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The Blackfriars Gladiators: Masters of Fence, Playing a Prize, and the Elizabethan and Stuart Theater

Ian Borden

ATTEMPTING TO DETERMINE THE NATURE OF STAGED COMBAT DURING the Elizabethan and Stuart periods is a difficult venture, for very few descriptions of stage fighting exist. Most plays from these periods, even when a moment of combat is central to the plot, simply describe swordplay as “They fight.” Yet dueling was common to the theatrical venues of the day, not just in period drama, but also in contests between skilled professional fencers and instructors called Masters of Fence or Masters of Defence.¹ Known as “playing a prize,” or “prize fighting,” competitions between these masters attracted substantial crowds. Beginning as amateur, yet public tests of ability, prize fighting eventually took on the full trappings of professional entertainment. Theatrical events in their own right, the popularity of these prizes appears to have exerted a considerable influence on the theater of the day.² Examination of the prizes, the publications of the masters, and the play texts of the Elizabethan and Stuart periods reveals a strong connection between the combat seen in plays, and that of the prizes of the Masters of Fence.

To illuminate the association between the theater and fencing, it is necessary not just to look at the texts of the plays but also to look at the history of prize playing, as well as the theatrical event of the prize fight itself. Earlier scholarship has either discussed the prizes as part of fencing history, or only looked at specific fencing scenes in period plays. Placing the drama in context with prize fighting allows a fuller comprehension of the relationship between the two. Audiences that frequented the theater were also those that attended prize fights, and would have been familiar with skill at arms. It is likely, then, that prize competitions served as a model for the theatrical combat of the period. Therefore, the simple phrase, “They

fight,” almost certainly describes staged combat that appears realistic, dangerous, and deadly. Specific instructions are given solely when the combat takes on special characteristics, sometimes for comic effect. Authors expected a skilled level of swordplay without needing to specify how the combat should be played, often employing descriptive dialogue that necessitated specific and complex fencing techniques. Writers used stage fighting to reveal aspects of plot and character temperament, and assumed both the actors’ ability and the audience’s knowledge of swordplay for its effect. Not only did stage combat reflect the struggles seen in the fencing masters’ playing of prizes, authors relied on the audience’s familiarity with fighting technique to reveal social commentary and hidden character.

The earliest firm indication of the Masters of Fence traces back to 1540 in a grant given to nine “masters of the ‘Science of Defence’” and eleven “provosts of the same science” to search out disreputable fencing instructors.³ The document reveals that there were recognized orders of fencing masters with established rules of conduct and behavior, and fencing schools were important enough to come under the stricture of law. The governing of these schools was sufficiently strict that in order to play a prize a license was necessary from London’s Court of Aldermen. These licenses were not always easy to gain, as seen in an exchange of letters listed in the *Analytical Index to the Series of Records Known as the Remembrancia*, a catalogue of London legal correspondence and records. Writing to the Lord Mayor in 1582, the Earl of Warwick asked the granting of a license so that “his servant” could “play his provest prize . . . at the Bull . . . or in some other convenient place to be assigned within the liberties of the city of London [*sic*].” A second letter followed, a complaint by the earl that the license had not been granted. Finally, the Lord Mayor responded, stating that “he had not refused permission for his servant to play his prizes, but had granted him a licence, only restraining him from playing in an inn for fear of infection.” The letter gave permission to perform outside city limits, and allowed “him liberty to pass openly through the City with his company, drums and show.” In another letter a year later, the Lord Mayor reveals that licenses were by no means guaranteed: “Certain fencers had set up bills and intended to play a prize at the Theatre on May Day next, which would cause great inconvenience and danger, especially as they desired to pass through the City with pomp. Fearing disorder, . . . licence had been refused, and also permission to pass through the

City.”⁴ These examples suggest a history of acrimony between the Masters of Defence and the Mayor and his aldermen.

However, the aldermen’s antipathy may have facilitated the relationship between fencing and theater as both found a home at Blackfriars. As J. D. Aylward describes it, “the fencers, together with [. . .] the stage-players [. . .] had congregated” there.⁵ Certainly the fact that “neither the Mayor, [. . .] nor any other Officers of the City of London, had the least Jurisdiction or Authority therein” made Blackfriars appealing.⁶ Its central location within the City made it “readily accessible to playgoers,” and the many noblemen who lived there provided clients for the fencing masters.⁷ In fact, the fencing masters and the Blackfriars theaters were in surprisingly close physical proximity, which likely strengthened the interconnection between the two.

