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Contents

Editorial Board & Acknowledgements 2
Editorial: Play in the Long Nineteenth Century – Sophie Thompson 4
Playing the King on Stage: Shakespeare's *Richard II* in the Shadow of Napoleon – Fernanda Korovsky Moura 10
Rivalry, Chess and Duality in Thomas Hardy's 'An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress' (1868) and *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) – Rebecca Welshman 40
The Parameters of Play in Honoré Daumier's Caricatures – Catherine J. L. Theobald and Alyssa N. Knudsen 65
Paget at Play, or Play in(g) Paget: Decadence, Performance and Play in the Life of Henry Cyril Paget (1875-1905) – Lucia Cowen 94
Review: Rory Muir, *Love and Marriage In the Age of Jane Austen*. Yale University Press, 2025. – Madeleine Mikinski 116
Review: John MacNeil Miller, *The Ecological Plot: How Stories Gave Rise to a Science*. University of Virginia Press, 2024. – Joshua Fagan 121
Review: *Steam: Impressionist Painting Across the Atlantic*. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 5 November 2022–ongoing. – Rachel Peacock 125
Review: *Essie Fox*, Dangerous. Orenda Books, 2025. – Maria Gemma Silva Ferrández 130
Afterword – Sophie Thompson 134

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Editorial: Play in the Long Nineteenth Century

SOPHIE THOMPSON
(EDITOR-IN-CHIEF)

There was an Old Man with a beard,
Who said, "It is just as I feared!—
Two Owls and a Hen, four Larks and a Wren,
Have all built their nests in my beard.
-Edward Lear[1]

EDWARD LEAR'S PLAYFUL excess hints at a familiar anxiety, that play may exceed the spaces and rules designed to contain it. Play is so often dependent on rules: on agreed limits, roles, and outcomes. Rules are what make play social and legible (board games, sports, and the roles of children's imaginative play, for example), creating a shared framework of meaning. For adults in particular, play is rarely private, with performance, spectacle, and spectators giving the rules of play significance. Even what we may imagine as 'free' play – children running and climbing – is more often than not constrained by the bounds of the playground or 'soft play' facility, if not by the anxious, watching parent. Play theory – itself a vast playground, dominated by certain 'big kids' – is fascinated by these structuring logics of play, with concepts such as the 'magic circle' and the 'liminoid' used to describe play's temporary worlds.[2] Across these

[1] Edward Lear, *Book of Nonsense* (Frederick Warne and Co., 1846), p. 17.

[2] Huizinga writes, 'Inside the play-ground an absolute and peculiar order reigns. Here we come across another, very positive feature of play: it creates order, *is* order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection. Play demands order absolute and supreme. The least deviation from it "spoils the game", robs it of its character and makes it worthless.' *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, trans. S. N. (Beacon Press, 1955), p. 10.
'The magic circle', from Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, and the 'liminoid', from Victor Turner, 'Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology' in *Rice University Studies*, 60.3 (1974), https://hdl.handle.net/1911/63159. There are numerous similar and related concepts, including Gregory Bateson's 'frame', Erving Goffman's 'keying', Roger Caillois's 'ludus' and Mikhail Bakhtin's 'carnivalesque'. See, J. Stenros, 'In Defence of a Magic Circle: The Social, Mental and Cultural

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frameworks, play is understood as a bounded or thresholded space (a playground, if you will), set apart from ordinary life, in which everyday rules are suspended, reconfigured, or replaced by new organising principles.

Play in the long nineteenth century was defined by a new profusion of games (sports, chess, billiards), leisure spaces (museums, the seaside, clubs), the accoutrements of play (books, board games, children's toys), popular hobbies (hairwork, photography, bicycling), and public cultural performances (royal pageants, political demonstrations, exhibitions). These are all rule-bound and structured forms of play, reflecting an era of strict social hierarchies, etiquette, and moral codes. Even the newly gained free time and disposable income that enabled this boom in leisure was itself made possible by industrial mass production, the rise of the middle class, and social reforms – in other words, the increasingly organised and bureaucratic frameworks of modern life.

Philosophical and cultural understandings of play shifted away from associations with mere frivolity, instead framing it as a means of self-improvement and moral cultivation. 'Rational recreation' presented leisure as a way of morally and socially guiding the working classes, promoting 'healthier', 'disciplined' activities in line with a public-school logic of fair play and civility.[3] Even for children, play was often treated as productive, a rehearsal for adulthood and work – the 'business' of childhood – reinforcing the capitalist status quo.[4] This is likely the exact kind of decorous, tight-laced play that many imagine in the long nineteenth century, if any is imagined at all. Within this context, Johan Huizinga – widely regarded as the patriarch of play theory – condemns the nineteenth century as an era defined by the decline of play.[5]

I begin this special issue on play by taking those rules seriously – only to test them.

Boundaries of Play', *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association*, 1.2 (2014), pp. 147–85 http://todigra.org/index.php/todigra/article/view/10.

[#] See, for example, Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830–1885* (Routledge, 1978).

[$] See Matthew Kaiser, *The World at Play: A Portrait of a Victorian Concept* (Stanford University Press, 2013), pp. 104–06, for a useful summary of play as 'protowork' in nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories of child development.

[%] In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga describes the nineteenth century as a time in which 'the pure play-quality is inevitably lost' to organisation and systemisation. Huizinga, p. 197.

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Victorianists have long since pushed back against Huizinga's solemn verdict that 'never had an age taken itself with more portentous seriousness'.[6] Play was ubiquitous in the period. As Matthew Kaiser argues in his appropriately playful monograph, *The World at Play* (2013), in the nineteenth century play was a structuring metaphor for understanding modern existence, one that pervaded culture and daily life: a 'totalizing concept [...] in which everything—death, war, earnestness—has the capacity, in theory, to be exposed to play, overwritten by it, infiltrated by it, represented by it'.[7] From theatrical excess to strategic games, from the audacious to the transgressive, Victorians used play to stretch and occasionally overturn social, political, and aesthetic norms, and to understand themselves, proving that even in an age of rules, the playground was never empty.

The articles in this issue all explore what happens when play pushes against, exceeds, or exposes the limits of its own rules.

This issue opens with 'Playing the King on Stage: Shakespeare's *Richard II* in the Shadow of Napoleon', in which Fernanda Korovsky Moura examines Richard Wroughton's textual adaptation and Edmund Kean's 1815 production of *Richard II* against the backdrop of Napoleonic power, showing how the Victorians 'play[ed] with the past' to make sense of the present.[8] By reading the staging of kingship as a form of serious play, the article demonstrates how actors, audiences, and theatre managers engaged in a risky, ludic negotiation with contemporary politics. Here, play operates both as theatrical performance and in 'a broader sense of play as negotiation, contestation, and disruption', as the performance of a deposed monarch becomes a space in which authority can be rehearsed, questioned, and symbolically undone.[9]

Next, we turn to literary gamesmanship with 'Rivalry, Chess and Duality in Thomas Hardy's ''An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress'' (1868) and *A Pair of Blue*

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[6] Ibid., p. 192. For work on the playfulness of the nineteenth century, see, for example, Nancy Morrow, *Dreadful Games: The Play of Desire in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Kent State University Press, 1988) and Matthew Kaiser, *The World in Play: Portraits of a Victorian Concept* (Stanford University Press, 2012).

[7] Kaiser, p. 10.

[8] Fernanda Korovsky Moura, 'Playing the King on Stage: Shakespeare's Richard II in the Shadow of Napoleon', *Romance, Revolution and Reform*, Issue 8: *Play in the Long Nineteenth Century*, pp. 10-39, (p. 11).

[9] Ibid., p. 10.

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Eyes (1873)'. Rebecca Welshman analyses chess and rivalry in Hardy's fiction as forms of adult play that structure social relations, desire, and power. Chess operates not simply as a metaphor but as a rule-bound game through which characters rehearse strategic thinking, competition, and control. Play exposes the asymmetries of gender, class, and knowledge that govern social interaction, revealing how apparently civilised pastimes can reproduce (and subtly challenge) social constraint.

In our third article, 'The Parameters of Play in Honoré Daumier's Caricatures', joint authors Catherine Theobald and Alyssa Knudsen analyse Daumier's caricatures of adult leisure. They find that spaces of adult play, such as billiard halls and swimming pools, become sites of satire, regulation, and exclusion. Daumier's caricatures reveal play not as an innocent diversion but as a socially fraught activity shaped by class, gender, and political authority, exposing the limits of who is permitted to play freely and under what conditions.

Finally, 'Paget at Play, or Play in(g) Paget', offers a refreshingly decadent exploration of adult play for its own sake. Lucia Cowen centres on Henry Cyril Paget, the Fifth Marquis of Anglesey, as a figure who collapses the boundary between play and life, treating decadence as a ludic mode of being. Through Paget's theatrical self-fashioning and his playful, performative public response to the robbery of his jewels in 1901, Cowen shows how adult play operates as a form of performative resistance to normative seriousness, propriety, and social expectation. Yet the article also complicates the subversive promise of play, suggesting that Paget's performances both challenge and depend upon the very structures – media attention, aristocratic privilege, social spectacle – that they appear to mock.

Notably – and contrary to my own research interests and the direction I initially imagined when drafting the call – none of the articles look at children's play. Instead, this issue centres on adults at play. This absence is telling. The persistent expectation that play belongs to childhood means that adult play often appears immediately transgressive or suspect.[10] Many of the articles in this issue respond to this tension:

[!*] While play theory has its roots in child development, recent shifts towards 'game studies' – in which children are largely peripheral and analysis is more concerned with ideology and representation – have changed the focus. See, Hannah Field and Ben Highmore, 'The state of play: an extended review of play theory' in *Playthings and Playtimes: Play, Affect and the Material Culture in the Ludic World*, ed. by Hannah Field, Seth Giddings and Ben Highmore (UCL Press, 2025), pp. 13-41, (pp. 35-6).

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Theobald and Knudsen, for instance, note that Daumier's acerbic satire bears little resemblance to the innocence associated with children's play, while Welshman shows how Stephen and Elfride's desire to play threatens Victorian norms of adulthood, gender, and self-control. Only Paget's decadent exuberance comes close to embracing what we might imagine as the destabilising potential of childish play carried into adulthood.

Collectively, the articles suggest that play in the long nineteenth century is neither trivial nor escapist, but a practice through which adults negotiate hierarchy, resistance, and selfhood. Reflecting a broader turn in play studies, the issue approaches playfulness not as a developmental phase confined to childhood, but as relevant throughout life.[11] While the contributions draw on Johan Huizinga, Roger Caillois, Brian Sutton-Smith, and other foundational theorists of play as a cultural and boundary activity, they also reflect more recent critical work on play's entanglement with representation, identity, and structures of power. Across theatre, fiction, visual satire, and lived performance, play emerges as a structured yet unstable practice – a 'give within a system' – through which authority is rehearsed, tested, and sometimes unsettled.[12] These tensions are particularly acute when play is located in adult life: play may unsettle and undo fixed categories (as in the political staging of *Richard II*), reinforce more regulatory or conservative frameworks (as in Daumier's caricatures), or, in others, do both simultaneously. Whether enacted on the stage, at the chessboard, in leisure spaces, or in self-fashioning, adult play appears not as diversion but as necessity.

That necessity, and the limits placed upon it, remain familiar to us. As academics, the desire to make our work more lively, playful, and creative may feel particularly urgent in a difficult intellectual and institutional landscape. There is growing interest in playfulness as a mode of thinking and writing, one that enables novel readings, methodological experimentation, and a productive unsettling of disciplinary boundaries.[13] Yet this too raises questions about the limits of play: whether playfulness

!! Field and Highmore, p. 35.

!" Field and Highmore, p. 37.

!# See, for example, the special issue of *The Journal of Play in Adulthood* on 'The Playful Academic' – R. T. Nørgård and A. Moseley, eds., *The Playful Academic*, *The Journal of Play in Adulthood*, 3.1 (2021) – which includes contributions on playful research methods, playful research identity, and playful approaches to academic scholarship. An interesting recent area of study is the use of 'gamification' in learning and teaching, which has been suggested to improve student motivation, curiosity, and

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within academic labour can ever be fully free, or whether it is inevitably embedded within broader systems of productivity and capitalism.[14] Here again, we encounter the problem of play's bounds, both in the nineteenth century and in our own moment.

In the spirit of this playful necessity, I hope readers will sense, as I do, the pleasure our authors take in their subjects: in researching, encountering, and thinking with playful forms and figures. It is this pleasure, as much as the arguments themselves, that animates the issue. I hope you find it as engaging to read as it was to assemble.

concentration. See, for example, N. Whitton, C. Goodley, C. Lewin et al., 'The Magic Circle of Learning: A Framework of Play in Education', *Postdigital Science and Education*, 7 (2025), pp. 542–59, https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-025-00558-9 and Nicola Whitton, *Play and Learning in Adulthood: Reimagining Pedagogy and the Politics of Education* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13975-8.

[!$] In D. Maynard, L. Ellwanger, L. Daher and M. Jagacki, 'Play Guilt Experiences Among College Students: A Grounded Theory Investigation', *American Journal of Play*, 17.3 (2025), pp. 283-308, the authors found that undergraduates experienced guilt when contemplating play, despite its importance for well-being, unless it was perceived to be productive.

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Playing the King on Stage: Shakespeare's Richard II in the Shadow of Napoleon

FERNANDA KOROVSKY MOURA

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, often characterised by its industrial rationality and imperial ambitions, was also a deeply playful age. Recent scholarship has demonstrated how play as imaginative engagement, performative practice, and cultural mode remained central to how nineteenth-century societies understood themselves and their pasts. Russell Jackson explains how spectacle and entertainment were an essential part of culture, with the theatre at its centre. Ingrained in all ideas of 'progress' in the nineteenth century, 'there is a strong sense of the modification of the free market to acknowledge the change in the nature of society and the importance entertainment had in it.'[1] Moreover, new technology allowed theatre managers to materialise on stage what before was unthinkable, producing 'a complete convincing illusory world, in which any modern, fantastic or historical event or scene could be rendered with accuracy and conviction.'[2] In fact, theatrical performance emerged as a key site where history could not only be reconstructed but played with: audiences were invited to revisit, reframe, and emotionally reanimate the past in ways that were both structured and speculative, educational and affective. This ludic engagement with history was especially visible in the spectacular revivals of Shakespeare's history plays, where theatrical recreations of national events became opportunities to participate (consciously or not) in the playful remaking of historical memory. It is important to note that the term 'play' here involves more than just the literal performance of the text; it involves a broader sense of play as negotiation, contestation, and disruption. In this context, this article examines Edmund Kean's 1815 production of Shakespeare's *Richard II* at Drury Lane as an example of the playful nature of theatrical historicism, combining the trappings of documentary realism with the emotional and interpretive freedoms of dramatic performance. Focusing on Richard Wroughton's textual adaptation of the Shakespearean play, the text used by

[1] Russell Jackson, *Victorian Theatre: The Theatre in its Time* (New Amsterdam, 1994), pp. 4-5.

[2] Ibid., p. 2.

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Kean, I argue that this production offered nineteenth-century audiences a form of cultural play that allowed them to emotionally engage with the uncertainties of monarchy, identity, and political legitimacy at a moment when those very concepts were unsettled by the shadow of Napoleon Bonaparte.[3] Kean's Richard II invites dual political readings: Bolingbroke's seizure of the crown can be seen either as an act of tyrannical usurpation, aligning him with Napoleon as despot, or as a liberation from divine-right monarchy, casting him as a Napoleonic hero.

This article situates Kean's performance within a wider theatrical and political culture that was itself saturated with performative notions of power. In the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, Britain's fascination with the stage mirrored its struggle to articulate national identity and imperial destiny through historical narratives. Napoleon, a consummate theatrical strategist himself, loomed large in the cultural imagination as both a figure of immense historical relevance and a master of self-staging. When Kean's Richard II becomes associated with the Napoleonic figure, the monarchy as staged at Drury Lane is not only enacted but contested, rehearsed, and emotionally reexperienced on stage. By reframing the medieval past of Richard II to his contemporary audience, Kean's production is an example of how performances of history plays act as a mode of historical interpretation, enabling the theatre-goer to play with the past: to inhabit it, reshape it, and find meaning within its theatrical repetition.

Theatre and the Napoleonic Wars

The English stage during the early nineteenth century was a space charged with political resonance, where historical drama intersected with contemporary anxieties, national identity, and questions of legitimacy. In the aftermath of the French Revolution and amid the long shadow cast by Napoleon, British audiences turned to Shakespeare's histories not only for entertainment but also for moral instruction, political allegory, and reflection. As Romanticism reshaped the cultural imagination, the performance of Shakespeare's kings – especially the deposed Richard II – took on new significance. The

[#] Although Wroughton's adaptation is mentioned in several accounts of the stage history of *Richard II,* including Margaret Shewring's *Shakespeare in Performance: King Richard II and Charles Forker's Richard II: 1780-1920*, there has, to my knowledge, been no in-depth, full-length scholarly article devoted specifically to this adaptation.

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stage became a forum where the past was not merely reconstructed but reinterpreted: history-making as imaginative and ideological play.

The Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815) profoundly shaped Britain's political landscape and cultural production. They reinforced both a sense of national vulnerability and triumphant superiority, as Britain stood against revolutionary France and later claimed victory after Waterloo. In this climate, theatre played an important role in the forging of national identity. As Linda Colley has argued, Britain's image of itself was consolidated in part through cultural rituals that emphasised difference from France and celebrated monarchy, Protestantism, and military might. British royal ceremony 'was hallowed by tradition, as distinct from the upstart and synthetic contrivances of the French.'[4] By the end of George III's reign (1760-1820), the monarchy was perceived differently by the people, a consequence of a sort of 'new kind of royal magic and mystique.'[5] The defeat in America, the consequences of the French Revolution, the threat of Napoleon and his armies, and the king's weakness and illnesses (which rendered him more human) combined to foster a sense of patriotism: 'Herein lay the essence of a newly invented royal magic. At one and the same time, Britons were being invited to see their monarch as unique and as typical, as ritually splendid and remorselessly prosaic, as glorious and *gemütlich* both.'[6]

Like George III, Napoleon also became a paradoxical figure in the British cultural imagination. While frequently cast as the embodiment of tyranny, he also emerged in Romantic literature and popular discourse as a tragic, charismatic figure – one whose downfall mirrored classical narratives of hubris and fall. As Simon Bainbridge explains in *Napoleon and English Romanticism*, British artistic and literary production has interpreted and reframed Napoleon to foster specific ideological, cultural or economic arguments. For instance, for the Tories, Napoleon's figure was used as a political threat 'to ensure loyalty to their administration and payment of taxes'; whereas for the Whigs, he was seen as a hero 'whose cause and character embody their advocacy for liberty and their opposition to the encroachments of monarchical power.'[7] He was both the 'greatest' and the 'meanest': 'on the one hand, Napoleon is described as

[$] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (Yale University Press, 2017), p. 221.

[%] Ibid., p. 237.

[&] Ibid.

[ˈ] Simon Bainbridge, *Napoleon and English Romanticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 6.

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"extraordinary", "gigantic", "great", "wonderful", "marvellous", "prodigious" and "tremendous". On the other, as "cruel", "mean", "merciless", "perfidious", "imperious", "cowardly" and even "insane"'.[8] When Napoleon was forced to abdicate in 1814, Lord Burghersh wrote to the Duke of Wellington: 'Glory to God and to yourself, the great man has fallen.'[9] However, the same event led the poet Lord Byron, a fervent admirer of Napoleon, to write an Ode to lament his hero's base submission:

> Is this the man of thousand thrones,
> Who strew'd our earth with hostile bones,
> And can he thus survive?
> Since he, miscall'd the Morning Star,
> Nor man nor fiend hath fallen so far.[10]

This dual image of Napoleon in the British imagination could resonate with the figure of Richard II in early 1815, especially given Kean's revival of the Shakespearean play 77 years after it had last been seen on a London stage.[11] What had prompted Kean to perform a rather obscure Shakespearean play? It is likely that the political climate of the age and the repercussions of Napoleon's first abdication in April 1814 raised the theatre manager's interest in *Richard II*, the only Shakespearean play in which a monarch is forced to abdicate on stage. Kean's production thus emerges as a site of political reflection, where the audience is invited to think about the consequences of absolutism and the thin line between heroism and tyranny. By drawing a parallel between Richard II and Napoleon, Kean simultaneously feeds from and challenges the ambiguous portrayals of these historical characters.

Napoleon was a constant presence in plays of the 1810s on the London stage. Responding to the public's appetite for martial spectacle, they dramatised recent battles, celebrated military heroism, and, crucially, caricatured or vilified Bonaparte. But

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[8] Ibid., p. 8.

[9] Elizabeth Longford, *Wellington: The Years of the Sword* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), p. 422, quoted in Bainbridge, p. 9.

[10] Lord Byron, 'Ode to Napoleon', ll. 5-9.

[11] Prior to Kean's revival of the play, the last time *Richard II* had been performed on the London stage was in 1738, when John Rich brought it to Covent Garden by request of the Shakespeare's Ladies Club.

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even as Napoleon became the embodiment of foreign threat and tyrannical ambition, the complexity of his image in the theatrical imagination goes beyond simple propagandistic binaries. As Gillian Russell explains, theatre held political power in Georgian society, where performance and spectatorship were central to social life. Coronations, processions, funerals and other rituals were turned into ceremonial spectacles, and institutions such as the army and the navy gained a new layer of theatricality. According to Russell,

> In a country which had not been invaded by an enemy since 1745, the majority of the population experienced war as theatre—the performance of manoeuvres and sham fights, the display, colour, and music of a parade, the elaborate choreography of large scale reviews presided over by the King in much the same way as he commanded Covent Garden or Drury Lane.[12]

Such displays inevitably affected the way the Napoleonic Wars were interpreted by the population.

Susan Valladares explores how war dramas offered audiences immediate, emotional engagement with current events, transforming newspapers and dispatches into visual and affective experiences. These productions capitalised on public enthusiasm for military figures such as the Duke of Wellington, while often representing the French – and Napoleon most of all – as both theatrical villains and symbols of dangerous charisma. For example, Fairburn's *Comic Constellation* (1814), a collection of songs from theatrical productions from the early nineteenth century, including songs from 'Vittoria', or 'Wellington's Laurels' (a musical and military melange by Charles Dibdin the Younger celebrating Wellington's victory in 1813), and the song 'Vittoria; or King Joseph's Last Gun,' performed at Astley's Amphitheatre. Valladares describes that in the latter,

> Napoleon is caricatured as "little Boneyparte", "With his swagg'ring frown, | And iron crown", while the Spaniards (represented by a "master Don") respond

!" Gillian Russell, The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics, and Society 1793-1815 (Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 17.

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> indignantly to Bonaparte's gift of the Spanish throne to his "brother Joey": […] For while we're back'd by England, | Lads, a fig for Mr. Boneyparte.[13]

In songs like 'Vittoria,' the emphasis is on British courage, Spanish alliance, and French cowardice, with Napoleon often figured indirectly or through his defeated generals. Such dramas helped audiences process the war through theatrical means, blurring the boundaries between history and entertainment.

A few weeks before Kean's *Richard II* premiered on the Drury Lane stage, Napoleon escaped the island of Elba, where he was sent in exile in May 1814 after his first deposition. Napoleon, who rose to power through a complex mix of military prowess and symbolic manipulation, was a political figure deeply attuned to the theatrical dimensions of authority. His career was marked by a constant self-staging: his carefully crafted public image, grand historical references, and dramatic entrances and exits all reveal a man who understood that power must be performed. As Sudhir Hazareesingh explains, the cult of Napoleon under the Bourbon Restoration (1815-1830) was celebrated by liberals, Napoleonists, and republicans. This idolisation sprang from 'a romantic and sentimental view of the Emperor, based on an idealization of the past (especially the Empire's military past), rather than any practical or programmatic vision of the future'.[14] His political power was deeply performative, built not only through war but through visual culture, staged ceremonies, and symbolic gestures.

The eighteenth-century French historian Gabriel Bonnot de Mably argued for 'the need to establish a republican system of government' modelled on 'the huge federal republican system that […] had once existed in Europe under Charlemagne,' the King of Franks from 768 until his death in 1814.[15] Mably's ideal system would be led by 'a prince who was simultaneously a philosopher, a legislator, a patriot, and a conqueror', an image that appealed to Napoleon.[16] The connection with Charlemagne would be explicitly established in Napoleon's coronation on December 2 1804, when the French

[13] Susan Valladares, *Staging the Peninsular War: English Theatres 1807-1815* (Routledge, 2019), p. 143.

[14] Sudhir Hazareesingh, 'Memory and Political Imagination: The Legend of Napoleon Revisited', *French history*, 18 (2004), p. 464.

[15] Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge: Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 224.

[16] Ibid., p. 250.

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leader 'received Charlemagne's sword and crown at the famously stage-managed coronation ceremony inaugurating the new reign'.[17] This act was not simply propaganda; it was a performance grounded in a self-aware manipulation of historical forms, which demonstrates that Napoleon did not just use the past but played with it. His imperial pageantry enacted his own medievalism, remaking tradition into theatre, and theatre into power.

Napoleon's own interest in theatre was not incidental. He was a frequent attendee of plays, especially tragedies.[18] According to Louis-Henry Lecomte, Napoleon affirmed that 'high tragedy is the school of great men; it must be that of kings and peoples; it is the duty of sovereigns to encourage and spread it. Tragedy warms the soul, lifts the heart, it can and must create heroes!'[19] Napoleon understood the political utility of theatricality. In his reign, as in his legend, history was dramatised for effect, constructed and consumed as a form of spectacle. After his defeat and exile, this performative legacy lingered. British theatre in the post-Napoleonic era remained haunted by the tension between spectacle and seriousness, and between grandeur and collapse; these were tensions that were especially vivid in performances of historical kingship.

This context is especially relevant when considering the staging of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, and Kean's interpretation of the deposed monarch. In contrast to the war spectacles of the early 1810s, which tended to flatten political complexity into a patriotic narrative, *Richard II* offered a more introspective, melancholic meditation on the fragility of kingship under the threat of tyranny. *Richard II*, performed in the long shadow of war, could thus evoke not only the ghost of England's own medieval past, but also the figure of the French emperor who threatened its future.

!' Ibid., p. 349.

!(Louis-Henry Lecomte lists sixty-three plays which Napoleon attended during the Consulate (1799-1804). Among them, he was a frequent attendant of productions of Pierre Corneille's tragedy *Cinna or the clemency of Caesar Augustus* (Daragon, 1912), pp. 74-96.

!) 'La haute tragédie est l'école des grands hommes ; elle doit être celle des rois et des peuples ; c'est le devoir des souverains de l'encourager et de la répandre. La tragédie échauffe l'âme, élève le cœur, peut et doit créer des héros!', Louis-Henry Lecomte, *Napoléon et le monde dramatique* (Daragon, 1912), pp. 72-73.

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History-Making as Play on the English Stage: Richard Wroughton's Richard II

Historical reconstruction found vivid expression on the nineteenth-century stage, combining a desire to bring the past back to life with apparent fidelity to historical detail (think, for example, of Charles Kean's sumptuous Shakespearean revivals at the Princess's Theatre during his management from 1850 to 1859), while simultaneously exploring emotional, aesthetic, and ideological reinterpretation. This dual investment in authenticity and affect represents a distinctively theatrical way of knowing history not as fixed knowledge, but as a kind of imaginative play.

Looking at the gap between history and performance studies, Katherine Johnson describes the liminal landscape occupied by the past and the present as 'a fertile ground rich with possibilities.'[20] Her research focus is on historical re-enactments, 'the (re)performance of a historical event, person, culture, or activity,' which are creative reconstructions of the past, where different conventions are 'played with, and at times, desecrated.' [21] Johnson understands historical re-enactments as an example of what Diana Taylor calls repertoire, or 'embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge'.[22] Different from the archive, which exists physically ('documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, cds, all those items supposedly resistant to change'), the repertoire is fluid; it requires creative and imaginative engagement in order to be reconstructed.[23]

Johnson makes a distinction between 'theatrical re-enactment' and 'historical re-enactment,' or 'living history.' She understands the latter as an effort to recreate the experience of living in a different era, whereas the former 'pertains to the restaging of plays and other forms of theatre, with a focus on recreating a portrayal as close as possible to the so-called original.'[24] In this way, the author limits the notion of playfulness to historical re-enactments, overlooking the fact that theatrical re-

"* Katherine Johnson, 'Performing Pasts for Present Purposes: Reenactment as Embodied, Performative History', *History, Memory, Performance*, edited by D. Dean, Y. Meerzon, and K. Prince (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 36.

"! Ibid., pp. 36, 37.

"" Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory In the Americas* (Duke University Press, 2003), p. 20.

"# Ibid.

"$ Johnson, p. 38.

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enactments are, by their very nature, equally playful. Consider, for instance, the aforementioned recreations of the Napoleonic Wars on the early-nineteenth-century English stage and the different dramatic depictions of the character of Napoleon.

In S*hakespeare's Victorian Stage: Performing History in the Theatre of Charles Kean*, Richard Schoch investigates why the theatre was a place for such historicism in action. He reflects that 'one possible answer is that the theatre was an especially provocative site for the recovery of Britain's medieval heritage because it was already a self-consciously nationalistic form of social practice and cultural production.'[25] The stage was a place where patriotism could gain vigour through the public demonstration of English grandeur. That is why choosing Shakespeare's history plays was meaningful: having become a national cultural icon by the end of the eighteenth century, Shakespeare added authority and legitimacy to theatrical reconstructions of English history. On the other hand, the summoning of the past could also be used as a method to criticise the present and subvert the status quo without referring directly to current affairs. As Jonathan Dollimore puts it, literature and theatre do not passively reflect history, but 'intervene in contemporary history in the very act of representing it.'[26] By reconstructing history, literature and theatre remake history.

Theatre thus became a site of historical negotiation: a space where audiences could encounter the past not as fixed knowledge but as dynamic performance. This form of performance was inherently ludic. In this sense, theatrical re-enactments can also be seen as a 'playful, public mode of historical inquiry' similar to recreational re-enactments of historical moments. [27] For instance, Johnson describes her experience watching the demonstrations at Winterfest, a medieval festival in Sydney, Australia:

> Dressed in reconstructed medieval armor, these men were fighting with full-size and weighted replicas of medieval weapons. They had learnt the same bodily techniques as medieval warriors and were now moving with their bodies in much the same way as their medieval counterparts, a skilled mode of moving created

"% Richard Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage: Performing History in the Theatre of Charles Kean* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 15.

"& Jonathan Dollimore; Alan Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 10.

"' Johnson, p. 38.

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> for and with these recreated tools. I never felt that these men (or their audience) were in any way in the Middle Ages. Rather, I began to consider the possibility that they were bringing something of the Middle Ages forward, bringing a touch of 'then' into the now.[28]

A spectator watching Kean's Richard II in 1815 may have felt a similar awareness of the bridge between past and present. For example, referencing the production, a theatre critic from the Public Cause claimed that:

> The opening scene of the play is a fine one for stage effect. The appearance of the Monarch on his Throne, supported by all the high and noble of his realm, assembled on either side, while the two powerful rivals, Mowbray and Bolingbroke, reciprocate their accusations, and interchange their pledges of hostility, presented altogether a display of Royal and Knightly pageantry.[29]

Over forty years later, a critic watching Charles Kean's production of *Richard II* at the Princess's Theatre would more explicitly describe the feeling of being transported to the past:

> From the moment we take our seat in the Princess's Theatre, to the period when reluctantly quitting it dazed and dazzled with the stage-wrought wonders that have been conjured before us, we relapse into the stern bustling reality of the modern gas-lit Oxford street, we are under the spell of a potent magician. A vale [sic] is dropped before our eyes, and the glamour of theatrical witchcraft enthrals every sense. We are thrown back to the time of the fourteenth century.[30]

These two critical excerpts demonstrate how theatrical re-enactments make use of props, costumes, carefully designed sets, and stage effects to create a visual and material illusion of lived history. They also involve tone, gesture, and emotion in the

"(Johnson, p. 45.

") 'Theatricals,' *Public Cause*, Wednesday, 15 March, 1815, p. 194.

#* 'Princess's Theatre Representation of "Richard II," *The Era*, Sunday, 15 March, 1857, p. 11.

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ways actors embody historical figures as affective subjects with modern resonances. As Freddie Rokem emphasises,

> The actors serve as a connecting link between the historical past and the "fictional" performed here and now of the theatrical event; they become a kind of historian, what I call a "hyper-historian," who makes it possible for us—even in cases where the reenacted events are not fully acceptable for the academic historian as a "scientific" representation of that past—to recognize that the actor is "redoing" or "reappearing" as something/somebody that has actually existed in the past.[31]

Much in the same way that the historical re-enactors in medieval armour prompted a historical reflection on Johnson, Edmund Kean functioned as the bridge between the past historical Richard (and Shakespeare's Richard) and the audience's present, playfully inviting the spectators to imagine themselves looking at the past.

When Kean assumed the role in 1815, his performance was thus situated within a broader theatrical and political fascination with the past, allowing the play to engage powerfully with both historical imagination and current anxieties. The playbill announced the play's premiere on Thursday 9 March:

> Their Majesties' Servants will perform, for the first time, with appropriate Splendour, SHAKESPEARE'S Tragedy of King Richard the Second, (With Considerable Alterations and Additions, from the Writings of the Same Author,) With New Scenes, Dresses, & Decorations. And a New Overture, Act Symphonies and Marches, Incidental to the Tragedy. [32]

#! Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (University of Iowa Press, 2002), p. 13.

