



Dandy Paris and Patroclus the Vulgar Gent: Comic Pain and Masculinity in Trojan War Epic Burlesques of Nineteenth-Century London Stage

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Abstract

The nineteenth-century burlesques drew inspiration from various sources, including ancient epic and mythology, thus using the classics as a background for contemporary discussions. In this paper, the portrayal of comic pain and masculinity in two epic burlesques of the Trojan War—Thomas Dibdin’s *Melodrame Mad! or, the Siege of Troy* (1819) and Robert Brough’s *Iliad; or, the Siege of Troy* (1858)—is brought into closer analysis. Through the characters of Paris and Patroclus, the study explores how violence and comic humiliation served as means for constructing masculine ideals on stage. By parodying classical sources by transforming Homeric duels into pugilistic contests, their comic framing exposed cultural anxieties about effeminacy, social class and national identity.

Abbreviations

- MM T. Dibdin, ‘Melodrame Mad! or the Siege of Troy’ (Surrey Theatre, 1819) in R. B. Davies, *Victorian Epic Burlesques: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Theatrical Entertainments after Homer*, London, 2019, pp. 34–91
- SoT R. Brough, ‘Iliad; or the Siege of Troy’ (Lyceum Theatre, 1858), in R. B. Davies, *Victorian Epic Burlesques: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Theatrical Entertainments after Homer*, London, 2019, pp. 137–218

Introduction

The nineteenth-century English comic stage hosted dozens of burlesques inspired by the ancient Greek and Roman mythological narratives. These plays offer a fascinating view into the reception of the classical past in contemporary English cultural thought. The burlesques operated on complex levels of intertextuality,

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drawing inspiration from both classical and modern sources, thus providing material for the study of classical reception across different times and cultures. Classical burlesques have received growing scholarly interest beginning with Edith Hall's pioneering work on the plays and their significance for a wider understanding of the uses of the classical past.¹ Interest has been given, for example, to contemporary social issues that were discussed on the stage using classical sources and storylines as negotiators.²

Drawing on classical reception theory as the theoretical framework, I approach nineteenth-century classical burlesques as a site where ancient narratives were reinterpreted to express contemporary cultural concerns. As articulated by Charles Martindale, rather than treating the epic material as unchangeable,³ the burlesques show how the playwrights adapted the classical narratives in innovative ways. Thus, classical burlesques offer a window into the ways in which the classical past was used and reshaped during the nineteenth century.

Negotiation of contemporary issues through classical material is at the centre of this paper as well. I examine the ways in which pain and violence were portrayed in a comic context in two classical epic burlesques, and how these portrayals constructed masculinities through performance. I approach masculinity as a performed and socially regulated set of behaviours, negotiated through physical capability, violence and classed forms of self-presentation. The article first examines the characters of Paris and Patroclus, analysing how their masculinity is constructed through themes of comic pain and violence, and the social commentary this entails. It then contrasts these findings with the broader theatrical culture of staged violence and the limits of its tolerance.

Comic pain and the theories of humour are central to the research question. Pain is here read as comic through the frame of the plays' burlesque genre, which aimed to produce laughter and humorous situations through parodying and inverting serious subject matter to something comical.⁴ On humour, many theories have been proposed, with three prevalent ones: relief, incongruity and superiority. Here, as will be discussed, primarily the two latter ones are the most relevant. The incongruity theory applies to laughter that is elicited by something unexpected and therefore is especially found in burlesques as a broadly applicable theory. For example, in burlesque subjects are turned from high to low and vice versa, which thus reverses expectations.⁵ The superiority theory, on the other hand, refers to laughter that is

¹ E. Hall, 'Classical Mythology in the Victorian Popular Theatre', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 5, 1999, pp. 336–66.

