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The Boxing Discourse in Late Georgian England, 1780-1820 : A Study in Civic Humanism, Gender, Class and Race

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HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

The Boxing Discourse in Late Georgian England, 1780-1820:

A Study in Civic Humanism, Gender, Class and Race

D i s s e r t a t i o n
zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades

Doctor philosophiae
(Dr. phil.)

von

M.A. Ruti Ungar

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This work is dedicated to my father

wishing he was here

and to Amos and Ima

with all my Love

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Introduction

In 1805, William Cobbett (1763-1835), the most important political journalist of the Georgian period, dedicated a series of lead articles in his immensely popular *Political Register* to the subject of boxing. He was not alone; in the late eighteenth century this popular sport was a subject to which poets, authors, artists and politicians devoted much attention. A vast number of pamphlets, handbills, caricatures and prints were produced in celebration or condemnation of the corporal practice, and the British Library catalogue lists over sixty books published, between 1750 and 1850, on boxing.[1] Despite the abundance of textual and pictorial sources, the boxing discourse in late Georgian English society has been, for the most part, neglected. Historians of popular culture have concentrated mainly on the practice of sports, focusing on the social struggles in which sports were involved and the process of commercialisation they underwent. The present study examines the discourse on boxing in English society circa 1780 to 1820. Specifically, it seeks to answer the question: What were the social, political and cultural issues negotiated within and around the practice? Boxing will emerge in this context as an important discursive area for negotiating issues of gender, class, and race.

In the eighteenth century boxing, or pugilism, as it was called at that time, "was winning a central and cherished place in everyday English culture, which it has never quite lost".[2] It became one of the most popular sports in Georgian England: it drew huge crowds, involved vast sums of money, and enjoyed fervent support, despite (or, perhaps, because of) its condemnation and persecution by moralists, magistrates and preachers.[3] Aristocrats of the first order were enthusiastic fans of what they called "the art of Self-Defence". The Prince of Wales (the future King George IV) organized fights, Lord Byron took boxing lessons and Secretary of War, the honourable William Windham (1750-

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[1] See also: R. A. Hartley, *History and Bibliography of Boxing Books: Collectors' Guide to the History of Pugilism* (Alton: Nimrod, 1988).

[2] Christopher Johnson, "'British Championism': Early Pugilism and the Works of Fielding", in: *The Review of English Studies* 47.187 (1996), pp. 331-351, quote on p. 335.

[3] A note on terminology: this study utilizes the words boxing, pugilism and prize-fighting synonymously, as they were used in the period. There were three central forms of boxing in Georgian England: professional prize-fighting, fighting with gloves as a form of exercise and boxing as a way of settling conflicts between men. Although this work deals mainly with professional boxing, and the debate surrounding it, most writers did not differentiate between professional boxing (the prize-ring) and street fights, and the line between them was indeed very thin, as even in grudge fights money was often involved (the two opponents would decide on a prize money and the spectators laid a wager on the outcome).

1810), even missed a parliamentary debate in order to watch a fight.[4] Boxers enjoyed huge public attention. They were heroes: songs were written in their honour, engravings of them were sold, and their names were known to everyone, including those who vehemently opposed the sport.[5] An indication of the sport's popularity can be found in *The Universal Register*, which abhorred pugilism, but regularly reviewed boxing matches, explaining that "this amusement is not of the most humane kind; yet, as a fashionable sport it demands our notice."[6]

Pugilism consisted of bare-knuckle fighting with some wrestling moves. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, there were no weight divisions, limits on the numbers of rounds, or prescribed duration for a round. Boxers who went down were given 30 seconds to return to the centre of the ring, i.e. 'scratch' (hence the saying 'up to scratch'), or they would lose the fight.[7] Fights were conducted in rural areas far from the reach of local authorities. The date of a fight would be fixed, but the location was not publicized until the day before, so as not to give the magistrates time to stop it. People travelled a long way and overcame considerable obstacles in order to watch a fight. Working men, members of the middle-class and gentlemen stood shoulder to shoulder around the prize ring. Matches began approximately at noon and lasted until dark or until one of the fighters gave in. Death in the ring or shortly after a fight was not unknown, but the great sums of money the winner received proved to be an enticing incentive for working-class men.[8]

Boxing was not simply any sport. It was regarded as the manliest of all sports. Moreover, boxing was also considered the quintessential English sport, and boxers were seen as archetypal representatives of English superiority over other nations.[9] In fact, comparisons were drawn between the French duel and English boxing, with many

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[4] John Ford, *Prizefighting: The Age of Regency Boximania* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1971), pp. 65-82; Dennis Brailsford, *Bareknuckles: A Social History of Prize-Fighting* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1988), pp. 25-6.
[5] Brailsford, *Bareknuckles,* pp. 31-2, 45-6.
[6] *The Universal Register*, 20 December 1787.
[7] For the development and changes which boxing underwent from the eighteenth to the twentieth-century, see: Kenneth Gordon Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, PhD Thesis (Chelmsford, UK: Anglia Polytechnic, 1992).
[8] Richard Holt, *Sport and the British. A Modern History* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 20-22; Ford, *Prizefighting,* pp. 97-118; Tony Gee, *Up to Scratch: Bareknuckle Fighting and Heroes of the Prize-ring* (Harpenden: Queen Anne Press, 1998), p. 15.
[9] Arthur E. Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century England*, PhD Thesis (University of Indiana, 2001).

Englishmen regarding the former as effeminate and cowardly and the latter as the more "manly", reasonable and "natural" way of settling conflicts, primarily on the grounds that boxing was conducted "without deceit or weapon".[10]

There was, nevertheless, strong opposition to boxing. People of all classes objected to the sport's brutality. They felt that boxing matches were fertile ground for criminal activities, such as pick pocketing and gambling. They claimed that boxing encouraged the mob and made gentlemen behave like rakes. The ambivalent status of the sport was reflected in the heated debate for and against boxing that took place in many arenas of the public sphere. Newspapers argued for and against boxing, pamphlets recommended the sport or attacked it, and judges considered its relative merits and dangers in court rulings. The many debating societies popular in Britain at the time enjoyed arguing the benefits and hazards of the sport, and discussing if "the present rage for boxing [ought] to be encouraged as manly, or discountenanced as a brutal exercise?"[11]

***

Popular culture has been a major subject of historical research since the 1960s.[12] Seminal to this historiography is E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) which presents popular culture as the field in which "the people" forge their idea of themselves and their place in society.[13] Following Thompson, Marxist social historians have painted a picture of a traditional, mostly rural, pre-industrial popular culture that was destroyed or changed in the wake of enclosures, industrialisation, urbanisation, the withdrawal of aristocratic patronage and middle-class social control. Some historians argued for continuity between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries; others

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[10] Boxing was, to some extent, a functional equivalent of the duel, as both were used as a means of settling conflicts. Nevertheless, there were a few differences between the two practices. The duel was restricted to the upper class, while boxing resolved quarrels between men of the lower classes or men of different social status. Duels were motivated by insult and fought privately; their outcome was irrelevant; attending the duel was enough to restore a man's honour. Professional prize-fighting was done in public, involved no grudge and the outcome was essential because of the large sums of money involved. Another important difference between the two concerns the representations of masculinity and corporeality: in boxing there was direct body contact, whereas in duelling there was a clear distance between the bodies, accentuated by the weapon. This can be seen as a manifestation of different, class related, ideas of corporeality [see also Chapter Three]. Christiane Eisenberg, *'English Sport' und Deutsche Bürger* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1999), p. 27; Cf. Ute Frevert, "Bürgerlichkeit und Ehre: Zur Geschichte des Duells in England und Deutschland", in: *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert: Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich,* ed. Jürgen Kocka (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1988), pp. 101-140; Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, pp. 108-12.

[11] Donna Andrew, *London Debating Societies 1776-1799* (London: London Record Society, 1994), p. 4.

[12] For two recent historiographical reviews, see: Peter Bailey, "The politics and poetics of modern British leisure: A late twentieth century review", *Rethinking History* 37 (1999), 131–75; Emma Griffin, "Popular culture in industrializing England", *Historical Journal* 45 (2002), 619-35.

[13] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

emphasized change.[14] However, at the centre of all studies stood the image of popular culture as a site of conflict between the middle classes on the one hand and a coalition of the working class and the aristocracy on the other.[15] In the centre of most of these work stood the cultural struggle between a traditional, autonomous, organic popular culture and a modern, individualistic commercial culture. Whatever the tags attributed to each side of the conflict –elite and popular, polite and vulgar, or patrician and plebeian – popular culture was usually described as a residual, backward-looking atavistic culture.[16]

Histories of boxing follow the same social trends as the historiography of popular culture in general. Early histories of boxing claim that pugilism succumbed to increasing attacks from reformers and policing forces, and that the sport's decline was largely due to the withdrawal of upper class patronage.[17] For Kenneth Sheard, a student of Norbert Elias, class plays an important role in the "civilising process" that boxing underwent: "Prize-fighting was coming to be regarded as an inappropriate activity for people in what was coming increasingly to be seen as a 'civilised' society, as the idea of a more controlled and disciplined middle class gradually gained the ascendancy."[18] John Carter Wood's *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth Century England*, which devotes an entire chapter to boxing, argues along similar lines. It suggests that attitudes towards violence underwent a considerable change in the nineteenth century. As part of middle class identity formation and an attempt to achieve greater social control "self-identified civilizing forces undertook a determined offensive against alternative, customary attitudes towards violence". Assuming a close correlation between culture and social

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[14] For example, Robert Malcolmson painted a picture of pre-industrial lower class recreations, patronised by the local gentry and clergy, which declined and were almost destroyed by the middle of the nineteenth century. Hugh Cunningham rejected emphasized continuity between 'pre-industrial' and 'industrial' leisure experience, emphasized the flexibility and adaptability of popular culture and the new possibilities brought upon by industrialization and commercialisation. Robert Malcolmson *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution c. 1780-c.1880* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

[15] See the latest addition to this historiography: Emma Griffin, *England's Revelry: A History of Popular Sports and Pastimes, 1660–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[16] The most influential book in this strain is: Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978).

[17] John Ford, *Prizefighting: The Age of Regency Boximania* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1971); Dennis Brailsford, *Bareknuckles: A Social History of Prize-Fighting* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1988).

[18] Kenneth G. Sheard, "Aspects of Boxing in the Western 'Civilizing Process'", *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 32.1 (1997), pp. 31-57, quote on p. 46. See also: Kenneth Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, PhD Thesis (Anglia Polytechnic, 1992).

class, Carter Wood identifies the middle class as the "civilising" force and the working class as adhering to "customary" mentalities.[19]

By the 1980s, the idea of class as a catalyst of cultural change was beginning to lose its force in historical analysis. Peter Borsay's *A History of Leisure* identifies two major arguments in this process: first, class was not more important than other factors such as gender, race or region; and second, there was no direct correlation between specific cultural forms and social groups.[20] The dichotomy between popular and elite culture and the idea of a homogenous lower-class popular culture were both questioned. It was argued that the high versus low model ignored the marked diversity within popular culture as well as the many similarities between elite and popular cultures.[21] Golby and Purdue's *The Civilisation of the Crowd: Popular Culture in England 1750-1900* stressed the adaptability of a popular culture created by the people, for the people, and argued for a strong resemblance between the cultures of different classes.[22] In his *Popular Cultures in England 1550-1750,* Barry Reay suggested that cultural practices had a cross-class appeal, but that different sections of society responded to them differently. He recommended a closer examination of collective cultural values on the one hand, and of the various cultural divisions not related to class (such as region, gender, and religion) on the other.[23]

Elliott Gorn's *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize-fighting in America* notes two contrasting forces at work within English boxing culture: modernisation and capitalist economy on the one hand, and the old "atavistic" values of aggressiveness and homosocial companionship on the other.[24] Although boxing upheld pre-modern notions of honour and was based on hierarchical relationships of patronage, it also exhibited modern

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[19] John Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth Century England: The Shadow of Our Refinement* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 9.
[20] Peter Borsay, *A History of Leisure* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2006), pp. 76-7.
[21] Barry Reay, "Review: The Cultures of the People in Early Modern England", *The Journal of British Studies* 36.4 (1997), pp. 467-472.
[22] J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd: Popular Culture in England 1750-1900* (London: Batsford, 1984).
[23] Reay, *Popular Cultures in England 1550-1750*, pp. 199-223. In his introduction to a collection of essays on popular culture Tim Harris also asserted that "a conflict between elite and popular culture which the elite eventually (and inevitably), won distracts us from considering the degree of interaction between the cultural worlds of the educated and the humbler ranks of society as well as the degree of resistance to pressure from above exhibited by those from below". Tim Harris, "Problematising Popular Culture", in: *Popular Culture in England , c. 1550-1850,* ed. Tim Harris (Basingstoke: Mcmillan, 1995), p. 5.
[24] Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize-fighting in America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986).

elements such as an emphasis on meritocracy. According to Gorn, prize-fighting was part of a colourful and hybrid urban culture that appealed to both the upper- and the lower-classes for different reasons. For the upper class it was an attempt to maintain patriarchal prerogatives, which were beginning to decline, and to re-establish upper-class patronage of the working class. For the working class boxing epitomized a raucous style of cultural play that affirmed virtues such as prowess, bravery and physical culture, representing an atavistic concept of manhood while elevating the romantic ideals of honour and valour over the middle class values of commerce and industriousness.[25] By emphasising the combined ideals of honour, masculinity and community, boxing came to represent traditional values in opposition to the newly rising middle class work ethic. Thus, for both upper- and working-class men, prize-fighting served as the antithesis of bourgeois culture.[26]

One issue that has, to a large extent, been neglected in the historiography of popular culture is the debate surrounding sport and its representational practices. Referring to this lacuna in his recent review article, "Politics and Poetics of Modern British Leisure", Peter Bailey acknowledges that the debate on leisure among contemporaries was "louder than any debate among historians".[27] The few studies that have mentioned the debate on popular culture have examined (in passing) only the arguments for and against certain sports. These brief assessments see the defence of boxing and other "manly sports" as an expression of nostalgia for Old England and an attempt to recreate a mythical past. Hugh Cunningham, for example, claims that arguments in defence of such sports must be taken seriously, but has devoted only a few pages to the subject in his book, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution,* and does not distinguish between conservatives and radicals when assessing the defence of the sport. Sports such as boxing, he claims, were defended in the eighteenth century on the grounds that they kept the poor content, provided a harmonious meeting place for all classes, helped instil martial qualities, prevented effeminacy and were truly patriotic and British.[28]

This is an over-schematic account of what – this study will show – was a differentiated, heterogeneous and complex discourse, in which major issues of late

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[25] Ibid, pp. 27-9.
[26] Ibid, p. 251.
[27] Bailey, "The Politics and Poetics of Modern British Leisure", p. 149.
[28] Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 47-8, 64, quote on p. 48.

Georgian English society were being debated, contested and negotiated. By analyzing the discourse rather than the practice of boxing, the present study thus aims to supplement and modify former perceptions about the role of the sport and its place in society.[29] An exploration of the discourse provides insights not only into which struggles took place between opponents and proponents of boxing, but also into the differences among proponents of the sport – questions that have not, as yet, been posed. The study asks what were the main subjects of the boxing debate? What issues were negotiated in it? What other discourses were interwoven with the boxing discourse? What notions of class, gender, race and nation were introduced into and produced by the discourse? And finally, did the boxing discourse help perpetuate social hierarchies of gender, class and race, or challenge them?

This study analyses pamphlets, boxing literature, reports of parliamentary debates and court sessions, newspapers, journals and sports journals.[30] The authorship of these works, the majority of which were produced in London, is mostly anonymous. The debate on the sport encompassed a wide readership, and some of the texts and pictures seemed to have reached not only the upper and middle strata of society but also members of the working class. In addition to the widely circulated newspapers, many of the prints and boxing books were inexpensive enough to be bought by artisans and skilled workers.[31] At least two of the most important texts examined in this study – William Cobbett's *Political Register* and Pierce Egan's *Boxiana* – were, as will be shown, clearly intended for a broad audience and enjoyed a large upper-, middle- and working-class readership.

This thesis utilizes a number of pictures as sources. Vic Gatrell, who sees in the mass of images created in the eighteenth-century the beginnings of the shift to the image-based culture of today,[32] has aptly pointed out that pictures were an important medium in late Georgian England. From the crude and cheaply produced woodcut prints and caricatures hanging on the cottage walls of the poor, to the expensive coloured prints and

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[29] This study utilizes the word discourse in the traditional sense of a corpus of texts referring to a single subject – boxing. For additional definitions of discourse see for example: Gesa Stedman, *Stemming the Torrent: Expression and Control in the Victorian Discourses on Emotions, 1830-1872* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 6. See also: Sarah Mills, *Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1996).

[30] The sources are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

[31] In the matter of readership I agree with the argument of Bilodeau rather than with that of Sheard, who suggested that boxing literature reflected only the values of the upper strata of society. Sheard, *Civilizing Process*, p. 82. For the middle class background of most journalists in the nineteenth century see: Eisenberg, *'English Sport' und Deutsche Bürger*, pp. 54-6.

[32] Gatrell, private communication, March 2005.

portraits collected by the nobility, people of all classes participated in the consumption of images.[33] Pictures served an important function in disseminating ideas and thus supply other information than that provided by written sources, as can be seen in matters concerning contemporary perceptions of the boxer's body.

For the analysis of pictures, the study draws on a number of works by art historians, in particular Marcia Pointon's "Pugilism, Painters and National Identity in Early Nineteenth-Century England" on the connection between artists of the Royal Academy and the boxing world, Sarah Hyde's "The Noble Art: Boxing and Visual Culture in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain" on portraits of eighteenth century boxers, and Henriette Heiny's survey of the development of boxing art in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *Boxing in British Sporting Art: 1730-1824*.[34] Although this study does not use works of fiction as primary sources, it does rely on the findings of a number of studies on the subject, including Christopher Johnson's article "'British Championism': Early Pugilism and the Works of Fielding", and Arthur Bilodeau's *Pugilistic Rhetoric in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century England*, which analysed boxing as a literary metaphor as well as the major impact of "pugilistic rhetoric" on literature.[35]

The study provides a synchronic rather than diachronic analysis of the boxing debate. It is more interested in the variety of issues that the boxing discourse addresses and its wider discursive context than in the changes taking place in the practice or

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[33] Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in eighteenth-century London* (London: Athlantic, 2006), pp. 9-11. For the use of pictures as historical sources see also: Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, (Ithaca and New York: Reaction, 2001); Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature. Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996); Robert L. Patten, "Conventions of Georgian Caricature", in: *Art Journal* 43 (1983), pp. 331-338; Roy Porter, "Seeing the past", in: *Past and Present* 118 (1988), pp. 186-205; Brigitte Tolkemitt, "Einleitung", in: *Historische Bildkunde. Probleme – Wege – Beispiele*, *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, Beiheft 12 (1991), pp. 7-14; Rainer Wohlfeil, "Das Bild als Geschichtsquelle", in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 243 (1986), pp. 91-100; Bernd Roeck, "Visual turn? Kulturgeschichte und die Bilder", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 29 (2003), pp. 294-315.

[34] Marcia Pointon, "Pugilism, Painters and National Identity in Early Nineteenth-Century England", in: *Boxer: An Anthology of Writings on Boxing and Visual Culture, ed.* David Chandler, John Gill, Tania Guha and Gilane Tawadros (London: Institute of International Visual Art, 1996), pp. 35-41; Sarah Hyde, "The Noble Art: Boxing and Visual Culture in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain", in: *Ibid.*, pp. 93-97. Henriette A. G. Heiny, *Boxing in British Sporting Art: 1730-1824*, PhD Thesis (University of Oregon, 1987). See also: Karin Rase, *Kunst und Sport: der Boxsport als Spiegelbild gesellschaftlicher Verhältnisse* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2003).

[35] Christopher Johnson, "'British Championism': Early Pugilism and the Works of Fielding". *Review of English Studies* 47 (1996), pp. 331-351; Arthur Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century England*, PhD Thesis (Indiana University, 2001); See also: Kasia Boddy, *Boxing: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion, 2008).

discourse of boxing over time.[36] The narrow time frame of 1780 to 1815 has been selected for in-depth examination for reasons both internal and external to the sport; this was the period when pugilistic activity reaches its peak, was most popular, most dynamic, and most publicly debated. Not coincidentally, the peak of the sports popularity and greatest controversy parallel one of the most momentous periods in English history.[37] Between 1780 and 1820 England experienced almost constant war abroad and great social, economic and political instability at home. The American Revolution and the wars with revolutionary and Napoleonic France (1793-1815) were a transformative period in British history. During these few decades many of the conflicts of the eighteenth century came to a head. This study investigates how the important social, cultural and political conflicts played themselves out within the boxing debate, and how the debate was shaped by and reflected these developments and confrontations.

The English government was in a precarious situation in the late eighteenth century, facing threats from both within and without. King George III suffered periodically from what a nineteenth century commentator called "melancholy aberration of intellect".[38] The state's resources were stretched to the limit through the expansion of the empire, the rivalry with France and at times Spain, the loss of the American Colonies and the French and Napoleonic Wars. Large sums of money were going to foreign countries or being spent on the war, and the national debt grew exponentially, leaving the country with a £900 million deficit.[39] A rise in population, which precipitated anxieties about the capacity of the nation to feed itself, together with wars and bad harvests (1795-1800, 1808-12) resulted in high food prices, hunger and social unrest.[40] Many labourers experienced deterioration in their standard of living as a result of enclosures, unemployment and the decline of the moral economy, which had protected certain

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[36] For this reason it does not deal with *long durée* theories of changes, such as the work of Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning. Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, *Quest for Excitement. Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963); Eric Dunning and Dominic Malcolm eds., *Sport: Critical Concepts in Sociology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

[37] Boxing was also practiced in Scotland and Ireland; this study, however, concentrates on England, both because the majority of sources are English sources (with a strong basis in London) and because boxing was much more popular in England. Any Scottish, Irish or Welshman who wished to make a name for himself would come to the Greater London area.

[38] Robert Walsh "Introduction", in: William Windham and William Huskisson, *Select speeches of the Right Honourable William Windham, and the Right Honourable William Huskisson* (E. C. Biddle, 1837), p. xi.

[39] William Stafford, *Socialism, Radicalism and Nostalgia. Social Criticism in Britain, 1775-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 20-3.

[40] Stafford, *Socialism, Radicalism and Nostalgia*, pp. 11-20.

privileges and regulated wages. An economically increasingly more powerful but disenfranchised middle class was becoming gradually more discontent with widespread corruption, rises in taxation, the loss of the American colonies and the wars that were affecting trade. Middle class men and women as well as members of the lower classes were becoming ever more active in the expanding public sphere and voicing their demands for parliamentary reform.[41]

The eighteenth and nineteenth century were a time when the boundaries of the nation were being intensely negotiated. After the Act of Union with Scotland (1707) there were some persistent attempts to cement a more inclusive view of the nation with the Jewish Naturalization Bill (1753), the Catholic Relief Act (1778) and the Act of Union with Ireland (1800). However, many of these attempts to widen the scope of the nation encountered fierce resistance. Thus, it was a time of constant negotiation between various, often antagonistic, views of the nature of English or British identity (two terms which were used interchangeably at the time).[42]

Standing at the crossroads between social, political, and cultural history as well as gender and race studies, the present study addresses and contributes to a number of current historiographical debates. The first of these is that about politeness and sensibility. The paradigm of politeness has ruled much of the cultural historiography of Georgian England.[43] However, because politeness plays such a central role in the cultural history of the period, alternative and oppositional discourses have generally been neglected. Anna Bryson has explained that influenced by Norbert Elias' notion of the "civilizing process", the anti-civility forces in history have often received only cursory glances. Moreover, she argues that "by reifying 'sensibility' as an object of research, [Elias] fails to see how far the whole notion of a psyche refined away from the immediate expression of natural impulse was itself a historical construct." She warns of the danger of writing a 'Whig

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[41] Dickinson "Popular Politics and Radical Ideas", p. 108.

[42] The literature on the making of the English/British national identity in the period is vast. The Most important publications are: Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Linda Colley, "Whose nation? Class and national consciousness in Britain 1750-1830", *Past & Present* 113 (1986), pp. 97-117; Linda Colley, "Britishness and otherness : an argument", *Journal of British Studies* 31 (1992), pp. 309-29; Otto Dann and John Rowland Dinwiddy, *Nationalism in the Age of the French Revolution* (London: Hambeldon, 1988); Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire, and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740-1830* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Samuel, Raphael ed., *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, 3 Vols (London: Routledge, 1989).

[43] For the review of the historiography of politeness see footnote 192.

history', i.e. a history in which only the signs of 'improvement' are registered. This kind of history looks only at one strain of 'social techniques' and ignores other, countering tendencies, which – Bryson says – are nevertheless important. She argues that the civility code has evolved through the conflict with other available codes: "far from simply holding up 'the civilizing process', such conflicts frequently underlay and moulded notions of civility, and made codes of manners an ambiguous and contested area of social change."[44]

Vic Gatrell, too, has argued that 'civilizing' discourses are always constrained by remnants of older cultures and traditions. *City of Laughter* argues that everything which is not politeness has been perceived in the historiography "only as 'transgressions' against or 'subversions' of dominant values, that is, as derivative or secondary reactions, which serve chiefly to highlight civility's deepening purchase." But while some behaviour patterns were indeed subversive of politeness, others had much older roots. These were not counter-cultures to politeness; rather, politeness was a reaction to these older codes of behaviour. The constancy of these remnants of past cultures and mentalities demands, he argues, a restructuring of our conception of politeness: "It's *im*politeness that becomes the baseline subject, and social disciplining that is the chronically challenged reaction."[45]

When politeness is viewed by historians as a moral code, its opposition is seen as atavistic and barbaric, and its values and ideologies are obscured. Historians, adopting the language of the age, often label the opponents of politeness rude, vulgar and backward-looking.[46] However, despite the roughness, brutality and vulgarity of many of the boxing fans, the vehement defence of the sport by sober and public-spirited men, such as William Windham and William Cobbett, indicates that boxing represented central values in Georgian society that cannot be summarized by the words vulgar, rough and popular. This analysis of the boxing debate aims to show that the opposition to politeness was more than a reactionary culture; it had a deeply-rooted ideological basis. The ideology which, this study will show, stood at the centre of boxing was civic humanism. Although this

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[44] Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility. Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 195-7.

[45] Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth Century England* (London: Atlantic, 2006), p. 17. Gatrell's is a social history of this impoliteness culture, emphasizing (one can even say celebrating), its libertine side.

[46] For example, Dennis Brailsford writes that boxing's "very nature pointed towards brutality, harshness, and the most sensational type of violence. It was scarcely the natural material for any but the most simplistic of moralities…" Dennis Brailsford, "Morals and Maulers: the Ethics of Early Pugilism". *Journal of Sport History* 12.2 (1985), pp. 126-42, quote on p. 126.

classical, patrician and masculine tradition has been investigated at length in the context of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century politics, its reverberation in popular culture has not, as yet, received significant attention.[47]

Influenced by research in the field of cultural studies, this study takes as its point of departure the assumption that class, gender and race are discursive categories, i.e. their meaning is culturally constituted, historically contingent, hence constantly in flux. It analyses how these categories are constituted in the debate on boxing in late Georgian England. A central theoretical perspective conceptualizing the relations between these categories is the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" developed by Robert Connell, which has gained many adherents in sociology, cultural studies and history.[48] This approach argues that different masculinities stand in hierarchical relation to each other, with one model of masculinity accepted as the leading masculinity. The hegemonic model acts as the symbol of authority and is used to guarantee male domination. Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to women on the one hand and subordinate masculinities on the other. Although few men fulfil the hegemonic ideal, most men subscribe to it because it effectively reproduces male domination, and is thus the ideal from which most men benefit.[49]

Sports, it has been argued, is one of the sites in which hegemonic masculinity is naturalized and perpetuated.[50] Michael Messner and other feminist theorists argued that violent sports such as boxing provide "linkages among men in the project of the domination of women, while at the same time helping to construct and clarify differences between various masculinities."[51] They argued that the masculine ideal epitomised in

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[47] For a historiographical review of civic humanism see footnote 183.

[48] A useful introduction to the concept of hegemonic masculinity in historical works is: John Tosh, "Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender", in: *Masculinities in Politics and War. Gendering Modern History*, eds. Stefan Dubink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 41-58.

[49] R. W. Connell, Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics (Cambridge: Polity, 1987); R. W. Connell, Masculinities (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); Mike Donaldson "What is Hegemonic Masculinity?", Theory and Society 22 (1993), pp. 643-57; Robert W. Connell and James Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity", Gender & Society 19.6 (2005), pp. 829-59.

[50] John Hargreaves, "The body, Sport and Power Relations", in: *Sport, Leisure and Social Relations*, eds. John Horne, David Jary and Alan Tomlinson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), pp. 139-159.

[51] Messner, "Masculinity and Violence in Sport", pp. 206, 213, 215. See also: David Whitson, "Sport in the construction of masculinity", in: *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Michael A. Messner and Don F. Sabo (Champaign, Ill., 1990), pp. 19-23; Michael Messner, "When bodies are Weapons: Masculinity and Violence in Sport", *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 25 (1990), pp. 164, 167-8.

boxing reinforces not only manly domination but also class and racial hierarchies.[52] Other sociologists and historians also argued that sports served to reproduce racial inequalities and reinforce racialized images, ideas and social practices.[53] However, recent research, such as the work of Douglas Hartmann and Ben Carrington, paints a more complex picture; showing that sport is a site in which various racial ideologies are contested, rather than merely reproduced.[54]

Although the concept of hegemonic masculinity generally appears in analyses of contemporary societies, various historians have postulated a similar trajectory for early modern Europe. They describe a late eighteenth century in which anxieties about political and social uncertainties encourage the rise of a masculine ideal that naturalized social inequalities of gender, class and race. This ideal was constructed in contrast to women, homosexuals, working-class men and minorities, e.g. Jews and Blacks. Revathi Krishnaswamy aptly summarizes the hegemonic model of eighteenth-century England: "the ideal appearance of the English male (the tall, strong, clean-cut English man) specifically excluded those who were stunted, narrow-chested, excitable, easily wearied, or inefficient – qualities associated with women, the lower classes, Jews, Papists, Spaniards, the French, and colored peoples."[55] Drawing on the insights of such studies on the hegemonic constructions of manliness, the present study explores the function of the manly ideal produced in the boxing discourse. As a sport considered the epitome of

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[52] Messner, "Masculinity and Violence in Sport", pp. 214-215.

[53] The most controversial example for such arguments is John Hoberman's *Darwin's Athletes*, which argues that in the twentieth century sport has helped perpetuate racial inequality. Hoberman claimed that because of western dualism of body versus mind, sport reinforces views of blacks as physically superior but mentally inferior to whites. He argued that the "obsession" of African-Americans with sport inhibits their social mobility and their integration. John Hoberman, *Darwin's Athletes: How Sport has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997).

[54] Douglas Hartmann, "Rethinking the relationship between Sport and Race in American Culture: Golden Ghettos and Contested terrain", *Sociology of Sport Journal* 17 (2000), p. 230. See also: Douglas Hartmann, "Sport as Contested Terrain", in: *A Companion to Racial and Ethnic Studies,* eds. David Theo Goldberg and John Solomos (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 405-8; Ben Carrington, *Race, Representation and the Sporting Body* (London: Goldsmith College, 2002).

[55] Revathi Krishnaswamy, "The Economy of Colonial desire", in: *The Masculinity Studies Reader*, eds. Rachel Adams and David Savran (Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 292-317, quote on p. 292. George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man. The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992); Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race. Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003). For the more general question of the role of the body in forming and maintaining social inequalities, which has been central in both social and historical research, see: Chris Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory* (London: Sage, 1993).

English manliness, boxing provides fertile soil for an exploration of the many ways in which gender, race and class interact in late Georgian English society.

This study is thus concerned with what Peter Burke has termed "the structure of belief systems, including the categories used to interpret experience and the dominant methods of proof and persuasion, categories and methods shared by individuals who may disagree about many things."[56] It focuses primarily on the debates and practices surrounding boxing as a site of struggle, where ideologies of gender, class, and race were both perpetuated and challenged.

The thesis is built thematically; the first and second chapters of the work deal with the struggle between opponents and proponents of boxing. The remaining chapters deal with the construction of gender, class and race in the boxing discourse.[57] Based mainly on secondary literature, Chapter One sets the scene for the following chapters by providing an overview of boxing in Georgian society. It examines both the popularity and the illegality of boxing during this period and the different social forces at work promoting or outlawing the sport. The discussion concentrates on the main groups interacting in the sport – boxers, patrons, spectators – and the main forces influencing the field – the commercialisation process, the media and the law. It asks who participated in boxing and in what role, who stood to gain from it and what social structure underlay the boxing world. How did local and legal authorities handle the illegal but popular sport, and what place did the sport have in the press?

Chapter Two delineates the public debate surrounding boxing: its scope, character, participants and main themes. Where did the debate take place, what form did it take, and who participated in it? It also explores the central issues in the debate for and against boxing, as well as the ideological frameworks in which these arguments were formulated, those of politeness and civic humanism.

Chapter Three looks at the manly ideal propagated within the boxing debate by both opponents and proponents, and investigates its functions. Why did the manly ideal

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[56] Peter Burke, *History and social theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 96. See also: Peter Schöttler, "Mentalities, Ideologies, Discourses: On the 'Third Level' as a Theme in Social-Historical Research", in: *The History of Everyday Life. Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 72-115.

[57] 'Race' is an analytical category which is used in this study in the sense of a sign of difference which is inscribed on the body. Thus it will be used for both Jews and Blacks, whose differences from 'white' boxers were, as will be shown, inscribed on the body, 'racialized'. For a theoretical consideration of the use of race see: Stuart Hall, *Race, the Floating Signifier* (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2002).

embodied in boxing become dominant in the late eighteenth century? And how did it legitimate social inequalities of gender, class and race?

Chapter Four looks more closely at the place of boxing in the writings of two proponents of the sport, the conservative William Windham (1794-1801) and the Tory-turned-radical William Cobbett (1763-1835). The chapter investigates the role boxing played in political struggles between conservatives and radicals at a time of heightened social tensions and the role of boxing in constructing and contesting class hierarchies.

Chapter Five analyses representations of Jewish and Black boxers in the boxing discourse.[58] Although they constitute a small percentage of boxers, minority boxers are significant for a number of reasons. The Jewish boxer Daniel Mendoza as well as Black boxers Bill Richmond and Tom Molineaux, for example, were not only household names in their communities, their names appeared regularly in the newspapers. They were the subjects of portraits and songs, and they socialized with nobility. In some milieus they were the most visible representatives of their communities. The high visibility of this small group of boxers raises a series of questions. How did the media represent them? How were Jewish and Black boxers accommodated by the discourse of masculinity? And what was their status and value in the representation of what was considered the national institution of boxing?

[58] For the social history of minority boxers see the work of Adam Chill, who argues that minority boxers attempted to use the prejudice against them as an advantage in promoting and marketing themselves. Adam Chill, "The Performance and Marketing of Minority Identity in Late Georgian Boxing", in: *Fighting Back? Minority Boxers in Britain*, eds. Ruti Ungar and Michael Berkowitz (London: University College London Press, 2007), pp. 33-49.

Chapter One

Between Popularity and Illegality: Boxing in Georgian Society

On 27 March 1787 a prize fight was supposed to have taken place between two famous pugilists: Martin 'the Bath Butcher' and Mendoza 'the Jew'. The fight drew a crowd of almost ten thousand people, including the Prince of Wales (the future George IV). However, before the fighters had time to enter the makeshift ring, a magistrate arrived with a military escort, and the crowd, including the Prince, dispersed demurely. Ironically, the newspapers reported that the soldiers sent to disperse the crowd were a party from the Prince of Wales's own regiment of dragoons.[59] This was the precarious nature of boxing in late Georgian England: on the one hand, it was popular among the lowest to the highest echelons of society; on the other, it fell afoul of a growing number of reformers who used their considerable authority in an attempt to eradicate the sport.

Sports have been the focus of conflict among different social groups in English society at least since the *Declaration of Sports* of James I (1617), which permitted certain sports on Sundays in defiance of Puritanical prohibitions.[60] In the eighteenth century sports again became the focal point of social struggle. A number of humanitarian reformers, religious moralists, factory owners, working-class leaders, and members of the upper classes, who were becoming increasingly more anxious about social order, opposed a variety of popular recreations, especially blood sports (prize-fighting, cock-fighting and bull-baiting). On the other side of the divide stood patriarchal-minded aristocrats, publicans and other middle class merchants, lower middle-class journalists, lower-class boxers and a wide range of people from all social classes, who were invested in the sport emotionally or financially. Although it was mostly working and upper-class men who

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[59] *The Gazetteer*, 29 March 1787; *The World,* 28 March 1787.

[60] Dennis Brailsford, *British Sport: A Social History* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1992), p. 35. For more on sport in English society see also: Dennis Brailsford, *Sport and Society: Elizabeth to Anne* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Dennis Brailsford, *Sport, Time & Society: The British at Play* (London: Routledge, 1991); Thomas S. Hendricks, *Disputed Pleasures: Sport and Society in Preindustrial England* (New York and London: Greenwood, 1991); Derek Birley, *Sport and the Making of Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

actively participated in the sport (in one form or another), its spectators came from all ranks of society. Moreover, the greatest opponents of boxing were not only middle-class men; many upper and working-class men and women strenuously objected to the sport as well. Although class issues certainly played a role in the struggle over boxing, class was not the only fault line between opponents and proponents of the sport.

This chapter provides an overview of the place of boxing in Georgian society. It begins with a short history that illustrates the growing popularity and professionalisation of the sport in the eighteenth century. The second section describes the range of social-economic backgrounds of the players involved in the sport, and its followers. The third section traces the commercialisation of boxing. I show that a range of people participated in boxing and commercially benefited from it either directly (as boxers, patrons, spectators) or indirectly (e.g. publicans, journalists, printers), and people of all social classes stood to gain from the sport. Moreover, boxing enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with the press, which added significantly to its popularisation and commercialisation. Section four describes the opposition to blood sports, showing that it was a coalition of disparate people who had various religious, economic or social objections to these sports. The final section examines the legal status of boxing and the inherent ambivalence toward the sport among local authorities and within the legal system, whose magistrates, judges and juries acknowledged its popularity and its necessity for national defence. I argue that both the widespread endorsement of boxing as well as the highly vocal opposition to the sport crossed class lines. Class divisions certainly played a role in the struggles between proponents and opponents of the sport, but there were also complex emotional, financial, social and political factors defining the borders between the pro- and anti-boxing camps.

1.1. A "fashionable amusement": the popularity and professionalization of boxing

Boxing, known in various forms since the ancient period, was one of numerous fighting sports, along with wrestling, fencing, cudgels and other contests, that were a regular feature at fairs and wakes in early modern England.[61] Boxing became increasingly more popular among all classes and was patronized by the highest in the land. Perceiving the sport as a means to preparing the lower orders for war, in 1723 King George I erected a

[61] For more detailed histories of boxing see: Tony Gee, *Up to Scratch: Bareknuckle Fighting and Heroes of the Prize-Ring* (Harpenden: Queen Anne, 1998); Ford, *Prizefighting*; Brailsford, *Bareknuckles*.

ring in Hyde Park for public use.[62] A match between a Venetian boxer, nicknamed "the Gondolier", and the English boxer Bob Whitacre raised massive interest, as well as the rumoured attendance of King George II, the Duke of Wales and the Duke of Cumberland. Whitacre's victory helped solidify the sport as a "manly" but also English sport.[63] By the 1740s boxing had already achieved its three main functions: entertainment, exercise and a way of settling disputes between lower-class men or between men of different classes. During the eighteenth century pugilism separated itself from other forms of fighting and underwent a process of specialisation and professionalisation from which it emerged as one of the most popular sports in England.[64]

The process of transforming boxing into a profession began with the contributions of several enterprising fighters. James Figg (c. 1695-1734), initiated the boxing booth business at fairs, gave aristocrats lessons in the arts of self-defence and introduced the first steps in codifying the sport.[65] He opened a school for boxing, cudgels and backsword in Oxford road and later extended his business by building an Amphitheatre. Boxing theatres, which were important institutions for training boxers and for building up an audience, became extremely popular over time. Working men, who boxed to earn extra money, began training and formalizing their skills and techniques at these schools and theatres, and professional pugilists began to appear. After Figg's death Jack Broughton (c. 1703-1789), a charismatic boxer and an astute businessman, took the lead and did much both for the commercialisation of the sport and for its development and regulation.[66] He invented or popularised the use of the 'mufflers' (gloves), which both helped improve fighting techniques for professional boxers and encouraged gentlemen to take up boxing lessons because it preserved the face from scars.[67] With the concepts of safety and body movement introduced into the ring, skill became an increasingly more important factor in a sport previously based mainly on force.[68]

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[62] Brailsford, *Bareknuckles*, pp. 1-11.
[63] Some sources spell the boxer's name with a K. The spelling of other boxers' names, such as Humphries and Molineaux also varied between sources.
[64] Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, pp. 12-4.
[65] Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, pp. 91-115; Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, pp. 11-2; Brailsford, *Bareknuckles*, pp. 4-5.
[66] Tony Gee, "Broughton, Jack", in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[67] Brailsford, *Bareknuckles*, pp. 6-8; Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, pp. 117-9, 123-5.
[68] For the changes in boxing techniques see: *Ibid.*, pp. 124-31.

The addition of rules to boxing matches helped professionalize and commercialise boxing. Jack Broughton is probably best known for the first set of written boxing rules introduced in his amphitheatre in 1743. These rules, which bear his name, governed the sport for the next hundred years.[69] Seven rules regulated the commencement and conclusion of fights, the breaks after a fall, the role of the seconds and umpires, the sharing of the money between the two boxers; other rules regulated the activities to be proscribed ("that no person is to hit his adversary when he is down, or seize him by the ham, the breeches, or any part below the waist; a man on his knees to be reckoned down"). Because the rules were rudimentary, boxers would sign a separate agreement to settle various details before a fight, such as the money and stakes involved, and the size and type of the ring.

The popularity of boxing declined in the 1750s, but the sport regained its status in the 1780s and 90s.[70] A number of factors contributed to the renewal of its popularity: a new style of boxing, new performers, and the rise of sports journalism. The late eighteenth century saw a gradual change in the style of boxing. A smaller ring was adopted which resulted in faster boxing. The sport became gradually more refined: rules became more systematic, skill and tactics became more important, parrying, blocking and feinting came to be accepted as legitimate tactic rather than perceived as cowardice. Boxers learnt to judge distance and wear down their opponents. Rituals were established, and the sport became more colourful and more exciting. Moreover, boxing attracted young journalists such as Pierce Egan (1772-1849), whose innovative writing style gave the sport an added excitement and glamour.[71]

By the end of the eighteenth century boxers had become national heroes. While pedestrians, for example, were also well-known, boxers were more prone to become famous because of their pronounced "manliness", because there were championships, and because the sport itself was very dramatic. The personalities of a new generation of boxers seem to have played an important role in the revival of the sport. Men like Richard Humphries (c. 1760-1827) and Tom Cribb (1781–1848) displayed higher technical skills

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[69] The Broughton Rules are reproduced in full in: Gee, *Up to Scratch*, p. 14. For more on these rules and their significance see: Brailsford, *Bareknuckles*, pp. 9-10; Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, p. 130.
[70] Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, ch. 3.
[71] Brailsford, *Bareknuckles,* pp. 23-32; Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, pp. 78-83. For a biography of Pierce Egan See: John Cowie Reid, *Bucks and Bruisers: Pierce Egan and Regency England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).

than their forefathers, and learned to project more of their character into the sport; some were flamboyant, others were more "folksy". Although their personal lives and personalities might have been less than stellar, boxers served an important role in embodying a certain manly ideal (discussed in Chapter Three). The attraction of boxing was also enhanced by the entrance of minority boxers such as Jewish boxer Daniel Mendoza (1765–1836) and black boxer Tom Molineaux (c. 1784-1818), which added new interest, as well as followers, to the sport.[72] Pierce Egan described the frenzy created by the most famous boxing rivalry of the time, the series of famous battles between Mendoza and Humphries that took place between 1788 and 1790:

> Boxing [was brought] into general notice; the abilities of the two pugilists occasioned considerable conversation at that period, both in the big and *little world*. The newspapers teemed with anecdotes concerning them; pamphlets were published in favour of pugilism; and scarcely a print-shop in the Metropolis but what displayed the set-to in glowing colours, and portraits of those distinguished heroes of the fist. Humphries and Mendoza were the rage: the modern comedies glanced at their exploits…they rose up like a new feature of the times! became fashionable – followed, patronized, and encouraged. Sparring matches took place at the Theatres and Royal Circus – Schools were established for the promulgation of the art; and the *science* of SELF-DEFENCE considered as necessary requisite for all Englishmen.[73]

Ironically, the opponents of boxing confirmed that the above examples were not an exaggeration of its popularity; in the same terms they too complained bitterly that "new bargains are daily making for combats of this sort; scarce a newspaper but what keeps alive the subject! the print shops disgust the eye, by holding out in full view the naked portraits of the bruisers; and almost everywhere the ears are annoyed with some remarks on this brutal fashion."[74] As these quotes testify, late eighteenth century boxing had become a regularized, professional and commercial sport that was hugely popular in various sections of society.