#" The play was originally scheduled to premiere on Monday, 6 March, but it was postponed due to Mr. Ellistone's indisposition, the actor playing 'the long and arduous Character of Bolingbroke.' As the playbill from that day announces, 'The Manager, in order to prevent that Play from being represented in an Imperfect State, is under the very unpleasant Necessity of postponing it until Thursday next; and (in Hopes of the Indulgence of the Publick, on so unforeseen an Occasion,) to substitute for this Evening, the Tragedy of Macbeth.'

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Although Wroughton's textual adaptation, the one used by Kean for his production at Drury Lane, lists it as 'a[n] historical play,' the playbill refers to it as a 'Tragedy,' and not as a History play, following the classification of the first Quarto (*The Tragedie of King Richard the Second*), and not the First Folio categorisation.

The bill makes no reference to any attention given to historical authenticity apart from the 'appropriate Splendour' – different from Charles Kemble's 1823 King John at Covent Garden, which was famously announced as:

> Produced with an attention to Costume which has never been equalled on the English Stage. Every Character will appear in the precise habit of the Period—the whole of the Dresses and Decorations being executed from copies of indisputable authority, such as Monuments, Seals, illuminated Manuscripts, painted Glass, &c.[33]

The review in the *Morning Post* from Friday, 10 March 1815, only states that 'the splendour of the dresses and scenery does credit to the liberality of the managers.'[34] This distinction suggests that Kean's relationship with the historical Richard II was more playful and malleable than Kemble's rigour.

In the advertisement for Wroughton's textual adaptation of *Richard II*, the author laments that the play had been neglected by the London theatre managers for the past

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Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, 'A collection of playbills from Drury Lane Theatre, 1814–1816', *Nineteenth Century Collections Online*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/AKSOGO512787134/NCCO?u=leiden&sid=bookmark-NCCO&xid=478c3f1a&pg=166 (accessed 4 Aug 2025).

[##] Kemble's King John was also categorised as a Tragedy in the playbill, and not as 'The Troublesome raigne of John, King of England,' as in the Quarto publication.

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, 'A collection of playbills from Covent Garden Theatre, 1823–1824', *Nineteenth Century Collections Online*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/AKTQXL409779735/NCCO?u=leiden&sid=bookmark-NCCO&xid=951a703f&pg=184 (accessed 4 Aug 2025).

[#$] 'Drury Lane Theatre,' *Morning Post*, Friday, 10 March 1815.

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years.[35] He allows that the text was 'too heavy for representation' as it was originally conceived, although it is not clear what Wroughton means by 'heavy.' It could mean that the content of the play was too politically charged, since it deals with the forced deposition of a monarch. Or, that the poetic language was burdensome or lengthy, 'bordering too much on the Mono-drama.'[36] Indeed, the reviewer in the *Public Cause* of 15 March 1815, writes that

> Few, we apprehend, would, from the very perusal of it [*Richard II*], have considered it likely to prove particularly interesting in the performance. The declamatory speeches run to such length, and the interest of the action appears to move forward so heavily, that it has been for a long time suffered to repose quietly on the Manager's shelf, and left to the silent enjoyment of those who could relish the rich poetry of its sentiment and diction.[37]

The critic adds that whether it was due to the manager's taste or Kean's sagacity, they are grateful for the final result seen on the Drury Lane stage.

Wroughton believes that disregarding so 'exquisite a production' as *Richard II* could be considered 'Theatrical Treason.'[38] For this reason, he proposes a new adaptation to rescue the play from its state of disregard. He admits having borrowed lines from *Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus* and *King Lear*, although he has also borrowed from *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Richard III*. Wroughton justifies his decision to combine extracts of different plays by referring to Colley Cibber's famous adaptation of *Richard III*, which had also altered Shakespeare's original text significantly. Although Cibber's adaptation was partly censored at the time of its creation in 1699, it became very popular at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was, as Wroughton points out, 'now acted at both Theatres,' that is, Covent Garden and Drury Lane.

[#%] Prior to Kean's revival of the play, the last time *Richard II* had been performed on the London stage was in 1738, when John Rich brought it to Convent Garden by request of the Shakespeare's Ladies Club.

[#&] Richard Wroughton, *King Richard the Second; an Historical Play. Adapted to the Stage, with Alterations and Additions by Richard Wroughton, Esq. And Published as It Is Performed at the Theatre-Royal, Drury Lane* (John Miller, 1815), p. 1.

[#'] 'Theatricals,' *Public Cause*, Wednesday, 15 March 1815, p. 194.

[#(] Wroughton, p. 1.!

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Wroughton's use of the phrase 'theatrical treason' can be interpreted in at least two distinct ways, both of which carry significant weight in the context of the play's historical moment. First, in a straightforward sense, Wroughton could be lamenting the neglect of *Richard II* in the theatre, calling it a 'crime' against both Shakespeare's legacy and the cultural enrichment that the play might provide. This interpretation frames the absence of the play from the stage as a missed opportunity to engage with a canonical work of drama, which is consistent with Wroughton's desire to revive and re-contextualise the play for contemporary audiences. From this angle, theatrical treason becomes a critique of theatrical conservatism or stagnation. However, a more politically charged interpretation is suggested when we consider the historical backdrop of Wroughton's adaptation. After the promises of freedom and change prompted by the French Revolution in 1789, a period of political unrest followed. The disillusionment derived from the failed revolution, the violence of the Reign of Terror and the eventual establishment of Napoleon as Emperor of France affected the perception of the country. As we have seen, his rule created a new oligarchy. William Wordsworth's (1770-1850) autobiographical epic poem *The Prelude* (1805), for instance, illustrates the author's change of heart from a radical pro-revolutionary youth into a conservative older man after disappointment with the outcomes of the French Revolution. Wordsworth describes his residence in France in Book 9. After encountering a starving girl on the streets of Paris, he is still hopeful of changes that would end poverty, recompense labour, and abolish 'empty pomp' and the cruel power of the state.[39] However, years later, he reconsiders his naïve confidence. Wordsworth abhors those who changed 'a war of self-defence' for 'one of conquest,' becoming oppressors in their turn.[40] The examples from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* contrast the idealised radicalism of Romantic poets at the turn of the century with the pragmatic realism of the failure of the First French Republic.

Kean's production of *Richard II* must be understood within this interplay of historical reconstruction and Napoleonic memory. His interpretation of the fallen king emerged in a cultural landscape still saturated with the spectacle of Napoleon's decline, especially after his first abdication and exile. Like Napoleon, Richard is a ruler undone by theatricality: a king who can no longer sustain the image of sovereignty that his role

[#)] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, l. 526.

[$*] Ibid., ll. 207-208.

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requires. The poignant de-coronation scene in Act IV of Shakespeare's play is a vivid example of the theatricality of kingship. When Richard hands over the crown to Bolingbroke (future Henry IV), Richard turns the act into a performance, full of poetic excess and self-conscious spectacle. He declares, 'You may my glories and my state depose, | But not my griefs; still am I king of those.'[41] Instead of resisting with dignity or authority, Richard indulges in a prolonged lamentation, emphasising his suffering and casting himself as a tragic figure. His line, 'With mine own hands I give away my crown,' foregrounds his agency in a gesture that is more performative than political.[42] The mirror scene that follows, in which he smashes a looking glass after studying his reflection, underscores his obsession with image and identity, turning his abdication into a kind of theatre. In this sense, Shakespeare's play, especially in this scene, invites audiences to witness not only a historical narrative but a meditation on the pageantry of power, as well as on the fragility of identity when shaped by ritual, public gaze, and symbolic power. Hazlitt disliked the way Kean performed this specific instance in the play. He writes that Kean made Richard 'a character of passion, that is, of feeling combined with energy, whereas it is a character of pathos, that is to say, of feeling combined with weakness.'[43] In the mirror scene, Kean 'dash[es] the glass down with all his might, […] instead of letting it fall out of his hands, as from an infant's.'[44] What Kean fails to convey in this scene is 'how feeling is connected with the sense of weakness as well as of strength, or the power of imbecility, and the force of passiveness.'[45] Hazlitt's observation highlights the paradox at the centre of Shakespeare's play: kingship is not only an exercise of authority but also a performance that reveals the human vulnerability beneath royal power.

This moment of Shakespeare's play is part of the de-coronation or deposition scene, undoubtedly the most politically charged in the text. Famously omitted from the first quarto publications, it was only printed in Q4 (1608), not coincidentally five years after Queen Elizabeth I's death. With the ageing of the childless queen and the absence

[$!] William Shakespeare, *Richard II* in *The RSC Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Macmillan, 2008), 4.1., pp. 186-187.

[$"] Ibid., p. 202.

[$#] William Hazlitt, 'Mr. Kean's Richard II,' *The complete works of William Hazlitt; vol. V, Lectures on the English poets and A view of the English stage* (J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd.), p. 223.

[$$] Ibid., p. 224.

[$%] Ibid.

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of an undisputable heir to the English throne, any mention – let alone a public performance – of a monarch's deposition was extremely dangerous. In fact, Shakespeare's play draws attention to the issue regarding who is more suitable to govern: the anointed monarch who has divine sanction to rule but abuses their power and therefore fails to care for their subjects, or a usurper who claims to be a better and more effective ruler but who has challenged the divine hereditary nature of the crown?

The early stage history of Shakespeare's *Richard II* connects the play to Robert Devereux (1565-1601), the 2nd Earl of Essex, and one of the Queen's favourites; he had a prominent position at court and led some to believe he coveted the English crown. Essex's popularity, especially his extravagant exhibitionism during the Accession Day tilts in 1595, had been compared to Bolingbroke's, creating a connection between Essex and the Shakespearean character. In 1601, the play *Richard II* was arguably commissioned by Essex's supporters and staged at the Globe on 7 February. Paul Hammer explains that 'on the morning of Sunday, 8 February, Essex and about one hundred gentleman followers marched out of Essex House and tried to rally the people of London to protect the earl from his private enemies.'[46] However, the public conviction was that Essex had gathered supporters to seize the castle and force the queen's deposition. Given the special production of *Richard II* the day before, such an assumption gained credibility, leading the queen to proclaim Essex and his followers traitors to the crown. Essex was executed in the Tower of London on 25 February of the same year.

The deposition scene gains further topicality in Kean's production in 1815. Napoleon's first deposition in April of the previous year would still be latent in the audience's mind, especially after his escape from Elba in February 1815. In this context, it is relevant to investigate whether Shakespeare's deposition scene was included in Wroughton's adaptation, and how Kean brought it to life. Wroughton's text cuts more than a third of the lines of the original play and inserts around two hundred. It alters the balance of the Shakespearean original, omitting instances of Richard's fickleness, borrowing extracts from other Shakespearean plays that would evoke an emotional reaction from the audience, and making Bolingbroke's plan to usurp the crown explicit. It ends with a repentant Bolingbroke and the death of Richard's queen on stage.

[$&] Paul Hammer, 'Shakespeare's *Richard II*, the Play of 7 February 1601, and the Essex Rising', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 59 (Spring 2008), p. 3.

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Wroughton also introduced a pastiche Elizabethan song sung by Blanche (one of the queen's ladies, a character created by Wroughton) in the Garden Scene, allowed more space to the role of the queen, focused the plot more exclusively on the conflict between Bolingbroke and the king, and rendered Richard's character more heroic than in the Shakespearean original text. Richard Forker sees the latter as a reason for Kean's energetic acting, criticised by Hazlitt as lacking pathos.[47] These alterations can be associated with the broader cultural landscape of dramatic writing in the Romantic period. Jeffrey Cox writes about the pattern in Romantic playwrights' responses to the past. He identifies a double impetus in the turn to earlier dramatic forms: 'First, there is little doubt that the romantic playwrights were unhappy both with those plays that remained committed to a neoclassical ethic and with the popular drama with its reliance upon spectacle, music, and pantomime' and, second, despite the need to revolt against the contemporary drama, they feared losing touch with this tradition.[48] As an actor himself and in tune with the dramatic production of his time, Wroughton inevitably manifests the same double impetus: by the same time that he evokes tradition by choosing a Shakespearean text and by adding extracts from other Shakespearean plays to his adaptation, he challenges it by incorporating melodramatic elements that would appeal to his contemporary audience.

In Wroughton's version, the deposition scene begins with Bolingbroke's words: 'My countrymen, my loving followers, | Friends that have been thus forward in my right, | I thank you all; | And to the love and favour of my country, | Commit myself, my person, and my cause.'[49] Wroughton borrowed these lines from Saturninus in *Titus Andronicus*, which is, not coincidentally, a play steeped in violence, usurpation, and the theatricality of power. This addition implicitly aligns Bolingbroke's ascent with the rhetoric of Roman imperial authority. Bolingbroke performs gratitude and humility while consolidating control; the act of addressing 'his countrymen' and 'loving followers' becomes a public ritual designed to secure legitimacy through performance rather than divine right. Here, Bolingbroke also makes his cause – that of usurping the crown – which he believes to be 'his right,' known to the lords.

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[47] Richard Forker, 'Introduction', *Richard II, 1780-1920* (The Athlone Press, 1998), p. 106.

[48] Jeffrey Cox, *In the Shadows of Romance* (Ohio University Press, 1987), p. 32.

[49] Wroughton, p. 53.

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The Duke of York speaks next, referring to Richard's willingness to resign and yield the royal sceptre to Bolingbroke, as in Shakespeare's original. However, the Bishop of Carlisle's speech condemning Bolingbroke's challenge to the hereditary right of kings and prophesying a bloody future for England has been removed. Instead, Bolingbroke immediately requests Richard's presence, so 'that in common view, | He may surrender, so we shall proceed | Without suspicion.'[50] As soon as Bolingbroke tells Richard what he must do, Richard asks for the crown and tells Bolingbroke to hold its other end. The comparison of the crown to a deep well with two buckets, the discussion on grief, and the play with the word 'care' were all cut by Wroughton, who, instead, offers a more succinct version of Richard's performative act of a reversed coronation ritual:

> I give this heavy weight from off my head,
> And this unwieldy scepter from my hand,
> The pride of kingly sway from out my heart;
> With mine own tears, I wash away my balm,
> With mine own hands I give away my crown;
> All pomp and majesty I do forswear;
> My manors, rents, revenues, I forego:
> My acts, decrees, and statutes I deny;
> Heav'n pardon all oaths, that are broke to me,
> And keep all vows unbroke, are made to thee.
> What more remains? —[51]

A reviewer for Johnson's Sunday Monitor on 12 March 1815, affirms that Kean's Richard's

> Address to Bolingbroke, on his abdication, drew down immense applause. The struggle with which he kept down his indignation, the tone and look of sarcasm in which he accepted the successful rebel's homage, the burst of ungovernable scorn and aversion which he ported on the Minister who offered him the articles of condemnation, were received with shouts and applause, which, from that

%* Ibid., p. 54.

%! Ibid., p. 55.

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scene until his death, were only suspended by the deeper excitement of the play.[52]

This reviewer's words reinforce the idea that Kean played a heroic rather than a pitiful Richard, keeping a look of sarcasm and scorn.

Richard's request for a mirror and his exploration of his unaltered face on the glass remain intact in Wroughton's adaptation, but the scene concludes in quite a distinct way. Shakespeare's original version ends it with the short conversation between Carlisle, Aumerle and the Abbot of Westminster, hinting at a plot to assassinate Bolingbroke, the failed Epiphany Rising. Wroughton, however, borrows extracts from Parts 2 and 3 of *Henry VI*, and ends the scene with Bolingbroke's rejoicing at his victory:

Thus far my fortune keeps an upward course,
And I am grac'd with wreaths of majesty—
How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown,
Within whose circuit is Elysium,
And all that poets feign of bliss and joy.
Ah! Majesty! Who would not buy thee dear? —
Let them obey, who knows not how to rule.
Now am I seated as my soul delights,
And all my labours have as perfect end
As I could wish—the crown, the crown is mine.
Fortune, I acquit thee—let come what may,
I'll ever thank thee for this glorious day![53]

This final monologue exposes Bolingbroke as a cruel and ambitious strategist, perhaps inviting the audience to connect him with the power-thirsty Napoleon.[54]

%" *Johnson's Sunday Monitor*, Sunday 12 March 1815.

%# Wroughton, p. 58.

%$ The audience's parallel between *Richard II* and the Napoleonic Wars would be reinforced by the performance of Beethoven's 'The Grand Battle Sinfonia,' also part of the Drury Lane repertoire that season. Beethoven wrote the song to celebrate the decisive victory of Arthur Wellesley (later duke of Wellington) over Joseph Bonaparte at Vitoria in 1813.

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The most significant change Wroughton made to Shakespeare's original version is at the very end of the play. Shakespeare's Richard dies after being attacked by Sir Exton, and the play concludes with Bolingbroke's empty promise to visit the Holy Land to atone for his sins after seeing Richard's coffin. Wroughton creates a more melodramatic ending, bringing the Queen back for the final act. After Richard's attack by Sir Exton, the Queen is heard offstage: 'Where is my Richard? Quick unbar | your gates— | Conduct me to his sight. | I will not be restrain'd!'[55] She then enters the stage and sees Richard's body: 'My king! My husband! | O horror!—my fears were true, and I am lost!'[56] Kean, however, renders the scene even more sentimental. The handwritten notes on the prompter's copy of Wroughton's *Richard II* mark that Richard does not die immediately after the attack. He hears the Queen's voice and says: 'Ah! My queen! My love!' He, then, 'makes a feeble effort to rise & meet her, but sinks and dies.'[57] This last exchange of words between Richard and his queen enflames the tragedy of Richard's misfortune, making him more human.

The stage directions in Wroughton's adaptation indicate that the Queen faints after seeing Richard's dead body. Bolingbroke re-enters the stage, followed by Exton and the lords. He notices the queen and says: 'She revives—remove her from the body.' But the queen refuses to part from her beloved: 'O, you are men of stone. | Had I tongue and eyes, I'd use them so, | That heaven's vault should crack! O, he is gone for ever. | A plague upon you! —Murderers! —Traitors all!'[58] Bolingbroke asks the queen to be comforted and leave that fatal place. Yet, the queen cannot be consoled. She cries in agony: 'Do you see this, look on him, look on his lips, | Look there, look there!'[59] And, according to the stage directions, she falls. Kean's prompter's handwritten notes reveal extra information regarding the production in 1815. Instead of falling, the 'Queen dies and the Lords let her gently to the ground.'[60] Kean's version of the play, therefore, ends with two bodies – of Richard and his queen – on stage. The reviewer for *Public Cause* of 15 March 1815, commends this affecting scene, writing that 'nothing could be more

[55] Ibid., p. 70.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Handwritten notes on Wroughton, p. 70. Promptbook held at the Folger Library, PROMPT *Rich. II* 3.

[58] Wroughton, p. 70.

[59] Ibid, p. 71.

[60] Handwritten notes on Wroughton, p. 71.

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natural or effecting than his last feeble, ineffectual, struggle to reach out his hand towards the beloved partner of his sorrows, whom in his dying moments he had seen approaching.'[61] Wroughton's ending transforms Shakespeare's original into a work of heightened sentiment and spectacle. This melodramatic conclusion departs from the historical record, yet it exemplifies how theatrical adaptations engage in playful historical reconstruction, using imagination and emotion to reanimate the past for the present. In this way, Wroughton makes history felt rather than merely narrated, turning the history of the fall of a monarch into a deeply human drama.

Wroughton's original text includes a final monologue for Bolingbroke, which is crossed out in Kean's promptbook:

> Lords, I protest, my soul is full of grief,
> Read not my blemishes in this foul report,
> But mourn with me for what I do lament.
> I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land,
> To wash this blood from off my guilty hand,
> And shed obsequious tears upon their bier.
> O, were the sum of those that I should pay,
> Countless and infinite, yet would I pay them;
> But let determin'd things to destiny
> Hold unbewail'd their way. Thus instructed,
> By this example, let princes henceforth learn,
> Though kingdoms by just titles prove our own,
> The subjects' hearts do best secure a crown.[62]

Wroughton's remorseful Bolingbroke and didactic tone did not align with Kean's vision of the play. Kean's focus, it seems, is not on absolving Bolingbroke but on placing the unfairness of Richard's fate in the foreground. If we extend the connection between Bolingbroke and Napoleon, then Kean's production exposes both as ambitious tyrants who usurped a crown.

&! *Public Cause*, Wednesday 15 March 1815, p. 194.

&" Wroughton, p. 71.

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The reviewer for *Public Cause* of 15 March 1815, wrote that this play, 'so seldom acted,' was,

> On the present occasion, so considerably altered, that it might, by the majority of the audience, have been considered a new play; [...] but this we may safely venture to say, that whatever liberties may have been taken with Shakespeare's text, the alterer, whoever he be, has produced a fine Drama for the Stage, and one which, with Mr. Kean's attraction, is likely long to keep possession of the boards.[63]

Despite all the changes made by Wroughton, the production at Drury Lane was a commercial success: it was staged 13 times in the first season in 1815 and continued to be part of the theatre repertory until 1828. It was also staged in America in 1820 and 1826 with Kean again in the leading role.

Kean's *Richard II* and *Richard III* in the Shadow of Napoleon

When *Richard II* premiered, Kean's reputation was already established as the most promising actor of the age. He had made his debut in London only a year before with the role of Shylock in a revival of *The Merchant of Venice* on 26 January at Drury Lane. In February, Kean played the role of another Shakespearean king, Richard III. He received a lot of attention for his performance, mainly positive reviews for bringing innovation to the role. Hazlitt describes it as 'entirely his own, without any traces of imitation of any other actor.' [64] The critic pinpoints what it is about Shakespeare's character that the actor should be able to perform. Shakespeare's Richard is:

> Towering and lofty, as well as aspiring; equally impetuous and commanding; haughty, violent, and subtle; bold and treacherous; confident in his strength, as well as in his cunning; raised high by his birth, and higher by his genius and his

&# *Public Cause*, Wednesday, 15 March 1815.

&$ William Hazlitt, 'Mr. Kean's Richard,' *The complete works of William Hazlitt; vol. V, Lectures on the English poets and A view of the English stage* (J. M. Dent & Sons, 1930), p. 180.

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> crimes; a royal usurper, a princely hypocrite, a tyrant, and a murderer of the House of Plantagenet.[65]

This is a role that the actors John Philip Kemble (1757-1823) and Thomas Cooke (1786-1864) had played before, but neither had managed to convey Richard's passionately conflicted character. Although Hazlitt acknowledges that Kean did not succeed completely, he affirms that the actor managed to surpass his predecessors.

Peter Manning stresses that Kean acted Colley Cibber's adaptation of the Shakespearean text, which 'replace[d] subtleties with crude effects, and reduce[d] Shakespeare's Machiavellian figure to a boisterous monster.'[66] The lawyer and diarist Crabb Robinson, for instance, described Kean's portrayal of the king as 'unkingly' for accentuating the evils of abusing power and 'royal misdemeanour, incompatible with an idealised perception of the monarch.'[67]

Lord Byron was one of the spectators of Kean's *Richard III*. Byron was an early admirer of Kean, and Kean's performance fascinated the poet to such a degree that he attended the theatre every night during the first season; he sent Kean an elegant snuffbox from Italy, and wrote the following verse:

> Thou art the sun's bright child!
> The genius that irradiates thy mind
> Caught all its purity and light from heaven
> Thine is the task, with mastery most perfect,
> To bind the passions captive in thy train
> [...] I herald thee to Immortality![68]

The poet was enthralled by one of the 'added points' that Kean introduced to the part, especially the one on the eve of the Battle of Bosworth. Both the critics Hazlitt and Leigh

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&% Ibid., p. 181.

&& Peter Manning, 'Edmund Kean and Byron's Plays', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 21/22 (1973), p. 193.

&' Peter Thomson, 'Edmund Kean', in *Great Shakespeareans: Garrick, Kemble, Siddons, Kean,* edited by Peter Holland (Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 156.

&(James Henry Hackett, *Notes and Comments Upon Certain Plays and Actors of Shakespeare: With Criticisms and Correspondence* (Carleton, 1863), p. 128.

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Hunt wrote about this specific moment. Hunt was disappointed overall with Kean's acting, deeming his style 'too artificial to be a mere falling off from nature.'[69] However, despite Kean's artificiality, Hunt praises the particular moments of naturalness and authenticity that Kean brings to the character, 'passages of truth and originality.'[70] One such moment is on the night before the battle. According to Hunt,

> It would be impossible to express in a deeper manner the intentness of Richard's mind upon the battle that was about to take place, or to quit the scene with an abruptness and self-recollecting, pithy and familiar, than by the reveries in which he [Kean] stands drawing lines upon the ground with the point of his sword, and his sudden recovery of himself with a 'Good night'.[71]

It is one of Kean's special moments because he manages to convey feeling with naturalness, awakening the spectator's sympathy. Kean's creation of the king drawing on sand with the point of his sword became iconic, and Byron incorporated it into his 'Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte':

> Then haste thee to thy sullen Isle,
> And gaze upon the sea;
> That element may meet thy smile—
> It ne'er was ruled by thee!
> Or trace with thine all idle hand
> In loitering mood upon the sand
> That Earth is now as free!
> That Corinth's pedagogue hath now
> Transferred his by-word to thy brow.[72]

Byron connects Kean's performance of a meditative moment that precedes the tragic battle at Bosworth with Napoleon's isolation on the island. Byron's biased poetic

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[69] George Rowell, *The Victorian Theatre, 1792-1914: A Survey* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 52.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., p. 53.

[72] Lord Byron, 'Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte,' ll. 118-126.

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expression manifests his disillusionment with the former hero-figure in forsaking his ambitious projects. Byron is embittered at the failed attempt to retain a French Republic and its consequential drawbacks in initiating a republican state in England, more than he is concerned with the fall of the individual man. Byron's poem expresses resentment for what Napoleon had represented for him, which was an illusion, a 'fabricated' image of Napoleon that Byron constructed for himself. The moment when Kean's Richard draws meditatively on the sand with his sword incites sympathy from the beholder, who – even if temporarily – identifies with the calculating Richard. It is a complex and contradictory emotion to feel sympathy for the villain of the play, hence its powerfulness. By transferring this impassioned moment to Napoleon, Byron awakens the same paradoxical reaction from his readers.

Byron also identified with the pre-exile heroic figure of Bonaparte. As Manning puts it, 'it is not fortuitous that an echo of Kean should be found in the Ode on Napoleon, for Byron's self-identification with Napoleon was recognised by their contemporaries in a commonplace linking of the two that often expanded to include Edmund Kean.'[73] Byron's poem thus connects himself, Napoleon, Kean and Richard III. The playgoer Leveson Gower writes after watching Kean as Richard III in a letter to Lady Bessborough: 'Kean gives me the idea of Buonaparte in a furor. I was frightened, alarmed.'[74] The Irish poet and diarist Melesina Trench writes about her experience seeing the same production: '[Kean] reminded me constantly of Buonaparte that restless quickness, that Catiline inquietude, that fearful somewhat resembling the impatience of a lion in his cage. Though I am not a lover of the drama […], I could willingly have heard him repeat his part that same evening.'[75] The poet John Keats also sees the connection; he categorises Byron and Napoleon, as well as Charmian from *Antony and Cleopatra*, as belonging to 'the worldly, theatrical and pantomimical' in opposition to 'the unearthly, spiritual and ethereal.'[76] Finally, Thomson compares Kean's impulse to exceed audience expectations with the characters of Byron and Napoleon,

'# Manning, p. 196.

'$ Arthur Colby Sprague, *Shakespearian Players and Performances* (Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 79.

'% Melesina Chenevix St. George Trech, *The Remains of the Late Mrs. Richard Trench, Being Selections from Her Journals, Letters, & Other Papers* (Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1862), p. 283.

'& John Keats, *Selected Letters, edited by Robert Gittings* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 395.

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'the heroes of 1814.'[77] For Byron, 1814 was the year of *The Corsair*, which sealed his reputation as the archetypal Romantic hero: restless, transgressive, and self-mythologising. For Napoleon, it was the year of his dramatic fall and exile to Elba, a moment that transformed him from emperor to legend, turning his political failure into a form of mythic grandeur.

These examples demonstrate that the images of Kean and Napoleon shared a common ground in the early-nineteenth-century cultural scene in London. Kean's biographer, Frederick William Hawkins, writes about Kean's acceptance of the audience's applause after his second time as Shylock during his debut season at Drury Lane. He writes: 'The fact that, after he had made a graceful acknowledgement of the welcoming applause, he took about as much notice of those in front as Napoleon is said to have done of his Parisian audiences, at once impressed the spectators in his favour.'[78] Hawkins' comparison between Kean's theatrical audience at Drury Lane and Napoleon's Parisian audiences adds topicality to the connection. It is interesting to note that Hawkins writes over thirty-five years after Kean's death, but the association of the actor with Bonaparte remained.

Kean's memorable performance as Richard III in 1814 also affected how his performance of Richard II was received in the following year. A reviewer for *Public Cause* of 15 March 1815, affirms that 'we cannot hesitate to declare, that, in our opinion, his representation of the 2nd Richard deserves to be ranked among his happiest performances, and is not excelled even by its most popular rival, Richard III.' According to the reviewer, these two Shakespearean characters are complete opposites: 'Ambition, indeed, they both possess, but in the Usurper it is "bloody, bold, and resolute;" while, in the legitimate Sovereign, it appears the restless vanity of an idle debauchee.'[79] The reviewer for the *Public Cause*, thus, explicitly connects *Richard III* with the unlawful seizing of the crown, and *Richard II* with legitimate monarchy. Although Kean was the actor portraying both characters, the role of the Usurper is placed on Bolingbroke in *Richard II*. Therefore, in an analysis of Kean's *Richard II* in the shadow of Napoleon, Kean could potentially be interpreted as embodying the death of lawful sovereignty, threatened by Napoleon, represented by Bolingbroke.

[77] Thompson, p. 163.

[78] Frederick William Hawkins, *The Life of Edmund Kean* (Tinsley Brothers, 1869), p. 140.

[79] *Public Cause*, p. 194.

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The role of Richard II evokes a different type of emotion from the audience than that of Richard III. As Hazlitt explains: 'we feel neither respect nor love for the deposed monarch; for he is as wanting in energy as in principle: but we pity him, for he pities himself.'[80] The pity incited by the Shakespearean character creates a bond with the audience, who sympathises with Richard not as a body politic but as a body natural: 'The sufferings of the man make us forget that he ever was a king.'[81] In this sense, we can link Richard II's human vulnerability, which invites the audience to sympathise with him, with George III's popularity at the end of his reign: the 'royal magic and mystique,' as explained by Colley. Whereas the focus of interest in *Richard III* is the ascension to power, in *Richard II* it is the fall from power that takes centre stage.

The connection between Kean's acting career and the figure of Napoleon extends into the realm of mythmaking. Both Kean and Napoleon were not merely individuals; they were public icons, constructed through performance, media, and public perception. As the audience responded to Kean's portrayal of monarchy on stage, they were engaging with a larger cultural narrative about power and its discontents. Just as Napoleon was mythologised both as a hero and a tyrant, so too were Kean's Richard figures, who transcended the boundaries of the plays themselves, becoming symbols of the emotional and political contradictions of the era.

Adaptation and the Politics of Play

Seeing Bolingbroke's usurpation of Richard's rightful crown as evocative of Napoleon's proclamation of himself as Emperor is tempting, but it is not the only interpretative possibility. As we have seen, Napoleon was a complex figure, viewed as a tyrant by some, but as a hero by others. When Kean gives the audience a commanding and passionate performance of Richard II, it is possible to read Kean's tyrannical king as a personification of absolutist monarchy. In this sense, Bolingbroke's intervention can be linked to Napoleon's rupture of the old chain of hereditary monarchy and the creation of a Republic, an achievement that Byron admired. Writing in his diary on 23 November 1813, Byron expresses his discontent with Napoleon's eminent fall after his failed

(* William Hazlitt, *The complete works of William Hazlitt; vol. IV, The Round Table and Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (J. M. Dent & Sons, 1930), p. 272.

(! Ibid., p. 273.

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conquest in Russia: 'Give me a republic, or a despotism of one, rather than the mixed government of one, two, three. A republic!'[82]

Hazlitt writes that it was a common assumption that Richard II was Kean's finest role until that point in his career in 1815, despite his success as Richard III the previous season. Nevertheless, Hazlitt found it 'a total misrepresentation.'[83] In Kean's Richard II, Hazlitt perceived 'only one or two electrical shocks,' whereas in other roles the actor had offered many more. Bryan Procter manifests a similar opinion. Although an admirer of the actor's career, Procter thought Kean's 'was not a true portrait of the weak and melancholy Richard.'[84] Procter also identified the lack of what Hazlitt describes as pathos in Kean's role: 'The grandson of Edward the Third was not fierce nor impetuous, but weak and irritable, and in his downfall utterly prostrate in spirit. We did not recognise these qualities in the acting of Mr. Kean, who was almost as fiery and energetic as he used to be in Richard the Third.'[85] Both Procter's and Hazlitt's reviews indicate that Kean could not offer a combination of emotion and frailty to the spectator. Instead, Kean gave energy and passion, emphasising Richard's belief in his divine right to be king.

Kean's performance as Richard II recalls how the actor had played the tyrant Richard III a year previously. The critic in the *New Monthly Magazine* noted the similarity between the two: 'Mr. Kean indulged rather too freely in what constitutes a predominant feature of his acting—a certain, sarcastic, epigrammatic turn, which gives peculiar force and meaning to particular passages', which he had employed with Richard III, and which did not agree with the character of Richard II.[86]

Kean's Richard is more decisive and authoritative. Manning agrees that Wroughton's text offers 'a worthier figure out of Richard,' and that this transformation was reinforced by Kean's 'acting Richard heroically.'[87] For example, when Bolingbroke and Mowbray refuse to return the gages thrown in defiance in Act I, Richard exclaims: 'Rage must be withstood,' and, according to the prompter's handwritten stage

(" Lord Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron with His Letters and Journals, and His Life*, edited by Thomas Moore, vol. 2 (John Murray, 1832), pp. 272-3.