² For example: M. Villalba-Lázaro, 'Myth and popular culture: Brough's Victorian Burlesque Medea as a heterotopic cultural space', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 43, 2021, 185–99; E. Richardson, "'A Conjugal Lesson': Robert Brough's Medea and the Discourses of Mid-Victorian Britain", *Ramus*, 32, 2003, pp. 57–83.

³ In his work *Redeeming the Text*, Charles Martindale developed reception theory to the field of classical studies. C. Martindale, *Redeeming the Text*, Cambridge, 1993. See also L. Hardwick and C. Stray, *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, Hoboken, 2003.

⁴ R. Schoch, *Victorian Theatrical Burlesques*, Oxfordshire, 2016, p. xiii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

produced by some perceived superiority, as will be elaborated later. As Louise Peacock has written in relation to comic pain, these theories are not isolated, and many comic situations are applicable to more than one framework.⁶

My source material consists of two epic burlesques—Thomas Dibdin’s *Melodrama [sic] Mad! or, the Siege of Troy* (1819)⁷ and Robert Brough’s *Iliad; or, the Siege of Troy* (1858)⁸—both of which handle the Trojan War narrative.⁹ Epic burlesques¹⁰ were a sub-genre of classical burlesques, which in turn was a sub-genre itself. Burlesques were popular in England, especially between the 1830s and 1870s, when many London theatres produced hundreds of burlesques that were inspired by sources such as Shakespeare, English history, the Arabian Nights tales and popular novels of the day, in addition to classical narratives.¹¹ These ‘serious’ and mostly familiar sources were parodied and loaded with incessant puns, as well as intertextual references and allusions to contemporary topics, completed with singing, dancing and spectacle. Rachel Bryant Davies has written about the portrayal of Troy and Carthage in the Victorian imagination and counted fifteen plays on the theme of Homer’s *Iliad* and Vergil’s *Aeneid*, thus constituting roughly 1.5% of all burlesque scripts of any topic.¹² I chose these two plays by excluding plays that didn’t concentrate on the Trojan War’s siege narrative (they were on Dido and Aeneas or Paris and Helen instead), did not have human actors (one was a marionette play) and were not professional theatrical productions (they were amateur, unperformed or school productions). Additionally, three pieces were shown at Astley’s Amphitheatre, which specialized in equestrian and circus shows.

⁶ L. Peacock, *Slapstick and Comic Performance: Comedy and Pain*, Hampshire, 2014, pp. 5–6.

⁷ Dibdin’s play will be hereafter referred to as MM in the footnotes, and the page number corresponds to that in Davies’s anthology, see n. 9 below and ‘Abbreviations’.

⁸ Hereafter referred to as SoT in the footnotes, see n. 9 below and ‘Abbreviations’.

⁹ For accessing these plays, I used the excellent critical anthology of R. B. Davies, *Victorian Epic Burlesques: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Theatrical Entertainments after Homer*, London, 2019. It has invaluable footnotes regarding the plays’ metatextual and cultural allusions. She has used for Dibdin’s play the 1819 John Miller’s edition (the original manuscript, which should have been admitted to the Lord Chamberlain’s office, is lost) and for Brough’s play the 1858 Hugh Barclay’s edition and the manuscript submitted for censorship to Lord Chamberlain’s office; pp. 32, 135.

¹⁰ Whilst Dibdin’s play is called a melodrama, it does not conform to many of the most defining characteristics of a one (it e.g. lacks clear stock characters, triumph of virtue, punishment of evil, predictable ending; see M. Booth, *English Melodrama*, London, 1965, pp. 13–14), but instead the play fits closer to the definition of burlesque. The play was written when melodrama and burlesque were rather new to the theatre world, which also explains some confusion of genre definition, complicated also by the fact that various terms were used interchangeably (J. Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770–1840*, Cambridge, 2000, p. 54; Schoch, *Victorian Theatrical Burlesques* (n. 4 above), p. xiii). Newspaper reviews called it a burlesque, see e.g. ‘It is a burlesque piece’, *The Times* 4 April 1820, p. 3; ‘all in burlesque’, *Morning Post*, 22 June 1819, p. 3; however, it was also once called ‘the excellent burlesque melodrama’, *Morning Post* 5.4.1820, p. 3. In its own advertisement it was often referred to as a melange (*The Times*, 25 June 1819, p. 3) or extravaganza (*Morning Chronicle*, 19 June 1819, p. 3).

