could count Rochester, Henry Savile, and Henry Killigrew among his friends (Roberts 85-87). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is suggested by the fact that Cademan had been a member of the Duke’s Company since around 1662 (Nicoll 302), and was later accidentally injured onstage while playing this part in 1673. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Wilks, along with Colley Cibber, John Mills, Anne Oldfield, and other key players, had left Drury Lane before the beginning of the 1706-07 season; in exchange, Christopher Rich, Drury Lane’s manager, now had exclusive rights to stage operas and dancing at his own theatre (Price 54-63). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Between 1688 and 1715 at least one of the heroes is explicitly identified as a gentleman officer in almost a third of all new comedies (forty-four out of 141): Behn’s The Widow Ranter (1690); Thomas Shadwell’s The Amorous Bigot (1690) and The Volunteers (1693); D’Urfey’s The Marriage-Hater Match’d (1692), The Campaigners (1698), The Bath (1701), and The Modern Prophets (1709); Dilke’s The Lover’s Luck (1695); Scott’s The Mock-Marriage (1695); Harris’ The City Bride (1696); Pix’s The Spanish Wives (1696); Corye’s A Cure for Jealousy (1699); Farquhar’s The Constant Couple (1699), Sir Harry Wildair (1701), The Inconstant (1702), The Twin Rivals (1702), and The Recruiting Officer (1706); Burnaby’s The Reformed Wife (1700) and Love Betray’d (1703); Craufurd’s Courtship a la Mode (1700); Steele’s The Funeral (1701), The Lying Lover (1703), and The Tender Husband (1705); Centlivre’s The Beau’s Duel (1702), The Basset Table (1705), The Platonic Lady (1706), The Man’s Bewitched (1709), Marplot (1710), The Perplex’d Lovers (1712), and The Wonder! A Woman Keeps a Secret (1714); Walker’s Marry or Do Worse (1703); Dennis’ Gibraltar (1705); the anonymous Siege of Barcelona (1706); Baker’s Hampstead Heath (1706) and The Fine Lady’s Airs (1708); Cibber’s The Rival Fools (1708); Charles Shadwell’s The Fair Quaker of Deal (1709) and The Humours of the Army (1713); the anonymous Injured Love (1711); Johnson’s The Wife’s Relief (1711) and The Successful Pyrate (1712); Taverner’s The Female Advocates (1713); Addison’s The Drummer (1715); Hamilton’s The Doting Lovers (1715). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. I count twenty-one plays written after 1688 that use such characters: Thomas Shadwell’s The Squire of Alsatia (1688) and The Volunteers (1693); the anonymous The Braggadocio (pub. 1691); D’Urfey’s Love for Money (1691), The Marriage-Hater Match’d (1692); The Richmond Heiress (1693), and The Bath (1701); Congreve’s The Old Bachelor; Southerne’s The Maid’s Last Prayer (1693); Powell’s The Cornish Comedy (1696); Cibber’s Woman’s Wit (1697) and The Double Gallant (1707); Vanbrugh’s The Provok’d Wife (1697) and The Confederacy (1705); Dilke’s The Pretenders (1698); Baker’s Tunbridge Walks (1703) and The Fine Lady’s Airs (1708); Steele’s The Tender Husband (1705); Motteux’s Farewell Folly (1705); Farquhar’s The Recruiting Officer (1706); Charles Shadwell’s The Fair Quaker of Deal (1710). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This second type of violent fop appears in nineteen plays: D’Urfey’s Love for Money (1691), The Intrigues at Versailles (1697), and The Old Mode and the New (1703); Higden’s The Wary Widow (1693); Thomas Shadwell’s The Volunteers (1693); Dilke’s The Lover’s Luck (1695); Lansdowne’s The She-Gallants (1695); Colley Cibber’s Love’s Last Shift (1696), Woman’s Wit (1697), and Love Makes a Man (1700); Vanbrugh’s The Relapse (1696); Farquhar’s Love and a Bottle (1698) and Sir Harry Wildair (1701); Centlivre’s The Beau’s Duel (1702) and The Basset Table (1705); Steele’s The Lying Lover (1703) and The Tender Husband (1705); the anonymous The Fashionable Lover (1706); Addison’s The Drummer (1715). There are a further five plays in which fops do not fight but boast of their skill with the sword: W. M.’s The Female Wits (1696), Pix’s The Different Widows (1703); Centlivre’s The Gamester (1705); Colley Cibber’s The Rival Fools (1708); Charles Shadwell’s The Humours of the Army (1713). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. These citations refer to the 1729 edition of the play. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. According to advertisements in the Daily Journal, the Daily Post, and the London Daily Post and General Advertiser between 1730 and 1740, The Provoked Husband was performed on twenty occasions at both Drury Lane and Covent Garden during this decade, never on consecutive nights. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The scripts for Jack the Gyant-Killer and Robin Goodfellow were apparently never published, but it seems reasonable to assume that they were thematically similar to the other plays listed, based on their titles. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Unless otherwise stated, all textual references use the second edition of the play from 1700, the source for all subsequent editions and performances. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. As the engraving of her in character as the Female Volunteer shows, she had been wearing a sword onstage since at least 1746, and there is no reason to suppose that she did not wear one earlier in her career. Philip H. Highfill et. al. (213) and Nussbaum (Rival Queens 204) have both suggested that the true reason for her conversion was that she was due to inherit a sum of money from Owen MacSwinny, the former manager at the Haymarket. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)