

## Dueling, Conflicting Masculinities, and the Victorian Gentleman

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**Abstract** This article takes an unexplored popular debate from the 1860s over the role of dueling in regulating gentlemanly conduct as the starting point to examine the relationship between elite Victorian masculinities and interpersonal violence. In the absence of a meaningful replacement for dueling and other ritualized acts meant to defend personal honor, multiple modes of often conflicting masculinities became available to genteel men in the middle of the nineteenth century. Considering the security fears of the period—European and imperial, real and imagined—the article illustrates how pacific and martial masculine identities coexisted in a shifting and uneasy balance. The professional character of the enlarging gentlemanly classes and the increased importance of men’s domestic identities—trends often aligned with hegemonic masculinity—played an ambivalent role in popular attitudes to interpersonal violence. The cultural history of dueling can thus inform a multifaceted approach toward gender, class, and violence in modern Britain.

“Duell[ing],” cautioned the *Sheffield Independent*, “would appear to be in the ascendant once more.”<sup>1</sup> This was an unexpected declaration for an English newspaper to make in 1861. Everybody knew that no duel had been fought in England for almost a decade.<sup>2</sup> But the national press soon echoed, and amplified, the *Independent’s* warning. The *Morning Chronicle*, a longtime liberal foe of dueling, issued a “strong protest against ... an attempt to revive duelling.”<sup>3</sup> “Duelling again brings all men to a level!” exclaimed the *Daily Telegraph*, continuing, with a touch of juvenile gaiety, “a dead level in some cases.”<sup>4</sup> An indignant *Punch* urged Lord Palmerston’s government to levy punishments of heavy fines and hard labor upon men who issued challenges, lest “the best and wisest fellow” find himself “at the mercy of any reckless fool, blackguard, and bully.”<sup>5</sup> This sudden clamor by the popular press for greater protection against duelists in the early 1860s was very much at odds with their confident assertions during the previous two decades that duelists no longer existed. “The race of duelists [was] extinct”

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<sup>1</sup> *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 11 October 1861.

<sup>2</sup> Donna T. Andrew, “The Code of Honour and Its Critics: The Opposition to Duelling in England, 1700–1850,” *Social History* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1980): 409–34, at 431.

<sup>3</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 18 November 1861.

<sup>4</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 5 March 1862 (emphasis added).

<sup>5</sup> “Discouragement for Duellists,” *Punch*, 8 March 1862, 91.

(1844); “witch-burning and dueling” were equally outmoded, not to say medieval, practices (1851); and, with the advantage of historical hindsight, Victorian commentators could impartially observe “reasons for its decline” (1852).<sup>6</sup> Less than a year before their request for greater deterrents, *Punch* complacently declared that dueling was “detested as a vulgar vice.”<sup>7</sup> If dueling had indeed returned to Britain, did it follow that the elite masculine values that had so long sustained the practice were likewise reanimated?

Two high-profile incidents undermined the popular belief that a new pacific masculinity had replaced an older martial ideal in Victorian Britain. In February 1862, Lord Palmerston intercepted a challenge intended for Sir Robert Peel, son of the famous statesman, by an infuriated young Irish member whom Peel had insulted during a House of Commons debate.<sup>8</sup> At the same time that this parliamentary challenge was issued, British newspapers contained detailed daily accounts of the court-martial of a Captain Robertson, an army officer whose “colonel had tried to bully him out of the regiment for not having fought a duel.”<sup>9</sup> Attempts by some members of the popular press to dismiss the Irish MP and the army colonel as laughable examples of outmoded manhood quickly collapsed. Newspapers debated the role of dueling in regulating relationships between men in the gentlemanly class. The continued cultural relevance of the duel in the second half of the nineteenth century runs counter to established social histories of gender and class in modern Britain that point to the eradication of dueling as evidence of two interconnected, long-term trends: the rise of the middle-class gentleman and the decrease in interpersonal violence.

The anti-dueling campaign that culminated in the 1840s was the last in a long lineage of efforts to check the power of the aristocracy, yet the campaign’s effect upon aristocratic masculine norms is oversimplified and underexamined in the scholarship.<sup>10</sup> Derived from the chivalric medieval practice of trial by combat, the highly ritualized violence of the duel regulated elite society in early modern England.<sup>11</sup> The autonomous and aristocratic *code duello* was resented by sovereign powers in the modern era as a threat to centralized law. By the eighteenth century, it was the subject of growing resentment from the largely law-abiding general populace.<sup>12</sup> Social historians, often informed by the Marxist tradition, hail the rejection of a separate law for the rich as a key political platform of the middle-class associational politics that finally overturned aristocratic social dominance by the mid-nineteenth

<sup>6</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 4 March 1844; *Daily News*, 25 July 1851; “Duelling: A Thing of the Past,” in William Chambers and Robert Chambers, *Chambers’s Pocket Miscellany*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh, 1853), 81–101, at 81.

<sup>7</sup> “If Not a Donkey, Certainly a Duellist,” *Punch*, 2 March 1861, 89.

<sup>8</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 25 February 1862.

<sup>9</sup> “Courts-Martial,” *Cornhill Magazine*, June 1862, 682–94, at 688.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew, “Code of Honour,” 431; Robert Baldick, *The Duel: A History of Duelling* (London, 1965), 113.

<sup>11</sup> Markku Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England: Civility, Politeness and Honour* (Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Berkeley, 1998), 27; Jeremy Horder, “The Duel and the English Law of Homicide,” *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 12, no. 3 (Autumn 1992): 419–30, at 420; Arthur N. Gilbert, “Law and Honour among Eighteenth-Century British Army Officers,” *Historical Journal* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 75–87, at 75.

century.<sup>13</sup> For the field of masculinity studies, the evident cessation of dueling around mid-century was, as John Tosh argues, part of a revolution where “an externally validated honor” was replaced by “the internal spring of ‘character’” and physical self-restraint.<sup>14</sup> Yet the power of the duel to facilitate male social equality—a role acknowledged by some of the same scholarship that hails the efficacy of middle-class pressure—echoes the nineteenth-century claim that the British aristocracy abandoned dueling to “ridicule and shopboys” rather than allowing the ritual to become a means of social mobility.<sup>15</sup> The diverse pressures placed upon duelists call into question the notion of an anti-dueling consensus; adherents of an aristocratic masculine code worked in concert with campaigners promoting middle-class values.

Despite the practice’s distinctive character, the cessation of dueling is cited by scholars of violence and crime as part of a broader trend of decreasing male-on-male violence in Britain’s cities.<sup>16</sup> As a recent review of the literature on crime and masculinity summarizes, “duels, tavern fistfights, and the public chastisement of servants and wives—became less acceptable as middle-class ideals of rational, law-abiding manhood replaced older concepts of honor, discipline, and proved physical prowess.”<sup>17</sup> Robert Shoemaker cites duelists’ relocation from urban spaces to commons and heaths in Georgian England as proof that “violence was increasingly unacceptable, and male honor came to depend far less on public displays of bravery and courage.”<sup>18</sup> Yet, because British duelists by the late eighteenth century heavily favored pistols over swords, duels *required* open and secluded spaces, for practical as well as legal reasons.<sup>19</sup> As an elite and extra-urban practice, the statistical decline of dueling coincides, rather than correlates, with reductions in working-class metropolitan male violence. We need to consider the everyday stresses placed upon duelists, particularly changes in nineteenth-century travel and leisure, before we attribute their “extinction” to the triumph of middle-class masculinity.

<sup>13</sup> Baldick, *Duel*, 113; V. G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History: Honour and the Reign of Aristocracy* (Oxford, 1988), 220; Donna Andrew, *Aristocratic Vice: The Attack on Duelling, Suicide, Adultery, and Gambling in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2013), 239–41.

<sup>14</sup> John Tosh, “Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800–1914,” *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 330–42, at 334.

<sup>15</sup> Mika LaVaque-Manty, “Dueling for Equality: Masculine Honor and the Modern Politics of Dignity,” *Political Theory* 34, no. 6 (Winter 2006): 715–40, at 725; Anthony E. Simpson, “Dandelions on the Field of Honor: Dueling, the Middle Classes, and the Law in Nineteenth-Century England,” *Criminal Justice History* 9 (1988): 99–155, at 105; Martin J. Wiener, *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness, and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge, 2006), 44–45; *Examiner*, 31 December 1853; *Graphic*, 9 April 1870. Stephen Banks repudiates this argument. See Stephen Banks, *A Polite Exchange of Bullets: The Duel and the English Gentleman, 1750–1850* (Woodbridge, 2010), 183–90.

<sup>16</sup> Robert B. Shoemaker, “The Taming of the Duel: Masculinity, Honour and Ritual Violence in London, 1660–1800,” *Historical Journal* 45, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 525–45, at 526; J. Carter Wood, “Locating Violence: The Spatial Production and Construction of Physical Aggression,” in *Assaulting the Past: Violence and Civilization in Historical Context*, ed. Katherine D. Watson (Cambridge, 2007), 20–37, at 33.

<sup>17</sup> Tammy Whitlock, “Masculinities and Crime in Historical Perspective,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Gender, Sex, and Crime*, ed. Rosemary Gartner and Bill McCarthy (Oxford, 2014), 191–206, at 202.