¹¹ Hall, ‘Classical Mythology’ (n. 1 above), p. 337; Schoch, *Victorian Theatrical Burlesques* (n. 4 above), p. xi.

¹² Davies unfortunately does not specify where the comparative number of all burlesque plays is derived. R. B. Davies, *Troy, Carthage and the Victorians: The Drama of Classical Ruins in the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*, Cambridge, 2018, p. 207.

The plays have recognizable storylines and characters from the epic sources (mainly Homer's *Iliad* and Vergil's *Aeneid* but also from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*) in addition to contemporary inclusions and alterations, or like one review of Dibdin's play wrote in the *Literary Chronicle*: 'The Iliad is closely adhered to; the gods intervene; the combats, described by Homer, are fought, though in a very different manner; the town burnt; and all in the most admirable burlesque imaginable.'¹³ With nearly four decades between the plays, the difference offers a window into the changing conception of violence and masculinity, as well as the developing genre of burlesque, making these plays fruitful and comparable source material. Based on my research, Dibdin's play appears to be the first performed classical burlesque of the nineteenth-century England, whilst by the time of Brough's play, the genre had developed and was approaching the height of its popularity.¹⁴

Homer and his epics were central to nineteenth-century English culture. Notably, Alexander Pope's translation of the *Iliad* (1715–1720), and later the *Odyssey*, made the epics accessible to a wider audience, including many women and members of the working classes who were unable to read the original Greek.¹⁵ Not only was Homer read, but also the Homeric epics were used as a touchstone for debates and inspiration in politics, society and culture.¹⁶ The connection between the epics and the ideas of manliness has likewise affected the English culture throughout history.¹⁷ The *Iliad*, often read as a masculine epic, offered inspiration (and therefore also warnings) for the country active in various wars and conflicts.¹⁸

Therefore, the *Iliad* was a particularly fruitful source for burlesque treatment: the plays appropriated a culturally revered classical text and transformed it into comic spectacle through the inventive reworking of plot points and character types. Additionally, the *Iliad*'s emphasis on martial honour and competitive masculinity – qualities that retained cultural value in nineteenth-century Britain—made it an effective narrative framework through which contemporary debates about manliness could be negotiated. The plays reveal a complex reception of the classical epic, shaped by centuries of adaptation of the Trojan War narrative. This becomes apparent in, for example, the use of later Roman names for the Greek gods, as well as in the inclusion of characters such as Troilus and Cressida, who were developed during the medieval and Renaissance periods, most notably by Chaucer and Shakespeare, yet were received as part of a more uniform classical tradition. The plays are deliberately anachronistic, blending classical and modern elements in line

¹³ *The Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review*, 26 June 1819, p. 95. Similar review including the cited part almost verbatim was published also in the *Morning Post*, 22 June 1819, p. 3.

¹⁴ For classical burlesque, Laura Monrós-Gaspar reads the years from 1830s to late 1860s as those of 'development and decay', L. Monrós-Gaspar, *Victorian Classical Burlesques: A Critical Anthology*, London, 2015, p. 13.

¹⁵ E. Hall and H. Stead, *A People's History of Classics: Class and Greco-Roman Antiquity in Britain and Ireland 1689 to 1939*, Oxon 2020, pp. 4, 49.

¹⁶ As discussed for example in K. Simonsuuri, *Homer's Original Genius, Eighteenth-Century Notions of the Early Greek Epic (1688–1798)*, Cambridge, 1979.

¹⁷ See more in C. D. Williams, *Pope, Homer, and Manliness*, London, 1993.