(# Hazlitt, Vol. V, p. 223.

($ Bryan Waller Procter, *The Life of Edmund Kean* (Hard Press, 2019), p. 126.

(% Ibid.

(& *New Monthly Magazine*, 1 May 1815, pp. 360-61.

(' Manning, p. 199.

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directions, he 'comes down from the throne and advances to the front – all the Lords rise.'[88] The figure of the king incites respect from the court members, who stand when he stands. Although Wroughton's text kept Richard's plea to Bolingbroke: 'Cousin, do you begin to throw up your gage,' Kean crosses out this extract of the text. On the Drury Lane stage, the king directly states his command after standing from the throne: 'We were not born to sue, but to command; | Which since we cannot do to make you friends, | Draw near, and list what, with our council, we have done,' and banishes Bolingbroke from England for 'twice five summers' and Mowbray forever, 'never to return.'[89]

As we have seen, the de-coronation scene in Richard II is a politically charged theatrical moment, rich with contemporary resonance. On the one hand, Bolingbroke's seizure of the crown might evoke the image of Napoleon as a tyrant driven by ambition, echoing fears of revolutionary leaders who usurp lawful authority. In this reading, Bolingbroke becomes a mirror of Napoleon's imperial overreach – a figure who overthrows a legitimate monarch and destabilises the natural political order. The stage thus becomes a site for mourning the loss of divine right and legitimate sovereignty, aligning with conservative anxieties about the consequences of revolution and regime change. Yet, the same scene also lends itself to a radically different interpretation. Bolingbroke's rejection of Richard's divine entitlement and assumption of power can be seen as an act of liberation from tyranny, a move away from the inefficacy and absolutism embodied by Richard's mystical view of kingship. Viewed this way, Bolingbroke resembles the heroic Napoleon of Byron's imagination, the man of action who deposes corrupt tradition and embodies meritocratic strength.

The theatre, as a space of interpretative play and adaptation, accommodates both readings simultaneously. Kean's energetic performance of Richard, and the layered reception of Shakespeare's histories in a post-revolutionary context, reveal the extent to which political meaning on stage is never fixed, but performed, contested, and reshaped in dialogue with the moment. In 1815, *Richard II* was not just the tragedy of a medieval king; it was a living allegory of sovereignty, revolution, and the precarious balance between legitimacy and ambition. Staging Richard's de-coronation at a time

((Wroughton, p. 10.

Handwritten notes in Wroughton, p. 10.

() Wroughton, p. 10.

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of such political unrest in France and in England, and during a period when drama in London was controlled and heavily censored by the Lord Chamberlain under the Licensing Act, could be regarded as subversive. In this light, the play on the stage becomes a kind of play with political power itself: the way theatre, through its manipulation of texts and performance, could challenge or reflect on the state of the nation. The divergent responses to *Richard III*, *Richard II* and Napoleon reflect the tensions inherent in theatrical historicism: the past, once opened up to performance, becomes contested and unstable. The stage becomes a space where history is not only remembered but negotiated – and played with.

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BIOGRAPHY: Dr. Fernanda Korovsky Moura completed her PhD at Leiden University, the Netherlands, in 2023. Her thesis, entitled *Farewell King! Staging the Middle Ages in Nineteenth-Century London Performances of Shakespeare's Richard II*, explores how three productions of the play (by Edmund Kean, William Charles Macready, and Charles Kean) recreate the Middle Ages, elucidating the complexities of negotiating several layers of past in art. Moura is working on a book proposal to share her research findings. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher at Leiden University.

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Romance, Revolution & Reform

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Rivalry, Chess and Duality in Thomas Hardy's 'An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress' (1868) and A Pair of Blue Eyes (1873)

REBECCA WELSHMAN

WRITING ON THE subject of a 'Liberal Education' in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1868, Thomas Henry Huxley stated:

> It is a very plain and elementary truth that the life the fortune and the happiness of every one of us depend upon our knowing something of the rules of a game infinitely more difficult and complicated than chess [...] The chess-board is the world, the pieces are the phenomena of the universe, the rules of the game are what we call the laws of Nature. The player on the other side is hidden from us.[1]

Referring to the painting known as *Checkmate* (1831) by Friedrich Moritz August Retzsch, which depicts a man playing Satan at chess, Huxley imagined replacing the man with an angel to be 'an image of human life'.[2] Education, he wrote, meant learning the rules of this game, including 'the instruction of the intellect in the laws of Nature [...] things and their forces [...] men and their ways.'[3] In *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876), a story about a woman's hand in marriage, and the strategy that she employs to secure a future for herself, Hardy directly recalls Huxley's quote, adding to it a characteristic sense of indifference:

> That life itself could be imagined as a game which could only be concluded, or lost, through death. Life is a battle, they say; but it is only so in the sense that a game of chess is a battle—there is no seriousness in it; it may be put an end to

[!] Thomas H. Huxley, 'A Liberal Education and where to find it' in *The Major Prose of Thomas Henry Huxley*, ed. by Alan P. Barr (University of Georgia Press, 1997), p. 209.

["] Ibid., p. 209.

[#] Ibid., p. 209.

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> at any inconvenient moment by owning yourself beaten, with a careless "Ha-ha!" and sweeping your pieces into the box. [4]

While Hardy's debt to Huxley has long been recognised by critics and by Hardy himself, focused studies of the role of strategic play in the narrative development of Hardy's fiction are few in number.[5] Scenes of contest in Hardy's fiction elicit important questions concerning duality, rivalry, and gendered concepts of power and rule, typically flavoured by Hardy's ambivalence. As Christian articulates in *The Return of the Native* (1878), 'What curious creatures these dice be—powerful rulers of us all, and yet at my command!'[6] Yet the world in which Hardy's characters move is one that they have to learn how to negotiate. To those who play well, according to Huxley's theory, 'the highest stakes are paid', and those who play 'ill' are checkmated 'without remorse.'[7]

With the ultimate aim of chess being to checkmate the opponent's king, and metaphorically capture the enemy, the game has long borne military symbolism. According to tradition, when chess reached Persia from India in the sixth century, the game represented a battlefield with units including foot soldiers, elephants, and other army units, including chariots and horses, with the action using tactics which could be reproduced in war. In the late nineteenth century, the nature of warfare changed rapidly in response to the mass production of rifles and artillery, alongside machine guns, which anticipated the trench warfare of the First World War. Larger, better-equipped armies essentially displaced the role of mass infantry attacks, and the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), for example, involved two armies of 400,000 and 1 million respectively. The Franco-Prussian War was contemporaneous with Hardy's writing of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, serialised between 1872-3, and the conflict was given coverage in periodicals Hardy

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[$] Frank Pinion also notes the double meaning of the title of this novel, which could refer to a hand of cards that the heroine 'finds it incumbent on her to play'. As Mountclere's brother articulates in the novel, Ethelberta is 'a clever young woman' who has 'played her cards adroitly'. Frank B. Pinion, *Thomas Hardy: Art and Thought* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1977), p. 56. Thomas Hardy, *The Hand of Ethelberta*, ed. by Robert Gittings (Macmillan, 1986), p. 128.

[%] See, for example, Carl J. Weber, *Hardy of Wessex: His Life and Literary Career*, rev. ed. (Columbia University Press, 1940; rev. edn 1965), pp. 246-7.

[&] Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, Norton Critical Edition 2[+] edn., ed. by Phillip Mallett (W.W. Norton, 2006), p. 262.

[ˈ] Huxley, 'A Liberal Education', p. 209.

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read and wrote for.[8] As perhaps suggested by the war themes of Hardy's poetry and his novel *The Trumpet-Major*, Michael Millgate posits that it was the Napoleonic period that predominantly stirred Hardy's imagination.[9] Yet as I suggest in this article, the subtle presence of the military imagination in Hardy's earlier works, detectable through his choice of imagery and language, is given enhanced visibility when considered through the lens of chess. In his characterisation of Elfride, in particular, who 'like the French soldiery […] was not brave when on the defensive', Hardy employs military allusions not only to sustain the attention of a reading public but to challenge gender expectations.[10]

Although the last pitched battle in Britain took place in 1746, the idea of fairly small rival armies meeting on a pre-arranged field of battle remained an enduring influence in the Victorian cultural imagination, thus reaffirming the long association between chess and battle.[11] In 1852, the professional chess player Howard Staunton invoked this tradition by observing that the main reason for the 'scientific beauty and intellectual interest' of chess lies in 'its representative influence, by which it reflects the real strategy of hostile armies'.[12] Military and associated tactical terminology had infiltrated Western literature, including works of fiction, through some of its most foundational works.[13] Next to the Bible, Hardy most frequently quoted from and alluded

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(Although Britain remained neutral during the conflict, many organisations were formed to provide medical assistance both France and Germany, including £300,000 of donations from the British public for medical services. The conflict was covered by Chambers's Journal, in which Hardy published his first article in 1865. In the Crimean War, in the mid-1850s, when Hardy was a teenager, Russia was defeated by an alliance of Britain, France, the Ottoman Empire, and Sardinia.

) Michael Millgate, *A Biography Revisited* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 4.

!* Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, ed. by Pamela Dalziel (Penguin, 1998), p. 184.

!! A tradition in the Shahanam of Firdausi and Chatrang Namak records chess to have originated in India, from where it reached Persia during the reign of Khusrau Nushirwarn in the sixth century. See C. Panduranga Bhatta, 'Indian Origins of Chess: an Overview', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, 84 (2003), pp. 23-32 (p. 26) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41694747> (accessed 28 April 2025).

!" Howard Staunton, *The Chess Tournament: A Collection of the Games Playe*d (Henry G. Bohn, 1852), p. xiii.

!# See, for example, military terminology in the works of Shakespeare, in Charles Edelman, *Shakespeare's Military Language: A Dictionary* (Bloomsbury, 2004), and Rebecca Welshman 'Rivers and Contested Territories in the Works of Shakespeare', in *Reading the River in Shakespeare's Britain*, ed. by Bill Angus and Lisa Hopkins (Edinburgh University Press, 2024), pp. 61-82.

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to the works of Shakespeare, with *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) containing the most Shakespearean allusions.[14] With this association between the tactical and creative psyche in mind, this article explores the latent presence of military terminology in Hardy's 'An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress' (1868) and *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) where characters must contend with the 'laws of Nature' and 'contrasting positions which could not be reconciled 'if they are to survive.[15] Although 'ILH' was not published until 1878, when it appeared in the *New Quarterly Magazine*, and remained uncollected in Hardy's lifetime, the text is known to have derived from his unpublished early novel *The Poor Man and the Lady*, written between 1867 and 1868. We might thus expect to find textual connections with *PBE*, first serialised in 1872, particularly in light of the works' shared focus on the turbulent course of romantic relationships and the restrictions imposed upon them by their gender and class.

The approach to these writings throughout this article reflects their autobiographical nature, with reference in particular to Hardy's four-year courtship of his first wife, Emma Gifford. In March 1870, while working as an architect's clerk, Hardy went to stay in St. Juliot, north Cornwall, to restore the parish church. While lodging at the vicarage, home of Reverend Caddell Holder, he met and befriended Caddell Holder's sister-in-law, Emma. Scholars generally agree that *PBE* incorporates a substantial amount of autobiographical detail and that the character of Elfride was largely modelled on Emma Gifford.[16] *PBE* was written during a formative time, when Hardy was deciding whether to fully commit to a career as a novelist, while also turning over the possibility of spending the rest of his life with Emma. While chess in *PBE* has been the subject of previous studies, notably those by Mary Rimmer and Glen R. Downey, little attention has been paid to the wider role of tactical game-play in the novel, consonant with the necessity of working with the 'hand' one is given.[17]

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[14] Author unknown, 'The Shakespeare Association Bulletin', *13* (Shakespeare Association of America, 1938), pp. 87, 91

[15] Thomas Hardy, 'An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress', in *An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress and Other Stories*, ed. by Pamela Dalziel (Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 43-113 (p. 71).
Hereafter *A Pair of Blue Eyes* will be cited as PBE and 'An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress' as 'ILH'.

[16] See Michael Millgate, *A Biography Revisited*, p. 186.

[17] See Mary Rimmer, 'Club Laws: Chess and the Construction of Gender in A Pair of Blue Eyes', in *The Sense of Sex: Feminist Perspectives on Hardy*, ed. by Margaret R. Higonnet (University of Illinois Press,

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Furthermore, neither study alludes to Thomas Huxley, whose ideas underpin the conceptual framework of the novel. In addition to considering Hardy's evocation of landscapes as theatres of conflict in domestic and urban spaces, this article explores his use of a black and white colour scheme in some of the best-known dramatic scenes in *PBE* – when the stakes for the characters are highest – to illustrate how his game world extends far beyond the chessboard or card table.

In 'ILH', the protagonist Egbert Mayne, in a quest to elevate himself from the position of village schoolmaster to acclaimed author, begins to consider art, literature and science as 'machinery' and 'factors in the game of sink or swim'.[18] When he falls in love with the daughter of a local squire, his actions in life become moves with 'life or death' consequences, reminiscent of the stakes involved in a game or military manoeuvre. As noted by Roger Ebbatson, Egbert's approach to the obstacle of class division between himself and Geraldine is 'combative', and their relationship is further 'complicated' by the contradiction between his 'male assertiveness' and her 'female receptivity'.[19] When walking along Piccadilly, 'absent-minded and unobservant', he sees his estranged lover, Geraldine, approaching and must decide what to do: 'Egbert felt almost as if he had been going into battle; and whether he should stand forth visibly before her or keep in the background seemed a question of life or death.'[20] Egbert's decision to remain inconspicuous at that moment is part of his strategy to postpone his meeting with Geraldine until a more opportune circumstance presents itself. When he secures a seat at a performance of the Messiah, near to where she sits, he is 'astonished that for once in his life he had made a lucky hit'.[21] Yet it is not until he is stirred by the music – '"Why do the nations so furiously rage together" [which] changed

1993), pp. 203-20, and Glen R. Downey, 'Chess and Social Game Playing in A Pair of Blue Eyes', *The Hardy Review*, 6 (Winter 2003), pp. 105-146.

!('ILH', p. 80.

!) Roger Ebbatson, 'An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress', in *Hardy: The Margin of the Unexpressed* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 111-127 (p. 113).

"* 'ILH', p. 83. The phrase 'stand forth' had religious and military connotations, being found in the Bible and in poetry of war. In his discussion of the nature of courage required in the military, Samuel Johnson once commented: 'the character of a soldier is high. They who stand forth the foremost in danger, for the community, have the respect of mankind.' Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*, ed. by George Birkbeck, 6 vols. No. 3 (Clarendon, 1887), p. 9.

"! 'ILH', p. 85.

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him to its spirit' – that he reveals his presence.[22] With this 'new impulse' of 'determination', he decides to speak to her immediately rather than wait until the following morning.[23] Geraldine is quick to read the situation, and upon seeing him 'with the peculiar quickness of grasp that she always showed under sudden circumstances, she realised the position at a glance'.[24] A red cord that separates Egbert's seats 'from stalls of a somewhat superior kind,' represents the class boundary between the couple which they attempt to subvert by holding hands beneath it.[25] Possibly recalling Hardy's own experience of rejection by Emma Gifford's father, Egbert reflects that 'should every member of her family be against him he would win her in spite of them'.[26]

After Geraldine writes to Egbert, however, to change her mind about meeting, and he discovers that she has become engaged to Lord Bretton, he is unsure how to feel. Alone in London, as if wandering in an unfamiliar landscape, detached from his former course, 'he knew not what point to take hold of and survey from'.[27] Unaccustomed to 'retreat' because his 'appetite for advance' had waned, Egbert returns to his 'native' land, where a chance encounter with Geraldine in the country church where she is to be married prompts further ruminations of his own hopes to marry her.[28] Here, the characters' memories themselves come under attack from the combination of circumstance and social difference that has previously thwarted their relationship – Geraldine's own 'stood their ground only half so obstinately as his own'.[29] That night, in a 'fitful sleep', plagued by images reminiscent of a wargame, Egbert 'dreamed of fighting, wading, diving, boring, through innumerable multitudes'.[30] Although Egbert and Geraldine marry just in time to avoid her entrapment in the loveless marriage planned for her, the strain of going against her father's wishes and the expectations of society proves too much and triggers a health complaint that ends in her demise.

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[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., p. 90.
[27] Ibid., pp. 93, 92.
[28] Ibid., p. 100.
[29] Ibid.

In *PBE*, published in serial form in *Tinsley's Magazine* from 1872-3, an early phrase offers an initial profile of the heroine that continues to resonate and becomes significant throughout the story: 'Elfride Swancourt was a girl whose emotions lay very near the surface.'[31] With no 'mask' and little capacity to conceal her emotions, we are thus immediately made aware of Elfride's disadvantage in the world of game-play, where it is prudent not to let your opponent read your face for signs of intention or allow them to notice any particular emotion concerning the outcome of a move or turn.[32] This absence of 'neutrality of countenance' – colloquially known in card-playing as a 'Poker face' – comes to the fore in the early scenes of the novel when Elfride challenges her two suitors, Stephen Smith and Henry Knight, to games of chess.[33] In contrast to the older, more experienced Knight, who is indifferent to the outcome, Elfride is 'bold' and shows every emotion as she feels it.[34] Unlike her 'placid' opponent, Elfride 'flushes', 'shades her face with her hand', then 'literally trembles now lest an artful surprise she has in store for him shall be anticipated by the artful surprise he evidently has in store for her.'[35] When Knight makes a surprising checkmate, 'the victory is won', and Elfride, unable to conceal her disappointment and indignation, retreats to her bedroom where she is found restlessly asleep 'full-dressed on the bed, her face hot and red, her arms thrown abroad', 'indistinctly moan[ing] words used in the game of chess.'[36]

As Mary Rimmer has noted in her study of chess in *PBE*, the Queen, as the powerful piece it is recognised as today, only became a feature of the chessboard during the medieval period when it transitioned from the Arab *firz* (meaning counsellor).[37] To chess players of the time, this 'mad queen' careering around the board

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[#!] *PBE*, p. 7.

[#"] See Knight's 'mask' in *PBE*, p. 361.

[##] Ibid., p. 246.

[#$] Ibid., p. 172.

[#%] Ibid. The phrase 'artful surprise' was often used in histories of military campaigns. Notably, the famous English defeat of Robert the Bruce at the Battle of Methven in the Scottish borders by Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, was achieved by a cunning dusk ambush of Bruce and his army. See George Ridpath and Philip Ridpath, *The Border History of England and Scotland* (P. Wright, 1810), who write of the 'artful surprise at Methven' (p. 228).

[#&] See Ibid., pp. 168-173.

[#'] Mary Rimmer, 'Club Laws', p. 208.

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brought chaos to an otherwise orderly arrangement.[38] Following Peter J. Casagrande, Rimmer aligns Elfride with the lawless and 'capricious Nature' depicted in the novel that displays a 'feline fun in her tricks'.[39] Rimmer develops this idea by drawing a parallel with the 'mobile, threatening queen' in the 'new chess' of the Middle Ages, who 'subtly threatens to rage through or madden everything around her,' bringing lawlessness into Knight's ordered celibate world.[40] While we might align the games of chess between Elfride and her suitors with the act of courtship, whereby the capture of the elusive, mobile queen could be seen as an alluring challenge, Hardy's depiction of Elfride as a Queen is complicated by the fact that Elfride cannot help being drawn to both men. Although society labels her fickle, each suitor engages different aspects of her personality and meets, or indeed fails to meet, her needs in different ways. As a Queen, Elfride represents the only piece on the board afforded dual movement, whereby both files – diagonal and horizontal – are open to her. Yet by the rules of chess, all pieces exist in duplicate except for the King and Queen, thus rendering Elfride's unintentional design to capture two Kings illogical and essentially impossible.

When Elfride impulsively runs around the narrow edge of the church tower and slips, Knight rushes to her rescue. Reprimanded and carried from the tower, she feels 'like a colt in a halter for the first time', whereby her new involvement with Knight symbolises her submission to her trainer or master and the end of her youthful freedom and wildness.[41] When Elfride promises Knight never to repeat the act, despite the imminent demolition of the Tower, she says, 'you are familiar of course, as everybody is, with those strange sensations we sometimes have, that our life for the moment exists in duplicate'.[42] The loss of the Tower is foreshadowed during the evening chess tournament when Knight's rook (or 'Castle') becomes the first piece he loses.[43] Yet despite being given an advantage, Elfride temporarily overlooks the duplicate nature of the chess pieces. When she gains Knight's rook, she then mistakenly places her queen on the file of his other rook, as if forgetting for a moment that there were two:

[#(] Ibid.

[#)] Ibid.

[$*] Ibid.

[$!] *PBE*, p. 167.

[$"] Ibid., p. 166.

[$#] Ibid., p. 168.

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> "There—how stupid! Upon my word, I did not see your rook. Of course nobody but a fool would have put a queen there knowingly!"
> She spoke excitedly, half expecting her antagonist to give her back the move.
> "Nobody, of course," said Knight serenely, and stretched out his hand towards his royal victim.[44]

Here, Knight becomes the 'antagonist', and 'enemy' for abiding by the 'Club Laws' that Elfride had previously insisted upon, despite her protest that she 'cannot endure those cold-blooded ways of clubs and professional players, like Staunton and Morphy.'[45] This duplicate courtship game echoes 'a similar performance with Stephen Smith the year before' where it was Elfride who had the upper hand over the amateurish architect.[46] When asked who taught him to play, Stephen replies that he 'learnt from a book lent me by my friend Mr. Knight, the noblest man in the world'. [47] The book Hardy refers to is most likely *The Chess Player's Handbook*, written by Howard Staunton and published in 1870, a copy of which Hardy owned and annotated.[48]

It is interesting to note, however, that Elfride readily adopts a playful and exuberant approach to the idea of the game as a 'contest' by first reminding Knight that vanity was a virtue for Nelson in battle, and then by quoting from *Richard II*:

> "Oh yes, in battle! Nelson's bravery lay in his vanity."
> "Indeed! Then so did his death."
> Oh no, no! For it is written in the book of the prophet Shakespeare—
> 'Fear and be slain? no worse can come to fight;
> And fight and die, is death destroying death!"[49]

[$$] Ibid.

[$%] Ibid., p.169.

[$&] Ibid., p. 167

[$'] Ibid., p. 51. See also Elfride and Knight's expedition to a cliff, which is 'a duplicate of her original arrangement with Stephen', *PBE*, p. 308.

[$(] See Michael Millgate, 'Thomas Hardy's Library at Max Gate: Catalogue of an Attempted Reconstruction': www.library.utoronto.ca/fisher/hardy (accessed 28 April 2025).

[$)] *PBE*, p. 171.

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That Hardy intended the library where they sit to play as an arena or battlefield is suggested by his description of the bookcase as a 'summit', thus implying that the contest takes place on the lower slopes or flatter area beneath.[50] In her reading of Staunton, Rimmer concludes that by the late nineteenth century, chess was generally devoid of military symbolism due to its status as a recreational middle-class game, and that in his recommendation for chess to 'strengthen the mind of the professional man', Staunton promoted the rational element of the game.[51] From this perspective, Rimmer suggests, 'chess banished not only any vulnerability to chance but also any acknowledgement of its own military symbolism'.[52] With this reading in mind, we might assume Elfride's ready investment of the game with competitive and hostile energy to be misplaced; an incongruous display that has no place in the demure world of chess. Yet although Staunton was largely responsible for modernising chess, he continued to promote the military symbolism of the game, and it is unlikely that such a simple distinction between military symbolism and chess as an intellectual activity can be made.[53] While nineteenth-century society may have elevated chess to a 'scientific game' and intellectual pastime, the players' decisions were still shaped by their characters, feelings, and the nature of the situation, much as in any sporting or military activity.[54] Hardy makes this clear when Knight, despite his rational style of play, nevertheless blunders his rook. Furthermore, such a simplified reading overlooks the longstanding close association between the nobility and the military. Despite warfare becoming increasingly distant from daily life, the idea of 'blue blood' in the veins, which Parson Swancourt so admires, continued to be stirred by ideas of chivalry and the male inheritance of coats of arms.[55] In many respects, the charm and bravado of those former days continued its hold over the nineteenth-century mind, even if, as Hardy recognised, it was 'adrift on change'.[56] Battles were frequently overseas, far removed from the civil wars in English fields, which by proximity directly engaged the public. Yet the legacy of

%* Ibid.

%! Rimmer, 'Club Laws', p. 206.

%" Ibid.

%# See footnote 13.

%$ *PBE*, p. 167.

%% Ibid., p. 20.

%& *The Return of the Native*, p. 11.

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power amongst landowners and associated snobbery towards non-landowners still prevailed.

While Stephen, not conversant with the etiquette of chess, has 'a very odd way of handling the pieces when castling or taking a man', his refashioning of the rural church tower under the direction of Mr Hewby, 'the London man of art,' represents the intervention of modern methods: the 'newest style of Gothic art'.[57] Knight sits on the site of the fallen tower, reflecting that 'the concatenation of circumstance originated by Stephen Smith [...] had brought about its overthrow.'[58] Thus in contrast to the folly raised in honour of the General by the 'hard featured' Squire Allenville in 'ILH', the demolition of the square Norman tower of Endelstow and its replacement by a more modern design in the Gothic style, represents the remodelling of traditional patriarchal values dating back to the Norman conquest, and the associated possibilities of new forms of masculinity.[59] Unlike the bearded Knight, 'docile' Stephen with his wispy facial hair and quiet manner symbolises a less oppressive type of masculinity that does not intimidate Elfride.[60]

The scene in which Elfride traverses the narrow parapet of the church tower again alludes to the gameplay involved in her courtship with Henry Knight. This 'giddy feat' that she had 'performed' before nearly ends in disaster when she trips on a tuft of grass and falls inwards onto the roof rather than outwards to her almost certain death.[61] Yet it is the 'slight perturbation' caused by Knight's criticism that unsteadies her, and following his denouncement of her as a 'fool', with an expression of 'stern anger', she is 'over-powered' by him and faints in his arms.[62] When she opens her eyes once more, she 'remembered the position instantly', as one might remember the arrangement of the pieces on a chessboard after a break from the game.[63] The crumbling square Norman tower and its association with oppressive patriarchal values are clearly

%' *PBE*, pp. 51, 314.

%(Ibid., p. 323.

%) 'ILH', p. 70.

&* *PBE*, p. 64.

&! Ibid., p. 163.

&" Ibid., pp. 163-5.

&# Ibid., pp. 164-5.

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dangerous to her.[64] Yet Elfride is so conditioned by the traditional values of her father and the pressure he puts upon her to choose a relationship that will elevate the social standing of the family, that she believes she must win the heart of a man who intimidates and criticises her and to reject Stephen who treats her more kindly, but is younger, more effeminate, and the son of a mason.[65]

Stephen's refashioning of the tower specifically echoes Hardy's intimate knowledge of the role of British architects in developing Indian architecture during the mid-nineteenth century. Hardy's London employer, Thomas Roger Smith, fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects and Professor of Architecture at University College London, designed the British hospital in Bombay, now Mumbai. The aspirational Stephen, the young clerk modelled on Hardy himself, is sent to India by his employer, Mr Hewby, during the course of the novel, to prepare drawings for work done by engineers. It was during what the narrator terms the 'exceptional heyday of prosperity which shone over Bombay some few years ago, that [Stephen] arrived on the scene.'[66] This diversion proves to be an essential plot point that affords the necessary time and space for the relationship between Knight and Elfride to develop. If characters themselves are to be considered symbolic pieces in the game-world of the novel, then Stephen, with his association with India as the cradle of chess, and his role in remodelling the church tower, most resembles the piece known as the castle or rook – the friendship that Knight accidentally sacrifices through his simultaneous courtship of Elfride.

For a profile of the Knight, we can turn to *The Chess-Player's Handbook*, where Staunton writes:

> The action of the Knight is peculiar, and not easy to describe. He is the only one of the pieces which has the privilege of leaping over another man. The

[&$] Norman architecture is known for its massive pillars, with early Norman buildings resembling fortresses with impenetrable castle keeps. The Romanesque style of the eleventh and twelfth centuries tended to be dark and inaccessible, whereas the medieval Gothic featured stained-glass windows with lighter, airier interiors.

[&%] The parapet scene may also recall 'King of the Castle', a well-known children's game in which the first person to get on the hill (symbolic of a castle) at the start of the game becomes the king. Other players then try to remove the king from the hill in order to take their position.

[&&] *PBE*, p. 137.

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> movements of the others are all dependent on their freedom from obstruction by their own and the enemy's men.[67]

While Knight jumps over Stephen to supplant his position as Elfride's suitor, nothing initially stands in his way except the 'hidden' player of nature herself, and his own 'neurosis' of needing to be Elfride's first love.[68] Although the character of Henry Knight is thought to have been modelled on Hardy's close friend Horace Moule, further insight into the characterisation of Knight can be found through a closer study of a particular book belonging to Parson Swancourt, titled *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland*, issued by Sir John Bernard Burke. While some scholars have previously noted the title, little attention has been paid to the connections between the text of the book and Hardy's casting of his male characters.[69] While Downey draws a lengthy comparison between Parson Swancourt's reliance on books and Prospero in *The Tempest*, he overlooks passages in Burke's peerage that seem to directly relate to Hardy's characterisation.

Whether or not Hardy had Burke's peerage dictionary at his disposal in Caddell Holder's library in Cornwall, or read it elsewhere, its formative influence on the novel is notable. The opening pages tell the story of Gerald 'the White Knight', and the marriage of 'the Black Knight of Lorn', immediately connecting the history of the landed gentry with the game-world of chess.[70] Of further interest are the presence of the names Stephen Smith and Henry Knight, the names of Hardy's male protagonists and Elfride's suitors in *PBE*.[71] Burke's peerage accounts how Henry Knight was the cousin of Anthony Gregson and assumed the rather unusual position of being the sole inheritor of the

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&' Howard Staunton, *The Chess-Player's Handbook* (Bell and Daldy, 1866), p. 5.

&(Geoffrey Harvey, *The Complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy* (Taylor and Francis, 2003), p. 96.

&) See, for example, Andrew Radford, *Thomas Hardy and the Survivals of Time* (Routledge, 2016).

'* Bernard Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland* (Harrison, 1862), p. 3, p. xv.

'! See Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary*, p. 594 under 'Greaves', where Sophia marries Stephen Smith Esquire, and footnote 12. Henry Knight became Henry Knight Gregson.

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Gregson estates after Anthony died unmarried, despite not being a Gregson by name.[72] We might note the similarities with the casting of Knight in *PBE* as Mrs Swancourt's cousin, who is brought into the story through a chance encounter in London: "Why, Henry Knight—of course it is! My—second—third—fourth cousin—what shall I say? At any rate, my kinsman."[73]

The real Henry Knight became High Sheriff of Northumberland in 1870, the year Hardy embarked on his journey to remote Cornwall that would shape the course of his life from that point on. Burke's book gives details of the Gregson arms, which includes a 'chequy' – a field or charge divided into squares of two colours, akin to a checkerboard – while the crest – the three-dimensional object placed on top of the helm – features an arm holding a battle-axe.[74] While the presence of a chequy and weaponry on a heraldic shield may not be unusual in itself, it is likely that this particular coat of arms and crest, which belonged to the Knight Gregsons, influenced Hardy's decision to cast cousin Henry Knight as a chess-playing man of letters whose lineage and London connections appease the socially-aspirant Parson Swancourt. Lastly, that 'Stephen Smith' only appears once in Burke's peerage – just a few pages from the noted Henry Knight, and features under the same section 'Gre', for the surnames Greaves and Gregson respectively – suggests that Hardy may have indeed glimpsed these names and associated stories while thumbing through the publication during one of his stays in Cornwall. Hardy's likely use of the book in this way lends further support to the idea that gameplay in the novel is closely aligned with social standing, as put forward by Glen R. Downey.

The role Elfride feels most naturally equipped to play in the novel is that of ruler, or Queen – an idea borne out by a flirtatious interaction when Stephen attempts to kiss her hand:

'" As a condition of the inheritance, Knight assumed the name Gregson. 'Anthony Gregson, Esq. of Lowlynn, high sheriff of Northumberland 1825, who dying unm. 23 NOV 1833, devised his estate to his cousin, HENRY KNIGHT, Esq., eldest son of the Rev. Henry Knight, rector of Ford, in Northumberland.' (Ibid., p. 603). Henry Knight's father the Reverend Thomas, died in the spring of 1872 after 53 years as the rector of Ford, at the time Hardy was writing *PBE*, and his death was widely reported in the periodical press.

'# *PBE*, p. 146.

'$ Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary*, p. 603.

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> "You know I think more of you than I can tell; that you are my queen. I would die for you, Elfride!"
> A rapid red again filled her cheeks, and she looked at him meditatively. What a proud moment it was for Elfride then! She was ruling a heart with absolute despotism for the first time in her life.
> Stephen stealthily pounced upon her hand.
> "No; I won't, I won't!" she said intractably; "and you shouldn't take me by surprise."
> There ensued a mild form of tussle for absolute possession of the much-coveted hand, in which the boisterousness of boy and girl was far more prominent than the dignity of man and woman.[75]

Here the 'much-coveted hand' becomes the object under dispute, and the tactic used to take possession of it – a stealthy 'pounce', which 'takes [her] by surprise' leads to a 'mild tussle': a playful dispute characterised by 'boisterousness' between 'boy and girl' rather than the 'dignity' expected of 'man and woman'.[76] The sense of youth and the natural inclination to play is not yet ready to conform to the expectations of Victorian society, and their playfulness is brought to an abrupt end by entrenched notions of social convention in the form of Elfride's sharp reprimands of 'You shouldn't', 'and 'ought not to have allowed such a romp! We are too old now for that sort of thing.'[77]

A prototype for this scene can be found in 'ILH', when Egbert tells Geraldine: 'I think more of you than of anybody in the whole world', and asks, 'let me always keep you in my heart, and almost worship you?'[78] A few lines later, Egbert and Geraldine's relationship is described as 'a battle' and 'a truce':

> Up to this day of its existence their affection had been a battle, a species of antagonism wherein his heart and the girl's had faced each other, and been anxious to do honour to their respective parts. But now it was a truce and a

'% *PBE*, pp. 58-9.
'& Ibid., p. 59.
'' Ibid., pp. 59.
'('ILH', p. 68.