<sup>18</sup> Robert B. Shoemaker, *The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 2014), 193, 213.

<sup>19</sup> Rosalind Carr makes this precise observation in the context of Edinburgh. See Rosalind Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2014), 168.

The 1860s debate over the practice of dueling and the fate of the duelists reveal that there were multiple competing models of gentlemanly masculinity in the mid-nineteenth century. The case of Sir Robert Peel and the parliamentary challenge highlighted public approval for martial as well as pacific masculine virtues. Increased European competition and imperial commitments encouraged an acceptance of those martial masculine models, particularly Celtic and military masculinities, that had been conveniently marginalized in the post-Napoleonic decades. The court-martial of Captain Robertson reflected the often conflicting pressures of professional and domestic models of manhood. The resource of the courts, once held up as the solution to the illegal dispute resolution offered by the duel, began to be viewed as a forum that could destroy men's reputations in a new media era. These popular discussions collectively support a burgeoning scholarly argument that the theory of hegemonic masculinity, prominently formulated by R. W. Connell, has serious limitations for understanding masculinity in Victorian Britain.<sup>20</sup> Rather than cementing middle-class restraint as the masculine ideal to which aristocratic and working-class men were slowly but inexorably forced to conform, the 1860s debate shows that the decline of dueling occurred in an era when competing masculine ideals overlapped class boundaries. The most important social delineation was the contested category of Victorian gentleman. An immediate need to assert and maintain social status in the face of defamation meant constant questioning: Who was a gentleman? What was honor? And how could a man best defend his claim to either?

## THE PACIFIC ENGLISHMAN

The continued cultural relevance of dueling in Victorian Britain provides important insight into the fabrication of a hegemonic masculinity that strained rather than strengthened a clear understanding of gentlemanly identity. The perennially confusing prerequisites for being a gentleman in modern Britain—a conflicting mixture of birth, wealth, and virtue that has been well documented by historians of class—seemed at last to cohere around middle-class pacific gentlemanliness in the post-Napoleonic decades in a rejection of “aristocratic vice.”<sup>21</sup> However, the appearance of a popular consensus was achieved by blaming “anachronistic” behaviors like dueling as much upon unenlightened outsiders as upon the aristocracy. Britain's colonies in particular provided a convenient mirror onto which primarily English commentators could reflect, and deflect, present uncertainties about gentlemanly behavior. The author of an 1841 tract on dueling was typical of the period in insisting that, while duelists were “rare” in England, “in Ireland ... and in our own colonies,

<sup>20</sup> Ben Griffin, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights* (Cambridge, 2012), 168; Lucy Delap, “‘Thus Does Man Prove His Fitness to Be the Master of Things’: Shipwrecks, Chivalry and Masculinities in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain,” *Cultural and Social History* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 45–74, at 74; R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge, 2005), 192.

<sup>21</sup> Penelope Corfield, “The Rivals: Landed and Other Gentlemen,” in *Land and Society in Britain, 1700–1914: Essays in Honour of F. M. L. Thompson*, ed. Negley Harte and Roland Quinault (Manchester, 1996), 1–23, at 13; Geoffrey Crossick, “From Gentlemen to the Residuum: Language of Social Description in Victorian Britain,” in *Language, History and Class*, ed. Penelope J. Corfield (Oxford, 1991), 150–78, at 163. Andrew, *Aristocratic Vice*, 237–41.

the breed still flourishes—at once the terror and the disgrace of civilized society.”<sup>22</sup> Yet colonial societies were not mirrors of a past Britain. Research on masculinity in nineteenth-century Australia, Canada, British India, and Ireland has consistently documented that white-settler and overseas military communities experienced considerable social and legislative pressures to cease dueling in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, followed by an intense, mid-century uncertainty over the definition of gentlemanliness.<sup>23</sup> Depictions of dueling as an expression of an atavistic Celtic masculinity were particularly egregious untruths as affairs of honor had been confined to an Anglo-Irish Protestant elite until the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Yet the idea that Irishmen and men in the colonies lagged behind—or even acted as a drag upon—modern, middle-class masculinity in Britain has persisted in scholarship on the duel.<sup>25</sup> It is important to examine the stereotype of the atavistic Celtic duelist because he formed an essential contrast to an equally fictitious character: the always physically restrained and law-abiding modern Englishman.

At first glance, the challenge issued following a House of Commons debate in 1862 supports the thesis that modern gentlemen eschewed violence and that duelists were outsiders. Sir Robert Peel, having succeeded to both his father's Staffordshire seat and the office of chief secretary of Ireland, was challenged to a duel by Daniel O'Donoghue, MP for Tipperary. Peel, who had already alienated Irish Roman Catholic MPs from the Palmerston faction, was speaking on 21 February 1862 to again deny the existence of famine in Ireland. To support his contention that Ireland had “yielded to the good influences of the age in which we live” and was prospering commercially, Peel pointed to the reception of an American delegation in Dublin. Although “a few manikin traitors sought to imitate the cabbage-garden heroes of 1848,” Peel declared that “no respectable man attended the political meeting.”<sup>26</sup> In fact, O'Donoghue had attended the meeting at the Rotunda in Dublin. Several members cheered Peel's comments and “cast derisive glances” at O'Donoghue, who then left the House with “dark hints of what it might be necessary to do for the vindication of his honor.”<sup>27</sup> O'Donoghue insisted that being publicly labeled a traitor was a personal rather than a political insult. His parliamentary colleague, a Major Gavin, attempted to present Peel with a challenge that night. Gavin was not

<sup>22</sup> John Gideon Millingen, *The History of Duelling: Including, Narratives of the Most Remarkable Personal Encounters That Have Taken Place from the Earliest Period to the Present Time*, 2 vols. (London, 1841), 2:428.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Stanley, *White Mutiny: British Military Culture in India, 1825–1875* (London, 1998), 58; Kirsten McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies* (Melbourne, 2004), 64; Penny Russell, *Savage or Civilized? Manners in Colonial Australia* (Sydney, 2010), 170–71; Hugh A. Halliday, *Murder among Gentlemen: A History of Duelling in Canada* (Toronto, 1999); Cecilia Morgan, “In Search of the Phantom Misnamed Honor: Duelling in Upper Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 76, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 529–62; James Kelly, *“That Damn'd Thing Called Honour”: Duelling in Ireland, 1570–1860* (Cork, 1995), 253, 270–71; Steven Patterson, “The Imperial Ideal: Ideas of Honour in British India,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 1–44, at 5; Maria Misra, “Colonial Officers and Gentlemen: The British Empire and the Globalization of ‘Tradition,’” *Journal of Global History* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 135–61, at 152.

<sup>24</sup> Kelly, “That Damn'd Thing,” 47.

<sup>25</sup> Kiernan, *Duel in European History*, 7. See also Baldick, *Duel*, 96.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Peel, Speech to the House of Commons, 21 February 1862, *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 3rd ser., vol. 165 (1862), cols. 548–92.

<sup>27</sup> “Men of Mark—No. XXX,” *London Review*, 1 March 1862, 210.

as quick as Palmerston, who had already instructed Peel to refer O'Donaghue's emissary to him. This move forced O'Donaghue's second to receive a lecture from the prime minister about the rules of debate in the House rather than to deliver his challenge.<sup>28</sup> The police presence that Palmerston requested at Westminster the following day was a further illustration that gentlemanly honor was now compatible with modern law and order.

To interpret the response to O'Donaghue's challenge as evidence of a consensus against gentlemanly violence ignores that the incident was a well-crafted piece of political showmanship. Palmerston's handling of the 1862 challenge in the House of Commons is evidence of his opportunistic use of the emotive language of "Englishness" when, as David Brown argues, it suited his policies.<sup>29</sup> Behind the scenes, Palmerston was far less calm. His first, and necessary, step had been to warn Peel against *accepting* O'Donaghue's challenge. Although the national press assumed an air of studied disinterest in the case, it was general knowledge that Peel had acted as a second in an 1851 duel at the West London suburban estate of Osterley Park.<sup>30</sup> Palmerston then woke up the solicitor general in the middle of the night to learn whether giving or receiving a challenge constituted a parliamentary breach of privilege, preparing for his cool dismissal of the case the following day.<sup>31</sup> Ignoring the many famous nineteenth-century parliamentary encounters, including Sir Robert Peel the elder's famous 1815 arrest on route to fight a duel with Daniel O'Connell, Palmerston framed the mooted duel as an attack on the hallowed parliamentary principle of "freedom of expression."<sup>32</sup> The legislative tradition that was actually maintained was far more pragmatic and cynical. Palmerston's Liberals were reusing the Peelite tradition and its brand of Englishness to neutralize descendants of Daniel O'Connor—O'Donaghue was O'Connor's grandnephew—and their evolving campaign for Irish rights. To read this incident as a gentlemanly consensus against armed combat is to accept Palmerston's public posturing as the whole story.

Framing his party's response to a literal attack around pacific, rational masculinity should have assisted Palmerston in accessing a deep reserve of popular support against dueling, but the press response was divided. The anti-Irish rights press eagerly elaborated upon Palmerston's inference that O'Donaghue and his friend were fire-eating Hibernians, what David Anderson has termed the "hysterical Celts" of popular imagination, determined to subvert an open and free democratic debate.<sup>33</sup> English legislators were, by contrast, models of restrained, mid-century masculinity. The *Times* painted a verbal portrait of "The O'Donaghue" striding down Parliament Street as one of his sixteenth-century ancestors might have done

<sup>28</sup> John Evelyn Denison Ossington, *Notes from My Journal when Speaker of the House of Commons* (London, 1900), 108–10.