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[72] Peter Radford "Lifting the Spirits of the Nation: British Boxers and the Emergence of the National Sporting Hero at the Time of the Napoleonic Wars", in: *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 12 (2005), pp. 249–270; Brailsford, *Bareknuckles*, p. 24; Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, pp. 77-78, 161-162. See also: Dennis Brailsford, "Humphries, Richard", in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Julian Lock, "Cribb, Tom", in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Tony Gee, "Mendoza, Daniel", in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[73] All quotes in this study follow the idiosyncratic spelling and typography of the sources. Pierce Egan, *Boxiana; or, Sketches of ancient and modern pugilism* (London: G. Smeeton, 1812), p. 110.

[74] Edward Barry, *A Letter on the Practice of Boxing, Addressed to the King, Lords, and Commons.* (London, 1789), p. 8; Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, p. 55.

1.2. Patrons, publicans and pugilists: the hierarchical structure of the boxing world

Both opponents and proponents of the sport agreed about the class-transcending character of boxing. In his memoirs Judge Hawkins, a fan of the sport, described a boxing crowd unsentimentally:

> It was a procession of the blackguardism of all ages and all countries under heaven. The sexes were apparently in equal numbers and in equal degrees of ugliness and ferocity… Amidst this turbulent rabble rode several members of the peerage, and even Ministerial supporters of the 'noble art', exchanging with the low wretches I have mentioned a word or two of chaf [sic] or an occasional laugh at the grotesque wit and humour which are never absent from an English crowd … There were illustrious members of all classes assembled there…[75]

Foreign observers also made much of the fact that the aristocracy stood shoulder to shoulder with chimney sweeps and butchers at boxing bouts; they were even more fascinated by occurrences of aristocrats and lower-class men settling their arguments on the streets of London through fisticuffs.[76] This appearance of equality and its egalitarian rhetoric not withstanding, boxing was in fact based on a system of patronage with a clear hierarchical structure.

Although there was a gradual withdrawal of the aristocracy's involvement in popular recreations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there remained a very strong element of upper class patronage of boxing. Pugilism enjoyed a wide variety of upper-class patrons, including royalty, aristocracy and gentry.[77] The most prestigious figure known for his love of boxing was the Prince of Wales, the future King George IV, who patronized boxers and was said to have personally arranged several fights. An avid backer of pugilists and a fashion setter, he had an important role in making the sport popular in the upper echelons of society. In June 1814, the Prince of Wales entertained the king of Prussia, Czar Alexander of Russia and General Blücher, who were on a state visit in England, with a show of pugilism. In his coronation, which took place on the 19 July 1821, he used eighteen of the leading boxers of the time as ushers and pages at the entrance to Westminster Abbey.[78] The prince's two brothers, the Duke of York and the

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[75] Henry Hawkins, *The Reminiscences of Sir Henry Hawkins (Baron Brampton)*, ed. Richard Harris, (London: Edward Arnold, 1904), p. 60.
[76] Eisenberg,*'English Sport' und Deutsche Bürger*, p. 26; Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character 1650-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 153.
[77] Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, p. 43; Eisenberg, *'English Sports' und Deutsche Bürger*, p. 26.
[78] Gee, *Up to Scratch*, pp. 38-9; Brailsford *A Taste for Diversion*, p. 96; Ford, *Prizefighting*, p. 71; Brailsford, *Bareknuckle*, pp. 29, 64.

Duke of Clarence (later King William IV), were also enthusiasts of the sport. Baronets, knights and esquires supported it and many Lords regularly attended prize-fights. For example, Lord Barrymore, a famous patron of boxing, would amuse himself by sparring with noted pugilists or hiring them as servants; he often won or lost enormous sums of money on prize-fights, which he also helped organize.[79]

Upper-class patronage took many forms. Before gate money was introduced these rich and influential patrons provided the money needed for the sport: they put up the prizes or paid the boxers a percent of their earnings from betting on them. Aristocratic patrons arranged for prize-fights to take place on their private grounds outside the reach of local authorities; the Duke of Clarence, for example, allowed matches on his Bushey Park estate.[80] Many aristocrats financially supported pugilists by studying boxing, or what they called 'the art of Self-Defence', in boxing schools under the supervision of the leading boxers of the time. Boxing superseded duels as a popular form of resolving points of honour between men from different classes.[81] Boxing was also perceived as a healthy exercise, and gentlemen often hired pugilists as sparring partners. Lord Byron, for example, considered boxing the "severest [exercise] of all", [82] and his journals mention numerous sparring sessions as well as participation at various boxing social events such as a dinner at boxer Tom Cribb's house.[83]

Although aristocrats and noblemen were the most prominent patrons, middle- and lower-class patronage was not less important for the survival of the sport. According to Brailsford, pugilism enjoyed a solid middle-class backing.[84] Fans of the sport included newspaper editors and proprietors such as the Reverend Bate of the *Morning Post* and Captain Topham of *The World*, who supported boxing by attending bouts and providing positive coverage in their newspapers. Brewery and pub owners also made up a large portion of the middle-class patrons. Harvey Coombe, a famous boxing fan from this latter category, was a Member of Parliament and Lord Mayor of London; as a brewer, he had

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[79] For example, in 1790 he won 25,000 pounds on a fight between Hooper and Watson. John Robert Robinson, *The Last Earls of Barrymore 1769-1824* (London: Sampson Low, 1894), pp. 56-7. See also: Brailsford, *Bareknuckles*, p. 29; Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, p. 162.
[80] Ford, *Prizefighting*, pp. 65, 159; Brailsford, *Bareknuckle*, p. 28; For the important role of patronage in boxing see also: Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, ch. 3.
[81] Eisenberg, *'English Sports' und Deutsche Bürger*, pp. 26-7.
[82] George Gordon Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron. A New, Revised and Enlarged Edition, with Illustrations,* ed. Rowland E. Prothero, 13 Vols. (John Murray: London, 1898-1904), Vol. II, p. 401.
[83] Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 166, 193, vol II, p. 401, 404, 407, vol. III, pp. 63, 70, 75, 81.
[84] Brailsford, *Bareknuckles*, p. 25.

an economic interest in popular recreations (in which huge amounts of alcohol were consumed). Publicans, many of whom were former boxers, were probably the most important lower-class patrons of the sport.[85] Pubs played a central role in the organization of the sport; it was in pubs that fighters were matched, fight terms settled, dates and places agreed upon and gambling bets placed. It was also where people went after the fight to celebrate their victory or drain their losses in a glass of gin.

Patronage from all classes took a number of forms. Patrons were usually those who initiated fights; a patron would hear of a fighter and would decide to back him against another pugilist thought to be relatively equal in weight and abilities. Most patrons backed a different boxer each fight, but some had a favourite boxer and would even take boxers into their service as servants or retainers.[86] Such positions most likely provided a certain degree of security for boxers whose income from the sport was unstable. However this patronage did not entail upward mobility, nor did it prevent patrons from viewing pugilists as a financial investment only. It appears that in many cases the patrons did not care whether the boxer was Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, black, white, or, as in one case, deaf, the only criteria for patronage focused on the boxer's ability to fight.[87] Like blood-sports animals, boxers too were often driven to the limits of their strength.[88] Many instances have been recorded of boxers deserted by their patrons after they lost or were badly injured; some were abandoned and left to die.[89]

Professional boxers came from a low socioeconomic background, and very few managed to rise above their origins. Having worked as manual labourers before they took on boxing, they came to the arena with nicknames that indicated their previous

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[85] Brailsford, *British Sport*, p. 49; Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 26-7, 84.
[86] For example, Tom Tring was the sedan Chairman of the Prince of Wales. Brailsford, *Bareknuckles*, pp. 26-7. See also: Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, p. 162; Adrian Harvey, *The Beginnings of a Commercial Sporting Culture in Britain, 1793-1850* (Aldershot: Burlington, 2004), p. 199.
[87] James Burke "The Deaf 'un" was a boxer active in the middle of the nineteenth century, who had considerable success in spite of his handicap. Ford, *Prizefighting*, p. 36.
[88] This comparison has also been made by contemporaries. For Example, Pierce Egan wrote about the boxer Young Dutch Sam thus: "Sam was as fine as a star; as sleek as greyhound, proud and erect as a race-horse – and though not absolutely crowing, yet possessing all the confidence of a game cock". Although Egan admired boxers, was a personal friend of many, and did not mean it in a degrading way, the comparison of the boxer with a dog, a horse and a cock is very telling. These were the three main animals used in Georgian sports. People admired their strength, beauty and courage, but sacrificed them to earn money. Pierce Egan, *Book of Sports and Mirror of Life* (London, 1832), p. 298. The comparison to animals is still common in boxing circles today, see: Loïc Wacquant, "Whores, slaves and stallions: Languages of exploitation and accommodation among boxers", in: *Body and Society* 7 (2001), pp. 181-194.
[89] For example: *Sporting Magazine* 28 (1806), pp. 6-7; *Ibid*., 27 (1805), pp. 294-5; Brailsford, *British Sport*, pp. 29, 52

occupations such as 'the Bath Butcher' (Sam Martin), 'Sailor Boy' (Harry Jones), and 'Master of the Rolls' (Jack Martin). Famous boxers could earn hundreds of pounds, however the majority of boxers earned small sums of money and seldom fought. Some augmented their pay by giving sparring exhibitions; earning money without having to submit themselves to the dangers of a real fight. Some gave their names to boxing manuals and, in Mendoza's case, to an autobiography.[90] Many earned extra money by teaching boxing. A successful end to a boxer's career was considered opening a pub. It was a way of staying in touch with the boxing crowd while having a relatively secure base of subsistence.[91] However, most boxers spent their money faster than they earned it. Many were known as spendthrifts and alcoholics, and most had difficulty in readjusting themselves first to a life of fame, then to life out of the ring.[92] Moreover, boxing was closely connected with the criminal underworld, and boxers were often involved in criminal activities. Even the famous boxers finished their ring career with little money; many died young or ended their lives in poor houses or in jail. Pierce Egan describes the sad process of decline:

> No men are subject more to the caprice or changes of fortune than the pugilists; victory brings them fame, riches, and patrons; their bruises are not heeded in the smiles of success; and, basking in the sunshine of prosperity, their lives pass on pleasantly, till defeat comes and reverses the scene: covered with aches and pains, distressed in mind and body, assailed by poverty, wretchedness, and misery, friends forsake them – their towering fame expired – their characters suspected by losing – and no longer the "plaything of fashion!" they fly to inebriation for relief, and a premature end puts a period to their misfortunes.[93]

Egan captured all the aspects of a boxer's problematic life: the sudden success, the high price which the body pays ("Distressed in mind and body" refers to *pugilistica dementia*, or punch-drunkenness, which afflicts many boxers).[94] The "plaything of fashion" is a

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[90] Daniel Mendoza, *Memories of the Life of Daniel Mendoza* (London, 1816); Harvey, *Commercial Sporting Culture*, p. 199; Brailsford, *A Taste for Diversion*, p. 125; Ford, *Prizefighting*, pp. 66, 94.
[91] Harvey, *Commercial Sporting Culture*, p. 199; Sheard, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 140-3; Brailsford, *Bareknuckle*, pp. 18-19.
[92] Jeffrey T. Sammons, *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society* (Urbana and Chicago, 1988), pp. 235-244; Brailsford *A Taste for Diversion*, p. 126.
[93] Egan, *Boxiana*, vol. I., pp. 5-6.
[94] For the medical aspects of boxing, see: Robert C. Cantu, *Boxing & Medicine* (Champaign, Ill., Leeds: Human Kinetics Europe Ltd, 1995).

criticism of exploitive patrons who used the boxers at whim and discarded them the moment they lost.

Nevertheless, given the scarcity of work, the low wages and the poor standard of living of the working class in the Georgian period, a career in the ring had its advantages. Coming from a lower class background, most boxers lacked education or connections; they used the only resource they had, their body, to earn money. In the terms of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, investment in the boxer's body is an embodied cultural capital. This kind of capital is acquired through learning; it is internal, bound to the body, and cannot be delegated to others.[95]

Another kind of capital the boxers acquired was symbolic capital. Because boxing was a highly regarded profession in working-class milieus, boxers earned the respect of their communities. As Jennifer Hargreaves argues, boxing gave "a dramatized public expression to the virile values (such as hardness, pugnacity and physical bravery) that compose the common bedrock of working-class culture across ethno-racial divides."[96] For the first time in their lives, lower-class boxers had the chance to receive public recognition and the admiration of their communities. George Borrow (1803-1881) suggested that boxers escaped their dull everyday lives through their profession. Boxers, he wrote, "were men of renown amidst hundreds of people with no renown at all, who gaze upon them with timid wonder".[97]

Boxers' fame reached well beyond their own neighbourhoods: they conversed with aristocrats, enjoyed crowds of followers, their portraits were painted and songs were sung in their honour. Cups, jugs, figurines and various other memorabilia testify to the momentary glory of these men who came from poor families and started their lives as manual labourers. Thus, although the boxing world had a strict hierarchical structure, people of all social classes had a financial investment in the sport and even working-class boxers, who doubtlessly paid a high price for their jobs and did not usually undergo upwards mobility, were able to gain from its popularity and commercialisation.

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[95] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital", in: *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education,* ed. John G. Richardson (Westport, CT., London: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 244-248.
[96] Jennifer Hargreaves, "Bruising Peg to Boxerobics: Gendered Boxing Images and Meanings," in: *Boxer*, eds. David Chandler, John Gill, Tania Guha, and Gilane Tawadros (London: MIT Press, 1996), p. 125; Wacquant, "Through the Fighter's Eyes", p. 146.
[97] George Borrow, *Lavengro. The Scholar, The Gipsy, The Priest* (London: Oxford University Press, 1914), pp. 183-4.

1.3. The commercialisation of boxing

According to Adrian Harvey's *The Beginnings of a Commercial Sporting Culture in Britain*, boxing was one of the many sports that underwent a process of commercialization in Georgian England. This process was characterised by an increase in the number of events and amount of money spent on boxing. Harvey calculated that between 1793 and 1815 there was a rise of 64.5% in the number of prize-fights and 85.6% in the expenditure on these events.[98] This process, I argue, involved a range of people from all social classes who stood to benefit commercially from their involvement. Some, like the boxers, patrons, and spectators, participated directly; while others, such as publicans, merchants, and communities in which bouts took place, were involved indirectly. The newspapers, in particular, shared a symbiotic relationship with boxing, which added significantly to the sport's popularisation and commercialisation.

It is difficult to calculate the amount of money involved in pugilism due to the lack of extant material, especially regarding the largest sums of money – those that came from gambling.[99] Although stakes were usually around 25 to 50 pounds, a famous boxer could earn up to 600 pounds a fight. Newspapers reported, for example, that 50,000 pounds changed hands after the first Mendoza-Humphries fight, but it is improbable that this is an accurate sum.[100] Entrance fees were generally not collected till the end of the eighteenth-century because prize-fights took place in the open countryside in makeshift rings. Organizers sometimes tried to elicit gate money by holding bouts in more enclosed venues such as inns or private parks, but records of these events were not kept.

In addition to stakes, bets and occasional entrance fees, pugilism brought in profits in other forms. The number of spectators at important prize-fights was immense reaching, in some cases, tens of thousands of people. For example, in 1822 there was reportedly a crowd of 50,000 people in a prize fight (the third largest crowd in a sporting event after rowing and horse racing).[101] Some had travelled long distances to reach the fights and were willing to pay for overpriced transportation, accommodations and refreshments.

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[98] Harvey, *Commercial Sporting Culture*, pp. 10-12; Christiane Eisenberg, *Englands Weg in die Marktgesellschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009).
[99] Gorn, *The Manly Art*, pp. 139-40; Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, pp. 16-19; Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, pp. 133-9; Cf. ,*'English Sport' und Deutsche Bürger*, pp. 29-3. For more on gambling and the working class see: Carl Chinn, *Better Betting With A Decent Feller: Bookmakers, Betting and the British Working Class, 1750-1990* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).
[100] *The World*, 11 Jan 1788.
[101] Table 7.4 Harvey, *Commercial Sporting Culture,* p. 176.

Fights thus proved profitable not only for the boxers and bettors but also for the neighbourhood.[102] Harvey has estimated that the Neat-Hickman fight of 1822 brought around 10,000 pounds to the Berkshire region, where it was held.[103]

Much money was also to be made from various paraphernalia such as prints, mugs, jugs, pitchers, figurines, and plates.[104] These memorabilia could range from expensive objects such as pottery, which was meant for upper- and middle-class patrons of the sport, to cheaper objects such as tokens and crude prints. Although such items were probably produced and sold without any advantage to the boxers, some pugilists found ways to capitalize on their fame in this new commercial culture. Young Dutch Sam was one of the boxers who had a handkerchief as his trademark:

> The wipe [handkerchief] was of bright yellow, with a scarlet border, and a garter in the centre, surrounding the initials D.S., and bearing the Latin inscription *Nil desperandum*, with the portrait of two men in combat. Sam, it appears, by his victory, has turned these fogles to a good account: he sold them for a guinea a-piece, if he won; but they were presents if he lost. He distributed a great number of them amongst his friends previous to the fight.[105]

An important element for boxing was the growth of journalism and especially the birth, at the end of the eighteenth-century, of sports journalism. Press coverage was important for a number of reasons. Boxing could not be openly advertised; newspapers, however, could report on upcoming fights, and fans knew where to get specific information. More significantly, press coverage widened the audience of a prize fight to include those not actually present, thus making the fight a national event.[106] This meant that apart from the people who saw the fight there were many others who sat in workhouses at break time and read about it in the newspaper (or had the newspaper read to them). In one of its attacks on the sport *The Times,* a newspaper catering mainly to

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[102] Although that in some cases the unpleasant effects, like the havoc which the crowd created, must have overcome the financial upsides.
[103] Harvey, *Commercial Sporting Culture*, pp. 168-173.
[104] The commercialisation of sporting items has not yet been researched. For a general historiography on commercialisation see: John Harold Plumb, *The Commercialisation of Leisure in the Eighteenth Century* (Reading: University of Reading, 1973); Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and John Harold Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Europa, 1983); Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harper Collins, 1997).
[105] Pierce Egan, *Pierce Egan's Book of Sports, and Mirror of Life* (T.T. Tegg and J. Tegg: London, 1832), p. 199.
[106] Ford, *Prizefighting*, p. 90; Harvey, *Commercial Sporting Culture,* pp. 36-7.

middle-class readers,[107] complained that boxing would not have become so fashionable had it not been for the media's widespread coverage:

> Some of the daily newspapers, whose long dissertations on this brutal art; with the *scientific* accounts, as they stile them, of the event of battles, have encouraged the prize fighters, and have brought them into a degree of celebrity extremely unsuitable to morality and decency. The public are to judge how far newspapers are justified in bringing the names of these blackguards so often before their observation, thereby promoting a custom, which is a disgrace to a civilized country. It is not an unusual thing now to see the names of *Humphries, Mendoza, Big Ben,* and *Tinman,* and 20 other public prize fighters, mixed among those of the first rank, and with as much seeming distinction.[108]

The Times was generally opposed to boxing, however, this opposition did not prevent it from regularly reporting on prize-fights with an uninhibited enthusiasm which belied its own attacks. Many newspapers in fact gave round-to-round descriptions of important bouts, including details of the blood and sweat.

The press was instrumental in shaping the image of the sport: it portrayed boxing as a glamorous and fashionable world, produced histories of the sport, built up the public character of the boxers, and presented them as public persona, thus helping boxers become national sporting heroes.[109] Newspapers reported on the health, social life and economical situation of boxers, and included stories of 'human interest'; writing about boxers who saved women, children and even animals from maltreatment or dangers.[110]

Thus, newspapers helped pugilism become more popular and coverage of pugilism helped newspapers raise their sale. However, as will be shown in the next chapter, the coverage of boxing in the press was not always positive. Between 1780 and 1820 newspapers also contained many anti-boxing tirades that berated the sport and its participants. This negative coverage reflected the growing opposition to the practice from wide sections of society.

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[107] *The Times*, established in 1785 was one of the leading dailies throughout the period, and its circulation rose steadily over the years, from 3000 in 1792 to 7000 issues a day after 1817. The newspaper, established and owned by the Walter family, did not receive subsidies after 1805, it was economically independent, consistently Tory, and aimed at a middle class readership. Cranfield, *The press and Society From Caxton to Northcliffe*, p. 159; Christie, "British Newspapers in the Later Georgian Age", pp. 323-4; Aspinall, *Politics and the Press,* p. 75.
[108] *The Times,* 4 October 1790.
[109] Joyce Carol Oates, *On Boxing* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), p. 22; Brailsford, *British Sport*, p. 56.
[110] Brailsford, *Bareknuckle*, p. 31-2

1.4. Preachers, employers and magistrates: the opposition to boxing

The late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century saw the rise of a new spirit of reform. This reformation of manners movement was in some ways a continuation of earlier Puritan tendencies. However, while earlier Puritan criticism of popular culture revolved around the breaking of the Sabbath, the new reform movement found the whole culture of popular recreation offensive. It was not only seen as promiscuous, violent and immoral but also as a threat to the economic efficiency of the lower orders (and hence to the economic strength of the nation) as well as to the social order as a whole.[111] Reformers, concerned with both morality and respectability, attacked various social ills: the mistreatment of children, the sick and the insane; cruelty to animals; corporeal punishment and public executions; imprisonment for debt and slavery. A great variety of initiatives appeared with a social moralizing aim, including the establishment of Sunday schools, prison reform, the abolition movement, as well as the many societies dedicated to combating such vices as idleness, drunkenness and prostitution. The campaign for the reformation of manners also tried to enforce new work practices that would be more useful to the new capitalist order than traditional working habits, which were perceived as chaotic, wasteful and disruptive to the social order. One of the main targets of the reform movement was the popular culture, including swearing, promiscuity, breaking of the Sabbath, drinking, gambling and sport.[112] Thus a loose coalition of disparate social groups with different religious, economic and social goals found themselves cooperating in a struggle against various forms of popular culture, especially blood sports.

Members of a middle class growing in number, economic force and social power were at the forefront of the struggle against popular recreations.[113] Having become economically powerful, they sought to shape the national agenda by their own aims and ideals; they wished to enforce work discipline, eradicate vulgar and irrational behaviour and enact humanitarian and moralistic reforms. Religious considerations still played an important role in the opposition to sports, and religious reformers often attacked sports like boxing as irreligious activities which occasioned sexual promiscuity, drunkenness, violence and other vices. There were also economic reasons for the middle-class

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[111] Eisenberg, *'English Sport' und Deutsche Bürger*, pp. 36-38; Holt, *Sport and the British*, pp. 28-34.
[112] G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago, Il.: Chicago University Press, 1992), p. 224.
[113] Brailsford, *British Sport*, p. 64; Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, p. 43; Golby and Purdue, *Civilisation of the Crowd*, pp. 42, 51-9; Gorn, *The Manly Art*, p. 31.

opposition to sports. An increasing number of employers (landlords, capitalist entrepreneurs, farmers and artisans) found the working habits of their workmen in dire need of reform. According to Golby and Purdue, "frequent holidays held up work, heavy drinking interfered with the worker's effectiveness, while sports and gambling distracted them".[114] Employers tried to increase work hours and decrease wages, but such measures were not always effective in curbing the working-class thirst for recreations. Thus, middle-class evangelicals, humanitarians, and employers cooperated in a concerted effort to eradicate certain popular practices. It was, in a way, the righteous objection to many aspects of popular culture which bound the various groups, belonging in the widest sense to the middle classes, together.[115]

There was also a segment of the lower class that opposed rowdy popular recreations. Both Methodist and secular-radical leaders were opposed to many forms of popular recreation. Golby and Purdue have argued that there was a clash between radical leaders and the mass of working-class men and women. Radical leaders, who were skilled artisans, small shopkeepers and professional men, opposed popular recreations as paternalistic, lacking dignity and destructive to working-class cohesion. They attempted to promote libraries and debating societies that emphasized self-improvement, self-sufficiency and respectability. The majority of working class men and women, in contrast, enjoyed rowdy popular recreations and still relied on ideas of custom and the moral economy.[116] This view is somewhat simplistic. As Anna Clark has shown, working-class culture was not homogenous. Artisans tended toward the traditional misogynistic popular culture, which was centred on homosociality, drinking, prostitution and blood sports. Textile workers, whose wives usually worked with them, shared a

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[114] Golby and Purdue, *Civilisation of the Crowd*, p. 53; Holt, *Sport and the British*, pp. 28-34.

[115] According to Vera Nünning, the growth of literacy and consumerism and especially the culture of sensibility, have all contributed to the development of a new kind of middle-class self-image. By branding older norms of behaviours, such as the code of honour, as false and immoral, they helped situate themselves as paragons of morality, and as morally superior to both the lower and upper classes. Vera Nünning, "From 'Honour' to 'Honest'. The Invention of the (superiority of the) Middling Ranks in Eighteenth-Century England", *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 2 (1995), pp. 19-41. See also Leonore Davidoff and Cathrine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 2002).

[116] Golby and Purdue, *Civilisation of the Crowd*, p. 61; Thompson, *Making of the Working Class*, pp. 62-4, 449-51.

culture that was more inclusive of women, more sober and "domestic".[117] Working class women too were split in their views on popular recreation: some enjoyed prize-fights, others criticised their men for spending their meagre earnings on drink and gambling while their children were starving. Thus, within the working class there was a considerable segment, and not only radical leaders, that opposed blood-sports.

Members of the upper and upper-middle classes were also active in opposing various forms of popular recreation. In 1787 a *Royal Proclamation for the Encouragement of Piety and Virtue* was issued by King George III, urging the suppression of "excessive drinking, blasphemy, profane swearing and cursing, profanation of the Lord's day, and other dissolute, immoral or disorderly practices."[118] Following the proclamation various societies were established for the purpose of reforming manners at all levels of government: they encouraged enforcement of laws and induced stricter rules and regulations, for example, in the licensing of pubs.[119] In 1802 the *Society for the Suppression of Vice* was established. It attempted to eliminate blasphemy, fairs, gambling and brothels; it also tried to enforce Sunday observance.[120] These societies succeeded in advancing the idea that relaxation in the lower classes had negative economic and moral effects. They brought lawsuits and promoted bills in Parliament. They also had an impact on the local level, where magistrates and local authorities were anxious to prove compliant and instigated closures of alehouses and banning of disorderly popular activities. According to Hargreaves, the effectiveness of the new reformation movement was "the co-ordination of its different elements through interlocking membership of key institutions" of church, state and economy. It enabled concerted and effective repressive measures: local authorities restricted the use of public space, employers decreased the free time of labourers and 'rational' recreations were

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[117] Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breaches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). The issue of boxing and class will be dealt with at length in Chapter Four.
[118] Quoted in: Golby and Purdue, *Civilisation of the Crowd*, p. 85.
[119] Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 41-2; Joanna Innes, "Politics and Morals: The Reformation of Manners Movement in the Later Eighteenth-Century England", in: *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century*, ed. Eckhart Hellmuth (London, Oxford and New York: German Historical Institute, 1990), pp. 88-92. See also: Edward J. Bristow, *Vice and vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (Dublin: Gill and Mcmillan, 1977); Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961).
[120] Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 41.

offered.[121] A serious source of consternation for the government, especially during the wars, was the shape that many of these popular recreations took. Even before the French Revolution, the authorities were anxious about large crowds of lower-class people.[122] Recurrent riots (such as the Gordon riots of 1780), on the one hand, and the threat of Jacobinism, on the other, made public order an important concern; and the large and somewhat unruly crowds in events such as prize-fights could raise considerable fears.

Christiane Eisenberg and John Hargreaves, however, have warned of overestimating the force of the reformation of manners movement.[123] Indeed, as will be shown in the next chapter, the movement encountered opposition from all levels of society. People saw the activities of the reformation societies as hypocritical as well as "incompatible with English liberties and oppressive to the poor".[124] It is significant that there were very few attempts to pass reform legislation against popular sports in Parliament and that no discussion about pugilism took place in Parliament until 1860. In 1800 and 1802 bills to outlaw bull-baiting were introduced in Parliament, they were not passed. As the practice was already on the decline, it seems that part of the rationale of the defenders of bull-baiting was to assure that boxing would not become an issue of a similar law. A strong element within the government perceived boxing and other "manly sports" as essential activities for national defence (as discussed in Chapter Four). In fact, even the legal system was divided on the issue and not all those whose work was to uphold and enforce the law shared the view of the reformers.

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[121] Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture*, pp. 21-3; Innes, "Politics and Morals", pp. 75-96. The struggle over the use of space is the main issue of: Griffin, *England's Revelry*.
[122] Neil Parpworth, "Boxing and Prize-fighting: The Indistinguishable Distinguished?", *Sport and the Law Journal* 2 (1994), pp. 5-8. Harvey, *Commercial Sporting Culture*, p. 95; Ford, *Prizefighting*, pp. 32-3; Sheard, *Boxing in the Civilizing Process*, p. 182; Golby and Purdue, *Civilisation of the Crowd*, p. 50. On the problem of mobs in eighteenth century England see: Robert B. Shoemaker, *The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in the Eighteenth Century* (London; New York: Hambledon and London, 2004). For riots and crowd control measures see: John Stevenson, "Social control and the prevention of riots in England, 1789-1829", in: *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain,* ed. A. P. Donajgrodzki (London: Croom Helm, 1977), pp. 27-50.
[123] Eisenberg, *'English Sport' und Deutsche Bürger,* p. 38; Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture*, p. 26.
[124] Harvey, *Commercial Sporting Culture*, p. 69; Innes, "Politics and Morals", p. 79.

1.5. Pugilism and the legal system

The research literature has long assumed that pugilism was prohibited by law in early modern England.[125] However, this was not the case. Pugilism was not mentioned specifically under the law, and in the words of a legal authority "it has never been the case that there has been an offence designated as 'prize-fighting' recognised at common law."[126] This meant that legal authorities enjoyed a measure of discretion when dealing with cases involving boxing. Generally, three kinds of charges were brought against the participants in the sport: assault, riot, or breach of peace.[127] Because assault by definition is an act performed without consent, proponents of the sport argued that the charge did not apply to boxing. The opposition responded by claiming that "no consent can render that innocent which is in fact dangerous".[128] Apparently, the charge of riot was also not easy to establish because "[a]ssembling at wakes, or other festival times, or meetings for exercise of common sports or diversions, as bull-baiting, wrestling, and such like are not riotous."[129] The breach of peace charge was the one most often used against the sport because prize-fights attracted large crowds, and pick pocketing and other crimes were a common occurrence at such occasions.[130] The popularity of this latter accusation is clear from Justice Lord Ellenborough's words at the trial of four pugilists in May 1803:

> [Pugilism] draws industrious people away from the subject of their industry; and when great multitudes are so collected, they are likely enough to be engaged in broils. It affords an opportunity for people of the most mischievous disposition to assemble, under the colour of seeing this exhibition, and to do a great deal of mischief; in short, it is a practice that is extremely injurious in every respect and must be repressed.[131]

At the beginning of the nineteenth century prize-fighting was prosecuted as unlawful assembly, and the charge of rioting was related less to the fighting activity itself and more

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[125] John Ford and Dennis Brailsford both write that boxing was illegal without substantiating their claim. Ford, *Prizefighting* p. 91; Brailsford, *Bareknuckles* p. 10; Adrian Harvey has noted that pugilism was not specifically proscribed. Harvey, *Commercial Sporting Culture*, p. 74.
[126] Pallante supra at 337, Quoted in: Parpworth, "Boxing and Prize-fighting", p. 6.
[127] Quoted from: Francis Frederick Brandt, *"Habet!" a short treatise of the Law of the Land as it affects Pugilism* (London, 1857). See also: Parpworth, "Boxing and Prize-fighting", p. 6; Stanley Albert Shipley, *The Boxer as Hero: A Study of Social Class, Community and the Professionalisation of Sport in London, 1890-1905*, Ph.D. Thesis (London University, 1986), pp. 113-23
[128] Rex v Coney (1882) 8 QBD 534 at 547.
[129] Richard Burn, *Justice of the Peace*, 3 Vols. (London: A. Miller, 1762), vol. III, p. 213. Quoted in: Harvey, *Commercial Sporting Culture*, p. 63.
[130] Shipley, *The Boxer as Hero*, p. 114.
[131] Quoted in: Brailsford, *Bareknuckles*, p. 44.

to the crowds it attracted and its larger social repercussions. Anderson argued that over time there was a growing tendency to prosecute boxing as assault, and courts gradually began to take legal action against not only the combatants, but their seconds and spectators as well.[132] However, I would like to argue that court records and newspaper reports prove that the local authorities and the legal system remained inherently ambivalent about the question of the sport's legality. The vagueness of the law regarding pugilism and the ambivalence towards its practice in society was visible both in court rulings and the enforcement of the law.

The prosecution of prize-fighting generally came under the jurisdiction of the local authorities represented by the magistrates, who were usually clerics, lesser gentry, or wealthy landowners. These authorities had no other means of enforcement than the army, a measure which was very unpopular with the crowds and hence not often used.[133] The decision to break up a prize fight depended largely on the magistrate's opinion of the sport.[134] As the memoirs of Judge Hawkins (1817-1907) shows, some magistrates were avid fans of the sport:

> Society loved a prize-fight, and always went to see it, as Society went to any other fashionable function. Magistrates went, and even clerical members of that august body. As magistrates it may have been their duty to discountenance, but as county gentleman it was their privilege to support, the noble champions of the art, especially when they had their money on the event. The magistrates, if their presence was ever discovered, said they went to prevent a breach of the peace, but if they were unable to effect this laudable object, they looked on quietly so as to prevent any one committing a breach of the peace on themselves.[135]

Often the fate of a prize fight depended on the feelings of the neighbouring gentry. For example, on 30 April 1789 the *Gazetteer* claimed that an upcoming fight between Mendoza and Humphries would proceed as planned: "[a] noble Lord in that neighbourhood and the Magistrates, do not mean to prevent it, it being the wish of a great number of the nobility and gentry this match should be decided." Some magistrates might

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[132] Jack Anderson, "Pugilistic Prosecutions: Prize-fighting and the Courts in Nineteenth Century Britain", *The Sports Historian* 21.2 (2001), pp. 37-57.
[133] For the social status of magistrates, judges and juries see: Peter King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion in England 1740-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 117-25. An overview of policing in late Georgian England can be found in: Stevenson, "Social Control and the Prevention of Riots in England, 1789-1829", pp. 27-50.
[134] Letters to newspapers decrying the unwillingness of magistrates to prosecute boxing bares this out. For example, *The Times,* 1 June 1789.
[135] Hawkins, *The Reminiscences of Sir Henry Hawkins (Baron Brampton)*, pp. 23-25.

have agreed with the Honorary Grantley Berkeley, who wrote in his autobiography that if such ills as boxing could not be prevented, they should at least be supervised by gentlemen who would ensure fair play. Using a standard defence of boxing (discussed in Chapter Two), he argued that if boxing was eradicated, worse (and foreign) methods of self-defence would appear:

> All the statutes in the world will not eradicate the passion for gambling, nor will the law prevent the boxing match, and it is a fact, known to me as a justice of peace, and told me also by judges on the Bench, that since the fairly-arranged combat with the fists has been stopped by the police, the appeal to the foreign weapon, the knife, has increased to a terrible extent.[136]

Although law and order were primary concerns for local authorities, commercial considerations were also an important factor. For example, the first fight between Tom Cribb and Tom Molineaux was not stopped because it was understood that the expected financial gains outweighed the local authorities' concern for law and order. Whether the underlying reasons were social, political or economic, the fact remains that of the five hundred prize-fights known to have taken place between 1793 and 1815 only fifteen were prevented.[137]

The legal system as well was ambivalent in its attitude toward prize-fighting in general and its prosecution of boxing in particular. Judges, usually members of the upper ranks of society, were clearly not unanimous in condemning the sport.[138] In some cases judges appeared to have given implicit consent to the practice, for example, by accepting gambling contracts and issuing judgments on boxing wagers.[139] There was also a large variance in the punishment meted out to boxers whose antagonist had died during or following a fight. In 1805 a coroner argued that it was murder when there was a premeditated design to commit a breach of the peace that resulted in death, "with the additional consideration that it was a prize fight, in which each had money as an inducement to do an injury to the other".[140] In contrast, other verdicts were far more lenient: in some cases boxers who had killed their antagonists were not even found guilty

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[136] Grantely F. Berkeley, *My Life and Recollections*, 2 vols. (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1865), vol 2, pp. 95-6.
[137] Harvey, *Commercial Sporting Culture*, pp. 74-5.
[138] King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion*, p. 245.
[139] For example: Lacaussade v. White (1798), *English Reports* vol. 170, p. 478; Smith v. Rickmore (1812), *English Reports* vol. 128, p. 41; Cotton v Thurland (1793), *English Reports* vol. 101, p. 227. See also: Harvey, *Commercial Sporting Culture*, p. 75.
[140] *The Times,* 26 July 1805.

of manslaughter; in other cases, they received lesser punishments than those found guilty of killing someone in a street brawl (for example, one boxer was sentenced to only two months in prison).[141]

There was, however, a strong element within the legal system that sought to eradicate boxing. Attempts were made not only to prosecute the boxers themselves but also the seconds and spectators of prize-fights too. In the 1825 case of *Rex. V. Billingham, Savage and Skinner* it was deemed that "all persons countenancing a prize fight, are guilty of an offence". Judge Burrough decreed that "it cannot be disputed that all these fights are illegal, and no consent can make them legal, and all the country being present would not make them less of an offence. They are unlawful assemblies and every one going to them is guilty of an offence."[142] After a boxer died in a prize fight in 1827, four men (most likely the two seconds and two bottle holders) were found "guilty of manslaughter" although each received only seven to fourteen days imprisonment. In 1829 a boxer found guilty of killing another in a prize fight received one year imprisonment for manslaughter; disproportionately, his seconds both received transportation for life.[143]

Sometimes juries, who were mostly from the middling ranks of society, appeared to have been reluctant to convict, even when instructed to do so by the judge. For example, in the 1831 case of *Rex v. Perkins and others*, Judge Peterson informed the jury that it was "proved that all the defendants were assisting in this breach of peace". When the foreman of the jury answered that "they doubted whether they could find all the defendants guilty of an assault", the judge replied that "if all persons went out to see these men strike each other, and were present when they did so, they are all, in point of law, guilty of an assault." The jury nonetheless found the defendants (the organizers of the prize-fights) guilty only of riot, not assault, thereby demonstrating their reluctance to accept the judge's view.[144]

Thus, while prize-fights were generally perceived as illegal, the punishment meted out varied according to the personal opinions of the magistrates, coroners, judges and

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[141] Brailsford, *Bareknuckles*, p. 51.
[142] Rex v. Billingham, Savage and Skinner (1825), *Carrington and Payne's Nisi Prius Reports* vol. 2, p. 234.
[143] Shipley, *The Boxer as Hero*, p. 64.
[144] Rex v. Perkins and Others (1831), *Carrington and Payne's Nisi Prius Reports* vol. 4, pp. 537-8; For the social status of juries see: King, *Crime, Justice and Discretion*, pp. 243-6. Juries were also very reluctant to convict poachers and smuggler, who, like boxers, were not perceived as criminals by customary views. See: E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters; The Origin of the Black Act* (London: Allen Lane, 1975).

juries. While most judges were opposed to the sport, others had a more lenient view. This split within the legal system was most likely the consequence of the eighteenth century view of boxing as a "manly" sport important for national defence. In 1888, when boxing with gloves had already largely replaced bare-knuckle prize-fighting, Lord Brabourne, somewhat circumspectly defended prize-fighting as a means of self-defence and a preparation for war, and mourned its decline:

> As regards prizefighting (sic), our forefathers considered it a thing to be encouraged, and that men should be taught endurance and how to defend themselves when attacked. In the present day, however, we had arrived at a state of thing which some people called more refined and more intense civilisation. Others, on the other hand, were of opinion that the banishment of prize-fighting had been followed by other things which were not a good exchange, either to the individuals concerned or the community at large.[145]

Another legal authority, Sir Michael Foster, differentiated between prize-fights performed for lucre and fights in which no malice was intended and bodily harm was not a motive. The latter, he decreed, were only a "trial of skill and manhood… I therefore cannot call these exercises unlawful. They are manly diversions, they tend to give strength, skill, and activity, and may fit people for defence, public as well as personal in time of need."[146]

Because the illegality of boxing was never fixed by law, it left a margin of doubt within which magistrates, judges and juries exercised their own discretion when handling the subject. The relatively light fines that some boxers received prove that well into the nineteenth century there was an implicit acceptance of the importance of the sport as a manly and English practice. The reactions of the legal system, I argue, reflected the ambivalent position boxing held in eighteenth century England between popularity and illegality.

To conclude, it is certainly true that, as Gorn argues, boxing was an arena for the struggle between a new economic and social order and older forces:

> Evangelical religion and capitalist forms of business organization… militated against the free-and-easy cultural style that prize-fighting represented. For the prosperous bourgeois and the dissenting preacher, the ascendant ethos of

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[145] *Sporting Life*, 17 October 1888, quoted in: Shipley, *The Boxers as Hero*, p. 122.
[146] Michael Foster, *A report of some proceedings on the commission for the trial of the rebels in the year 1746, in the county of Surry* (London: W. Clarke and Sons, 1809), p. 260. See also: Edward Manson, "Notes", *The Law Quarterly Review* 21 (1890), p. 110.

> productivity, humanitarian reform, steady habits, sober self-control, accumulation of property, and devotion to the domestic family seemed as inevitable as sunrise. But the values and powers of such new men were a direct threat to the gentry, old aristocrats, wealthy young dandies, professional gamblers, the urban underworld, and a large segment of the working class. The flowering of pugilism was a cultural statement opposing the efforts by the middle class to reshape the world in its own image.[147]

However, although there was a high degree of correspondence between the ideals, values and aims of certain sections of the middle classes regarding the reformation of manners, there were strong currents within the working and upper classes that opposed blood sports as well. At the same time, not everyone in the middle classes opposed the sport; there was also a growing involvement by middle-class men, such as journalists, publicans or brewers, in boxing.

Despite the ambiguity of its legal status, during the eighteenth century boxing gained numerous followers, financial backers and a specialised press as it simultaneously underwent a process of professionalisation and commercialisation. A large number of people from all classes were involved in this process of commercialization. Although upper-class patrons earned the majority of the money, they were not the only people benefiting from the sport. Tradesmen, journalists, printers, publicans, bookmakers, prostitutes and petty criminals all earned (directly or indirectly) money from boxing. A small number of pugilists, although they paid a high price for their careers, were also active agents in this commercialisation process. In one way or another all social classes were involved in the sport, and people of all classes opposed it. In the next chapter the arguments of the two sides of the debate are examined in order to ascertain the issues at the heart of the struggle.