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> settlement, in which each one took up the other's utmost weakness, and was careless of concealing his and her own.[79]

A further parallel can be found at the start of the following chapter when, in contrast to the demolition of the tower in *PBE*, Egbert and Geraldine play an active part in laying the foundation stone for a 'tower or beacon' to be raised in memory of Geraldine's uncle, a General.[80] However, unlike the aristocratic Geraldine, who flounders at the sight of a muddy trowel, Elfride's qualities, including her preference to ride her pony out alone and for spontaneous 'scamper[s]' along the cliffs, are deliberately inconsistent with the stereotype of a young lady of Victorian society, and have been noted by Thomas to 'violate the norms of conventional femininity'.[81] These qualities are detectable in Stephen's early observations of Elfride at the beginning of their courtship. From his window overlooking the garden – which becomes another form of arena or battleground – he catches sight of her, in a 'carefully timed' game of catch with her pet rabbit, who 'darted and dodged' her 'strategic' attempts to 'capture' it.[82] Hardy writes:

> Ah, there she was! On the lawn in a plain dress, without hat or bonnet, running with a boy's velocity, superadded to a girl's lightness, after a tame rabbit she was endeavouring to capture, her strategic intonations of coaxing words alternating with desperate rushes so much out of keeping with them, that the hollowness of such expressions was but too evident to her pet, who darted and dodged in carefully timed counterpart.[83]

Here, Elfride is characterised with a 'boy's velocity' combined with a 'girl's lightness', and without the head covering that would usually be considered a sign of modesty and adherence to social convention. Elsewhere, Elfride occupies the ambivalent position of being endowed with masculine qualities yet expected by those around her to live as a

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[79] Ibid.

[80] A notable Dorset folly or tower is the Hardy monument on Black Down near Portesham, erected in 1844 in memory of Vice Admiral Sir Thomas Hardy, flag captain for Admiral Lord Nelson at the battle of Trafalgar.

[81] *PBE*, p. 58. Jane Thomas, *Thomas Hardy. Feminism and Dissent* (Macmillan, 1993), p. 72.

[82] Ibid., p. 25.

[83] Ibid.

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woman of society. In his characterisation of Elfride, Hardy does not follow a conventional pattern of gendered character traits, but rather a curious and inconsistent mix whereby her presence is 'no more pervasive than that of a kitten', or a 'butterfly', yet at others is surprisingly imbued with tastes and actions befitting a competitive man.[84] She is, for example, aligned with the male perspective of a military commander – 'Oh yes, in battle. Nelson's bravery lay in his vanity' – as well as Rhadamanthus, the wise king of Greek mythology, while in her appetite for combat, she is criticised by her father for being a 'slave to the game' of chess.[85]

These incongruous aspects of Elfride's character chime with Linda M. Shires's observation that Hardy's novels 'award and deny power of differing kinds to both sexes unpredictably': a reflection of his belief in 'power as shifting, as attained and lost by multiple negotiations that cross gender, age, and class'.[86] Furthermore, the fluidity suggested by Stephen's appearance – his 'pretty' face and 'delicate' cheeks – so much in contrast to how Elfride expected him to look, reminds us of the instability of gender stereotypes and the fluidity of the Queen's historic transition from the advisor:

> His complexion was as fine as Elfride's own; the pink of his cheeks as delicate. His mouth as perfect as Cupid's bow in form, and as cherry-red in colour as hers. Bright curly hair; bright sparkling blue-gray eyes; a boy's blush and manner; neither whisker nor moustache, unless a little light-brown fur on his upper lip deserved the latter title.[87]

The correlation between the facial features of Stephen and Elfride echoes Shires's identification of Hardy's representation of gender in *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) as 'subtle, mobile, and heterogeneous'.[88] That Hardy deliberately imbues Stephen with a mouth 'as perfect as Cupid's bow', offers an overtly feminine image designed to challenge the stereotypes inherent in his reading public, particularly as he

($ Ibid., pp. 8, 28.

(% Ibid., p. 170.

(& Linda M. Shires, 'Narrative, Gender, and Power in Far from the Madding Crowd', in *The Sense of Sex: Feminist Perspectives on Hardy*, ed. by Margaret R. Higonnet (University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 49-65 (p. 51).

(' *PBE*, p. 16.

((Ibid.

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uses the image again later in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, where Tess has 'deep red lips like Cupid's bow'.[89] While Hardy may be invoking Freud's theory that masculine and feminine 'currents' exist within everyone, we might also note that at the time Hardy was writing, the standardisation of chess pieces was a fairly recent occurrence.[90] Modelled on designs by Nathaniel Cooke and endorsed by Howard Staunton in the mid-nineteenth century, the 'Staunton style' became the universally accepted set and is still in use today.[91] Although this standardisation precluded any further transitioning of the pieces, it could not reverse the entrenched rule that had already challenged strict gender stereotypes by allowing players to be both King and Queen.

With high stakes equivalent to a military manoeuvre or act of war, death is an ever-present possible outcome of the courting games in *PBE*: a wager perhaps best epitomised in the scene set in the Luxellian family vault. Nowhere in the novel are the high stakes of life and death so clearly depicted, further aligning the work with 'ILH', the earlier novella, where Egbert's actions are 'a question of life or death'. Downey highlights this scene as 'the episode that marks the transition to the novel's endgame and acutely foreshadows its grim denouement': one that holds 'a great deal of symbolic value because it represents the only meeting of all three central characters' before Elfride's untimely death.[92] When Elfride and Knight enter the tomb to find Stephen there, the moment echoes a similar scene in 'ILH' when Geraldine and Egbert attend the performance of the Messiah, and Stephen, like Geraldine, 'read the position at a glance', and tactically decides to take his lead from Elfride: 'he saw that her bearing towards him would be dictated by his own towards her; and if he acted as a stranger she would do likewise.'[93] In drawing attention to the 'blackened coffins', the 'whitened walls', and the positions of the people standing within, Hardy reminds us that the game involving these three players continues beyond the chessboard.[94] Conscious, however, of the inequalities between Elfride and her suitors in the game in which they are all

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[89] Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, ed. by Sarah Maier (Broadview Press, 2007), p. 274.

[90] Tracy Hayes, 'Hardy's Unmen and Other Men', *Romance, Revolution and Reform*, 2 (2020), pp. 114-132 (p. 127).

[91] Hardy also owned a Howard Staunton Chess set.

[92] Glen R. Downey, 'Chess and Social Game Playing in A Pair of Blue Eyes', *The Hardy Review*, 6 (Winter 2003), pp. 105-146. (p. 137).

[93] *PBE*, p. 259.

[94] Ibid., pp. 260.

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engaged, the narrator admits that 'It is difficult to frame rules which shall apply to both sexes'.[95]

That the situation in *PBE* of rival suitors may have been founded on Hardy's own experience is further suggested by the poems 'I was not He' (1922), and 'The Face at the Casement' (1871). Like the rival, or 'duplicate', suitors in 'ILH' and *PBE*, there is only room for one. 'The Face at the Casement' details a drive with Emma on an evening in May 1871, when the couple stops at a house to visit a man who once wished to marry her. The identity of the other man in the poem has been convincingly put forward by Andrew Norman as William Serjeant, son of the curate of Saint Clether, with the setting of the poem being the vicarage.[96] Knowledge of the younger man as a rival in the woman's affections drives the poem's narrator to play a decisive move against his opponent, one that he describes as 'a deed from hell [...] done before I knew it'.[97] The younger man, aware that his opportunity to marry and live a life with Emma has faded, watches from the casement window as she departs, pressing his face against the glass to set eyes upon his rival. Having seen the man at the window, the narrator places his arm firmly around the woman beside him in a symbolic gesture or 'deed', thus communicating to his rival his newly assumed position in the woman's affections.[98] Although his knowledge of the younger man's imminent demise is already apparent ('well did I divine / It to be the man's there dying'), the speaker of the poem does not hesitate to extinguish his opponent's hopes when the chance arises.[99] Through a single 'deed', one man takes the place of another, as swiftly as a piece in a game of chess.[100] The title of the poem singularly conjures the image of the 'white face' that is 'pressed against an upper lattice'. Upon this move –

> The pale face vanished quick,
> As if blasted, from the casement[101]

)% Ibid., p. 262.

)& Andrew Norman, *Thomas Hardy: Behind the Mask* (The History Press, 2011), p. 164.

)' Thomas Hardy, 'The Face at the Casement', in *Thomas Hardy: The Complete Poems*, ed. by James Gibson (Palgrave, 2001), pp. 317.

)(Ibid.

)) Ibid., p. 316.

!** Ibid., p. 317.

!*! Ibid., p. 317.

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With its connotations of detonated explosives or the fire of a gun, we might infer 'blasted' here to represent an act of aggression, or even war. Hardy tells us that it was an evening in May, and the sun, like a tally or financial reserve, has 'dropped' 'low and lower' in the north-west sky.[102] The time of day, coupled with the position of the Saint Clether vicarage in a dell, surrounded by steep hills and trees, would have created a low light, and possibly by the time the couple ride away, even twilight. One can imagine that under these conditions, a pale face at the window could have resembled a white disc on a dark background, not unlike a dice, domino, or draught on a board that will inevitably 'vanish' upon the player's next move. At the sight of the younger rival, like a vulnerable piece on a board, the narrator of the poem is quick to seize the advantage, with his reflection, 'What devil made me do it, I cannot tell!', enacting Huxley's recall of Retzsch's 'Checkmate'.[103]

Returning to *PBE*, in the well-known cliffhanger scene in which Knight slips and hangs suspended until Elfride comes to his rescue, Hardy employs a colour scheme that echoes the white and black of a chessboard with a 'narrow white border' at its edge:

> The sea would have been a deep neutral blue, had happier auspices attended the gazer it was now no otherwise than distinctly black to his vision. That narrow white border was foam, he knew well; but its boisterous tosses were so distant as to appear a pulsation only, and its plashing was barely audible. A white border to a black sea—his funeral pall and its edging.[104]

Recalling Huxley's words, 'the rules of the game are what we call the laws of Nature', Knight becomes nature's prey in this prolonged 'experiment in killing'.[105] Yet when the threat of his immediate peril is removed by Elfride's innovative fashioning of a rope from her undergarments, and while directing her to let down the rope, Knight is 'already resuming his position of ruling power.'[106] In contrast to the rook that is placed 'in the

[!*"] Ibid., p. 315.

[!*#] Ibid., p. 317.

[!*$] *PBE*, p. 216.

[!*%] Huxley, p. 209. *PBE*, p. 217.

[!*&] *PBE*, p. 219.

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arms of one of her pawns', Elfride finds herself with the 'sufficiently complete result' of being 'encircled by his arms', with the fleeting sense that 'it was infinitely more to be even the slave of the greater than the queen of the less.'[107] Interestingly, due to its ability to jump diagonally, a knight is the only piece that can directly threaten a queen, without being threatened by the queen itself: symbolism borne out by Hardy casting Knight as the most destructive figure in Elfride's life. As Elfride hurries away back to West Endelstow, she is pictured as pursued game or quarry: 'like a hare; or more like a pheasant when, scampering away with a lowered tail, it has a mind to fly, but does not.'[108] Knight gathers up her garments – 'her knotted and twisted plumage of linen, lace, and embroidery work, and laid it across his arm' – conjuring the image of Elfride as a gamebird, reared and shot for the sport of the elite, her spoiled plumage over his arm recalling the way in which dead pheasants are carried in braces.[109]

While dozens of critics have paid close attention to the cliffhanger scene, and the presence of a directing agency working through the natural phenomena against Knight, the significance of the 'pair' of eyes Knight finds himself looking at – the eyes of a Trilobite 'dead and turned to stone' – has received less attention.[110] While it has been suggested before that due to the colour of the slate in that area of north Cornwall, the eyes of the trilobite could also have been blue, it is interesting to note that the hand Knight is dealt here – 'a pair' – is in card games a relatively low hand.[111] A 'pair of blue eyes' becomes Elfride's final wager in her gamble to persuade the indifferent Knight to pay her the admiration she so deeply craves from him. After her defeat in the chess games, followed by reading notes concerning her in his notebook, she challenges Knight to disclose his preference for female hair colour. When he replies 'Dark', knowing that her hair colour is pale brown, she 'hazarded her last and best treasure':

> She could not but be struck with the honesty of his opinions, and the worst of it was, that the more they went against her, the more she respected them. And

[107] Ibid., p. 220.

[108] Ibid., p. 221.

[109] Ibid., p. 221.

[110] Ibid., p. 213.

[111] Rebecca Welshman, 'Monuments, Memories, and Megaliths', paper presented at *Thomas Hardy: Literature and Context*, 3-6 April 2025, University of Oxford.

In Poker a pair is only more valuable than a High Card.

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> now, like a reckless gambler, she hazarded her last and best treasure. Her eyes: they were her all now.
> "What coloured eyes do you like best, Mr. Knight?" she said slowly. […]
> "I prefer hazel," he said serenely.
> She had played and lost again.[112]

Although *PBE* has been judged as 'one of [Hardy's] slighter efforts, thanks chiefly […] to a suspicion of undue sentimentality in the title', a reading of the presence of pairs in the novel – human and non-human – suggests that this judgment might be unduly superficial.[113]

A sense of tragedy ultimately overhangs the narrative, even when the chance for Elfride and Knight's happiness still seems possible. As they walk 'between the sunset and the moonrise', their shadows cast by the setting sun, Knight becomes aware of 'a rival pair' of shadows cast by the rising moon, which threatens to eclipse them.[114] These 'antagonistic' shadows represent their better or alternate selves; those that may have thrived under different circumstances:

> Their shadows, as cast by the western glare, showed signs of becoming obliterated in the interest of a rival pair in the opposite direction which the moon was bringing to distinctness.
> "I consider my life to some extent a failure," said Knight again after a pause, during which he had noticed the antagonistic shadows.
> "You! How?"
> "I don't precisely know. But in some way I have missed the mark."[115]

Knight's awareness that somehow he has 'missed the mark' in life is made through the metaphor of a shooting target, imbuing his realisation with military and sporting

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[!!"] *PBE*, p. 179.

[!!#] Harriet Waters Preston, 'Thomas Hardy', Century, XLVI. (1893), pp. 352-358 (p. 354). Michael Millgate notes a review by James Hutton for the Spectator who similarly criticised the novel's title for its sentimentality. See Michael Millgate, p. 138.

[!!$] *PBE*, p. 186.

[!!%] Ibid.

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associations, and again when the narrator tells us that 'Knight, in his own opinion, was one who had missed his mark by excessive aiming.'[116] In his appraisal of Elfride's character and the possible reasons for her sudden demise, Knight speculates that 'circumstance has, as usual, overpowered her purposes—fragile and delicate as she—liable to be overthrown in a moment by the coarse elements of accident.'[117] The implied vulnerability of Elfride as a chess piece 'liable to be overthrown in a moment', and the youthful exchange between Elfride and Stephen for the 'much-coveted hand', are prefigured by Geraldine's lines to Egbert in 'ILH':

> You have by this time learnt what life is; what particular positions, accidental though they may be, ask, nay, imperatively exact from us […]
> To be woven and tied in with the world by blood, acquaintance, tradition, and external habit, is to a woman to be utterly at the beck of that world's customs. In youth we do not see this. You and I did not see it. We were but a girl and a boy at the times of our meetings at Tollamore.[118]

In 'ILH' and *PBE*, the high stakes of life and death are explained by the youthful exuberance and even rashness of 'boy and girl' so carefully detailed in both stories. When Stephen and Knight, both estranged from Elfride, are reunited under one roof, neither is willing, due to each harbouring a hope to marry her, to share their real feelings. When Knight asks Stephen, 'do you love her now?', Stephen replies, 'with all the strategy love suggested.'[119] It is only once behind a closed door that Knight can reflect on his position as a 'rival' to Stephen, and the effort it takes to 'mask' his true feelings:

> To wear a mask, to dissemble his feelings as he had in their late miserable conversation, was such torture that he could support it no longer. It was the first time in Knight's life that he had ever been so entirely the player of a part.[120]

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[116] Ibid., p. 328.
[117] Ibid., p. 376.
[118] 'ILH', p. 89.
[119] *PBE*, p. 360.
[120] Ibid., p. 361.

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Elfride, the 'reckless gambler', is the only character in *PBE* bold enough to gamble everything she has, with the high risk that entails.[121] Of the three main characters, Elfride was inevitably going to lose because the odds – her position in society as a young woman – are stacked against her.

Although further analysis of textual affinities between 'ILH' and *PBE* is required, the comparisons made in this article suggest that Hardy incorporated elements of the earlier *The Poor Man and the Lady* into *PBE*, while also employing the experience he gained in having written *PBE* in his revision of the unpublished work into novella form for publication in 1878. Perhaps due to an essential philosophical incompatibility and the ideological disjuncture between the public and the army in contemporary society, the influence of the military imagination on the nineteenth-century creative mind is often overlooked. The prominence of the Franco-Prussian War in European society may have influenced Hardy's decision to use language which he believed would have appealed to the reading public of the time. Further exploration of the presence of game terminology and imagery in Hardy's other works might offer new ways of thinking about the techniques he employed in the construction of his fictional worlds. Yet at the same time, the high stakes of *PBE*, which result in Elfride's untimely death, remind us of the emotional intensity, drawn from his own youthful experiences in Cornwall, that Hardy invested in this early novel. Hardy's chance meeting with Emma upon being dispatched to Cornwall on a business matter surely contributed to his fictional vision, wherein characters are moved by a directive presence or unseen hand. As in a game of chess, where moves cannot be reversed, the hand of fate was moving him into a new position, to which he would be unable to return.

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[121] Ibid., p. 178.

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including a chapter in *Thomas Hardy in Context* (CUP, 2013). Her latest essay, which highlights military associations in the works of Shakespeare, appeared in *Reading the River in Shakespeare's Britain* (Edinburgh University Press, 2024).

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The Parameters of Play in Honoré Daumier's Caricatures

CATHERINE J. L. THEOBALD AND ALYSSA N. KNUDSEN

FOR OVER FIFTY years, the French artist Honoré Daumier depicted Parisians of all walks of life in ground-breaking French publications like *La Silhouette* (1829-31), *La Caricature* (1830-43), and *Le Charivari* (1832-1937), the inspiration for the English magazine *Punch* and the first daily satirical newspaper.[1] Fuelled by the political tumult of the July Revolution and the regime changes that followed, Daumier's masterful caricatures generated a 'human comedy' documenting the inequalities and idiosyncrasies of mid-nineteenth-century French society.[2] The son of a glazier, the artist grew up as a member of the petite bourgeoisie but later mixed with famous writers and visual artists of his day, providing him with an insider's view of different French social orders. Daumier's 4000 lithographs thus offer a satirical lens for better understanding French urban society during the upheavals of the nineteenth century. His prints reflect a period shaped by an expanding middle class, the growth of mass media, numerous political rebellions, and a growing women's suffrage movement contending with systemic misogyny. As we demonstrate in this article dedicated to Daumier's illustrations of adults in play spaces, the multimedia nature of caricature allows for a sophisticated engagement with such weighty topics, often on the same page, and usually behind a smokescreen of physical and verbal humour.[3]

[!] Patricia Mainardi, *Another World: Nineteenth Century Illustrated Print Culture* (Yale University Press, 2017), p. 55; Roger Passeron, *Daumier* (Rizzoli, 1981), p. 49.

[¨] Most often associated with the writings of Daumier's friend, editor, and collaborator Honoré de Balzac, the term 'comédie humaine' has also been widely applied to Daumier's work. See, for example, Passeron, p. 117.

[#] As word-image scholars, we view his multimedia caricatures as 'texts' that include verbal and visual content. This idea is reinforced by the fact that when Daumier's higher quality lithographs were sold in print shops, they almost always included the titles and captions. In addition, period censors largely viewed the verbal and visual matter as part of the same caricature (Robert Justin Goldstein, *Censorship of Political Caricature in Nineteenth-Century France* (Kent State University Press, 1989), p. 15). This practice is also in keeping with most modern discussions of his caricatures, since it is impossible to know which legends and titles Daumier wrote himself, particularly those directed by Charles Philipon, the co-founder of *La Silhouette* and publisher of both *La Caricature* and *Le Charivari*. It is important to

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Derived from the Latin *carricare*, meaning 'to charge a firearm' or 'to exaggerate', the term *caricature* made its début in French in the seventeenth century to define a type of portrait combining realistic depiction and ridiculous distortion.[4] Its first appearance in a European dictionary, Filippo Baldinucci's *Vocabolario toscano dell' arte* (1681), will guide our exploration of Daumier's works related to the act of play. Baldinucci defines a *caricatura* as a portrait 'quanto si può somiglianti al tutto della persona ritratta; ma per giuoco, e talora per ischerno, aggravando o crescendo i difetti delle parti imitate sproporzionatamente, talmente che nel tutto appariscano essere essi, e nelle parti sieno variati' ('as similar as possible to the whole of the person portrayed; but for fun/play, and sometimes for mockery, accentuating/worsening or increasing the defects of the parts imitated disproportionately').[5] Flexing the critical muscle of caricature, Daumier navigates those paradoxes in different ways as he balances its cruelty with Baldinucci's idea of fun or play (*giuoco*), particularly in certain lithographs focusing on leisure spaces.[6] Moreover, our word-image analyses of his texts devoted to play signal a rich self-reflexivity, for they also document the rapid expansion and power of a new kind of artistic playground: the mass-produced caricature.

Printing, Politics, and Play

Honoré Daumier's impressive body of work is at once a product and perpetuator of the 'explosion' of both caricature and popular media during the first half of the nineteenth

note, however, the potential influence of Philipon's perspective on material appearing in his publications, as explored in David S. Kerr, *Caricature and French Political Culture, 1830-1848: Charles Philipon and the Illustrated Press* (Oxford, 2000). Goldstein reminds us that censorship also played a role in shaping the illustrations, captions, and topics of French caricatures (Goldstein, pp. 1-32).

[$] Entries 'Caricature' and 'Charger' in *Larousse* (*Dictionnaire*) [online], <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/caricature/13298> and <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/charger/14747> (accessed 30 July 2025); Bertrand Tillier, *Caricaturesque: la caricature en France, toute une histoire… de 1789 à nos jours* (La Martinière, 2016), p. 15.

[%] All translations are ours (and quite literal) unless indicated otherwise.

[&] For a discussion of the history of the related concepts of pastimes, leisure, and recreation – ideas that took shape in the early modern and industrializing eras – see Peter Burke, 'The Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe', *Past & Present*, 146 (1995), pp. 136–50.

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century, a change that had a great impact on the spread and use of information.[7] Jürgen Habermas argues that the increase in print material available post-Revolution to more members of the public sphere – a place of debate and political decision-making – was essential for the ferment of democratic ideals.[8] Those political changes were thus interwoven with the skyrocketing circulation of the illustrated journal made possible by innovations in printing, especially the invention of the lithographic process in 1796 and the steam press in 1810. Lithographs better maintained the original quality of the images than both woodblock printing and engraving, while radically decreasing the time and cost of production.[9] Newspapers and lithographs joined forces in the satirical press, becoming the main venue for caricature from the 1830s onward for a rapidly expanding reading public.[10] Indeed, this was a moment of 'éclat inégalé' ('unequalled brilliance') for the art of caricature, which underwent a shift in tone toward more sophisticated and cruel attacks.[11] A fusion of incredible draughtsmanship, political fervour, and technological revolutions, the art form had far-reaching geographical and historical impacts: David Kunzle explains that, together with William Hogarth's and George Cruikshank's contributions, nineteenth-century French caricature 'established the panoramic vocabulary on which the picture story of the future was to draw'.[12]

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[7] On the increase of caricature, see Christian Achet, 'La caricature politique, médium méconnu de l'année 1819?', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 392.2 (2018), pp. 107–39 (p. 139), doi.org/10.3917/ahrf.392.0107; for popular media, see Mainardi, *Another World*, p. 13 and 23.

[8] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (The MIT Press, 1989).

[9] Regarding the steam press, see Jean Duché, *Deux siècles d'histoire de France par la caricature, 1760-1960: 1 consulat, 2 empires, 3 monarchies, 4 révolutions, 5 républiques* (Pont royal, 1961), p. 106 ; for information on the development of lithography, see Michel Ragon, *Le dessin d'humour: histoire de la caricature et du dessin humoristique en France* (Seuil, 1992), p. 37, Mainardi, *Another World*, p. 13 and 23, and Passeron, pp. 40-41; for the benefits of lithography, see Mainardi, *Another World*, p. 31 and Goldstein, p. 126.

[10] For the economics of lithography, see Tillier, p. 22; regarding the reading public, see Martyn Lyons, 'The New Readers of Nineteenth-Century France', in *Readers and Society in Nineteenth-Century France: Workers, Women, Peasants*, ed. by Martyn Lyons (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2001), p. 1, doi:10.1057/9780230287808_1.

[11] Ragon, p. 37.

[12] David Kunzle, *Rebirth of the English Comic Strip: A Kaleidoscope, 1847-1870* (University Press of Mississippi, 2021), p. 11.

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We should thus not underestimate the power of caricature at the time to provoke and persuade through exaggeration, all key elements of its definition.[13] Daumier's harsh punishment attests to that power perhaps more than anything: he received a six-month prison sentence for one of his first political cartoons, *Gargantua*.[14]

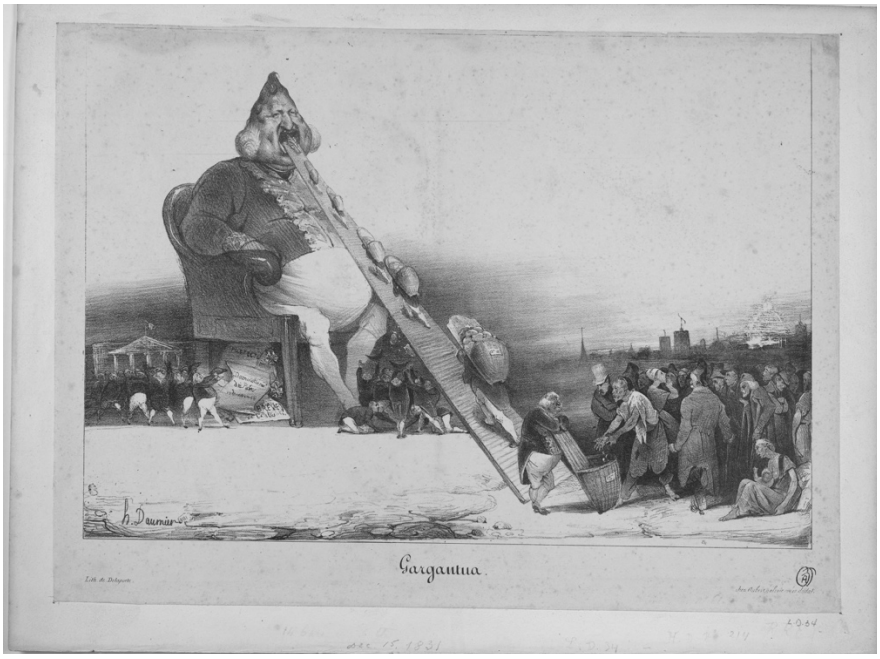


Fig. 1. Honoré Daumier, *Gargantua* (1831), lithograph, Courtesy of Robert D. Farber University Archives & Special Collections Department, Brandeis University.

This 1831 lithograph uses the vulgar and absurdist contours of François Rabelais's sixteenth-century giant tales and those of traditional French farce to depict the king.[15] It also exploits the incendiary trope of Louis-Philippe's head as a soft, rotting pear, first drawn by Daumier's editor and collaborator, Charles Philipon.[16] The monarch appears as a greedy, mechanical giant swallowing the nation's wealth, which is delivered by the hands of its poor. The king simultaneously defecates peerages and commissions,

[!#] Ragon, p. 13.

[!$] For details about Daumier's arrest and sentencing, see Passeron, pp. 65-72.

[!%] Medieval French farces such as *La Farce du cuvier* (*The Farce of the Washtub*) (c. 1490) and *La Farce du pet* (*The Farce of the Fart*) (c. 1550) emphasise physical violence and bodily functions.

[!&] See, for example, Patricia Mainardi, 'Of Pears and Kings', *The Public Domain Review*, 8 January 2020 <https://publicdomainreview.org/essay/of-pears-and-kings/> (accessed 20 March 2025) and Goldstein, pp. 128-55. For more on Daumier's *Gargantua*, see Elizabeth C. Childs, 'Big Trouble: Daumier, Gargantua, and the Censorship of Political Caricature', *Art Journal*, 51.1 (1992), pp. 26–37, doi:10.2307/777251.

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presenting them as soiled prizes to be gathered up by his bourgeois sycophants. Such hostility reflects a deep cynicism about Louis-Philippe's *juste-milieu* doctrine that advocated economic and political moderation while increasing the power of the haute bourgeoisie. This middle class was 'fast becoming the upper class all over again', as Thierry Pech has observed, '[by combining] a powerful work ethic with a formidable capacity for saving […] which nurtured the highest ambitions.'[17] Caricatures like *Gargantua* were representative of a relentless campaign in the popular media throughout the first half of the 1830s designed to discredit both the king and the arrivistes who supported him. They factored greatly into Louis-Philippe's eventual crackdown on the press, and the resulting September Laws of 1835 reinstated the former system of censorship, thus making the art of caricature an enemy of the state.[18]

Following that policy of restored rigid censorship, Daumier's caricatures largely avoid overt criticism of political leaders, although we can identify an underlying thread of staunch republicanism in his social satire.[19] His images of the bourgeoisie, a class 'dominant and difficult to join', remain scathing: he frequently makes the big-bellied figurants of *Gargantua* his main subjects, often in opposition to the artisan or working classes in series such as *Les Bons Bourgeois* (*The Good Bourgeois*) (1846-47) and *Moeurs conjugales* (*Married Life*) (1839-42).[20] As we will see, the related concepts of play and sport figured among the main topics of satire in his explorations of different social orders interacting in their prescribed environments.

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[17] See Gwénael Lamarque, 'La Monarchie de Juillet: Une monarchie du centre? Le « Juste-milieu »: évolutions et contradictions de la culture orléaniste juillet 1830-février 1848', in *Le Centrisme en France aux XIXe et XXe siècles: Un échec ?*, ed. by Sylvie Guillaume (Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, 2005), pp. 13–28, doi:10.4000/books.msha.17947 ; Thierry Pech, 'Two hundred years of the middle class in France (1789-2010)', *L'Economie politique*, 49.1 (2011), pp. 69–97 (p. 5), doi.org/10.3917/leco.049.0069.

[18] See, for example, Matthieu Letourneux and Alain Vaillant, *L'Empire du rire (19ème-21ème siècles)* (CNRS, 2021), p. 74, and Christophe Charle, 'La Presse de la Monarchie de Juillet: Des contraintes politiques aux contraintes économiques', in *Le Siècle de la presse*, *L'Univers historique* (Seuil, 2009), pp. 37–71.

[19] An important exception to this was his invention in 1850 of the character *Ratapoil* (*Skinned Rat*), a character representing a partisan of Louis-Napoléon (Passeron, p. 117). On Daumier's Republicanism, see Bruce Laughton, *The Drawings of Daumier and Millet* (Yale University Press, 1991), p. 189.

[20] Pech, pp. 5-6.

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In virtue of the simple 'fish out of water' comedic trope, middle-class members pursuing traditional recreational activities formerly reserved for the nobility, such as the fashionable promenade or the hunt, are a ready target of his lithographs.[21] The main examples of this article are plates evoking play, which show bourgeois and working-class citizens participating in relatively 'new' games like billiards and dominoes and frequenting new spaces like public swimming areas.[22] Joan-Lluís Marfany affirms that we find 'evidence of a gradual rise of a sense of "free" time among ordinary people' in European urban areas during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in Paris, where the population quintuples over the course of the latter century.[23]

Emphasising the framing concepts of interlopers and of adults acting childishly, Daumier frequently depicts his subjects as children by altering their proportions and exaggerating their primal urges. The strong sociological association between children and the act of play throughout Johan Huizinga's and Lev Vygotsky's writings informs our analyses.[24] Both theorists cite play as a fundamental element of human existence; according to Huizinga: 'It is a significant function—that is to say, there is some sense to it. In play there is something "at play" which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action'.[25] By satirising adults in play spaces, Daumier also taps

"! On the promenade, see William H. Sewell Jr., *Capitalism and the Emergence of Civic Equality in Eighteenth-Century France* (University of Chicago Press, 2021), p. 135. For the hunt, see Edouard Decq, 'L'Administration des eaux et forêts dans le domaine royal en France aux XIVe et XVe siècles: Mémoire Posthume d'Édouard Decq', *Bibliothèque de l'École Des Chartes*, 84 (1923), pp. 92-115 (p. 98), doi.org/10.3406/bec.1923.448688 and the royal edict Conférence de l'Ordonnance de Louis XIV of August 1669 at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k96026941/f7.item.texteImage> (accessed 15 March, 2025).

"" For more on the growth of sporting and gaming, particularly among the lower classes, see Jean Durry and Bernard Jeu, *L'histoire en mouvements: le sport dans la société française (XIXe-XXe siècle)* (Colin, 1992), pp. 101-03 and Joan-Lluís Marfany, 'The Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe', *Past & Present*, 156 (1997), pp. 174-91 (p. 148) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/651182> (accessed 1 April 2025).