<sup>29</sup> David Brown, "Palmerston and Anglo-French Relations, 1846–1865," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 17, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 675–92.

<sup>30</sup> William Gregory, *An Autobiography* (London, 1894), 150–54. Those few papers that did document the case reprinted it from the *United Services Gazette*. See, for example, *Freeman's Journal*, 2 June 1851.

<sup>31</sup> Ossington, *Notes from My Journal*, 72.

<sup>32</sup> James N. McCord, Jr., "Politics and Honor in Early-Nineteenth-Century England: The Dukes' Duel," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 62, no. 1–2 (1999), 88–114, at 89–90.

<sup>33</sup> David Anderson, *Mansex Fine: Religion, Manliness and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Manchester, 1998), 98.



“with a score or two of half-naked savages at his heels, carrying axes and cross-bows.”<sup>34</sup> A *Punch* cartoon of O’Donaghue as a hypermasculine, mace-wielding Celtic barbarian, literally throwing down his gauntlet (figure 1), closely imitated the *Times*’ description. In the same image, the restraining Palmerston and the indignant Peel each wear that most indispensable article of Victorian gentlemanly status: a top hat.<sup>35</sup> Yet, in contrast to these biting satirical portraits of the Tipperary MP, several London weekly reviews excused O’Donaghue’s challenge by expressing their poor opinion of Peel. The popular *Illustrated Times* condemned the “hard phrase” used by the “rash and impetuous” Peel.<sup>36</sup> At the other end of the publication market, the select *London Review* contrasted the “young mild-mannered Irishman” O’Donaghue favorably with the “impetuous Irish Secretary” in their highly unflattering feature on Peel.<sup>37</sup> The amusement, too, was not all at O’Donaghue’s expense. A joke circulating in London’s political clubs was that “whatever becomes of the Ministry, Sir Robert Peel would not *go out*.”<sup>38</sup>

Palmerston’s political use of personal combat as the dividing line between modern Englishmen and backward Irishmen was further blunted by the imperial revival of chivalric masculinity and the rehabilitation of “barbarians.” As Bradley Deane concludes, the nineteenth-century notion of “barbarism” was not simply a reversion but “an ideology with its own history, actively encouraged and sustained by a set of carefully elaborated fantasies.”<sup>39</sup> While the perennial charges that dueling was illegal and immoral had only a fitful impact on the practice, the accusation begun in the Georgian era that dueling was “barbaric” was a damning indictment to the century’s many clean-shaven gentlemen.<sup>40</sup> Neo-medievalism blunted the pejorative power of premodern masculinities, and as Mark Girouard first conclusively illustrated, the character of the modern knight was cultivated by the bloody imperial struggle.<sup>41</sup> Historians of empire have now firmly established that soldiers and explorers, populations in which Celtic masculinities were well represented, were popularly imagined as knights-errant.<sup>42</sup> Highland soldiers, a less politically problematic, if equally fabricated, image of unreconstructed manhood in the nineteenth century, became synonymous in popular culture with “chivalric masculinity.”<sup>43</sup> Popular imperialists began to overtly identify themselves with the “barbaric” masculinity of the men they encountered.<sup>44</sup> These interlinking trends were poised to render the Celtic barbarian depicted by *Punch* a more ambiguous figure in the second half of

<sup>34</sup> *Times*, 25 February 1862.

<sup>35</sup> *Punch*, 8 March 1862, 92.

<sup>36</sup> “The duel that was to have been fought,” *Illustrated Times*, 1 March 1862, 134.

<sup>37</sup> “Men of Mark—No. XXX,” 210.

<sup>38</sup> *Spectator*, 1 March 1862, 225.

<sup>39</sup> Bradley Deane, “Imperial Barbarians: Primitive Masculinity in Lost World Fiction,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 205–25, at 220.

<sup>40</sup> John Leigh, *Touché: The Duel in Literature* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), 25.

<sup>41</sup> Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven, 1981), 220.

<sup>42</sup> Kenneth E. Hendrickson, *Making Saints: Religion and the Public Image of the British Army, 1809–1885* (Cranbury, 1998), 76; Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (New York, 1994), 175–76.

<sup>43</sup> Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914* (Manchester, 2004), 61.

<sup>44</sup> Deane, “Imperial Barbarians,” 205–6.



Figure 1—"The O'Mannikin," *Punch*, 8 March 1862, 94.

the nineteenth century than Palmerston's supporters intended. Indeed, the expanding imperial project required that idealized English masculinity co-opt some of the allegedly outdated martial masculinities that had previously been employed to exaggerate a consensus against interpersonal violence in England.

### THE MARTIAL BRITON

The rejection of dueling demarcated "civilized" Britain from her foreign rivals in the immediate post-Napoleonic period. But a renewed British desire to appear ready for



European warfare resurrected the popularity of the martial model of manliness. The new, radical-leaning, middle-class monthly magazine *Temple Bar* proclaimed in 1861 that the recent heroics of the Crimean War and the Indian Uprising had “grafted a new flower of chivalry upon the old stock.”<sup>45</sup> As the *Daily News* acknowledged, there was an intimate link “between the settlement of private and of national quarrels by violence instead of by reason and arbitration.”<sup>46</sup> An increase in dueling at moments of national birth and rebirth further complicated British insistence that dueling was an outmoded custom. Scholars of European masculinity highlight the significance of the duel as “an aristocratic concept of male honor [that made] its own contribution to the construction of modern masculinity.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, dueling was an active agent in the creation of the masculine Republican ideals of the French Third Republic and in “the arrival of a liberal, constitutional regime” in the Italian peninsula.<sup>48</sup> In the emerging republics of both North and South America, dueling provided a focal point for elite debates on how to fashion a new nation.<sup>49</sup> The 1860s was a particularly concentrated period of national reformation, a fact that reinvigorated dueling in the Western world while simultaneously spiking international interest in the encounters. The British press closely followed foreign duels in the early 1860s. France, Prussia, and Italy were each in turn said to be suffering from a “duelling mania”; the United States meanwhile was in the grips of a “duelling epidemic.”<sup>50</sup> Britain was less internationally exceptional than popularly portrayed in its rejection of dueling, and we must therefore question the inference that British masculinity, like the nation’s economy, modernized in advance of other nations.<sup>51</sup> Although British commentators seized upon the copious quantity of foreign duels to illustrate the comparatively uncivilized character of other nations, the popular debate of 1862 revealed that the British gentlemanly classes were not immune to the appeal of personal combat during this dynamic decade.

The revival of the dueling debate after the collapse of the peace movement in Britain demonstrates the perceived link between personal and militarized violence. During the liberal euphoria in the late 1840s and early 1850s, the near eradication of dueling in Britain was seen as a harbinger of permanent peace. As an 1852 public letter in defense of a peace society declared, “The reprobation passed on a brace of pistols will

<sup>45</sup> “Soldiers and Volunteers,” *Temple Bar*, March 1861, 103–13, at 104.

<sup>46</sup> *Daily News*, 26 March 1869.

<sup>47</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford, 1996), 22.

<sup>48</sup> Robert A. Nye, “Fencing, the Duel and Republican Manhood in the Third Republic,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 365–77, at 369; Steven Hughes, “Men of Steel: Dueling, Honor, and Politics in Liberal Italy,” in *Men and Violence: Gender, Honor, and Rituals in Modern Europe and America*, ed. Pieter Spierenburg (Columbus, 1998), 64–81, at 65.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Bell, “The Double Guilt of Dueling: The Stain of Suicide in Anti-Dueling Rhetoric in the Early Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, no. 3 (Autumn 2009): 383–410, at 387; David S. Parker, “Law, Honor, and Impunity in Spanish America: The Debate over Dueling, 1870–1920,” *Law and History Review* 19, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 311–41, at 313.

<sup>50</sup> France: *Standard*, 25 April 1863; Prussia: *Bradford Observer*, 17 October 1861; Italy: *Daily News*, 29 June 1863; US: *Birmingham Daily Post*, 10 March 1858.

<sup>51</sup> Ute Frevert, “Honour and Middle-Class Cultures: The History of the Duel in England and Germany,” in *Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Jürgen Kocka and Mitchell Allen (Oxford, 1993), 207–40, at 222; Behrooz Hassani Mahmooei and Mehrdad Vahabi, “Dueling for Honor and Identity Economics,” Munich Personal RePEc Archive, <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/44370/>, 1–48, at 29.

be alike effectual upon parks of artillery, and broadsides of ships of the line.”<sup>52</sup> The delegates at the International Peace Congress (1848–1853) passed a resolution against dueling in 1850 and imagined that the expurgation in Britain of “war between individuals” was a precursor of greater peace.<sup>53</sup> The Congress even created a space in which gentlemen of all European nationalities could publically confess and repent of dueling.<sup>54</sup> The ambitions of the Congress for radical reform were not those of the majority of Britons, but they echoed mainstream thought in their belief that the abolition of dueling in Britain was a fixed historical event rather than a contingent conclusion.<sup>55</sup> Instead, the evaporation of hopes for peace in Europe endangered the imagined consensus against dueling. An article in the *Army and Navy Review* that filtered into the mainstream press insisted that it was hypocritical for the British to despise dueling yet still talk of “the moral benefits accruing from war.”<sup>56</sup> The resurgent popularity of military solutions for national problems imperiled domestic accord on what forms of defense a gentleman might acceptably use on his own behalf.