Documents detailing a dispute over property at Blackfriars help frame the physical relationship. In 1550, Edward VI granted to Sir Thomas Cawarden, his Master of Revels, “certain portions of the Blackfriars property.”⁸ Before he died in 1559, he is known to have hosted a group of gentlemen who “‘all supped together’ in the room that later became a fencing school, and there saw a play.”⁹ This same room would become part of the fencing school established in 1563 by one of the best-known Masters of Defence, William Joyner.¹⁰ As he is one of the original Masters, it is likely that the Society of the Masters of Defence employed Blackfriars as their home. A second Master, Henry Nayler,¹¹ is also listed in the property records, supporting the idea that the Masters of Defence were here. The use of Blackfriars property as a fencing school may even go back before 1538 when the monastery was surrendered to Henry VIII. Elizabeth Baxter, a witness in the property dispute, notes that in the same room mentioned above, the “scole of ffence [was] kept before the dissolucōn of the ffryers [*sic*].”¹² If this is so, it supports Aylward’s claim that Blackfriars was the home and staging area for the Society of the Masters of Defence.

The physical connection between theater and fencing at Blackfriars would deepen over the next two decades. Obtaining the lease to the lodgings vacated by Cawarden after his death, Richard Farrant established the first Blackfriars theater in 1576. Joyner was still living in Blackfriars, and “still teaching the art of fence in the hall beneath the Parliament Chamber.”¹³ At least for a few years, the Blackfriars Theatre existed above Joyner’s fencing school below. Evidence suggests that there was interaction between the two. One of Joyner’s stu-

dents was the actor Richard Tarlton, who would himself become a fencing master. But by 1584, Joyner had gone, and the management of the theater had fallen to John Lyly. Once again, the property was in dispute, and Lyly turned over his lease to Rocco Bonetti, an Italian Master of Fence. While this ended the tenure of the first Blackfriars, it helped establish a new Italian form of fencing in England, and had a strong influence on playwrights such as William Shakespeare.

Bonetti undertook many improvements on the property, having the promise of the owner, Sir William More, to extend the lease. When More tried to renege on the deal, Walter Raleigh and others helped secure an arrangement that would allow Bonetti (and his successors, Saviolo and Ieronimo) to maintain the fencing school for another ten years. Finally, in 1595, More sold the property to James Burbage, and in 1596, the Second Blackfriars Playhouse was born. Burbage did not resurrect the rooms used earlier by Farrant. Instead the "fencing school of later days . . . was destined to become the main body of the theatre."¹⁴ But the Blackfriars property was not the only connection between the fencing masters and the theater.

From the beginning of the Society of the Masters of Defence, the masters recognized the popularity of their prize contests and sought open arenas for their staging. Early challenges took place in enclosed enclaves and courtyards such as Leadenhall and Grey Friars. By the 1570s, most prizes were played in the more controlled environment of a theater or similar venue, despite the cost of renting the space. The prizes of the Society of Defence remained public tests of a student's ability rather than professional combats, but an entry in Phillip Henslowe's diary suggests the monetary reward for contesting a prize inside a theater: "James cranwigge the 4 of [November, 1598] played his challenge in my house & I shoulde have had for my [part 40 shillings which] the company . . . oweth [yet] to me."¹⁵ As Berry points out, this is more than Henslowe normally earned for plays, indicating a sizable crowd.

Although prizes were also fought at the Theatre and the Curtain, the most desired arenas in the 1560s and 1570s were the Bel Savage and the Bull. These inns possessed open courtyards that were similar to the sites of earlier contests at Leadenhall and Grey Friars. The earliest recorded date for a prize fought at the Bel Savage is 1568,¹⁶ but by 1573, the Bull had replaced the Bel Savage as the favorite arena, and served as the stage for twenty-one prizes. The reason the Bull rose to prominence may simply have been a preference for its lower platform, as the scaffold at the Bel Savage seems to have been

very high indeed. Evidence from George Silver's *Paradoxes of Defence* suggests that the platform was raised high above the surrounding floor without a railing,¹⁷ as "he that went in his fight faster backe then he ought [. . .] should be in danger to breake his necke off the scaffold." ¹⁸ No solid evidence exists regarding the permanence of the platforms, although it is likely that prizes were fought upon both temporary and permanent stages.