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[147] Gorn, *The Manly Art*, p. 29.

Chapter Two

One of the Great Glories of the Country or a Disgrace to a Civilized Nation? The Debate on Boxing

On 15 April 1789 *The Times* of London published an advertisement announcing a debate on boxing that was to take place at the Westminster Forum that day. The announcement promised an exciting confrontation between opposing sides and offered possible avenues of discussion:

> The Advocates for the Advantages of Refinement and Civilization in society will here have an Opportunity to declaim against a practice so repugnant to the feelings of Humanity; while on the other hand the Amateurs of Boxing may argue in Favour of the Science, as a constant Means of Self-Defence, consistent with the naturally bold and hardy Characters of the ancient race of Britons.[148]

The language of the advertisement reflected the conceptual framework shaping the debate. "Refinement", "civilization" and "feelings of humanity" were key concepts of the politeness and sensibility culture, which argued that boxing was socially subversive, immoral and illegal. The advertisement's use of martial language, its claim for the fundamental right to self-defence and its rhetoric of masculinity and chauvinistic patriotism were typical expressions of the pro-boxing faction, which based its arguments on cultural traditionalism, Libertarianism, but above all civic humanism. The arguments of both sides and the language in which they were articulated suggest that the boxing discourse reflected a major nation-wide conflict between the advocates of politeness and the proponents of the masculinist culture rooted in civic humanism.[149]

This chapter provides an overview of the main arguments of both sides of the debate for and against boxing and the ideological framework in which they were formulated. It argues that one of the reasons for the prevalence of boxing as a subject of public debate was that it reflected central controversies within Georgian society over *inter alia* gender roles, law, justice, social order, human nature, and manners. The chapter

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[148] *The Times*, 15 April 1789.

[149] Civic humanism and politeness, key features of eighteenth century life, took on many forms and encompassed a variety of issues such as ethics, philosophy, politics and aesthetics. This chapter concentrates on their central meanings and the characteristics most relevant to the debate on boxing, necessarily ignoring other discursive and cultural practices. See also bibliography in footnotes 183 and 192.

begins by delineating the scope, character and participants of the public debate on boxing, illustrating that it occupied a significant place in the very lively public sphere of Georgian England. The second section describes the two philosophies that shaped the debate: politeness and civic humanism. Politeness and its concomitants refinement and sensibility concentrated on the social aspects of life, on sentiments and sociability. It celebrated polite conversation and French manners as well as such "feminine characteristics" as emotionality, empathy and introspection. Civic humanism was a masculine, patrician and patriotic tradition emphasizing masculine virtue and the public good. Section three presents the arguments of the anti-boxing factions. The proponents of politeness argued that boxing was not only uncivilized and barbaric but also an illegal practice that undermined the authority of the state; it was degrading, immoral, irreligious, economically unsound and socially subversive. The final section presents the views of the sport's proponents, who argued that boxing exemplified the right of every Englishman to defend himself, it was important to national security and the liberty of the nation, it was a "system of ethics" with an inherent restriction on violence, and it was a manly English sport that counteracted the dangerously effeminising effects of politeness on the nation. Thus, the debate on boxing was not only a conflict between social groups, but also a major encounter between opposing segments of society, united primarily by their leanings toward either politeness or civic humanism.

2.1. The public debate on boxing

The debate on boxing was not restricted to certain social or political groups; it was part of the public sphere, in which open discussion on issues of general concern took place and public opinion was formed.[150] This public debate, which found its arenas in salons, debating societies, pubs and coffee houses, was one in which issues of the day were argued, ideas were exchanged and the government could be criticised.[151] Although this

[150] The research on the rise of the public sphere is inspired by the work of Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zur einen Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1962). See also: Eley Geoff, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century", in: *Habermas and the Public Sphere,* ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 289-339; James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[151] The rise of the public sphere in England, as a result of complex socioeconomic developments such as improvements in transportation and commercialization, the new urban culture, and the rise in literacy and a critical press, has been well established in the historiography. See for example: Paul Langford, *A Polite and*

public sphere was largely masculine and patrician in character, it was increasingly growing in scope in the late eighteenth century was becoming more open to the lower classes and women.[152] Moreover, although the majority of commentators (both opponents and proponents) in the debate on boxing came from what can loosely be termed the "middling ranks" of society; the difference in social status between lower middle-class impoverished journalists and upper middle-class brewers and landlords was huge.[153]

Some of the important arenas of the public sphere were debating societies, which were very popular in Britain at that time.[154] According to Donna Andrew, their meetings, which took place in large commercial venues (seating 400 to 1200 people), attracted a mixed audience that ranged from the nobility to the working classes.[155] These societies, which debated various issues, from religion and politics to sex, marriage and the place of women in public life, clearly enjoyed discussing the pros and cons of the sport and a number of meetings of these societies were devoted to the subject.[156] The British Forum,

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Commercial People: England 1727-1783 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harper Collins, 1997).

[152] My definition of public sphere is based on the work of Geoff Eley who has argued with respect to the nineteenth century that although the rise of the public sphere was closely connected to the growing self-consciousness of the middle class, it was not restricted to its members; it was also, to some extent, open to "nonbourgeois, subaltern groups", such as the working class. He explains that "[t]he public sphere makes more sense as the structured setting where cultural and ideological contest or negotiation among a variety of publics takes place, rather than as the spontaneous and class-specific achievement of the bourgeoisie in some sufficient sense." Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures", p. 306. Cf. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", in: *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, pp. 109–142.

[153] The 'middling ranks' in Georgian England have been a subject of many studies which have shown that on the whole they did not function as a cohesive social group. Peter Earle argued that the upper tier of the middle class had close ties with the landed aristocracy, while many of the lower middle class were close to members of the working class from which they had sprung. Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (London: Methuen, 1989); Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, *passim*. For a historiographical review see: H. R. French, "the Search for the 'middle sort of people' in England, 1600-1800", *The Historical Journal* 43 (2000), pp. 277-293. For the development of the concept "middle class" and its political usage see: Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780-1840* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[154] Donna Andrew, "Popular Culture and Public Debate: London 1780", *Historical Journal* 39.2 (1996), pp. 405-23.

[155] Although the majority of the participants were middle class, the many complaints about lower class participants indicate that the societies drew a mixed audience. Andrew, "Popular Culture and Public Debate", p. 409.

[156] For example, on 15 April 1789 the *Westminster Forum* debated whether "Ought not the magistrates to unite their efforts to prevent the intended Battle between Humphreys and Mendoza, and to abolish the practice of boxing entirely?" [*The Morning Post*, 15 April 1789] The same Forum had another discussion on a later occasion concerning the question: "Is the assertion of Dr. Barry's late letter to the King true, that boxing is repugnant to the laws and maxims of a civilized state, evinces but any service, but certainly productive of many evils?" The fact that Dr. Barry himself opened and closed the debate might have been responsible for the fact that a decision was made in favour of his treatise [*Daily Advertiser*, 17 March

for example, debated whether "the present rage for Boxing [ought] to be encouraged as manly, or discountenanced [sic] as a brutal exercise?"[157] One of the speeches given in that debate was subsequently published in a pamphlet, *Arguments upon Boxing or Pugilism; which will always be proper for perusal, so long as the brutal practice of boxing shall continue*.[158] Numerous other tracts, pamphlets, treatises, essays and sermons, either decrying or commending boxing, were also published, usually anonymously.

A more specialised channel for the debate on boxing was the vast boxing literature including boxing histories and manuals, which filled an important role in propagating the rhetoric and arguments of boxing and in establishing legitimacy for the sport.[159] As Arthur Bilodeau notes, this literature helped "consolidate a popular pastime into an institution" by documenting boxing history, training instructions, fight descriptions, the pedigree and biographies of various boxers, boxing songs, etc.[160] There were two kinds of boxing books: cheap books, produced and sold by publishers of works on crime, magic and astrology, which were probably intended for lower-class audiences.[161] These works, often published under the names of famous boxers like Owen Swift, were written by Grub Street hackers who had no knowledge of the sport and either invented or plagiarised the material.[162] More expensive books, which were attractively bound, priced between

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1790]. On 27 September 1790 the *City Debates* society held a discussion on the subject: "Which is the greater deviation from real manhood, the effeminacy of a man-milliner, or the brutality of the modern boxer?" [*Daily Advertiser*, 25 September 1790]. See also: Donna Andrew, *London Debating Societies* (London: London record Society, 1994).

[157] *British Forum,* 8 April 1806.

[158] Anon. *Arguments upon Boxing or Pugilism; which will always be proper for perusal, so long as the brutal practice of boxing shall continue; but more especially applicable now, as the subject has just been discussed at the British Forum No. 22 Piccadilly, By a Friend to Rational Debate.* (London, 1806).

[159] For an account of this blossoming boxing literature see: Ford, *Prizefighting*, ch. 10. Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, chs. 2-3. The fullest available bibliography is: R. A. Hartley, *History and Bibliography of Boxing Books: Collectors' Guide to the History of Pugilism* (Alton: Nimrod, 1988).

[160] Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, pp. 14, 24.

[161] For example: Anon., *Recollections of Pugilism and Sketches of the Ring By An Amateur* (London, 1811); Thomas Belcher, *The Art of Boxing, or Science of Manual Defence, Clearly Displayed on Rational Principles. Whereby every person may make themselves masters of that Manly Acquirement so as to ensure success both in Attack and Defence. To which is added Memoirs and Delineations of the Most Celebrated Pugilists and accounts of their Principle Battles* (London, ca. 1820); Anon., *The art and pratice of English boxing, containing explanatory illustrations of pugilistic attitudes* (London, ca. 1816); Anon., *The Art of Manual Defence; or System of Boxing: perspicuously explained in a series of lessons, and illustrated by plates. By a Pupil both of Humphreys and Mendoza* (London, 1789);

[162] Owen Swift, *The Handbook to boxing being a complete instructor in the art of Self Defence* (London, 1840).

two and five pounds, were aimed at a middle- to upper-class audience and written by reputed sports journalists, such as John Badcock and Pierce Egan.[163]

Without a doubt the single most important journalist who shaped the boxing debate was Pierce Egan (1772-1849). Son of a respectable Protestant Irish family, Egan was born in London, where he was apprenticed to a printer and worked various jobs in the print industry, including parliamentary reporter, until he started writing on sports and became a successful journalist and author (although he always remained on the edge of poverty). He became popular due to his unique style (he had invented much of the typical slang of the sporting literature), his use of a mixture of "high" and "low" sources, his close acquaintance with the sporting world (both boxers and patrons) and his books were a great success in all social classes. Egan helped shape the image of the sport, by establishing its antique heritage, by celebrating the boxers as heroes, shaping their images and celebrating their feats. His books and articles had an important role in constructing what Bilodeau called the "pugilistic rhetoric", in shaping the defence of boxing, emphasizing it's link to patriotism, manliness, and a certain homosocial subculture, and in constructing the image of the boxers as heroes.[164] The five volume *Boxiana, or, Sketches of ancient and modern pugilism, from the days of the renowned Broughton and Slack to the heroes of the present milling era,* became an instant bestseller, went into several editions and remains one of the most important sources for Georgian pugilism.[165]

An important contemporary and competitor of Egan, John Badcock, who wrote under the pseudonym Jon Bee, published *The Annals of Sporting and Fancy Gazette* (1822-1828)**.** Boxing historian John Ford has criticised him for plagiarism, for inventing facts and for being jealous of Egan, but argued that Badcock gave a more balanced view of boxers, including their faults. His writing style was more earnest than Egan's, and he provided, as Bilodeau writes, a "sober alternative" to Egan's carnivalesque style.[166]

Boxing has also been a subject of visual interpretation. Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, but especially from the 1780s, with the peak of enthusiasm for

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[163] For example: Jon Bee [John Badcock], *Pancration: A History of Pugilism* (London, 1811); Pierce Egan, *Pierce Egan's Every Gentleman's Manual a lecture on the Art of Self Defence* (London, 1845); Henry Lemoine, *Modern manhood; or, the art and practice of English boxing. Including the history of the science of natural defence; and memoirs of the most celebrated practitioners of that manly exercise* (London, 1788).
[164] Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, pp. 79-104.
[165] Reid, *Bucks and Bruisers*, *passim.* On *Boxiana* see ch. 2.
[166] Ford, *Prizefighting*, p. 183; Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, pp. 119-24.

pugilism, portraits of boxers and paintings of fights became a common subject and developed its own iconography. Pictorial sources depicting boxing swung between two poles: one which tried to ennoble the sport, emphasized masculinity, beauty, and classical heritage; and the other which underscored the cruelty and baseness of the sport, and its lower class participants. These moods very much depended on the genres of pictures used to depict the subject: prints and portraits usually aesthetically edified the boxers, and caricatures rotated between satirizing boxing and celebrating its convivial and carnivalesque side.[167]

However, the most significant stage for public debate in general and for the debate on boxing in particular in terms of circulation, social diversity and influence was the press.[168] The late Georgian period saw a flowering of newspapers and a rise in the number and range of readers. By 1821 there were fourteen daily newspapers, over forty periodicals in London, and more than a hundred published in the provinces; most had a circulation of between 2,000 and 5,000 issues.[169] As it was a common custom to loan newspapers, it is estimated that one newspaper was shared by up to thirty people. Thus in the 1780s about a third of London's population and eight percent of the population outside London were most likely reading newspapers regularly. The rise in literacy meant that newspaper readership crossed class boundaries; whereas at the beginning of the century newspapers were written exclusively for the higher classes, by its end newspaper readers came from all social classes.[170] Newspapers were the most popular printed material as they were cheaper and more available than books and took less effort to read.

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[167] Heiny, *Boxing in British Sporting Art*, pp. 159-62; Hyde, "The Noble Art: Boxing and Visual Culture in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain", pp. 35-41.

[168] Ian R. Christie, "British Newspapers in the Later Georgian Age", in: Christie, *Myth and Reality in late Eighteenth Century British Politics and Other Papers* (London: Macmillan Co, 1970), pp. 311-33; Hannah Barker, "England 1760-1815", in: *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820*, eds. Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 93-112; Hannah Barker, *Newspaper, Politics and Public Opinion in late Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader. A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 317-20; For more on the importance of newspapers in Georgian society see: Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), ch. 1.

[169] Christie, "British Newspapers in the Later Georgian Age", p. 314; Barker, "England 1760-1815", p. 103.

[170] According to James Van Horn Melton, in the middle of the eighteenth century about 60% of adult males were literate. Moreover, illiterate people often had the papers read to them by literate friends or colleges. Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe,* p. 82.

This readership also included the lower classes who could not afford to buy newspapers, but had access to them in public libraries, pubs and coffee shops.[171]

In comparison with newspapers on the continent, the press in England was able to provide a platform for public opinion, including some criticism of the government and the king. In late Georgian England there was no censorship of newspapers, and although editors were at times accused of seditious libel, the public outcry surrounding these prosecutions managed to reduce the number of trials and the harshness of the punishments.[172] Many newspapers received subsidies from political parties, but they were more dependent on commercial than political factors because most of their revenue came from advertisement. As newspapers gained in value and their profits rose considerably between 1790 and 1820, they became less dependent on subsidies. Hannah Barker has concluded that newspaper content was dictated more by what editors thought readers wanted to read than by political considerations. According to Barker, the press represented a wide range of opinions, it "appealed to the English people *en masse*, presuming to speak both to them and for them; and in facilitating the exchange of information and ideas and providing a new institutional context for political action, it was instrumental in the development of public opinion and, with it, the political public sphere." [173]

Sports in general and pugilism in particular were popular subjects among newspaper readers in the late Georgian period. Journalism's focus on action, its need for conflict and its stress on personality made boxing one of the most attractive sports for the journalism of the time. According to Adrian Harvey the "popularity of sport was such that newspapers whose 'Methodist' editors opposed its inclusion faced financial disaster".[174] In the late eighteenth century most major newspapers (though not religious ones) covered boxing: whether it was Tory papers such as *The Times*, or the leading opposition organ, *The Morning Chronicle*, all covered boxing.[175] There is no doubt that

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[171] Altick, *The English Common Reader*, p. 318; Barker, "England 1760-1815", pp. 105-7; Christie, "British Newspapers", p. 325.
[172] For example, a journal like the *Morning Chronicle*, which was outspokenly oppositional, could survive for years without encountering problems from the law. Barker, "England 1760-1815", pp. 95-7; Christie, "British Newspapers", p. 328.
[173] Barker, *Newspaper, Politics and Public Opinion,* p. 4. See also: Barker, "England 1760-1815", pp. 100-1, 108-9; Christie, "British Newspapers", pp. 320-322; Harvey, *Commercial Sporting Culture,* pp. 32-47.
[174] Harvey, *Commercial Sporting Culture,* pp. 40-4, quote on p. 44.
[175] The *Morning Chronicle* edited by James Perry (1756-1821) was the major oppositional paper and the most influential daily until the 1820s. Perry was an actor and journalist who was associated with the Whig

some newspapers reported on boxing somewhat reluctantly, but none could afford to ignore it.

Most newspapers conveyed both sides of the argument, publishing articles that attacked and defended the sport side by side. An extreme example was an article published in *The Times* on 24 October 1789, which opened with a hostile condemnation of the sport: "The Practice of this barbarous custom, we ever have and shall decry, as an offence against society – brutal in its nature – murderous in its consequences – an encouragement to profligacy – a scandalous waste of time…." However, it then proceeded to give an enthusiastic and knowledgeable rendering of the fight, assessing the merits of the two boxers and their boxing style and finishing with a praise for both winner and loser: "…we give the palm to Johnson, for his skill and knowledge of what was necessary to succeed in the contest, we must not deny Perrins the praise of having acted with spirit; and while he shewed [sic] his want of *skill,* of having, at least, evinced much *bottom*".[176]

Harvey attributes this ambivalence in the press coverage of boxing to a conflict between the financial interests and the moral stance of the newspapers. His analysis constructs a contrast between what he considers enlightened newspapers and traditional minded readers, implying that newspapers reporting on prize-fighting succumbed to financial motives.[177] In analyzing the important role the press played in shaping the image of the sport and the boxers, he overlooks the important part they had in reflecting and shaping the debate on boxing. Without underestimating the commercial aims of the newspapers, I would like to argue that financial considerations alone would not explain the coverage of the sport in the press. The ambivalence of the press reflected the split within society (and among journalists) concerning the sport. Boxing was hotly debated in the very lively public sphere of Georgian England, and the newspapers reflected and enhanced this debate, not only because it boosted their circulation, but also because the debate over boxing was a debate about the character of society.

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leader Charles James Fox. The newspaper, which remained very popular with up to 3000 issues a day in 1803, regularly reported on boxing and defended the sport which "will always be necessary to be learnt by every man who mixes in a world where good behaviour affords no shelter from insult". Its boxing coverage was not relegated to the fights themselves, but actively engaged in build-ups to fights, publishing background material on the history of boxers and boxing and even reviews of boxers' portraits. *The Morning Chronicle,* 11 August 1788; *Ibid.*, 14 January 1788; *Ibid.,* 15 January 1788. Christie, "James Perry of the Morning Chronicle, 1756-1821", pp. 334-358.

[176] *The Times*, 24 October 1789.

[177] Harvey, *Commercial Sporting Culture,* pp. 35-48.

2.2. Politeness and its discontents: the boxing debate as a clash between politeness and civic humanism

The sports journalist and boxing chronicler, Pierce Egan, succinctly summarized the main issues underlying the debate on boxing:

> Refinement of character has been the object of many eminent writers – and public stage-fighting has, perhaps, in many instances, received just and merited censure, under an alarm that our feelings might become callous, and acts of brutality be viewed with indifference from the witnessing of those prize combats….but we are equally afraid, in turn, that the English character may get too *refined*, and the *through-bred* bull-dog degenerate into the *whining* puppy. Lord Chesterfield, with his superior refinement, graces, and politeness, did more real injury to the cause of morality than all the public exhibitions of boxing have done….[178]

While the opponents of the sport perceived boxing as inimical to refinement, politeness and sensibility and as representative of a vulgar, impolite and insensible culture; its defenders not only readily agreed that the sport was not in accordance with polite maxims, but also perceived it as an antidote to the adverse effects of politeness and refinement on English society.[179] Proponents of boxing opposed both the style and the values of politeness and sensibility. The choice, as they put it, was between liberty, courage and manliness on the one hand, and effeminacy, corruption and slavery on the other.[180] "To its promoters", writes historian Philip Carter, "polite society (however conceived) remained a source of self- or societal improvement … to its critics these aspirations brought social disharmony and … declining gender standards".[181] Politeness had a multitude of detractors from all sides: libertines and libertarians, Tories and Whigs. Its critics perceived the culture of refinement as cold and insubstantial; it laid emphasis on external and superficial manners, but ignored inner qualities. They perceived sensibility as inauthentic and opposed all forms of what they called 'cant' (meaning

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[178] Egan, *Boxiana*, vol. I, pp. 3-4.
[179] For example, Henry Lemoine conceded that "politeness and good manners forbid the frequent exercise", before recommending boxing as the best means of self-defence. Lemoine, *Modern Manhood*, pp. iii-iv.
[180] The mention of Lord Chesterfield in the quote is meaningful; Philip Dormer Stanhope, the fourth Earl of Chesterfield (1694-1773), was probably the most famous example of the precariousness of politeness. His letters to his son, published posthumously, exposed the way politeness could serve as a cover for duplicity, contempt and self-advancement. Philip Carter, "Polite 'Persons': Character, Biography and the Gentleman", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002), pp. 334-5.
[181] Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), p. 19.

hypocrisy and "a whining pretension to goodness").[182] Many of those who rejected demands for politeness and emotionality on the grounds that it was unmanly and effeminate, saw boxing as the embodiment of the masculine ideology of civic humanism. The boxing debate thus became a central site for the struggle between politeness and civic humanism.

Civic humanism originated in fifteenth-century Florence and was transplanted (with variations) to England in the seventeenth century.[183] It was largely republican, advocating a balanced constitution, the participation of citizens in elected assemblies, and a citizen's army. The most important conditions for the welfare and liberty of the state were the virtues of individual men and the general manners of society (manners meaning both demeanour and ethics). Vices such as corruption and luxury were seen as leading to dissipation and the loss of liberty.[184] It was especially the loss of manly virtues such as honour and independence that, according to civic humanists, would lead to the "loss of political liberties, the erosion of national health and vigour, and falling cultural and moral standards."[185] Originally civic humanism was adopted by independent landowning Tories and opposition Whigs (known as the Country Party) during their attempts to battle the court and the growing influence of commercial interests (the Court Party).[186] Country ideologists argued that the new moneyed interests were ruining England with their shady financial dealings and corrupting the state with their nefarious influence on Court and Parliament.[187] However, civic humanism was a flexible framework, which was used in

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[182] Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Atlantic, 2006), p. 435.

[183] My understanding of the concept of civic humanism is based on: J. G. A. Pocock, "Civic Humanism and its Role in Anglo-American Thought", in *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (London: Meuthen, 1971), pp. 172-89; id., *Virtue, Commerce, and History. Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); id., *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); id., "Virtues, Rights, and Manners: A Model for Historians of Political Thought", *Political Theory* 9.3 (1981), pp. 353-368; id., "Cambridge Paradigms and Scotch Philosophers: A Study of the relations between the civic humanist and the civil jurisprudential interpretation of eighteenth-century social thought", in: *Wealth and Virtue*, *the Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, eds. Istvan Hont and Michale Ignatieff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 179-202. See also: Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); id., "Liberty, Manners and Politeness in Early Eighteenth-Century England", *The Historical Journal* 32 (1989), pp. 583-605. Cf. Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism: Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England and America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

[184] Klein, "Liberty, Manners, and Politeness", pp. 586-91.

[185] Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, pp. 119-120.

[186] See Chapter Four for more on the Country Party.

[187] Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History*, pp. 129-31.

the eighteenth century by different groups to advocate various ends; it provided the conceptual framework for both the radical proponents of parliamentary reform and the conservative defenders of the establishment. However, as Emma Clery has shown, civic humanism had some generic characteristics: it was a masculinist and patrician tradition, it was a moral code, and it was based on certain historical and economic modes of thinking.[188] All these characteristics could be found in the boxing debate.

Civic humanism viewed honesty, independence and martiality as masculine virtues while often portraying luxury, credit and fortune as feminine vices.[189] Although the late eighteenth century saw a gradual change in the concept of independence (to be discussed in Chapter Four), civic humanism was a patrician code; only a virtuous, free and independent landowning citizen possessing the ability and willingness to fight could defend his country from corruption, tyranny and foreign occupation. Civic humanism was preoccupied with the threat of decay and dissolution of the body politic as well as with the conditions for its survival and health. Its view of history was cyclic: states moved from savage to more advanced stages, but following loss of virtue or corruption they would become effeminate, degenerate and decline. Morality was seen as the way to achieve political stability, while moral failures (corruption, effeminacy and selfishness) were seen as threats to the welfare of the state. Civic virtues such as courage, frugality, and military prowess were pitted against such vices as luxury, corruption, cowardice and "feminine" characteristics (such as softness and sensuousness).[190]

According to J. G. A. Pocock, there was a basic tension in civic humanistic thinking between the concepts virtue and commerce. Civic humanism tied the welfare of the nation to certain economic restrictions. Frugality in both public and private matters was considered admirable; commerce, consumption and luxury were seen as threats to the state, while the national debt and the stock market were perceived as pathways to effeminacy and decline.[191] In the eighteenth century the anti-commercial stance was somewhat muted as civic humanism was adopted by middle class individuals. The fear of

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[188] Clery, *The Feminization Debate*, p. 6.
[189] Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History*, pp. 113-116; Catherine Ingrassia, *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender in Early Eighteenth-Century England: A Culture of Paper Credit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1-5.
[190] Klein, "Liberty, Manners and Politeness", p. 593.
[191] These arguments underlie, as the title suggests, the whole book, but see especially: Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History,* pp. 48-50, 124-6. See also: Clery, *The Feminization Debate*, pp. 4-6; Ingrassia, *Authorship, Commerce, and Gender*, pp. 1-7; John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

effeminacy, "the loss of physical strength, independence, judgment, courage, moderation and sense", remained central.[192] Associated with such vices as corruption, cowardice, and luxury, effeminacy was a severe threat to the nation, as it resulted in enervated individuals, a weakened army and a diseased nation.[193]

Politeness, which arouse in England in the last decades of the seventeenth century, was an attempted to resolve the tension between commerce and virtue inherent in civic humanism, by providing a moral code for the new realities of market economy, public debt and central banking.[194] Much more than an ideological defence of commerce, politeness became a code of conduct, a way of life and "the means to understand oneself and one's place in the world."[195] This new culture was characterised by an emphasis on propriety, decency, elegance and sociability, and had a wide influence on various areas of life (such as gender ideals). At the core of politeness stood a redefinition of virtue in social and cultural terms that were less political than those of civic humanism. Civic humanistic values such as independence, simplicity and martiality were rejected in favour of refinement, sociability and propriety.[196] In contrast to civic humanistic thinkers who

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[192] On the centrality of civic humanism for the middle class see: Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), *passim*; id., "Empire, gender, and modernity in the eighteenth century". In: *Gender and Empire* ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 14-45; id. "Citizenship, empire, and modernity in the English provinces, c.1720-1790", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (1995), 69-96.

[193] Philip Carter has convincingly argued that effeminacy referred to social, not necessarily sexual, behaviour, thereby disputing Rudolph Trumbach's equation of effeminacy with homosexuality. Philip Carter, "Men about Town: Representations of Foppery and Masculinity in Early Eighteenth-Century Urban Society". In: *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England. Roles, Representations and Responsibilities*, eds. Hannah Barker and Eliane Chalus (Harlow: Longman, 1997), pp. 31-57; id., "An 'effeminate' or 'efficient' nation? Masculinity in eighteenth-century social documentary", in: *Textual Practice* 11 (1997), pp. 429-43. Cf. Rudolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[194] For an historiographical review on politeness and sensibility see: Lawrence E. Klein, "Politeness and the interpretation of the British eighteenth century", *The Historical Journal* 45.4 (2002), pp. 869-98, and Paul Langford, "The Uses of Eighteenth Century Politeness", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002), pp. 311-31. Two general studies on polite culture are: Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People. England, 1727-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); John Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harpercollins, 1997). For politeness in early eighteenth century politics see: Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness;* id., "Liberty, Manners and Politeness", pp. 583-605. For the influence of politeness on gender see: Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society;* Michèle Cohen. *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1996); Barker-Benfield, G. J. *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago, Il.: Chicago University Press, 1992).

[195] Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 101-2.

[196] Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History,* pp. 48-49, 195-96; id., "Cambridge Paradigms", pp. 240-44; Klein, "Liberty, Manners, and Politeness", pp. 586-7; id., "Politeness for Plebes: Consumption and Social Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century England", in: *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text*, ed. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 362-82.

saw decline as inevitable, politeness was part of the enlightened belief in linear progress and the perfectibility of human society.[197] Enlightenment thinkers saw in politeness and refinement the peak of historical progress and connected the cultivation of sensibility with material affluence. Economic development, they claimed, promoted arts and sciences, and this, in turn, produced refined manners and increased the occurrence of sociability and sympathy.[198]

Proponents of politeness and civic humanism also had considerably different views on gender and social order. Although it was considered easier for a nobleman to attain, politeness was, theoretically at least, an achievable goal for all classes, especially at a time when the term gentleman referred less to heritage and more to behaviour and appearance.[199] In contrast to civic humanism's perception of women as "selfish, licentious and potentially dangerous", polite society provided women with a pivotal part to play in society; being more tender, delicate and sensitive than their male counterparts, they were considered good role models for men.[200] It was imperative that the Englishman, famous for his taciturn unsociability, learn to converse properly, and this he could do either by imitating women or the French, both considered paragons of refinement.[201] This close connection between politeness, women and the French, and their combined association with consumerism made polite culture an easy target for accusations of effeminacy. Many civic humanists felt that politeness and liberty were incompatible, and that in fact politeness could only be achieved at the price of liberty.[202]

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[197] Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2000), pp. 424-427; Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History*, pp. 113-18.
[198] Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp. 424-45; Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, pp. 27-8.
[199] However, Langford has argued that politeness was also used as an exclusionary tool. Langford, "The Uses of Eighteenth-Century politeness", p. 318. See also: Klein, "Politeness and the interpretation of the British eighteenth century", pp. 876-877. For more on the changing status of 'gentleman' see: Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, ch. 3.
[200] Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, pp. 25-6, 171-2; Philip Carter, "An 'effeminate' or 'efficient' nation? Masculinity in eighteenth-century social documentary", in: *Textual Practice* 11 (1997), pp. 429-43.
[201] Michèle Cohen argues that the anxiety produced by fears of effeminacy changed the relations towards the French language, which at the beginning of the eighteenth-century was considered a 'must' for every gentleman to learn, and at the end of the century became a 'feminine' language fit only for women: Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity, passim;* Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, pp. 25-6, 171-2.
[202] Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History*, pp. 109-15. Klein, "Liberty, Manners, and Politeness in Early Eighteenth-Century England", p. 585. Carter, "An 'effeminate' or 'efficient' nation?", pp. 429-43.

In the mid eighteenth century there was a shift from politeness to sensibility, in response to criticism that polite culture had lost its moral integrity.[203] Sensibility, "the capacity for *refined emotion*, delicate sensitiveness of taste, readiness to feel compassion and be moved by the pathetic", emphasized inner values rather than behaviour and outer appearance, a new status was given to empathy. [204] Sensibility became synonymous with consciousness and emotions. It aggrandized emotions and invested them with moral value and had a wide impact on society: it changed practices of sociability, consumption, body comportment, child-rearing, leisure activities and art. It influenced political discourse and had a massive impact on literature (visible in the rise of the novel).[205]

Both style and values distinguished the civic humanists from their polite and sensitive antagonists.[206] Their major disagreement was over the definition of virtue. Civic humanism celebrated honesty, independence, simplicity of manners, frugality, martiality and public-mindedness (which expressed itself, for example, in a willingness to defend the country). In contrast, the "apologists of commerce" perceived the civic humanistic idea of virtue as "archaic" and redefined it in a social rather than political sense, while developing such ideals as "polish, refinement, politeness, civility and cultivation" to take its place.[207] Thus, in many ways politeness and civic humanism were contrasting, even if not always mutually-exclusive, ideologies. The two clashed in several arenas, one of which was the debate on boxing.

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[203] Carter has argued that although there was a clear shift from refinement to sensibility, the two coexisted and the terms were used interchangeably. Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, pp. 27-9; see also: Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 100-117. There is an extensive literature on sensibility in the Georgian period. This study has mainly utilized the historiographical approaches, as exemplified by Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society;* Michele Cohen *Fashioning Masculinity*; Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*. For a general overview on sensibility see: Janet Todd, *Sensibility. An Introduction* (London: Meuthen, 1986); John Mullan *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Walter Göbel, "Conflicting Definitions of the Culture of Sensibility", in: *Anglistentag 1995 Greifswald. Proceedings. XVII*, eds. Jürgen Klein and Dirk Vanderbeke (Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tübingen, 1999), pp. 93-104.

[204] Gesa Stedman, *Stemming the Torrent: Expression and Control in the Victorian Discourses on Emotions, 1830-1872* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 40. See also: Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, p. 2, 27-9, Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, pp. 100-117; Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, p. vii.

[205] Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Klein, "Liberty, manners and politeness", pp. 583-605; id., "Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century", pp. 869-898; G. J. Barker-Benfield, "Sensibility", pp. 102-114.

[206] Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, p. 48; Klein, "Liberty, Manners and Politeness", pp. 586-7.

[207] Larry Dickey, "The Pocockian Moment", in: *The Journal of British Studies* 26 (1987), p. 100.

2.3. Brutal, vulgar and degrading: the anti-boxing arguments

The most famous attack on boxing and one which exerted considerable influence on subsequent anti-boxing arguments was a small pamphlet by the Reverend Edward Barry. The treatise, *A Letter on the Practice of Boxing Addressed to the King, Lords and Commons*, was first published in 1789 and subsequently appeared in three more editions. Barry (1759-1822), who had studied medicine and theology, was a High Churchman and a Tory, presided as curate of St. Marylebone and served as chaplain of the freemasons. One of the most popular preachers in London, he wrote several books on religion, ethics and science, and apart from his treatise on pugilism also preached against bull-baiting and duelling.[208] The first paragraph of Barry's treatise is a concise rendering of the anti-boxing arguments: boxing was in defiance of "[t]he established order and good decorum of society" and prize-fights were a "direct violation of every law, of humanity, and common decency."[209] These arguments related to four central categories: law, order, morals (humanity and decency) and manners (decorum). Boxing was subversive to the social order, it was immoral and indecent and it was impolite, unrefined and uncivilized.

Law and order were central concerns for opponents of pugilism, and the issue of the (il)legality of boxing was raised by numerous enemies of the practice. Boxing was often condemned as an unlawful sport, and many pamphleteers called for stronger enforcement of existing laws.[210] Prize-fights, warned Barry, would "increase, if the legislative power [did] not step forth, either to prescribe new laws, or else command a strict exertion of those already framed…" He was especially infuriated by the fact that prize-fights had "received a sanction from men whose duty as good citizens, but especially as magistrates,

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[208] Sharp, Richard. "Barry, Edward". In: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; Edward Barry, *Bull-Baiting, A Sermon on Barbarity to God's Dumb Creation* (London, 1802); id., *Theological, Philosophical and Moral Essays* (London, 1797),.

[209] Edward Barry, *A Letter on the Practice of Boxing Adressed to the king, Lords and Commons* (London, 1789), p. 7. A Similar list can be found in an article in *The Times* explaining its opposition to the building of a boxing amphitheatre: "The law of the land prohibits such an establishment – the law of God forbids it – Humanity shrinks from the idea – Decency reprobates it – and Public Decorum would be disgraced by it". *The Times*, 15 January 1788.

[210] Most anti-boxing commentators felt the need to explain why boxing was illegal (for example that it was a breach of peace, was tantamount to murder etc.), thus strengthening the argument from chapter one, that the legal standing of the sport was hazy. See for example: Anon. *Arguments upon Boxing or Pugilism; which will always be proper for perusal, so long as the brutal practice of boxing shall continue; but more especially applicable now, as the subject has just been discussed at the British Forum, No. 22 Piccadilly, By a Friend to Rational Debate* (London, 1806), p. 15.

it was to prevent them".[211] Other opponents of boxing called for specific anti-boxing legislation. For example, *The Public Advertiser* argued that prize-fights should be made a transportable offence and a writer calling himself Humanus suggested that "it would be much to the honour of our Legislature to pass an act of Parliament against [prize-fights]."[212]

Critics of pugilism argued that the state had the sole authority over the use of force and that boxing was undermining this authority. Barry contended that in England the law protected the life, property and rights of a person and was "the sole avenger of his wrongs". The law provided, he claimed, for every possible event and preserved justice and order in society. Since the law and its representatives treated everyone (from the lowest to the highest) equally, there was no justification for breaking the law, and anyone who did so (i.e. boxers) should be perceived as an enemy of society.[213] Thus, boxing was deemed antisocial and a threat to public order. Opponents of boxing argued for a state monopoly on use of physical force. Concerted attempts were made to limit the extent of legitimate violence; community justice, especially pugilism, was becoming increasingly unacceptable. This was accomplished with the aid of the new discourse of "civilisation" versus "savagery" or "barbary".[214]

All anti-boxing texts implied or explicitly stated that the sport was uncivilized and barbaric.[215] *The Times* often complained that boxing was "a disgrace to a civilized country" and "might be allowable among savages; but in an enlightened country it [was] shameful." In a similar tone the *Public Advertiser* called for the abolishment of "this barbarous custom" because the reputation of the nation "suffer[ed] extremely in the opinion of all civilized countries as long as such brutality [was] allowed among us."[216] According to Wood, the use of the keywords civilization and its antonyms, savagery and barbarism, was part of an attempt to discipline the working classes; it posited a

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[211] Barry, *A Letter on the Practice of Boxing*, pp. 7-8. The accusation that magistrates were neglecting their duty by not prosecuting pugilism was often repeated. For example, an anonymous letter in *The Times* argued that magistrates were punishing duellists while neglecting pugilists, although both violate the law by a breach of peace and should be punished accordingly. *The Times*, 1 June 1789.
[212] *Public Advertiser,* 12 January 1788.
[213] Barry, *A Letter on the Practice of Boxing*, pp. 16-8.
[214] This is the thesis of John Carter Wood based on the work of Michele Foucault. Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth Century England*, pp. 27-40.
[215] "low and barbarous" [*The Times*, 12 January 1788]; "blackguardism and barbarity" [*The Times*, 16 May 1792].
[216] *The Times*, 4 October 1790; *Public Advertiser*, 12 January 1788.

dichotomy between the "civilised" enlightened middle class and the "savage" working class. Wood asserts that part of the "civilizing" movement included an attempt to redefine violence. Certain acts of violence were deemed anti-social while other "legitimized" forms of violence (such as that used by state representatives) came to be seen as part of society and thus not violent at all.[217] Thus, by proclaiming boxing a brutal and savage practice, its opponents tried to locate it outside society. This argument is confirmed by numerous anti-boxing texts which argued that fighting in defence of the country was "laudable, noble and heroic", while fighting without a cause, "premeditated and in cool blood", was bestial and cowardly.[218] Critics were also, as Wood has argued, worried about the use of space by the working classes, which were conceived as "a carnival of immoral, unrestrained and carnal impulses". Working-class families usually lived and worked in confined and cramped places, and thus spent much time in public spaces such as streets, pubs and taverns. At a time when middle-class space was being refined and reshaped, and separate spheres were demarcated for different activities and for the two genders, the mixing of the private and the public in working class spaces was a thorn in the eye of reformers.[219]

The anti-boxing faction was particularly concerned about the large crowds and the promiscuous mixing of the classes (and sexes) in pugilistic events, which it perceived as a potential threat to the social order. However, the struggle against boxing was not only about class, nor was boxing seen only as a problem of the lower classes. There was little agreement among opponents of boxing as to which class was responsible for the evil practice. Some blamed the "middle and lower grades of people", others placed the problem with the upper classes, who managed boxing, accumulated the money, arranged the terms of the fight, fixed the fights according to their wagers, used deceit and abused the ignorant fighters.[220] Critics also disagreed as to which class was more adversely

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[217] Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth Century England*, pp. 35-40, 138-40.
[218] For example, *Public Advertiser*, 10 January 1788.
[219] Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth Century England*, pp. 100-5, quote on p. 100. For the classical argument about the centrality of the ideology of separate spheres for the middle class see: Davidoff, Leonore and Cathrine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 2002). Amanda Vickery, on the other hand, has convincingly argued that it was not a descriptive account of women's lives, but rather a conservative attempt to prescribe more restrictive roles for women in a time in which they were increasingly active in the public sphere. Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History", *Historical Journal* 36 (1993), pp. 383-414.
[220] William Vasey, *Remarks on the influence of Pugilism on morals. Being the substance of a speech delivered at the Newcastle Debating Society on the Fourth of November 1824* (Newcastle, 1824), p. 3;

affected by the practice. Some thought that boxing was a sport that was tolerable for the lower classes, but highly unsuitable for the upper ranks of society. Others were more concerned with the negative effects of the practice on the lower orders, arguing that prize-fights encouraged the independence and insolence of the working class. The judge Sir Nash Grose, for example, reasoned that boxing had a "tendency to render the minds of the common people barbarous and revengeful".[221]

However, the use of the keywords civilization and barbarism pointed to a broader anxiety that transcended class borders. Critics were concerned not only with the behaviour of the lower classes but also with the spreading of a vulgar, insolent, insensible culture, one in which people of all classes participated and of which boxing was a symptom. Detractors of boxing did not see it as an isolated problem but rather as an integral part of a wide variety of social vices such as gambling, idleness, drunkenness and profligacy.[222] It was, among other things, the public nature of boxing that irked its critics. Reverend Barry, for example, complained about the prevalence of boxing in the public sphere:

> New bargains are daily making for combats of this sort; scarce a newspaper but what keeps alive the subject! the print shops disgust the eye, by holding out in full view the naked portraits of the bruisers; and almost everywhere the ears are annoyed with some remarks on this brutal fashion.[223]

Indeed, the most frequent complaint against the practice was that boxing defied polite standards of decency, propriety and good taste. Opponents berated the effects which the popular practice had on morals, manners and even posture. For example, an article in *The Times* explained that because of the kind of society boxing fans are exposed to, "nothing can be derived but the most vulgar and despicable meanness of manners". According to the writer, the effect of boxing was so pernicious that instead of "the necessary and decent deportment" of respectable people, many fashionable men adopted "the very aukward [sic], ungraceful, and indecent lounge which the boxing heroes affected".[224] Barry complained that boxers did nothing "but rejoic[e] and tak[e] pride in

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Anon., *A Hint on duelling, in a letter to a friend. To which is added, the Bruiser, or an inquiry into the pretensions of modern manhood. In a letter to a young gentleman* (London, 1752), pp. 33-6.

[221] Quoted in: *The Times*, 17 April 1792; Ibid, 21 December 1787; Ibid, 4 December 1804. See also: Gorn, *The Manly Art*, p. 61.

[222] For example: Anon. *A Hint on Duelling*, p. 37; *The Times*, 17 April 1792.

[223] Barry, *A Letter On the Practice of Boxing*, p. 8.

[224] *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 30; Anon., *Arguments upon Boxing*, p. 10;*The Times*, 11 January 1788.

insolence, and pleas[e] themselves in the commission of barbarous and inhuman cruelties". Boxers thus contributed to strife in society and taught other men to be unnaturally cruel and brutal. Another tirade against the sport also accused boxers of being "irritable, insolent and quarrelsome".[225] For the proponents of politeness, in which sociability and the accommodation of others was the most important maxim, insolence and irritability were the gravest of offences.