¹⁸ N. Vance, 'Classical Authors, 1790–1880', in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature: Volume 4: 1790–1880*, ed. N. Vance and J. Wallace, Oxford, 2015, pp. 29–55 (33).

with the burlesque tradition. They clearly inhabit neither past nor present, creating a unique setting in which ancient Greeks discuss the transatlantic cable, drink whiskey and duel in boxing rings—events that are both conventional within the genre and absurdly comic to the audience.

Dibdin's *Melodrame Mad!* premiered in the Surrey Theatre on June 21 in 1819, during which time Dibdin was also the manager of the theatre. The play ran for nearly a year,¹⁹ and was seen by the likes of Prince Leopold,²⁰ Duke of Montrose with 'many other distinguished families'²¹ and Duke of Sussex, who 'expressed himself highly pleased with the performance, which went off with the greatest éclat'.²² The play was also once advertised as being performed by the 'special desire and under the patronage of their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Kent'.²³ As will be elaborated later, to comment on the variety of the audience, one review also commented on it being 'almost too classical for the Surr[e]y side of the water,' but also 'the best burlesque we ever witnessed'.²⁴

Brough's *Siege of Troy* was first performed nearly forty years later as a Christmas spectacle on December 27, 1858. The Lyceum Theatre (formerly known as the English Opera House) was one of London's minor West End theatres, located on Wellington Street behind the Strand, along which there were many prominent theatres. The play only ran until the following February—which was common for the fast-paced change of programme—and it received a lot of attention from the press. It was praised especially for its scenery and costumes, which showed that 'no expense ha[d] been spared to make the *Siege of Troy* one of the most superbly mounted pieces ever put on the stage'.²⁵ The play was much discussed, especially as a burlesqued classical epic: one of the reviews wrote how 'none but a most fanciful and eccentric imagination could ever have conceived such a queer subject for burlesque, or devised such a singular transformation of historic characters'.²⁶

For the purpose of this article, the ways in which the plays portray war are of importance. Both plays were written and performed in the wake of real-life wars in which England was active, which influenced their portrayal of the theme. In Dibdin's *Melodrame Mad!*, the ethos of war was brought on by the contemporary turn-of-the-century conflicts and most notably by the Napoleonic Wars between 1803 and 1815. The play begins in a highly metatheatrical manner, in which various imagined staff members of the theatre engage in a discussion. The author of the play-within-a-play, Major Dennis Murphy, explains that as a retired soldier, he must continue the war even during the time of peace by writing a play about the Siege of Troy,

¹⁹ It seems to have been advertised for the last time (without any special mention of a last run) on April 4th, 1820. *The Times*, 4 April 1820, p. 2.

²⁰ *Morning Post*, 13 July 1819, p. 3.

²¹ *Morning Post*, 5 April 1820, p. 3.

²² *Morning Post*, 3 July 1819, p. 3.

²³ *Morning Chronicle*, 6 August 1819, p. 3.

²⁴ *The Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review*, 8 April 1820.

²⁵ *The Era*, 2 January 1859, p. 11.

²⁶ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 2 January 1859, p. 4.

which is ‘fitting and correspondent to the feelings of a soldier’.²⁷ Not only does this potentially echo the feelings of other inactive soldiers in the audience, but it also explains the various anachronisms that will ensue, from pugilism to fire brigades. At the heart of the author’s justifications for such anachronisms is that ‘the stage should reflect men and manners, not only as they are, but also as they ought to be’.²⁸ This is an important notion for the aims of this paper, as well, since it highlights how the contemporary attitudes and values were central to the play’s presentation of its ancient characters and events.