Although Britain remained removed from active European warfare in the post-Crimean War period, Britons still summoned imaginary contests with continental rivals through manufactured scenarios like the Volunteers and more organic developments such as mass travel. As travel became a form of popular entertainment in Victorian Britain, more middle-class men were exposed to the question of whether or not to fight if challenged abroad. Indeed, recent research showing how diplomatic duels extended the lifespan of the practice suggests that international exchange could have a deleterious as well as salutary effect upon duelists.<sup>57</sup> There was little censure, and even some praise, when Lord Howden acted as a second in an 1853 duel between his American and French counterparts while serving as the British ambassador in Madrid.<sup>58</sup> As the Grand Tour, with its pressures upon privileged “young continental tourists” to fight foreign antagonists, gave way to package tourism, British gentlemen had to decide whether to abide by new British social dictates or prevailing European customs.<sup>59</sup> This conundrum was not, by the 1860s, a personal choice but a matter of national interest to the conservative press. Noting the tourist appeal of the gas-jet illuminations of the Mabilles Balls in Paris, the *Standard* insisted that young British men should fight a duel if challenged by a Frenchman.<sup>60</sup> As the more moderate *Glasgow Herald* explained in 1865, demurrals from duels might be construed as “the basest poltroonery” by foreigners and “expose us to undue liberties.”<sup>61</sup> A British gentleman defended the reputation of his nation when he protected his personal honor abroad.

<sup>52</sup> *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 6 June 1852.

<sup>53</sup> *Manchester Times*, 31 August 1850; *Morning Chronicle*, 23 January 1853.

<sup>54</sup> *Daily News*, 25 July 1851.

<sup>55</sup> David Nicholls, “Richard Cobden and the International Peace Congress Movement, 1848–1853,” *Journal of British Studies* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 351–76, at 370.

<sup>56</sup> *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 14 May 1865, quoting from *Army and Navy Review*.

<sup>57</sup> Amelia M. Kiddle, “In Mexico's Defence: Dueling, Diplomacy, Gender and Honor, 1876–1970,” *Mexican Studies / Estudios Mexicanos* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 22–47, at 29.

<sup>58</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 29 December 1853; *Morning Post*, 29 December 1853; *Examiner*, 31 December 1853; *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 1 January 1854.

<sup>59</sup> *The Art of Duelling by a Traveller* (London, 1836), xii.

<sup>60</sup> *Standard*, 6 August 1869.

<sup>61</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 15 April 1865.

While international events were credited with creating a “military feeling” in Britain, the increased appeal of martial display in the 1860s was also fed by a desire for manly leisure pursuits among the gentlemanly classes. The high-profile wars of the 1850s were immediately followed by two largely spurious French invasion scares in 1858–59 and 1862. In a period of extensive global cooperation with France, including in Peking (1860) and in Mexico (1861), the resulting Volunteers movement was an emotional rather than a strategic response fed by what Ian Beckett characterizes as an “increasingly hysterical press campaign.”<sup>62</sup> The perennial excuse of national martial preparedness for aristocratic recreations, such as hunting, now justified sport and leisure for an expanded and urbanized gentlemanly population.<sup>63</sup> Proponents of “muscular manhood” and sports-focused education in boys’ public schools were, unsurprisingly, supporters of the Volunteers.<sup>64</sup> Joining the Volunteers allowed British gentlemen an opportunity for extra-urban recreation via highly visible displays of martial prowess. The Volunteers promoted a knightly ideal, and “fair English maidens” were publicly urged in 1862 not to accept suitors until they had demonstrated their ability to put “a bullet into a target at 900 yards.”<sup>65</sup> As figure 2 shows, the men in uniforms with peaked forage caps lounging in picnic chairs or else mixing on equal terms with spectators in top hats mark the heavily publicized shooting competition as a genteel event. The contestants practice their marksmanship on Wimbledon Common, site of some of the nineteenth century’s most famous duels, including the Canning–Castlereagh political contest (1809), the Earl of Cardigan’s exchange with an army subordinate (1840), and the future emperor Napoleon III’s contest with his cousin (1840).<sup>66</sup> The European implications of such displays of marksmanship were clear. As the *Glasgow Herald* boasted, the “spontaneous” raising of a volunteer army “should teach the world of schemers and duellists that Britain has still the heart and the hand to strike when the proper time comes.”<sup>67</sup> This increased public interest in martial vigor created a new vogue for the sports and leisure that were once associated with aristocratic martial masculinity.

The twin strategies of depicting duelists as outsiders or as relics of Britain’s past were turned on their heads in the 1860s. European competition prompted commentators to rehabilitate the violence of the past *and* those present-day expressions of martial masculinity. The conservative *Standard*, a paper whose revitalization in the 1860s was aided by its in-depth coverage of the American Civil War and the Prussian-Austrian War, was particularly conspicuous in championing “respectable” military men who still believed in the “moral efficacy of duelling.”<sup>68</sup> When a retired colonel running for parliament challenged his opponent to a duel in 1865, the *Standard* noted that he was “galled by a sense of wrong, publicly and disgracefully

<sup>62</sup> Ian F. W. Beckett, *Britain’s Part-Time Soldiers: The Amateur Military Tradition, 1558–1945* (Barnsley, 2011), 165.

<sup>63</sup> Anthony Taylor, *Lords of Misrule: Hostility to Aristocracy in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2004), 80.

<sup>64</sup> J. A. Mangan, “Manufactured” Masculinity: *Making Imperial Manliness, Morality and Militarism* (London, 2013), 153–54.

<sup>65</sup> William Harnett Blanch, *The Volunteer’s Book of Facts: An Annual Record* (London, 1862), 125.

<sup>66</sup> *Times*, 23 September 1809; 17 September 1840; 6 March 1840.

<sup>67</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 15 April 1865.

<sup>68</sup> *Standard*, 30 December 1864; John Richard Wood, “The *Standard* (1827–1916),” in *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*, ed. Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (London, 2009), 596–97.

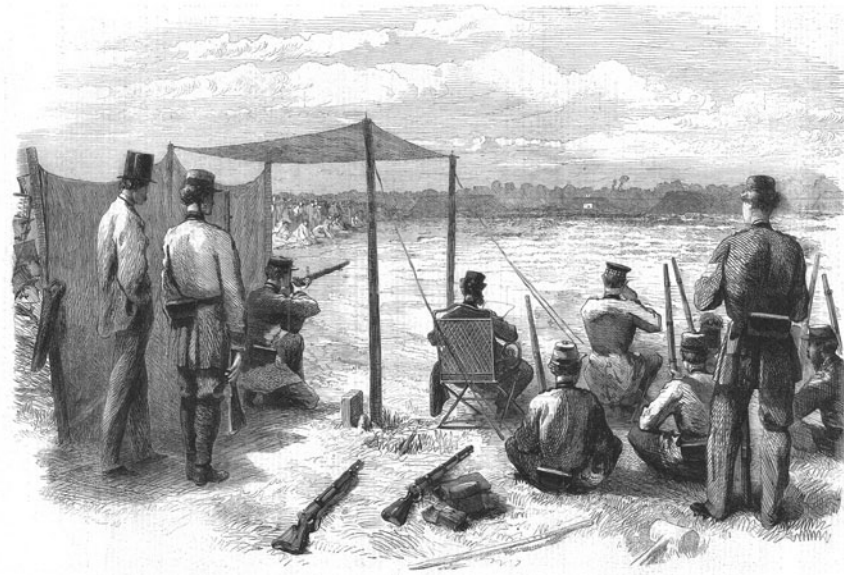


Figure 2—“National Rifle Association Meeting, Wimbledon Common, Shooting Queen’s Prize,” *Illustrated London News*, 20 July 1861, 54.

insulted, and governed by an old tradition of *all European armies*.<sup>69</sup> British commentators became preoccupied with how their nation appeared to outsiders and resurrected their own violent past as proof of national vigor. The *Morning Post*, another conservative daily, concluded an 1869 article on dueling in the newly unified Italy with the boast that present-day Italian men could not compare with the fighting editors from the paper’s own hot youth.<sup>70</sup> References to past dueling prowess served a nuanced purpose for the more liberal press outlets: they declared Britain more advanced than its neighbors and yet still as masculine as they were. The *Graphic*, a pro-reform weekly picture paper, insisted in 1870 that, while other nations might unfairly point to “a growth of effeminacy,” Britons’ dislike of dueling was due to their extensive *experience* of the custom.<sup>71</sup> With no clear division between domestic and foreign, past and present, the increasingly mobile Victorian gentleman had to negotiate between the pacific ideals of the early nineteenth century and the martial ambitions of the present day.

The mid-Victorian debate on dueling, with its links to popular politics and culture, allows us to create a more complex view of British masculine identities. It connects the Volunteers movement of the late 1850s and 1860s with the “knightly” ideal of crusading soldiers that allowed for a hardening attitude toward British violence in the empire. In both cases, the need to make gentlemanly violence “honorable” resurrected older ideals of elite male behavior; this rehabilitation of the medieval and even

<sup>69</sup> *Standard*, 16 August 1865 (emphasis added).