While it is difficult to ascertain the true nature of one of these early prizes, from period drama we can surmise fairly accurately what might have occurred. Ben Jonson includes a mock prize fight in his play, *Cynthia's Revels, or the Fountain of Self-Love*.¹⁹ The play suggests that once the provost had marched to the theater,²⁰ accompanied by his drums and throng of well-wishers, he would step upon the platform while his Master would address the crowd: "Be it known to all . . . that we . . . Master[s] of the noble and subtle science of [defense], doe give leave and licence to our provost, . . . to play his Masters prize, against all Masters at these foure, the choice and most cunning weapons."²¹ At this point, the weapons to be tried would be named. These could include the long sword, back sword, sword and dagger, sword and buckler (also known as a target), two-hand sword, and the staff (or quarterstaff). Most often three weapons were chosen, and three to seven masters would elect themselves to fight against the challenger in each weapon. Each round with a new weapon would be announced separately, and the challenger would fight every master at the chosen weapon. If Jonson is to be believed, the fighting was enthusiastically discussed and wagered upon by the spectators. As the challenger proved himself round by round, successive weapons would be announced, and a new round of fighting would begin. The sequence of weapons and masters would continue until the challenger had finally proved himself worthy of his new rank. According to Aylward, the "victorious prizer was escorted back to the Blackfriars with the same ceremonial as had attended his coming."²²

That Jonson would include a prize fight in his play is not surprising, for a firm tradition of stage fighting had already been established in England. The plays of the medieval period often featured wrestling and other contests of strength.²³ By 1475,²⁴ the fascination with fencing prowess could be found in *Robin Hood and the Knight*, a play fragment of only forty lines, but which contains five separate contests of martial skill, including two instances of blade play.²⁵ As Louis Wright explains, "the play is merely a framework for the con-

tests.”²⁶ The play echoes the format of a prize fight, with a series of contests using different weapons. This fragment suggests that the prize fight may have already been a common occurrence by the late 1400s, and that it was influencing the drama of the day.

By the late sixteenth century, many playwrights were staging “elaborate duels and fencing scenes” and relied upon the audience’s knowledge and expectation of skilled sword combat. Wright points out that in Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*, the duel between the characters Mathias and Lodowick²⁷ “was prolonged, thus giving them a chance to display their swordsmanship.”²⁸ As Lodowick and Mathias duel, another character, Barabas, speaks from above: “O, bravely fought! and yet they thrust not home. / Now Lodowick! now Mathias!—So!” Barabas’s comments echo the action on stage, “So” coming as both fighters die. For his words to make sense, there needs to be a complex interchange of blades. The first line indicates a series of parried thrusts. The second line requires the struggle to be complicated by first one fighter and then the other gaining the advantage. Finally, both characters sustain a killing wound, causing each to fall dead. Such a scene requires two skilled combatants to play it, and appears written for an audience that would understand and enjoy watching swordplay.

Robert Greene²⁹ also relies on the knowledge of the crowd in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*.³⁰ As the characters Lambert and Serlsby arrive with rapiers and daggers to fight a duel, Lambert greets Serlsby with respect, noting that he is willing to “prize his blood,” an unmistakable reference to the prize playing of the masters. Their two sons, both scholars, regard the match and comment upon it:

FIRST SCHOLAR: Ah, well thrust!

SECOND SCHOLAR: But mark the ward.

These observations indicate an appreciation of skill and understanding of systems of defense. Clearly, the Elizabethan authors were familiar with prize playing and fencing terminology. They also seemed to expect their audience to be the same: the two scholars highlight aspects of the duel that are especially skillful and need an educated eye to appreciate fully.

The increased fencing knowledge of Elizabethan theater audiences may have coincided with the growth of London fencing schools. Among the most famous of these schools was that of Rocco Bonetti. He is the Italian Master who adopted Lyly’s lease for the

first Blackfriars theater, presumably establishing his fencing salle in the same rooms that Joyner had used. Bonetti very likely trained “actors as well as the nobility in fence” and his Italian style coincided with the rising use of the rapier in England.³¹ He is best known for a famous war of words with the Society of Defence, who ridiculed his foreign mode of fencing. Bonetti’s boasting response has been immortalized in *Romeo and Juliet*, when Mercutio refers to Tybalt as the “very butcher of a silk button” (2.3.20–21). Mercutio paraphrases Bonetti’s claim that “he could hit anie Englishman with a thrust upon anie button.”³² By the 1590s, in part because of Bonetti’s personal downfall, this story had become “an allusion to pride [in one’s] skill . . . rather than to any specific fencing technique.”³³ Shakespeare’s inclusion of this reference suggests that discussions of fencing prowess had become common to the audiences of the day.