Brough’s *Iliad*, on the other hand, handled the theme of war more comically and critically. The Crimean War (1853–1856), having just ended before Brough’s play, influenced the play’s narrative differently.²⁹ Especially in the aftermath of the war, much critique was directed at the British leaders and their incompetence, which had resulted in the unjust suffering of British soldiers.³⁰ For example, the play portrays Agamemnon’s character as a ridiculous, gouty old general who ‘prefers the task of looking on / and seizing prizes which brave hands have won’.³¹ In addition, Nestor sings a song with lyrics such as ‘I recollect men drawing swords / Without quite knowing why’.³² This can be read as a comment on the absurdity and futility of war from the point of view of soldiers at the mercy of their generals’ orders. Generally, the theme of war is treated more jokingly, which may also reflect the development of the genre and the expectations of a more humorous approach.

This paper argues that comic representations of pain in epic burlesque functioned as a means to comment on masculine legitimacy, using laughter as a way to correct unwanted behaviour. Focussing on the characters of Paris and Patroclus, it demonstrates that representations of bodily pain are concentrated on characters whose masculinity is presented as deficient: the dandy Paris in Dibdin’s play and the socially aspiring Patroclus in Brough’s. By transforming Homeric duels into pugilistic encounters, both plays replace heroic combat with a contemporary, class-marked and highly masculine form of violence that renders loss in battle visible and laughable.

First, through the treatment of Paris, the article shows how effeminacy and cowardice manifested in the character of the dandy, linking bodily incapacity to anxieties about decadence and national masculinity. Second, in the case of Patroclus and his attempt to imitate Achilles, bodily humiliation exposes the limits of social mobility and failure to cultivate one’s own individuality. In both cases, the plays position violence as an appropriate response to perceived deviations from ideal masculinity.

²⁷ MM, p. 45.

²⁸ MM, p. 45.

²⁹ Additionally, Britain had been involved in (imperialistic) campaigns and conflicts during the 1830–50s in Africa, Asia, New Zealand and India. R. Barrow, ‘Militarism, Masculinity and National Identity in Victorian Britain’, in *Graeco-Roman Antiquity and the Idea of Nationalism in the 19th Century*, ed. T. Fögen and R. Berlin 2016, pp. 131–51 (132–3).

³⁰ L. Kriegel, *The Crimean War and its Afterlife: Making Modern Britain*, Cambridge, 2022, pp. 8–9.

³¹ SoT, pp. 157–9.

³² SoT, p. 158.

Finally, the article situates these case studies within the wider theatrical culture of nineteenth-century London in order to account for the limits placed on the representation of violence itself. Violence was not merely a spectacle but a corrective mechanism through which masculine legitimacy could be tested and either affirmed or denied on the stage. By contrasting epic burlesque with more explicitly violent popular genres such as melodrama, I argue that comic pain in burlesque operated according to genre conventions, middle-class audience expectations and classed notions of respectability. These strategies allowed burlesque to present corrective narratives about masculinity whilst remaining appropriate middle-class comic entertainment.

Paris: dandy in a boxing ring

Paris of Dibdin's play and Patroclus in Brough's are interesting examples of performance of violence, pain and power dynamics, since the relationship between these elements and masculinity is explored through the two characters. In the *Iliad*'s book III, Paris and Menelaus engage in a duel which would have ended in Menelaus' victory had not Venus³³ saved Paris. Dibdin narrates this duel in the play's second act in a more contemporary manner as a boxing match. Whilst Paris is often seen to represent non-normative masculinity already in Homer's epic, his portrayal in the context of English pugilism functions as a way to understand nineteenth-century conceptions of masculinity. Another contemporary addition is the link between Paris's beauty and the figure of the dandy. In the *Iliad*, beauty is similarly connected to effeminacy and failure on the battlefield.³⁴ Made contemporary through the culturally recognizable character of the dandy, these characteristics extend the play's commentary on a type of gentleman whose excessive interest in his appearances was perceived as vain, effeminate and potentially dangerous in a nation that valued military strength.