Boxing also offended the sensibilities of its critics, who denounced spectators for gazing "with pleasure on Eyes swelled, Skulls laid open, Lips cut asunder, Arms dissected…" and called upon "the sensible and feeling breast" to join the opposition to boxing.[226] One of the main arguments of the anti-boxing faction was that viewing prize-fights would harden the hearts of the spectators and make them insensible to human suffering, or even induce them to rejoice in it. Pugilism, warned William Vasey, might be the first step in the decline of Englishmen into "gross insensibility". He explained that in order to be good at his job, a boxer (like a butcher) had to overcome his feelings of sympathy and sensibility and become ferocious. Vasey admitted that a boxer was bold and undaunted and that he had prowess, which were good things; but added that the boxer "exchange[d] a breast of honourable bravery for a despicable spirit of bullyism (sic) and brutality", thereby losing his ability to discriminate right from wrong.[227] The majority of anti-boxing authors did not express concern for the boxers' welfare. They derided boxers as inhuman, compared them to animals, or scorned them for having "exchanged the feelings of a man for those of a brute".[228] In the few cases in which boxers were

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[225] Barry, *A Letter On the Practice of Boxing*, pp. 7, 24-5; Vasey, *Remarks on the Influence of Pugilism on Morals*, pp. 5-6.
[226] *St. James's Chronicle*, 8-10 January 1788; *Public Advertiser*, 10 January 1788.
[227] "An individual who looks for the first time at cruelty practised upon either man or beast, will feel a lively interest in what is going on, and, in all probability, shudder at the inflicted severity; but let him be habituated to the sight, and he will gradually lose his sensibility, and be enabled to gaze upon the inhuman spectacle without emotion. The uniform Ring-goer witnesses the human butchery of a Prize Fight with indifference; and he who can do this, will pass by a fellow-creature in distress with the utmost heedleness [sic] and unconcern. A crowd, accustomed to a similar display of wantonness, *must* (according to the constitution of the human mind, and the governing power of habit), grow callous to human suffering, and thirst for scenes of additional barbarity." Vasey, *Remarks on the Influence of Pugilism on Morals*, pp. 5-6, 8, 15-16.
[228] Barry, *A Letter On the Practice of Boxing*, p. 17. *Public Advertiser*, 12 January 1788.

mentioned, the main concern expressed was for their families and the fact that they would become burdens on the parish in case of death.[229]

According to Elliott Gorn, the anti-boxing faction brought enlightened ideas of human advancement to bear against boxing. Opponents of the sport argued that in an Enlightened society there was no place for pugilism, which brutalized men and degraded human nature. Pugilism challenged assumptions about the progress of mankind and defied ideas of perfectibility.[230] The Oxford-educated rector and Headmaster of Tonbridge School, the Reverend Vicesimus Knox (1752-1821), a Whig who opposed the war with France and championed the removal of religious disabilities, published an essay against boxing in his *Winter Evenings*, a collection of essays on literary, social and moral issues.[231] Knox objected to boxing on the grounds that it "contributed to the degradation of human nature". Only vicious people who were contemptuous of human life and who thought of men as equal to animals could organize events that would cause harm to a fellow human being and even lead to death. Love of boxing, he wrote, could only come "from a gross ignorance of better and more manly pleasures, and from a savage heart, restrained only by human laws, from the actual perpetration of the worst cruelty".[232] In the same vein as Knox's argument, another opponent of boxing also rejected the boxing faction's claim that there would always be strife among humans, explaining that such a claim was based on the false premise that people were incapable of improvement: "as the minds of men get better stored with information, it is reasonable to suppose that they will become more peaceful, because they will see more clearly the inutility (sic) of quarrelling."[233]

Surprisingly, both economic and religious issue are largely missing in the anti-boxing arguments. It is perhaps most unexpected that the Reverend Edward Barry did not make use of them, except for writing that boxing "defaces the image of God".[234] Only

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[229] In one case, after a prize-fight in which a boxer died, a newspaper argued that if the fight had been stopped, the boxer "might have been preserved to his family and to society, and the former not become burdensome to the parish". *The Times*, 1 June 1789.
[230] Gorn, *The Manly Art*, pp. 60-4.
[231] For a biography of Knox see: James Ferguson, *The British Essayists*, vol. 41 (London: Richardson & co., 1823), pp. i-xii.
[232] Vicesimus Knox, "On the art which has lately been heard with the name of pugilism", *Winter Evenings or Lubrications on Life and Letters*, Vol. 2 (London, 1788), p. 150.
[233] Vasey, *Remarks on the Influence of Pugilism on morals,* p. 9.
[234] Bilodeau sees in Barry's argument that boxing encourages idleness and is an exhibition of the "naked" body, a religious argument. But I do not agree with him that these are necessarily religious in character. Barry, *A Letter On the Practice of Boxing*, p. 30.

one source made extensive use of religious arguments against boxing – the pamphlet *Arguments upon Boxing or Pugilism Which will always be proper for perusal, so long as the brutal practice of boxing shall continue; but more especially applicable now*. The anonymous author of the pamphlet argued that violence was prohibited by both Mosaic and Christian law. Christians did not wage war with arms but through reasoning; "rational arguments" were the weapons of true Christians. He wrote that the issue of pugilism should not even be discussed in a Christian community as it was "so manifestly repugnant to the great outline of national morality and national policy." The author acknowledged that the religious argument did not play an important role within the debate on boxing.[235] Probably, as in the case of the debate on duelling, the religious argument was not prevalent because it was perceived as too weak to combat the practice.[236] Interestingly, some proponents of boxing, such as radical journalist William Cobbett, argued that the practice was in full accordance with Christian principles.[237]

The economic argument regarding the unproductivity of the sport was also seldom brought to bear in the litany against boxing. The conservative newspaper *The Times* raised the issue in one of its articles, claiming that boxing was not only "a scandalous waste of time" but also harmful to the economy:

> the most unprofitable method of circulating money – because it takes a number of industrious men from their labour – teaches them a profligate course of life, by the sums of money they receive on these occasions, which they generally squander away from their families, who in case of accident are thrown on the parish, and a burthen to the public – and at least, the bruises they receive, disables them for a time [from] pursuing any avocation useful to society.[238]

In another case *The Morning Herald* wrote that a prize-fight took place on a Saturday, "a day on which many working men hope to make amends for their idleness at the beginning of the week".[239] In contrast, the economic argument was raised by

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[235] Anon. *Arguments upon Boxing*, pp. 17-8, 20.
[236] Knox, for example, explains that he did not bring religion to bear on boxing because he knows that the boxing fraternity will not lend an ear to "religious conscience". Knox, "On the art which has lately been heard with the name of pugilism", p. 155. See also: Markku Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England: Civility, Politeness and Honour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 215.
[237] Both William Windham and William Cobbett, fervent proponents of boxing, were religious people. See: James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 204.
[238] *The Times*, 24 October 1789.
[239] *The Morning Herald*, 22 July 1805. *The Morning Herald,* an important public opinion maker, was a strong supporter of the Prince of Wales. Much of the newspaper's character was due to its editor, the reverend Bate, widely known as "the fighting parson", for his propensity to fight duels and fist-fights. The

proponents of the sport. According to one newspaper article the boxer Daniel Mendoza, having been brought before a judge who cautioned him not to fight again, argued that prize-fighting "was a great benefit to the neighbourhood in which the conflict took place, as it caused a great deal of money to be spent there; and affirmed, that wherever he had fought, more money was spent than he ever got by his victory."[240]

The arguments regarding law and order were certainly part of a middle class attempt to discipline the working class and eradicate behaviours that were seen as subversive to the social hierarchy, but this effort should also be seen in the wider context of a struggle to establish the manners and morals of politeness throughout all classes of society. From this civilising perspective, all proponents of boxing – from the aristocracy to the middle and working classes – were seen as promiscuous and vulgar. Boxing, its opponents argued, made the spectator brutal and insensible to human suffering, impeded human progress, degraded human nature, undermined the civilising process and vulgarised public spaces.

2.4. Liberty, manhood and national character: the pro-boxing arguments

Hugh Cunningham's *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution* has argued that the defence of boxing was based on "lauding the virtues of a way of life that was under threat", and that it was "a body of thinking which stressed the role that rural sports played in keeping society cohesive, loyal, patriotic, contented, with the lower orders linked by ties of patronage to the higher".[241] According to Gorn the ideological defence of boxing was based on traditional notions of honour, chivalry and courage, and on patriotism and the need to defend the country.[242] However, as will be shown, the defence of boxing was not only a traditional backward-looking outlook but also a cultural stance anchored in the classic ideology of civic humanism. It defended civil liberties and community forms of justice, it heralded boxing as a manly English sport that restricted the negative ebullitions of human nature and it promoted the practice as an imperative for the defence of the nation and the preservation of its liberty.

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paper printed regularly articles about boxing well into the 1810s. Aspinal, *Politics and the Press,* pp. 171-2, 271; Werkmeister, *The London Daily Press*, pp. 41-8, 62.

[240] *Public Advertiser*, 4 February 1790.

[241] Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 50.

[242] Gorn, *The Manly Art*, pp. 56-8.

One of the most influential defences of boxing appeared in a somewhat unlikely source. John Lawrence (1753–1839), a radical Whig and supporter of the French Revolution, born to a family of brewers, wrote books on various political and agricultural subjects and regularly published articles in the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *Sporting Magazine*. Best known for his work on animal welfare and his fervent advocacy of animal rights, his most famous book was *A Philosophical and Practical Treatise on Horses, and on the Moral Duties of Man Towards the Brute Creation* (1796-98). The book has a wealth of practical information on training horses and veterinarian advice, a section "On the right of beasts" (which calls for animal rights legislation) and a defence of boxing. While the treatise opposes the cruel practices of cock-fighting and bull-baiting, it passionately defends boxing as "the noble old English custom", which Lawrence finds "so strictly consonant with the rules of justice and morality, as to form one of the greatest glories of the country."[243]

Lawrence blames the decline of manly sports among the lower classes on prosecution by religious reformers: "those fanatical reformers, whose love of liberty far exceeded their comprehension of its real nature, metamorphosed the conciliating cheerfulness of our Church-of-England Sunday, into a horrid gloom, a Jewish Sabbath".[244] Only mercy or forgetfulness, he adds ironically, stopped them from enacting other Hebrew rituals, such as circumcision. He provides a list of reasons for encouraging manly sports such as boxing: they have salubrious effects on the body; they invigorate and strengthen it, are a good training for war and prepare men to defend their country. Boxing also inculcats moral values: "an English blackguard learns more humanity and good morals, in seeing a regular boxing match than it is probable he would, in hearing five dozen of sermons".[245] The rules and regulations of boxing, the umpires and seconds, the fairness of the sport and the fact that at the end of the fight the antagonists shake hands without anger is "so excellent a practical system of ethics, as no other country can boast, and has chiefly contributed to form the characteristic humanity of the English nation". Thus, the lower classes learn to become "valuable and peaceable citizens" at the same time that many people on the continent are killed by weapons every year. Lawrence

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[243] John Lawrence, *A Philosophical and Practical Treatise on Horses, and on the Moral Duties of Man Towards the Brute Creation* 2 Vols. (London: H.D. Symonds, 1796-98), vol. 2, p. 29.
[244] Ibid., p. 8.
[245] Ibid., pp. 9, 29.

concludes that boxing is the best form of exercise for men of all classes. Because it has such beneficial moral effects on the lower classes, it would be a mistake to allow "fanaticism, hypocrisy, or mistaken ideas of humanity" to stop it, and magistrates should refrain from infringing upon the "privileges of Englishmen". Pugilism, the argument continues, does not need encouragement as it is part and parcel of English nature, however at a time when trade and industry induce "habits of delicacy, the love of ease, and an inaptitude for defence", it is imperative to encourage the "martial spirit" in any form.[246]

Lawrence is somewhat atypical in that he endorses boxing while opposing other forms of popular sports, such as bull-baiting and cock-fighting. He notes that the proponents of popular sports will not comprehend his distinction between the various sports, while the proponents of the refinement camp will not understand why he supports sports which they perceive as immoral.[247] His treatise is thus significant in showing the perceived inherent value of boxing in contrast to other blood sports. Moreover, the work includes the most important elements in the defence of boxing: the rights of Englishmen and the liberty of the nation, boxing as a "system of ethics", and the argument that boxing contributed to shaping the manly national character at a time when effeminacy was threatening it. These arguments, in various forms and variations, reverberate throughout the defence of boxing.

The first line of defence for all proponents of boxing was rights and liberty. The concept of liberty, the cornerstone of civic humanistic tradition, encompassed both the civil liberties of the individual and the liberty of the country, and the two were seen as closely connected.[248] Boxing was defended on the basis of the right (and duty) of the individual to bear arms, which was a basic postulate of civic humanism. This right was seen as grounded in the constitution. According to the legal authority William Blackstone, one of the "liberties of Englishmen" was the "right of having and using arms for self-preservation and defence".[249] In the boxing debate this was translated into the

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[246] Ibid., pp. 30-1, 35.
[247] "I shall on the one hand be accused of attempting to split hairs, and of vainly labouring to introduce impracticable refinements; on the other, of endeavouring to establish principles of licence totally incompatible with certain revered ideas of morality". Ibid., p. 6.
[248] "universal liberty is the favourite child of nature ... all possible acts which do not involve absolute crime, are, and ought to be, left to the discretion of man." Ibid., p. 5.
[249] William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England: A Facsimile of the First Edition of 1765—1769,* 2 Vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), vol. 1, p. 140.

right to defend oneself and one's property with the help of natural weapons. Thus, boxing proponents portrayed it not as a breach of the law, but rather as part and parcel of the liberties of Englishmen. In the eighteenth century the idea of the rights of the freeborn Englishman was a central concept in politics and played an important role in the construction of the national identity.[250] This concept was not the sole preserve of any one political party but was rather, according to E. P. Thompson, a powerful language which could be used for patrician, radical or popular ends: "patriotism, nationalism, even bigotry and repression, were all clothed in the rhetoric of liberty…." The rights of Englishmen meant security of person and property, the right to a trial by jury, equality before the law and freedom from foreign rule, tyranny, and arbitrary arrest.[251] However, liberty was larger than all these individual rights taken together; it was part of the national character. At a time when the wars with France and Spain were defined as battles between freedom and tyranny, equality before the law distinguished Englishmen from their continental counterparts. This rhetoric of freedom with its strong nationalist and xenophobic overtones, that cast other countries as barbaric or enslaved, underlay the arguments of the proponents of boxing.

For its defenders, who made a logical connection between boxing, the national character, civil liberties and the nation's freedom from foreign rule, boxing not only ensured the civil liberties of every Englishman but also guaranteed the nation's liberty; only a free man possessing the ability and willingness to bear arms could defend his country from corruption, tyranny or foreign occupation.[252] As *The Sporting Magazine* explained, "the government that should attempt, with a despotic and severe authority, to contract the exertions of self-confidence, and a moderate exercise of just resentment, could only expect to rule over a nation of slaves."[253] Using the same argument as the defenders of duelling, proponents of boxing insisted that abolishing the practice could only be achieved through tyranny.[254] The prosecution of prize-fights was portrayed as the use of arbitrary (thus unconstitutional) authority and an attack against the rights of

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[250] Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York and London: Norton, 1998), pp. 5-10; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 84-6, 90-1.
[251] Ibid., 84.
[252] Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, pp. 48-50.
[253] *Sporting Magazine* 28 (1806), p. 263.
[254] Cf. Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England*, p. 15.

Englishmen. Many of the pro-boxing arguments were based on the consensus that Englishmen had the moral right to be protected from the arbitrary use of force:

> Liberty is the precious gift of Heaven, and ought not lightly to be invaded. Men have a right to take their own way in managing their own affairs. If they interfere not with their neighbours, be their mode of settling their own business such as we approve of or not, it is not for us to assume the power to prescribe to them what they are to do.[255]

It was not only the working class who resented any attempt at policing as an infringement upon their rights, whether in the form of a standing army or a police force. Tories and Whigs, conservatives and radicals alike, were united in this consensus. Public opinion perceived policing as foreign to the English character and incommensurable with the liberties of Englishmen.[256]

Similar to the arguments in defence of duelling, pro-boxing arguments were based on the idea that humans were by nature quarrelsome and that boxing (like the duel) was a way to contain violence.[257] It was, they argued, a moral code that regulated social behaviour and prevented bloodshed. Boxing was "so excellent a practical system of ethics, as no other country can boast" because it embodied justice and humanity as well as afforded a fair way of resolving conflict within bound rules.[258] Boxing subsumed the need for a court of law – the spectators were both judge and jury, and the defeated man knew he had had a fair trial.[259]

According to William Cobbett, boxing was the masculine and traditional English way of resolving quarrels: people would always disagree, and in spite of the law, the Bible and the courthouse, people would always try to settle their arguments and receive satisfaction for injury in private without recourse to the law. Violence was inherent to receiving satisfaction, and boxing was the least dangerous and the least offensive to Christianity. Because boxing used no weapons and no deceit, it depended wholly upon the strength of the antagonists. Moreover, it was a long ingrained British principle that when the fight ceased, so did the argument, thereby preventing further violence. The people committed to "the substance and not mere sound of humanity" would agree that

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[255] Egan, *Boxiana*, vol. 4, p. 562.
[256] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 87-9; Golby and Purdue, *Civilisation of the Crowd*, p. 65.
[257] Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England*, pp. 52-54, 169-70.
[258] Lawrence, *A Philosophical and Practical Treatise on Horses*, p. 30.
[259] Egan, *Boxiana*, vol. 1, p. 596.

abolishing boxing could only lead the common people to commit other outrageous acts such as cuttings and stabbings, which were frequent occurrences in other countries.[260] Owen Swift, too, commended the humanity and good sense of the rules of boxing, which protected participants from extreme brutality and saved lives. These rules insured the equality of the two sides and the fairness of the fight. There were no "secret assaults" or "unmanly advantages"; boxing inculcated "a feeling of forbearance, of humanity, and of self-government", thereby improving the character of its fans.[261]

As John Carter Wood and Paul Langford have noted, boxing represented a form of "community policing". Both point out the concept of fair and unfair fighting, which played an important role in the trial of men who killed their opponents in fights; lighter penalties were imposed on men who killed their opponents while fighting fair.[262] The boxing code of honour was not the sole preserve of the lower classes. The *Sporting Magazine*, for example, recommended teaching boxing "and the laws of honour by which it is regulated" in public schools and factories.[263] In another issue the magazine stated its fear that if boxing were banned from public schools, little boys would be told by their mothers that in case of affront they should go to their masters (i.e. snitch) instead of settling their quarrels fairly and honourably by fisticuffs. The author explained that fist fights taught boys "courage, magnanimity and forgiveness" and gave the youth of England "their nobleness and manliness of character".[264]

One of pugilism's strongest defences was that the practice was a national characteristic.[265] While people of other nations used knives, stilettos or swords, "John Bull manfully enters the lists and uses those weapons only *which nature has given him*, and with which indeed he seems gifted in a manner superior to all the world."[266] Boxing, agreed all its defenders, was truly English and of utmost importance for national honour: "the manly art of boxing has infused that true heroic courage, blended with humanity,

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[260] *Political Register* 8 (1805), cols. 195-7.
[261] Owen Swift, *The Hand-book to boxing being a complete instructor in the art of Self Defence and comprising – A defence of the art of Pugilism, History of ancient and modern boxing, Mode of training and seconding, including the duties of seconds, umpires, time-keepers, referees &c. With a complete chronology of the ring from the days of Fig and Broughton to November* (London, 1840), p. 6.
[262] Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth-Century England*, pp. 48-9; Langford, *Englishness Identified,* p. 153.
[263] *Sporting Magazine* 28 (1805), p. 263.
[264] *Sporting Magazine* 33 (1808), p. 65.
[265] Lawrence, *A Philosophical and Practical Treatise on Horses*, vol. 2, p. 30.
[266] *The Annals of Sporting and Fancy Gazette* 3 (1823), pp. 11-12.

into the heart of the Britons, which have made them so renowned, terrific, and triumphant, in all parts of the world".[267] As will be shown in the next chapters, its patriotic rhetoric gave pugilism legitimacy which was especially hard to rebut in times of war. Boxing was paraded as an antidote to the effeminising foreign (especially French) manners, in other words, politeness, which was seen as a danger to the nation. The sport was considered the embodiment of the characteristics of the English nation as a whole, and it was especially the mix of Englishness and manliness which made pugilism, in the view of its proponents, a very good preparatory tool for war. English defenders of boxing were not the only ones that perceived it to be a typical English sport; foreign visitors too felt that it explained the special character of the English and a boxing match was almost mandatory in foreign descriptions of England. Even the Frenchman Voltaire (1694-1778) acknowledged that English boxing "was a kind of honour not known in any other part of the world".[268] Boxing was thus seen as inherent to the manly national character, and pursuing pugilism, as one defender of boxing argued, would "eradicate that *foreign Effeminacy* which has so fatally insinuated itself among us, and almost destroyed that glorious spirit of British championism, which was wont to be at once the Terror and Disgrace of our enemies."[269]

Indeed, the threat of effeminacy was the most recurring argument in defence of boxing. With effeminacy a central concern in Georgian England, many defenders of boxing could identify with Pierce Egan's opinion that "the practice of boxing through the means of the prize-ring is one of the corner stones towards preventing effeminacy from undermining the good old character of the people of England".[270] Proponents of boxing were weary of the effeminising effect of polite culture and warned of the dangers it presented to the masculinity of individuals and to the virility of the nation. Lawrence, for example, cautioned that "[i]n countries where commerce and manufacture universally prevail, habits of delicacy, the love of ease, and an inaptitude for defence, will invariably be induced with length of time; amongst such people it must be madness to check the principle of a martial spirit under whatever form".[271] Britain, so the argument went, was corrupted by commerce and effeminising French influence and the way to return to its

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[267] Egan, *Boxiana*, vol. 1, p. 424.
[268] Quoted in: Langford, *Englishness Identified,* p. 149.
[269] Quoted in: Johnson, "'British Championism'", p. 331.
[270] Egan, *Sporting Anecdotes*, p. vi.
[271] Lawrence, *A Philosophical and Practical Treatise on Horses*, vol. 2, p. 35.

former glory and keep up the fighting spirit of the nation was Boxing. A good example for an article extolling the effectiveness of boxing in countering the negative effects of French manners is an article published in the *Gazetteer*. It contrasted the refined, effeminate and foreign food which had become fashionable in certain circles, with the diet of boxers, who ate nearly raw beef in preparation for fights (beef being the typical English food – plain but wholesome and manly with the ability to improve strength and stamina).[272] The article explained that training men to box would give them the "exercise and strength" that would "animate them in danger" and prove invaluable in times of war. It celebrated the fact that in such degenerate days young people were returning to those activities "by which the national character [would] be preserved in all its masculine properties". Boxing would restore "the muscular character of the British people", and every prize fight, was "an accession of national strength" which would give "an infusion of new blood to the constitutional economy of England."[273] The *Sporting Magazine*, too, called for the end of the "effeminate cant about maintaining order and decorum, by the suppression of the public exhibition of manly exercises."[274] The magazine declared that it was to boxing that the Englishman owed his superiority over foreigners in the martial qualities of strength, courage and dexterity:

> to what other causes can England more reasonably impute her proud pre-eminence among nations which she now enjoys which she will ever maintain till this spirit is tamed into servility, under the pretence of applying salutary restrictions to the licentiousness of the people.[275]

Thus, the proponents of boxing argued that it was a moral code, a form of community justice and that it embodied all the qualities which made the English what they were. The attack on the sport, they argued, was stark hypocrisy and an infringement on the rights of free Englishmen. The eradication of boxing would have catastrophic

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[272] The *Gazetteer* asks "Do the advocates against this practice know, that previous to each battle the combatants go into a course of feeding, and that they bring themselves by habit to eat their meat almost raw, and that by this course their vigour and wind are so improved as to make it impossible for any common habit of body to stand against them? In the present days of ragouts and byson tea, when we are ashamed to eat like men, when instead of ducks we must have ducklings, and turcky poults [sic] instead of Turkies, when every thing is frittered down and served up in little, and that the race is diminishing with the food – is it not something that the young man of fashion are recurring to a course, by which the national character will be preserved in all its masculine properties." *Gazetteer*, 22 Dec 1787. For more on English culinary chauvinism see: Ben Rogers, *Beef and Liberty: Roast Beef, John Bull and the English Nation* (London: Vinatge, 2004).
[273] Notice the synonymous use of Britishness and Englishness. *Gazetteer*, 22 Dec 1787.
[274] *Sporting Magazine* 33 (1808), p. 65.
[275] Ibid.

effects, they argued, on national defence and on the national character, and would lead to the loss of liberty.

In conclusion, the heated debate for and against boxing reflected various divisions within Georgian society. Boxing represented a cultural style which was diametrically opposed to politeness and sensibility. Whereas politeness focused on manners and conversation; pugilism concentrated on action. The sensibility culture with its female role models was accommodating, refined, sensitive, heterosocial and decidedly feminine; the boxing culture, with its emphasis on everything martial, hard and tough, was masculinist, homosocial and misogynistic. Politeness was "French" and foreign; boxing was "English". Polite culture was grounded in the idea of "consciousness of form, a concern with the manner in which actions were performed" and "social artifice".[276] The proponents of boxing prided themselves in having no artifice, no weapons, and no contraptions; boxing, they argued, represented authenticity. The debate between opponents and proponents of boxing was dialectical. Opponents of boxing argued it was illegal; proponents argued that it was indispensible for safeguarding the liberty of the nation and that any attempt to curtail it was an act of tyranny. Anti-boxing commentators argued for the sole authority of the state regarding violence; proponents argued for personal freedom and the right to self-defence. Opponents of the sport decried its immorality; proponents celebrated its "system of ethics". When the anti-boxing faction argued that boxing was a threat to the social order, their antagonists insisted that politeness was a threat to the gender order and the masculinity of the nation's male citizens.

Above all the debate mirrored one of the central controversies of eighteenth-century England – the conflict between politeness and civic humanism. Opponents of boxing, based on the recent enlightenment ideal of progress and guided by a positive view of human nature, believed in the perfection of mankind and attempted to improve English habits (especially those of men), refine English tastes and import superior French manners. They argued that man was inherently peaceful, and if only such activities as boxing would be stopped, strife would cease. Offended by the sport's sweaty, corporeal, bloody aspects, they were appalled by the vulgar, brutal and immoral cross-class culture

[276] Klein, "Liberty, Manners and Politeness", p. 874.

of which boxing was a part. The defence of boxing was based on civic humanism, a masculinist and patrician tradition. The defenders of boxing had more negative views on human nature, adopting the motto *Humo humini lupus*, i.e. man is a wolf to man. Violence, they argued, was an inevitable aspect of human nature; boxing afforded a regulation of violence and ultimately prevented bloodshed. Vigorously defending a man's right to protect himself and his duty to defend his country, they were alarmed by the effeminising effects of commerce on society and the spread of what they considered a sterile, frigid, effeminate culture. They saw the attack on boxing as the hypocritical cant of religious fanatics and self-righteous reformers, who were influenced by foreign manners incompatible with the "true" English spirit. Sincerity and taciturnity were the hallmarks of a true Englishman, they argued, and eating beefsteak and drinking beer were his customs, not conversing with women, wearing effeminate finery, eating tiny pieces of poultry and drinking wine. Opponents of politeness and refinement feared the effects this movement would have on men as individuals and the nation in general. The debate on pugilism, therefore, was central to the affirmation of a militaristic form of English manliness while simultaneously denouncing a perceived national trend toward effeminacy and everything feminine. This strong emphasis on effeminacy elevated gender standards to one of the most significant issues of the debate on boxing. As will be shown in the next chapter, one of the important differences between the two cultures was contrasting ideals of manliness.

Chapter Three

"Since boxing is a manly game": the Rise of a Masculine Ideal

Come move the song, and stir the glass,
For why should we be sad;
Let's drink to some free-hearted lass,
And Cribb, the boxing lad,
And a boxing we will go, will go, will go

Italians stab their friends behind,
In darkest shades of night;
But Britons they are bold and kind,
And box their friends by light.

The sons of France their pistols use,
Pop, pop and they have done:
But Britons with their hands will bruise,
And scorn away to run.

Throw pistols, poniards, swords, aside,
And all such deadly tools;
Let boxing be the Briton's pride,
The science of their schools!

Since boxing is a manly game
And Britons' recreation
By boxing we will raise our fame;
'Bove any other nation.

Mendoza, Gulley, Molineaux,
Each Nature's weapon wield;
Who each at Boney would stand true,
And never to him yield.

We've many more would like to floor
The little upstart king;
And soon for mercy make him roar
Within a spacious ring.

A fig for Boney – let's have done
With that ungracious name;
We'll drink and pass our days in fun,
And box to raise our fame.

A Boxing We Will Go is a song that circulated throughout England during the Peninsular War (1807-14), when British troops were desperately battling Napoleon's forces on the Iberian Peninsula.[277] The chauvinistic manliness highlighted in this popular song encompasses characteristics as far-ranging as heterosexuality and virility (toasting a "free-hearted lass"), honesty and fairness (fighting fairly and without weapons), courage tempered by magnanimity towards the enemy ("bold and kind") and bottom (the ability to withstand hardships without yielding to the enemy). Boxing embodied, as illustrated in this song, a certain manly ideal that became increasingly important in the late eighteenth century. This chapter describes the main characteristics of this ideal and how it was shaped and promulgated by the boxing debate of late Georgian England.

[277] Source unknown. Song published in: *Sporting Magazine* 38 (1811), p. 294.

One of the main themes in the boxing debate was the issue of masculinity.[278] Each side argued its point by drawing on diametrically opposed concepts of manliness: the anti-boxing camp proposed the ideal of the polite man, or the 'man of feeling', while the pro-boxing camp invoked the classical masculinist ideal epitomized by the boxer.[279] Proponents of boxing denigrated the effeminate 'man of feeling' while glorifying the male body and the manly traits attributed to the masculinist ideal: physical beauty, strength, virility, honour, courage, honesty, and independence. Although in the first half of the eighteenth century the 'man of feeling' was the norm, by the later decades of the century this ideal was rejected in favour of the masculinist model embodied in boxing.[280]

The historiography has suggested that the masculinist ideal reinforced social distinctions of gender, class and race during an increasingly tense social and political situation.[281] This chapter traces the way the boxing debate and the masculine ideal it promulgated encouraged the development of a militaristic nationalistic consciousness that confirmed the gender hierarchy. However, as will be shown in the following chapters, this manly ideal was not only one which promoted the interests of the white upper classes; it could also be utilised to claim political power for working-class men and it was the basis on which minority men were tentatively included into the body politic. This ideal served different functions for different social groups; and though it was exclusionary it could also be potentially inclusionary.

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[278] On masculinity in eighteenth century Britain see: Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen eds., *English Masculinities 1660-1800* (Longman, London and New York, 1999); Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus eds., *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England. Roles, Representations and Responsibilities* (London: Longman, 1997); Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres* (London and New York: Longman, 1998); Michael Roper and John Tosh eds., *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991); Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003); Karen Harvey and Alexandra Shepard, "What have historians done with Masculinity? Reflections on five centuries of British history circa 1500-1950", in: *Journal of British History* 44 (2005), pp. 274-280.

[279] The term 'masculinist' as defined by Wilson refers to "values and practices which are meant to uphold 'masculine' authority, attributes or hierarchy – it is unrelated to the question of women's presence or absence or to their contribution to its construction". Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race. Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 220 n. 32. In contrast to the 'man of feeling' the masculinist ideal does not have a name in the historiography yet and, as Kathleen Wilson argues, "its main characteristics… have yet to be entirely effaced". Kathleen Wilson, "Nelson and the people: manliness, patriotism and body politics", in: *Admiral Lord Nelson: context and legacy* ed. David Cannadine (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 50.

[280] Michèle Cohen, "'Manners' Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1750-1830", in: *Journal of British Studies* 44 (2005), pp. 312-3.

[281] This is the argument of numerous works, see for example: Kathleen Wilson, "Empire, Gender and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century", in: *Gender and Empire* ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 14-45; Mrinalini Sinha, *"Giving Masculinity a History: Some Contributions from the Historiography of Colonial India"*, *Gender & History* 11.3 (1999), pp. 445-60.

3.1. On the manliness or unmanliness of shedding tears: the polite ideal and its discontents

The anti-boxing faction attempted to undermine the manly ideal underlying boxing and to promote an alternative, polite, ideal. A case in point was the description of Milo, a gentleman pugilist, in the pro-duel but anti-boxing pamphlet *The bruiser or an inquiry into the pretensions of modern manhood*:

> Milo discovered an early aversion to Literature and Politeness; and from the Time he became Master of his Actions, consorted with the lowest Company; contracting thereby an habitual Love of their Exercises and Amusements, for a Preeminance in which an Athletic Body qualified him… Milo Boxes, Cudgels, Fox-hunts, Rides races, Drives, Rows or Punts, drinks and Smokes. When compell'd as a legislator to be in *London,* he frequents the Amphitheatrical exhibitions, Hunts, Drinks Riots and engages with Hackney-Coachmen and Watchmen. Milo knows nothing of the Constitution of his own, or of the History of other nations; but he understands a Horse or a Dog as well as any Jockey or Huntsman in the Country. He despises genteel exercises, and can neither Ride, Fence or Dance; but then he can Stick, Box and Play at Cricket. Milo… gives and receives ill language, warms, quits his Equipage strips and fights… [Milo] drives home in his shirt, chequered with dirt and blood, pursued by the acclamation of the mob. Another time Milo chanced to mix with a company of men of fashion and honour. He presently conceived an antipathy against a well-dressed Gentleman, whom he did not know. Emboldened by Liquor (of which he always secures a Benjamin portion) he commenced a volunteer inopportunate quarrel, reproached him with effeminacy, and dealt a blow. The person so injured proved to be a man of known spirit. He retreated to his sword, bared and pointed it at his gigantic insulter, minding him of his defence. Milo falls into a panic, applies to the company for protection, pleads his ignorance of the use of a Weapon that every gentleman carries about him, and exclaims on the cowardice of drawing on a naked man. His antagonist having given him some correction with his Flat, retired. Recovered from his Freight, Milo enquired who his opponent was; and received information: He then left the Company, declaring with an Oath, 'that the first Time he met that Frenchified Pygmy *without his Toledo*, he would beat him within an Inch of his Life.'…[282]

The pamphlet presents two distinct and contrasting models of masculinity: Milo, the gentleman pugilist; and his implied counterpart, the refined and polite gentleman. Milo keeps low company (e.g. coachmen, watchmen and 'the mob'), shares their *low exercises* (boxing, cudgels, etc.) and *amusements* (drinking, smoking and rioting). He is ignorant, lacks cultivation, and does not care for the constitution (this is a hint at the argument that boxing is a defence of Englishmen's rights and the ancient constitution). He has an athletic body but is undignified and acts in a manner unfit for a man of his status: drinks

[282] Anon., *A Hint on Dueling*, pp. 38-40.

excessively, swears, undresses in public and fights with lower class men. He accuses polite gentlemen of being effeminate and frenchified. Although this is a negative description of the pugilistic gentleman, it does evince some of the characteristics of the corporeal masculinist ideal: a chauvinistic, militaristic, pugnacious homosocial male disdainful of finery, refinement and effeminacy. The polite man is its exact opposite.

According to Carter, sociability was the mainstay of the polite man.[283] He could easily engage in polite conversation and was compassionate, sensitive and moderate. He spent his time in refined, heterosocial settings (e.g. coffee-houses, promenades or parks), drinking tea instead of alcohol. He was a connoisseur of *literature and politeness*, and had mastered various genteel accomplishments. On the whole, the polite man rejected the traditional masculine attributes of violence and roughness, adopting instead the qualities of benevolence, compassion and domesticity.[284] Polite authors emphasized feeling and the verbal expression of emotions, and some even encouraged displays of emotion through physical signs such as sighs and tears.[285] Vicesimus Knox argued that "hardness of heart, and insensibility of temper, conceal themselves under the appellation of manly fortitude." Real men, according to Knox, were not stoic but empathetic, compassionate and sensitive; crying was the true sign of their tender feelings and their sympathy.[286] In his essay *On the Manliness of shedding tears*, he went so far as to claim that a man who did not weep from time to time was unnatural and deficient. Other polite commentators concurred; the essayist Peter Shaw argued similarly that "it may be questioned… whether those are properly men, who never weep upon any occasion."[287]

The world of sensibility was uncomfortable with the manly body. Theories of politeness did not, as a whole, pay much attention to the form of the masculine body, and if they did, they associated refinement with a delicate, soft and slender body, which

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[283] This summary highlights only a few characteristic, for a fuller picture of the polite ideal see: Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800*; id., "Polite 'Persons': Character, Biography and the Gentleman"; Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*; Cohen *Fashioning Masculinity*.

[284] Interestingly, the author of *The Bruiser,* like a few other polite commentators, perceived duelling as an acceptable means of defending a man's honour; however many, if not most, found it objectionable. Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, p. 71; For a discussion of duelling and politeness see: Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England*, pp. 201-44.

[285] Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, pp. 72-3; Carter, 'An 'effeminate' or 'efficient' nation?', pp. 439-40; Barker-Benfield, "Sensibility", pp. 105-10.

[286] Knox, "On the inconsistency of affected sensibility", in: *Winter Evenings*, p. 158. According to Knox, a series of vices, such as gaming and corrupt society contravened nature, dried up the tear glands and scorched the fibres (which conveyed emotions); thus a man who does not cry is a man incapable of feeling emotions. Knox, "On the Manliness of Shedding Tears", p. 274.

[287] Quoted in: Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, p. 107.

enabled the better communication of feelings.[288] Delicacy, both as a bodily and a mental characteristic, became, as Carter points out, one of the important features of the polite man, and one of the most vulnerable points when it came to establishing his manliness because it was traditionally associated with effeminacy. The precariousness of this bodily image can be seen, for example, in the lack of sexuality in the construct of the 'man of feeling' and the fear of impotency, which was a recurring theme in the culture of sensibility. [289]

Some opponents of boxing argued that the masculinist ideal which was becoming increasingly popular was not suitable in modern times and civilised societies. One opponent of boxing argued that "Cudgelling, Driving, Hunting, Cricketing, Drinking, Slovenliness", were all part of what he called *modern manhood*, but all the other vices were "but appendixes" to "the principle head of this Hydra", which was boxing.[290] He attempted to present boxing as an antiquated practice and its manly ideal as outdated and incompatible with civilised times and manners. The pamphlet explained that in the past boxing was valuable because being a man consisted of being strong and robust; since only strong men could prove their courage, it was falsely concluded that strong men were heroes and weak men were cowards. When combat was a one-on-one affair, boxers were heroes because sports strengthened the body while preparing men for war. However, in modern times and civilized countries, they were superfluous and dangerous.[291]

Other polite commentators attempted to undermine the central characteristics of the manly ideal of boxing. Almost every pamphlet attacking the sport took up the discussion of the meaning of courage, a central characteristic of the boxing ideology. The argument of the anti-boxing faction was not that courage was not a necessary characteristic; rather an attempt was made to redefine the term.[292] An anonymous letter in the *Public Advertiser* argued that boxing elicited "cruelty and barbarity of disposition in the hearts

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[288] Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, pp. 105-6; Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, pp. 340-4.
[289] According to Susan Korba Sir Charles Grandison, the hero of Samuel Richardson, was a virgin and proud of the fact. Susan Korba, "Clarissa's "Man of Violence" and Grandison's "Truly Good Man": Masculine Homogeneity in Richardson", in: *The Image of Manhood in Early Modern Literature*, ed. Andrew P. Williams (Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood, 1999), pp. 161-84.
[290] Pugilism is again seen not as an isolated practice or just as an illegal activity, but as the main symptom of a dangerous culture. Anon., *A Hint on Duelling*, p. 32.
[291] *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 30-31.
[292] Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society*, pp. 71-2, 108-10.

of our countrymen, which must ever be incompatible with true bravery."[293] Similar discussions about true and false courage can be found in almost every anti-boxing pamphlet. Edward Barry's attempt to undermine the manliness of boxing relied on the (re)definition of courage. He explained that courage was a power which came in times of danger, "when exercised in a good cause, it is a virtue; but ceases to be noble, when employed in a bad one."[294] Boxers fought without provocation and risked their lives for no reason, and thus were not truly courageous. Interestingly, boxing opponents never attempted to negate the assumption that courage, fairness and strength were the basic characteristics of the ideal man, nor did they try to undermine the basic association of men with certain classical martial values.[295]

A concerted attack was launched against the idea that the boxer's body represented the ideal body. The anti-boxing faction depicted the boxer's body as vulgar, bestial, uncontrolled and disfigured: "writhing in agony, disfigured by bruises, and weltering in blood…"[296] This is especially visible in a caricature by well-known caricaturist Thomas Rowlandson (1757-1827).[297]

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[293] *Public Advertiser*, 10 January 1788.
[294] Barry, *A Letter On the Practice of Boxing*, pp. 22-4.
[295] Julia Banister has similarly shown how polite authors were struggling in vain against the connection of manliness with militarism. Julia Banister, "The Court Martial of Admiral John Byng: Politeness and the Military Man in the mid-eighteenth Century", in: *Masculinity and the Other: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Heather Ellis and Jessica Meyer (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 236-60.
[296] *Sporting Magazine* 33 (1808), p. 63.
[297] Thomas Rowlandson (1757-1827), artists and caricaturist, was a son of a merchant, who had studied at the Royal Academy, but concentrated on caricatures in order to pay his gambling debts. Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, pp. 602-3.



Figure 1: Thomas Rowlandson, *A Prize Fight*, ca. 1785-90.

The image vividly renders boxing as a brutal sport and boxers, as one opponent put it, "the worst men from the lowest ranks of society. Their depraved passions… calculated for the transaction of every thing base".[298] Rowlandson's caricature of boxing clearly reflected the crude force, the brutishness and the savageness of both boxers and crowd.

However, the promoters of the 'man of feeling' were fighting a downhill battle; by the end of the eighteenth century the masculinist ideal had already gained the upper hand. During the second half of the eighteenth century politeness was increasingly seen as effeminate and foreign, unsuitable for a nation at war and incommensurable with the manly national character.[299] From the 1750s onwards there was intense anxiety about the erosion of gender boundaries, and growing fears of the effeminacy of the nation. There were debates about the adverse, effeminising effects of polite society on the military forces. It was argued that luxury and effeminacy have brought on a general change in manners and a blurring of gender differences; that an effeminate nation was unable to defend itself as it has lost its manly martial qualities, such as courage and honour, and is

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[298] Vasey, *Remarks on the influence of Pugilism on morals*, p. 12.

[299] According to Michèle Cohen, there was a basic tension between politeness and masculinity. "If 'natural' manliness was, as variously noted throughout the century, rough, brutal, ungracious or rude, in fashioning themselves as polite, men became softer and more refined, but not necessarily more manly." Even promoters of sensibility warned constantly against it's danger of effeminacy. Michèle Cohen, "'Manners' Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1750-1830", in: *Journal of British Studies* 44.2 (2005), pp. 312-29; id., "Manliness, effeminacy and the French", pp. 57-8; Barker-Benfield, *The Cult of Sensibility*, pp. 104-41. See also: John Tosh, "Gentlemanly Politeness and Manly Simplicity in Victorian England", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12.6 (2002), pp. 455-72. Clery, *The Feminization Debate*, pp. 171-73.

doomed to decline.[300] The best known of these observations on the relations of effeminacy and the general decline of the nation was John Brown's *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (1757-8), which was published in seven editions in one year. For Brown, England's weakness (visible in military losses), was a result of the disastrous effects of effeminacy on the national character. This effeminacy (evident in men participating in effeminate diversions, such as tea-drinking) resulted in the enervation of the army, and the general weakening of the population, it led to impotency and would ultimately result in the loss of liberty.[301] At this point in time a new manly ideal rose, one which was masculinist, militaristic and which was embodied in boxing.