As the prominence of early masters and the Society of Defence faded, new masters such as Giacomo Di Grassi and Vicentio Saviolo published their treatises on fencing styles.³⁴ Their theories on Italian technique established them as the successors to Bonetti, and in fact Saviolo took Bonetti’s place at the Blackfriars school.³⁵ Particularly admired by the nobility, the Italian style of fighting emphasized simplicity of movement, and suited the newer, thinner weapons available to the upper classes. In fact, the Italian style was so popular that it came to be thought of as English.

Newly popular fencing forms continued to influence Elizabethan drama, as seen by William Shakespeare’s contrast of two styles of fencing in *Romeo and Juliet*. Adolph Soens proposes that Shakespeare’s “fencing terms describe with [enough] precision” that we are able to determine that Mercutio subscribed to the Italian school and Tybalt to the Spanish. Having adopted the Italian thrusting style of Bonetti, Saviolo, and Di Grassi, the English discounted the Spanish mode of fencing, which used an erect stance, a blade extended for cutting, and a complicated pattern of footwork. What Shakespeare does, then, is set up a fight with the simple, compact “English” form of Mercutio juxtaposing the upright, complex Spanish style of Tybalt: “Mercutio, appealing to English xenophobia, plays the rough, honest . . . Englishman confronted with the foreign and affected.”³⁶ By selecting particular schools of fence for each character, Shakespeare has helped sway the allegiance of the audience to Mercutio.

The evidence for this competition of style is established early in

the play. In the first scene, Benvolio explains to Montague how he fought with

the fiery Tybalt, with his sword prepar'd,
Which as he breath'd defiance to my eares,
He swung about his head and cut the winds,
Who nothing hurt withal, hiss'd him in scorn.

(1.1.102–5)

What Benvolio describes are a series of *moulinet*³⁷ cuts about the head that “suggests the Spanish school of fence, as found in the manuals of their most famous masters.”³⁸ Benvolio completes the picture of English style versus Spanish when he states, “we were interchanging thrusts and blows” (1. 106). The “thrusts” refer to Benvolio’s English fighting style, and “blows” refer to the cutting motion of Tybalt’s Spanish attacks.

The style of the combatants would have been firmly fixed in the minds of the audience when Tybalt later duels with Mercutio, one of the central conflicts in the play. The moment where Mercutio is stabbed beneath Romeo’s arm has given fits to generations of fight directors. Anyone who has staged it understands all too well how difficult a maneuver this can be. Soens explains that the scene is written as a conflict between the Spanish and Italian styles. The Spanish school requires an upright posture with an extended sword arm, the sword straight out. When engaged in a fight, the Spanish duelist will always return to this position after a cut or if his sword is deflected. In contrast, the Italian (now English) fencer holds his sword in one of two postures: *stoccata*, a low angle; or *imbrocatta*, a high angle. Since Mercutio earlier in the scene makes mention of *stoccata*, it is probable that Shakespeare meant for him to be in a low guard position. Thus when Romeo rushes between the fighters and “beats down their fatal points,” the Italian blade is knocked out of the way, opening Mercutio’s body to a thrust (3.1.160). Tybalt, his arm still extended, by reflex “immediately recovers his point and thrusts automatically and quickly.” Mercutio “complains that Tybalt has ‘scratched’ him to death, . . . a peculiarity of the Spanish thrust.”³⁹ Since the Spanish fencer’s arm was already extended, the thrusting motion would be relatively shallow. Mercutio completes the image of Tybalt’s Spanish style as he bleeds to death, describing Tybalt as “a villain, that fights by the book of arithmetic” (3.1.97). Mercutio refers to the complex geometrical patterns of the Spanish fencing

duels and brawls were so popular that authors needed to excuse the lack of a fight, as may be found in the prologue of *Hannibal and Scipio* from 1635. Thomas Nabbes writes, “Nor need you Ladies feare the horrid sight: / And the more horrid noise of target fight.”⁴⁵ Notice that by referencing the target, or the use of the buckler, Nabbes highlights a common weapon choice for the prize fights of the masters. It was no longer in common use by the general population, having been superseded by the rapier and dagger. The prize fights were being copied by theatrical producers and playwrights. The reference to the target appears again in the prologue to Thomas Davenant’s *The Unfortunate Lovers* from 1638:

Good easie judging soules with what delight
They would expect a jigge or Target fight,
A furious tale of Troy, which they ne’er thought
Was weakly written, so ’twere strongly fought.⁴⁶

Davenant’s prologue not only confirms the influence of prize fighting, it also implies that stage fighting is tremendously popular. Notice that he complains that some writers include combat to hide weak writing, a sure sign that fighting is extremely common. The relation between the theater and the Masters of Fence appears strong throughout the Stuart period.

Yet it is difficult to make an accurate picture of the prizes played after 1600. Certainly, the more cynical description of combat in Stuart theater suggests a change in the nature of prize fighting. Indeed, with the demise of the Society of Defence around 1590, prize fights would likely have moved toward the professional combat seen in the Restoration. However, as actual descriptions of the contests do not exist, it is necessary to extrapolate with evidence from later periods to determine what Stuart prize fighting may have been like. That prizes remained popular is reinforced by evidence from the interregnum and the Restoration. In 1653, a writ was issued ordering “bear baiting, bull baiting, and playing for prizes by fencers . . . to be suppressed.”⁴⁷ Prize fights were also among the earliest theatrical activities recorded in the Restoration. On July 30, 1660, Henry Herbert issued a warrant for two masters, Francis Burgess and William Tubb, “to play a tryall of skill at eight several weapons” at the Red Bull.⁴⁸ Although the format appears similar to Elizabethan prize fights, detailed accounts of the Restoration matches indicate that they were fought for money and entertainment, and were no longer tests of ability as they had been with the Society of Defence.

In the fifty years between the end of the Society and the interregnum, it is almost inconceivable that Stuart fencing masters had not also fought professionally. The amount of activity recorded in diaries such as Samuel Pepys's suggests that these professional fights were widespread before the Restoration, as well as after it. Using Pepys's accounts, we can extrapolate that Stuart masters rented theaters to stage their fights, as they were popular enough to make large sums of money, an assertion supported by the previous entry from Herbert's *Records* in 1622. Pepys's description also allows us to verify that these weapons were relatively sharp: when he ventured to test the blade of one of the swords, he found "it to be very little, if at all blunter on the edge than the common swords are." Finally, he notes that between bouts, the audience would fling "a deal of money" to the fighters.⁴⁹ The prizes fought under the Stuarts were likely much the same, not a test of rank but a duel for money.

Another narrative from the Restoration allows us to extrapolate further. In his *Description of Ireland and England*,⁵⁰ Jorevin de Rocheford describes a visit to the Bear Garden⁵¹ to see a prize fought between two masters: "before they engage [they] parade the town with drums and trumpets sounding, to inform the public there is a challenge between two brave masters of the science of defence, and that the battle will be fought on such a day." Notice that the parade with drums echoes earlier descriptions from the Elizabethan period. Rocheford goes on to describe the fighting in great detail, being careful to point out that the two masters fought in the English style. The combat was extremely intense, as one fighter lost "a slice of his head and almost all his ear" and the other suffered a "cut on the wrist, which [was] almost cut off." These wounds apparently were only a momentary setback, for both fighters had their wounds dressed and resumed the fray. The battle was ended when one fighter was struck in the wrist again, "dividing the sinews."⁵² Duels from the Stuart period would likely have been as violent.

However, if Stuart prizes do adhere to the Restoration model, they may not have been true contests. Professional prizes possibly had a fixed outcome, an idea shared by the Restoration public. When Pepys felt the edged weapons, as noted above, he also remarked that "I did till this day think that it had only been a cheat; but this being upon a private quarrel, they did it in good earnest."⁵³ A letter written to the *Spectator* in 1712 supports such a surmise: "I over-heard two Masters of the Science agreeing to quarrel on the next opportunity. . . . When this was settled, one asked the other, Will you give

Cuts, or receive? The other answered, Receive. It was replied, Are you a passionate Man? No, provided you cut no more nor no deeper than we agree."⁵⁴ Notice that the fighters agree to quarrel, the fact that earlier assuaged Pepys's suspicions. Although long past the Stuart period, this letter supports the idea that the Masters' prizes may have been preordained, more theater than sport. At any rate, the Restoration evidence suggests that Stuart prizes were bloody, professional contests fought solely for money, the outcome of which may have been decided before the first blow was struck.