"# Ibid., p. 148. For population growth, see Paul Gerbod, 'A propos du loisir parisien au XIXe siècle', *Ethnologie Française*, 23.4 (1993), pp. 613–22 (p. 613) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40989503> (accessed 22 April 2025).

"$ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (1949) and Lev Vygotsky 'Play and Its Role in the Mental Development of the Child', *International Research in Early Childhood Education*, 7.2 (2016), 3-25, doi:10.2753/RPO1061-040505036.

"% Huizinga, p. 1.

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into the universal comprehensibility of what Huizinga terms the 'play-concept', an inherent idea of what true play is (according to both theorists, it is an absorbing, meaningful, free activity that requires imagination but that has rules and order).[26] Daumier's lithographs about recreation trade on the immediate recognition of what it means to be 'childish', but, paradoxically, they suggest seriousness instead of mirth. The gravity depicted in the prints does not rule out the idea of play, however, since Huizinga cites its frequent serious nature and emphasises that laughter is not a requirement.[27] Similarly, Vygotsky, while recognising a player's goal of attaining 'maximum pleasure', frequently evokes the serious nature of play for both small children and adolescents.[28]

Under Daumier's crayon and with the addition of multi-layered verbal elements to his images, play often becomes folly: a threat to morality, decency, and even society as a whole. Huizinga's assertion that '[true] play, however, is not foolish' is a key observation to consider as we explore Daumier's play contexts, which expose satire's inherent mean-spiritedness by staging exaggerated characters who often do not play.[29] Underneath its playful façade, suggested at times by its seemingly improvised lines and exaggerated visages, caricature is, by nature, 'cruelle, souvent triviale' ('cruel, often trivial'), as Ragon unequivocally states and the following examples show.[30] Breaking the rules of how and how often the expanding reading public experienced satire, Daumier's lithographs shore up period biases, especially concerning women's roles in society. They also serve up subversion on artistic, political, and social levels as they engage in a dangerous game with French censors. His texts centred around play, particularly those showing transgressive behaviours, thus also present a metacommentary on the power and possibilities of playing in print media.

"& Ibid., pp. 1-10; Vygotsky, pp. 9-20.

"' Huizinga, pp. 5-6.

"(Vygotsky, p. 20.

") Ibid., p. 6.

#* Ragon, p. 13.

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Games and Play Spaces for the Men of Daumier's World

A dichotomy of foolishness and seriousness runs through Daumier's many distortions of the act of playing among the French middle class, a demographic that was more established than its English and German counterparts in the nineteenth century.[31] Jerrold Seigel explains that, throughout Europe, more people gained access to 'the expanding and thickening networks that opened the way to new forms of modernity and of bourgeois life during the nineteenth century', and increased access to leisure activities, mostly for male citizens, was a prime example of that change.[32] Daumier's play scenes witness this greater overall participation in recreational activities, and our focus turns to certain modish pastimes that took hold among the non-noble classes: billiards, dominoes, and swimming. The word-image interactions in these publications and their numerous shared traits will further elucidate certain socio-political and satirical aspects of Daumier's work.

We find social tensions and ironies in one such text set in a billiards hall. The exploding popularity of the game provided a fertile environment for Daumier with its mixture of social strata and cocktail of vices. *Une partie de queues de billard* (*A game of pool cues*) is part of a series of thirteen texts from 1865 dedicated to carom billiards, a game that features a cue stick and three balls on a pocketless table.

[#!] Pech, pp. 70-71.

[#"] Jerrold Seigel, *Modernity and Bourgeois Life: Society, Politics, and Culture in England, France and Germany since 1750* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 185; Richard Holt, *Sport and Society in Modern France* (Archon, 1981), pp. 3-4 and p. 170; Durry and Jeu, pp. 62-67.

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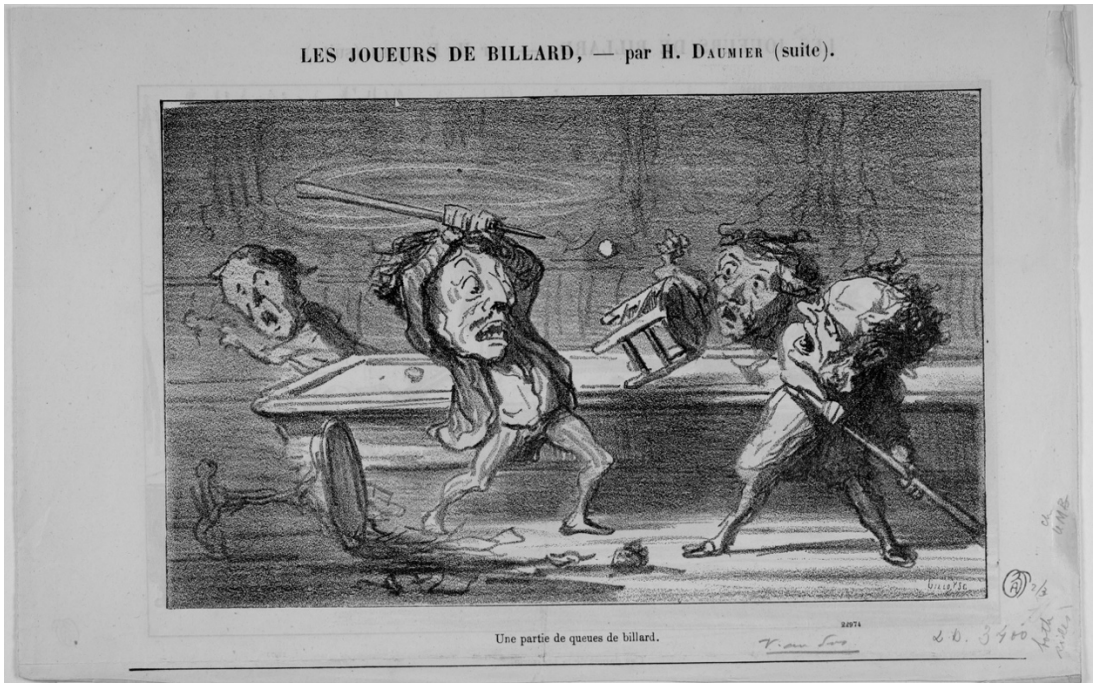


Fig. 2. Honoré Daumier, *Une partie de queues de billard* (1865), gillotage, Courtesy of Robert D. Farber University Archives & Special Collections Department, Brandeis University.

While the exact origins of the sport remain hazy (some authors cite a relationship to medieval croquet), such gaming tables were a fixture in noble houses and palaces throughout the previous centuries, especially at Louis XIV's court.[33] An early master of the game, the former French soldier François Mingaud, references that heritage in the title of his 1827 treatise *Noble Jeu de Billiard: Coups extraordinaires et surprenants* (*The Noble Game of Billiards: Extraordinary and surprising strokes*). Mingaud revolutionised the cue by adding a chalked leather tip, allowing for more ludic play, an invention that factored into the game's growing ubiquity in urbanising France among the working and middle classes.[34] Targeting both public and private tables, the French billiards tax of 1871 documents that popularity, even among women, yet female participants are absent in Fig. 2.[35] We indeed find female players in one of the billiards caricatures, *Ces*

[##] For more on the game's origins, see Everton, *The Story of Billiards and Snooker* (Cassell, 1979), p. 9. Louis XIV was an avid player, as depicted in the 1694 engraving by Antoine Trouvain of the king playing billiards with his brother Philippe at Versailles (Antoine Trouvain, *Troisième appartement* [online] <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8406998r.item> (accessed 3 April, 2025)).

[#$] Michael Phelan, *The Game of Billiards* (D. Appleton, 1858), p. iv.; Entry 'Billard (de billes)', *Larousse* (*Dictionnaire*) [online], <https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/billard/26952> (accessed 16 March 2025); See also Everton, pp. 10-12.

[#%] Phelan, p. iv.

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dames de la brasserie (*Those women of the tavern*), but their presentation suggests a subservient role rather than one of equal participants in the game, as explained below.

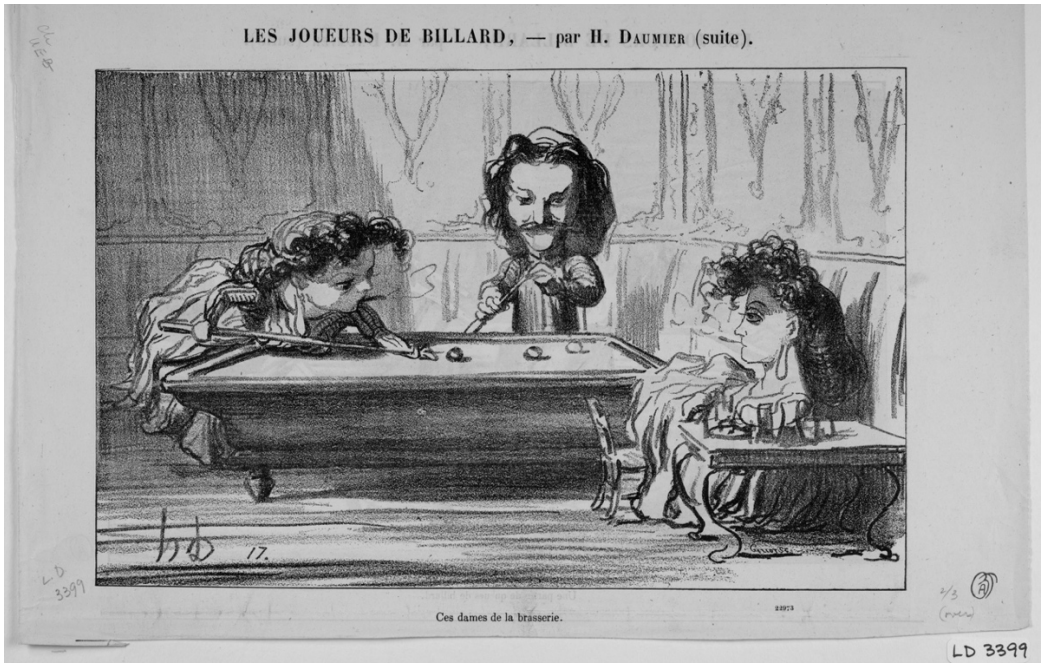


Fig. 3. Honoré Daumier, *Ces dames de la brasserie* (1865), gillotage, Courtesy of Robert D. Farber University Archives & Special Collections Department, Brandeis University.

In the male-dominated space of the billiards hall, the characters' actions, appearances, and attitudes interact with the drawing style and word play of the legend to amplify both the humour and the criticism of this crowded social space.

Une partie de queues de billard is the final entry in a set of six caricatures that takes up the initial pages of the 11 March 1865 edition of *Le Journal amusant*, and it thus represents the crescendo of this group of texts targeting billiards. Beginning with a calm scene between neatly dressed bourgeois entitled *La première leçon* (*The First Lesson*), the six images all depict ill-proportioned players with large, childish heads who become increasingly more dishevelled and unruly throughout the set.

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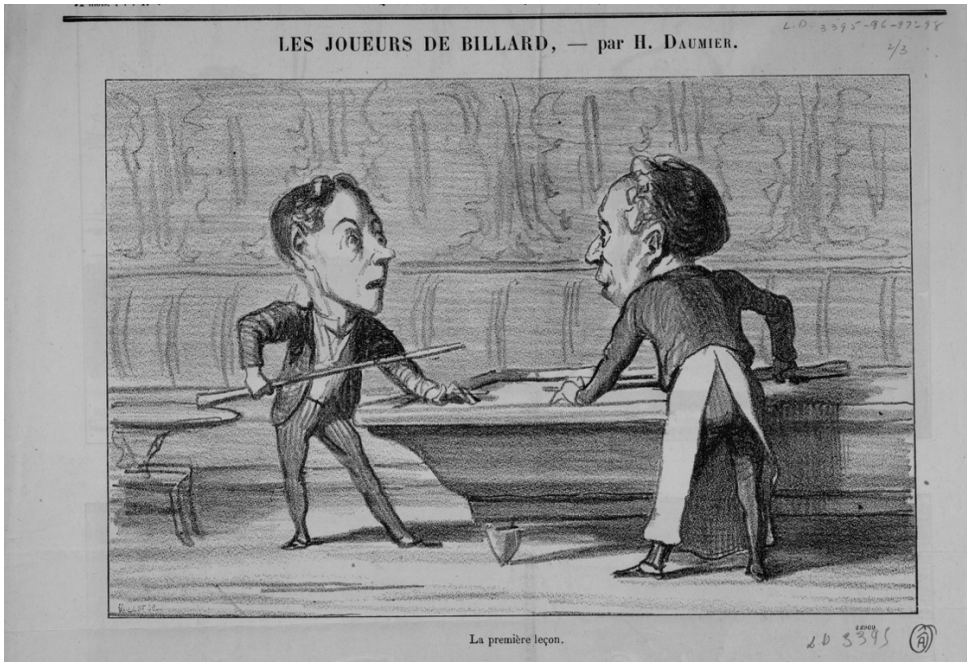


Fig. 4. Honoré Daumier, *La première leçon* (1865), gillotage, Courtesy of Robert D. Farber University Archives & Special Collections Department, Brandeis University.

In *La première leçon*, Daumier uses clean, tight lines to render his bourgeois subjects in their striped trousers and, for the figure on the left, waistcoat and jacket. By the time we reach the final Daumier plate of this edition, however, the focus has shifted away from an orderly game practised by men in expensive suits and top hats (key symbols of the well-heeled in many of Daumier's drawings) toward the baseness of the players. Departing from the sober billiards 'lesson' of Fig. 4, we now arrive in Fig. 2 at a match in which the rules – of both decorum and the game itself – have been suspended as the scene devolves into violence. The four men grimace as they knock over side tables, throw stools, run from the scene, and threaten one another with their cue sticks. Three of them have exaggeratedly raised eyebrows, and all of their mouths are open, suggesting surprise or anger. The second figure on the left, whose suit identifies him as potentially the only bourgeois of the four, looks particularly enraged as he raises his cue overhead in a high sword stance whilst baring his teeth. The evolution in tone over the course of the four pages also appears in the style of the images: Daumier's drawing technique changes, as shown by a comparison of *La première leçon*, appearing first, and *Une partie de queues de billard*, for the two caricatures share a similar background and furniture. In the latter (and final) image, the table is tipped over and sketched with dynamic, overlapping pen strokes. The thin, imprecise lines used to render the men evoke rapid movements. Indeed, when contrasted with the walls in *La première leçon*,

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even the boiserie panelling in the background seems to shake with energy, a technique that at once reflects and amplifies the billiards room clash. Violence takes over the competition and the drawing, an idea that forms the basis of a multi-faceted comic critique.

On a surface level, the many visual markers of *Une partie de queues de billard* that emphasise the excesses of the players offer the reader instant pleasure. As in the popular marionette shows of the time, the distorted bodies and raw physical comedy of the scene seem geared toward eliciting a quick laugh. In terms of the objects of criticism in the series, the most obvious target seems to be the popularity of the public billiards hall. That space held a reputation for behaviours considered immoral, such as gambling, drinking, and prostitution, 'a distinctive and distinguishing feature of nineteenth-century Parisian culture'.[36] Indeed, sex work permeated similar social spaces, such as dancehalls, cafés, and the new *brasseries à femmes* (women's taverns) that first appeared in the 1860s.[37] The two doll-like women with extraordinarily large heads and elaborate outfits in *Ces dames de la brasserie* embody all of those perceived vices as they drink, smoke, and shoot. Daumier's billiards series engages with the idea of an erosion of values by visually and verbally calling out 'those women' in the caption.[38] They appear part of a narrative of moral decay spun by many authors and social commentators of the time, a phenomenon that proved impossible to control by the government, despite its significant efforts to do so.[39] The final image, *Une Partie de*

[#&] Regarding immorality, see Everton, p. 13. For the growth of drinking establishments as related to sports and games, see Holt, p. 155, and, for the general explosion of alcohol consumption and licenses in France, see Michael R. Marrus, 'Social Drinking in the "Belle Epoque"', *Journal of Social History*, 7.2 (1974), 115–41 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3786351> (accessed 24 April 2025). On prostitution, see Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (Getty, 2003), p. 1.

[#'] Andrew Israel Ross, 'Serving Sex: Playing with Prostitution in the "Brasseries à Femmes" of Late Nineteenth-Century Paris', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 24.2 (2015), pp/ 288–313 (p. 288, p. 294), doi:10.7560/JHS24205. For the lifting of restrictions in 1880 on prostitution in these brasseries, see Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 317.

[#(] [Emphasis added].

[#)] Regarding moral decay, see Ross, pp. 288-89 and Clayson, p. 1. Harsin discusses at length the various measures throughout the century to control prostitution, pp. 39-55 and pp. 75-130. For more on the system of registering prostitutes and how it changed under Haussmann, see Ross, p.294 and Alin Corbin, *Les Filles de Noce: Misére Sexuelle et Prostitution (XIX siècle)* (Flammarion, 2015), pp. 171-78.

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queues de billard, is another example of that narrative, since the bourgeois ringleader succumbs to primal instincts.

In the context of his many caricatures about playing, we propose that Daumier's work launches a broader critique of the ways that adults approached leisure places and activities in nineteenth-century French society. The above examples exploit the technical idea of playing as a framing device, but the spirit of play is missing. In *Ces dames de la brasserie*, the fact that the nearly identical women share the same hairstyle, clothing, and even jewellery accords them a decorative, passive role, which finds its echo in the vacant stare of the figure on the right. Her companion seems to concentrate on her shot, but her face is serious, as is that of the male figure between them. Indeed, in the six texts of *Les Joueurs de billard*, a gravity reigns in the faces of the main characters of all levels of society. Although that attitude does not exclude play, as discussed above, Daumier depicts a larger trend suggested by Huizinga, that 'the nineteenth century […] lost many of the play-elements so characteristic of former ages'.[40] Huizinga cites 'the increasing systematisation and regimentation of sport' resulting in a 'fatal shift toward over-seriousness'.[41] An example of that change, billiards went through an intense period of technological advancement and expansion in France at the time. The excess implied by Huizinga's term 'over-seriousness' takes shape in the expressions and actions of the players in *Une partie de queues de billard*. The title of the caricature reinforces the notion, for it changes the expression *Une partie de billard* ('a game/match of billiards') to *une partie de queues de billard* ('a game/match of billiard cues'), ironically suggesting the metamorphosis of the traditional 'noble' game into a mêlée in which the players use their gaming objects as weapons. That change signals a move away from Huizinga's notion of pure play, which lies 'outside the antithesis of wisdom and folly, and equally outside those of truth and falsehood, good and evil. Although it is a non-material activity it has no moral function'.[42] In *Une partie de queues de billard*, ambition, madness, and malice take over the game, inviting moral judgment upon this episode of non-play. While we can view the title as playful – a 'play on words' – Daumier's gallows humour does not evoke the mystery and 'fun' of the

[$*] Huizinga, 'The Play Element in Contemporary Sport' in Eric Dunning, *The Sociology of Sport: A Selection of Readings*, 2.2 (Cass, 1971), p. 11.

[$!] Ibid., p. 13.

[$"] Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 6.

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innocent play of children and instead offers an acerbic commentary. The exaggerated caricatures of *Les Joueurs de billard* collectively highlight the 'unhealthy' practices of this leisure space. However, it is the figure holding the billiards cue – the most vicious of all – who acts as a lightning rod for the artist's decades-long critique of the selfishness and heady aspirations of the bourgeois class, as we saw in *Gargantua*.

Daumier again uses the framing concept of game-playing and recreation to ridicule his subjects in one of his many lithographs dedicated to swimming, *UN JOLI CALEMBOUR* (*A PRETTY PUN*) (Fig. 5), part of his series *Les Baigneurs* (*The Bathers*) (1839-42).



Fig. 5. Honoré Daumier, *UN JOLI CALEMBOUR* (1842), lithograph, Courtesy of Robert D. Farber University Archives & Special Collections Department, Brandeis University.

Swimming surged in popularity for the lower and middle classes throughout the nineteenth century in both natural areas and constructed pools, and Daumier exploits both settings.[43] In fact, Daumier's lodgings on the Ile Saint-Louis were located near one of the popular floating swimming barges first established at the end of the previous century, places devoted to hygiene, cooling, exercise, and recreation that circumvented

[$#] Gerbod p. 615; Isabelle Duhau, 'Les baignades en rivière d'Île-de-France, des premiers aménagements à la piscine parisienne Joséphine-Baker', *Livraisons de l'histoire de l'architecture* [online], 14 (2007), 4, doi:10.4000/lha.422.

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the prohibition of swimming directly in the Seine.[44] In the interest of modesty and snobbery, those spaces were physically divided by gender and class (via differing price points and amenities), and many of them eventually featured warm water, dining rooms, equipment rentals, and private cabanas and pools.[45] One of his works, likely set on such a barge, is of singular importance to this article, as it presents a palimpsest of ideas related to sport, play, and games. Appearing in *Le Charivari* in 1842, *UN JOLI CALEMBOUR* likewise presents overlapping word-image interactions to reveal the themes of class division, competition, and over-seriousness discussed above, while offering new types of playfulness to consider in Daumier's work.

In this image, we discover a dim room with a wooden floor connected to a swimming area that is occupied by two bourgeois men, identified by their titles as 'Général' and 'Baron'. The men drying off to the left, the towels on the chair, and the thin man's wet hair suggest that they have just completed their swim and have moved on to other entertainments in a more private area.[46] They are drinking and beginning a match of layout dominoes, a game originally from China that, like billard, grew in popularity in France at the time.[47] The game divides the competitors, a theme that manifests itself in their opposing body language. The slump of the man leaning forward in contrast to the relaxed posture of the second figure reinforces the agonistic tone of their interactions. That tension also surfaces in their facial expressions of gloom and glee, both evidence of how seriously they take their match. The struggle between them, echoed in their differing body language and sizes, is articulated with their near-nakedness and contrasting expressions to great comic effect. By removing most of their clothes, Daumier not only cashes in on a basic engine of physical comedy (nudity), but also ironically associates the men with ancient Greeks: they are contemporary Olympians, naked warriors focused on victory. Their faces – a downturned mouth and brow on the left and a devilish grin on the right – reinforce the connection by

[$$] For Daumier's residential proximity to a swimming barge, see Passeron, p. 141 ; Davide Lombardo, 'Se baigner ensemble: Les corps au quotidien et les bains publics parisiens avant 1850 selon Daumier', *Histoire urbaine*, 31.2 (2011), pp. 49-51, doi:10.3917/rhu.031.0047.

[$%] Duhau, pp. 2-17, p. 29; Lombardo, pp. 47–48.

[$&] Daumier targets this 'après-swim' ritual in another caricature, *Après l'eau, le feu* (1858), in which two bathers smoke after swimming on a barge.

[$'] Entry 'Domino', *Britannia Academic* [online], <https://academic-eb-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/levels/collegiate/article/domino/30883> (accessed 17 April 2025).

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resembling a pair of Greek theatre masks. Here, however, the competition takes the form of a seated game of dominoes in a post-swim lounge, an absurd foil to the idea of the pursuits of the Greek athlete or actor.

Taking the form of a mini-dialogue, the caption emphasizes their competitiveness and state of undress while introducing a verbal tragi-comedy: 'Avez-vous du six, Général?.. - Attendez donc Baron, je vais vous faire une petite culotte qui ne vous irait pas mal dans ce moment ci! hi! hi! hi! hi!....' ('Do you have a six, General?.. - Just you wait Baron, I will make you a little pair of pants which would suit you right now! hi! hi! hi! hi!....'). The general's suggestion of making the baron wear a small, humiliating garment prepared by his opponent enlivens the caption with the promised 'pun' of the title, underscored by exclamation points. The word play thus works with the visual components of the caricature to intensify the humour: here, the baron has neither trousers nor underwear in the first place and will be stripped naked metaphorically by the general's win. The irony generated between the title and the caption, the 'pretty' pun that references the baron's backside, adds to the humour, and, at the end of the legend, the general laughs out loud ('hi! hi! hi! hi!') in anticipation of his win, encouraging a similar reaction from the reader. However, the dejected countenance of his partner points simultaneously to the drama of the match and to that of a broader commentary. Separated from their visual markers of wealth and status, the two members of the social élite project childishness as they taunt, gloat, and pout in the *huis clos* of the game room. The caricature dives even further below the surface laughter into the domain of sharp satire when we consider that the man on the right relaxes on a larger chair, a type of visual throne, in this play space. The subtle reference to such 'ambitions of grandeur' exposes again an overarching critique in Daumier's work of bourgeois ambition. The laughter, pun, wine goblets, swimming venue, and game of dominoes indicate layered pleasures, but *UN JOLI CALEMBOUR* implies, through a multimedia, satirical palimpsest of games, that the joy of sport and playing is not always shared by all.

The oscillation between pleasure and displeasure enacted in the above leisure spaces of the billiards hall and the bathing area also accentuates the self-reflexivity in Daumier's work. Caricature, as we have seen, relies upon both lightness and gravity to engage and persuade the reader. While we do not know much about Daumier's artistic process or emotional engagement with his texts, it seems fair to say that generating

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such complex content would involve, at once, hard work and creativity, regardless of editorial input.[48] The art and literary critic Charles-François Farcy in his comparison of English and French satirical depictions in the *Journal des artistes et des amateurs* (1828) declares as much when he appreciates the skill and wit of French caricaturists: 'Les Français, meilleurs dessinateurs, […] comme, dieu merci, l'esprit ne leur manque pas, ils s'arrangent de manière à le laisser dominer dans le faire comme dans la pensée de leurs caricatures' ('The French, better draftsmen, […] since, thank God, they never lack in wit, they let wit dominate the form as well as the content of their caricatures').[49] In the case of Daumier, we perceive his imaginative gifts in the varying style, execution, and exaggerations of his drawings. Daumier scholar Philippe Roberts-Jones highlights this creativity when admiring the artist's 'verve', 'originalité', and 'humour' in the *Idylles parlementaires* series of 1850-51.[50] On the other side of the coin, Roberts-Jones notices that Daumier's many prints about the economic side of art suggest that hard work and hardship underpin artistry. He cites the 1845 lithograph showing two impoverished artists dancing to keep warm, 'Quand on a brulé [sic] son dernier chevalet!' ('When the last easel has been burned!'), as a prime example of Daumier's view that 'l'art est difficile' ('art is difficult').[51]

Likewise, satire can be 'difficult' to grasp – or stomach – for recipients who do not share the same cultural fabric or values. That gap explains, at least in part, the required effort of the present-day reader tasked with deciphering the intended humour and rhetoric in Daumier's work. Returning to the prime example of bathers, the following section, which treats his negative depictions of women in swimming areas, dives deeper into the gravity of his ridicule. The following section also exposes the potentially harmful impacts of such caricatures for female participation in the evolving public sphere.

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[48] Philippe Roberts-Jones, 'Honoré Daumier, critique d'art', *Bulletins de l'Académie Royale de Belgique*, 57 (1975), 13, doi:10.3406/barb.1975.52707.

[49] Cited in Mainardi, *Another World*, pp. 30-31.

[50] Philippe Roberts-Jones, p. 17.

[51] Ibid.

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Women at Play?[52]

As noted throughout this article, sporting and gaming areas were mostly male-dominated in the nineteenth century, and the scarcity of females at play in Daumier's work is unsurprising. The fact that he dedicated an entire series to *Les Baigneuses* (*Female Bathers*) (1847) is therefore significant, for it attests to the growth, albeit much slower, of women's access to leisure time and spaces. At the same time, however, it further exposes the misogynistic tendencies of both the artist and the journals in which he published.[53] His caricatures of Françaises in swimming pools – whether bathing for hygiene, exercise, or pleasure (or a combination) – present a more subtle attack than we find in his overtly hostile, well-studied series *Les Bas-bleus* (*Bluestockings*) (1844) and *Les Femmes socialistes* (*Socialist women*) (1849). Nonetheless, they similarly target women's expanding choices and efforts of self-assertion in industrialising France. In fact, as this section will demonstrate, Daumier's criticism of women represents a departure from the typical function of the caricature, as the women he mocked already lacked any semblance of political and social power typically held by his bourgeois subjects, such as those in *Gargantua*. Specifically, the *mises-en-scène* of women in these drawings reveal a complicated interplay between the modern city and its inhabitants, as female citizens gradually entered into the public sphere concomitant to social and technological transformations.[54]

Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation introduced new spatial needs into the cramped and dirty city to accommodate the growing body of Parisians, while recent epidemics prompted a focus on public health and sport that necessitated the construction of wider streets, public baths, and gymnasiums.[55] At the same time,

%" Second author Alyssa N. Knudsen contributed the majority of the section, 'Women at Play'.

%# See, for example, *Femmes d'esprit: Women in Daumier's Caricature*, ed. by Kirsten H. Powell and Elizabeth C. Childs (University Press of New England, 1990); Jacqueline Armingeat, *Lib Women: Bluestockings and Socialist Women* (L. Amiel, 1974); and Lucy Gellman, 'Absent Mothers, Anxious Fathers, Babies in the Bathwater: Honoré Daumier's "Les Bas-Bleus"', *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* (Yale University, 2014), 54–58.

%$ Yannick Ripa, 'Le XIXe siècle: le renforcement de la différence des sexes', in *Les femmes, actrices de l'Histoire: France, 1789-1945* (Sedes, 1999), p. 52; Moncan, p. 7, pp. 21-22.

%% Gerbod, pp. 613-14; Antoine Le Bas, 'Des piscines et des villes: genèse et développement d'un équipement de loisir', *Histoire urbaine*, 1 (2000), 146; Sun-Young Park, 'Introduction', in *Ideals of the*

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concerns over moral and social decay during the Restoration and July Monarchy inspired greater government and private investment into sporting and leisure spaces as a way to construct good citizens.[56] Yet, in Daumier's caricatures, the status of women in those areas appears intensely paradoxical: they are not playing, and they are ostentatiously disengaged from their surroundings. A word-image examination of the female swimming area in Daumier's 1841 *Bains de Femmes* (*Women's Baths*), a precursor to his later series, reveals the view of women's entry into and participation in spaces of play – and, by extension, the public sphere – as antithetical to their familial and political responsibilities.

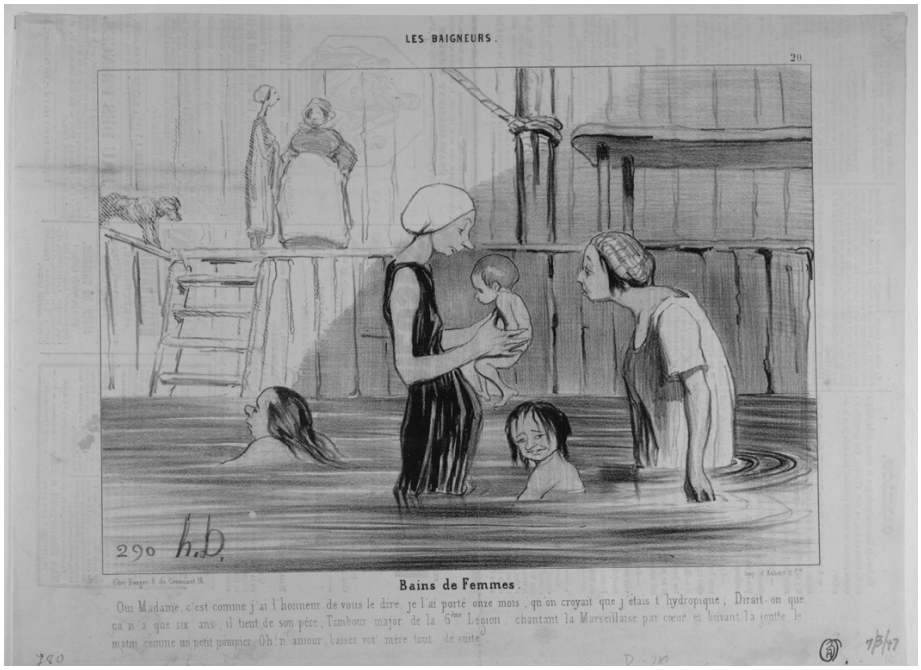


Fig. 6. Honoré Daumier, *Bains de femmes* (1841), lithograph, Courtesy of Robert D. Farber University Archives & Special Collections Department, Brandeis University.

Applying Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice permits a nuanced reading of gender and play in Daumier's *Bains de Femmes*. Unlike other contemporary social theorists, Bourdieu argues that social inequalities are reinforced primarily in leisure settings rather than in sites of economic production. In his view, power imbalances no longer need to be exerted in a personal manner when social practices assure the dominant group's

Body: Architecture, Urbanism, and Hygiene in Postrevolutionary Paris (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), pp. 11; Patrice de Monan and Claude Heurteux, *Le Paris d'Haussmann* (Mécène, 2002), pp. 10-12.

%& Park, 'Introduction', p. 6.

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continued authority.[57] Thus, such places both reproduce and create systemic hierarchies like classism and sexism, particularly because of their strong connection to perceived morality. In Daumier's time, doctors linked bathing – not only for hygiene, but also for beautification – to upright morals for both men and women.[58] For women in particular, the connection between probity and public spaces reflected the post-Revolutionary drive for social order. Despite opposition from small but driven quasi-feminist movements such as the Saint-Simonians, the legal status of women in the first half of the century was characterised by political and moral conservatism, as enshrined in the Napoleonic Civil Code, which stated that 'La femme doit obéissance à son mari' ('A wife owes her husband obedience').[59] Likewise, the period's idealisation of women as 'angels of the hearth' promoted the idea of separate, gendered spheres, at least partially as a manner of differentiating between the working class and the bourgeoisie.[60] The reification of separate spheres expressly tasked women with passive citizenship, dictating that, despite the inability to vote, French women – not just bourgeois women – took on greater moral responsibility for the nation's wellbeing.[61] Supported also by the renewed social influence of the Catholic Church, female duties to the State operated through motherhood and marriage: to raise a good citizen was to raise a good Christian, and to lead the household was to support the social order.[62]

%' Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 183-84. For discussions of Bourdieu's theory, see Kangjae Jerry Lee, Rudy Dunlap, and Michael B. Edwards, 'The Implication of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice for Leisure Studies', *Leisure Sciences*, 36.3 (2014), pp. 314-23 (p. 315).