3.2. The boxer as a manly ideal

The boxing debate helped shape and promulgate a contrasting manly ideal, which became increasingly important in the late eighteenth century. This new ideal, suggests George Mosse's *The Image of Man*, emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century and remained dominant until well into the twentieth century.[302] Derived from aristocratic notions of manliness, such as honour, chivalry and courage, it was reshaped by new values, such as order, restraint and harmony. The main difference between modern masculinity and its predecessors was the emphasis on the body.[303] As the body became the chief signifier of manliness and its symbolic importance grew, much attention was given to defining and shaping it. A major shaper of this new ideal was Johann Joachim

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[300] Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, pp. 185-205; Clery, *The Feminization Debate*, pp. 171-173; Banister, "The Court Martial of Admiral John Byng", pp. 236-60.

[301] Carter "Masculinity and eighteenth-century social documentary", p. 433.

[302] Mosse gives a few English examples, but concentrates on the German middle class after 1880. It still provides the clearest outline for the emergence of this ideal. Mosse, *The Image of Man*, pp. 17-55.

[303] The rise of the manly ideal with its emphasis on the body coincided with a long term shift in the view of human bodily differences. The shift, described by Thomas Laqueur, from the one-sex to the two-sex body model, precipitated differentiation between men on the one hand and women and effeminate men on the other. Until the beginning of the eighteenth century the ruling theory concerning sex was the one body theory, based on the idea that men and women had the same body, with the balance of fluid determining the gender. In this continuum between men and women, men could "degenerate" into effeminacy, and women could achieve manly qualities. In the eighteenth century sex was increasingly seen in dual terms: men and women were opposites, having two radically different bodies. This new construction changed the general perception of femininity and masculinity. Deviations from gender norms, such as cross-dressing, became increasingly unacceptable. "Natural" physical differences between the sexes were emphasized, and women were portrayed as inherently weaker, both physically and mentally, their weakness, emotionality and maternity was emphasized. Men's masculinity was more closely connected with physical force. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 194–207; Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*: *Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 5-44.

Winckelmann (1717–68), antiquarian and art historian, who systemised and popularised new standards of beauty based on Greek art and the Greek ideal of beauty. The beautiful body, as defined by neoclassical ideals and exemplified by Greek sculpture, combined strength and power with harmony, symmetry and control. Most of Winckelmann's models were athletes: tall, muscular, strong, and virile.[304] Through this revived Greek glorification of the male body, joined with Enlightenment ideas about the connection of body and soul and the "science" of Physiognomy (based on the idea that outward appearance reflected inner characteristics) the male body became an expression of a man's character and an outward symbol of moral value. Ugliness was believed to reflect moral degeneracy and disease, and beauty was equated with virtue.[305]

Thus, by the end of the eighteenth century, the new masculine ideal was imbued with both moral value and a clear aesthetic standard that required constant training and strengthening of the male body, and sports came to play a central role in shaping it.[306] Sport and gymnastics (on the continent) were purported to restrain passions and build character as well as to prevent degeneracy and mental illness. Engaging in sport was also seen as ideal training for war, eventually becoming a patriotic duty. Boxing was recommended to male readers in the Georgian period as health-inducing and inculcating manly characteristics.[307] *The Gazetteer*, for example, explained that boxing "advance[s] muscular strength – it invigorate[s] the animal and improve[s] the species." According to the newspaper, both boxers and spectators benefited from the sport: "Every man who sees a battle, and observes the influence of invigorating aliment, rationally pursues a course of exercise, and returns to the simple and unadulterated diet of an Englishman."[308]

The boxer, in contrast to the 'man of feeling', symbolized a very corporeal form of masculinity. As Bilodeau has pointed out, boxers performed with their upper body naked,

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[304] Within the general Greek ideal of beauty there were different types: the Achilles type, trim, tall and lithe, or the Herculean type – muscular, strong, and square – to which boxers belonged.
[305] Mosse, *The Image of Man*, ch. 2.
[306] There were certain similarities between boxing and German gymnastics, such as their nationalistic and militaristic fervour, the fact that both were homosocial areas, and reproduced a certain masculinist ideal. In both cases sport became a site for the construction of the prescribed body, skills and character. However, there were important differences between the two models which were significant (for example, gymnastics was a middle class reform movement with anti-aristocratic overtones). Mosse, *The Image of Man*, pp. 19-24, 40-7. Eisenberg, *English Sports" und Deutsche Bürger*, *passim*; Gertrud Pfister, "Cultural Confrontations: German Turnen, Swedish Gymnastics and English Sport--European Diversity in physical Activities from a Historical perspective", *Culture, Sport, Society* 6 (2003), pp. 61-91.
[307] Carter, "An 'effeminate' or 'efficient' nation?", p. 437.
[308] *The Gazeteer*, 22 December 1787.

thereby giving spectators a chance to admire it and artists and authors an opportunity to extol its masculine beauty.[309] At a time marked by neoclassicism and a return to classical ideals of beauty, the body of the boxer Donnelly was, according to Pierce Egan, so "fine a picture of the human frame" that "if Flaxman [John Flaxman (1755-1826) the English Neo-classical sculptor] had wished to have selected a living model…a finer subject than Donnelly could not have been found."[310] Boxing literature is replete with unabashed admiration for the masculine beauty and manly character of boxers:

> a fine athletic form, strength, wind and agility, … with the most manly courage and sublime feeling; and if ever greatness of soul raised the character of man, or humanity alone resplendent in the breast of a human being – a purer claim to those inestimable qualities were never witnessed, than that of Henry Pearce.[311]

The boxer's body was considered a healthy body.[312] Proponents of the sport explained that because it was an "athletic and masculine game", boxing strengthened the body, "it advance[d] muscular strength – it invigorate[d] the animal and improve[d] the species". The sport developed stamina, it "tend[ed] to brace the nerves, and to assist muscular motion".[313]

In contrast to the polite man, boxers were celebrated for their virility and implicit heterosexuality. The boxer Buckhorse "was distinguished for his numerous amours with the *gay nymphs* of the town, *more* by the potency of his arm than the *persuasive* power of his rhetoric…."[314] The sexual innuendo of the quote is not accidental. It was hinted, and often explicitly stated, that boxers were very potent. Portraits of boxers showed them in their tight-fitting pants which outlined and emphasized their sexual organ. Boxers were believed to be very fertile. One article commended boxing for its affect on reproduction, explaining that because only "strong active individuals, sound in wind and limb" could box, they would "stimulate to the having a robust and healthy offspring" and mend the

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[309] Gorn, *The Manly Art*, p. 142; Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, p. 84.
[310] Egan, *Boxiana*, vol. 3, p. 84.
[311] Marcia Pointon, "Pugilism, Painters and National Identity", p. 36.
[312] According to Heiny, apart from the healthy benefits of the sport itself, boxing (and other sports), were connected with the health inducing countryside in contrast to the cities, which were crowded, polluted and filthy. Heiny, *Boxing in British Sporting Art*, pp. 27-8.
[313] *The Times,* 16 January 1788.
[314] Egan, *Boxiana,* vol 1, p. 36.

dissipated "*breed* of several of our *nobility* and *gentry*", hinting at the effeminising effects of politeness on the upper classes.[315]

The perfection of the boxer's body was a sign of his moral qualities. The masculine ideal epitomized by the boxer was based on civic humanistic values. It incorporated martial virtues such as courage, honour and bottom (the ability to sustain pain), but also included magnanimity towards the enemy and morally uprightness – the boxer always played fair. In effect, he embodied the mainstays of the national character. In the words of Pierce Egan:

> …prize-fighting practically teaches men to admire true courage; to applaud generosity; to acquire notions of honour; nobleness of disposition; and greatness of mind…likewise [it] is a stimulus to love of the country; and these maxims are not only thorough-bred English ones from top to toe, but they are felt and acknowledged by the mass of the people: and the name of a BRITON makes a man feel proud that he belongs to such a nation.[316]

The ideal man was both born and made. He needed to have such inborn requisites as courage and magnanimity, but also to acquire such characteristics as skill and stamina. Tom Johnson, a famous boxer, was praised by Egan thus:

> NATURE has given him a form almost of Herculean strength, which rendered him either capable of resisting with ease, or in attacking with the utmost impetuosity; and he had improved these natural qualifications by a most minute attention to ART. His courage was of the finest order, well versed in science, and possessed of native coolness of disposition, that infused into his composition a superior degree of firmness over most of his competitors; and, added to these great capabilities, JOHNSON had learned to subdue his passions…[317]

This passage also highlights another characteristic of utmost importance – the stoic value of self-control and self-restraint. The control of emotions was an important part of the rhetoric of boxing, and newspapers often commended boxers for temperate and cool conduct.[318]

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[315] *The Times*, 16 January 1788. In very similar words John Lawrence argued that manly sports such as boxing "conduce materially to the procreation of a vigorous and healthy offspring…". Lawrence *A Philosophical and Practical Treatise on Horses*, vol. 2, p. 29.
[316] Egan, *Boxiana,* vol. 3, p. 4
[317] *Ibid*., vol. 1, p. 90.
[318] Self-restraint was important not only because it was one of the hallmarks of manliness, but also because it was an important factor in a boxer's success in the ring. Gorn, *The Manly Art*, p. 58; Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric,* p. 102; Carter, "An 'effeminate' or 'efficient' nation?", p. 437. See also the concept of "controlled decontrolling of emotions" in: Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning*, Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

Honour, which was an important part of aristocratic manliness, was also central to the manly ideal. However, its meaning changed dramatically from the external, aristocratic honour of lineage to the internal honour of virtue that was constantly subjected to tests of manliness and character.[319] Implicit to the honour code of boxing was the idea of the fair fight: boxing used no external aids or weapons, it was performed openly and in public, between opponents of similar weight. In short, it was "conducted on the principles of honour and equity, a contest of courage, strength, and dexterity, where every thing like an unfair and ungenerous advantage is proscribed and abhorred".[320]

Another important characteristic of the manly ideal was independence and self-reliance. Paradoxically, although boxers were dependant on patronage, they symbolised in Elliott Gorn's words "independence through physical prowess".[321] In boxing, a contemporary explained:

> Man is taught to look his equals, nay, his superiors, boldly in the face. Though he is not inclined to attack others, he knows he is able to defend himself, a reflection which must be ever pleasing to an independent mind. No size, no weight of body, will make any courageous person, skilled in Pugilism submit to bade indignities.[322]

Similar qualities were attributed to famous boxer John Jackson (1769-1845): "Servility is not known to him. Flattery he detests. Integrity, impartiality, good-nature, and manliness are the corner-stones of his understanding".[323] Jackson was sincere, unbiased and friendly, but above all, the description emphasised Jackson's honesty and independence (an important concept which will be discussed in chapter four).[324]

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[319] Frank Stewart and George Mosse have shown that in the eighteenth century duels became a test of character and manliness rather than a defence of family honour or evidence for the judgment of God, as before. Frank Henderson Stewart, *Honour* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 11-18, 32-47; Mosse, *The Image of Man*, pp. 19-22. See also: Robert B. Shoemaker, "Male Honour and the decline of public violence in eighteenth-century London", *Social History* 26.2 (2001), 190-207; id., "Taming of the Duel: Masculinity, Honour, and Ritual Violence in London, 1660–1800" *Historical Journal* 45.3 (2002), pp. 525–45; Ute Frevert, "Bürgerlichkeit und Ehre: Zur Geschichte des Duells in England und Deutschland", in: *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert: Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich*, ed. Jürgen Kocka (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1988), pp. 101-140.

[320] *Sporting Magazine* 33 (1808), p. 65.

[321] Gorn, *The Manly Art*, p. 142.

[322] Anon. *The Art of Boxing, or Science of Manual Defense, Clearly Displayed on Rational Principles, Whereby Every Person may easily make themselves Masters of that Manly Acquirement, So as to ensure Success both in Attack & Defence. To which is Added, Memoirs and Delineations of the Most Celebrated Pugilists, And an Account of some of their Principal Battles* (London, 1815), p. 9

[323] Pierce Egan, *Life in London ;or, The Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, Esq. and his elegant friend Corinthian Tom, accompanied by Bob Logic, The Oxonian, in their Rambles and Sprees through the Metropolis* (London: Sherwood, Neely, & Jones, 1821).

[324] The concept of independence and its political implications will be examined at length in the next chapter.

Even though their character might have been less than stellar, boxers were greatly admired for their courage and especially their bottom, their ability to withstand pain and overcome adversity. If manliness had always to be proven in struggle against adversity, as gender historian John Tosh has argued, what better test than that of a fist-fight?[325] William Cobbett mentioned the willingness to risk life and limb when explaining why the boxer Jem Belcher was admired even by those who disapproved of boxing:

> Belcher has, by the sons of cant, in every class of life, been held up to us as a monster, a perfect ruffian; yet there are very few persons who would not wish to see Belcher; few from whom marks of admiration have not, at some time, been extorted by his combats; and scarcely a female Saint, perhaps, who would not, in her way to the conventicle, or even during the snuffling there to be heard, take a peep at him from beneath her hood. … The reason is not that Belcher strikes hard; not that he is strong, not that he is an adept at his art, but that he exposes himself voluntarily to so much danger, and that he bears so many heavy blows.[326]

When the qualities of courage, strength and self-reliance are combined with the popular ideal of chivalry the consequence was an image of boxers as heroes and champions.[327] Egan's biography of the Henry Pearce (1777-1809) described numerous incidents of a chivalrous boxer, who "proved himself almost more than mortal" when he rescued a girl captured in a burning house or saved a woman from an assault by three "athletically built gamekeepers" and then admonished them for their unmanly conduct.[328] Many newspapers reported the story about the boxer Tom Johnson (c. 1750-1797), who carried a double load in his work in order to help the family of a sick colleague. A story which, according to the newspaper, proved that Johnson was not only "one of the strongest men is England" but also had a "humane and benevolent heart".[329]

It is easy to see this as an exaggerated rhetoric of committed fans. However, boxing fans were not alone in viewing boxers as the representation of the masculine ideal in both body and character. Boxers were regularly portrayed in art and literature as the embodiment of the masculine ideal. Art historian Marcia Pointon has shown that many

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[325] Tosh, "Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain", p. 94.
[326] *Political Register* 8 (1805), col. 198.
[327] Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, p. 95; Mosse *The Image of Man*, p. 23.
[328] Egan, *Boxiana*, vol 1, pp. 151-4.
[329] *The Gazetteer,* 3 January 1788; *Morning Chronicle,* 9 January 1788; *Morning Herald,* 9 January 1788.

artists searching for English models of classical male beauty found them in the boxer, who "epitomised heroic and patriotic masculinity".[330]

Figure 2 is a portrait of one of the most famous boxers of late Georgian England, Richard Humphries (c.1760-1827). It was painted by John Hoppner (1758-1810), a sought-after portraitist.[331] Heiny has argued that portraits such as figures 2 and 3 ennobled their subjects and idealize the boxers and their bodies. The portraits depicted the bruisers in a natural landscape without a ring, crowd or opponent. The artists chose not to show the fight itself, but the 'coming up to scratch', the moment before the fight started when the boxers stood facing each other in the ring. This afforded the patrons an opportunity to compare the boxers' bodies and apparent fitness for the fight before laying their wagers. In a sport that revolved around the question as to who was the better man, this was an important moment in assessing their relative masculine merits.

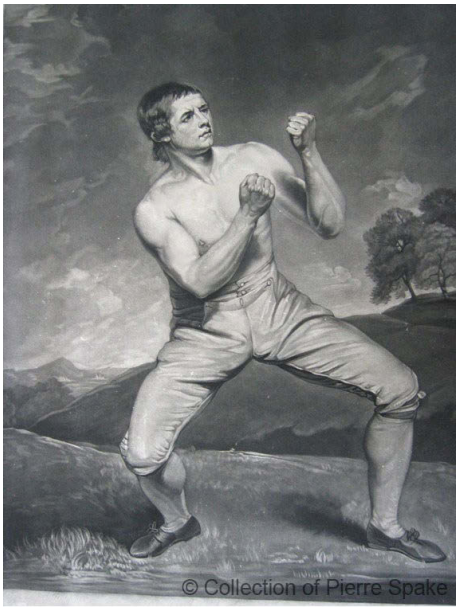


Figure 2: John Hoppner, *Richard Humphreys*, 1788.

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[330] According to Pointon the "heroic physique of the pugilist" was widely admired until well into the nineteenth century with a certain change in emphasis: in the Georgian period the association of boxing was with the ideal body and neo-classicism, while in the Victorian period the emphasis lay more on its attributes as character-building, embodying discipline and virtue. Pointon, "Pugilism, Painters and National Identity", pp. 36-8. Possibly, this change was connected with the growing popularity of boxing with the middle-class in the second half of the nineteenth-century. For middle class interest in boxing see: Stanley Albert Shipley, *The Boxer as Hero: A Study of Social Class, Community and the Professionalisation of Sport in London, 1890-1905*. PhD Thesis (London University, 1986).

[331] John Hoppner (1758-1810), whose mother was an attendant at the Court, studied at the Royal Academy of Art on an allowance from George III (which led to an unfounded the rumor that he was the king's natural son). He was a sought after portraitists for the aristocracy and fashionable set and was made portrait painter to the Prince of Wales. Heiny, *Boxing in British Sporting Art*, pp. 176-8.

The portraits are "clean", revealing nothing of the violence, gore and sweat of the sport. They portrayed the boxers in a typical boxer's pose – clenched fists, bulging muscles, and hardened jaws – that highlighted their masculinity and accentuated their manliness. Drawn with almost no hair on their bodies so as to afford a better view of their musculature, their nakedness afforded a full view of the upper body, broad shoulders and solid body shape (their bodies not rounded, like female bodies, but more angular, almost square). Although most boxers probably suffered the hazards of their trade – e.g. "cauliflower ears" and broken noses – there was no evidence of that kind in the pictures; the boxer's body was the perfect body. The accumulated effect, Heiny argued, was to romanticize the fighters and glorify their beauty and masculinity.[332]



Figure 3: Charles Jean Robineau. *Daniel Mendoza the most scientific boxer ever known*, 1789.

Such admiration of pugilists is also visible in literature. Numerous authors such as William Hazlitt, Lord Byron and Thomas Moore all used boxing and boxers as "a sign of genuine masculinity and an antidote to effeminacy, a hallmark of nationality and race, an expression of egalitarianism, and a means to a more authentic lifestyle."[333] Perhaps the best example of the role of boxing in eighteenth century literature is the work of author

[332] Heiny, *Boxing in British Sporting Art*, pp. 176-200.
[333] Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, p. v.

and magistrate Henry Fielding (1707 –1754).[334] According to Christopher Johnson, in Fielding's works boxing was a manly weapon and the virtuous means for the hero to restore order. Fielding's masculine heroes (Joseph Andrews, Parson Adams and Tom Jones), were expert boxers, willing and able to defend their principles and fight for their cause. Fielding, who was opposed to duelling, perceived boxing as the humane, fair and natural way of resolving conflicts. Interestingly for a magistrate, in Fielding's work boxing was often the means of restoring order without recourse to the law. Johnson found that "the essential values espoused by the boxing propaganda and literature of the early eighteenth century (national pride and uniqueness, pugnacious courage, humanity and egalitarianism, which together with the prevailing sense of moral righteousness…) thus all find echoes in the novels of Fielding".[335]

As poor men from lower-class backgrounds, pugilists were far from their idealized images in fiction and art. They were, as one of the sport's fans admitted, "for the most part ignorant, unintelligent men…"[336] Most were brutal, rough and vulgar; some were drunkards or criminals; and many had anger management problems. The numerous accusations of cheating prove that fair play was more an ideal than a reality.[337] The bodies of many boxers suffered some form of disfigurement after years of violence and alcohol abuse. But although most pugilists were probably far from the manly ideal, they were nevertheless portrayed as representatives of beauty, health, strength and virility; and they were imbued with the manly virtues of courage, honour, bottom, magnanimity, honesty and independence. [338] A large number of journalists, artists and authors invested hard work to idealise them, so that although they did not actually correspond to the

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[334] Johnson, "'British Championism'", pp. 336-42.
[335] Johnson, "'British Championism'", p. 342.
[336] Anon., *The Complete Art of Boxing*, p. vi. Quoted in: Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, p. 46.
[337] Dennis Brailsford, "Morals and Maulers: the Ethics of Early Pugilism", in: *Journal of Sport History* 12.2 (1985), pp. 126-142.
[338] An entry in artist Joseph Farrington's diary, which described a meeting between the pugilist Bob Gregson and artists from the Royal academy, shows that although Gregson had many flaws, the artists were eager to find him beautiful: "We found Gregson, the Pugilist stripped naked to be exhibited to us on acc[oun]t of the fineness of his form – he is six feet two inches high – all admired the beauty of his proportions from the knee or rather from the waist upwards including his arms & small head – The bone of his leg it was S[ai]d is too short & His toes are not long enough & there is something of heaviness ab[ou]t the thighs, knees & legs – but on the whole he was allowed to be the finest figure the persons present had seen." Joseph Farrington, diary entry from 20 June 1808, in: *The Diary of Joseph Farrington,* ed. Kathryn Cave (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 3300; Marcia Pointon, "Pugilism, Painters and National Identity", p. 35.

image, boxers came to symbolise this ideal nonetheless. They played it out, gave it a public face and naturalised it.

As the new masculinist culture spread throughout the country and the polite ideal began to decline in popularity, attempts to reveal the ugly reality behind the idealized images fell on deaf ears. The large amount of energy invested in romanticising the imperfect, often disfigured body of the boxer and idealising the character of brutal lower-class men raises important questions. What function did boxing and the masculinist ideal serve to have motivated the idealization of the boxer's body and character and how was this idealization so easily disseminated throughout the culture?

3.3. Shaping a manly national character

Boxing embodied a hypermasculine, aggressive, assertive national character. The ideal it expressed was a reaction to the passive, weak and indecisive "refined man" who was held responsible for the military, political and moral decline of the nation. It also appeared as an attempt to redraw boundaries and to create clarity in an age of chaos.[339] Anxieties about political and social uncertainties resulted in the rise of a masculine ideal that "naturalized" social inequalities of gender, class and race. At a time of political struggle and challenges to the social order, the masculinist ideal provided a symbol of strength, stability and order.

The rise of "a militaristic, masculinist version of the national character" in the 1780s was due to wars, trade and empire, suggests Kathleen Wilson. The new manly national character was based on those qualities that best served the fiscal-military interests of an imperialist nation-state at war: "independence, fortitude, courage, daring, resourcefulness and paternalistic duty."[340] During the eighteenth century, England endured several military losses and threats which awakened a national crisis of confidence: the Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1745, the loss of the colonies in America, the permanent rivalry with France and sporadic conflicts with Spain. Consumerism, the high profile of women in the public sphere and the French cultural influence of politeness

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[339] Mosse, *The Image of Man*, *passim.*

[340] This argument is repeated in many of Wilson's articles and books. Kathleen Wilson, "Nelson and the People: Manliness, Patriotism and Body Politics," in: *Admiral Lord Nelson: Context and Legacy*, ed. David Cannadine (Houndmills, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan 2005), p. 50. id., *The Sense of the People*, ch. 3; id., *Island Race*, *passim*;

were blamed for effeminising the national character and undermining its manliness, courage, strength and military prowess. Military setbacks were portrayed as the result of "effeminacy" while victories were considered the natural consequence of manly virtue. The result was a "devaluation of the 'feminine'" and an emphasis on martial values. It was generally assumed that only an "austere, forceful, disciplined and martial manliness could restore national spirit and power".[341]

Leo Braudy has argued that in the late eighteenth century, when governments were increasingly dependant on the willingness of lower-class men to fight their wars, military service became "the prime form of masculine citizenship".[342] England's strength and wealth depended on her military and naval capabilities, which ultimately depended on her manpower. Although wars with France were almost incessant since 1689 onwards, earlier wars had been more limited, serving mainly as instruments for diplomacy, and were, for the most part, fought by mercenaries. The American and Napoleonic wars were different in both size and aim. At a time when more than one of every five able-bodied men served in uniform (in the army, navy or volunteer forces), the new manly ideal became invaluable for the nation.[343]

The image of the manly warrior as the epitome of the ideal man was a means to shoring up patriotic fervour and a willingness to sacrifice life and limb for the patria. Boxers, like naval and military heroes, "mobilised and concentrated a version of stoic, affective, masculinist patriotism in the service of the nation-state".[344] Boxers were often presented as role models for sailors or soldiers because the same characteristics were required of them: courage, strength, aggressiveness, and especially the ability to withstand hardship and pain. As Pierce Egan wrote:

> When a boxer is engaged in fighting the battles of his country… the true courage of the pugilist is again witnessed bursting forth in a flame… he courts danger, and then the honour of victory only presents itself before his eyes. He becomes a hero, a host

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[341] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[342] Leo Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), p. 246.
[343] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 286-7, 308-19; Emma Vincent Macleod, *A War of Ideas: British Attitudes to the Wars Against Revolutionary France, 1792-1802* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), p. 38.
[344] Wilson, *Sense of the People*, p. 161. For the importance of naval and military heroes see also: Wilson, "Nelson and the People: Manliness, Patriotism and Body Politics", pp. 49-66; Gerald Jordan and Nicholas Rogers, "Admirals as Heroes: Patriotism and Liberty in Hanoverian England", *Journal of British Studies* 28.3 (1989), pp. 201-224; Timothy Jenks, "Contesting the Hero: The Funeral of Admiral Lord Nelson" *Journal of British Studies* 39.4 (2000), pp. 422-53.

> within himself, and his companions in arms endeavour to follow so bright an example in battle. The conquest gained, his eye beams with sympathy, humanity softens his heart, and the generosity he displays to succour a fallen foe, is one of the finest specimens of the philosophy of human nature.[345]

The masculinist ideal also had nationalist overtones. Boxing was presented as both source for and evidence of national superiority as well as a cause for national pride. *The Gazetteer* praised boxing as "a sport which, however the frigid may condemn, is highly conducive to that high blooded and masculine character, which the English as a nation have ever been proud to maintain."[346] Boxing was considered not only a martial sport that prepared the nation for war, but also a peculiar English practice and thus one that contributed considerably to the shaping of the national character:

> The inhabitants of every country have their peculiarities, and these are often of public utility. Boxing… is of great service; it inspires, even in infancy, a martial spirit, which improves, even in our boyish days, and is matured in manhood… Many have laughed at the idea, that boxing is of national service, but they have laughed at the expense of truth. An exercise that diffuses courage throughout any nation, but more particularly England, a country from its politics and commerce so liable to war, must be of public utility. It is principally on this account that the legislature, always attentive to the interest of the people, has never interfered on the subject of Pugilism.[347]

Boxers were seen as archetypal representatives of the English superiority over other nations. As both Gerald Newman and Linda Colley have shown, after the cessation of war with the American colonies, the French became Britain's strongest enemy.[348] The two cultures came to stand for opposite values: "freedom against slavery, manly straightforwardness against effeminate cultivation, truth against deceit – and independence against dependence."[349] Boxing rhetoric was not only aimed against France and the French, but also against French influences on British culture, especially

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[345] Egan, *Boxiana,* vol. 3, pp. 5-6.
[346] *The Gazeteer,* 10 June 1788.
[347] Thomas Belcher, *The Art of boxing or science of Manual Defence*, p. 9
[348] Colley, *Britons*, *passim*; Newman, *Rise of English Nationalism*, *passim*; Stella Cottrell, "The Devil on Two Sticks: Franco-Phobia in 1803", in *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of the British National Identity*, ed. Raphael Samuel, 3 Vols (London: Routledge,1989), vol. 1, pp. 259-74.
[349] McCormack, *The Independent Man*, p. 151. Ansgar Nünning sums up the virtues of the Englishman as he found them in literature of the time: "honesty, sincerity, industry, gravity propriety, plainness, modesty, taciturny, reason, good sense, nature, plainness (sic), valour, and above all love of liberty, property and country", while the French were "associated with affectation, cowardice, flattery, foppery, gaiety, garrulousness, levity, luxury, vanity, artifice, and love of absurd fashions, extravagant manners, and frivolous pursuits." Ansgar Nünning, "Historicizing British Cultural Studies. Patriotic Xenophobia and the Rhetoric of National Character in Eighteenth-Century British Literature", *Journal for the Study of British Cultures* 9.1 (2002), 62-93, quote on p. 82.

politeness. This was part of a greater nationalistic rhetoric that portrayed Englishmen as courageous and Frenchmen as cowardly and equated boxing and its manly ideal with Englishness, implying that foreigners who did not box were effete:

> The dexterous use of the fist is a truly English exercise, and the sturdy English have been as much renowned for their boxing, as their beef, both which are by no means suited to the watery stomachs and weak sinews of their enemies the French. To this nutriment and this art is owing that long established maxim, that one Englishman can beat three Frenchmen.[350]

Defenders of the sport argued that boxing embodied, and thus inspired, all the characteristics that made the English nation the envy of every civilization. Courage, independence, strength and other martial qualities were indispensable for an island nation dependent on trade and perpetually at war. One function of boxing and its masculine ideal was to help shape a more militaristic national character.

However, the new manly national character was not only constructed in contrast to the enemies from without such as the French; it was also conceptualised in contradistinction to internal, marginalised, groups which were becoming gradually more threatening to the established order, such as women, homosexuals, the working-class, Jews and Blacks.[351] In the late eighteenth century, women were becoming increasingly more present in the public sphere, a growing number of middle and working-class men aspired to achieve a say in politics (as will be discussed in Chapter Four), and various racial, religious and ethnic minorities were beginning to claim a right to enter the folds of the nation (as will be discussed in Chapter Five). The French Revolution intensified anxieties about the social order because its rhetoric of natural rights and democratic representation threatened to undermine not only class but also gender and racial hierarchies. The new manly ideal was promoted in an attempt to exclude these groups from the body politic. This was done mainly by anchoring the manly ideal in the body. The body of the Other (women, working-class men, Jews and Blacks) became the site for the construction of difference.

The boxer's body as presented in portraits such as Figures 2 and 3 is an idealized body, however it is not a universal body. Heiny argues that by romanticising fighters and glorifying their beauty and masculinity, portraits such as this ennoble their bearers, thus

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[350] *Connoisseur*, 22 August 1754, quoted in: Heiny, *Boxing in British Sporting Art*, p. 65.
[351] Mosse, *The Image of Man*, ch. 4.

erasing their working class background.[352] I argue that this apparently ideal body bears various telltale signs that reveal its social status as working class: its nakedness, short-cut hair, and the structure of the body, which shows that it habitually performed manual labour. The stance also hints at its professional rather than amateur fighter status. Pictures of professional boxers portray them with their body weight in the middle, standing firmly on both feet. This is because professional boxers were expected to stand in the ring and pummel each other to prove their strength, courage and ability to receive punishment. Moving around in the ring was called "shifting" and was considered unmanly.

Upper class men also fought, but matches were conducted in a completely different setting and had different connotations. Upper class men usually did not box, but rather sparred, which meant fighting with gloves, with an emphasis on speed and agility. Upper class boxers had slim bodies, were fully dressed, and wore gloves. The gloves, their clothes and their stance all created a distance between the bodies of the antagonists that was more "suitable" to an upper class sport. Upper class men boxed as exercise, in order to improve their health and treated the body as an end in itself. For working class men the body was as an instrument; as manual labourers they needed power, strength and the ability to withstand pain, characteristics which were reproduced in boxing.[353]

3.4. "We would have men, men: and women, women": boxing and the gender order

During the eighteenth century middle and upper-class women became increasingly more prominent in the public sphere; writing, publishing, campaigning, participating in debating societies, and demanding political rights.[354] By providing a cheaper work force and operating machinery that outstripped the productivity of male workers, working-class women began to infringe on jobs traditionally held by men.[355] The activities and growing independence of women created anxieties that resulted in various reactions. One was the

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[352] Heiny, *Boxing in British Sporting Art*, pp. 176-200.

[353] This analysis is based on the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who has shown that different classes possess different body forms and have different attitudes to their bodies. Pierre Bourdieu, "Program for a sociology of sport", *Sociology of Sport Journal* 5 (1988), pp. 153-161; id., "Sport and Social Class", pp. 819-40; id., *Distinction*, pp. 212-3. See also: Schilling, "The Body and Difference", pp. 88-90.

[354] For the unprecedented opportunities afforded to upper and middle class women at the time, see: Wilson, *Sense of the People*, pp. 42-53; Colley, *Britons*, pp. 238-50. See also: Philip Harling, "Equipoise Regained? Recent Trends in British Political History, 1790-1867", *Journal of Modern History* 75.4 (2003), p. 913.

[355] Anna Clark has argued that industrialisation changed the relationship between working class men and women; because women and children performed cheap work thereby taking away men's working places. The response of men varied: artisans responded by advancing a libertine misogynistic culture and by excluding women, textile workers, on the other hand, who needed women's work, viewed them as economic partners. Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches*, ch. 1-2.

promotion of the ideology of separate spheres and another was the rise of a new masculinist ideal epitomised by boxing.[356]

Whereas politeness appeared to blur gender boundaries, the boxing discourse and its inherent manly ideal projected clearly defined gender roles. Boxing reinforced the sexual dichotomy and provided symbolic enactment of an assumed inherent superiority of men over women legitimised by biological differences. Boxing was especially potent in constructing gender hierarchy because it functioned as a site for male bonding that excluded women and "effeminate" men, and "naturalized" male power over women by celebrating aggressiveness, violence and strength.[357]

Boxing played an important role in providing symbolic proof of the "natural" superiority of men over women. The boxing discourse emphasised the biological differences between men and women, and exaggerated sexual characteristics. By "naturalizing" activity, strength and aggressiveness as masculine characteristics it implicitly ascribed passivity, weakness and dependence to women. Because physical strength defined the hierarchy in boxing, it was equated with social power as well. Boxing taught men to achieve power by combining skill with strength, to maximise the use of their bodies by using force in a way that occupied much space, and "to project the physical presence that speaks of latent power".[358] Thus, the sport's valorisation of physical power lent support and legitimisation to patriarchy, excluding women and "effeminate men".

Boxers did not only have an ideal manly body – their whole habitus was manly. The former chapter has shown that boxers were admired for eating "masculine" foods such as raw meat and drinking beer or gin (instead of tea). Boxers also enjoyed a homosocial,

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[356] For the ideology of separate spheres see: Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English middle class, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 2002). For a different view: Robert B. Shoemaker. *Gender in English Society 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres* (London and New York: Longman, 1998); Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History" *The Historical Journal* 36 (1993), pp. 383-414. Linda Colley and Kathleen Wilson have both noted that the emergent 'separate spheres' ideology was more pronounced in periods of intense female political activity and thus was as much a product of male anxiety as a description of public life. Colley, *Britons*, pp. 263-73; Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, p. 49.

[357] Michael A. Messner, "When bodies are Weapons: Masculinity and Violence in Sport", *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 25.3 (1990), pp. 203-20; id. *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1992).

[358] Whitson, "Sport in the Social Construction of Masculinity", p. 23; Dunning "Sport as a Male Preserve", pp. 83-4;Messner, "Masculinity and Violence in Sport", pp. 167-8, 204-205.

clubby and often misogynistic lifestyle.[359] The prize-fighting culture was "a highly performed group masculinity, a celebration of the male body and the male will", and an important site for male bonding. [360] At a time when the blurring of gender lines and the mixing of the genders was increasingly perceived as a threat, the homosociality of boxing with its misogynistic undertones enforced an aggressive, dominant form of masculinity that excluded effeminate men as well as women. Similarly, Pierce Egan's assertion that "[t]he practice of boxing through the means of the prize-ring is one of the corner stones towards preventing effeminacy from undermining the good old character of the people of England…"[361] was exclusive not only of women but also of homosexuals. At a time when, according to Rudolph Trumbach, homosexuality was portrayed as degenerate, vilified and increasingly ostracised,[362] boxing played an important role in instigating compulsory heterosexuality. The sport might be seen as enabling a sublimation of homoerotic tendencies by affording a space in which naked muscular male bodies could be aestheticized and admired while concurrently affirming the heterosexuality of its participants and spectators.[363] Through boxing heterosexuality and virility were celebrated as the epitome of manliness.

Boxing discourse helped construct and sustain a masculine sphere. For the proponents of boxing the ring was the masculine place *par excellence*. Everybody in the ring – the boxers, the seconds, the bottle-holders and the referees – were men. John Bee, in his Slang dictionary (1823) defined 'fist' as "wholly masculine: when a female makes up a fist, she is no longer a woman, and must be floored like a man".[364] Fights were often described as contests to see "which was the best man". The role of the female spectators, usually from the lower classes; was to "enjoy the display of manhood".[365] Boxing discourse objectified women, rendering them passive sexual objects and admiring spectators.[366]

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[359] Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, pp. 87-9. On alcohol and masculinity see: Jürgen Martschukat and Olaf Stieglitz, *"Es ist ein Junge!". Einführung in die Geschichte der Männlichkeiten in der Neuzeit* (Tübingen, Diskord, 2005), pp. 146-8.
[360] Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, p. 90.
[361] Egan, *Sporting Anecdotes*, p. vi.
[362] Rudolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
[363] For the homoeroticism of boxing, see: Ford, *Prizefighting,* pp. 28-31.
[364] John Bee, *Slang, a Dictionary of the Turf, the Ring, the Chase, the Pit, of Bon-Ton* (London: Hughes, 1823), p. 78.
[365] Egan, *Boxiana,* vol. 1, p. 95; *Ibid.*, p. 40.
[366] Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, p. 108, n. 8.

Although it was never a common occurrence, female pugilism had been around since the beginning of the eighteenth century.[367] The majority of female fisticuffs were small local affairs, which usually followed the same rules as the men's matches, although some female pugilists fought bare-bosomed.[368] Nevertheless, two or three fighters were talented enough to have their names retained in the annals of the sport, such as Elizabeth Stokes and Mary Ann Fielding of Whitechapel, whose fight with "a noted Jewess of Wentworth street" attracted a "vast concourse of people".[369] However, by the nineteenth century female pugilism became increasingly unacceptable even among boxing enthusiasts, eliciting such comment as the following:

> Notwithstanding the author so strongly advocates the cause of pugilism, he by no means feels desirous to see such conflicts displayed by the softer sex. It is the gentleness of their manners, and their acknowledged inability of defending themselves, that frequently excite us to acts of the greatest bravery and gallantry.[370]

It was women's place to be weak and defenceless and men's role to be strong and protective. Another commentator argued that the unnatural phenomenon of female boxing was a result of the effeminisation of men:

> [a] Female fight of any kind is an abomination, and it is worthy to remark that this practice has increased amongst us as our men have become, or been forced to appear, less pugnacious... [it is not] consistent with female delicacy to be forward in witnessing, or advocating, or promoting the sports of the Pugilistic Ring though, as is natural, their smile and secret approbation should not be wanting to the brave and honourable boxer… We would have men, men; and women, women.[371]

The growing condemnation of female pugilism was just one sign of the wider development that saw an increasing intolerance to the blurring of gender boundaries, a general masculine backlash and the rise of a new manly ideal, in which the male body played a central role.

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[367] Tony Gee, "Stokes, Elizabeth", in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. For female pugilists in general see: Jennifer Hargreaves, "*Bruising Peg* to Boxerobics: Gendered Boxing Images and Meanings", in: *Boxer: An Anthology*, pp. 121-131; Catriona M. Parratt, *"More than Mere Amusement": Working-Class Women's Leisure in England 1750-1914* (Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press, 2002), pp. 35-7.
[368] Between 1792 and 1813 The *Sporting Magazine* reported an average of one female prize-fight a year.
[369] *Sporting Magazine* 6 (1795), p. 163.
[370] William Oxberry, *Pancratia, or a history of Pugilism. Containing a full account of every battle of note from the time of Broughton and Slack down to the present day, etc* (London, 1812), p. 113.
[371] Vincent Dowling, *Fistiana; or, Oracle of the Ring* (London: William Clement, jr., 1841), p. 15.

Thus the body was the place where sex, class and (as will be shown in Chapter Five) race and religious differences were made manifest. Differences between men and women, whites and blacks, Jews and gentiles, even upper- and working-class came to be inscribed on the body, "naturalized" and thus implicitly fixated. These bodily differences became the basis for exclusion. Marginalized groups were branded effeminate, ugly and morally corrupt. At a time when the white male body symbolised the body politic, the body of the Other was read as an outward sign of an inner deficiency, the physiognomy of these marginalized peoples was thought to reflect their flawed character, and their failure to answer the masculine ideal became the reason for their exclusion from the nation.[372]

To conclude, the later decades of the century witnessed a decline in the prevalence of the polite ideal, which had been prominent throughout the century. Viewed as effeminate and foreign, the culture of politeness was increasingly seen as incompatible with the manly national character needed in times of war. Boxing played an important role in reconstructing a new masculine ideal that conformed to a tough and muscular style of manliness. In contrast to other models of masculinity, the new ideal emphasized the body and created a new standard of male beauty. It replaced the "man of feeling", a model of male behaviour that required men to take their cue from women, with a masculinist ideal that enabled men to set the tone of their activities.

In the late eighteenth century when, according to Mosse, "the structure of the male body... became a symbol of a healthy nation and society", boxers came to represent not only a certain manly ideal but a national ideal as well.[373] During a period when Britain was embroiled in wars, the imperial project was in full swing and public discourse stressed the superiority of Englishmen over Europeans, boxing was one of the sites in which the militaristic and chauvinistic manly national character was being propagated. This manly ideal became increasingly important in the late eighteenth century not only because it was better suited for the needs of a nation at war, but also because it functioned

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[372] These concepts are derived from the following works: Robert Connell, *Gender and Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987); Thomas Laqueur and Catherine Gallagher eds., *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987),; Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Chris Schilling, *The Body and Social Theory* (London: Sage, 1993).
[373] Mosse, *The Image of Man*, pp. 12, 23.

as a reinforcement of patriarchy and naturalized the differences between men and women (mainly through its anchorage in the body) at a time when middle and upper class women were building a presence in the public sphere and working-class women were threatening the livelihoods of many working-class men.

Concepts of masculinity have political implications.[374] Citizenship was traditionally connected to manliness; and at a time when citizenship was perhaps the most important political issue, the question of manliness became highly politicised and its definition became a political issue. As will be shown in the next chapters, independence, courage, honesty, self-restraint and other qualities associated with the masculine ideal became tools in the political struggle over the character of the body politic. Originally the masculinist ideal was part of a wider political ideology of civic humanism that equated manliness with citizenship and viewed political participation as an exclusive practice. According to this ideology, citizenship was the privilege of propertied white men rather than the right of everyman. The rise of the masculine ideal was thus an attempt to exclude women, homosexuals, working-class men and racial and ethnic "others", thus maintain the impermeability of the body politic. However, as will be shown in the next two chapters, the attempt was only partially successful, as working-class men and racial minorities used the same manly ideal to stake their claim to the body politic.

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[374] This issue has been analysed in a wide array of publication. For example: Karen Hagemann, Anna Clark and Stefan Dudink eds., *Representing Masculinity: Male Citizenship in Modern Western Culture* (New York: Palgrave Press, 2007); Karen Hagemann and John Tosh, *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History, passim.*; Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches*, *passim*; McCormack, *The Independent Man*, *passim*.

Chapter Four

The Construction of the Body Politic and the Politics of the Body: Conservative and Radical Views on Boxing

In 1805 William Cobbett, the most important political journalist of the Georgian period, warned of the dangers of eradicating boxing:

> I am thoroughly persuaded, nothing could be more injurious, whether considered as to its effects in civil life, or in its higher and more important effects on the people regarded as the members of a state, and, of course, always opposed to some other state, and therefore always liable to be called upon to perform the duties of war.[375]

He expounded his views on the matter in a series of lead articles published in his influential *Political Register* in 1805, and in numerous remarks in several of his other publications.[376] Cobbett's one-time friend later turned antagonist, William Windham, whose boxing abilities in his youth earned him the title "fighting Windham", was another avid defender of boxing. Although he did not write on the subject as extensively as Cobbett, Windham extolled boxing in private letters and defended it in Parliament. A devoted fan, he attended over 20 prize-fights and in 1787 even missed a parliamentary debate in order to view a fight.[377]

The interest of these two political figures in boxing has been seen as something of a curiosum, and their separate defences of manly sports have usually been lumped together.[378] In the words of historian Daniel Green, for example:

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[375] *Political Register* 8 (1805), col. 195.