Throughout the Elizabethan and Stuart periods, the prize fights of the Masters of Fence had a multifaceted influence on theater. Most obviously, the contests were theatrical events in and of themselves. Whether as tests of a student's skill during Elizabeth's reign, or possibly fixed professional combats during the Stuarts', people came to the theater to watch prize fights contested with swords. But it is obviously too simple to limit the influence on theater to the tests and professional sword duels on the various stages. Decades of physical proximity within the Blackfriars enclave could only have familiarized playwrights with the world of fencing. Moreover, the milieu created by the fencing masters through examples of fencing skill and published treatises set a standard to be copied by theatrical producers. Actors were trained in fencing, and writers utilized the audience's expectation of skilled swordplay. Fencing proficiency and terminology were used to enrich the story and establish character, and many duels and combats were included for their value as entertainment. In fact, the stage fight was so expected that authors found it necessary to excuse its absence. Clearly, the Masters of Fence made a profound impression on the Elizabethan and Stuart stage, and understanding their impact is necessary to fully comprehend the theater of the day.

NOTES

1. The Masters of Defence most commonly specifies a member of the Society of the Masters of Defence. The Minutes of the Society of the Masters of Defence are the main source for early records of prize fighting.

2. As an example of interconnection between the stage and the masters, the actor Richard Tarlton was listed as a Master of the Society of Defence in 1587 (Herbert Berry, *The Noble Science: A Study and Transcription of Sloane Ms. 2350, Papers of the Masters of Defense of London, Temp. Henry VIII to 1590* [Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991], 55).

3. Alfred Hutton *The Sword and the Centuries, or Old Sword Days and Old Sword Ways*. (1892; repr. London: Lionel Levant Ltd Limited, 2003), 260.
4. *Analytical Index to the Series of Records Known as the Remembrancia: A.D. 1579–1664* (London: E. J. Francis and Co., 1878): 351–352.
5. J. D. Aylward, *The English Master of Arms: From the Twelfth to the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), 31.
6. David Stevens, *English Renaissance Theatre History: A Reference Guide* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982), 203.
7. Joseph Quincy Adams. *The Conventual Buildings of Blackfriars, London, and the Playhouses Constructed Therein* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 15. Clear evidence exists for the patronage of the Blackfriars' fencing school by the nobility. Recalling the school under Rocco Bonetti, George Silver describes how Bonetti would "[cause] to be fairely drawne and set round about his school all the Noblemens and Gentlemens armes that were his Schollers [*sic*]" (64).
8. Adams, *Conventual Buildings*, 23.
9. Irwin Smith, *Shakespeare's Blackfriars Playhouse: Its History and Design* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 125–26.
10. Joyner is listed in the minutes of the Society of Defence as one of the "Ancient Masters of Defence," the original masters to whom licence was given, possibly as early as 1540 (Berry, *The Noble Science*, 28). His school was in rooms known as the Blind parlor and the Paved Hall.
11. Rather than establish a competing school of fence, Naylor "'procured an interest unto a void place' and turned it into bowling alleys to the great annoyance of his neighbors," Albert Feuillerat, *Le Bureau des menus-plaisirs et la mise en scene la cour d'Elizabeth* (London: A. Uystpruyst, 1910), 24.
12. *Ibid.*, 50.
13. Smith, *Shakespeare's Blackfriars Playhouse*, 126.
14. Charles William Wallace, *The Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars, 1597–1603* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska in University studies, 1908), 196.
15. Phillip Henslowe, *Diary*, ed. R. A. Foakes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 101.
16. According to Herbert Berry, the Bel Savage likely hosted a prize in 1565 (*The Noble Science*, 3).
17. Post-Restoration the platform was probably surrounded by a sturdy railing, as depicted in a business card for Fencing Master James Figg, who fought between 1719 and 1734.
18. George Silver, *Paradoxes of Defence* (1599) (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), 66.
19. Act 5, scene 3–4.
20. Aylward describes a scene where the challenger and his supporters would congregate at "the Blackfriars," from which "a somewhat noisy procession set forth, . . . headed by drums and banners, straggling through the City streets to be swollen, as it went, by every idler along the line of march" (*The English Master of Arms*, 202).
21. *Ibid.*, 138.
22. *Ibid.*, 37.
23. Examples include *Jacob* from the Towneley cycle, the Chester mystery play *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, and the morality play *The Trial of Treasure*, which all featured prominent wrestling matches.