%([Anon.], Review of P.J. Marie-de-Saint-Ursin, *L'Ami des Femmes, ou Lettres d'un Medecine* (1804), *Monthly Review & Literary Miscellany of the United States*, 1 (1806), pp. 50-53; Lombardo, pp. 51-53. For a slightly later medical text that links bathing to social progress against the Catholic Church, see also Auguste Debay, *Hygiène des Baigneurs*, (Moquet Librarie, 1849-50).

%) Siobhán McIlvanney, 'Women's Roles, Rights and Representations in France, 1758–1848', in *Figurations of the Feminine in the Early French Women's Press*, *1758–1848* (Liverpool University Press, 2019), p. 36; Ripa, pp. 35-36.

&* G.R. Bullaro, 'Salvatore Morelli, John Stuart Mill and the Victorian "Angel of the Hearth" Feminine Role Paradigm', *Forum Italicum*, 39.1 (2005), pp. 157-166 (p. 157), doi.org/10.1177/001458580503900109; McIlvanney, p. 37.

&! Ibid., p. 38.

&" Ripa, p. 47.

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This national guardianship extended beyond the foyer of the home into public places like pools and baths, which began to appear for the middle and lower classes following the 1783 interdiction of public bathing in the Seine (mentioned earlier).[63] Such leisure spaces reflected and reinforced the social stratification of mid-nineteenth-century Paris.[64] Via their geographic delimitation and emphasis on moral and political formation, they underscored women's marginalised and othered participation in play and their continued responsibility to others rather than to their own pleasure. The public swimming pool, as represented in Daumier's caricatures, highlights not only Daumier's derisive stance toward women's participation in 'new' leisure activities, but also women's conditional entry to public life.

In *Bains de Femmes*, our eyes are drawn to the two women standing in a dilapidated wooden pool: the figure on the left appears to be pregnant and holds a small child while the other, hunched over dejectedly and more corpulent, stares at the back of the child's head. The positioning of the female figures immediately demonstrates the paradoxical existence of women in such leisure spaces. Notably, the primary subjects are in the pool, but they are not actively swimming or bathing; rather, their attention is focused exclusively on the emaciated child. The shading in the image reinforces their lack of participation. Though the positioning of the women in the foreground suggests their importance to the scene, the diagonal shading that darkens the area where they stand ironically minimises their sense of belonging in the pool, as they seem to be lurking in the shadows. Daumier's choice of lighting thus re-marginalises the women even in this female space, as they are cut off from the rest of the scene, echoing the idea of separate spheres.[65] The fact that the two appear fully clothed further highlights the gendered divide of bathing spaces. Compared to the long dresses and hair coverings depicted here, Daumier's male bathers wear only shorts or small towels, as described above. It should be noted, however, that working-class people like the women in this image typically bathed nude, and the presentation of their clothing thus indicates little more than the necessity to adhere to demands of (female) modesty in the press.[66] Considered together, the visual elements of the

&# Le Bas, pp. 145-46.

&$ Ibid., pp. 146-47; Lombardo, pp. 51-55.

&% McIlvanney, pp. 37-38.

&& Lombardo, pp. 54-55.

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lithograph suggest that although these women may theoretically enter public leisure spaces, their primary obligation is to their families.[67]

The title's reference to 'Femmes' and the legend's focus on an ambiguous view of motherhood (the mother of the child is not identified) emphasise the collective responsibility of women to reproduce familial values even in public. Additional verbal elements of *Bains de Femmes* explicitly connect female status to the continued influence of conservative socio-political values and legislation ushered in by the Restoration and maintained by the July Monarchy, including the abolition of divorce, censorship of the press, and renewed political influence of the Catholic Church. The stark contrast between the gravity of the discussed subjects and the light tone upon which the legend finishes (reflecting the divided shading of the image) reveals again the tension between women's responsibilities and their participation in leisure activities. The caption suggests a conversation between the two standing figures, although it is not clear who begins or if the speaker changes:

> Oui Madame, c'est comme j'ai l'honneur de vous le dire, je l'ai porté onze mois, qu'on croyait que j'étais hydropique ; dirait-on que ça n'a que six ans, il tient de son père, Tambour majeur de la 6ème légion, chantant la Marseillaise par coeur et buvant la goutte le matin comme un petit pompier. Oh ! n'amour, baisez vot'mère tout de suite'. (Yes ma'am, as I have the honor to tell you, I carried him for eleven months, to the point that we thought I was hydropic; it's said that it [the child] is only six years old, he takes after his father, Drum Major in the sixth legion, singing the Marseillaise by heart and drinking his drops/ration in the morning like a little firefighter. Oh! m'love, come kiss ya' mother immediately).

Men – the child, father, legionnaires, and firefighter – dominate the legend, while references to illness and the military foreground maternal concerns more pressing than the pleasures of swimming or bathing, complementing the explicit references to childbirth. Supported by the heavy, rapidly sketched figures of the female subjects, the legend's description of the difficulty endured during the pregnancy, and its astonishing

[&] Nicole Ward Jouve, 'Balzac's A Daughter of Eve and the Apple of Knowledge', in *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall (Routledge 1989), pp. 34-35 and pp. 39-41.

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length, emphasises the physical and moral weakness of women. Indeed, *citoyennes* of the time who committed adultery often lied about the length of their pregnancies to protect themselves from harsh financial penalties, imprisonment, and retributive violence from their husbands, whom the law empowered to beat their unfaithful wives even to the point of death.[68] In the context of the inferior legal and social status of women, the verbal and visual references to pregnancy suggest not only that the female figures are not playing, but that they should not play at all: potentially adulterous and prone to frailty, women are not morally or physically strong enough to participate in the public sphere. The impossible length of the pregnancy also recalls Rabelais's *Gargantua* (1534), a common referent in Daumier's work, as we saw in his print of the same name. In light of popular reprints of Rabelais' work between 1820 and 1840, contemporaneous readership would have immediately recognised the allusion to the giant in the idea of the eleven-month pregnancy (the same gestation as Gargantua's).[69] In Rabelais's tale, the unbelievable length of Gargantua's incubation mirrors the many detailed and comical measurements included as a testament to Gargantua's size and greed.[70] Situated within the context of *Bains de Femmes*, the eleven-month pregnancy reinforces a perceived conflict between women and leisure spaces. When combined with the women's haggard faces, distorted bodies and the small child's listless appearance, the effect is to render the body grotesque, as though it had 'transgressed its own natural limits'.[71] As her form grows through pregnancy, so, too, does her visible presence in the public sphere. Like Gargantua, whose insatiable growth is often interpreted to represent 'the embodiment of material excess' at the expense of others, the woman's unnatural (perhaps even monstrous) pregnancy in Daumier's caricature suggests that she likewise exists in fundamental opposition to the stated goals of hygiene and leisure that the pool embodies.[72]

&(Until the complete abolition of divorce under the Civil Code of 1816, adultery was only one of two legitimate reasons for divorce. The other was excessive physical abuse (Yannick, pp. 35-36). For a more detailed history of divorce in pre- and post-revolutionary France, see also Sylvain Bloquet, 'Le marriage, un « contrat perpétuel par sa destination » (Portalis)', *Napoleonica. La Revue*, 14.2 (2012), 74-110.

&) Elizabeth C. Childs, 'Big Trouble', p. 28. The unusual gestation of the giant is the subject of Chapter 3 in Rabelais's book.

'* Ibid. François Rabelais, *Gargantua et Pantagruel*, ed. by Henri Clouzot, (Larousse, 1913?), i, p. 50.

'! Childs, 'Big Trouble', p. 28.

'" Ibid.

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By highlighting pregnancy as integral to the visual and verbal structure of the lithograph, Daumier alludes to the larger connections among women's bodies, leisure spaces, and the State, in which women held the status of minors under the 1804 Civil Code. In the early and mid-nineteenth century, swimming pools were not only a place of leisure, but they were also locations of civic and national development.[73] Under the July Monarchy, the French military placed great importance on the instruction of swimming as a way to inculcate male discipline and national pride. This was in direct response to similar programs in Germany and Scandinavian countries, which explicitly used swimming as a way to promote military values among populations who had not yet fought in wars.[74] Absent from military exercises and deprived of suffrage and financial independence, French women, as depicted here, are clearly not the recipients of the civic and moral education promulgated in public leisure spaces. The references to the military and the national anthem included in the legend underscore the irony of the scene, further reinforcing the notion of female incompatibility with the space of the pool. A masculine presence thus frames the scene via the verbal elements, which shift focus to comparisons between the child and its father, linking the two in several key ways. The mother notes how, like the father, the child acts dutifully: 'buvant la goutte le matin comme un petit pompier'. The metaphor 'boire la goutte' references both the father's consumption of his soldier's alcohol ration and the child's nursing habits (hence our dual translation of 'drinking his drops/ration'). The added comparison to a firefighter adds another hyper-masculine element to the semantic web. Moreover, the inclusion of the father's rank of 'tambour majeur' can be viewed as a double irony that reinforces the woman's subordination, as even a low-ranking army drummer possesses more political sway than she does. As we see in the image, such references interrupt the mother's participation in the setting and render bathing itself political, furthermore reinforcing the women's separation from the pool and, by extension, the public realm.

We have shown that the lithograph *Bains de Femmes* negates the female figures' ability to take part in the leisure of the space, as their relationship to men and the State prevents them from freely enjoying or experiencing the simple act of bathing. That idea runs through Daumier's later *Les Baigneuses* series, as we witness in 'Madame

[73] Ella Johansson and Marcelle Frison-Enskog, 'Fabriquer Un Citoyen Nageur', *Ethnologie Française*, 2.0 (2008), 293-94; Le Bas, p. 148.

[74] Johansson and Frison-Enskog, p. 294.

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Rabourdeau à sa première leçon' ('Madame Rabourdeau at her first lesson') (1847), which presents the faceless woman as an ungainly, oversized beast attached to a rope held by her dapper male swimming teacher.

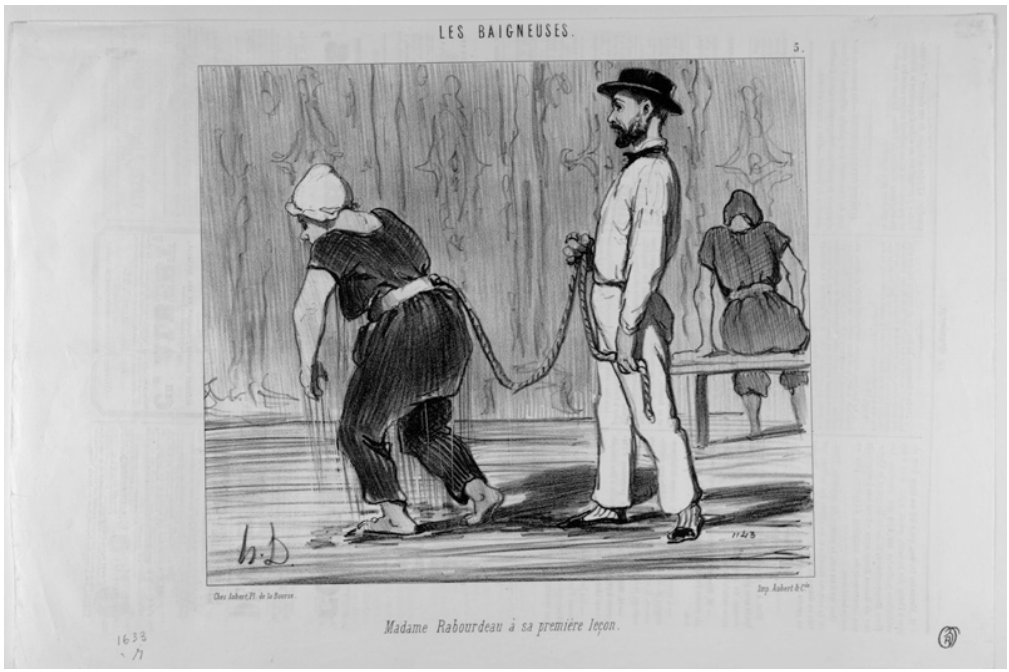


Fig. 7. Honoré Daumier, *Madame Rabourdeau à sa première leçon* (1847), lithograph, Courtesy of Robert D. Farber University Archives & Special Collections Department, Brandeis University.

By purposefully setting disempowered women in pools, Daumier's work strongly supports Bourdieu's previously cited idea of the power of leisure spaces to heighten and reproduce social and political inequalities, both in life and art. The female figures here cannot escape domination by their husbands, sons, teachers, and politicians, nor, apparently, by the artist's crayon. The mixing of body comedy and exaggeration with nuanced attacks in these lithographs lures the reader into the quicksand of caricature, a dangerous pool of prejudice under what appears to be a harmless surface of 'low' humour.

Conclusion

The caricatures presented above provide a broad view of types, locations, and notions of play over four decades in nineteenth-century France. They also give a sense of the socio-political biases present in Honoré Daumier's work, ranging from overt *ad hominems* targeting specific individuals to coded, generalised critiques that traded on different types of humour from farce to word play. We have seen that caricature

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exaggerates and mocks to deliver serious messages and that the medium, while playful, is not representative of the act of pure play itself, though it can satirise those who play. As the theorists Ernst Kris and Ernst Gombrich explain, satire transforms a comedic idea meant to amuse into 'une arme sociale, destinée à démasquer l'outrecuidance des puissants et à tuer le ridicule' ('a social weapon, meant to unmask the arrogance of the powerful and kill the ridiculous/foolish').[75] Produced by hand, the satirical lithograph, an art form that had recently risen to prominence in popular media, necessarily presents a visual and verbal rhetoric.[76] The period synonym for *caricature* in French, *une charge* ('a charge'), takes us far away from lightness or 'fun' and back to the multiple definitions stemming from the word's origins. As outlined in our introduction, it can refer to a military attack or the loading of a gun, meanings that emphasise its capacity for weaponisation. 'Charger' also means to add weight, accord responsibility, exaggerate, and accuse.[77] Such metaphorical definitions expose the many ways Daumier wields caricatures: from encouraging political rebellion to criticising arrivistes, or to campaigning to keep women out of play spaces and in their traditional decorative, maternal, and domestic roles.[78]

It is impossible to know the effects of Daumier's works on the growing body of readers viewing them in satirical journals or print shop windows of the time. Sociologists, psychologists, and art historians, however, make a collective case for the power of the caricature to influence reputations, disseminate knowledge, and encourage political change. For example, a psychological study from 2025 suggests that satire can have a bigger impact on an individual's reputation – in the sense that it persuades the recipient to hold and express a more negative view – than does direct

'% Ernst Kris and Ernst Gombrich, 'Principes de la caricature', in *Psychanalyse de l'art*, trans. by Beatrix Beck and Marthe de Venoge (PUF, 1978), p. 237.

'& For rhetoric, see Tillier, p. 12. For media consumption and economic successes, see Mainardi, *Another World*, pp. 13 and 240, respectively.

'' Entry 'Charger', *Dictionnaire Larousse*.

'(This was a collective effort among caricaturists of the day. See Solange Vernois, '"La Femme dans la caricature française" de Gustave Kahn" (1907): De la contradiction du féminisme et de la caricature', *Textes & Contextes*, 3 (2009), <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00440996/document> (accessed 1 April 2025).

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criticism.[79] The study also states that satire 'continues to serve an important social function in society, a means of social commentary, constructive criticism, and reputational communication'.[80] With the advent of the mass-market lithograph and, in the present day, of digital images, there is no longer a distinct difference between original and copy, despite the invention of the non-fungible token.[81] Present-day caricatures, often taking the form of social media memes packaged as 'macros' or satirical videos, thus seem more influential than ever as they circulate in the digital sphere, particularly concerning women's participation in male-dominated socio-political spaces. Literary scholars Mara and Ioana Mohor-Ivan indicate little change from Daumier's day when they conclude that 'editorial cartoons and internet memes (their more recent offspring) play their part in naturalising the patriarchal order when representing women politicians, reiterating thus societal norms and cultural assumptions that confine woman to the domestic space (albeit through verbal-visual forms of humour, mockery or caricature)'.[82] Moreover, the viral modifications and parodies of contemporary portrait memes – an intense version of the Louis-Philippe-as-pear theme of the nineteenth century – indicate a sophisticated layering capability that allows infinite amplifying or subverting the message in a self-referential loop. That phenomenon underscores the complexity of caricature, which exploits humour and irony to reinvent itself constantly and to move its own parameters. Indeed, any discussion of twenty-first century play activities and spaces must include the virtual world, in terms of not only gaming culture, but also the ludic and critical ways we represent ourselves and others on digital platforms as caricatures.

Daumier, one of the main artists for the first satirical illustrated newspapers, popularised that type of multi-faceted depiction in works like *Les Bas Bleus*. The final figure referenced in this article is one of the best examples of the complex binary of

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[79] Hooria Jazaieri and Derek D. Rucker, 'Softening the Blow or Sharpening the Blade: Examining the Reputational Effects of Satire', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* (2025), 1, doi.org/10.1037/xge0001729.

[80] Ibid., p. 16.

[81] For more on the question of originality over time in relation to technological advances in image reproduction, see Lee Streicher, 'On a Theory of Political Caricature', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 9.4 (1967), pp. 427–45 (p. 433), doi.org/10.1017/S001041750000462X.

[82] Mara Mohor-Ivan and Ioana Mohor-Ivan, '"Iron Maidens" vs. the "Witless Pet": Typecasting the Woman Politician in Editorial Cartoons and Memes', *Cultural Intertexts*, 11.11 (2021), pp. 125–46 (p. 125).

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playfulness and seriousness in his work. This caricature presents a dishevelled feminist raging against the latest critical depiction by 'Daumier'. Its spirited legend reads 'Comment! encore une caricature sur nous ce matin, dans *le Charivari*!... ah! jour de ma vie! j'espère bien que cette fois c'est la dernière!... et si jamais ce Daumier me tombe sous la main, il lui en coutera cher pour s'être permis de tricoter des Bas bleus' ('What! another caricature about us, this morning, in *Le Charivari*!... ah, upon my soul, I hope this time it's the last one!... and if ever this Daumier should cross my path, it'll cost him dearly for having tried to "knit" the Bluestockings').



Fig. 8. Honoré Daumier, *Comment! encore une caricature sur nous ce matin, dans le Charivari!...* (1844), lithograph, Courtesy of Robert D. Farber University Archives & Special Collections Department, Brandeis University.

The idea of a repeated attack ('encore') makes the caricature a testament to the growing suffrage movements in Western culture. The fact that the image provides another example of the denigration of such ambitious women in Daumier's work, however, counters both the targeted feminists' efforts and the light-heartedness of this self-referential (and seemingly self-deprecating) lithograph. That basic tension reveals, once again, the paradox of caricature, an art form that smiles to reveal its sharp teeth.

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Paget at Play, or Play in(g) Paget: Decadence, Performance and Play in the Life of Henry Cyril Paget (1875-1905)

LUCIA COWEN

Yet in this intensity, this absorption, this power of maddening,
lies the very essence, the primordial quality of play.
– Johan Huizinga[1]

Life imitates art far more than art imitates life.
– Oscar Wilde[2]

AT THE *FIN-de-siècle*, the character of Sherlock Holmes was such a sensation that William Gillette, American actor and manager, adapted Conan Doyle's stories into the play, Sherlock Holmes.[3] The curtains opened on an expectant crowd in September 1901 at the Lyceum Theatre, London. In the audience was the Fifth Marquis of Anglesey, Henry Paget (1875-1905), who was himself an enthusiastic actor, with a group of friends. Immersed in the detective drama, the Marquis was unaware that back at his room at the Walsingham Hotel, Piccadilly, a scandalous case of his own was unfolding. When the Marquis and his friends returned to his suite after the performance, they discovered that there had been a 'shame faced robbery' of his precious jewels.[4] Dubbed the 'Anglesey Jewel Robbery', the theft of jewels worth £40,000 – in today's money, nearly

[!] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Routledge, 2008), p. 2.

[¨] Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying* (Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 4.

[#] Sherlock Holmes, the four act play by William Gillette was premiered in 1899 at the Garrick Theatre in New York City and, after a successful run on Broadway, the play ran in 1901 at the Lyceum Theatre, London. For further reading of its production see, Allen Eyles, *Sherlock Holmes: A Centenary Celebration* (Harper and Row, 1986) and for further reading on the play see, William Gillette, *Sherlock Holmes, in Plays by William Hooker Gillette*, ed. by Rosemary Cullen and Don B. Wilmeth (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[$] *Adelaide Observer*, September 1901, p. 35, The National Archives.

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one and a half million pounds – caused a sensation.[5] News reports covered the illustrious Marquis's theft not only because of the staggering value of the property stolen, but also because of the fascinating and unconventional manner in which the case was conducted, as the Marquis and his friends were recruited to play amateur detectives in the case.

The Fifth Marquis of Anglesey frequently challenged the social norms of his time through his unconventional lifestyle and eccentric public conduct. Public fascination with his reputation for performance and spectacle persisted well beyond his lifetime; some newspaper reports referenced in this article were published after the Marquis's significant financial collapse and subsequent death. This event provided an opportunity for him to defy expectations and to experience the sense of freedom from the constraints of everyday life through decadent and playful means. This article considers: how might reading decadence through play theory prompt us to consider the two concepts' linkages? How did the Marquis use play to complicate notions of the decadent dandy? And what can we learn from the ways in which he used play to re-examine and adapt to the dynamic and restless *fin-de-siècle*? This article will consider how play and decadence – as both connected and distinct concepts – shaped the Marquis's response to the sensational crime. Examining decadence through the lens of play offers new perspectives into the cultural impact of decadence. As shall be discussed, the Marquis, acting as an amateur detective, exemplifies how play and decadence interact, illustrating this performative dynamic in its most pronounced form.

In what follows, I provide an evaluation of the Fifth Marquis as a figure who subverts the traditional concept of the dandy by initiating a dynamic between reality (action) and fiction (play), challenging the distinction between the two. First, I shall take the event of the Anglesey Jewel Robbery as a means of decadent permission for Paget to engage in play and to 'act out' in the real world. The critic Charles Bernheimer describes decadence as both a provocative and 'subversive agency,' rather than simply a sign of cultural decline. Instead, he believed decadence could also act as a challenge to traditional and cultural moral norms.[6] Expanding on the breadth and scope of

[%] *Adelaide Chronicle*, 'Behind the Secret Curtain', 1935, p. 46, The National Archives.

[&] Charles Bernheimer, *Decadent Subjects: The Idea of Decadence in Art, Literature, Philosophy and Culture of the Fin de Siècle in Europe*, ed. by T. Jefferson Kline and Naomi Schor (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 5.

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decadence in recent scholarly criticism, this analysis will explore how the Marquis displayed unconventional behaviour and challenged the expectations of the aristocracy through his involvement in the investigation. The following section contextualises the incident within its historical moment, examining how the Marquis's various forms of play are entangled with notions of leisure, aristocracy and the permissiveness of play at the heart of the Establishment, while also occupying the (geographic, social and gendered) margins. I shall conclude by considering how these events define the Fifth Marquis as a decadent who used aspects of play to both fragment and develop his sense of self.

Decadence and Play

Recent criticism by David Weir and others has revisited the polyvalent nature of decadence, and despite efforts to clarify its meanings, scholars generally agree on its slipperiness.[7] As Joshua Polstsky notes, decadence 'never adumbrated a single unified doctrine.'[8] Decadence in the *fin-de-siècle* was a cultural and literary phenomenon, characterised by its connections with aestheticism, moral decay and a sense of cultural decline. Decadence was often framed as symptomatic of psychological and moral degeneracy, with critics such as Max Nordau pathologising decadence, drawing on Morel's formulation of it manifesting in the individual as 'morbid deviations from the original type.'[9] Yet, as contemporary decadent scholar David Weir states, 'decadence is more than decline, decay and degeneration.'[10] Recent criticism has examined its performative qualities. Adam Alston considers decadence's relationship to performance by suggesting that 'decadence is performed, particularly if we understand the word

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[7] David Weir considers 'the fact that decadence has been studied using the analytical procedures of such disparate disciplines as eugenics, history, philosophy, psychology, physics, and aesthetics illustrates just how polyvalent the concept of decadence is'. David Weir, 'Afterword: Decadent Taste', in *Decadence and the Senses*, ed. by Jane Desmarais and Alice Condé (Legenda, 2017), pp. 219-28 (p. 219).

[8] Matthew Potolsky, *The Decadent Republic of Letters: Taste, Politics, and Cosmopolitan Community from Baudelaire to Beardsley* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 4, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhbz3 (accessed 9 January 2026).

[9] Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (Project Gutenberg, 2016) https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51161/51161-h/51161-h.htm, p. 16, (accessed 18 August 2025).

[10] David Weir, *Decadence: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 8.

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"perform" in an archaic sense as an "alteration" (*parfoumer*).'[11] If we look at decadence through such performative praxis, it inevitably invites us to consider its playfulness. After all, the intransitive use of the verb play aligns semantically with performance, both denoting forms of active engagement: 'to have an effect,' 'to act,' or 'an action.'[12] The slipperiness and capaciousness of each concept do not allow for a detailed examination within this article; therefore, the focus here will be on addressing how the Marquis performed decadence through decadent play. By play, I am drawing on the core theoretical concepts outlined by Johan Huizinga, highlighting its performative qualities. This will be expanded by exploring its multifaceted nature through theorists such as Brian Sutton-Smith and Roger Caillois, to illustrate how Paget used play to navigate his position in *fin-de-siècle* society.

The theory of play developed by Huizinga provides a useful framework for understanding the aesthetic and philosophical dynamics of decadence. In his seminal work, *Homo Ludens* (1938), Huizinga posits play as a foundational element of culture – an activity sustained by voluntary engagement and tensions between seriousness and frivolity. Huizinga explores the role of play in culture through a separate, bounded space (metaphorical or physical), known as the 'play-ground', in which normal rules and realities are suspended and 'ordinary life' is set aside.[13] I contend that decadent art and literature similarly constructed aesthetic 'play-grounds': self-contained worlds devoted to artifice and beauty pursued for its own sake, where the self becomes an exercise in performativity. In Joris!Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours*, for example, Des Esseintes constructs his own private environment as a 'playground' – an artificial sanctuary distinct from the realities of the external world. Within this framework, aesthetic experience in decadent art adheres to its own set of principles: artifice and sensation

[11] Adam Alston, 'Carnal Acts: Decadence in Theatre, Performance and Live Art', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 4.2 (2021), pp. ii–xxiii (p. ii). For interesting discussions on decadence and performance, see 'Decadence and Performance', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 4.2 (2021). See also the first monographic study of decadence in theatre and performance: Adam Alston, *Staging Decadence: Theatre, Performance and the Ends of Capitalism* (Methuen Drama, 2023).

[12] 'Play', *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford!University!Press [online] https://www.oed.com/dictionary/play_v?tab=meaning_and_use#30106143 (accessed 1 March 2025).

[13] Huizinga, p. 10.

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are regulated by aesthetic considerations rather than moral imperatives.[14] As Potolsky argues, decadence can be understood as a 'dispersed phenomenon arising out of discreet moments of artistic production and receptions [...] forged across space and time.'[15] In this sense, the operations of decadence and play converge: the decadent artist fashions an aesthetic world that consciously resists moral or natural reality. Both decadence and play, in short, create distinct 'play-grounds' of deliberate artifice.

Who was the Marquis? A Playfully Decadent Inquiry

Lord Henry Cyril Paget, who became the Fifth Marquis of Anglesey in 1898, was well-known in *fin-de-siècle* society for his playful nature. His great-grandfather, the first Marquis of Anglesey, was a military hero: a British Army officer and politician who led the charge of heavy cavalry at the Battle of Waterloo and lost one leg to a cannonball. Unlike his predecessors, Henry, his great-grandson, showed little interest in a military or political career, choosing instead to enjoy a life of luxury while dedicating himself to acting. Yet, it was not solely his wealth that brought him notoriety, but rather what he did with it. With an annual income of £110,000 (the equivalent of £9 million today), he was called a 'dandy', the 'handsomest of men', and likened to the archetypal Regency dandy, Beau Brummell (1778-1840).[16] In *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863), Charles Baudelaire introduces the dandy as an aesthetic archetype – a man who fashions his existence into a work of art, characterised by immaculate attire, composure and wit, establishing new standards of masculine elegance.[17] Oscar Wilde elaborates on this image, portraying the dandy as an artist and philosopher whose pursuit of beauty and style serves as a platform for intellectual critique. In both conceptions, the dandy surpasses fashion, representing the primacy of art over life and embodying individuality, resistance, and a deliberate aesthetic approach to life.

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[14] For further reading see J. K. Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. by Robert Baldick (Penguin Classics, 2004) and Jane Desmarais and Alice Condé (eds), *Decadence and the Senses* (Legenda, 2017).

[15] Matthew Potolsky, *The Decadent Republic of Letters: Taste, Politics and Cosmopolitan Community from Baudelaire to Beardsley* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 1.

[16] *Washington Post*, 11 September 1904, p. 6, The National Archives.

[17] Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. by Jonathan Mayne (Phaidon, 1964).

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Paget's dandyism is exemplified in the description offered by Welsh architect Clough Williams-Ellis (1883-1978) of an 'Aubrey Beardsley illustration come to life […] a sort of apparition' and 'a tall elegant and bejewelled creature with wavering, elegant gestures.'[18] Such mannerisms were reminiscent of the Fifth Marquis's contemporary, Robert de Montesquiou, renowned as the 'most notorious dandy of the age.'[19] Paget resided primarily at Anglesey Castle, located on the island of Anglesey, off the north coast of Wales.[20] It was here that he indulged in playful, decadent pastimes such as converting the music room of the family chapel into a small theatre, named The Gaiety. Paget also wrote plays that combined elements of comedy and pantomime. He performed them on the grounds of his estate, invariably dressed in glittering gowns dripping with diamonds, as a spectacle for all to see.[21] Paget's theatrical pursuits extended beyond his home, too, and he participated in a four-week tour of Oscar Wilde's play, *An Ideal Husband*, in 1903, receiving favourable recognition for his convincing portrayal of Lord Goring. These performances remained prominent in public memory, given the relatively recent events of Wilde's trials, imprisonment, and death.[22] Contemporary news outlets noted the Paget transition 'from the scene of war to the scene of the stage,' a statement subtly hinting at the diminishing prominence of the family title.[23] This observation cannot be overlooked by its allusion to historical decline. As private theatricals became more common, they began to redefine the conventions

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!(Christopher Simon Sykes, *Black Sheep* (Chatto and Windus, 1982), p. 215.

!) Timothy Verhoeven, 'A French Dandy in New York: Robert de Montesquiou and American Visions of France in the Progressive Era', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 15.4 (2017), pp. 386–402, (p. 386), https://doi.org/10.1080/14794012.2017.1371458 (accessed 29 July 2025).

"* Plas Newydd was renamed 'Anglesey Castle' by Paget in 1902. For an interesting read on the Marquis, see Viv Gardner, 'Toppy, Tilley and the Faithful Jerry: decadence on display in the performing loves of the 5-· Marquis of Anglesey (1875-1905)', https://www.stagingdecadence.com/blog/5th-marquis-of-anglesey (accessed 10 April 2025).

"! For further reading on historiography of the Marquis and his public performances see, Viv Gardner, 'In the Eye of the Beholder: Recognising and Renegotiating the Scenario in Writing Performance Histories' in *Theatre History and Historiography: Ethics, Evidence and Truth*, ed. by Claire Cochrane and Jo Robinson (Palgrave, 2016), pp. 60-81.

"" For further reading on Wilde's trials see, Joseph Bristow, *Oscar Wilde on Trial: The Criminal Proceedings, from Arrest to Imprisonment* (Yale University Press, 2022) and for Wilde's wider legacy see Nicholas Frankel, *Oscar Wilde: The Unrepentant Years* (Harvard University Press, 2017).

"# *Adelaide Chronicle*, 1935, p. 46, The National Archives.

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of public performance; as David Coates writes, 'the theatrical canon was no longer being determined by professional actors [...] but those involved in private and amateur theatricals.'[24] Paget's way of life reveals how play and performance could function within the everyday for many late-Victorian aristocrats.

'Is this the stuff that playfulness is made of?'

It would have been no surprise to *fin-de-siècle* society to learn that the Marquis's jewels had been stolen. Paget was renowned for carrying jewels of 'every conceivable description' with him – in fact, it was remarked by one newspaper that the real mystery was 'how it had not happened more often.'[25] The Marquis was also known to wear 'brilliants' (diamonds) at almost every occasion, including for his own theatrical productions. In a production of *Aladdin* in 1901 at his theatre in Anglesey Castle, for example, the Marquis was reported to be wearing 'a gauze suit, to which had been fastened literally thousands of brilliants so that he was all of a sparkle whenever he moved.'[26] Wearing diamonds and other precious gems during performances garnered significant attention in the press, with reports frequently highlighting Paget's attire and its expense, often overshadowing commentary on his acting skills. The press frequently divulged how much each jewel – from 'magnificent diamonds to glowing emeralds' – cost: a decadent excess likened to the infamous novelist Ouida. [27] However, during the Marquis's bankruptcy proceedings in 1904, further scandal arose when it was declared that some of his jewels were, in fact, paste. The press was dismayed by such dramatic conceit, and it gave 'great surprise locally'.[28] The Marquis, meanwhile, was far less concerned and declared that he 'knew perfectly well they were paste!'[29] Wearing paste and costume jewellery was typical in the theatre for practical reasons. Notably, at the 1890 opening of Antony and Cleopatra, Lillie Langtry wore a real jewelled necklace as Cleopatra, drawing public interest and highlighting the blurred line between reality and

"$ David Coates, 'Elite Theatricals and the Professional Amateur' in *The Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century British Theatre and Performance*, ed. by Claire Cochrane, Lynette Goddard, Catherine Hindson and Trish Reid (Routledge, 2025), pp. 331-43 (p. 334).