<sup>70</sup> *Morning Post*, 25 January 1869.

<sup>71</sup> *Graphic*, 9 April 1870.

pre-medieval past defanged critiques of dueling as “barbaric.” Even vocal denunciations of dueling in this period must be read as expressions of foreign and colonial agendas. The *Times*, so damning in its portrayal of O’Donaghue after his challenge against an English legislator, took little interest when his 1869 challenge to a fellow Irish-Catholic politician was accepted.<sup>72</sup> The precarious balance between the conflicting yet interdependent pacific and martial models of masculinity was controlled by national trends and international events. In their day-to-day lives, men claiming membership in the gentlemanly classes faced the challenge of balancing the competing obligations of their professional and personal identities. While the interior workings of the Peel-O’Donaghue case were largely shielded from public view by Palmerston and his supporters, the concurrent case of Captain Robertson gave the British reading public an inside perspective on a Victorian challenge.

### THE PROFESSIONAL GENTLEMAN

While the parliamentary fracas played out in Westminster, a Crimean War veteran stood trial for “conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman” after failing to properly defend his reputation. Officers were required by the military code to defend their reputations, and this occupational demand contributed in no small measure to the Army and Navy’s reputation as inveterate duelists who were slow to concede that “the concept of gentlemanly conduct [had] altered” in favor of restrained Christian virtue.<sup>73</sup> The difficulties that officers experienced in satisfying this requirement in the mid-nineteenth century rendered the traditional military charge suddenly resonant with civilian gentlemen struggling to defend their own reputations using the civil courts and the press. In her work on the Scottish Enlightenment, Rosalind Carr concludes that, however persuasive the arguments against the “barbarous social custom,” they never translated into a “consensus” against dueling simply because they could not “negate the importance of public reputation.”<sup>74</sup> Like military men with their no longer insular courts-martial, civilian professionals were by the mid-century largely reliant upon exhaustively chronicled legal processes in order to repair damage to their public reputations. Aristocratic men had once defended the practice of dueling by claiming that their honor was the same as their lives. An enlarged gentlemanly population in the mid-nineteenth century equated their reputations with their livelihoods.

The reason for Arthur Robertson’s twenty-eight-day court-martial in February and March 1862 was his failure to issue a challenge after a dispute at the Army and Navy Club. On the night of the quarrel, Robertson encountered a man that he had fallen out with over the money that came with Robertson’s marriage. The marriage trustee’s insult, issued in a loud voice in the Club’s entrance hall, was calculated to strip Robertson of his gentlemanly status: “This is Captain Robertson of the 4th Dragoon Guards—he is a blackguard, and I will horsewhip him before his

<sup>72</sup> *Times*, 9 November 1869. George Henry Moore made an appropriate apology to O’Donaghue at Burlington Hotel, London, but not before their seconds had purchased tickets to Boulogne for the contest.

<sup>73</sup> Edward M. Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815–1914* (London, 1980), 26; Andrew, “Code of Honour,” 429; Patterson, “Imperial Ideal,” 8.

<sup>74</sup> Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture*, 174.



regiment!”<sup>75</sup> While a challenge to duel asserted “an equality of genteel rank,” a threatened horsewhipping produced the opposite effect.<sup>76</sup> Robertson attempted to ignore this public attack, but as an army officer he could ill afford to do so. Professionally, a military officer’s individual honor was the same as his regiment’s honor and must be defended.<sup>77</sup> Once he realized his error, Robertson tried in vain to privately arrange a duel with his insulter. His commanding officer insisted that Robertson publicly goad his antagonist into a duel, an act that the commander claimed “was a strong measure, but there was *nothing else* to be done.”<sup>78</sup> Although belatedly willing to hazard his life in a private encounter, Robertson refused to risk a libel action by making a published attack lest the whole affair “obtain a disagreeable notoriety” in the courtroom.<sup>79</sup> His insulter continued to defame Robertson while out riding in Hyde Park and hunting in the Home Counties, so the officers of the Fourth Dragoon Guards, first stationed in Birmingham and then in Dublin, sought to hound him out of the regiment before their collective honor was further damaged. Robertson later claimed that, in order to “escape the everlasting persecution” by his brother officers, “he could almost have drowned himself.”<sup>80</sup> It was Robertson’s protest against these bullying tactics that landed him in the last place he wished to be: in court and on the front page of national newspapers.

While there was a touch of dark comedy in the predicament of a man on trial for failing to commit an illegal act, the impasse of Robertson and the Fourth Dragoon Guards was taken seriously by the major news outlets that sent correspondents to Dublin to cover the court-martial. Despite the inevitable censure from traditional liberal dailies of military officers who were “seeking to revive the worst practices of dark and savage days,”<sup>81</sup> coverage of the case quickly developed into a genuine discussion of “the abstract principle of duelling which is on trial.”<sup>82</sup> The new penny press saw the significance of the court-martial for their readers, with the *Telegraph* reflecting that a gentleman in “ordinary civilian life” struggled to respond to a gross insult such as the one Robertson had received in a way “which will accord at once with the laws of the country, the views of society, and his own sense of dignity and self-respect.”<sup>83</sup> The *Morning Post* thought the Robertson case was a “very pretty Gordian knot to unravel, *social* and military,” and declared that the abolition of dueling “should have been postponed until it could have been replaced.”<sup>84</sup> Encouraged by this civilian sympathy, the previously cautious editor of the *Naval and Military Gazette* admitted that he was “better contented under the code of honor.”<sup>85</sup> Even vehemently anti-dueling publications were forced to

<sup>75</sup> Arthur Mastertson Robertson, *Authentic Report of the Trial (by Court Martial) of Captain A. M. Robertson, Fourth (Royal Irish) Dragoon Guards* (Dublin, 1862), 4.

<sup>76</sup> Carr, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture*, 161; Kirsten McKenzie, *A Swindler’s Progress: Nobles and Convicts in the Age of Liberty* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), 283.

<sup>77</sup> Kiernan, *Duel in European History*, 205.

<sup>78</sup> Robertson, *Authentic Report*, 68 (emphasis added).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>81</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 18 November 1861.

<sup>82</sup> *Morning Post*, 18 February 1862.

<sup>83</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 4 February 1862.

<sup>84</sup> *Morning Post*, 12 November 1861.

<sup>85</sup> “The Position of Officers when Insulted,” *Naval and Military Gazette*, 12 April 1862.

concede that the practice's "abolition" had not necessarily improved gentlemen's social intercourse. The *Post's* soon-to-be-discontinued rival, the *Morning Chronicle*, sniffed that it was "far better that men's manners should be rough" than that they should endorse "an institution which insults the laws of God and violates the laws of man."<sup>86</sup> The Robertson court-martial focused civilian dissatisfaction on legal arbitration that invited potentially embarrassing exposure in the press and increased the appeal of more exclusive methods of arbitrating professional disputes.

Dueling was a fascinating legal problem for both civilian and military communities, but these difficulties were reflected in, rather than solved by, the laws which governed appropriate responses to defamation of character. When Sir Robert Peel, the prime minister, in 1844 refused to debate proposed legislation against dueling, he noted that "public sympathy" was a flexible quality and predicted that, if duelists "were again to arise," the courtrooms in which they might be tried were "very much under the influence of public opinion."<sup>87</sup> Accordingly, although support for new laws against dueling in the civil and military code peaked in 1844, very little was achieved legislatively. The lone direct legislative action against duelists, the 98th Article of War, contradicted existing military law, and the judge advocate general was forced during the Robertson court-martial to concede that a new article was required "to regulate the conduct of officers whose character may be impugned."<sup>88</sup> Legislation designed to facilitate personal prosecution, including the Offenses against the Person Act of 1837 and the Libel Act of 1843, were thought to promote non-violent dispute resolution.<sup>89</sup> However, Margot Backus traces the birth of New Journalism to this loosening of Britain's strict libel laws, and we can see from the debate over the protection of gentlemanly reputation how legal changes "destabilized an earlier, more absolute division of public and private morality."<sup>90</sup> The increasing scope of court reporting that coincided with the growth of the press in the 1850s rendered the courts a far more problematic ally. Although the performance of individual officers during the Robertson court-martial were sometimes satirized by the press, the new middle-class weekly periodicals of the 1860s used their blend of opinion and story-telling to portray army officers as the victims of a cumbersome and punitive legal system.<sup>91</sup> Witnessing the events in Dublin in 1862, the *Cornhill Magazine* lamented that "accusations enough are exchanged in court and in the newspapers to make the regiment a hell for months or years to come."<sup>92</sup> Indeed, the public sympathy for Captain Robertson and his subsequent acquittal—thus saving him from the devastating loss not only of his occupation but the purchase price of his captaincy—demonstrates the flexible quality of that public opinion against dueling in the 1840s that has frequently been converted into a "consensus" in favor of pacific middle-class masculinity.

<sup>86</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 18 November 1861.

<sup>87</sup> Robert Peel, Speech to the House of Commons, 14 March 1844, *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 3rd ser., vol. 73 (1844), cols. 1031–32.