24. John Matthews Manly suggests the play must have been written before 1475, assuming that dates on the remaining page of the folio were written later than the verse itself (*Specimens of the Pre-Shakespearean Drama* [London: Ginn & Co., 1897], 279).

25. The contests include a shooting match, a stone throwing competition, a wrestling contest, a fight wherein Robin kills a knight, and a battle with the Sheriff's men.

26. Louis B. Wright, "Stage Duelling in the Elizabethan Theatre," *Modern Language Review* 22 (1927): 265–75.

27. Act 3, scene 2.

28. Wright, "Stage Duelling," 265, 268.

29. It is likely no more than coincidence that the playwright shares the name of one of the first eight Masters listed in the records of the Society of Defence. As these Masters had all gained their status prior to 1578, and Greene the writer was born in 1560, the writer would have to have gained his Master's status by the age of eighteen, a study requiring at least twelve years. This would have been a most remarkable feat, indeed.

30. The play was printed in 1594, and was likely played one to two years before, although it could be c. 1589.

31. A. L. Soens, "Tybalt's Spanish Fencing in 'Romeo and Juliet,'" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 20 (1969): 121–27, esp. 123.

32. Aylward, *English Master of Arms*, 42.

33. Soens, "Tybalt's Spanish Fencing," 123.

34. Di Grassi's *His True Art of Defence* was translated and published in England in 1594. It had already been published in Italy in 1570. Saviolo's treatise, *His Practice*, came in 1595. Both may be found in James L. Jackson's *Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals* (N.Y.: Scholars Facsimiles & Reprints, 1972).

35. Saviolo taught with Ieronimo, Bonetti's former student.

36. Soens, "Tybalt's Spanish Fencing," 121, 123.

37. Moulinet translates as "little windmill," and describes a circular, or windmill-ing cutting motion of the blade, usually made from the wrist (Dale Anthony Girard, *The Fight Arranger's Companion* 3rd ed. [Dale Anthony Girard, 1997], 137).

38. Soens, "Tybalt's Spanish Fencing," 124.

39. *Ibid.*, 124, 127.

40. A thrusting attack (often used without the term *reversa*, indicating an attack from the reverse line of the cutting circle) (Girard, *Fight Arranger's Companion*, 160).

41. An English spelling of the Italian *passata*, which came to represent a thrust accompanied by a passing step (Girard, *Fight Arranger's Companion*, 147).

42. Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *A Fair Quarrel*, ed. George R. Rice (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), 3:2.

43. Dramatic performances were not allowed during Lent, so other entertainments were frequently offered.

44. Joseph Quincy Adams, *Dramatic Records of Sir Henry Herbert* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Studios, 1917), 48.

45. *Hannibal and Scipio, An Historical Tragedy* (London, 1637), A5.

46. Thomas Davenant, *The Unfortunate Lovers: A Tragedy* (London, 1649), A3.

47. *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, 1652–1653*, ed. M. A. E. Green (Nindel Lichtenstein: Kraus Reprint Ltd., 1965): 36:307.

48. *Dramatic Records of Sir Henry Herbert*, 81.
49. Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), 4:168.
50. Jorevin de Rocheford, "Description of Ireland and England," in *The Anti-quarian Repertory: A Miscellaneous Assemblage of Topography, History, Biography, Customs, and Manners; Intended to Illustrate and Preserve Several Valuable Remains of Old Times*, ed. Francis Grose, Thomas Astle, and Edward Jeffery (London: Edward Jeffery, 1807–9), 549–623.
51. Rochefords spell it "Bergiardin" (*ibid.*, 571).
52. *Ibid.*, 571.
53. Pepys, *Diary*, 1:167.
54. Rusty Scabbard. Letter. *Spectator*, Aug. 5, 1712. 2. *Early English Newspapers: Spectator 1711–1712*. Film NP 407, Reel 596, Rusty 2.