Whilst both plays have a few other instances of fighting, showing that violence and battlefield visuals were diverse in these plays, they are less accessible to today's interpretation because of the scarcity of stage directions. Additionally, they often follow a similar, simple pattern: characters exit the stage, often leaving open the style and length of the duel. For example, in Dibdin's play Achilles and Hector exchange taunts during their duel, but the physicality of the scene is only described as 'they fight and pause' until the two leave the stage 'exeunt fighting'. After this, Achilles re-enters the stage to inform that 'Hector's past hectoring, he is no more'.³⁵ Except for the two example characters Paris and Patroclus, the duels are also

³³ As mentioned earlier in the text, in classical burlesques, the gods were systematically referred to with their Roman names. I use these names, too, to avoid confusion.

³⁴ For example, M. Mueller, 'An Affect Studies Approach. Reading Non-normative Masculinities in Homer's *Iliad*', in *The Epic World*, ed. P. Lothspeich, New York, 2024, pp. 60–73; C. Ransom, 'Aspects of Effeminacy and Masculinity in the *Iliad*', *Antichthon*, 45, 2011, pp. 35–57.

³⁵ MM, pp. 83–84.

portrayed as happening between equal opponents. Whilst one might die leaving the other victorious, their masculinity as such is not diminished by this. As discussed in more detail below, nineteenth-century theatrical conventions shaped how violence could be displayed and interpreted on stage: Character deaths happen only in Dibdin's play, and almost always off-stage—a tactic also familiar in classical Greek and Roman theatre.³⁶ In Brough's play, the ending is reversed in a comic manner, when it turns out that the war reporter Homer has misinterpreted the situations, and all the characters are alive to reconcile in the end.³⁷

In the treatment of Paris and Patroclus, however, the characters' masculinity is commented on through their failures in combat. Whilst some duels in both plays happen in a more canonical manner with swords, these two characters and the violence they encounter are depicted in a contemporary mode: that of pugilism. These fist-fighting duels reveal both hierarchical orders of masculinity and broader modes of performed violence within a comic context.

It is not surprising that boxing was integrated as a part of bodily performances on stage, in addition to the actual prize rings. The popularity of boxing as entertainment had been on the rise from the late eighteenth century onwards, and it was seen as a British invention.³⁸ Public displays of violence such as duels started to decline around the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whilst boxing became increasingly codified and thus viewed more as a sport and as acceptable entertainment.³⁹ At the same time, masculinity itself was a subject of cultural negotiation, as emerging middle-class values of respectability, self-control and national character challenged earlier elite models of polite gentlemanliness.⁴⁰ Additionally, the rise of consumerism and luxury consumption was often portrayed as a threat to masculine strength, fostering anxieties about decadence and effeminacy that found expression in the figure of the dandy, as will be discussed below.⁴¹

In Dibdin's 1819 play *Melodrame Mad! or, the Siege of Troy*, the boxing fight between Paris and Menelaus is only narrated. Because of the narration, however, it is more accessible today than the other duels. Before the fight, the Greek and Trojan camps settle a duel in the boxing ring between the two men, and known prize ring

³⁶ With the exceptions of the death of Laocoon and his sons (who perish in the style of the statue group already famous during the time of the performance) and a scene where Aeneas 'kills many Greeks', who are unnamed. MM, pp. 85, 89.

³⁷ SoT, p. 218.

³⁸ Whilst this was held as true, simultaneously the ancient roots of pugilism were acknowledged. P. Radford, 'Lifting the Spirits of the Nation: British Boxers and The Emergence of the National Sporting Hero at the Time of the Napoleonic Wars', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 12, 2005, pp. 249–70 (254); P. Babiak, 'The Manly Art': The Burlesque Boxing Match in Nineteenth-Century Knockabout Comedy', *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and Film*, 43, 2016, pp. 21–42 (22).

³⁹ K. Downing, 'The Gentleman Boxer: Boxing, Manners, and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century England', *Men and Masculinities*, 12, 2010, pp. 328–52, (330); Babiak, 'The Manly Art' (n. 38 above), p. 22.