"% *Adelaide Observer*, 'The Marquis of Anglesey', 1901, p. 4, The National Archives.

"& *Perth Times*, 'Jewelled Johnnie', 1904, p. 10, The National Archives.

"' *The Yorkshire Evening Post*, 'Lord Anglesey and his Jewels', 1902, p. 2, The National Archives.

"(*Nottingham Post*, 'Marquis of Anglesey Jewels', 1902, p. 3, The National Archives.

") *The Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 'Pauper Marquis', 1904, p. 2, The National Archives.

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performance.[30] The Marquis's playful disinterest in the discovery that his jewels were not real can be read through Huizinga's terms: that 'play lies outside […] truth and falsehood.'[31] This intersects with Kristen Mahoney's exploration of the definitional diversity of decadence, particularly as it overlaps with camp, in which 'power comes from its refusal to take power seriously.'[32] Similarly, Jack Babuscio asserts that camp can be 'subversive' and 'a means of illustrating those cultural ambiguities and contradictions that oppress us all.'[33] Although, as Weir writes, 'camp should not be taken as a definition of decadence,' there are linkages in their nuances.[34] The word camp, which was beginning to circulate in subcultural contexts during Paget's era, derives from the French se camper, meaning to pose exaggeratedly.[35] The Marquis's flippant indifference to his jewels marks a tension between the real and theatrical – on stage and off. For him, the value of jewels is less about their cost than their ability to sparkle through playful decadence.[36]

To dazzle was to engage in the most decadent performance, and, unsurprisingly, Paget was invariably seen wearing an array of jewels in public. The press was most intrigued by the Marquis's frequent playful interactions with jewels in his everyday life,

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#* For more on Lillie Langtry see, Laura Beatty, *Lillie Langtry: Manners, Masks and Morals* (Chatto and Windus, 1999).

#! Huizinga, p. 6.

#" Kristen Mahoney, 'Decadence,' *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 2016, pp. 637-39 (p. 639).

Jack Babuscio, ''The Cinema of Camp, aka Camp and the Queer Sensibility' in *Gays and Film*, ed. by Richard Dyer (British Film Institute, 1977), pp. 117-36 (p. 128).

#$ David Weir, p. 8.

#% For more information and etymology on the word 'camp,' see https://www.oed.com/dictionary/camp_v3?tab=factsheet (accessed 30ʳJune 2025].

#& For an interesting discussion on the subcultural uses of the word 'camp' in this era, see National Archives: https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/explore-the-collection/stories/earliest-use-of-the-word-camp/#:~:text=and%20gender%20expressions.-,Subcultural%20origins,theatrical%20performers%20Fanny%20and%20Stella. (accessed 1 July 2025) and for further reading into the linguistics of camp see: Chi, Luu 'The Unspeakable Linguistics of Camp', *Jstor Daily*, 6 June 2018 https://daily.jstor.org/unspeakable-linguistics-camp/ (accessed 3 Aug. 2025) and Julia Stanley, 'Homosexual Slang', *American Speech* 45.1/2 (1970), pp. 45–59.

Paget's sexuality has long been a subject of conjecture; however, in the absence of definitive biographical evidence, any discussion must necessarily remain speculative. Although I do not have space to explore this here, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge the broader critical associations between camp aesthetics and queerness.

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and journalists deemed him to be an obliging interviewee who (like his contemporary, Wilde) 'willingly [saw] and talk[ed] with all the reporters who called upon him.'[37] The public expected a tableau, but Paget playfully flirted with expectation:

> The Marquis' greatest excitement it seems is the anticipation of a new […] jewel from Paris. When I met him this afternoon, he apologised somewhat profusely for his appearance. "I must apologise," he said, "for not appearing before you in peacock blue plush, wearing a diamond and sapphire tiara, a turquoise dog collar, ropes of pearls, and slippers studded with Burma rubies, but I prefer and have always preferred Scotch tweed." I was astonished that Lord Anglesey was as other men are.[38]

The reporter is notably 'astonished' that the Marquis did not conform to his expectation to appear before him in his usual dazzling manner. In apologising for not wearing an excess of finery, the Marquis reveals an acute self-awareness and adopts an ironic, flirtatious performance. As one 'whose amazing extravagance and fantastic fads as to jewellery and dress […was] quite unparalleled', to declare that he prefers tweed subverts expectation, and such distortion underpins his playful persona.[39]

Dismissing his expensive trifles with a paradoxical lexis of disregard affirms the Marquis's camp capacity to play and distort. As can be seen, journalists were a necessary component of these daily performances. In another example of his flirtatiously performative character, the Marquis questioned one reporter regarding the press's bewilderment over his 'expensive trifles' and declared: 'Journalists interest me as much as I interest them […] can you tell me why they seemed to regard my possession of a cigarette case studded with diamonds and rubies with such extraordinary surprise?'[40] Nina Lieberman defines playfulness as the ability to transform something ordinary into something creatively surprising. She proposes that playfulness is a disposition, with playful individuals characterised by qualities such as 'creativity, wit

[#'] *Daily Mail*, 18 October 1904 p. 5, The National Archives.

[#(] Ibid.

[#)] *The Referee*, 1904, p. 4, The National Archives.

[$*] Ibid.

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and divergent thinking.'[41] Frequently described as an artistic figure with a sharp sense of humour, the Marquis clearly relished playful engagement with the media, often transforming predictable interviews into unexpected and subversive performances.

Paget's relationship with his jewels embodies Sutton-Smith's concept of 'frivolous' play, one of the seven rhetorics that reveal play's meaning. Sutton-Smith argues that 'frivolity is potentially the most sacred play of them all [...holding the power] that makes players feel that they can transcend reality.' [42] The ways in which the Marquis interacts with his 'trifles' – interestingly, the adjective 'trifle' itself is a derivative of the verb 'play' – underscores how he uses frivolous play intentionally to distort the perception of reality and performance, employing camp as a strategy to exaggerate his presence. Oscar Wilde similarly used triviality in his works as his characters engage in Sutton-Smith's 'frivolity' to avoid confronting the complexities of reality through distortion. In *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1894), for example, characters are seen to distort reality to cope with its constraints, such as their obsessive concerns with cucumber sandwiches and proper names, which transform seriousness into absurdity and embody Sutton-Smith's insight that play can function as a form of resistance in disguise. Wilde's inversions of dialogue through Algernon Moncrieff's claim that 'the truth is rarely pure and never simple' expose earnestness itself as a game of masks.[43] Similar comparisons can be drawn from Roger Caillois's theory of 'mimicry' – one of his four categories of play. This form of play involves simulation, in which one 'disguises or temporarily sheds his personality in order to feign another' and where 'pleasure lies in being or passing for another.'[44] This can be seen in *The Importance of Being Earnest* when characters adopt false identities (Jack as Ernest and Algernon's invention of Bunbury, for example) to navigate society. Thus, by 'playing' at life, Wilde exposes the 'artificial' rules that governed Victorian morality. In an interview with *St James's Gazette* in 1895, Wilde declared: 'we should treat all the trivial things of life very seriously, and

[$!] J. Nina Lieberman, 'Playfulness in Play and the Player' in *Playfulness: Its Relation to Imagination and Creativity* (Academic Press, 2014), p. 23.

[$"] Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 213.

[$#] Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* in *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays*, ed. Peter Raby (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 247-307 (p. 258).

[$$] Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, Games* (University of Illinois Press, 2001), p. 20.

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all the serious things of life with sincere and studied triviality.'[45] The similarities between Wilde's witticisms and those of the Marquis cannot be overlooked: the Marquis's attempt to interview the reporter himself, for example, by questioning the fascination with his 'diamond studded cigarette case' echoes Wilde's declaration in one interview, 'the more the public is interested in artists, the less it is interested in art. The personality of the artist is not a thing the public should know anything about. It is too accidental.'[46] The double irony in this context lies in the fact that Wilde's personal reputation arguably surpassed the fame of his literary works, yet even his public persona was carefully constructed, serving as an artistic façade, a mask through which he engaged with the world. This is a noteworthy comparison given that the Marquis himself was a figure surrounded by intrigue even as he asserted – through performance – a claim to artistry. In a similar vein, and returning to the case of the Anglesey Jewel Robbery, this incident led to a creative act that shifted the public's attention away from the persona of the artist and towards the aesthetically nuanced and blurred fictional nature of the crime. Indeed, for the Marquis – for whom 'all the world [was] a stage' – creative engagement with the theft became an integral part of his playful and decadent iconography.[47]

Sherlock Holmes and the Missing Jewels

The Marquis's frivolous display of decadent jewels proved too tempting for his valet, Julien Gault. At around midnight on 10 September 1901, the Marquis returned to his hotel suite on the second floor to discover that both his jewels and valet were missing. After quickly informing the police at the Vine Street police station, he returned with Inspector Drew. The subsequent investigation revealed that the valet had met a woman from France named only 'Mathilde' who had persuaded him to steal the Marquis's jewels. Gault had entered the suite while the Marquis was at the Sherlock Holmes production, 'bustled and fidgeted about the apartment a great deal', seized the jewels

[$%] Oscar Wilde, interviewed in 'Interview with Oscar Wilde', *St. James's Gazette*, 18 Jan 1895, p. 3, Archive.org, archive.org/details/1895-01-18-st-james-gazette-oscar-wilde (accessed 2 July 2025).

[$&] Ibid.

[$'] William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. by Juliet Dusinberre, Arden Shakespeare, 3rd ser. (Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2006), p. 139.

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and carried them out under his shirt in a basket.[48] When Gault was eventually arrested, he was found with some of the jewels in Dover, and Mathilde had mysteriously vanished, leaving Gault to be sentenced to five years' imprisonment. Rather than despairing, the Marquis seized the moment as an opportunity to stage a new tableau for public consumption, declaring that 'annoyed as he was about his loss he was not going to make himself ill about it'. [49] The Anglesey Jewel Robbery offered a vivid instance of life imitating art: as the Marquis watched Sherlock Holmes on stage – a play centred on the solving of crime – his own jewels were being stolen in real life.

The Marquis's missing jewels case mirrors Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, blending gravity with playfulness and blurring the line between reality and acting. As Algernon Moncreiff acknowledges, 'one must be serious about something if one wants to have any amusement in life' – a sentiment that captures how the earnestness of 'play' emerged both from the Marquis's investigation itself and the public's intense fascination with the entire affair as a distinctly serious form of play.[50] The Marquis's use of the theft to justify acting out reality reflects a decadent interest in artificial pleasure as a distinct aesthetic experience. A newspaper report of the crime at the time details how:

> On the night of the theft […] the marquis was entertaining a large party […] they all returned to the hotel together, and his lordships guests were permitted to hear Inspector Drew's plan propounded to the Marquis for getting on the track of the missing valet. [There was a] gusto with which the lordship entered into the matter […and] subject to Inspector Drew's approval, it was decided that they should become amateur detectives and assist Scotland Yard in their search.[51]

The Marquis's reaction is characteristically unexpected: instead of being dismayed by the robbery, he is excited and immediately 'entered into the matter.'[52] Such a description of how the cases' immediate uptake signals a sense of performance and

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[48] 'A Marquis Robbed', *Daily Telegraph,* 1901, p. 4, The National Archives.

[49] Ibid., p. 4.

[50] Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, p. 262.

[51] *Lichfield Mercury*, 'The Marquis of Anglesey's Jewels', Sept 1901, p. 4, The National Archives.

[52] Ibid.

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action, as, like performance, play is dynamic and ever-changing ('pace' in Huizinga, Caillois and Sutton-Smith). For the Marquis, confronting the theft meant interpreting it as play: much like what Huizinga sees as 'the contrast between play and seriousness [which] is always fluid, [where] play turns to seriousness as seriousness turns to play.'[53] By creating an interlude between the frivolous manner in which he accepted the role of detective and the gravity of the theft – £40,000 worth of jewels – the Marquis established an aesthetic space in which the investigation became a 'game.' The Marquis and his friends became the players, each given a Sherlock Holmes role and directed to station themselves at key ports that the thief might use to escape, as 'they all were familiar with his features and could intercept his retreat to France.'[54]

The assignment of Sherlock Holmes roles to each participant created a unique playing space, one that Huizinga terms a 'play-ground': a space that is set apart from the 'ordinary,' governed by its own rules, order and logic.[55] This multi-player space was equally multi-layered, with participants blurring the lines between the real crime and the fictional performance of detection, all while shaping their actions in imitation of the Sherlock Holmes narratives. Examining this through the lens of play, each port represents 'a play-ground', and when inside each play-ground 'absolute and peculiar order reigns [...as] play creates order into an imperfect world [...] bring[ing] a temporary limited perfection.'[56] Such an interpretation of play illuminates the linkages to the field of aesthetics, as Huizinga elaborates that 'the profound affinity between play and order is perhaps the reason why play [...] seems to such a large extent belong to the field of aesthetics.'[57] Each participant exists in these spaces both literally and metaphorically, allowing for a 'suspension of normal social life' while simultaneously creating a sense of real-time engagement with the unfolding events and pursuit of the thief.[58]

In a further contribution to the interplay of seriousness and play, it was rumoured in the press that Arthur Conan Doyle was consulted on the case of the Marquis's stolen

%# Huizinga, p. 8.

%$ 'The Marquis of Anglesey's Jewels,' p. 10.

%% Huizinga, p. 10.

%& Ibid.

%' Ibid.

%(Ibid., p. 12.

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jewels, reportedly helping Inspector Drew trace some of the jewels back to London.[59] Notably, the public was more than intrigued by the Marquis's investigation: they were spectators of a 'game.' As Mathew Kaiser emphasises, 'play is at the root of a variety of Victorian cultural phenomena [...] we see it in the burgeoning Victorian entertainment industry, in the celebritization of actors and actresses, those ultimate ludic subjects.'[60] By reporting on the events and eliciting comments on the case from Conan Doyle, reporters, too, were playing a part by keeping 'the game' in motion. As Sutton-Smith, drawing on Gadamer, argues:

> [...] the player doesn't play the game [...] it is, rather, that the game plays the player. Once you begin playing, you are taken over by the things that are serious within the game, regardless of how serious that game is estimated to be in the eyes of the non-playing world.[61]

As Sutton-Smith describes, play can blur the line between reality and imagination, creating a liminal space in which a figure such as Paget can transgress the boundaries of the present and explore performative possibilities. The investigation, as part of the 'working world', needed an investigator (Inspector Drew), fitting with Sutton-Smith's description of work as 'obligatory, sober [and] serious.'[62] Meanwhile, the Marquis and his friends reveal the fluid boundary between play and seriousness by performing the role of detectives with self-aware theatricality and imitating fictional tropes that were familiar to them. Yet the distinction between play and the 'non-playing world' remains blurred, as their involvement in reporting on the event positioned them not just as

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[59] Peter Costello, *Conan Doyle Detective: True Crimes Investigated by the Creator of Sherlock Holmes* (Constable and Robinson, 2001) reports that Conan Doyle traced some of the jewels to London. This report originates with biographer, Charles Higham, who Costello declares as a 'not always reliable biographer, but a writer who was connected with London High Society' (p. 43).

[60] Matthew Kaiser, *The World in Play: Portraits of a Victorian Concept* (Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 1.

[61] Sutton-Smith, p. 44. Sutton-Smith cites Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (Crossroad, 1982; first pub. in German in 1960) emphasising that '[the] players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation through the players', p. 107.

[62] Sutton-Smith, p. 44.

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players, but also as pawns, unwittingly reinforcing the very order they appeared to subvert. Considered in this way, the action of the investigation became an experience of the world. Building on Huizinga's consideration of the linkage between aesthetics and play (fifty-nine years before Sutton-Smith's theory), there is a real sense within the distortion between the crime/game binary of an attempt to create 'perfection' away from the 'imperfect world.'

This article has addressed the ways in which the crime at the centre of the Anglesey Jewel Robbery permitted the Marquis and his friends to 'act' through play in the real world. But what about the leading part in this event? The Marquis took his role so seriously that when the thief – his valet, Julien Gault – was captured, he allegedly shouted: 'Sherlock Holmes! Hurrah!'[63] The report continues to note that 'he was more concerned in the methods employed by Inspector Drew [...] in hunting down the valet than he was in getting the stolen jewels restored to him [...] although he regarded one as corollary to the other.'[64] While Paget evidently revelled in the game's ultimate victory, this second quote reveals that Paget's involvement in the investigation meant more than merely reclaiming his valuables. The play that formed part of the investigation involved several types of participation, going beyond a simple notion of victory.[65]

In an interview after his jewels were stolen, the Marquis inverted expectations of how a robbery victim should behave:

> The Marquis is reported to have made the following statement: "Julien, the missing valet, I engaged in France. He came to my hotel about a month ago and I took him on as my valet," remarked his Lordship simply. "Now, here are some curious facts connected with him. He was seen by one of my servants to take impressions of two keys with spiritine. Spiritine is a patent, solid petroleum which I use for heating my shaving water etc. Here is a box of it [...] see how easy it is

&# 'The Marquis of Anglesey's Jewels,' p. 44.

&$ Ibid.

&% Georg Simmel highlights the fluidity of social life, showing how the same individual or group can take on very different social forms. Georg Simmel, 'Group Expansion and Development of Individuality' in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. by Donald N. Levine (University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 251-93.

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> to take an impression. […] On withdrawing it you see there is a perfect impression."[66]

The Marquis details the case using a vocabulary reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes: from the declarative 'here are some curious facts connected to him' and the consideration of 'spiritine' to take a 'perfect impression'. His excitement is clear, and his 'part' is evident by his Holmes-like language of evidence, demonstration and methodical explanation. Given Holmes's famous rationality, the Marquis's subversion of this performance as part of a true-fictional/real-performed 'staging' of the everyday is doubly subversive. Such dialogue between the journalist and Paget underscores the tensions between what is real (the crime) and what is not (the drama of Sherlock Holmes). Returning to consider Sutton-Smith's *The Ambiguity of Play* (1997) underscores the multiplicity of 'rhetorics' through which play is understood, particularly those of frivolity and the imaginary. His emphasis on ambiguity enables a reading of this dialogue as a ludic mode of aesthetic experimentation that deliberately blurs distinctions between seriousness and play.

While other contemporary articles described the Marquis as a 'victim' and gave him a passive role in the theft, the Marquis used performance to shift his portrayal from a crime victim to the leading character. Nikolai Evreinov, theatre playwright, director, and theorist, argued that life itself is inherently theatrical, noting that 'we are constantly playing a part when we are in society.'[67] Seen in this light, the Marquis's role during the incident was equally fluid and adaptable – shifting like the acts of a stage play. The Marquis was both victim and investigator, but he resisted being confined to a particular role, instead using play and its imaginary spaces to re-cast himself within the play's order. In this sense, the theft allowed for a heightening of the Marquis's everyday performativity: aristocrat, actor, celebrity, collector – all roles with their own rules, costumes and opportunities to subvert through performance. Roger Caillois's concept of 'mimicry' is evident in how the Marquis affirms his identity by 'playing to believe'; he takes on the mask of Sherlock Holmes, fashioning a persona distinct from that of a mere victim. Instead of being a passive victim of theft, he actively reconfigures the event through play to claim the lead role at the centre of its rebellious possibilities.[68]

[&&] 'A Marquis Robbed,' p. 10.

[&'] *Lichfield Mercury*, September 1901, The National Archives.

[&(] Caillois, p. 20.

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A Case of Moving Through Play

The Marquis's ostentatious engagement with play and performance was frequently reported in the press due to his elite status, often linking his title to the leisure time it afforded. His activities were frequently described in derogatory terms, such as 'bizarre', 'whimsical', and 'frivolous' fancies. During the *fin-de-siècle*, play was an activity usually associated with triviality and frivolity, and the advent of industrialisation further accentuated the divide between work and play.[69] Indeed, leisure originally developed among certain aristocratic groups who had the time and resources to pursue it.[70] For the Marquis, his lineage delineated the entitlement to acquire fanciful objects and pursue a lifestyle that allowed the freedom of play and leisure. Caillois defines such play as 'an occasion of pure waste; waste of time [...] skill and often money.'[71] The connections between waste and the decline associated with decadence cannot be disregarded. The waste and idleness characteristic of decadence are epitomised in the stereotypical dandy, exemplifying '*grande passion* [as a] privilege of people with nothing to do.'[72] Critics such as Ellen Moers suggest that the 'dandy stood for irresponsibility and inactivity.'[73]

The Marquis's *grande passion* is the performative play he enacted with his jewelled objects:

> A jeweller in the Rue de la Paix told me on one occasion he showed Lord Anglesey a pearl remarking "That, my Lord, is I think as fine as any you possess." Lord Anglesey thereupon ran from the shop, jumped into a waiting brougham, and in 10 minutes came back with a grin of amusement. To the jeweller's surprise

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[&)] Sutton-Smith, p. 4.

['*] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Macmillan, 1899) and Sebastian de Grazia, *Of Time, Work and Leisure* (Doubleday and Company, Inc, 1964).

['!] Caillois, p. 5.

['"] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. by Robert Mighall (Penguin, 2003), p. 40. See also, Verlaine's *Langeur* for a provoking read on the elements of lassitude in the context of decadence. www.poetry.com/langeur (accessed 11 April 2025).

['#] Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (Viking Press, 1960), p. 13. For more on the dandy, see Rhonda K. Garelick, *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de Siècle* (Princeton University Press, 1998).

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> he pulled out about £40,000 worth of pearl pins and necklaces from his pockets and thew them on the counter. "Talking of pearls," he said, "what about those?"[74]

Such an account of the Marquis utilising his decadent props to create surprise through immediate action – 'he ran from the shop' – presents a subversive depiction of the dandy, shifting from a life of idleness and 'living uselessly' to one characterised by decisive agency.[75] It also demonstrates an action of excess, both in terms of speed and the accumulated display of objects, in a way that the Marquis tried to outpace even the excesses expected of the late-Victorian dandy. The Marquis positioned himself at odds with the conventional association of the dandy with inertia. Dynamism through play is also exhibited in the Anglesey Jewel Robbery case, which kept the Marquis constantly stimulated by evolving aspects of the performance. In newspaper reports, there is a sense of a race against time, as the Marquis would 'accompany Inspector Drew in his search across the Metropolis' to catch the thief.[76] Yet again, the Marquis's enactment of the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes illustrates a recurring duality, whereby he performs a character separate from himself. In *The Sign of Four* (1890), Holmes remarks that '[his] mind rebels […] at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work […] and I am in my proper atmosphere'.[77] This sensibility is echoed in Gillette's play of *Sherlock Holmes*, which the Marquis was watching when his jewels were stolen, when Holmes exclaims: 'my whole life is spent in a series of frantic endeavours to escape from the dreary commonplaces of existence!'[78] Isabel Stowell-Kaplan has examined the similarities between the detective and the stage dandy in Staging Detection, noting their shared use of 'active leisure', as they both 'pose and posture in pursuit of their own performative ends.'[79] The Marquis – described in reports as Inspector Drew's 'able assistant' – illustrates the dynamic engagement in activities that ensued a sense of

'$ *The Mercury*, 'Last of the Dandies', 1905, p. 7.

'% Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm*, p. 11.

'& 'The Marquis of Anglesey's Jewels', p. 44.

'' Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four,* ed. by Ed Glinert (Penguin Classics, 2001), p. 13

'(William Gillette, *Sherlock Holmes,* p. 227.

') Isabel Stowell-Kaplan, 'A Tell-tale bracelet': The detective and the dandy' in *Staging Detection: From Hawkshaw to Holmes* (Taylor and Francis, 2021), pp. 123-46 (p. 143).

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liberation from societal expectations. Huizinga, too, associates the aspect of play linked with leisure as something 'free.'[80]

It could be argued that the Marquis's state of playful energy gestures towards the stimulation of modernity. Max Nordau's apprehension of degeneration describes the '*fin-de-siècle*'s state of mind' as 'a compound of feverish restlessness': a disconcerting assertion of the period's relationship with modernity, which suggests uncontrollable and nervous stimulation.[81] Decadence played a part in the physicality of the time, explicated through symbols of transience: where Pater's 'to burn always with [a] hard, gemlike flame' became synonymous with connections of speed and time.[82] The processes of navigating space through play are gamified in the 'race to capture' the criminal, as the Marquis and the other players participated in the 'chase': 'from early morning Monday to late evening Thursday his Lordship was exploring with his "Sherlock Holmes", the Mysteries of Soho and other French quarters.'[83] Such voluntary engagement in playful activities chosen by the Marquis and his friends calls into question the ways in which the Marquis used play to create his own productive and creative forms of leisure time. Boundaries between leisure and play were increasingly blurred during the *fin-de-siècle*, as aesthetic ideals embraced by decadence – such as the doctrine of 'art for art's sake' – championed the idea that life itself could be approached as an artistic expression. From this perspective, Huizinga's concept of 'play as a form of cultural activity' and how 'play has a tendency to be beautiful' proves particularly relevant, illuminating the Marquis's creative explorations of leisure as a 'productive' and temporally bounded event.[84] Paget highlighted that, much like the superfluous nature of decadence, his aristocratic background enabled him to both lead a criminal investigation and stay playfully detached from the elite.

The Marquis's sense of momentary play in the case of his missing jewels also offered the potential of a liminoid experience. Victor Turner suggests that liminal experiences in modernist societies were 'replaced by 'liminoid' moments', which are 'an

(* Huizinga, p. 8.

(! Nordau, p. 2, 3.

(" Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance,* ed. by Matthew Beaumont (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 120.

(# 'The Marquis of Anglesey's Jewels', p. 4.

($ Huizinga, pp. 7-8.

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independent domain of creative activity.'[85] There is, for Turner, the sense that the liminoid 'resembles, without being identical with liminal.'[86] Through this distinction, he associates the emergence of the liminoid with industrial and post-industrial societies, where leisure became increasingly entangled with fears of modernity. For Turner, the liminoid has strong connections with the concept of 'play', a link he underscores by drawing attention to its etymology. Turner interprets the Old English for play, *plegan*, as meaning 'to exercise oneself, to move briskly.'[87] It also means, according to Webster's Dictionary, to be 'free, as against work's obligatory character', that which is derived from 'action, motion or activity' and has connections with 'performance.'[88] As such, these liminoid moments are exemplified in the Marquis's play. Such moments also relate to how Sutton-Smith's play theory expands the concept of Turner's 'liminoid,' by acknowledging its ambiguities to explore the transitions between reality and unreality, suggesting that play is an active, powerful pursuit.[89]

Through this lens, the Marquis's Sherlock Holmes detection shares similarities with that of the reality of crime when analysed through a framework of motivation, means and opportunity. Both the thief and the Marquis were motivated by personal desire. The means by which the Marquis could enact the role of Holmes was afforded by his elite status. Gault's means was 'spiritine', to make an impression of the keys to unlock the drawer of a 'receptacle that once held between £60,000 to £70,000 worth of jewellery.'[90] For play to happen, there must be an opportunity where it 'stand[s] quite consciously outside ordinary life as not being serious, […] within its own boundaries of time and space'.[91] For the Marquis, this was the opportunity of leisure time afforded by his elite position, enabling him to create his own form of play 'outside ordinary life'. For

(% Victor Turner, 'Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology' in *Rice University Studies*, 60.3 (1974), pp. 53-92, (p. 65), https://hdl.handle.net/1911/63159.

(& Turner, p. 64 [emphasis added].

(' Ibid, p. 65.

((Ibid, p. 67.

() Turner also reflects on Sutton-Smith's acknowledgement of the liminoid by addressing its potential for creativity: 'What interests me most about Sutton-Smith's formulations is that he sees liminal and liminoid situations as the settings in which new symbols, models, and paradigms arise-as the seedbeds of cultural creativity in fact.' (Turner, p. 60).

)* 'A Marquis Robbed', p. 4.

)! Huizinga, p.13.

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the thief, the opportunity lay in the Marquis's reckless behaviour with his jewels (it was later determined that the drawer to the receptacle on the evening of the crime was, in fact, unlocked: a convenient opportunity and temptation for even the least likely of thieves). It cannot be underestimated that, in the Anglesey Jewel Robbery, play and crime are aligned.

Just as this high-profile theft was resolved, the Marquis transformed the crime into an act of creative expression, attaining emotional catharsis through play. As Sutton-Smith suggests, 'play is a state of mind, a way of seeing and being, a special "mental set" towards the world and one's actions in it.'[92] For the Marquis, this 'state of mind' was realised within his own version of the 'play-ground,' a conceptual space governed by his own personalised, aestheticised, productive forms of leisure. In this context, play functioned not only as a complex mode of creative socialisation through which he engaged with the *fin-de-siècle* world, but also as a means of exerting control over it, adapting to its anxieties through subversive and decadent means.

Conclusion

Closely investigating the events of the Anglesey Jewel Robbery illustrates the varied ways the Fifth Marquis of Anglesey subverted the status quo. By engaging in forms of play, the Marquis reconfigured the gendered stereotype of the dandy as idle or passive, instead positioning himself as an instigator of action, while simultaneously renegotiating the expectations of his aristocratic identity. Employing decadent tropes to distort and fragment aspects of reality, the incident was both a liberating and creative experience, one that offered an alternative reality away from the governed constraints of Victorian expectations, which the Marquis had already spent much of his life attempting to subvert and defy. Huizinga's observation about the loss of the 'play spirit' in modern life reflects the *fin-de-siècle* concern with cultural decline and fatigue, positioning play and decadence as considered responses to periods of societal crisis. There has been relatively little consideration of the linkages between play and decadence in decadent criticism, yet, the theorists examined here as a means to explore the case of the Marquis's missing jewels, reveal that decadence may be conceived as a cultural form of play – one that enacts pleasure, performance, and excess within self-imposed limits, while simultaneously testing the very boundaries that sustain it. The

)" Sutton-Smith, p. 174.

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Marquis thus offers an exemplar of this performative relationship between play and decadence, which offers a perspective on the greater attention we could give to play theories in this transitional moment of the late-Victorian and Modernist periods.

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RRR
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Review: Rory Muir, Love and Marriage In the Age of Jane Austen. Yale University Press, 2025. pp. 407. ISBN 9780300281071, $24.00.

MADELEINE MIKINISKI

IN 1818, SURVEYING Jane Austen's career, one reviewer observed that the author 'seems to be describing such people as meet together every night, in every respectable house in London; and to relate such incidents as have probably happened, one time or other to half the families in the United Kingdom.'[1] While for some of Austen's early readers, such domestic 'incidents' rendered her work too drab for entertainment, her works have proven an important time capsule for scholars of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Rory Muir writes that, because of this, 'we turn to [Austen's fiction] to see her world most clearly'.[2] Austen's world is a well-trodden field for Muir. In 2013 and 2015 respectively, Muir published each half of a two-part biography of Austen's contemporary the Duke of Wellington: *The Path to Victory, 1769-1814* and *Waterloo and the Fortunes of Peace, 1814-1852*. More recently, Muir has moved into Austen studies, authoring *Gentlemen of Uncertain Fortune: How Younger Sons Made Their Way in Jane Austen's England* (2019). Now, in his latest popular history, *Love and Marriage In the Age of Jane Austen* (2025), Muir further opens this window into Austen's life and work, presenting a detailed and spirited portrait of Austen's society and the matrimonial ties that held it all together.

The topics of love and marriage are, of course, broad and highly nuanced, even without the distortions of a historical lens. In the text's preface, Muir acknowledges the sheer scale of these concepts, but writes that it 'is not [his] purpose to advance a single thesis or central argument, to claim that there were more or fewer happy marriages in this period than in any other or that marriage in the early nineteenth century was

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! 'Unsigned review, British Critic 1 March 1818, n.s. ix, 293–301,' in *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by B.C. Southam (Taylor & Francis, 1996), pp. 89–93.

" Rory Muir, *Love and Marriage In the Age of Jane Austen* (Yale University Press, 2025), p. 371.

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simpler or more complicated than it is today.'[3] As a survey, and with few argumentative guardrails, the book is indeed ambitious in its scope. Despite the insinuation of its title, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Jane Austen* considers a much wider period than the forty-one years of Austen's life (1775–1817) by examining the 1780s to 1850. Accordingly, *Love and Marriage* is drawn from a rich assortment of primary sources, including letters, journals, novels, periodicals, and conduct literature. Muir attempts to rein in this somewhat unwieldy topic by limiting himself to 'the whole of the upper layers of society, from dukes to curates, anyone who might be plausibly regarded as a lady or a gentleman.'[4] From this still-sizeable milieu, Muir's book selects a variety of characters and personalities. For most readers familiar with the period, some names will most likely be familiar: the Austen family, the Duke of Wellington, Admiral Horatio Nelson, and Anne Lister. Muir, however, primarily focuses on some genteel figures perhaps less known to non-experts, like Charles Arbuthnot and his second wife, Harriet, Betsey and Thomas Fremantle, and Lady Maria Stanley. Like any historian of the period, Muir must contend with a profusion of Harriets, Marias, Georges, Janes, etc., making the book's Dramatis Personae appendix necessary for following the text's expansive cast. This section very helpfully includes, in an alphabetised list, the biographical details of the book's major players, including reminders of female figures' maiden and married names. While many of the book's anecdotes are sourced through the life writing of these subjects, Muir also turns to contemporary publications. Muir consistently pulls from Austen's oeuvre, of course, but also examines Susan Ferrier's *Marriage* (1818), Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), and Emily Eden's *The Semi-Attached Couple* (1860), among others.