[376] Not content with writing on the subject close to his heart, between 1805 and 1808, Cobbett organized single-stick contests on his farm at Botley, in which winners were awarded a large sum of money (30 guineas); the contests attracted competitors from all over the area and were a great success. Spater, *William Cobbett: The Poor Men's Friend*, vol. 1, pp. 167-8; Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture*, pp. 20-1; Duff, *William Cobbett and the Politics of the Earth*, pp. 85-7.

[377] As Sack notes, Windham's speeches in defence of manly sports "seem among his most heartfelt". James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 205; William Windham, *The Windham Papers. The life and correspondence of the Rt. Hon. William Windham, 1750-1810,* ed. Earl of Rosebery, 2 Vols. (London: Jenkins, 1913), vol. 1, pp. 6-8.

[378] Daniel Green, for example, calls boxing one of a "fringe subjects to which [Cobbett] often returned". Daniel Green, *Great Cobbett: The Noblest Agitator* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), p. 218; Leonora Nattrass, *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 21; Gerald Duff, *William Cobbett and the Politics of the Earth* (Salzburg: Institute für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1972), p. 85.

> They were both countrymen, and both were interested in preserving what they thought of as the native vigour, courage and ferocity of the race. Consequently, they worked together to preserve the old sports of the countryside that were now beginning to be considered brutal, and to resist those who, either out of Puritanism or misplaced benevolence, sought to abolish them as part of the continuing process of educating and civilising the English.[379]

Both Whigs and Tories defended the rights of the poor to enjoy their sports, explained leisure historian Hugh Cunningham, because these sports kept the poor content, provided a harmonious meeting place for all classes, helped instil martial qualities, prevented effeminacy, and fostered truly patriotic and British feelings.[380] While Windham's and Cobbett's individual defence of boxing have generally been interpreted as reactionary attempts to re-enact Old England, the political implications of their views on boxing, as they relate to their body of work, have not been fully contemplated.

This chapter will show that although Cobbett's and Windham's defence of boxing had much in common, there were also significant differences between them which have been ignored by the scholarship. It will argue that it is these differences that illuminate their separate reasons for making the defence of boxing a priority. Windham, considered the "embodiment of the conservative reaction in England",[381] and Cobbett, an anti-Jacobin turned radical after 1804, both appropriated the sport in order to define patriotism, manliness, citizenship, and the place of the working class in the nation from their loyalist or radical viewpoints respectively.

The chapter begins with a general description of the state of late eighteenth century English politics, which was characterised by polarisation and popularisation. The main issue at stake was parliamentary reform; while radicals clamoured for reform, conservatives argued that any reform would present a threat to the social and political order. Both used extra-parliamentary activity, including boxing, to win the hearts and minds of the people. Section two analyzes the place of boxing in Windham's conservative worldview and shows that for Windham boxing was a counter-revolutionary measure of the first order; it was a way to prepare the lower orders to defend their country, and it was

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[379] Green, *Great Cobbett,* p. 210.
[380] Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 47, 64; Similarly, Ian Dyck argued that their campaign against the bill to outlaw bull-baiting was a Country Tory attempt to maintain fair play for "rich and poor alike" and part of their "opposition to most species of innovation". Ian Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 22.
[381] Eugene Richard Gaddis, *William Windham and the conservative reaction in England, 1790-1796* : *The Making of a Conservative Whig and the Norwich Electoral Response*, PhD Thesis (University of Pennsylvania, 1979), p. 34.

also a means to inculcate paternalism, loyalism and patriarchy, thus safeguarding the social, political and gender order respectively. Section three analyzes Cobbett's defence of boxing and shows that for Cobbett boxing was invariably a way of empowering the labourers, educating them about their strengths and power and making them aware not only of their duties but also of their rights. In this way, boxing became an important site of struggle between radicals and conservatives.

4.1. The polarisation and popularisation of politics in late Georgian England

In the 1790s the English political scene became increasingly polarized between radicals demanding parliamentary reform and loyalists wishing to preserve the established social and political order.[382] The debate for and against reform was not restricted to the highest political levels; various reform and loyalist associations were established in which members of the working classes were also active. Boxing, perceived as a patriotic practice, became a battlefield between reformists and loyalists, each trying in its own way to appropriate the sport as a tool for the dissemination of its own ideas.

The movement to reform Parliament arose in the 1760s, and had made great headway amongst the middling ranks, especially in industrialized towns and centres of religious dissent.[383] Aiming to combat corruption, the national debt, public credit and tax increases, reformists demanded annual elections and an extension of the franchise. Reform associations were successful in educating a growing number of disenfranchised people about their rights through debating societies, the press, pamphlets and petitions, and mobilising wide sections of the population by means of celebrations, feasts and processions.[384] The most important radical text was Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791-

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[382] Harry Thomas Dickinson, ed., *Britain and the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989); Mark Philp, ed., *The French Revolution and British popular politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Jennifer Mori, *Britain in the Age of the French Revolution* (Harlow: Longman, 2000); Harry Thomas Dickinson "Popular Politics and Radical Ideas", in: *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Dickinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 106-7; Mark Philp, ed., *Resisting Napoleon: the British response to the threat of invasion, 1797-1815* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

[383] For middle class radicalism see: Wilson, *Sense of the People, passim*.

[384] Although these societies varied in their membership and aims, they all had in common their advocacy of some degree of male suffrage, lower taxes, law reform, annual parliaments, and the eradication of corruption. Harry T. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 245; For radical rituals see: Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual and Symbol in England, 1790-1850* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

2), which was printed in cheap editions and read by over half a million people at the time. Reacting against Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and defending the American and French Revolutions, Paine (1737-1809) attempted to explain the principles of the revolution to a working-class audience.[385] He argued that human rights originated in nature, that citizenship rested on reason, not property and that revolution was permissible when a government did not safeguard its citizen's rights and interests.[386]

During the first phase of the war, radicalism was shaped mainly by Paine's ideas. However, Paine's universalism, deism, anti-monarchism and stance on France made it problematic for English radicals to espouse his principles wholeheartedly.[387] The 1810s saw the revival of a form of radicalism, to which William Cobbett came to belong, which put less emphasis on French ideas of egalitarianism and natural rights, and more on the English language of the Country Party.[388] Radicals attacked government corruption and arbitrary abuse of power by Crown and Parliament and decried the national debt and paper money, and demanded parliamentary reform.

Although the reform movement received a new impetus from the events in France, but the French revolution also created a conservative backlash. The revolutionary and Napoleonic wars saw the rise of a new popular conservatism, which lauded the constitution and liberties of Britons while decrying the threats of French revolutionary forces from without, and radicals from within.[389] On an unprecedented scale, loyalism found a voice in popular associations (which imitated the structure and activity of the reform associations), the press, demonstrations and the volunteer movement.[390] The 1790s

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[385] Eric J. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 71; Mori, *Britain in the Age of the French Revolution*, pp. 33-39; David Wilson, *Paine and Cobbett: the Transatlantic Connection* (Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queeen's University Press, 1988).

[386] Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (London, 1791-2, reprint: Mineola, N.Y: Dover, 1999).

[387] Philp, "Disconcerting ideas: explaining popular radicalism and popular loyalism in the 1790s", pp. 157-89.

[388] Dickinson, *The politics of the people in eighteenth century Britain*, pp. 226-7; id., "Popular Politics and Radical Ideas", p. 109; Mori, *Britain in the Age of the French Revolution*, pp. 75-6.

[389] In the 1970s radicalism was seen as a popular movement; conservatism as a function of state mobilization. Lately Mark Philp, Harry Dickinson and Frank O'Gorman have shown that there was grass-root conservatism, a genuine antirevolutionary sentiments and aversion to social change: Mark Philp, "Disconcerting Ideas: Explaining Popular Radicalism and Popular Loyalism in the 1790s'", in: *English Radicalism 1550-1850,* eds. G. Burgess and M. Festenstein (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007), pp. 157-189; H. T. Dickinson, "Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism, 1789-1815", *Britain and the French Revolution*, pp. 103-25; O'Gorman, "Pitt and the 'Tory' Reaction", *Ibid.,* pp. 21-37.

[390] Linda Colley views volunteers as loyalists; Cookson has shown that this was not always the case. Linda Colley, "The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation, 1760-1820", *Past and Present* 102 (1984), 94-129; .id., "Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain, 1750-1830", *Past and Present* 113 (1986), 97-117; J. E. Cookson, "The English Volunteer Movement of the

saw a climate in which demands for parliamentary reform were increasingly branded as Jacobinism. The conservative reaction to the French Revolution was, to a large extent, shaped by Whig theorist Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). At the heart of Burke's (1729-1797) work stood a rejection of the egalitarian ideas, inherent in the natural rights ideology, and a reaffirmation of the traditional social and political orders. He rejected the right to depose governments and argued that social order was organic and hierarchical, social inequality was natural, and any attempt to assert the people's natural rights would lead to anarchy.[391]

Before the declaration of war between France and Britain in February 1793, various leaders and organisations who saw in it a French version of the English Glorious Revolution, lauded the cause of the French Revolutionaries. However, by 1793 the events in France had become increasingly more threatening to the British establishment and its interests at home and abroad. Even politicians such as Prime Minister William Pitt, who favoured some sort of reform before the beginning of the war, began to oppose it and insisted that the legitimacy of the social and political orders be reaffirmed and the nation mobilised for conflict. The question of reform and the reaction to the revolution in France divided the Whig party between conservative Whigs (such as Windham), supported the government on the issues of the war against France and the suppression of English Jacobins, and the more radical Whigs, led by Charles James Fox who continued to oppose the war, criticised the suppression of English liberties and advocated moderate reform. In 1794 conservative Whigs led by Windham, fearing that domestic radicals posed a viable threat to the nation, defected from the Whig party and joined Pitt's coalition. Pitt's charismatic leadership maintained a relatively stable and strong government until his resignation (over his support of Catholic emancipation) in 1801, which was succeeded by a number of small unstable governments as a consequence of political scandals and widespread dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the war.[392]

French Wars, 1793-1818: Some Contexts", *Historical Journal* 32 (1989), 867-91; id., *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

[391] Mori, *Britain in the Age of the French Revolution*, pp. 39-46. For the shaping of the conservative reaction to the French Revolution and its popular appeal see also: Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative, passim*; Dickinson, *Liberty and Property. passim;* Ian R. Christie, *Myth and Reality in late Eighteenth Century British Politics and Other Papers* (London: Macmillan Co, 1970).

[392] O'Gorman, "Pitt and the 'Tory' Reaction to the French Revolution 1789-1815", pp. 21-37; John Derry "The Opposition Whigs and the French Revolution 1789-1815", *Britain the French* Revolution, pp. 41-59; Dickinson, "Introduction: The impact of the French Revolution and the French Wars, 1789-1815", in: *Ibid*, pp. 6-8; Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State*, pp. 64-6.

In the 1790s the government faced not only the war with France but great social unrest, including numerous riots and naval mutinies that were interpreted by the government as signs of spreading Jacobinism.[393] The huge amounts of money spent on the conflict with France necessitated a rise in taxation and the immense growth of the national debt. There was widespread opposition to the war not only by radicals, but by many starving workers and a broad section of the middle classes, who opposed the war on religious grounds, or because it disrupted trade.[394] The government, which was facing the menace of French invasion, manpower shortage, and no effective policing force, was extremely disconcerted by the growth and spread of extra-parliamentary grassroots organisations, from the middle and lower orders, pushing for political reform. It adopted two main strategies: repression of what was perceived as Jacobin radical attempts at reform, and, to a lesser extent, promotion of loyalist defence of government, state and monarchy. A series of legislations gave a very wide definition of treason and enabled the government to censure radical free speech, curtail the right to free assembly and restrict the rights of workers to organize. The repressive measures included clamping down on political events and prosecuting leading radicals and radical associations.[395]

Some conservatives attempted to counteract radical activity by addressing themselves to the lower orders.[396] For the first time, active loyalism was encouraged, even if cautiously. Loyalist associations published pamphlets and prosecuted authors of "seditious" writings. They stressed the long tradition on which Britain's political and social order was based and the dangers of the abstract ideas of the revolution. Conservatives emphasized that all Britons enjoyed a balanced constitution, equality before the law and lack of interference in their affairs. Inequality between men was

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[393] For the social and economic problems of Britain during the war see: P. K. O'Brien "Public Finance in the Wars with France 1793-1815", in: *Britain and the French Revolution, 1789-1815*, pp. 165-88; Francois Crouzet, "The Impact of the French Wars on the British Economy", *Ibid.,* pp. 189-210; Clive Emsley "The Social Impact of the French Wars", *Ibid.*, pp. 211-228.

[394] John Stevenson, "Popular Radicalism and Popular Protest 1789-1815", in: *Britain and the French Revolution*, pp. 61-81; David French, *The British way in warfare, 1688 - 2000* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 98-100; Macleod, *A War of Ideas,* p. 55; Evans, *Forging the Modern State*, p. 63.

[395] O'Gorman, "Pitt and the 'Tory' reaction to the French Revolution 1789-1815", pp. 30-1. Dickinson "Popular Politics and Radical Ideas", p. 110; Mori, *Britain in the Age of the French Revolution: 1785 - 1820*, pp. 66-9.

[396] For more on the work of these associations see also: Susan Pedersen, "Hannah More Meets Simple Simon: Tracts, Chapbooks, and Popular Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century England", *The Journal of British Studies* 25.1 (1986), pp. 84-113; Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984); Mark Philp, "Vulgar Conservatism, 1792-3", pp. 42-69; Kevin Gilmartin, "In the theatre of Counterrevolution: Loyalist Association and Conservative Opinion in the 1790s", *Journal of British Studies* 41.3 (2002), pp. 291-328.

natural and divinely ordained; both rich and poor had duties and rights, they were mutually dependant, and any attempt to change the social order would result in anarchy.[397] As Kevin Gilmartin and Mark Philp argued, this conservative mobilisation had unforeseen consequences in widening the scope of the political sphere to include members of the middle and lower classes; Burke's "swinish multitude" became active participants in the public debate.[398]

Late eighteenth century radicals succeeded in transforming extra-parliamentary politics and mobilising people in ways that forced the government to appeal to a greater segment of society. Radical activity forced conservatives, who wished to defend the established order, to address themselves to a larger public in similar ways – through political societies, the press, petitions, ballads, handbills, prints and newspapers. Fighting for the hearts and minds of the people, conservatives like radicals had to widen the scope of political debate. Like popular literature, press and celebrations of naval and military victories,[399] boxing too became a site of conflict between conservatives and radicals.

4.2. "Keeping rancorous spirits at bay": William Windham's conservative defence of manly sports

William Windham (1750-1810), MP for Norwich, came from a wealthy Norfolk landowning family, was educated at Eton and Oxford, and was well-known as a scholar, gifted orator and sportsman.[400] Originally a leading spokesman for the Whigs, his attitude towards the French Revolution and his consistent opposition to parliamentary reform increasingly distanced him from his party. In March 1790, when a motion was brought

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[397] Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819*, p. 71; O'Gorman, "Pitt and the 'Tory' reaction to the French Revolution 1789-1815", pp. 29-32; Dickinson, "Popular Conservatism and militant loyalism 1789-1815", 103-7.

[398] Philp argues that the loyalist associations did not originally intend to address the lower order, but once they did, they "inevitably contributed to the broadening of the politically literate nation." These loyalist associations in effect "consolidated and extended the role for a broader public in the political life of the nation… [they] played an important part in creating expectations, traditions and institutions for popular participation in politics". Philp, "Vulgar Conservatism, 1792-3", *The English Historical Review*, pp. 42-69, quote on p. 69. See also: Gilmartin, "In the theatre of Counterrevolution: Loyalist Association and Conservative Opinion in the 1790s", pp. 291-328.

[399] For other sites of conflicts between radicals and conservatives see for example: Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Timothy Jenks, *Naval Engagements: Patriotism, Cultural Politics and the Royal Navy, 1793-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[400] Huskisson, "introduction", in: William Windham and William Huskisson, *Select speeches of the Right Honourable William Windham, and the Right Honourable William Huskisson* (E. C. Biddle, 1837), p. x; Wagner, *England und die französische Gegenrevolution 1789-1802*, p. 68.

before Parliament to expand voting rights to all householders, Windham was the first to oppose it.[401] He argued that the House of Commons answered all its purposes, the people were "happy and free", and the times were too dangerous for reform of any kind. Reform in such a time, he warned in an oft-quoted phrase, was like repairing a house during hurricane season.[402]

Windham became the leading representative of the "alarmist" conservative reaction to the French Revolution.[403] Having spent time in France, Windham became increasingly wary of the revolution; he supported the Sedition Act (which Fox fiercely opposed) and rejected Fox's suggestion to recognize the French Republic. When France declared war on Britain in February 1793, Windham formed the Third Party, a group of Whig MPs that broke with Fox and created a coalition with William Pitt in order to support the government's war efforts. For Windham, as for Burke, the war was not one between nations, but between ideologies.[404] Windham consistently supported all the repressive measures of the government (such as the suspension of Habeas Corpus) against what he called "the dissemination of poisonous doctrines".[405] He also supported measures of loyalist instruction and recommended that the government give financial assistance to several loyalist publications. In 1794 Windham became Secretary of War, responsible for the administration and organization of the army, a post in which he served until he resigned the government in 1801, together with Pitt.[406] Windham was opposed to the Peace of Amiens, which he felt was contrary to Britain's interests and a danger to her safety. During the brief period of peace Windham predicted the resumption of war, and warned tirelessly against the inadequacy of Britain's military forces. After Pitt's death in 1806, he became Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, under Lord Grenville's 'Ministry of All Talents', a post he resigned in 1807, over the question of Catholic emancipation.[407]

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[401] Gaddis, *William Windham and the Conservative Reaction,* pp. 68-9.
[402] *Parliamentary History* 28 (1788-9), col. 467.
[403] Gaddis, *William Windham and the Conservative Reaction, passim.*
[404] *Ibid.*, pp. 94-5, 354, 520; Windham and Huskisson, *Select speeches of the Right Honourable William Windham, and the Right Honourable William Huskisson*, p. xviii.
[405] *Parliamentary History* 29 (1789-90), cols. 1501-02; Windham and Huskisson, *Select speeches of the Right Honourable William Windham, and the Right Honourable William Huskisson*, p. xiv
[406] Gaddis, *William Windham and the Conservative Reaction*, pp. 143-6.
[407] David Wilkinson, "Windham, William (1750–1810)", in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Despite his desertion of the Whig party, Windham's political career was summarized by one contemporary as consistent: "from the outset of his career to the close if it, he was the uniform enemy of Parliamentary Reform. In his zeal for the improvement of the army, his attachment to the crown and aristocracy, and his protection of the real comforts of the common people, he will be found to have been equally consistent."[408] A late nineteenth century eulogy in the *Edinburgh Review* commended Windham, the esteemed defender of "British muscular pastime", for having done much towards "raising the spirit and improving the position of the British soldier, and rendering him that instrument of marvellous efficiency used by Wellington to conquer Spain and decide the great European conflict". The eulogist argued that "few voices were so powerful and so inspiriting as his in arousing that popular enthusiasm by which the battle was finally won".[409]

Windham's oft-mentioned defence of manly sports has generally been seen as a quirk; a nostalgic wish to preserve an idealized Old England as a rural, organic and interdependent society.[410] However, boxing played an important role in his political thinking, as it bound together the issues that were closest to his heart from the 1790s onwards: the war with France and the countering of revolution within Britain. For Windham, boxing was invaluable for the defence of the nation, for countering Jacobinism and for inculcating loyalism.

Windham's encouragement of boxing was part of an attempt to remake Britain into an "armed nation".[411] One of the most serious problems facing Britain during the wars was the number and condition of its military forces. Britain entered the war against an unprecedented military force: France initiated a *levée en masse* of all able-bodied men in August 1793 and entered the war with 750,000 men in 1794 and 1,300,000 men between 1800 and 1812. Unlike France, Britain did not have mass conscription, and popular opinion was decidedly against a standing army. At the beginning of the war Britain had about 40,000 men in the army, approximately 120,000 in the navy, and a few volunteer auxiliary forces and local militia, that could only be used for home defence. Because there

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[408] Amyot, *Some account of the life of William Windham,* p. 116.
[409] "Review of the Diary of the Right Honourable William Windham, M.P (1783-1809), ed. By Mrs. Henry Baring", *Edinburgh Review* 252 (1866), pp. 557-585.
[410] See for example: Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 46-9, 88; Harvey, *The Beginnings of a Commercial Sporting Culture in Britain*, p. 71.
[411] Cookson, *The British Armed Nation 1793-1815*, p. 95. Philip Harling, "A tale of two conflicts: critiques of the British war effort, 1793–1815", in: *Resisting Napoleon,* p. 19.

was no police force, the army had to maintain order at home and defend the colonies abroad, and was thus stretched to the limits, in addition to being undisciplined, untrained and demoralized. The navy, although somewhat better prepared and better manned than the army, was plagued by mutinies. The need for manpower was always greater than the number of volunteer enlistees because the British populace was strongly averse to military service.[412] According to many military experts, including Windham, the volunteer forces were a hindrance rather than a useful military tool; because the volunteer forces exempted men from serving in the army, it drew able bodied men who might otherwise have joined regular military units.[413]

Army reform was thus one of the most important issues on the agenda. Both as Secretary of State for War and the Colonies in 1806 and Secretary of War (and effectively the civilian head of the army) between 1794 and 1801, Windham thought that the army was "the first concern of this country".[414] His most pressing concerns were to solve the recruiting problems, to impose unity and to link the regular and irregular armed forces. Windham improved conditions for soldiers, while concomitantly suspending the militia ballot and restricting financial allowances for the volunteer forces, in an attempt to disband them in order to allow more able-bodied men to be recruited for the army.[415]

Windham fully agreed with War Secretary Henry Dundas, Lord Melville, who said that as many men as possible should actively take part in the defence of their country: "it is of much importance to extend, as widely as possible, that feeling of confidence that will naturally result from men of every description being placed in a situation to take, in their respective stations, an active part in the defence of their country."[416] In 1803 Windham expressed his doubts about the effectiveness of soldiers "hired or compelled to defend

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[412] Military service was considered a form of slavery as soldiers signed for life and received only a small enumeration for serving under harsh conditions. The majority of soldiers were recruited by force, while others were convicts who enlisted to avoid jail time or paupers who had no other possibility for making a livelihood. See: Nicholas Rogers, "The Sea Fencibles, Loyalism and the Reach of the State", in: *Resisting Napoleon*, pp. 41-59.

[413] Cookson, *The British Armed Nation*, pp. 22-3; Glover, *Peninsular Preparations*, 220-5.

[414] Letter from William Windham to Thomas Amyot, 23 January 1806. Thomas Amyot, *Some account of the life of William Windham*, p. 79.

[415] A former officer in the Norfolk militia, Windham knew the militia and volunteer forces to be too costly and to impede army recruitment, and he disliked the fact that they were not under direct army control. For a critical view of Windham's reforms see: Glover, *Peninsular Preparations*, pp. 240-5. For more lenient views see: Cookson, *The British Armed Nation 1793-1815*, pp. 80-2; Beckett, *The Amateur Military Tradition, 1550-1945*, pp. 106-8.

[416] Dundas to the lord lieutenants, 6. April 1798, Essex RO, D/DHa 01/10, quoted in: Cookson, *The British Armed Nation 1793-1815*, p. 212

us", in a parliamentary debate. He argued that the people "must be thoroughly impressed with the conviction of danger", and instructed on the threat facing them and their means of fighting it. Windham wished to instil in the population the sense of danger and the need for defence measures, so that all able-bodied men would become involved in defence preparations and national defence would become "the conversation of the village-green, of the church porch, and, what is not the least perhaps, of the ale-house".[417] Believing that universal training would both create a pool of men for the army and be valuable for home defence, Windham introduced the Training Act, which decreed that every year 200,000 men be selected from the adult male population to undergo twenty-four days of annual training for which they would be reimbursed.[418] The act had no time to be implemented before the government fell; however, it was clearly meant to establish groups of trained men who could defend their localities in case of invasion and could be called to serve in the army at any time. This "armed peasantry" would have "embrace[d] all the strength, energy, zeal, talents, faculties mental and corporeal of the country". If, according to Windham "[e]very day of exercise or every walk into the fields [would] be a sort of clinical lecture" on defence,[419] how much more efficient was boxing in inculcating military experience in the lower orders.

In 1809 William Windham wrote a letter to one of his constituents, in which he explained the importance of boxing for the military spirit of the British army. Mentioning three battles in which the British forces, as a consequence of efficient and courageous fighting, were victorious, even on occasion beating a larger enemy force,[420] he asked:

> Why are we to boast so much of the native valour of our troops, as shewn [sic] in Talavera, at Vimeira, and at Maida, yet to discourage all the practices and habits which tend to keep alive the same sentiments and feelings? The sentiments that filled the minds of the three thousand spectators who attended the two Pugilists [Maddox and Richmond], were just the same in kind as those which inspired the higher combatants [in these battles] – it is the circumstances only in which they are displayed that make the difference. 'He that the world subdued, had been but the

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[417] Windham and Huskisson, *Select speeches of the Right Honourable William Windham, and the Right Honourable William Huskisson*, p. 87.
[418] Cookson, *The British Armed Nation 1793-1815*, pp. 67-71, 80-2.
[419] Windham, Army of Reserve speech, 20 June 1803, in: Windham and Huskisson, *Select speeches of the Right Honourable William Windham, and the Right Honourable William Huskisson*, pp. 89-90; Cookson, *British Armed Nation*, pp. 81-3; Gee, *The British Volunteer Movement*, p. 46; Glover, *Peninsular Preparations*, pp. 244-5.
[420] In the battle of Talavera, which took place on the 27 and 28 July 1809 in Spain, British and Spanish troops fought the French. In this battle a British infantry of light brigade made a famous march of 68 km in 26 hours, a feat which was widely acclaimed. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State,* p. 91.

> best wrestler on the green'. There is no sense in the answer always made to this 'Are no men brave but boxers?' Bravery is found in all habits, classes, circumstances, and conditions. But have habits and institutions of one sort no tendency to form it more than of another?…. courage does not arise from mere boxing, from the mere beating, or being beat; but from the sentiments excited by the contemplation and cultivation of such practices. Will it make no difference in the mass of people, whether their amusements are all of a pacific, pleasurable, and effeminate nature, or whether they are of a sort that calls forth a continued admiration of prowess and hardihood?[421]

Thus Windham thought that boxing did not only prepare the lower classes physically for encounters with the enemy, it also instilled in them the right military virtues (courage, stamina and the ability to bear hardship and pain) which were pertinent for men engaged in modern warfare. Many conservative commentators agreed with Windham that boxing prepared the lower classes for war. The Tory *Morning Post*, a fiercely anti-oppositional organ, also recommended the sport because it "inspire[d] the lower order of people with an ardour, intrepidity, and courage that in engagements more important to national honour, [was] the best stimulative to prevent their ever giving ground to the natural enemies of their country".[422] Thus boxing was a means of providing able-bodied, virile and courageous men ready at any time to defend their country at any cost.[423]

Cookson has argued that Windham's decision to mobilise and arm the lower classes was contrary to his political conservative views.[424] I would like to counter-argue that for Windham instructing and mobilising the lower classes was a counterrevolutionary measure of the utmost importance. Boxing was not only a practical method of training men for the defence of their country, it was also a corporeal means of inculcating loyalism and a way of keeping the "rancorous spirits" of the lower orders at bay, thereby averting revolution. As one of the leading conservative alarmists, Windham was concerned about "the strange mixture of metaphysics with politics" witnessed in France. He saw the growth of reform associations as a sign of the immanent danger of the spread

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[421] Windham to A. Hudson, 17 August 1809, in: *The Windham Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 351-2.
[422] *Morning Post*, 5 March 1786. The *Morning Post* was established in 1772 by a group of businessmen for the main purpose of advertising. Boxing was one of the only three sports (the others being cricket and racing), which received enlarged space in its columns. Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and Public Opinion in Late Eighteenth-Century England*, pp. 53-6; Wilfrid Hindle, *The Morning Post 1772-1937: Portrait of a newspaper* (London: Routledge, 1937), pp. 7-21, 37, 106-7, 126.
[423] *The Annals of Sporting and Fancy Gazette* warned that abolishing boxing would result in the English being meek, thus becoming enslaved by the French. *The Annals of Sporting and Fancy Gazette* 3 (1823), p. 38. For similar claims, see: *Gazetteer,* 22 Dec 1787; *Morning Post*, 5 Mar 1786.
[424] Cookson, *The British Armed Nation 1793-1815*, p. 93.

of "French principles" to England and feared it would lead to revolution.[425] In May 1794 Windham argued that the demands of reform societies for parliamentary reform were but a smokescreen to hide their sinister intention, which was "a total annihilation of all property, constitution, and religion."[426] Windham was especially troubled by the effects of the French ideas on the common people, whom he found very susceptible and whose political judgment he did not trust. He warned that political agitators would have an easy time influencing "poor peasants", who "were incapable of pursuing a subject logically from premises to a conclusion".[427] In view of these attitudes towards the lower classes, Windham would not have supported boxing, a practice in which a large number of working-class men congregated in droves, if he did not believe that it was a means to preserving the social and political orders.

For Windham boxing was a political issue of the first degree; it "nearly blended… with the very existence of our constitution", he explained, referring to the accusation that Jacobins aimed to subvert the constitution.[428] He warned that eradicating boxing would make the lower classes effeminate, weak and more susceptible to Jacobinism: Jacobins wished to eradicate manly sports so as to "turn the common people into politicians", (because people who were active in such sports were not susceptible to Jacobinism).[429] Reformers wished to teach the people to read, so that they could read *The Rights of Men* and become politicians.[430] But for Windham the sport was more than a safety valve that helped vent their energy in harmless ways.[431] It was primarily a positive measure for mobilising them in defence of their country and the social and political order.

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[425] *Parliamentary History* 28 (1789-91), cols. 452-68; Gaddis, *William Windham and the Conservative Reaction,* pp. 68-9; Windham to W.J. Gurney, 2 May 1792, in: *The Windham Papers*, vol. 1, pp. 100-3.
[426] *Parliamentary History* 31 (1795-7), cols. 542-46, quoted in: Gaddis, *William Windham and the Conservative Reaction*, p. 230.
[427] *Parliamentary History* 30 (1792-4), cols. 34-40.
[428] For the "constitutional idiom" as contested terrain between radicals and conservatives see: Epstein, *Radical Expression,* ch. 1.
[429] *Political Register* 1 (1802), cols. 626-7
[430] Harvey, *The Beginnings of a Commercial Sporting Culture*, p. 71. Cf. Dirk Berely, "Bonaparte and the Squire: Chauvinism, Virility and Sport in the Period of the French Wars", in: *Pleasure, Profit, Proselytism, British Culture and Sport at Home and Abroad, 1700-1914*, ed. James Anthony Mangan (London: Cass, 1988), pp. 21-41.
[431] Though this was also, in some cases, argued; *The Times* published an article in which it defended boxing for the lower classes: "We have never lent our paper to puritanical cant, or to any of those fantastic notions of human society which experience has proved to be impracticable. We have, therefore, considered those diversions of the vulgar, which have been the subject of declamation with many, as things not good in themselves, but as the means of suffering popular feelings and prejudices to discharge themselves in the least hurtful way to the community at large. Thus, boxing, cockfighting, bull-baiting…have appeared to us, as the outlets of popular attachment to things in themselves disorderly, and as tending to absorb, in matters

Assuming social inequality to be natural and divinely-ordained, Windham rejected Paine's ideas of natural rights and social equality. All ranks, he insisted, were dependent on one another and any attempt to change the social order would lead to anarchy. Each rank had its rights and duties: "[L]et the lower classes keep their sports, and the higher conduct the business of the state."[432] Windham and other conservatives believed that only men of property had the right to an active role in politics; that they were the best guarantors of national interests as they had the most stakes in it, and that they had the responsibility of safeguarding the interests (and amusements) of the poor.[433] Windham saw boxing, like the army, as effective in reducing social tensions because it tended to create social leadership at the upper social levels.[434]

As one of his admirers explained, Windham loved the common people, and though he did not wish them to become politicians or be involved in political discussion, he did "desire to see them honest, active, cheerful and content – sensible of the blessings they enjoyed, and capable of defending them". He denounced attempts to deprive them of their amusements because he thought that the practice of manly sports was responsible not only for English courage but also for "that hatred of bloodshed and assassination, and that human forbearance in victory, by which the British character is happily distinguished from that of many other nations."[435] According to his biographer, he wished the lower classes to be strong, loyal and content in their position in life, and to defend the many blessings and liberties they enjoyed as Englishmen.

For Windham boxing bolstered national confidence, infused loyalism and was an excellent tool for mobilising the people behind the war effort; it was an important counterrevolutionary measure. Boxing was a way to communicate with the lower orders in their own language, thus establishing a viable alternative to radicalism and an unofficial way to shore up loyalism.[436] Windham, himself a member of a loyalist organization, the *Association of St. Alban's Tavern,* was the most active government supporter of John Reeves's loyalist *Association for the preservation of Liberty and*

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comparatively harmless, those predilections and passions which might otherwise be turned to the extreme disadvantage of society." *The Times,* 4 December 1804.

[432] *Political Register* 1 (1802), col. 627.

[433] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, pp. 164, 182.

[434] For the view of the army as reducing social tensions see: Cookson, *The British Armed Nation*, p. 187.

[435] Amyot, *Some account of the life of William Windham*, p. 136.

[436] For "polite" forms of loyalist mobilisation see: Eastwood, "Patriotism and the English State in the 1790s", pp. 146-68.

Property against Republicans and Levellers, which aimed to counteract radical ideology, shore support for church and government, and exhort patriotism. He believed in mobilizing the masses, and was searching for unofficial ways to boost public morale and elicit loyalism.[437]

One of the strongest problems of the loyalist associations and other counterrevolutionary measures that Windham actively supported was the perception that they collaborated with the government. According to Gilmartin, loyalist associations "had to develop arguments on behalf of the state that did not appear to issue from the state".[438] I would like to suggest that by promoting the hugely popular but illegal practice of boxing, Windham attempted to counteract the work of radical associations but without seeming to do so. In a letter to Boswell, Windham wrote that he was convinced that "the manly and honourable spirit of our common people, is in a great measure produced by, as it has produced, the practice of [prize-fights]". He was, he argued, "quite persuaded of their salutary influence on the manners of the Common people; particularly of rendering them more liberal and humane: and keeping at a distance, that rancorous spirit, and thirst for blood, that we see rage with such violence among our neighbours."[439] Written on 26 October 1792, the letter probably refers to the storming of the Tuileries Palace in France two months earlier, the subsequent arrest of the Louis XVI and the royal family, and the September massacres in which thousands of aristocrats (including women and children) and a large number of priests were killed. With the word "liberal" at that time a synonym of generosity and an antonym of mean or vulgar,[440] this use of the term referred to the idea that boxing inculcated the English manly characteristics of humanity, fairness and magnanimity towards a fallen enemy, instead of the revolutionary thirst for blood.

One of Windham's important aims in espousing boxing was to appropriate patriotism for the loyalist side.[441] Patriotism, a "political prize much fought over in the

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[437] Gaddis, *William Windham and the conservative reaction in England, 1790-1796*, p. 155; Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative*, p. 93.
[438] Gilmartin, Kevin, *Writing Against Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790-1832,* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007) p. 24.
[439] William Windham letter to James Boswell, October 26, 1792, in: *The Correspondence of James Boswell*, vol. 3, p. 378.
[440] 'liberal', in: Samuel Johnson, Henry John Todd, and John Walker, *Johnson's dictionary*, 1836.
[441] Hugh Cunningham, "The Language of Patriotism, 1750-1914", *History Workshop Journal* 12 (1981), pp. 8-23; John Dinwiddy, "England", in: *Nationalism in the Age of the French Revolution*, eds. Otto Dann and John Dinwiddy (London: Hambledon 1988), pp. 54-55; Eric Evans, "Englishness and Britishness, c. 1790-1870", in: *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History*, eds. Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 225. This chapter refers explicitly to patriotism, which was

war years", had originally been an oppositional language, and the word itself denoted people who advocated reform and enlargement of the franchise. Radicals argued that they embodied the true spirit of the nation, while the elite were portrayed as having objurgated their responsibilities. Constructing a certain manly patriotism was a cornerstone for radical leaders, who defined "the true patriot as the austere, forceful and independent masculine subject who would resist, often at considerable personal cost, the illegitimate powers that threatened to overtake the polity".[442] In the spirit of this manly patriotism, opponents were branded as unpatriotic, homosexual and effeminate. Radicals used civic humanistic rhetoric to contrast their foreign, effeminate and corrupt enemies with their own patriotic, virile and English image. Radical patriotic rhetoric, which celebrated the freedom and independence of Britons in contrast to the slavery of Frenchmen, was also used to make the case for extending the franchise based on the ideas of the right and duty of a patriot to resist an unjust government.[443] This made it at first difficult for conservatives to revert to the language of patriotism, and is the reason why government supporters during the French wars were called loyalists. However, during the French wars, when radicals were represented as disseminators of French ideals and collaborators with the enemy, the government managed to reclaim patriotism. It successfully mobilised public opinion in what was portrayed as a war to protect English liberties, laws, morality, religion and economic interests against a foreign enemy. Conservative patriotic rhetoric celebrated England's constitutional freedom and prosperity, on the one hand, and the divinely ordained, hierarchical social order, on the other.[444]

Windham claimed the patriotic practice of boxing for loyalists. Manly sports, he explained, "cherished those feelings, which were the best support of loyalty and the greatest protection both of the Church and State."[445] In assuming that the patriotism of boxing was invariably and inherently loyalist, Windham thus implicitly branded radicals as unpatriotic. In his writing on boxing Windham established an implicit picture of true patriotism: it was an attachment to King, Church and constitution, it was a commitment to

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the word used at that time, denoting love of the country, not the more coherent political ideology of nationalism, based on the sense of a united nation, "a group of people united by a common error about their ancestry and a common dislike of their neighbours", as Karl Deutsch humorously defined it. Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and its Alternatives* (New York: Knopf, 1969), p. 3.

[442] Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, pp. 213-4, 219.

[443] McCormack, *The Independent Man*, p. 154.

[444] Dickinson, "Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism", pp. 103-4; Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution,* p. 15.

[445] Sporting Magazine 20 (1802), p. 188.

the social order, and it was loyalty to the nation's leadership. This definition rejected any attempt to imbue "the people" with a voice and negated the right of resistance. Boxing was contrasted to French and Jacobin effeminacy and presented as one of the English institutions (together with beef and liberty), which emphasized the inherent superiority of British customs and character and the freedom and liberties enjoyed by Englishmen.[446] By identifying boxing as loyalist, Windham attempted to set the boundaries of Englishness, to exclude radicals, whom he branded as traitors. Through his defence of boxing and other manly sports, I argue, Windham attempted to claim patriotism for the conservatives by reconstructing it as an attachment to King and Church, while simultaneously branding radicals as unpatriotic; Jacobins and Methodists were those who "wished to destroy the old English character".[447] By identifying the opponents of boxing as Jacobins and arguing that "in the whole of the London Corresponding Society, not one bull-baiter, not one pugilist, not one man who delighted in the manual exercises, was to be found to give countenance to their dark, mischievous and cowardly transactions", Windham laid claim to patriotism.[448] Boxing was central to Windham's political thought: it was a useful measure for preparing the lower classes for defence against France, it was also a counterrevolutionary measure against Jacobinism, and it infused loyalism in the established social and political orders.[449]

4.3. William Cobbett's radical views on boxing

William Cobbett (1763-1835), the son of a farmer, joined the army in 1784, where he educated himself and was rapidly advanced.[450] In 1791 Cobbett fled to the United States after trying unsuccessfully to prosecute some of his former officers for corruption. In

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[446] Dickinson, *The politics of the people in eighteenth century Britain*, pp. 266-7.
[447] *Political Register* 1 (1802), col. 627.
[448] *Sporting Magazine*, 20 (1802), p. 187.
[449] Another example of a conservative attempt to appropriate patriotism through boxing is an article published in the Tory *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1821: "The pugilists of Britain are part and parcel of her fame, and must, of necessity, be loyal – they must be downright Tories, like myself…the valiant heroes of the ring are, to a man, ready to throw a crossbutttock in honour of Church and State….No Whigs are pugilists; they have not the heart to shake a fist, or even to write a good boxing article." Christopher North, "Letter to Pierce Egan, Esq.", *Blackwood's Magazine* 8 (1821), p. 676.
[450] Richard Ingrams, *The Life and Adventures of William Cobbett* (London: Harpercollins, 2005); Ian Dyck, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); George Spater, *William Cobbett: The Poor Men's Friend*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Raymond Williams, *Cobbett* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

Philadelphia he worked as a journalist, publishing fiercely pro-British and Anti-French works under the pseudonym Peter Porcupine. In 1800 he returned to Britain to avoid libel actions in America and soon afterwards founded his weekly *Political Register* with the financial support of William Windham and a couple of pro-war members of Parliament. In 1803 he wrote the alarmist pamphlet *Important Considerations for the People of this Kingdom*, which was distributed in large numbers by Reeve's loyalist *Association for Preserving Liberty and Property*.[451]

Between 1802 and 1804 Cobbett became suspicious of Pitt's government and disillusioned by a parliamentary system in need of reform. Becoming increasingly more radical he used his newspaper to attack the British government for corruption.[452] In 1816, as a reaction to the hunger and economic hardship that plagued England, Cobbett began issuing the *Political Register* in a shorter, cheaper two-penny version, which left out the news (thus evading stamp duty) but included his political articles. Between 40,000 and 50,000 copies of the cheap edition were sold; more than any other newspaper. In 1832, after the passing of the Reform Act in which he had been much involved, he became a Member of Parliament. Cobbett, called a "fourth estate" in British politics, enjoyed a wide readership from the highest to the lowest echelons of society and was arguably the most important political journalist of the nineteenth century.[453]

Heralded by both right- and left-wing historians, Cobbett has often been castigated for fickleness and his failure as a democratic leader.[454] However, one consistent thread ran through all his work: his concern for the condition of the labourers, which was the touchstone of his politics. According to E. P. Thompson, Cobbett's importance lay in his personalization of politics, his success in setting the tone for the post-war reform movement, a writing style that spoke directly to the people, and the way he shaped his

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[451] George Spater puts Cobbett's break with Pitt at the time between July 1802 and September 1804. Spater, *William Cobbett: The Poor Men's Friend*, vol. 1, p. 137; Ingrams, *The Life and Adventures of William Cobbett*, pp. 19-43.

[452] It was a prolonged process: first, he was deeply disappointed by William Pitt, whose government he soon discovered to be as corrupt as others. While travelling the country, he found that the standard of living of labourers had vastly declined. He had also read Paine's *Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance* (1796), which convinced him of the evils of taxation, national debt and paper money. Cobbett's innovation was to tie all these things together. He began to argue that corrupt government and a disastrous financial system were ruining the true wealth of the nation. Spence, *Romantic Radicalism*, p. 28.

[453] Williams, *Cobbett*, p. 16; Altick, *The English Common Reader*, p. 325.

[454] For a historiographical review see: Martin J. Wiener, "The Changing image of William Cobbett", *The Journal of British Studies* 13 (1974), pp. 135-54.

arguments in the language of the Country Party.[455] Cobbett's aim was to fight *The Thing*, the system of corruption which he believed to be the ruin of England.[456] The main elements of which were paper money, taxation, the disposition of agricultural labourers, high rents and the national debt. More than anything, the struggle against the system was a struggle over the shape of society.[457] Apart from what he perceived as devastating military failures, he was particularly disturbed by the disastrous effects the "Pitt System" was having on the traditional structure of society and on the quality of lives of the agricultural labourers.[458] For Cobbett, commercialisation entailed a shift from an authentic, organic, paternalistic community to an individualistic society based on falseness. The face-to-face community, in which problems were resolved in the old, traditional way of fighting it out "like a man", had become an anonymous society in which conflicts were resolved in courts of law.