<sup>88</sup> The National Archives, WO 81/108, "Judge Advocate General's Office: Letter Books," 1862.

<sup>89</sup> Emelyne Godfrey, *Masculinity, Crime and Self-Defence in Victorian Literature* (Basingstoke, 2010), 71. For the use of the courts to advance the cause against dueling, see Andrew, *Aristocratic Vice*, 70–77.

<sup>90</sup> Margot Gayle Backus, *Scandal Work: James Joyce, the New Journalism and the Home Rule Newspaper Wars* (Notre Dame, 2013), 40.

<sup>91</sup> "Tried by Court Martial," *Temple Bar*, July 1862, 280–86, at 283.

<sup>92</sup> "Courts-Martial," 682.

If the ability of the courts to enforce a dictate against violent dispute resolution was dependent upon the mutable quality of public opinion, the popular press both curated and undermined the public opinion against dueling. As Sarah Cole has recently demonstrated, an overemphasis upon the anti-aristocratic nature of middle-class masculinity in the post-Napoleonic period had a destabilizing effect; “this narrative of middle-class triumph soon generated its counternarratives of middle-class failure.”<sup>93</sup> The press, popularly believed to be the best gauge of public opinion by the mid-nineteenth century, certainly held a high opinion of its role in promoting anti-dueling sentiment.<sup>94</sup> The editor of *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* boasted in 1852 of how the press succeeded in growing “opinion” against dueling from a stricken “seed” into “a tree of strongest root and robust dimensions.”<sup>95</sup> However, in practice, the popular press focused on sensational episodes to attract readers’ attention, and coverage of dueling veered wildly in tone and focus as a consequence.<sup>96</sup> A nineteenth-century tract mocked this press response, noting that, in the case of serious injury, a duel was “denounced in the lurid leading columns,” whereas uninjured parties were “treated as fools, and the whole affair is covered with ridicule!”<sup>97</sup> Cases that did not conform to farce or tragedy, such as Sir Robert Peel the younger’s 1851 duel, were largely ignored by the press. The reactive nature of the anti-dueling campaign made it dependent upon current events and vulnerable to the “counternarrative” described by Cole. It was little to be wondered at when *Punch* declared in 1862 that “the formation of *public opinion* in favor of duelling ought to be checked at once.”<sup>98</sup> Although essential in promoting anti-dueling sentiment in the first half of the nineteenth century, the press proved an unreliable custodian of pacific male virtue and an uneasy ally of professional men under pressure to publically defend their reputations in court and in “the court of public opinion.”

The press-framed debate over dueling, with its self-interested promotion of open courtrooms and public discourse, hindered the implementation of non-violent, extra-legal methods of gentlemanly arbitration. Anti-dueling campaigners declared that dueling was diametrically opposed to legal, nonviolent methods of resolving disputes, yet gentlemen in the mid-Victorian period continued to experience a continuum between legal and extra-legal methods when they sought to defend their reputations. As scholars of extra-European masculinity have established, “the courts and the press” were used to “attack and defend reputations” in ways that mimicked the “rituals” of the duel.<sup>99</sup> “Courts of Honor,” in their various civil and military incarnations, had stood between dueling and the regular judiciary since the early modern period.<sup>100</sup> Several Victorian schemes for a “Court of Honor” were proposed

<sup>93</sup> Sarah Rose Cole, “The Aristocrat in the Mirror: Male Vanity and Bourgeois Desire in William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 61, no. 2 (Autumn 2005): 137–70, at 145.

<sup>94</sup> James Thompson, *British Political Culture and the Idea of “Public Opinion,” 1867–1914* (Cambridge, 2013), 93.

<sup>95</sup> *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 6 June 1852.

<sup>96</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 18 November 1861.

<sup>97</sup> *The History of Duelling, in All Countries*. Translated from M. Coustard de Massi, *Histoire du duel en France*. Introduction and concluding chapters by Sir Lucius O’Trigger [pseudonym] (London, 1880).

<sup>98</sup> “Discouragement for Duellists,” *Punch*, 8 March 1862, 91.

<sup>99</sup> Russell, *Savage or Civilized?*, 174; McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies*, 64; Kiddle, “In Mexico’s Defence,” 38–39.

<sup>100</sup> Peltonen, *Duel*, 136–45.

in 1844.<sup>101</sup> Prince Albert favored establishing an honor court along modern Prussian lines.<sup>102</sup> Even the Association for the Discouragement of Duelling finally conceded that there needed to be an alternative way of “meeting the want in society ... over which neither the courts of law [n]or equity can exercise an effectual control.”<sup>103</sup> When no such scheme came to fruition in the United Kingdom, extra-legal dispute resolution was limited to threats of illegal violence.

The failure to find a true replacement for dueling resulted in a climate of uncertainty that, commentators worried, unscrupulous men might exploit. British politics, assisted by the presence of retired military officers, was the professional sphere most associated with nineteenth-century dueling after the military itself. A contest between two candidates during the 1852 general election was the last-documented completed duel between two Englishmen in England.<sup>104</sup> Nor did political aspirants altogether abandon the political utility of dueling thereafter. A retired colonel running for parliament in 1865 was taunted by his civilian opponent “that fighting had been the colonel’s trade, but it was not now.”<sup>105</sup> The colonel’s supporters saw calculated malice in such a statement; the opponent knew that the colonel would respond to the taunt with a challenge, and he obligingly did. This scandal echoes the popular feeling that Peel intentionally insulted O’Donaghue with a hope of provoking a challenge.<sup>106</sup> In the same issue of the *Illustrated Times* that featured a cover image of the Robertson court-martial, the parliamentary reporter who observed the altercation between O’Donaghue and Peel bristled that the Irish Secretary knew that “no Irish gentleman would quietly swallow such an insult.” An 1869 episode in a London courtroom illustrates how such “baiting” strategies brought dueling into play with legal, as well as illegal, methods of resolving disputes. Having come into conflict over the content of some articles, a newspaperman took a peer to court for “using language with a view of provoking a duel.” A scuffle broke out after the hearing at Marlborough Street in which “chairs were broken, hats smashed, and one of the persons met with very rough treatment.”<sup>107</sup> Talk of dueling among professional gentlemen was due to frustration with the present-day constraints of legal dispute resolution—and the perceived liberties taken by their fellow professionals as a result.

A central conundrum exposed by the two 1862 dueling case studies was that gentlemen were still required to take action upon being insulted and yet were uncertain as to what that action should be. As a consequence, the insulter and not the challenger became the more reviled and feared. A regular correspondent of the *Naval and Military Gazette* observed that “the general feeling elicited” by both the Irish member and the Dublin court-martial “as expressed in *many publications*” revealed that the public condemned the “savage insulter” more than “the challenger who takes up the defense of his own right.”<sup>108</sup> It was often a desire for greater *civility*

<sup>101</sup> Titus, *A Plan to Abolish Duelling* (London, 1844), 22–23; *Thoughts on Duelling and its Abolition* (London, 1844), 36–37.

<sup>102</sup> “British and Foreign Arms, No. VIII.” *Colburn’s United Services Magazine*, 1843, 414–21, at 420–21.

<sup>103</sup> *Report of the Association* (1846), 19.

<sup>104</sup> *Times*, 24 May 1852. Colonel Romilly, MP, and the Hon. G. Smythe were contesting Canterbury.

<sup>105</sup> *Standard*, 16 August 1865. Colonel Dawkins was challenging the MP Alfred Seymour.

<sup>106</sup> “The duel that was to have been fought,” *Illustrated Times*, 1 March 1862, 134.

<sup>107</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 14 July 1869.

<sup>108</sup> *Naval and Military Gazette*, 8 March 1862.

between gentlemen that prompted the espousal of pro-dueling sentiment. The *Standard* thought that many an “outrage” would simply not have occurred when “a reply would have come to him from the point of a sword or a pistol’s muzzle” and lamented how the legal system was now used to protect “jibing upstarts who can be so courageous in the defense of their own timidity.”<sup>109</sup> The editor of the *NMG* thought that “the bully and the slanderer” had “taken advantage of the almost total suspension of that much abused appeal to arms.”<sup>110</sup> O’Donaghue and Robertson’s antagonists represented the “bullies” that any gentleman might encounter in public life. Yet the ability to successfully counter such public disrespect depended not only upon a gentleman’s public character but also upon his private circumstances.

### THE PRIVATE MAN

The case of Captain Robertson points to the ambivalent role of domesticity and chivalry in the advocacy of pacific masculine ideals. Scholars of Victorian masculinity, most prominently Tosh, cite the increased status of men’s domestic identities as a key factor in the creation of a new standard of self-controlled, other-focused middle-class manhood.<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile, historians of gender and politics have urged scholars to appreciate “how male responses to domesticity remained complex and ambivalent” throughout the modern period.<sup>112</sup> This is certainly true of violence and domesticity. Ben Griffin has persuasively reasoned that the reframing of domestic violence as a working-class social problem reflected a wide variety of positions on male domestic authority and was inspired in part by a desire to protect elite male privilege.<sup>113</sup> Popularly expressed fantasies of violence, in literature and in the theatres, enjoyed a similarly ambivalent relationship with the domestic sphere, ranging from chivalric fantasies of defending the home to Sensational representations of the home as the chief source of interpersonal violence. Popular crime panics centering upon garroters and housebreakers in 1862 focused primarily upon middle-class male victims, echoing Lucy Delap’s caution that “historians’ accounts of chivalry gives a false picture of consensus” in the nineteenth century.<sup>114</sup> In the context of this broader cultural conversation about gentlemanly violence, the revived interest in dueling that coalesced around the case of Captain Robertson is part of a forward-facing historical intervention necessary to counter the narrative of the smooth rise of a pacific masculine ideal.