Love and Marriage is divided into seventeen relatively short chapters. These chapters cover a variety of nuptial outcomes and contingencies, from courtship and elopement to society weddings, childrearing, domestic violence, and widowhood. Muir's excellent primary sourcing brings us straight into the assembly rooms and domestic spaces where the era's gentility met and sometimes fell in love with – whilst simultaneously judging – each other. In the early chapters 'Courtship' and 'Hesitation and Heartbreak,' we hear of Harriet Fane's girlhood crush on Charles Arbuthnot, a widower twenty-six years her senior, alongside future prime minister George Canning's

[#] Ibid, p. xii.

[$] Ibid.

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ham-fisted, though successful, attempts to convince Joan Scott of his suitability, despite a poor background and uncertain political career. Alongside these drawing-room dramas, Muir presents the kinds of scandals that would populate an especially lively season of *Bridgerton*. Chapter Four, 'Hesitation and Heartbreak,' also details Harriet Capel's unreciprocated, ill-fated obsession with a forty-year-old army officer named Baron Ernst Trip. The teenager's lovelorn and quite literally tearstained letters are, as Muir observes, 'painful reading even two hundred years later,' documenting an outlandish affair that included a duel, the Battle of Waterloo, and 'a never to be forgotten night' on a couch in Brussels.[5]

While this vivid gossip gives the book both colour and human interest, Muir often uses these episodes to explain the larger social and legal contingencies of love and marriage at the turn of the nineteenth century. For instance, in Chapter Fifteen, 'Domestic Violence, Adultery, Divorce, and Separation,' Muir details an extramarital affair between Lady Charlotte Wellesley and Lord Henry Paget.[6] Recounting the pair's attempts to extricate themselves from their respective marriages, Muir deftly uses this incident to illustrate Georgian England's complicated – and often contradictory – divorce law, as well as the gendered social repercussions of such ruptures. For the curious, casual reader of Austen, case studies such as this will further texture her work, offering illustrative details on the world her characters inhabit. *Mansfield Park*'s first readers, for instance, would have known that divorce was a rarity, possible only through individual acts of Parliament. For a modern reader, having this context helps to illustrate the severity of Maria Bertram's affair with Henry Crawford, as well as understand the great lengths to which cuckolded Mr Rushworth goes to separate himself from her.

While Muir does offer this contextualising analysis, at times it feels like more could be done to explicitly connect this information with the overarching issues of the day. Chapter Five, for instance, offers a necessary crash course on marriage settlements, defining terms like 'jointure' and 'entail' – legalese that crops up throughout Austen's work. Though these explanations are straightforward, Muir misses a valuable

[%] Ibid., pp. 68, 66.

[&] Henry William Paget (1768–1854), later First Marquess of Anglesey, was the great-grandfather of Henry Paget, Fifth Marquess of Anglesey (1875–1905), the subject of Lucia Cowen's article – '*Paget at Play, or Play in(g) Paget'* – in this issue (pp. 94-115). The First Marquess is mentioned on p. 98 as the family member who established the family's' prominent political and military reputation.

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opportunity to explain how this maps onto broader trends in the long eighteenth-century, when women of all social strata were being systematically disadvantaged in what Ruth Perry calls 'the great disinheritance.'[7] This disinheritance, Perry has argued, was enacted in part through the strengthening of entail laws and reorganisation of marriage settlements.[8] Brief, large-scale commentary such as this could help non-expert readers more fully understand Austen's ongoing commentary on the shifting financial and social roles of women amid such massive socioeconomic change. Though Perry is not cited in the book, *Love and Marriage* does rely on a solid foundation of modern scholarship. In his thorough bibliographical essay, Muir credits historians of the period like Katie Barclay, Sally Holloway, Amanda Vickery, and – with some caveats – Lawrence Stone, to name just a few. Meanwhile, the Austen components of this book are grounded in the Austen family papers, as well as the work of prominent scholars such as Deirdre Le Faye and Claire Tomalin.

However, despite this rigorous grounding in Austen studies, *Love and Marriage*'s most obvious weakness is its mishandling of some facts about Austen's life and work. In Chapter Two, for instance, Muir misstates that Chawton, where Austen lived for the final eight years of her life, is located in Sussex, not Hampshire. These inaccuracies extend to discussions of Austen's novels themselves. Lady Catherine de Bourgh's name is misspelt throughout, and at one point, Anne Elliot's father, Sir Walter, is conflated with their cousin William Elliot. These conspicuous errors should certainly have been caught during the editing process, especially as the text was being prepared for this new paperback edition. Conspicuous errors such as these somewhat compromise the integrity of the book as a whole, exposing other, less easily verifiable, assertions to credulity.

Fans of Austen, however, could still find interest in learning about Austen's society from the testimony of those living within it. Betsey Fremantle's letters to her husband, a naval officer who saw action in the Atlantic, offer insight into the potential thoughts of the fictional Anne Elliot as Britain slipped back into war, most likely sending *Persuasion*'s Captain Wentworth back to sea. Charles Arbuthnot's grief at the death of his wife Harriet could similarly suggest the feelings of *Emma*'s Mr. Weston, whose first

[7] Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 38

[8] Ibid., p. 52

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wife dies early in their marriage, leaving him to raise their son Frank alone. Like Austen's own work, *Love and Marriage* is an enduring testament to the varied 'incidents' of life – both small and large – in an era defined by financial instability, war, and rapid industrialisation.

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RRR
Romance, Revolution & Reform

Review: John MacNeil Miller, The Ecological Plot: How Stories Gave Rise to a Science. University of Virginia Press, 2024. 228 pp. ISBN 9780813951782, $32.50.

JOSHUA FAGAN

THE MOST ARRESTING element of John MacNeil Miller's *The Ecological Plot* is referenced by its subtitle: *How Stories Gave Rise to a Science*. With clear and sharp argumentation, Miller traces how Victorian writers – from economists and scientists to authors of popular fiction – helped develop the study of ecology. The monograph articulates the concept of 'the ecological plot,' which Miller distinguishes from works that simply use natural locations or depict the environment metaphorically and symbolically. For Miller, the 'ecological plot' is a narrative structure that engages with the real, material conditions of the natural environment and accurately depicts the dependence of humanity on its inevitably limited resources. As Miller explains in the first two chapters, the inventor of the ecological plot is the economist Thomas Malthus, and it was then implemented into fiction by the author Harriet Martineau, who was heavily inspired by Malthusian ideas. The latter two chapters discuss the novelists George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, whom Miller views as gradually straying from the foundations of the ecological plot toward a more anthropocentric view.

It is broadly accepted that in the nineteenth century, there existed a deep relationship between scientific and literary work. Seminal works in the field of literature and science, like Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots* (1983) and George Levine's *Darwin and the Novelists* (1988), demonstrate that nineteenth-century scientists and novelists shared similar ideas, concerns, and vocabulary. Recent scholarship, such as Allen MacDuffie's *Climate of Denial* (2024) and Noah Heringman's *Deep Time: A Literary History* (2023), as well as the excellent collection, *After Darwin* (2022), edited by Devin Griffiths and Deanna Kriesel, also discuss the relationship between nineteenth-century literature and scientific thinking. Miller makes an even stronger claim: that literature primarily influenced science, not the other way around. As such, the proliferation of Victorian fiction depicting the relations between living organisms and their environment inspired the development of ecology as a scientific field. Miller argues that these

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ecological narratives are not merely symbolic and instead depict the physical reliance of humanity on the material resources of the natural environment. He supports this claim with an impressive range of research, including analysis of literary and scientific writers along with political economists. This focus on the intersections between political economy, literature and science gives the book an unexpected dimension, as similar works do not address the influence of economists like Thomas Malthus.

The influence of Malthus on Darwin's work is well known but often understated, largely due to Malthus's connection to eugenics. Miller asserts that eugenicist thought deviates from Malthus' ideas, and he offers a sustained defence of Malthus in his first chapter. For Miller, Malthus's key contention in his most famous work, *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), is that human capacity for 'growth and development ultimately rests on the growth and development of the plants and animals supporting it,' and as such, there are 'finite resources that impose material limits on growth.'[1] Such an idea demonstrates how 'economic quantification fails to capture the actual flows and obstructions of vital resources that move ceaselessly through a community.'[2] Miller convincingly argues that this worldview created the framework of modern ecological thinking and that the influence of Malthus should be appreciated instead of condemned. One could argue that Miller's analysis risks being too absolute, as Miller asserts that anti-Malthusian attacks are only 'a lazy caricature of the man and his ideas,' while praising Malthus for attacking the supposedly unrealistic idea that 'human science and technology had improved dramatically and promised to do so indefinitely.'[3] This cynicism obscures the fact that science and technology have continued to improve dramatically in the nearly two hundred years since Malthus's death. Despite this, Miller's focus on Malthus is valuable and relevant to his overall argument. It is widely acknowledged that Malthus influenced Victorian novelists, yet Miller's argument is innovative, as he more narrowly focuses on interrogating how Malthus was a pioneer in shaping the ecological plots of the nineteenth-century novel.

In the second chapter, Miller details how writers like Martineau and Darwin were inspired by Malthus's insistence on the finite quantity of natural resources. Miller argues that Malthus 'had a profound effect on how they saw and described living

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[1] John MacNeill Miller, *The Ecological Plot* (University of Virginia Press, 2024), p. 24.

[2] Ibid., p. 25.

[3] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

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communities.'[4] For example, Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* presents short tales that conclude with Malthusian morals, such as 'Weal and Woe in Garveloch', a narrative depicting resource exhaustion due to overpopulation, which ends with thematic concerns surrounding the importance of having fewer children to reduce the risk of scarcity and starvation. Martineau is still an undervalued Victorian writer and thinker, and Miller deliberately positions her as a founder of the 'ecological plot', showcasing the depth of her ecological thinking in depth, while also analysing her influence on later 'social-problem novels' like those written by Elizabeth Gaskell. Miller argues that Martineau, though largely posthumously disregarded, was crucial in transforming the ideas of Malthus into fiction, demonstrating how authors such as Gaskell and Darwin later interacted with her works. Despite this, the monograph would benefit from a discussion of other nineteenth-century scientific or literary writers, such as Alfred Russel Wallace, who receives only a glancing and rather dismissive mention. Such a broader discussion would provide a comprehensive picture of how writers of this period utilised and considered ecological ideas.

The third and fourth chapters of the book focus on George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, respectively, but significantly depart from the common praise of these authors for their depiction of the environment. Miller undertakes a more critical reading, arguing that their ecological descriptions are sentimental and human-centric. He asserts that both Hardy's novels and the later work of Eliot mark a departure from the ecological foundations established by Martineau and Malthus. Eliot's seminal *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) is, for Miller, too anthropocentric, as it eventually 'provides a picture of adult society' alone while relegating 'animal companions to the background.'[5] Miller objects to Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878) in even harsher terms, asserting that 'Hardy's metaphors never develop into ecological insight.'[6] Such opinions are alluring in their boldness, but Miller's omission of the extent to which he is departing from common scholarly consensus is somewhat baffling.

Overall, *The Ecological Plot* is an inventive work of scholarship that makes a significant contribution to the field of ecocriticism through its focus on the ecological value of often-derided works of political economy. Miller's depiction of the

[$] Ibid., p. 32.

[%] Ibid., p. 106.

[&] Ibid, p. 118.

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interconnection between nineteenth-century literary writers, economists, and natural scientists and their importance to the development of the blueprint of ecological thinking is thoroughly convincing and invites reflection on current ecological narratives in media and literature. Though Miller is a Victorianist who situates the idea of the 'ecological plot' within the nineteenth century, the idea is relevant beyond that context. It offers a novel and productive approach for evaluating and conceptualising ecological storytelling that is relevant to the contemporary age of environmental catastrophe and climate change. Through the concept of 'the ecological plot', Miller offers ecocritics a valuable tool for examining the narratives of the Anthropocene, not only in the nineteenth century, but also in the twenty-first and beyond.

! ! !

BIOGRAPHY: Joshua Fagan is a doctoral candidate at the University of Washington, specialising in American and British literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a particular focus on shifting conceptions of history, ecology, and science. His current project focuses on literary utilizations of Darwinian ideas of time and scale in response to the impermanence and overstimulation of the *fin-de-siècle* world. He has published on authors from William Morris and H. G. Wells to Mark Twain, and his writing on the relation between the premodern and naturalistic transcendence in Robert Frost's poetry received the Lesley Lee Francis Prize from *The Robert Frost Review*.

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RRR
Romance, Revolution & Reform

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Review: Steam: Impressionist Painting Across the Atlantic. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 5 November 2022–ongoing.

RACHEL PEACOCK

STEAM POWER REVOLUTIONISED travel during the nineteenth century, bridging physical, ideological, and even artistic distances. The Art Gallery of Ontario's new exhibition, 'Steam: Impressionist Painting Across the Atlantic', highlights the ways steam travel shaped Impressionist artists' work, practices, and their interactions with the world around them on both local and international scales. Local steam railways in Europe provided Impressionist artists with opportunities to escape the confines of city life and find inspiration in rural and suburban settings. Meanwhile, affordable international steam travel allowed Canadian artists to travel to Europe for an artistic education and bring the styles they learned, including Impressionism, back to North America.

The exhibition features a collection of twenty-one paintings spanning the late Victorian and Edwardian periods (c. 1870-1915). It includes the works of eminent Impressionists such as Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Claude Monet, alongside pieces by Canadian Impressionists like William Blair Bruce and Mary Hiester Reid. Although the exhibition is advertised as a collection of French, English, and Canadian artists, it also features the works of American Impressionist Eric Carlsen and Belgian artist Théo van Rysselberghe. Most of the paintings on display are landscapes, but there are also a few striking portraits and still life studies. !

The exhibition begins with introductory text presented in English, French, and Anishinaabemowin, the language of the Anishinaabe people of the Toronto region. The inclusion of Anishinaabemowin alongside Canada's two official languages underscores the Art Gallery of Ontario's dedication to pursuing reconciliation with Canada's Indigenous peoples. Short wall text (in English only) accompanies thirteen of the twenty-one paintings on display, commenting on artistic style or providing insights into the artist and their work. !

One of the exhibition's main themes is how steam travel allowed artists to escape increasingly congested and polluted urban centres. William Blair Bruce's *Landscape with Poppies* (1887) and George Clausen's *Haying* (1882) depict the charming rural

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scenes that artists encountered while touring the European countryside. Similarly, van Rysselberghe's *Landscape with Houses* (1894) and Monet's *Étretat, L'Aiguille and the Porte d'Aval* (1885-86) depict the seaside towns that were popular day trip destinations for urban populaces. Other paintings highlight the steam-powered modes of transportation which made these day trips possible: Monet's *Wooden Bridge* (1872) shows a steamship approaching the harbour, while Alfred Sisley's *Saint-Mammes, Grey Weather* (c. 1884) features a railway bridge. !

The exhibition also considers how travel influenced the media Impressionist artists used in their work. As steam made travel more accessible to Impressionist artists, their materials adapted to reflect their newfound mobility.[1] Paul Peel's *Luxembourg Gardens, Paris* (1890) is an excellent example of this phenomenon. As the exhibit explains, the piece was painted on a 'small and durable wood panel [which] allowed the artist to easily leave his studio' and was less susceptible to damage during travel.[2] Meanwhile, Monet's *Étretat, L'Aiguille and the Porte d'Aval* (1885-85) demonstrates how artists could be inspired by the materials they encountered during their travels. The piece, which depicts the town's coastline and impressive rock formations, is painted on a wooden door from a wardrobe in Monet's hotel. The exhibit speculates that perhaps Monet chose this unusual medium because 'the curved lines of the cliffs echo the panel's shape.'[3] !

The exhibition's most significant contribution lies in its emphasis on Canadian Impressionists, as it places their work in dialogue with more prominent European Impressionists. As Paul Duval explains, Canadian Impressionism has often been dismissed as a 'secondary movement' that was not nearly as influential as its European counterpart.[4] The exhibition illustrates how Canadian Impressionists were influenced by their exposure to Impressionism in Europe, and how they adapted this style to suit Canadian artistic preferences. William Blair Bruce's paintings effectively demonstrate how Canadian Impressionists replicated and altered Impressionist styles. For example,

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! Anthea Callen, *The Art of Impressionism: Painting Technique & the Making of Modernity* (Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 4-5.

" 'Steam: Impressionist Painting Across the Atlantic', Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 5 November 2022–ongoing.

Ibid.

$ Paul Duval, *Canadian Impressionism* (McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1990), p. 13.

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Blair Bruce's *Landscape with Poppies* (1887), with its rural European setting, vibrant colours, and thick brush strokes, mirrors paintings like Dutch artist van Rysselberghe's *Landscape with Houses* (1894), which hangs nearby. Meanwhile, Blair Bruce's *Portrait of the Artist's Wife Caroline* (1890) differs significantly from French artist Henriette Tirman's portrait of a young girl, entitled *The Little Ardennaise* (c. 1915). Although the two works are separated by another painting, the contrast between them is clear. While Tirman's portrait is light and uses bright colours, Blair Bruce's painting employs a more muted colour palette and plays with shadows.

The spatial juxtaposition of Canadian and European works also demonstrates how geography influenced interpretations of Impressionism. Katerina Atanassova argues that the boundaries between urban and rural life were much more malleable in Canada than in Europe, and Canadian Impressionists reflected this reality in their paintings.[5] J.E.H. MacDonald's *Morning after Snow, High Park* (1912), for instance, depicts a couple walking through a serene, wintry scene. High Park was located within the limits of the bustling metropolis of Toronto, meaning Torontonians were less reliant on steam travel to escape the confines of the city than their European counterparts. This painting stands in stark contrast with the work exhibited below it: Canadian artist Paul Peel's *Luxembourg Gardens, Paris* (1890). Like High Park, Luxembourg Gardens was a natural retreat within a bustling city, but in Peel's painting, the leafy trees and plants are surrounded by stone and man-made structures, contrasting the pure, almost untouched nature shown in *Morning after Snow, High Park*. The comparison between these two paintings broadens the viewer's understanding of the relationship between steam power and urbanisation and effectively demonstrates how the Canadian landscape differentiated Canadian Impressionism from its European counterpart.

Despite the exhibition's many strengths, one notable shortcoming is its representation of female Impressionists. Although five of the twenty-one paintings featured in the exhibit are by women Impressionists, only one is accompanied by a longer description explaining the significance of the painting and its connection to the exhibition's themes. These pieces and their contributions to the exhibition deserve more attention. For instance, Mary Hiester Reid's *Chrysanthemums, A Japanese Arrangement*

[%] Katerina Atanassova, 'Painting Impressionism in Canada: An Introduction', in *Canada and Impressionism: New Horizons, 1880-1930*, ed. Katerina Atanassova (National Gallery of Canada, 2022), pp. 31-43, (p. 35).

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(c. 1895) features Japanese influences, including an Edo art print in the painting's background and a Nanking vase with traditional motifs.[6] This piece could have been a catalyst for a discussion of how steam travel also made goods from Asia, and the fashion for *Japonisme*, more accessible to Canadian consumers. The lack of commentary on the works by female artists is a significant drawback and means that visitors are less likely to engage critically with these pieces.

'Steam: Impressionist Painting Across the Atlantic' is a pleasant introduction to Impressionism and effectively demonstrates how steam travel facilitated the spread of this artistic movement to Canada. Ultimately, however, the exhibition does not provide a revolutionary interpretation of Impressionism. Art historians, including Anthea Callen, André Dombrowski, and Robert L. Herbert, have long acknowledged the importance of steam-powered modes of transportation in the facilitation and spread of Impressionism, and the exhibition reinforces this perspective.[7] Moreover, the Art Gallery of Ontario has hosted more innovative exhibits on the relationship between steam and Impressionism in the past, such as its 2019 exhibition, 'Impressionism in the Age of Industry: Monet, Pissarro, and More.' This exhibition highlighted the 'destabilizing effects' of steam in the nineteenth century and challenged the association between pastoral landscapes and Impressionism, focusing instead on steam and industry as subjects of Impressionist paintings.[8]

The exhibition's greatest contribution to nineteenth-century studies lies in its emphasis on Canadian Impressionism. Canadian art scholars have often lamented the lack of attention to Canadian Impressionists and have called for greater attention to their works.[9] However, even when Canadian Impressionists are studied, they are

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[&] Andrea Terry, 'Chrysanthemums: A Japanese Arrangement', *Mary Heister Reid: Life & Work* [n.d.]<https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/mary-hiester-reid/key-works/chrysanthemums-a-japanese-arrangement/> (accessed 16 May 2025).

['] See, for example, Callen, *The Art of Impressionism*, pp. 3-5; André Dombrowski, 'Impressionism and the Standardization of Time: Claude Monet at Gare Saint-Lazare', *The Art Bulletin*, 102.2 (2020), pp. 91-120; Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (Yale University Press, 1988), p. 4.

[(] Andrew Eschelbacher, 'Impressionism in the Age of Industry: Monet, Pissarro, and More', *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, 18.2 (Autumn 2019), pp. 195-203 (pp. 195-96, 199).

[)] Atanassova, pp. 31-33, 35.

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isolated as a separate and distinct movement from their European counterparts.[10] By displaying Canadian works next to their European predecessors, the Art Gallery of Ontario encourages visitors to draw comparisons, parallels, and contrasts between the works they see on display. Rather than focusing merely on the ways steam allowed Canadian artists to travel to Europe for artistic education, the exhibition urges visitors to reflect on how steam-powered transportation also allowed Canadians to return home, bringing with them the art forms they had learned in Europe, and adapting them to fit Canadian priorities, geographies, and artistic interests.

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BIOGRAPHY: Rachel Peacock is a PhD candidate in the Department of History at Queen's University. Her research interests include the Victorian monarchy, gender, media, political culture, and privacy. Her doctoral research, funded by the Social Studies and Humanities Research Council of Canada, focuses on nearly 100 individuals who attempted to intrude on the privacy of (or 'stalk') Queen Victoria and the British royal family throughout the nineteenth century.

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!* Duval, pp. 1-5, 13.

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RRR
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Review: Essie Fox, Dangerous. Orenda Books, 2025. 307 pp. ISBN 9781916788442, £16.99!""

MARIA GEMMA SILVA FERRÁNDEZ

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ON 31 AUGUST 1813, Lord Byron sent a letter to Lady Melbourne which contained a story, written by Lord Sligo, about the origin of Byron's poem *The Giaour* (1813). Byron remarked: 'I think it will make you laugh when you consider all the poetry & prose which has grown out of it'.[1] From a twenty-first-century perspective, and in light of the long-term evolution of the Byronic hero and Byron's image in popular culture, these lines take on a prophetic quality. Essie Fox's choice to open her latest novel, *Dangerous*, with a quotation from *The Giaour* is not incidental. By quoting this poem, Fox aligns her work with a longstanding literary tradition that dates to the Romantic period, with works such as Lady Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon* (1816) and John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), which portray fictionalised accounts of the poet, blending elements from his life and works. These texts notably draw on *The Giaour*, whose protagonist is cursed with vampirism, to construct a fictionalised profile of Byron as the dangerous, even fatal, supernatural lover. !

Dangerous is structured as a story within a story, playing with the idea that Vicar Thomas Gerrard Barber may have uncovered a fragment of Byron's memoirs when he opened the Byron family vault at the Church of St Mary Magdalene in Hucknall in 1938. The central plot is set in 1819, during Byron's residence at the Palazzo Mocenigo in Venice, and adopts the form of a mystery novel as the poet finds himself accused of the murder of two women. His implication in these crimes coincides with the circulation of rumours linking him to vampirism, exacerbated by the recent publication of Polidori's *Vampyre*. A similar premise appears in Stephanie Barron's novel *Jane and the Madness of Lord Byron* (2010), in which the poet is also cast as a murder suspect, with incriminating clues drawn from lines of *The Giaour.* In Barron's novel, Jane Austen must solve the mystery, while Byron is portrayed as a clichéd

[1] Lord Byron, *Byron's Letters and Journals: Alas! The Love of Women*, ed. by Leslie A. Marchand (John Murray, 1974), p. 102.

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archetype of the fatal lover. In contrast, Fox's Byron becomes his own detective. This narrative device enables the author to construct a nuanced portrayal that is primarily concerned with revealing Byron's most human aspects beneath the layers of myth. Rather than perpetuating a sensationalised version of Byron, Fox draws attention to often-overlooked details, such as his fondness for his menagerie of animals and his affectionate, if complicated, relationship with his illegitimate daughter, Allegra. The novel also brings to the fore figures who played important roles in Byron's everyday life, such as his long-serving valet William Fletcher and his gondolier Tita – both of whom accompanied his body back to England after his death in 1824. These characters are frequently marginalised in works of biographical fiction in favour of more sensational figures such as Lady Caroline Lamb or the Shelleys. In *Dangerous*, Fox re-centres the working class, offering a more intimate portrayal of Byron's private world that is informed by the works of biographers such as Fiona MacCarthy.[2]

While the novel is well researched, with carefully crafted settings and characters that bring Byron's world to life, this attention to detail sometimes weakens the narrative focus as new subplots emerge and the central mystery becomes harder to follow. Yet this apparent unevenness can be read as a deliberate narrative strategy: by the end of the manuscript, the reader, like Barber, is left with several unanswered questions, reflecting the challenges historians face when working with incomplete records. By blending vivid episodes with underdeveloped plots and occasional gaps in information, Fox invites the reader to inhabit the role of the historian, highlighting the provisional and interpretive nature of reconstructing the past.

At the end of *Dangerous*, Fox includes a bibliography of sources that inform the novel's historical texture and underpin the development of key characters. Among these is Susan Vaughan, one of Byron's servants at Newstead Abbey, with whom he is believed to have had an affair. Little is known about Vaughan beyond her brief correspondence with the poet and her subsequent dismissal from his service, after which she disappears from the historical record. Fox uses this gap as a space for imaginative reconstruction. Another historical figure is the vicar, Thomas Gerrard Butler, who led the 1938 exhumation of Byron's vault. Fox uses this event to frame her narrative, drawing on the speculative possibility that Butler may have discovered a surviving fragment of Byron's lost memoirs. The bibliography reflects a wide range of

[2] Fiona MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend* (John Murray, 2002).

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Byron scholarship, combining earlier and more recent sources. These include Gerrard Barber's *Byron and Where He Is Buried* (1939), Doris Langley Moore's *Lord Byron: Accounts Rendered* (1974), Fiona MacCarthy's *Byron: Life and Legend* (2002), Richard Lansdown's *Byron's Letters and Journals: A New Selection* (2015), and Andrew Stauffer's *Byron: A Life in Ten Letters* (2024). Fox also signals a broader interest in the cultural history of the vampire through works such as Erik Butler's *The Rise of the Vampire* (2013) and Violet Fenn's *The History of the Vampire in Popular Culture* (2021). In drawing on nineteenth-century studies scholarship to inform her creative practice, Fox aligns her work with the emerging scholarly interest in Romantic afterlives and adaptation, as reflected by the 2025 International Byron Conference's theme of 'The Afterlives of Lord Byron'.[3] !

Fox's novel also challenges problematic representations of the Byron-vampire myth commonly found in biographies and biographical fiction. While other narratives that associate Byron with vampirism tend to focus on fictionalised retellings of his Grand Tour – blending elements from *The Giaour*, such as the murder–revenge plot, with excerpts from Byron's letters and journals – these often perpetuate problematic representations of Euro-Orientalism. The curse that transforms Byron into a vampiric figure is frequently associated with his travels through Eastern Europe, depicted in such narratives as rural, archaic, and steeped in superstition. In *Dangerous*, however, Byron's association with vampires is situated at a later period of his life, while he resides in Venice in 1819, de-exoticising the myth. Essie Fox takes advantage of this chronology to align her plot with the publication of Polidori's *Vampyre*, which established the archetype of the Byronic vampire that would dominate twentieth and twenty-first-century Gothic fiction. Upon its initial publication, Polidori's tale was wrongly attributed to Byron as the result of a failed marketing strategy. Fox engages with a relatively recent field of inquiry in Romantic Studies: the emergence of celebrity culture, by foregrounding this episode and its consequences in her novel.[4] Her nuanced treatment

[#] 49th International Byron Conference: 'The Years That Followed: The Afterlives of Lord Byron', University of Pisa, 30 June"5 July 2025.

[$] See Tom Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Intimacy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and Lindsey Eckert, *The Limits of Familiarity: Authorship and Romantic Readers* (Bucknell University Press, 2022).

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of Byron reflects on how popular Romantic authors became commodified, misrepresented, and mythologised during the period, with lasting effects.

While Fox also sensationalises Byron by weaving historical fact with Gothic fiction, her approach is self-aware and critically reflective. She relocates the vampire myth from a fantasised East to Venice and turns the lens on Western culture's complicity in creating the legend of the Byronic Vampire. In doing so, *Dangerous* becomes not only a historical mystery but also a meta-commentary on authorship, celebrity, and the cultural afterlife of Romanticism. By interrogating the ways that Byron's public image has been shaped and circulated, Fox participates in discourse around how nineteenth-century authors persist in the twenty-first century – not as static historical subjects, but as mutable cultural figures. Fox's decision to reframe the vampiric mythos and foreground overlooked working-class figures challenges the hierarchies of representation that have long shaped both biographical fiction and Romantic studies and aligns her novel with trends in contemporary Romantic scholarship. *Dangerous* not only incorporates nineteenth-century studies scholarship but also models a creative practice that is historically grounded and ethically aware.

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BIOGRAPHY: Maria Gemma Silva Ferrández is a third-year PhD Candidate in English at the University of Stirling, where she also completed her BA in English (2022) and Research Master's degree (2023). Her area of expertise is the Romantic period, and her doctoral research explores the reception histories of Lord Byron and Walter Scott from the nineteenth century to the present. Her broader research interests include celebrity culture, the history of the book, and Gothic literature.

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Afterword

SOPHIE THOMPSON
(EDITOR IN CHIEF)

I HOPE THAT readers have enjoyed this special issue on play in the long nineteenth century, and that the contributions collected here inspire new ways of thinking about the cultural, literary, and social significance of play in nineteenth-century studies. I also hope these essays encourage continued exploration of the pervasive and often paradoxical presence of play in nineteenth-century life and beyond. Whether understood as metaphor, practice, or performance, play remains a vital lens through which to examine cultural formation, social interaction, and human creativity. By drawing attention to its enduring complexities, this issue opens avenues for further scholarship and reflection on the role of play in shaping both historical and contemporary worlds.

This issue grew out of the *Romance, Revolution and Reform* conference held on 17 January 2025 at the University of Kent, which was likewise devoted to the theme of play in the long nineteenth century. The theme immediately suggested itself to me, not only because of its relevance to my own research, but because of its capacity to be almost endlessly generative. Play is vividly interdisciplinary and international, and – both productively and problematically – resistant to any easy definition. The contributors certainly rose to this challenge, with papers and panels spanning game studies, children's and education studies, musicology, space and place, identity and sexuality, and a wide range of other topics and disciplines. Participants travelled from the United States, China, Australia, South Korea, and India, among other locations, creating a genuinely creative, collaborative, and supportive scholarly environment. We were also fortunate to host Dr Timothy Gao, author of *Virtual Play and the Victorian Novel* (2021), with a keynote entitled 'Messing Around with M. P. Shiel's The Purple Cloud'. Gao's talk animated Shiel's lesser-known fin-de-siècle novel (so much so that, on my way to buy a copy the day after the conference, I was told by staff at the local Waterstones that they had already sold their only copy to a conference attendee that morning) and exemplified the playful, experimental spirit of the event.

My congratulations go to all the authors whose work appears in this issue. Collectively, their articles enliven and enrich our understanding of the many forms of

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play – its ubiquity, ambivalence, and cultural resonance – and trace the connections that run across literature, performance, and everyday life in the long nineteenth century. It is especially worth noting that the majority of contributors are postgraduates or early career researchers, fulfilling the journal's mission to support scholars at the earliest stages of their academic careers. I hope you agree that this alone makes the issue an impressive achievement.

I would also like to extend thanks to the editorial board, who assisted not only with the general running and governance of the journal, but with the numerous rounds of editing that have shaped these articles into their final form: Daniel Breeze, David Brown, Fabia Buescher, Aude Campmas, Marion Tempest Grant, Johanna Harrison-Oram, Ellie Hibbert, Pauline Hortolland, Will Kitchen, Andrea Lloyd, Megha Mazumdar, Megan McInerney, Jessica McLennan, Beth Mills, Stephanie O'Rourke, Michelle Reynolds, Fraser Riddell, Beth Stewart, Benedict Taylor, Clare Walker Gore, and Chelsea Wallis. Special thanks go to Chris Prior, *RRR*'s Lead Academic Editor, whose steady guidance, patience, and reassurance have made both the running of the journal and the production of this issue possible as I navigated this new challenge.

With the publication of this issue, I will be stepping down as Editor-in-Chief. I have greatly enjoyed my time at the helm, having been involved with the journal since 2022, after publishing my first review here at the very start of my academic career. Experiencing the journal's intellectually rigorous and uniquely supportive community prompted me to remain involved, and it has been a privilege to help sustain that ethos. I am delighted that Katie Maclean will be taking over as Editor-in-Chief for the next issue. Andrea Lloyd will serve as Deputy Editor, and I am confident that she will continue to be a consistently rigorous and valuable member of *RRR*. Katie has been an unfailingly supportive Deputy Editor, always ready to step in when needed, and I have every confidence in her leadership as the journal advances to the next issue on Sex in the Long Nineteenth Century. The success of this issue owes much to her, and she deserves my sincere thanks.

Finally, I dedicate this issue to my daughter, whose insistence on play – even when I should be working – has never been regretted. I hope that readers of this issue, too, will be inspired to embrace the spirit of play in their own scholarly and creative endeavours.

10 January 2026

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