Cobbett defended manly sports and especially boxing, both when he was pro-government and after he became a radical.[459] William Cobbett's most important writings about boxing were a series of lead articles, entitled "In Defence of Boxing", published in his *Political Register* in 1805. Although he had not yet fully shaped his radical ideology, Cobbett had already begun to part with conservatives, and in his writings on boxing one can find the seeds of his transition from conservative to radical. These writings, I argue, reflect his gradual move from a concern with corruption, typical to the Country Party, to his focus on the sources of poverty, which became the basis of his radical ideology. For Cobbett, as for Windham, boxing was important for exacting personal justice and for defence of the country against foreign enemies. However, for Cobbett boxing also played a role in people's ability to resist an unjust tyrannical government, it was this later goal that underscored the radical element of his ideology.[460]

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[455] Thompson, *The Making of the Working Class,* pp. 820-37.
[456] For Gilmartin, Cobbett's *Thing* "could not be reduced to a discrete set of objects (paper money, linen, potatoes), individuals (spies, priests, borough mongers), or institutions (church, banks, parliament), but included, too, the practices through which these were assembled and organized." Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, pp. 160-4, quote on p. 161.
[457] Wilson, *Paine and Cobbett*, pp. 187-189; Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, pp. 164-5.
[458] The corrupt system, which accumulated wealth in the hands of a small number of people instead of spreading it, had severed, he argued, the traditional relationships between people, herding large numbers together into barracks, jails, factories and cities. Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 164.
[459] letter William Cobbett to William Windham, May 2, 1804, in: *The Windham Papers*, pp. 233-4.
[460] *Political Register* 9 (1806), col. 226; *Ibid.* 8 (1805), cols. 195-6.

Like Windham, Cobbett argued that boxing was imperative for the military strength of the nation. Boxing imparted "address and strength to the body, inspire[d] courage and fortitude of mind." Manly sports produced military power, encourage people to strengthen the body, and taught men to "*bear great bodily pain,* and to bear it *with patience and even with humour,* and, amongst the common people, this is the great foundation of military bravery." Of all sports boxing is "the most eligible means of offence and defence"; it toughens the body and helps men develop courage. Courage, the conquest of the fear of death, is important because a country's strength is dependent on people's willingness to risk their lives for it.[461]

According to Cobbett the attempt to eradicate boxing was not a Jacobin conspiracy but rather was part of the *System of Effeminacy*, or as he called it *The Thing*. Cobbett explained that boxing and other manly sports had declined "not because the nation ha[d] become more *civilized*, as it [was] called, but because it ha[d], unhappily, and from causes evident enough, become more effeminate." According to Cobbett, the eradication of boxing was both a symptom and a cause of the effeminacy and degradation of the nation: "as much as I abhor cuttings and stabbings, I have, as I hope most others of my countrymen have a still greater abhorrence of submission to a foreign yoke – Commerce, Opulence, Luxury, Effeminacy, Cowardice, Slavery: these are the stages of national degradation. We are in the fourth". [462]

Like other radicals of the time, Cobbett used the language of Country patriotism and the well-known civic humanistic idiom of national decline to criticise the corruption of the existing order.[463] He explained the connection between the eradication of boxing and national degradation: "[o]f the symptoms of effeminacy none is so certain as a change from athletic and hardy sports, or exercises, to those requiring less bodily strength, and exposing the persons engaged in them to less bodily suffering; and when this change takes place, be assured that national cowardice is at no great distance."[464] Dependence on wealth made men comfortable, effeminate and unwilling to fight as exemplified by the problem of finding recruits for the army, the signing of the Treaty of Amiens (to which

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[461] *Ibid.* cols. 377-424, 199.
[462] *Political Register*, 8 (1805), cols. 197, 422.
[463] McCormack, *The Independent Man*, p. 155.
[464] *Political Register* 8 (1805), col. 200.

Cobbett was opposed), and the decline of manly sports.[465] National effeminacy was also a consequence of the influence of moneyed interest, patronage, and a system of corruption that aimed to eliminate any exercise in which people developed great strength or the ability to withstand pain: "[e]very thing calculated to keep alive the admiration, and even the idea, of hardihood, seems to have become offensive and odious in the sight of but too many of those, whose duty it is to endeavour to arrest, and not to accelerate, the fatal progress of effeminacy."[466]

John Ulrich has argued that for Cobbett the corruption of the state was closely connected to the material effeminising of the bodies of men.[467] Ulrich suggests that Cobbett's aim was not, as many have claimed, to return to the past, but rather to reform the bodies of the people. The issues of both the material and the metaphoric bodies of the labourers is Cobbett's key to solving the problems of the poor and reforming the degradation of the nation: "his 'body politics' may be seen as advocating a materialist version of the social body metaphor, one that recenters the national body around individual rural labourers and the satisfaction of their material needs."[468] For Cobbett the state of the nation was a direct result of the health of its citizens, not in a metaphoric but in a material sense. The national welfare was directly bound to the labourers' welfare, and Cobbett's materialism defines that welfare literally: their food, drink, clothes.[469] Cobbett devotes a large amount of space in his writing to the food of the working classes: its decline (as visible in a fare of tea and potatoes instead of beer and roast-beef), its proper preparation (he even provides recipes) and its importance for the future. Curing the bodies of the labourers was the best way to restore the national body as a whole.[470] Cobbett's strategies for reforming the body and eradicating corruption, according to Ulrich, include

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[465] Wilson, *Paine and Cobbett*, p. 152; Daniel Green, *Great Cobbett*, p. 248.
[466] *Cobbett's Political Register*, 8 (1805), col. 200.
[467] According to Catherine Gallagher there was a long tradition "of seeing the individual body as sign – both as metaphor and source – of the health or infirmity of the larger social body". Catherine Gallagher, "The Body versus the Social Body in the works of Thomas Malthus and Henry Mayhew", in: *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 83-106. See also: John M. Ulrich, *Signs of Their times: History, Labour, and the Body in Cobbett, Carlyle and Disraeli* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2001) chs. 1, 2.
[468] *Ibid*, pp. 4-8, 17-8, 36.
[469] Duff, *William Cobbett and the Politics of the Earth*, pp. 73-82; Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, pp. 71-2.
[470] Ulrich, *Signs of their Times*, p. 8.

radical husbandry, parliamentary reform, and his linking of "the symbolic with the material, the political with the everyday."[471]

Another strategy for reforming and renewing the (material) body of the labourers and hence the body politic was, I argue, boxing. Cobbett believed that two elements affected the strength of the nation – the labour of its people and their strength. The nation depended on the labourers not only for its wealth but also for its strength and ability to defend itself:

> The real strength and all the resources of a country, ever have sprung and ever must spring, from the *labour* of its people; and hence it is, that this nation, which is so small in numbers and so poor in climate and soil compared with many others, has, for many ages, been the most powerful nation in the world: it is the most industrious, the most laborious, and therefore, the most powerful... [a]s it is the labour of those who toil which makes a country abound in resources, so it is the same class of men, who must, by their arms, secure its safety and uphold its fame.[472]

For Cobbett boxing was not only a matter of the individual male, but also a means of empowering the labourer, who was the foundation stone on which the building of the nation rested; empowering the labourer (literally and mentally) would therefore produce a stronger nation: "in estimating the strength of England, or any other country, we must look more at the character and performances of the people than at their numbers,"[473] and there was "no instance" in which the "manly, spirited and generous character of Britons r[o]se to a higher pitch" than in boxing.[474] In an article entitled "The English Character", Cobbett explained that boxing and other manly sports were part of the "causes for national power" as they tended "to produce great energy in individuals, and it is of the union of individual energy that national power principally consists". He exemplified the connection of such manly sports as boxing and national strength through the example of soldiers: "A regiment of soldiers all of whom can *ride* and *box* and *shoot* must be much more formidable than a regiment of men who only know how to dance and sing and act plays. It must be the same with a nation."[475]

The argument that the (economic and military) strength of the nation resided with the labourers is of utmost importance. Cobbett used it to fight the conservative's

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[471] Stafford, *Socialism, Radicalism, and Nostalgia,* pp. 264-5; Ulrich, *Signs of Their Times*, pp. 8-9.
[472] *Political Register* 30 (1816), col. 433.
[473] *Ibid*., col. 361.
[474] *Ibid.* 8 (1805), col. 373.
[475] *Ibid*.

exclusion of the working classes from politics. "Only by acknowledging their centrality as the producers of national wealth", suggests Leonora Nattress, "or by stressing their numerical supremacy… can Cobbett establish their right to more than the merest subsistence level of wages or poor relief."[476] For Cobbett the fact that the strength and resources of the nation derived from the labourers meant that in exchange for their labour, they had a right to earn a living. This was the first step on the road to demanding the extension of the franchise.

Like Windham, Cobbett despised the puritans and the reformation of manners movement. He argued that the "saints and philanthropists" behind the *system of effeminacy*, who were waging a battle against boxing and other hardy sports, were not motivated by compassion towards the boxers but were rather promoters of "the cant of humanity".[477] He attacked the educational schemes of so called humanitarians like Hannah More and the Society for the Reformation of Vice, claiming that their aim was to keep "the cause of the poverty and misery of the people disguised from them, and thereby perpetuating the plundering of them."[478] However, while Windham opposed educating the poor from fear it would make them Jacobins, Cobbett feared that education would make the lower orders complacent, while indoctrinating them to *The System* and distracting them from the real sources of their poverty.[479] Cobbett argued that the *system of effeminacy* (which was part of the "Pitt system of internal politics") made "almost every man, who ha[d] property, a sort of prisoner…of the state", through the national debt and heavy taxation.[480] The "Pitt system of finance and taxation" had no direct hold on the poor (because they did not pay direct taxation), which was why the *system of effeminacy* was needed for "the suppression of mirth as well as hardy exercises, and, indeed, of every thing that tend[ed] to produce relaxation from labour and a communication of ideas of independence amongst the common people". However, the *system of effeminacy*, which destroyed internal resistance also destroyed the ability of the country to defend itself against foreign occupation, for a people rendered submissive would not resist submission to foreign rule:

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[476] Nattrass, *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style,* pp. 158-9, 107-8.
[477] *Political Register* 8 (1805), cols. 200-1.
[478] *The Opinions of William Cobbett*, p. 293; Gilmartin*, Print Politics*, p. 25.
[479] Dyck, *Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture*, pp. 37-8; Daniel Green, *Great Cobbett*, p. 278; Williams, *Cobbett*, p. 23; Duff, *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture*, p. 16; Bilodeau, *Pugilistic Rhetoric*, pp. 68-74.
[480] Cobbett, *Political Register* 8 (1805), col. 201.

> render the whole nation effeminate; suffer no relaxation from labour or from care; shut all the paupers up in work-houses, and those that are not so shut up, work in gangs, each with its driver: this do and it is evident that you will have no internal commotion…you will hold the people in complete subjection to your will; but then, recollect, that … they will stir neither hand nor foot to prevent a transfer of their subjection to another master.[481]

Thus, while Windham argued that boxing would keep the people from revolting, on the one hand, and teach them to fight foreign oppression, on the other, Cobbett argued that fighting foreign oppression and resisting a corrupt government were two sides of the same coin. Oppressed people would not resist an oppressive government, but they would also not stir to defend it from foreign dominance. Stopping boxing, Cobbett insisted, would only create "a nation of timid and resentful slaves", who would not raise a hand to defend the nation.[482] Cobbett's boxing argument was a new variation on this right to resistance theme. Kathleen Wilson has suggested that an early basis for the radical claim to legitimacy was the resistance argument, i.e. "the idea that subjects had the right to counter corruption and resist tyranny."[483] Basing their claims on the idea of the liberties of Englishmen and of the natural rights of all men, radicals argued that government needed consent. The people had the right to determine their representatives and to depose them if they abused their powers.[484] From this it followed that a patriot was a man who resisted a tyrannical government.

For Cobbett boxing was indispensable for achieving independence, a word which had important political connotations. Independence, a key concept in Georgian society, was seen as the ultimate virtue and as the requirement for citizenship.[485] Originally only an independent man, who was defined as a head of a household, was free and only he had the right to vote, because only a man of rank and property could be considered independent of undue influence and corruption.[486] However, by Cobbett's day, the concept of independence had undergone a wide-ranging change, one which had important political repercussions. Radicals laid claim to independence through a redefinition of the term. By challenging the intersection of property and power and severing the link between property and political participation, they redefined the concept to denote

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[481] *Ibid.*, cols. 201-2.
[482] *Ibid.*, cols. 373.
[483] Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, p. 216.
[484] Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, pp. 198-9; Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, pp. 212-3.
[485] McCormack, *The Independent Man*, pp. 2-7, 13, 33.
[486] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

character and inner qualities rather than property and rank, thus creating a more inclusive ideal of citizenship.[487] When independence became available (in theory) to men who were not part of the upper class, with it came the right to political participation.

Cobbett made a decided attempt to redefine independence; it was not, he claimed, a factor of money and property because "independence is in the mind".[488] Cobbett habitually portrayed himself as "the very embodiment of the independent freeborn Englishman" and, according to McCormack, "the bodiliness of masculine independence" was a recurrent theme in his writings.[489] It was in this context that he warned against attempts to eradicate exercises of the working-class which "tends to prepare them for deeds of bravery of a higher order, and, by the means of those deeds and of the character and consequence naturally growing out of them, to preserve the independence and the liberties of their country.[490]

He contrasted boxing to cuttings, stabbings and poisoning. Such secretive practices, he argued, would never "render [the people] politically turbulent, or bold." He thus implied that boxing, which was a public act, done in the open, had significant political ramifications:

> Boxing matches give rise to assemblages of the people; they tend to make the people bold; they produce a communication of notions of hardihood; they serve to remind men of the importance of bodily strength; they … occasion a transient relaxation from labour; they tend, in short, to keep alive, even amongst the lowest of the people, some idea of independence."[491]

With boxing as part of the foundation of his political worldview, Cobbett offered three arguments on the basis of which the working classes would be able to claim a voice in the political process. First, he declared that the economic and military strength of the nation derived from and depended on the labourers. Second, he insisted that subjects had the right and duty to resist a tyrannical government. Any attempt to curtail the liberties of the people, including their pursuit of sports and recreation, and their right to resist a tyranny would lead to the destruction of the nation, because submissive citizens would not resist a foreign occupation. Third, he argued that boxing empowered the lower classes by imparting ideas of "independence". The independence learned in boxing did not

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[487] *Ibid.*, pp. 158-62.
[488] *Political Register* 22 (1812), col. 193.
[489] McCormack, *The Independent Man*, p. 34.
[490] *Political Register* 8 (1805), col. 200.
[491] *Ibid*. col. 201.

belong to the old, conservative order of rank and property, but to the new political order based on a man's character and body. Although in 1805, at the time he wrote his series on boxing, Cobbett had not yet demanded universal male suffrage, when he did so later, it was on the basis of these three claims.

In conclusion, boxing, which was perceived as both source and symptom of the manly national character, and a patriotic practice, became a site of struggle between the radical Cobbett and conservative Windham. Up to a point, Windham's and Cobbett's interest in the sport stem from similar considerations. They both saw boxing as a partial solution for mobilizing Britons in defence of the country, shoring up manpower for the army and training the lower orders for army service. Each was incensed by the reformation of manners movement; although they were both religious men, they resented the Puritanical cant and hypocrisy, they despised the moroseness and hyper-religiosity of the movement, and they were suspicious of various educational schemes for the poor. Perhaps most significantly, both shaped their arguments in the language of the patriotic civic humanistic ideology of the Country Party: they feared the increasing influence of money and corruption, and they believed that independence, honesty, patriotism and self-sacrifice were needed to resist corruption and unite men in defence of liberty and the balanced constitution. They believed that patriotism, courage, strength and manliness were what the nation needed and that boxing was the means to instil these properties in the lower order.

However, Windham and Cobbett each appropriated the sport in order to define patriotism, independence and manliness from their loyalist or radical viewpoints respectively. Windham argued that patriotism was loyalty to the social and political order, whereas Cobbett claimed that it was first and foremost a commitment to combat corruption in all its forms, the resistance to a tyrannical government, and the willingness to fight for the country. Windham believed that independence –the requisite for political participation – remained a factor of landed property, while Cobbett argued that independence was a factor of body and character (hence attainable by working-class men too). For Windham, the role of the working classes was to remain loyal to the established order, acquiesce to the rule of their betters, and sacrifice themselves by defending their country against foreign enemies. For Cobbett, the working classes were the producers of national wealth and strength. They were independent in mind and body and they had the

duty to resist tyrannical government in addition to defending their country against foreign opponents, but also the right to subsistence and political representation. He used the well established Country language to argue the radical ideas of labour as the property of the labourer, the right and duty to resist a tyrannical or corrupt government, and independence as a factor not of property but of manliness and character, and therefore available to all men. For both Windham and Cobbett boxing was a way to impart these ideas to the working class in an effective manner.

For William Windham, boxing was a measure to militarise the nation, the social glue that reinforced the social order, and a loyalist strategy to strengthen the established political order. It was a corporeal means of inculcating loyalist patriotism, a practical method to train men for the defence of their country and a way to keep the lower orders at bay thus averting revolution. In effect, boxing was one of the numerous counter-revolutionary measures that Windham supported as he became convinced of the need to mobilise the lower classes to defend the country and the social and political order. For William Cobbett as well, boxing was a practical means for training the lower orders to defend their country, but it was also a way of empowering them, educating them about their strength and power, and making them aware not only of their duties but also of their rights. For Cobbett, the working classes were the producers of national wealth and strength. They were independent in mind and body and they had the duty to resist tyrannical government in addition to defending their country against foreign opponents, but also the right to subsistence and political representation.

As Matthew McCormack and Anna Clark point out, this identification of manliness with independence and hence citizenship had the effect of excluding women as well as "effeminate" men from the political arena.[492] While attempting to undermine the older definition of independence connected to property, radicals emphasized the manliness of independence, and this emphasis on the gender aspect of independence disqualified women, homosexuals and minority men.[493] Although he was a proponent of Catholic emancipation, Cobbett was strongly opposed to the inclusion of Blacks and Jews in the national collective, accusing the latter of having had a part in corrupting prize-fighting.[494] For Cobbett and other fans of boxing, the sport was an area in which the superiority of the

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[492] McCormack, *The Independent Man*, *Passim*; Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches*, *passim.*
[493] McCormack, *The Independent Man*, p. 165-6.
[494] *Political Register* 5 (1804), col. 935; Ibid. 69 (1830), cols. 733-4.

masculine Englishman over non-English others could be proven. However, as will be shown in the next chapter, boxing did not always produce an exclusive idea of national identity.

Chapter Five

"Be he white or Black, a Turk or a Jew": Minority Boxers in the Boxing Discourse

> Generally speaking [pugilism] displays the headlong impetuosity of the Irishman the caution of the wary Jew risking no more than is absolutely necessary the short lived fury of the gipsy negro or other foreigners commonly bottomless and yielding to opposition and lastly the genuine John Bull armed at all points by a courage equally active and passive[,] the safest man to back in the universe.[495]

> Mendoza, Gulley, Molineaux,
> Each Nature's weapon wield;
> Who each at Boney would stand true,
> And never to him yield….[496]

These two quotes exemplify two different attitudes towards minority boxers evident in boxing discourse. The first quote reflects all the possible stereotypes concerning minority boxers: the impulsive and violent Irish, the calculating Jew, passion-ruled gipsy negro (whoever that epithet refers to), and all of them cowards in comparison to which the "English" boxer is perfection. It also brands Irish, Jewish, Black and Roma boxers as "foreigners", excluding them from the fold of the nation. In the second quote (a stanza from the popular song "A boxing we will go"), which celebrates the manly national character exemplified in boxing, two of the three pugilists represented as exemplars of manliness confronting Napoleon ("Boney") are the Jewish Daniel Mendoza and the African-American Tom Molineaux.[497] Their manliness and their service to England accord them a place in the nation. These images of minority boxers represent different notions concurrently present in the boxing discourse: Jews and Blacks as capable and worthy of assimilation, on the one hand, and as irredeemably foreign, on the other.

Chapter Three has shown that boxing had an important function in shaping an ideal masculinity that was tough and muscular, and in sharp contrast to the effeminate and foreign "refined man". This ideal, it has often been argued, was created "not only through an increasingly stricter demarcation between the sexes but also through a systematic

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[495] Vincent Dowling, *Fistiana; or, Oracle of the Ring* (London: William Clement, jr., 1841), p. 15.
[496] Source unknown. Song published in: *Sporting Magazine* 38 (1811), p. 294.
[497] John Gulley (1783-1863), the third pugilist mentioned, was an English boxer who had retired from the ring and became landlord of a pub. Gulley later earned a fortune in horse-racing and become Member of Parliament in 1832, and was thus a unique case of social mobility – but in 1811 that was still in the future.

'unmanning' of minorities within and foreigners without Europe".[498] This ideal masculinity, it has been claimed, depended upon a contrast with the Other for its definition. Jews, Blacks and other marginalised groups were excluded and systematically stigmatised as ugly and effeminate; their body was an outward sign of their inner deficiencies; their physiognomy reflected their flawed character.

However, I will argue that boxing and the masculine ideal it shaped did not create a consistent image. It was, as Douglas Hartman has postulated, a "contested terrain", a site in which "racial images, ideologies and inequalities are constructed, transformed, and constantly struggled over rather than a place where they are reconciled or reproduced one way or the other."[499] The chapter analyzes the tropes and stereotypes through which minority boxers were represented, and the terms and conditions under which they were symbolically excluded from and included in the body politic. It does not attempt to ascertain whether prejudice existed against minority boxers or whether they received "fair play", but rather to reconstruct the way ideas of gender, race, religion and ethnicity shaped notions of national identity, and the role played by discursive oppositions such as masculine-effeminate, honest-dishonest, English-foreign in the process.[500]

The chapter begins by delineating the place of Jews and Blacks in English society, illustrating their precarious situation in the late eighteenth century. The second section describes the symbolic strategies used to include and exclude one Jewish boxer, Daniel Mendoza, from the national collective. Section three examines representations of Black boxers, and compares images of Bill Richmond and Tom Molineaux in order to ascertain the conditions under which certain minority boxers were accepted while others were denied. The chapter argues that boxing was one of the contested terrains in which various

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[498] Revathi Krishnaswamy, "The Economy of Colonial desire", in: *The Masculinity Studies Reader*, eds. Rachel Adams and David Savran (Malden, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 292-317.

[499] Douglas Hartmann, "Rethinking the relationship between Sport and Race in American Culture: Golden Ghettos and Contested terrain", *Sociology of Sport Journal* 17 (2000), p. 230.

[500] The racial significance of sport and the image of minority (especially black) sportsmen has received much attention in sport sociology and this study has utilized a number of works on the subject: Ben Carrington and Ian McDonald, eds., *Race, Sport and British Identity* (London: Routledge, 2001); Ben Carrington, *Race, Representation and the Sporting Body* (London: Goldsmith College, 2002); Douglas Hartmann, "Rethinking the relationship between Sport and Race in American Culture: Golden Ghettos and Contested terrain", *Sociology of Sport Journal* 17 (2000), 229-253; id. "Sport as Contested Terrain", in: *A Companion to Racial and Ethnic Studies*, eds. David Theo Goldberg and John Solomos (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 405-415; David Andrew, "The Fact(s), of Michael Jordan's Blackness: Excavating a Floating Racial Signifier", *Sociology of Sport Journal* 13 (1996), pp. 125-158; Grant Jarvie ed., *Sport, Racism and Ethnicity* (London: Falmer, 1991). See also: Ruti Ungar and Michael Berkowitz eds., *Fighting Back? Jewish and Black Boxers in Britain* (London: University College London Press, 2007).

ideologies concerning the national identity competed for dominance. However, it also argues that images of minority boxers were not simple reflections of two different constructions of national identity. Rather, they were the result of a complex process of construction in which questions of gender, class, race, ethnicity and national identity, as well as commercialisation, the media, and the larger debate on boxing, all played a part.

5.1. Jews and Blacks in Georgian society

The figures of the Jew and the Black were both cultural stereotypes of the Other that were part of English culture for centuries, playing an important role in theatre, literature and art long before the people they represented lived in the country. Even when there was no tangible Jewish presence in England – between the Jewish expulsion in 1290 and their return in the seventeenth century – the image of the Jew was present in English culture.[501] In the Middle Ages the Jew was usually portrayed as usurer, child murderer, and desecrator of the Host. In the early modern period Jews came to be associated with the negative aspects of capitalism and were accused of having undue financial influence; the image of the Jew thriving on Christian blood was transformed into the Jew flourishing on Christian money.[502] According to Isaiah Schachar, eighteenth-century caricatures generally referred to Jews as a collective, sharing the same traits of dishonesty and greed, and variously portrayed as the same dangerous type – the circumciser, crucifier, Christian hater, and abominable Shylock. Prominently represented in these caricatures were also

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[501] The literature on the figure of the Jew in English culture is vast, see especially: Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714-1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1978); id. *The Jews of Britain 1656 to 2000* (London: University of California Press, 2002); Cecil Roth, A History of the Jews in England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964); Alfred Rubens, *A Jewish Iconography* (London: Jewish Museum, 1954); James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Frank Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic stereotypes: a paradigm of otherness in English popular culture, 1660 – 1830* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Edgar Rosenberg, *From Shylock To Svengali. Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960); Bernard Glassman, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes without Jews: Images of the Jews in England 1290-1700* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1975); Michael Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion: 'The Jewish Question' & English National Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); id., "Jews and other 'Outlandish Englishmen': Ethnic Performance and the Invention of British Identity under the Georges", *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2000), pp. 773-97; Isaiah Shachar, "The Emergence of Modern Pictorial Stereotypes of 'the Jews' in England", in: *Studies in the Cultural Life of the Jews in England,* eds. Dov Noy and Issacher Ben-Ami (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), pp. 331-365; David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture 1840-1914* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

[502] Glassman, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes without Jews*, pp. 21-2, 33-4.

the bible, synagogue and Rabbis.[503] These negative representations effectively dehumanised the Jewish community already ostracized since medieval times for their refusal to acknowledge Christ and their alleged role in his murder.[504]

The late eighteenth century saw a shift from religious anti-Judaism to a racialized anti-Semitism.[505] Medieval anti-Semitism emphasised differences in beliefs, rituals and practices (hence mutable differences) between Jews and Christians. From the late eighteenth century onwards, emphasis lay more on immutable characteristics summarized in the image of the Jewish body, whose supposed deformity negated the possibility of assimilation. The body became the main marker of difference and images of the abnormal Jewish body played a central role in anti-Semitic discourse. Jews were habitually portrayed as ugly, deformed, dirty and unhealthy creatures, who carried infectious diseases like syphilis. Images of Jews had clearly identifiable physiognomic characteristics: dark eyes, crooked nose, side-locks and beard.[506]

The figure of the Jewish boxer increases in significance within the historical framework of the emasculation of Jewish men. In the Middle Ages it was rumoured that Jewish men menstruated, which was seen as an explanation for their alleged need to drink Christian blood.[507] A conflation of circumcision and castration resulted in another form of emasculation. Jewish men were seen as uncontrolled and unrestrained – feminine characteristics. The Jewish male was portrayed as a clever but cowardly man in an emasculated, effeminate, weak body, who was unfit to fulfil traditional masculine roles. This picture of the Jew, suggests Michael Shapiro, was always contrasted with that of the

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[503] Schachar, "The Emergence of the Modern Pictorial Stereotype of 'the Jews' in England", pp. 331-65.
[504] Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, p. 87.
[505] This is the central argument of George Mosse and Sander Gilman: Mosse, *The Image of Man*, *passim*; Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's body* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991); id., *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca, N.Y and London: Cornell University Press, 1985); Sander L. Gilman, Robert Jütte and Gabriele Kohlbauer-Fritz eds., *'Der schejne Jid'. Das Bild des 'jüdischen Körpers' in Mythos und Ritual* (Wien: Picus 1998), pp. 57-74.
[506] For historiographical reviews on the Jewish body see: Sharon Gillerman, "More Than Skin Deep: Histories of the Modern Jewish Body", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95.3 (2005), pp. 470-478; Patricia Vertinsky "The 'Racial' Body and the Anatomy of Difference: Anti-Semitism, Physical Culture, and the Jew's Foot", *Sport Science Review* 4.1 (1995), pp. 38-59; Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews,* pp. 36-8; Howard Eilberg-Schwartz ed., *People of the Body. Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992).
[507] David S. Katz, "Shylock's Gender: Jewish Male Menstruation in Early Modern England", *The Review of English Studies* 50 (1999), pp. 440-462; Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews,* pp. 37-8; Glassman, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes without Jews,* pp. 33-40; David S. Katz, "Shylock's Gender: Jewish Male Menstruation in Early Modern England", *The Review of English Studies* 50 (1999), pp. 440-462.

wholesome, healthy and masculine Christian body.[508] The anti-Semitic discourse argued that the effeminate and degenerate Jewish male was unworthy of becoming a part of the nation because he was weak and cowardly, and thus unfit to fight in its defence. In short, his inability to be a soldier confirmed his ineligibilty to be a fully-fledged citizen.[509]

Images of Black people have also had a long history in England.[510] In the Middle Ages Black people were associated with one of the three Magi, but also identified as the descendents of Ham, the accursed son of Noah, who was doomed to perpetual servitude. By the seventeenth century the growth of the slave trade and frequent contact with Africans prompted discussion about the cause of the African skin colour and its significance. Regardless of the climatic, cultural or biblical explanations given, skin colour was a major sign of difference.[511] The difference between white and Black people was perceived within a binary structure that generated an endless series of positive and negative connotations, with white always holding the positive and dominant position; white represented soul, black represented body; white symbolised purity, beauty, and holiness, black connoted dirt, ugliness, and sin; white represented culture and civilization black represented nature, wilderness and barbarism. The white man was perceived as rational, self-disciplined, and reasonable; the Black man was portrayed as emotional, instinctive, and unrestrained.[512]

Savagery, proximity to animals, sexuality and lack of reason were the most prominent features of the black stereotype. Their physiological differences exemplified "inherent" mental deficiencies.[513] Blacks were often compared to animals in an attempt to

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[508] Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews,* p. 39.
[509] Vertinsky, "The Anatomy of Difference", pp. 46-9; Gilman, *The Jew's Body,* ch. 2; Felsenstein*, Anti-Semitic Stereotypes*, pp. 229-31.
[510] For the images of Blacks in Western culture see: Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black*, *American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black. Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992); James Walvin, *Black and White. The Negro and English Society, 1550-1945* (London: Allen Lane, 1973); Paul Hoch, *White Hero Black Beast. Racism, Sexism and the Mask of Masculinity* (London: Pluto, 1979); Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the 'other'", in: *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997), pp. 223-79.
[511] I follow the argument of Jordan Winthrop that "blackness" always served as an important marker of difference. In contrast, Roxanna Wheeler has argued that in the beginning of the eighteenth century skin colour was much less pervasive as a marker of difference than religion or culture. Jordan, *White over Black*, pp. Ch. 1; Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race*, pp. 33-38.
[512] Hoch, *White Hero, Black Beast*, pp. 44-49; Carrington, '*Race*', *Representation and the Sporting Body,* pp. 7-10. Hall, "The Spectacle of the Other", pp. 243-7.
[513] Jordan, *White over Black*, pp. 8-12, 29-32, 150-8.

imply that they were instinctual creatures incapable of reason and moral, or legal, thinking. The Black man was perceived as hypersexual, and portrayed as having an exceptionally large penis. These were the recurring images of black people in popular culture but also accepted as "facts" in many scientific circles.[514]

Jews and Blacks were two of the many racial and religious minority groups whose belonging to the nation was being negotiated in the public sphere in late Georgian society. At the end of the eighteenth century the Jewish community counted around fifteen to twenty thousand Jews, many of them well acculturated.[515] The 1770s had seen a wave of immigration of poor Jews from Germany, Holland and Poland, who earned their livelihood mainly through hawking food and clothes but also through criminal activity.[516] Jewish life in England was typified by a large degree of acculturation; the upper class Jews lived like gentlemen, their lower class brethren shared the lifestyle of their non-Jewish neighbours. There were no specific anti-Jewish laws in England; Jews suffered the same disabilities as other non-Anglicans. In 1753 the place of Jews in English society became a matter of a heated public debate: that year a Jews' Naturalization Bill was passed which granted foreign-born Jews the right to petition Parliament to be naturalized (thus being able to buy land) without having to take the sacrament.[517] The bill, which was mainly introduced to further trade, aroused strong indignation from the Tory opposition, who fought vehemently against it as part of election struggles, and was promptly repelled.[518] The opponents of the Jew Bill revitalized anti-Semitic stereotypes and accusations, such as ritual murder and forced circumcision. They argued that it would enable Jews to buy all the land in the country, that Jewish blood would contaminate the English nation, and that Jews were inassimilable. For many opponents of the bill it was England's expulsion of Jews which had contributed to its greatness.[519]

The black community was smaller, less cohesive and economically poorer than the Jewish community. Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, slave

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[514] Walvin, *Black and White*, p. 163.
[515] Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, pp. 3-11; Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*, p. 204.
[516] Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, pp. 166-226
[517] Thomas W. Perry, *Pubic Opinion, Propaganda, and Politics in eighteenth-century England. A Study of the Jew Bill of 1753* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962); G. A. Cranfield, "The 'London Evening-Post' and the Jew Bill of 1753", *The Historical Journal* 8.1 (1965), pp. 16-30.
[518] Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews,* pp. 195-224; Cranfield, "The 'London Evening-Post' and the Jew Bill of 1753", pp. 16-30;
[519] Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, pp. 206-13; Cranfield, "The 'London Evening-Post' and the Jew Bill of 1753", p. 22; Ragussis, "Jews and Other 'Outlandish Englishmen'", p. 796.

trade and the American war (in which many black people fought on the British side) brought Africans and Afro-Caribbeans to London in increasing numbers. It is estimated that by the 1780s there were between 10,000 and 15,000 Blacks in England.[520] Black servants were much in demand and considered status symbols; Blacks also worked as sailors, artisans or musicians. Although free black people in Britain had more opportunities and a relatively higher level of education than their contemporaries in America, most were poor. Denied the right to poor relief, many, including ex-servicemen, became beggars, and the problem of the 'poor black' was a subject of debate in the late eighteenth century, culminating in 1787 in a failed attempt to resettle poor Blacks in Sierra Leone.[521] The more economically stable and literate representatives of the community organized networks of economic and financial support, and were active in the abolitionist movement, which became increasingly stronger in the late eighteenth century. The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade successfully lobbied for the Slave Trade Act, passed in 1807, which made the trade illegal throughout the British Empire, and the Slavery Abolition Act, passed in 1833.[522]

Debates over key issues such as the Jew Bill, slavery and the Sierra Leone project were important as they situated Jews and Blacks prominently on the national agenda. They were part of the larger debate on religious tolerance (including discussions about Catholics and Protestant Dissenters) and alien immigration, and expressed deeply ingrained fears regarding the frailty of the body politic and the threat of its "contamination" by "foreign bodies", i.e. Jews and Blacks, whose assimilation threatened the white Christian character of the nation. The opponents of the Jew Bill, like many of the proponents of the Sierra Leone project, portrayed Jews and Blacks as a threat to the

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[520] The most important literature on Blacks in Georgian England is: Folarin O. Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974); Jagdish S. Gundara and Ian Duffield eds., *Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain: From Roman Times to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1992); Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1984); Norma Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in Britain, 1780-1830* (London: Frank Cass 1996); Gretchen Grezina, *Black London: Life Before Emancipation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Isaac Land, "Bread and Arsenic: Citizenship from the Bottom Up in Georgian London", *Journal of Social History* 39.1 (2005), pp. 89-110.

[521] Land, "Bread and Arsenic", pp. 89-110; Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 67-88; Grezina, *Black London*, ch. 1.

[522] Walvin, *Black and White*, pp. 56-64; Fryer, *Staying Power*, pp. 195-209; Land, "Bread and Arsenic", pp. 89-110.

nation.[523] These debates were sites of contestation between toleration and racism, but also raised the question of the permeability of the nation. They reflected the struggle between alternative concepts of Englishness and Britishness (at a time when the two concepts were used interchangeably). The issue at stake was not only the status of Jews or Blacks but the broader character of the national identity.

Gerlad Newman and Linda Colley have painted a picture of a successful forging of an inclusive nation by the beginning of the nineteenth century.[524] Whether English, as per Newman, or British, as per Colley, a cohesive idea of national identity was formed in the late eighteenth century, conceptualised in opposition to the Other. This national identity was created by invoking past heroes or national enemies, it was produced in cultural artefacts and embodied in the cult of monarchy, it was the subject of group identification and transcended political, social and regional loyalties. Kathleen Wilson, on the other hand, has argued that there was an isolationist strand in England which encouraged a biological, essentialist sense of the nation. Englishness was seen as innate, immutable, and connected to skin colour, blood and lineage.[525] She argues that the periodic harassment, denigration and expulsion of Africans, Jews and Catholics, show that their inclusion in the body politic was tentative, to say the least. Similarly, Isaac Land has convincingly argued that debates about the dangers of incorporation of Jews and Blacks into the British nation prove that there was no accepted idea of "Englishness". If there had been a cohesive sense of nation, there would not have been a need to protest against their inclusion.[526] Boxing, as one of the sites in which the English constituted their ideas of Englishness/Britishness, and the only sport in which minority sportsmen played a prominent role, naturally became one of the sites in which struggles between different ideas of the national identity took place.

5.2. Not the Jew that Shakespeare drew: representations of a Jewish boxer

The Georgian period saw numerous Jewish pugilists enter the ring, however the most famous and celebrated was Daniel Mendoza (1765–1836). Born in Aldgate, East London,

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[523] William Cobbett, for example, was strongly opposed to the inclusion of both Jews and Blacks in the English nation. He warned of the dangers of miscegenation and the pollution of the nation by Blacks, and the dangers of its corruption by Jews. *Political Register* 5 (1804), col. 935; Ibid., 69 (1830), cols. 733-4.
[524] Colley, *Britons*, p. 365ff.; Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, pp. 127-35.
[525] Wilson, *Island Race*, p. 43.
[526] Land, "Bread and Arsenic", p. 108.

to a poor Sephardic family, he was the first Jewish boxer to win national acclaim. Like other boxers, he had learned to fight in the streets and had acquired a reputation over time. He achieved his professional reputation through three fights with Richard Humphries, which attracted massive attention and did much to raise interest in the sport. He became very famous, received the patronage of the Prince of Wales and taught the cream of London's aristocracy how to box. After his retirement he tried to earn money by giving boxing exhibitions, keeping a pub and various other means, but he died penniless, leaving his eleven children and wife impoverished. Egan's biography of Daniel Mendoza in the "boxing bible", *Boxiana*, describes the acclaim that the Jewish boxer achieved both within the Jewish community and in wide sections of Christian society:

> The name of Mendoza has resounded from one part of the kingdom to the other; and the fame of this once-celebrated pugilist was the theme of universal panegyric – and though not 'The Jew that Shakespeare drew' – yet he was that *Jew*, the acknowledged pride of his own particular persuasion, and who, so far interested the *Christian*, that, in spite of his prejudices, he was compelled to exclaim – 'Mendoza was a pugilist of no ordinary merit!'[527]

Although Egan's portrayal of Mendoza is a sympathetic attempt to repudiate the negative stereotype, the allusion to Shylock, the bloodthirsty moneylender of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, is significant. It invokes one of the most important stock images of Jews, and by raising the spectre of anti-Jewish prejudice at the very beginning of the passage, keeps the anti-Jewish stereotype before the reader's eyes. Shakespeare's image of Shylock incorporates many stereotypes of Jews as usurious, miserly, malignant, blood-thirsty, cruel, vengeful and cunning. In short, the play's "Jew" is the "eternal outsider" and the embodiment of evil and the audience celebrates his downfall.[528] Shylock is not merely a Jew, but *The Jew* representing all Jews. This is made clear both through his presentation as the only meaningful Jewish character and by reference to him as 'The Jew' more often than by name. In and through the play, Shylock becomes the ultimate Jew, and the story of one individual becomes the story of the

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[527] Egan, *Boxiana,* vol. 1, p. 255.

[528] Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes*, pp. 158-186; Hermann Sinsheimer, *Shylock: Die Geschichte einer Figur* (München: Ner-Tamid Verlag, 1960), pp. 141-3; Derek Cohen, "Shylock and the Idea of the Jew", in: *Jewish Presences in English Literature,* eds. Derek Cohen and Deborah Heller (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), pp. 23-39; Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion*, p. 85; id., "Jews and Other 'Outlandish Englishmen'", p. 779; Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews*, pp. 89-111; Glassman, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes without Jews*, pp. 68-70.

Jewish nation.[529] According to James Shapiro, Shylock is evoked to claim that "Jews threatened to contaminate or transform the English body and body politic".[530] Thus, the evocation of Shylock and other anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews in the boxing discourse are important inasmuch, as they reflect an exclusionary vision of the nation. The interspersed use of racial and religious stereotypes in representations of Jewish boxers and spectators, the presentation of victory and losses of Jewish boxers as that of the Jewish community as a whole, the juxtaposition of English versus Jewish, and the emasculation of Jewish boxers were, it will be shown, all strategies used to exclude Jewish boxers symbolically from the nation.



Figure 4: Johann Heinrich Ramberg, *The Triumph*, 1788.

Although unique in its venom, the caricature *The Triumph* exemplifies many of these strategies. It is a depiction of a fantastic procession celebrating the victory of Humphries over Mendoza in Odiham on 9 January 1788.[531] Humphries is depicted sitting on a sedan chair carried by the Prince of Wales, a butcher, a sailor and an alderman. The procession is headed by Captain Hanger, a well-known boxing fan, holding a banner with the inscription: "Long live Humphries the victorious, who in a bloody fight overcame the 12 Tribes of Israel." On the left is a group of bearded Jews; Mendoza is "drawn with a

[529] Sinsheimer, *Shylock: Die Geschichte einer Figur*, pp. 147-8.
[530] Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews,* p. 225.
[531] The fight really took place but the procession is probably fictitious. Captain Hanger was, in fact, not present at the fight. *The Times*, 15 January 1788.

ludicrous beard", as one contemporary newspaper report, critical of the caricature, describes it. He is lying on the ground, spitting blood and looking very ill, with his pants open and his face contorted almost to the degree of inhumanity.[532] Tending him are a Jew with a crooked nose (wearing a typical eastern European Jewish hat) a Rabbi and Lord George Gordon, who is reading the Talmud. On the right hand side of the picture, a group of people are watching the procession, one of whom is Major Topham, editor of the newspaper *The World*, which enthusiastically supported boxing. Under the print there is an inscription celebrating Humphries's victory as a loss not only for Mendoza but for the whole Jewish community.