The family was heavily invoked during the campaign against dueling and during the revived public debate of the practice, highlighting the ambivalent role of domestic identities in the creation of pacific masculinity. Anti-dueling campaigners in the early Victorian period argued to good effect that a gentleman’s domestic obligations

<sup>109</sup> *Standard*, 16 August 1865.

<sup>110</sup> “The Position of Officers when Insulted,” *Naval and Military Gazette*, 12 April 1862.

<sup>111</sup> John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, 2007), 5.

<sup>112</sup> Martin Francis, “The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity,” *Historical Journal* 45, no. 3 (Winter 2002): 637–52, at 643.

<sup>113</sup> Griffin, *Politics of Gender*, 67.

<sup>114</sup> Delap, “‘Thus Does Man,’” 47.



were more important than his personal honor.<sup>115</sup> A fatal 1843 duel between two brothers-in-law, the 1844 passage of military legislation to deprive duelists' widows of their pensions, and even Queen Victoria's own publicly expressed "disapprobation and abhorrence of the practice" the same year, all contrived to put the idea of the family at the center of the dueling debate.<sup>116</sup> Yet, as the Robertson case shows, apologists for dueling in the 1860s also used the emotive image of the domestic sphere. Robertson's failure to issue a challenge was framed by his brother officers as part of a pattern of failure to publicly uphold his familial obligations. Before his altercation at the Army and Navy Club—with, revealingly, an old friend of his wife's family—Robertson had been warned by a fellow officer to "keep his games to himself," as gossip had become common that he was frequently seen walking with "an improper female" on Birmingham streets.<sup>117</sup> An officer who chose to remain on intimate terms with Robertson when the regiment moved to Dublin was told that "being a married man [he] ought to feel [Robertson's] misconduct doubly."<sup>118</sup> While some of the antagonism that Robertson experienced might have been due to sympathy for his wife, his fellow officers were clearly angry that Robertson's private conduct would reflect poorly upon their own reputation as a regiment. As long as the domestic sphere, with its female inhabitants, remained a cipher for gentlemanly contests of reputation, it remained a flexible force as regards male-on-male violence.

If we observe the class and gender dynamics of the final distillation of the anti-dueling movement in the 1840s, we see greater coherence between two seemingly polarized positions. The overwhelmingly male and elitist network that ultimately claimed responsibility for the "death of the duel" is suggestive of its socially conservative ambitions. The important role of women's voices, as used by both female and male writers in the eighteenth century to critique dueling as "unmanly," was supplanted by private, elite male correspondence networks, notably between Jeremy Bentham and the Duke of Wellington.<sup>119</sup> The Association for the Discouragement of Duelling, formed in early 1842, recruited its male members exclusively through personal invitation and insisted upon "quiet and unostentatious" promotions such as circulars and letters to newspapers.<sup>120</sup> The Association for the Suppression of Duelling, although providing the alternative of an open subscription society upon which so many popular reform movements were based, nevertheless boasted of its entirely male members' high status when it formed the following year.<sup>121</sup> Despite the utility of women as practicing activists as well as symbols of morality, as shown by the previously discussed contemporary Peace Movement, these associations paid little heed to the argument of a successful temperance campaigner who

<sup>115</sup> Banks, *Polite Exchange*, 202.

<sup>116</sup> Henry Hardinge, Speech to the House of Commons, 11 March 1844, *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 3rd ser., vol. 73 (1844), col. 811.

<sup>117</sup> Robertson, *Authentic Report*, 126, 118.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>119</sup> On the important role of female narrators in anti-dueling literature, see Leigh, *Duel in Literature*, 75–99; and A. Forbes Sieveking, "Duelling and Militarism," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 11 (1917): 165–84, at 183.

<sup>120</sup> *Report of the Association for the Discouragement of Duelling with the Regulations and List of Members &c.* (London, 1844), vi.

<sup>121</sup> *Spectator*, 5 August 1843, 11.

advocated mobilizing female opinion, noting that women's views would carry great weight "with young men of the duel-exposed class."<sup>122</sup> The immediate decline and demise of the Association for the Discouragement of Duelling after the high-profile denouncements of the practice in 1844 further suggest that the final triumphant incarnation of the anti-dueling campaign was focused on reforming a symptom of elite male privilege rather than on addressing class- and gender-based disparities.<sup>123</sup>

Fantasy violence in the domestic setting in 1860s popular entertainments provided a cathartic outlet for gentlemen faced with the difficulties of internally policing their peer group while defending the gentlemanly classes' privileged position as performers of legitimate violence. Like the symbolic as well as physical threat of a horsewhipping, dueling had always contained a fantasy component—it did not need to be fully performed in order to serve its social function—and the increasing impracticality of its full performance allowed dueling to merge more fully still with the world of imagined violence. The masculine predicament of how to defend family honor was explored in fictional form in an Anthony Trollope novel that began to be serialized in the new and very popular middle-class monthly *Cornhill Magazine* in 1862. Emelyne Godfrey hypothesizes that Trollope, who often fictionalized current events, observed "a yearning fascination among young men towards duelling" in the 1860s and that his work demonstrates "lingering doubts as to the appropriate response to a duel."<sup>124</sup> The old squire in Trollope's *The Small House at Allington* is appalled by the idea of bringing family affairs, specifically the jilting of his niece, under the scrutiny of a courtroom. He wistfully reflects that in the days of dueling "a man was satisfied in feeling that he had done something" and he wishes that "any other punishment had taken its place."<sup>125</sup> While the old man's sorrow for his young female relation is genuine, the chief social problem is that a man is publically passing as a gentleman when his private conduct disbars him from full membership. When the young hero of the novel finally shakes off similar indecision as to the acceptability of violent retaliation and publicly assaults the jilter at the railway station, overturning a stand of yellow shilling-novels at the W. H. Smith stall in the process, he succeeds in shaming his opponent by blacking his eye.<sup>126</sup> He has literally marked the jilter out as a scoundrel in a way that is intelligible to other gentlemen. Although a man might approve of a shaming public assault and disapprove of a challenge to duel, invocations of fantasy violence in popular novels reflected the way

<sup>122</sup> David Nicholls, "Richard Cobden and the International Peace Congress Movement, 1848–1853," *Journal of British Studies* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 351–76, at 373–74; John Dunlop, *Anti-Duel; Or, a Plan for the Abrogation of Duelling Which Has Been Tried and Found Successful* (London, 1843), 44.

<sup>123</sup> *Report of the Association* (London, 1844); *Report of the Association* (London, 1845); *Report of the Association for the Discouragement of Duelling with the Regulations and List of Members &c.* (London, 1846); *Report of the Association for the Discouragement of Duelling with the Regulations and List of Members &c.* (London, 1850).

<sup>124</sup> Godfrey, *Masculinity*, 73, 75; Kathleen E. Urda, "How Full of Interest Are the Present Times!": Anthony Trollope's Letters to John Lewis Merivale, 1849–1862," *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 72, no. 2 (Winter 2011): 477–85, at 492.

<sup>125</sup> Anthony Trollope, "Chapter 31: The Wounded Fawn," *Cornhill Magazine*, July 1863, 59–66, at 62; Anthony Trollope, "Chapter 34: The Combat," *Cornhill Magazine*, August 1863, 208–14, at 208.

<sup>126</sup> Trollope, "The Combat," 211–12.

in which the domestic sphere might be utilized to justify the use of violence in order to protect a gentlemanly group identity.

Potent as were fantasies of knightly violence in defense of women, the simultaneous rise of the Sensation craze in the early 1860s suggests that fictional gentlemanly violence was also a response to challenges from women. As Griffin's argument about the contemporary campaign against domestic violence makes clear, anti-violence rhetoric in this period must be viewed in light of a need to preserve elite male privilege against challenges along gender as well as class lines.<sup>127</sup> Sensation was a potent mixture of lower-class melodramatic formulations and middle-class audiences whose presence did not lessen the violence of the spectacles.<sup>128</sup> "Murder, brutal forms of discipline, duels and brawls," Rosalind Crone claims of mid-nineteenth-century entertainments, "were presented to audiences in a more extreme manner than they had ever been."<sup>129</sup> The spectacular growth of the middle-class magazine market was due in part to Sensation fiction and its altogether more troubling portrayal of violence in the domestic sphere. In Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Aurora Floyd*—which was serialized in the *Cornhill's* competitor, *Temple Bar*, at the same time as *The Small House at Allington*—the heroine uses a horsewhip to chastise a scoundrel. Discovering her in the act, her husband is horrified, insisting to the man whom she has corporally chastised that "it was her duty to let me do [the whipping] for her."<sup>130</sup> The husband's own possession of a home arsenal with all the equipment of a sporting gentleman, Marlene Tromp argues, reflects his capacity for violence against his wife as well as his ability to defend her.<sup>131</sup> The debates about both domestic violence and dueling in the mid-nineteenth century are evidence of a need to defend elite masculinity.