The caricature and its inscription referred to the craze surrounding the Humphries–Mendoza fight of 1788, which drew huge crowds as well as many gentlemen and noblemen, and was the talk of the town for weeks. The caricature ridiculed all the participants: the crowd, the newspapers, the Jewish fans, and the rich patrons who indulged in such sports, and even the authorities (represented by the Alderman), whose job it was to stop these events, had participated. The caricature was probably aimed against the Prince of Wales who, from an artistic point of view, was represented as the main figure in the picture (apart from Humphries). The Prince was shown keeping company with butchers and sailors, and degrading himself by carrying a prize fighter.[533] In addition to this probable political aim, the caricaturist, Johann Heinrich Ramberg (1763-1840),[534] portrayed Mendoza as a representative of his 'tribe' and his downfall as a loss for the Jewish community as a whole. The inclusion of Lord Gordon in the group was also significant. Lord George Gordon (1751-1793), an instigator of the anti-Catholic Gordon riots and imprisoned for treason in 1787, had been a popular figure of ridicule since his conversion to Judaism in 1786. Featured widely in caricatures that reflected not only on Gordon's person but also on the Jewish community as a whole, his image

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[532] A review of the caricature in *The Morning Chronicle* on the 24 January 1788 describes it as "illiberal".
[533] The Prince, later to become George IV (1762-1830), was the eldest son of King George III, but unlike his austere father he became a symbol of the corruption of the aristocracy. He was notorious for his enormous debts, his radical Whig connections, his secret marriage to the Catholic Mrs. Fitzherbert, his many sexual adventures, and his mistreatment of his wife Caroline. His avowed patronage of boxing was sometimes used as a weapon by his enemies, who attacked him for endorsing illegal activities. E. A. Smith, *George IV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).
[534] The artist Johann Heinrich Ramberg (1763-1840), was a German artist who studies at the Royal Academy of Arts in London from 1781 to 1788, under the direct patronage of George III, whose troubled relations with the Prince of Wales were no secret. Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, p. 603.

functioned as a reiteration of the accusations that Jews wished to convert Englishmen and that their presence in England posed a danger to the Christian character of the nation.[535]

Although this caricature was unique in its blatant anti-Semitism, many other caricatures showed Jewish followers of Mendoza with ludicrously pronounced Semitic features. Portrayals of Jewish crowds in box fights often featured the perceived physiognomic characteristics of Jews - dark eyes, crooked noses, side-locks, and beards. Although Mendoza did not, according to all his portraits, have a beard, some newspaper articles called him "brother of the beard", thereby simultaneously referring to the Jewish crowd.[536] Born and bred in England and probably fluent in English, Mendoza was nevertheless often represented speaking in what was considered a Jewish dialect, for example, saying "dat he vas quite shatisfied".[537] Emphasizing Jewish dialect was, according to Michael Ragussis, "a way of making visible - or audible - the traditional mark of Jewish identity, namely, the mark of circumcision."[538] Mendoza was also portrayed as a person with an unusual attachment to money; *The Times,* for instance, explained that Mendoza opened his boxing academy near the bank "consistently with his character as a Jew…"[539] Representations depicting Jewish boxers or their followers with "typical" Jewish physiognomy or characteristics had their effect. They reiterated anti-Semitic stereotypes and positioned Jewish boxers within their ridiculed ethnic group and outside the boxing community proper. By positioning Mendoza among the group of Jews on the left of the picture rather than as part of the boxing group in the middle, *The Triumph* caricature literally and symbolically excluded Mendoza from the boxing community.

Despite the many anti-Semitic stereotypes reproduced in *The Triumph*, Mendoza's manliness was not questioned: his body was drawn muscular and strong. This was probably a consequence of a critical infliction towards boxing. As part of its ironic representation, the caricature depicted the sport as a site of hypermasculinity that was brutal, monstrous and degrading, hence the almost inhuman features of Mendoza and the sailor carrying Humphries's chair. However, other sources hinted that Mendoza lacked certain manly qualities. Mendoza was famous for developing "scientific boxing", a

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[535] Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes*, pp. 115-8.
[536] *General Evening Post*, 9 May 1789.
[537] *The Morning Herald*, 9 January 1788.
[538] Ragussis, "Jews and Other 'Outlandish Englishmen'", p. 791.
[539] *The Times,* 28 December 1787.

method of fighting that included a system of footwork, sparring, and special guarding techniques enabling him to defeat heavier and stronger boxers. Praise of Mendoza's skill was, however, often tinged by comments on his lack of strength. Egan's biography of Mendoza in *Boxiana* was typical of this tendency. An obvious admirer, Egan wrote that Mendoza "was considered one of the most elegant and scientific pugilists in the whole race of Boxers, and might be termed a complete artist."[540] Nevertheless, he often observed that while Mendoza was never short of skill, talent or courage, he did lack physical strength and force: "there was more elegance about his positions than an indication of strength", and Mendoza's "game, though good, was not capable of resisting the strength and activity of his opponent." In fact, much of Egan's praise of Mendoza was marred by negative remarks: "No pugilist ever stopped with greater neatness, hit oftener, or put his blows quicker, than Mendoza", but his blows "often failed in doing that execution which might have been expected, from their want of force."[541] Mendoza, it appeared, often lacked certain attributes (usually strength, but also honesty or courage) which made him inferior to the "English" boxer.

While some newspapers praised Mendoza's fighting technique, hostile commentators described him as fighting "low, and with cunning".[542] Fighting low, the opposite of fighting fair, was considered unmasculine. Cunning, a negatively connotated word, was considered a feminine characteristic and was often used in anti-Semitic discourse. Thus what in an "English" boxer would have been called skill, in a Jewish boxer was defined as scheming. This is not a singular incident; *The World*, hostile to Mendoza, often implied that he was dishonest. The *Morning Post* of 9 May 1789 also accused Mendoza of cheating: "Humphreys fought with a generosity almost censurable, particularly as the Jew had let him [feel] an example of savage fighting, in renewing his old tricks… yet Humphreys was superior to all such foul arts…" Once again cheating was attributed to the Jew while fighting in a fair, noble (thus English) way was attributed to the Englishman; the implication was that Mendoza was dishonest, unmanly and un-English. An example of a different kind of emasculation was a report that Mendoza had

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[540] Egan, *Boxiana*, vol 1, pp. 254-5. The word 'race' at this time had a very general meaning of a group of people having some common (not necessarily physical), characteristics. See: Silvia Sebastiani, "Race as a Construction of the Other: "Native Americans" and "Negroes" in 18th Century Editions of the *Encyclopedia* Britannica", in: *Europe and the Other and Europe as the Other*, ed. Bo Stråth, (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 195-228.
[541] Egan, *Boxiana*, vol 1, pp. 257-8.
[542] *The World*, 10 January 1788.

been seen crying in the theatre.[543] Disparagements of Mendoza's character as weak and unmanly carried greater significance when articles referred to Mendoza as *the Jew*, rather than by name, implying that he represented Jews in general. Thus, Mendoza was both a victim of the racial stereotyping inherent in the slur *Jew* and a symbol of his religious community. His victories were considered victories for all Jews, and his losses the loss of the whole community.[544]

For *The World* Mendoza's Jewishness clearly hindered him from belonging to the national community: "Such was the predominance of valour's regard in Englishmen, that every momentary success of Mendoza was gratulated [sic] to the full as much, if not more, than those of (his antagonist)".[545] Although *The World* commended Mendoza for his success, by juxtaposing him to Englishmen rather than Christians, *the World* clearly conveyed the message that Jewishness and Englishness were mutually exclusive. The use of racial and religious stereotypes explicitly contrasted to "English" boxers and the questioning of Mendoza's manliness were a few of the many strategies used to exclude the Jewish boxer from the boxing community and the body politic. This exclusion had a wider meaning as the Jewish boxer was often taken to stand for his community as a whole.

Nevertheless, Mendoza's manliness and his fame as a boxer helped him become symbolically accepted into the body politic, as visible in the comparison of Figures 2 and 3 (in Chapter Three). Mendoza's portrait was painted in 1789, a year after Humphries's portrait, and it was probably meant to be displayed side by side with Humphries' portrait to commemorate the famous rivalry between them.[546] As discussed, such portraits of boxers were part of an eighteenth century movement to reconstruct the masculine ideal, a type of tough and muscular manliness which was counterpoised to the effeminate and foreign refined man. The similarities between the two full body portraits of Mendoza and Humphries are striking: both are shown with the upper part of the body naked, standing 'in attitude' (as the stance typical to each boxer was called). Mendoza was depicted like his Christian antagonist, his body presented as a boxer's body, without the physical characteristics which were part of the stereotypical representation of Jews. Mendoza was

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[543] *Morning Post,* 6 February 1788.
[544] The *Morning Chronicle* reported one of Mendoza's victories with the words: "[t]he Jews became victorious after an obstinate conflict…" *Morning Chronicle,* 18 April 1787.
[545] *The World*, 11 January 1788.
[546] Heiny, *Boxing in British Sporting Art*, pp. 176-80.

often commended for his manliness: "Mendoza…stood up to [his opponent] with great manliness and followed him with…coolness and resolution…"; Mendoza had "a well-formed manly chest, and arms of a strong athletic nature, a bottom never impeached; and possessing wind that was seldom disordered".[547] The construction of the Jewish boxer's body like that of his Christian antagonist is important. If the construction of the Jewish body as effeminate helped to exclude Jews from the body politic, its masculinization afforded a potential for inclusion. The construction of the Jewish boxers' bodies, like the body of their non-Jewish colleagues, as symbolizing the masculine ideal, paved the way to their acceptance in the body politic.



Figure 5: John Nixon, *The English Ambassador and his Suite before the King at Madrid*, 1790.

This is clearly evident in *The English Ambassador and his suit before the King of Spain* (1790) by John Nixon. Published at a time when war between Spain and England seemed imminent, the context of the picture is a dispute between Britain and Spain over control of the Nootka Sounds.[548] The caricature can be seen as a bellicose statement of England's readiness for war: John Bull as the English ambassador is accompanied by four

[547] Egan, *Boxiana*, vol 1, p. 258.
[548] In 1789 the Spanish commander of a fort in Nootka Sounds arrested the crew of an English vessel harbouring in the bay, which was intending to build an English fortification. England demanded of Spain compensation, and on the 5 of May 1790 King George III, asked the Parliament for forces "to put it in his Majesty's power to act with vigour and effect in support of the honour of his Crown and the interests of his people." After a futile attempt to receive assistance from France, Spain capitulated, but for a while both countries were getting ready for war. Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State,* p. 3.

boxers (Big Ben, Humphries, Mendoza and Ward) when he confronts the King of Spain and his courtiers. Part of the caption reads:

> . . . Should you wish for a War we have got a new race
> Of such brave fighting fellows, not the devil dare face!
> A sample I've brought, only four of our men,
> Mendoza, Dick Humphries, Joe Ward and Big Ben:
> So great is their power each lad with one blow,
> Would knock down an Ox, or twelve Spaniards lay low . . .

The Spaniards, who are shown with small bodies and the typical big heads of the Habsburgians, look apprehensive. Sturdy John Bull, the embodiment of the English patriot, has a "no-nonsense" look and is backed by the most prominent boxers of the time.[549] As mentioned in chapter three, at a time in which the male body came to symbolise society and especially the nation, boxers – with their classically built bodies – exemplified a certain ideal of masculinity, but also symbolised the masculine and strong English nation. As a consequence, strengthening national consciousness was considered one of the critical functions of boxing. The presentation of the boxer as symbol of masculinity and nationality instrumentalised him in the nationalist and imperial project. In this caricature and in other instances, such as the song "A boxing we will go" (see beginning of chapter), the Jewish boxer represents national strength and character.

However, it is important to stress that ethnicity was not the only factor for the way minority boxers were represented. This can be seen, for example, when analysing the press coverage of the fight between Mendoza and Humphries, which took place on 9 January 1788. *The Times* published the following account of the fight: "Mendoza … stopped every blow, and knocked Humphries down repeatedly… Humphries… shewed [sic] evident marks of fear; he ran backwards to the different corners of the stage from him; and when the blow was coming, always turned his back".[550] *The Times* reported that a blow from Mendoza that would have finished the battle was parried by Humphries's second, Johnson (which was a clear violation of boxing rules). According to the newspaper, Mendoza would have won had the referees not ignored the foul. Contrary to *The Times*, another newspaper, *The World,* chose not to mention the unfair and unlawful

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[549] The artist, John Nixon (before 1759-1818) was merchant officer of the Bank of England and Secretary of the Beefsteak Club, one of the popular West End clubs. Henry Angelo, *Reminiscences of Henry Angelo, with memoirs of his late father and friends, etc* (London, 1828), pp. 272-274.
[550] *The Times*, 11 January 1788.

interference by Humphries's second and generally painted Mendoza's actions in unflattering colours. Praising Humphries for his gallantry and grace, the newspaper reported: "twice, when there was an idea of Mendoza doing something unfair, and the Umpires were enquiring about it Humphries gave it against himself and said his antagonist has hit him as he has ought to".[551] *The World* habitually depicted Mendoza as a dishonourable coward, claiming, for example, that he declined "very fair and honourable" terms for a fight.[552]

The animosity of *The World* to Mendoza and the sympathy of *The Times* stand in stark contrast to their political affiliations: *The World* was at that time closely connected with the Whig party, and *The Times* generally tended towards the Tories. Moreover, *the Time*s' enthusiastic endorsement of Mendoza greatly contrasted with its general negative outlook on boxing. Its endorsement of Mendoza probably lies in the newspaper's struggle against what it labelled "that little insignificant piece of printed nonsense called *The World*".[553] *The World*, which was established in 1787, was very successful, not least because of its coverage of boxing, and there was a fierce competition between the two papers.[554] On 15 January 1788, *The Times* printed an article in which it berated *The World*'s coverage of the battle of which "nobody could make head or tail", arguing that the newspaper's rendering of the event was contrary to the general opinion. Thus, factors outside the sport and beyond issues of ethnicity and national identity, such as a struggle between two organs of the press, could also have considerable influence on the coverage of minority boxers.

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[551] *The World*, 11 January 1788.
[552] *The World*, 27 September 1787; *Ibid.*, 18 October, 1787.
[553] *The Times*, 15 Aug 1788.
[554] *The World* was identified with the Prince of Wales' circle and reflected the taste of West End society. It was established in 1787 by Edward Topham (1751–1820), sportsmen, journalist and playwright and John Bell (1745-1831), a successful publisher, printer and official bookseller to the Prince of Wales. *The World* reached a circulation of 3,000 to 4,000 issues a day and became a fashion setter. It's coverage of boxing was extensive, it's highlight was probably in 1788-9 when it published (and possibly orchestrated) a set of challenging letters between Humphries and Mendoza; the publishing of this correspondence was apparently responsible for raising the circulation of the newspaper to three thousand issues a day. Christie, "British Newspapers in the Later Georgian Age", p. 317; G. A. Cranfield, *The Press and Society From Caxton to Northckiffe* (Longman, London and New York, 1978), p. 75; Ford, *Prizefighting*, p. 169; Aspinall, *Politics and the Press,* p. 73; Lucyle Werkmeister, *The London Daily Press 1772-1792* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1963) pp. 162-6.

5.3. "Handsome for a man of colour": images of Black boxers

The most famous Black boxers in Georgian England were Bill Richmond and Thomas Molineaux. Richmond (1763–1829), the first prominent Black boxer, was born in New York to emancipated slaves. He received the patronage of the Duke of Northumberland, who sent him to school and helped him pursue an apprenticeship as cabinetmaker. After his patron died Richmond entered the prize ring. He enjoyed a series of successful fights, but not being among the best, he turned to teaching boxing, trained other fighters, and often acted as a 'second' in matches. In 1821 he was chosen as one of the eighteen pugilists who dressed as pages, stood guard at the coronation of George IV. Tom Molineaux (c.1784-1818) was an ex-slave from Virginia. He arrived in Britain around 1810 and began fighting successfully under Richmond's guidance. Molineaux's claim to fame came from his two fights against Tom Cribb, who was considered the champion of England. The fights, both of which Molineaux lost, created a huge amount of interest, and many pictures, artifices, songs and handbills were dedicated to both fighters.[555]

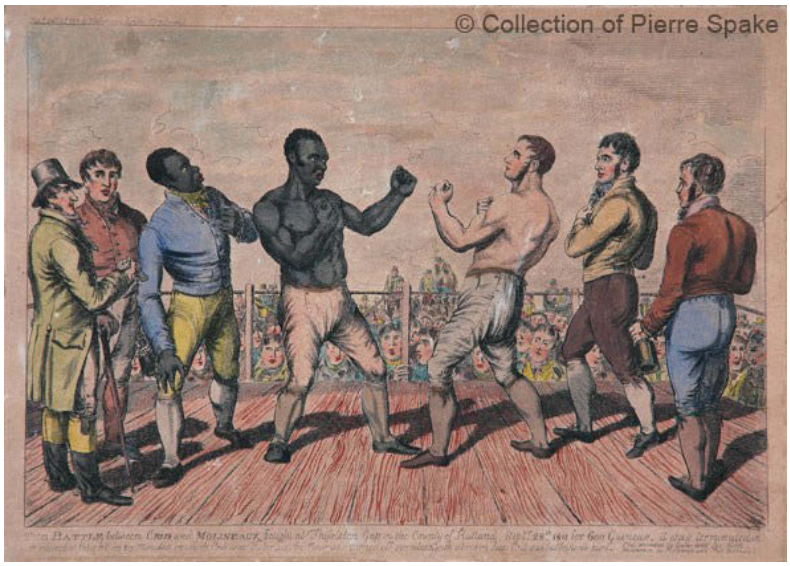


Figure 6: George Cruickshank, *The Battle between Cribb and Molineaux*, 1811.

The battle between Cribb and Molineaux by George Cruickshanks depicts the second of the two fights between Molineaux and Cribb.[556] The match, which took place

[555] For biographies of Bill Richmond, Tom Molineaux and other black boxers see: Freyer, *Staying Power*, Appendix I "Prize-fighters, 445-454".
[556] George Cruickshank (1792-1878) was well-known for his satirical work. For more on Cruikshank, see: Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, pp. 211-21, 477-81, 508-20, 598.

at Thistleton Gap in Leicestershire on 28 September 1811 and attracted approximately 15,000 spectators, became one of the most famous fights of the nineteenth century. Contrary to Heiny's claim that "the racism and nationalism which had its impact on the press and spectators is not evident in the pictorial presentations of the boxers", this print, like so many others, shows that racial stereotypes were as inherent to pictorial sources as to written sources.[557] The thick lips, broad nose and squashed heads of both boxers were typical of the physiognomy of Blacks as depicted in the evolving 'race science' of the time.[558] These racial stereotypes were important because when the body was "read" like a text, outer characteristics signified inner values.[559] As the external mirrored the internal, the boxer's "ugliness" (defined by his deviation from the white ideal of beauty), became a sign of his "inherent" stupidity, laziness and lack of cultural development.

Fights between Black and white boxers were often based on the premise that the white should win.[560] *The Times* reported that "The Black's prowess was regarded… with a jealousy which excited considerable national prejudice against him" from the fear that "the laurels of a British Champion were in danger of being wrested from him by a Baltimore man of colour."[561] Sources show the beginning of what would, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, develop into a full-blown ideology around sports in general and boxing in particular. The success of a Black man was perceived as a threat to white masculinity.[562]

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[557] Heiny, *Boxing in British Sporting Art*, p. 196.
[558] Pieterse, *White on Black*, pp. 30-51; Hall, "The Spectacle of the Other", p. 249.
[559] Maurice L. Wade, "From eighteenth- to Twentieth-Century Racial Science: Continuity and Change", in: *Race and Racism in Theory and Practice*, ed. Berel Lang (Langham and Oxford: Rowam & Littlefield, 2000), pp. 32-3.
[560] There has been much discussion about whether Molineaux had been fouled against. However, the question of the prejudiced behaviour of the crowd at fights is not a matter of concern in this thesis. Cf. Dennis Brailsford, "Nationality, Race and Prejudice in Early Pugilism", *Proceedings of the XI HISPA International Congress* 3 (1985), pp. 17-23; Cone, Carl B. "The Molineaux-Cribb Fight, 1810: Wuz Tom Molineaux Robbed?", *Journal of Sport History* 9 (1982), pp. 83-91.
[561] Although Molineaux was a Black man and an American, most sources consistently refer to his colour, not his nationality. The sources often call him "the black", "the moor", only in one or two instances is he referred to as "Baltimore man of colour". *The Times*, 30 September 1811.
[562] These fears were articulated in the "colour bar", developed in the early twentieth century, which prevented Black boxers from competing for British titles and in the concept of the "white hope", a white boxer who contends for the heavyweight championship, see: Ben Carrington, '*Race', Representation and the Sporting Body* (London: Goldsmith College, 2002), p. 16-17; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization. A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 1-44.

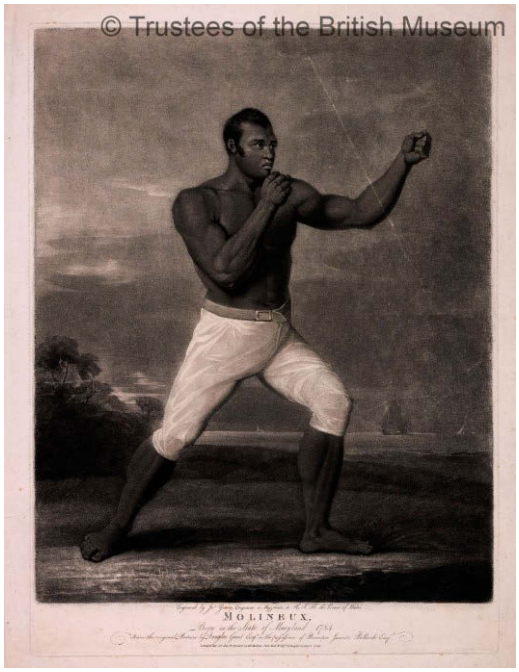


Figure 7: Thomas Douglas Guest, *Molineaux*, 1811.

The portrait of Molineaux, like the portraits of Richard Humphries and Daniel Mendoza (Figures 2 and 3) discussed above, celebrates the boxer's masculinity and his beauty. He is portrayed 'in attitude', a pose which emphasizes his muscles and accentuates his fitness and the fine tuning of his body. His white pants create a visual contrast with his body, making it even more impressive. However, comparison of this picture with that of white boxers reveals striking differences: while portraits of other boxers show them with shoes, Molineaux is painted barefoot. Usually prize fighters are portrayed on a stage or in the foreground of a landscape; Molineaux is painted on the beach with a ship in the horizon, hinting at slave ships, one of the most potent symbols of slavery. His massive body dominates the picture, suggesting aggression, darkness, defiance, and his bare feet imply savagery; Heiny has described Molineaux as representing "an elemental nature force".[563] This portrait reveals an admiration of the black boxer's body, tinged with the stereotypes attached to the Black male - savage, uncivilized, emotional, and aggressive.[564] Although the portrait of Molineaux celebrates the boxer's body, his masculinity and his boxing prowess, it also reiterates many of the negative stereotypes of Blacks.

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[563] Heiny, *Boxing in British Sporting Art*, p. 198.
[564] Pieterse, *White on Black*, p. 34; Carrington, '*Race ', Representation and the Sporting Body,* p. 7; Hall, "The Spectacle of the Other", p. 244-5.

Boxing, because of its corporeality, was a perfect medium to rehearse stereotypes about Blacks. In the eighteenth century a plethora of racial stereotypes about Blacks concentrated on the body, which was taken to express a natural, immutable difference. According to Stuart Hall, for Black people "'primitivism' (Culture) and 'Blackness' (Nature) became interchangeable…their biology *was* their 'destiny'. Not only were Blacks represented in terms of their essential characteristics. They were *reduced to their essence*."[565] These stereotypes were an important part of the Western ideological justification of imperialism: the rational civilised white man was superior to the natural, savage black man. When a white boxer conquered a black boxer, "mind … triumph[ed] over body, civilisation conquer[ed] nature, law and order return[ed] to the land."[566]

While stereotypes relegated Blacks to a few characteristics, not all Blacks were portrayed in the same way. As in the case of all stereotypes, these included various contradictions: the Black was seen as both brutal and docile; both childish, and a sexual predator.[567] People belonging to minority groups were often portrayed through sets of binary oppositions: "good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling-because-different/compelling-because-strange-and-exotic."[568] Blacks, writes Carrington, "became idealised/eroticised *and* despised/condemned at the same time; the colonial construction of the abject Black body was ambivalent from the start." This ambivalence typical to all stereotypes, instead of undermining it, made it even more powerful because it allowed "the constructions of the Other to remain both 'fixed' and to adapt (and sometimes to even reverse its connotations) in different historical contexts…" [569]

One set of stereotypes about Blacks was that they were docile, well-mannered, tame, submissive, devoted; in short, they never turned on white people. Many images used by the abolitionists, though well intended, portrayed Blacks as "childish, simple and dependent", docile in character and grateful when freed. According to Hall, these images "countered one set of stereotypes (their savagery) by substituting another (their eternal goodness)."[570] A second type was the threatening image of the strong, brutal intimidating

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[565] *Ibid.*; Carrington, '*Race*', *Representation and the Sporting Body,* pp. 7-10.
[566] Hoch, *White Hero, Black Beast*, p. 48.
[567] Ibid, pp. 243, 263; For a discussion of the roles of stereotypes, see: Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, ch. 1.
[568] Hall, "The Spectacle of the Other", p. 230.
[569] Carrington, '*Race*', *Representation and the Sporting Body*, pp. 9-10.
[570] Hall, "The Spectacle of the Other", pp. 249-50; Walvin, *Black and White*, p. 186.

Black man with an insatiable sexual desire.[571] I would like to argue that newspaper reports habitually cast Bill Richmond and Tom Molineaux in the roles of tame and threatening Blacks respectively.[572]

Richmond was portrayed as a grateful and unassuming Black man with a tendency to defer to others: "a respectable, well-behaved member of society"; "intelligent, communicative and well-behaved".[573] Although these descriptions were clearly meant to be positive, they were condescending; and Richmond's characterization as docile made the man appear childlike. Especially telling was Egan's praise of Richmond: that he "seems to feel the situation in which he is placed in society, and endeavours to keep it", implying that he knew his lowly place in society and did not attempt to overreach it.[574]

Molineaux's image was quite different; Newspaper reports often characterized him as a "brave, warlike hero" and "as good a man as ever entered a ring", but many of the compliments he received were ambiguous such as: "handsome for a man of colour".[575] Typically, however, he was presented as a threatening, defiant, ungrateful Black man. The stereotype of the natural, savage African appeared time and again in his description, and he was depicted as "a rude, unsophisticated being" who was easily "thrown off his guard by passion", as well as a volatile, emotionally unstable, unreasoned man incapable of restraining his feelings. For example *The Times* reported that Molineaux "had provoked a good deal of feeling against him, by savage denunciations of vengeance, and vapouring [sic] professions of what he would do to Crib. These are certainly sufficiently disgusting and repugnant to the spirit of Englishmen".[576] This article reproduces the idea, deeply ingrained in eighteenth century mentality, that black people (like women) were driven by their passions, but also portrays the Englishman as restrained, controlled – as mentioned before important characteristics of the manly ideal.[577]

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[571] Hall, "The Spectacle of the Other", pp. 245, 251.
[572] Ben Carrington, "Double Consciousness and the Black British Athlete", in: *Black British Culture and Society: A text-reader*, ed. Kwesi Owusu (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 133-156.
[573] Jon Bee [John Badcock], *The Fancy; or True Sportsman's Guide: being authentic memoirs of the lives, actions, prowess, and battles of the leading pugilists, from the days of Figg and Broughton to the championship of ward by an operator* (London, 1826), p. 212; Egan, *Boxiana*, vol 1, p. 456.
[574] Ibid, pp. 455-6.
[575] *Morning Herald*, 19 December 1810; *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 4 October 1811.
[576] *The Times,* 7 October 1811.
[577] Walvin, *Black and White*, pp. 159-62.

Comparing or equating black people to animals were common forms of racial stereotyping.[578] Various animalistic qualities were attributed to Molineaux: "Strange stories are circulated about his strength; it is said that he strikes harder than…horses",[579] or that "his fists…are sufficient to stun a bullock".[580] Such characterizations ostensibly compliment the boxer, while reinforcing popular animal-like representations of Blacks that dehumanize the entire community.[581] While Richmond was described as a timid and placid man who knew his place, Molineaux was obviously seen as a threatening force. *Bell's Weekly Messenger* wrote that the Black had a notion that "he could beat the most celebrated professors of Boxing" and was full of "high vaunting", challenging "all the world".[582] *The Times* reported that "the Black…threatens to mill the whole race of fighters of the day". Pierce Egan wrote that he was "manly, fair and honourable but too ambitious by threatening to wrest the laurels from the English brow, and planting them upon the head of a foreigner"; he "paid dearly for his temerity", implying that Molineaux was a Black man who did not know his place and deserved his punishment.[583]

Two main factors stood behind the different images of the Black boxers Richmond and Molineaux. One was their very different characters; Richmond's docile and unthreatening behaviour conformed to prevailing perceptions of appropriate behaviour for a Black man. Tom Molineaux was a much more problematic figure for the majority culture; the white public did not readily accept his independent spirit and individualistic nature. A second factor was probably the fact that Richmond's pugilistic successes were minor. He never threatened to "wrest the laurels" away from any important white boxer. Molineaux, on the other hand, was perceived as a threat to hegemonic white masculinity, both in his boxing success and in his behaviour. This ambivalence created a complex image of the man: he was simultaneously courageous and martial as well as savage and technically backward. As a fighter he was not knowledgeable in the "science" of boxing, but rather instinctive (animalistic). What defined Molineaux's masculinity, his strength and courage, were the same characteristics that marked him as racially different and inferior to the white boxer. In keeping with assumptions about the "perfectibility of

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[578] *Ibid.,* p. 163; Jordan, *White on Black*, pp. 228-234.
[579] *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 27 October 1811.
[580] *The Morning Herald*, 23 August 1810.
[581] Carrington, '*Race', Representation and the Sporting Body,* pp. 16-17.
[582] *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 27 October 1811.
[583] *The Times,* 23 August 1810; *Morning Herald,* 23 August 1810; Egan, *Boxiana*, Vol. 1, p. 361.

'backward' races", the texts evinced the belief that Molineaux could 'improve', but encoded within this belief were the conflicting notions of equality and difference. This assumption of the essential inferiority of Blacks was evident in all texts concerning Black boxers.[584]

To conclude, previous chapters have shown that boxing had an important function in shaping an ideal type of masculinity. This ideal, it has often been argued, was created through the emasculation of minority groups such as Blacks and Jews. This chapter has shown that many representations of minority boxers indeed reiterated racial stereotypes: depictions of Jewish boxers perpetuated ideas about Jews as clannish, avaricious and cunning, while Black boxers were portrayed as obstinate, aggressive and savage, or as childlike and docile. Often the characteristics that marked Jewish and Black boxers as Others were the characteristics most highly valued by their admirers. Jewish boxers were valued for their scientific boxing, Black boxers for their "natural" animal-like strength. Nevertheless, always implicit in such praise was the reminder of their difference. Portraits show minority boxers with clear physiognomic characteristics that served to perpetuate the framing of racist discourse around the body of the Other. While racial ideology was not yet fully developed at the turn of the century, the characteristics represented in textual and pictorial images suggested stereotypical racial and ethnic deficiencies.

Images of minority boxers were also atypical; by presenting minority boxers on an equal footing with English boxers, they often challenged established racial and ethnic hierarchies.[585] Generally, images of Jewish boxers did not suffer from the same deformities that characterised the usual depictions of Jews in art; instead they represented the ideal manly body. In several of his images Mendoza epitomized an ideal type of manliness: strong, tough, courageous, and in possession of an ideal body. At a time when the most prevalent images of Black people portrayed either servants or slaves, images such as those of Richmond and Molineaux were remarkable. These Black boxers appeared independent, self-reliant, and manly; they exhibited a remarkable degree of agency; and they not only stood on a par with white men, they contested them. The comparison of the images of

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[584] Cf. Elizabeth Vibert, "Real Men Hunt Buffalo: Masculinity, Race and Class in British Fur Traders' Narratives", *Gender & History* 8 (1996), pp. 4-21.

[585] The end of the nineteenth century saw a growing intolerance to interracial sport with the introduction of the 'colour bar', which prevented black fighters from competing for British titles; It was lifted only after World War II. Ruti Ungar and Michael Berkowitz, "Introduction", in: *Fighting Back?* pp. 3-16.

Richmond and Molineaux is also revealing. Richmond, an inoffensive and unexceptional boxer, conformed to a certain idea of the way Blacks should behave and thus was accepted by the English. Molineaux, on the other hand, was perceived as a threat, both to white hegemonic masculinity and to British superiority. Richmond was palatable as a role model while Molineaux was not.

Images of minority boxers are important not only for what they tell us about the representational practices through which race, religion and ethnicity are marked as Otherness, but also for what they reveal about the type of national identity being constructed through the boxing discourse. As the historiography on British nationalism has demonstrated, ideas about 'Englishness' were frequently conceptualised in opposition to the Other. As has often been argued, the perceived ideal superior white male body was constructed in contradistinction with Others, whether women, Blacks or Jews. Indeed, many of the representations of minority boxers appeared to have worked to define the superiority of the "English" (i.e. White, Christian) boxer. In images of minority boxers, sets of binary dichotomies were utilized to paint the picture of the ideal 'English' boxer – he was clever, when the Black boxer was stupid, he was brave when the Jewish boxer was cowardly, he was skilled when the Black boxer was incompetent, etc. Minority boxers were also depicted as manly, sexual and strong. However, these positive characteristics often appeared marred by some underlying racial or ethnic imperfection: Molineaux was commended for having natural strength but criticized for not having enough science; Mendoza was praised for having science but disparaged for not having enough strength. Representations emphasising skill and science as compensation for a natural lack of strength continued the emasculating process of the Jewish boxer, while images of Black boxers that equated them with nature promoted impressions of the Black man as uncivilized, uncultivated and unintelligent. The "English" boxer was constructed in contrast to the Jewish and Black boxers and as superior to them. The "true" English boxer possessed both natural strength and culturally acquired skills. Thus, the images of minority boxers were integral to the construction of the "English" boxer's body as the ideal body and his character as the ideal character. Implicit in these images was an exclusive notion of Englishness, one which saw the nation as a racially coherent entity.

However, participating in a practice that was so thoroughly characterised as "English/British" was an important symbolic step. Jewish and (to a lesser extent) Black boxers were symbolically accepted into the fold of the nation. These social currents

implied a more cultural understanding of Englishness. The appearance of Mendoza in print as one of four boxers representing the British nation and the choice of Richmond as one of the pugilists who served as pages in the coronation of George IV (1821) were important symbolic events. Although boxing produced exclusive visions of the nation that branded black and Jewish boxers unmanly and "un-English", the existence of such inclusive images of minority boxers proved that Englishness was not a unitary ideal.[586]

Images of minority boxers prove that instead of a unitary imagined community of Britons, as Colley has argued, the body politic was a contested site. The place of minorities in the body politic was thus, as Wilson has argued, "contingent and incomplete at best, denigrated and despised at worst and always the product of contestation and resistance."[587] Thus, there was no single idea of the nature of the body politic: certain strands saw the nation as a culturally and racially coherent entity and perceived Englishness as innate and determined by skin colour, facial angles and the size and shape of one's nose; others acknowledged the flexibility of the concept of Englishman, notably along the dividing lines of gender and class.

Finally, it must be emphasized that images of minority boxers were not simple reflections of different racial ideologies or two different forms of nationalism. Political, social and cultural issues also played a significant part in shaping the representation of minority boxers. The anti-Semitic tone of the caricature *The Triumph*, for example, was part of an anti-boxing argument, including a critic on the role newspapers played in the promotion of the sport, and was also a political attack on the Prince of Wales. Rivalry between newspapers and commercial considerations also played an important role in shaping the images of minority boxers. Fights between Jewish or Black and white "English" boxers were very popular and commercially successful, and these boxers often developed a distinctive style that highlighted their difference.[588] Thus, images of minority boxers were the product of a complex process of construction in which questions of gender, class, ethnicity and national identity together with the forces of commercialisation, media, and the public debate on boxing, all played a crucial role.

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[586] Although this study dealt with representation rather than the practice of integration, according to social historian Todd Endelman Jewish boxers were a good example of working-class Jewish assimilation. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, pp. 166-226.
[587] Wilson, *The Island Race*, p. 48.
[588] Adam Chill has argued that minority boxers utilized the commercial value of fights between "English" and ethnic boxers to promote and market themselves. Adam Chill, "The Performance and Marketing of Minority Identity in Late Georgian Boxing", in: *Fighting Back? Minority Boxers in Britain*, pp. 31-49.

Conclusion

On 19 July 1821 the most lavish and expensive coronation in English history took place, that of George IV. Dressed impressively in purple and gold, eighteen of the leading boxers of the time, including Black boxer Bill Richmond, were chosen to serve as ushers and pages at the entrance to Westminster Abbey. After the proceedings the pugilists, there to represent English manliness at its best (and to prevent the estranged wife of George IV from crashing the coronation), took advantage of the opportunity and "stripped even ladies of their booty."[589] The anecdote vividly reflects the strong dissonance between the lofty rhetoric of boxing and its vulgar and messy reality. However, to understand the place of boxing in Georgian society only in terms of the latter is to miss the underlying significance of the sport as well as the diversity of trends and attitudes shaping early modern English culture. Although the reality was often far removed from the discourse, the debate surrounding boxing embodied central issues of Georgian society.

Boxing was considered an English institution by Britons and foreigners alike. In the eighteenth-century it became deeply rooted in English culture; although certain groups attempted to eradicate it, they found themselves fighting against a practice which had a wide resonance in society. In the eighteenth century, boxing, like other sports, developed from a popular event held at fairs to an increasingly organised, market-oriented and professional phenomenon attracting huge crowds. This process was one in which people of all classes were personally involved and from which they profited in various ways as patrons, boxers, publicans or journalists. The opposition to boxing was also one that crossed class lines as disparate sections of society coordinated their attempts to combat what they perceived as a brutal and socially disruptive sport. Nevertheless, the legal authorities and the middle class press were ambivalent in their condemnation of the sport as they recognized that boxing had significance as a repository of social values and as a nationalistic and militaristic practice.

Although class played a role in separating the anti-boxing and pro-boxing camps, the major factors dividing these oppositional attitudes were ideologies, values and cultural styles that often crossed class boundaries. Many of the people who opposed boxing did

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[589] Douglas MacLeane, *The Great Solemnity of the Coronation of a King and Queen According to the Use of the Church of England* (London: George Allan & Co. Ltd, 1911), pp. 265, 238.

not care who practiced it – rich or poor, black or white. Their concern was with the vulgarity and brutality of a practice that offended their polite sensibilities and their ideas of morality, law and order. Highlighting all the things they loathed and aimed to reform in the uncouth Englishman, boxing represented an obsolete idea of patriarchal social relations and a rough manly ideal they abhorred. For its proponents boxing was more than a nostalgic practice reminiscent of Old England; it was a potent symbol of manliness. The boxing debate revealed the degree to which the sport embodied civic humanistic values and the manly qualities that became increasingly more important to a considerable section of society in the late eighteenth century. For opponents of politeness in particular, boxing became emblematic of the war against refinement, effeminacy and French manners, as well as their corrupting influence on a nation constantly at war. The debate for and against boxing thus reflected one of the central controversies of late Georgian English society – the conflict between politeness, or sensibility, and civic humanism.

A central issue of contention between proponents of politeness and those of civic humanism concerned gender standards. Boxing personified a civic humanistic masculine ideal that stood in stark contrast to the polite manly ideal. By the late eighteenth century, the latter was losing its force, as it was considered effeminate and foreign, unsuitable for a nation at war. The militaristic and nationalistic rhetoric propagated in the boxing debate and through the image of the boxer, conveyed the message that only a man willing to suffer and sacrifice his life for his country was a real man. However, this manly ideal was not simply a top-to-bottom product of a ruling class attempting to mobilise its masses. The rise of the manly ideal also reflected anxieties about the integrity of the nation, the permeability of class, and the increasing power of women. The manly ideal answered the needs of men of all classes: working-class men threatened by women taking away their jobs; middle-class men infuriated by their wives' demands for the "rights of women" and upper-class men sceptical of their wives' growing political activity.

Civic humanism or, as it was alternatively termed, republicanism, was a masculinist, patrician tradition, which had a cyclic view of history, looked back at classical ideals of civic duty and was critical of commerce and the new market economy. It has been seen as the basis of modern Anglo-Saxon conservatism. However this study has shown that civic humanism did not reproduce one clear ideology of class, nation or race. It was rather a language in which various ideas were contested. The present analysis of the boxing discourse has uncovered struggles between proponents of boxing that were not less

significant than the fierce conflicts between opponents and proponents of the sport; boxing was a site of struggle between diverse notions of gender, class, race, and nation.

It was its manly and patriotic image that made boxing an important site of struggle between loyalists and radicals. Both the conservative William Windham and the radical William Cobbett structured their arguments within the framework of civic humanism, but they did so with very different aims. Windham perceived boxing as a counter-revolutionary measure and an effective way to mobilise the masses in defence of their country without surrendering to their demands for political participation. It was an active means of preserving the social and political order. For Cobbett too, boxing was a way of strengthening the nation, however it was also a radical tool, which played an important role in empowering the poor: it strengthened the labourers and educated them on their rights and duties (including the obligation to resist a tyrannical government), it also imparted notions of independence, thus preparing them for their roles as political actors.

Boxing was also a site of struggle between conflicting notions of race and differing ideas of national identity. The discourse on boxing was one of a number of sites through which the English constituted their ideas of Englishness and manliness. The necessity to accommodate Jews and Blacks in this discourse – to inscribe their power, victories, and courage – challenged received assumptions about the national body politic. Because of its nationalistic rhetoric and the prominent role of Jewish and Black boxers in Georgian England, contradictory images of minority boxers emerged – not only as a result of these conflicting notions, but due to other factors such as commercial considerations and political motivations.

Much of the historiography on the manly ideal has concentrated on the concept as a site of othering, i.e. as a site in which social hierarchies of gender, class and race were reproduced. The manly ideal provided clearly drawn gender boundaries while emphasizing man's inherent and "natural" superiority over woman (and effeminate men). It privileged white upper- and middle-class men and excluded working-class men, women, and minorities from political participation. It has been shown, however, that although the manly ideal privileged a certain white, male, middle- to upper-class vision of citizenship, its mobilisation also enabled marginalized groups, including the working classes and racialized "others", to claim political rights and visibility. The same manly ideal – as epitomized in the working-class body of the boxer – was used by radicals like William Cobbett to further their claims for independence (the basis for political

participation), and it formed a basis on which minority boxers were afforded, however tentatively, a symbolic part in the body politic. Thus, rather than a construct whose sole function was to reinforce manly domination and class and racial hierarchies, the masculinist ideal needs to be seen as a powerful social and political concept, whose success was due to the perception, shared by a large segment of the population, that it served their needs and aims.

The findings of this study raise a number of questions that could prove productive for further research. The first question – as evident by the anecdote on the coronation of George IV – is that of the relation between the practice and the discourse of boxing. Questions could be asked, for example, what effect the anti-commercial rhetoric of civic humanism had on the commercialisation of the sport. It is possible that the answer to this question lies in the recourse made, in commercial prize-fighting, to the notion of honour (professional prize-fights were marketed as "grudge-fights" or as fights concerning points of honour). Further research could also inquire what other conflicts beyond those about loyalism, radicalism, race and gender took place in the boxing discourse? Regional differences, for instance, seem to have also played an important role. There also appeared to be other schisms within the pro-boxing faction, requiring further investigation in a study of different scope. For example, when evaluating boxers and their performances, different authors emphasised different qualities - some found strength more important while others preferred technique. Did these conflicting notions reflect class-related ideas of manliness, or personal taste? A comparison could also be made with other popular sports, such as cricket, pedestrianism and horse-racing, to see how different notions of manliness were constructed in those and what their function was. The manly ideal incorporated in boxing also raises the intriguing question whether female boxers undermine or sustain the manly ideal? Further research is also needed to complement the findings of this study concerning the efficacy of civic humanism which, as has been shown, reverberated within popular culture in ways which have not, as yet, been recognized.

In conclusion, this study has shown that although boxing was defended in the language of civic humanism, an old tradition with a nostalgic tinge and patrician overtones, the questions that were asked, the themes that were debated, the issues that were at stake in the debate on boxing were distinctly modern preoccupations. Notwithstanding their evocation of Old England, debates on boxing were about manliness

and effeminacy, the nature of patriotism, definitions of independence and ultimately the nature of Englishness/Britishness at a time when this national identity, as Linda Colley, Gerald Newman, Kathleen Wilson and other historians have argued, was being formed. Thus, far from being a backward looking rhetoric "at odds with industrial England",[590] the boxing debate articulated schisms and fissures within late Georgian English society. Indeed, it was a site in which some of the most important social, cultural and political struggles of the time were being "slugged out".

[590] Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 48-50.

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