A popular crime panic, surfacing just a few months after the Robertson court-martial, blended real and fantasy gentlemanly violence and suggests how we can place Victorian discussions of dueling into a broader cultural history of gender, class, and violence in modern Britain. The garroting panic that occurred in the summer of 1862 made middle-class Londoners of both sexes frightened of being throttled then robbed in the public streets.<sup>132</sup> This fear of attack was particularly problematic for men who were expected to have unfettered access to the city's streets. As we see from the *Punch* cartoon "A practical application of an old pantomime joke" (figure 3), the desire to be able to physically retaliate against these

<sup>127</sup> Griffin, *Politics of Gender*, 68.

<sup>128</sup> Lynn M. Voskuil, "Feeling Public: Sensation Theater, Commodity Culture, and the Victorian Public Sphere," *Victorian Studies* 44, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 245–74, at 251.

<sup>129</sup> Rosalind Crone, *Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth-Century London* (Manchester, 2012), 9.

<sup>130</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon, "Chapter 12: Steeve Hargraves, The 'Softy,'" *Temple Bar*, July 1862, 80–91, at 91.

<sup>131</sup> Marlene Tromp, "The Dangerous Woman: M. E. Braddon's Sensational (En)gendering of Domestic Law," in *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context*, ed. Marlene Tromp, Pamela K. Gilbert, and Aeron Haynie (New York, 2000), 93–110, at 98–99.

<sup>132</sup> Jennifer Davis, "The London Garroting Panic of 1862: A Moral Panic and the Creation of a Criminal Class in mid-Victorian England," in *Crime and the Law: The Social History of Crime in Western Europe since 1500*, ed. V. A. C. Gatrell, Bruce Lenman, and Geoffrey Parker (London, 1980), 190–213, at 190; Robert Sindall, "The London Garroting Panics of 1856 and 1862," *Social History* 12, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 351–59, at 351.

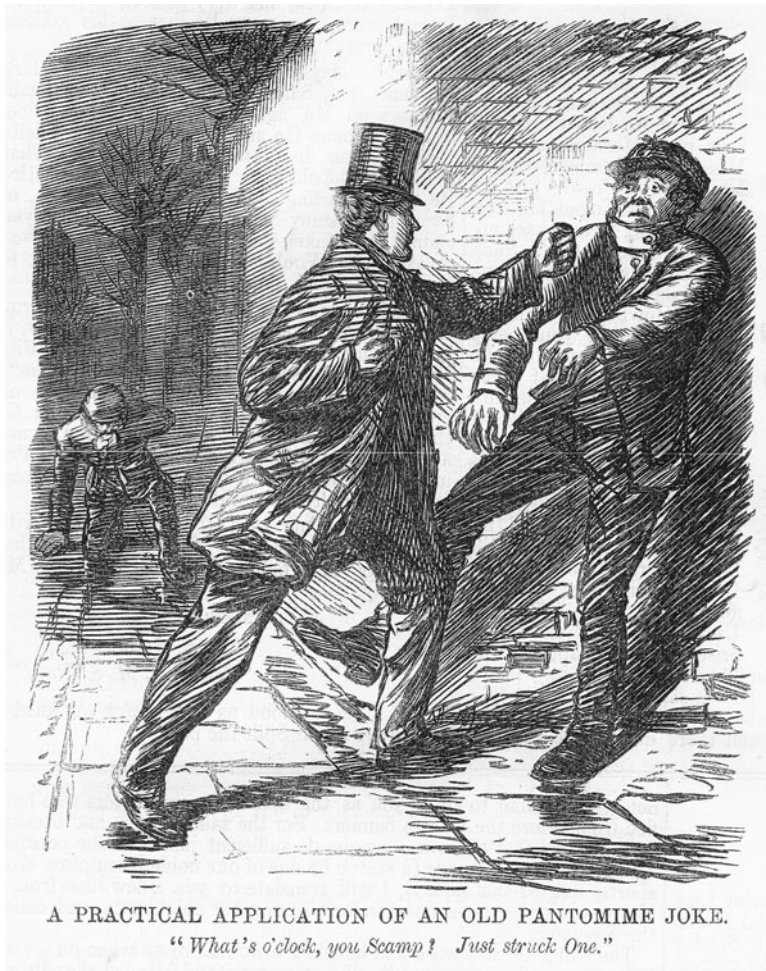


Figure 3—"A Practical Application," *Punch*, 20 December 1862, 254.

much-publicized attacks took hold of the public imagination. The gentleman in the cartoon, his class designated by his top hat and overcoat, has already "struck one" of his roughly-attired assailants—garrotters worked in pairs—and it is clear from his upright pugilistic stance that he is about to "strike two" in the approved fashion of a gentlemen boxer. Just as the press portrayed duelists as outsiders to mainstream English society, garrotters were commonly believed to be returning Australian convicts who had learned the underhanded tricks on the prison hulks.<sup>133</sup> By framing debates about English masculinity around an outside threat, the popular panics of 1862 were significant precursors of the public endorsement of extreme violence overseas in the same decade, the vociferous nature of which caught some members of the

<sup>133</sup> "The Science of Garrotting and Housebreaking," *Cornhill Magazine*, January 1863, 77–94, at 80.



press off guard.<sup>134</sup> Just as the dueling debate demonstrated a disinclination to delegate the protection of men's reputations to the courtroom, the garroting panic exposed concerns about deputizing self-protection to the police and popularized the practice for gentlemen to carry concealed "life-preservers," flexible sticks with leaded weights upon the end, a practice that continued into the next century.<sup>135</sup> The garroting panic brought the exclusionary masculinity at the heart of the anti-dueling campaign full circle. Once again, the perpetrators of criminal violence were atavistic specters from the nation's past returning to haunt the Britain of the present day. But, as the popular response to the panic indicates, the "Pacific Englishman" was a flexible model of masculinity when it came to violent retaliation.

## CONCLUSION

We require a more nuanced model of masculinity if we are going to answer important questions about violence, class, and gender in nineteenth-century Britain. In order to achieve this recalibration, it is essential that we jettison a nineteenth-century historiography that alternately announced interpersonal male violence as an unfashionable vice of the aristocracy and as a working-class weakness. The middle classes certainly encroached upon traditional aristocratic privileges like dueling, but we cannot read these checks as a collective rejection of genteel, masculine violence. The ability to commit and counter interpersonal violence remained an important component of Victorian masculinity in all classes. The social, and to a lesser extent legal, restraints placed upon interpersonal violence influenced the degree to which this ability might be acted upon, but it did not negate the original prerequisite. A gentleman had recourse to the courts and to the newspapers to arbitrate a disagreement, but *not* because he was afraid to meet the scoundrel in the street. A gentleman could delegate the protection of his person and family to the authorities, yet he must be able to defend himself and his home if attacked. And, of course, a gentleman should not fight a duel—provided he was unafraid to do so.

A clear caution against hegemonic Victorian masculinity, the dueling debate makes a compelling case for a model of gender that accounts for powerful competing trends. Calls for greater official response to crime were perennially mixed with self-reproach for having originally delegated the performance of violence to an authority—and with worries that manliness was deteriorating in consequence. In order to appear militarily competitive, English middle-class restraint had to be tempered with clear potential for violent retribution. This pressure complicated the "backward" status of Celtic and other colonized masculinities and was ultimately resolved with controlled army displays. By returning our gaze to the popular debates of the nineteenth century, we see how martial and pacific values were interrelated ideals rather than

<sup>134</sup> For the Governor Eyre case, see Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge, 1992), 255–95. For the Colonel Crawley case, see Douglas Peers, "The more this foul case is stirred, the more offensive it becomes": Imperial Authority, Victorian Sentimentality and the Court Martial of Colonel Crawley, 1862–1864," in *Fringes of Empire: Peoples, Places, and Spaces at the Margins of British Colonial India*, ed. Sameetah Agha and Elizabeth Kolsky (New Delhi, 2009), 207–35.

<sup>135</sup> Godfrey, *Masculinity*, 102.



opposing forces. We can allow older masculine ideals to coexist with, rather than to cancel out, more modern values. This flexibility enables us to productively consider masculine behaviors that might otherwise be dismissed for being out of step with the “spirit of the age.”

Professionalization and domestication are held to have had a pacifying and controlling effect upon British masculine norms, but the effect of these interlinked trends upon attitudes toward violence was decidedly more mixed. If we wish to have a more complete picture of why dueling ceased to be a practical method for resolving gentlemanly disputes, we need look no further than the open spaces surrounding Britain’s expanding cities and the use that was made of these parks and commons in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was not only the Volunteers whose target practice signaled Britain’s preparedness for war. In the proliferating playing fields of Victorian Britain was the next generation of gentlemen playing healthful sport. As one Scottish newspaper observed in 1865, for students in Europe “the duel supplies the place which cricket and boats hold among English youth.”<sup>136</sup> Gentlemanly identity was to a degree democratized, but it was more importantly brought into clearer alignment with the ambitions of the nation rather than the interests of any single class group. This synergy was accomplished not by a sea change from an aristocratic to a middle-class ideal of masculinity but rather by the selective preservation of those martial values that were the most profitable to the nation.

<sup>136</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 15 April 1865.