⁴⁰ M. Cohen, "'Manners' Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1750–1830', *Journal of British Studies*, 44, 2005, pp. 312–29 (312–15; 324–5).

⁴¹ Downing, 'The Gentleman Boxer', pp. 331–333 (n. 39 above).

locations of Wormwood Scrubs and Hounslow are mentioned.⁴² Ulysses narrates the boxing match that follows: ‘Third round, Menelaus rallied, found his opponent’s bread-basket, queer’d his left peeper, hit him to the ropes—bets altered, Menelaus made play.’⁴³ Whilst the fight ends with Menelaus winning and being the ‘champion of Greece’, it appears that Paris fights until his defeat instead of being saved by Venus.

Whilst this fight does not offer visual entertainment for the audience, it is nevertheless very important. Because the fight is only narrated, it was assumed to resonate with the audience. Since boxing matches and prize fights were a popular form of entertainment in the contemporary England, their terms would have also been more familiar to the audience than those of fencing, for example.⁴⁴ Therefore, the change in the form of violence aims to create familiarity with the audience, since real-life boxing matches were both watched and reported in newspapers.⁴⁵ Additionally, in a burlesque context, to transform a fight into a boxing match was to make it more comic, since it clashed with audience expectations—here we see an example of incongruous humour. Similar alterations of duels were also made in Shakespearean burlesques.⁴⁶

What operates underneath the boxing match is the old idea of an honour duel: opponents are challenged, and the outcomes dictate the honour of the winner and the loser. The boxing match is central in carving out Paris’s character, since the result of the fight acts as a reason to condemn him. Paris returns to the stage with a black eye, ashamed that he has been beaten by ‘a fellow of no mark’ (that is, of no importance) and that he will not be able to show his face in his social clubs any longer.⁴⁷ This moment underlines the fragility of a gentleman’s position when his masculinity is challenged, also serving as a pointed reminder to the gentleman members of the audience, who would recognize both the social stakes and the humour in Paris’s humiliation. Earlier, Paris’s new wife, Helen, and her nurse have had a conversation, in which the nurse chastises Helen for running away with a ‘dandy’—the appearance of the man and his snobbish words support her claim.⁴⁸

Most critical for this defeat is Hector, Paris’s brother, who enters the room. Paris is also rebuked by his brother in the *Iliad*, but here the lines are drawn from *Macbeth*.⁴⁹ Shakespeare’s plays were likely familiar to the majority of viewers, perhaps even more so than the *Iliad*. The references provide another intertextual layer to the burlesque as was usual for the genre. In Shakespeare’s play, Macbeth is horrified by the appearance of Banquo’s ghost during a banquet, whose death is

⁴² MM, p. 60.

⁴³ MM, p. 66.

⁴⁴ Babiak, ‘The Manly Art’, p. 22 (n. 38 above).

⁴⁵ Radford, ‘Lifting the Spirits’, p. 252 (n. 38 above).

⁴⁶ N. Caputo, ‘“The Farcical Tragedies of King Richard III”: The Nineteenth-Century Burlesques’, *Theatre Survey*, 62, 2021, pp. 25–50 (28).

⁴⁷ MM, p. 71.

⁴⁸ MM, p. 70.

⁴⁹ Quoting, citing and altering Shakespearean dialogue was common in both plays, adding another level of intertextuality for the audience to resonate with.

on his conscience. Here, instead, Hector—who would perhaps rather see Paris dead than alive—calls out:

[...] Thy bones are useless, and thy blood is cold; / Thou hast no skill for parrying in those eyes, / thy foe has blacken'd.⁵⁰

Furthermore, he tells his brother that whichever way Menelaus might have approached him, Paris should not have been a coward, and that it is now time for him to regain his honour:

[...] be alive again / And dare him to the Fives' Court [professional boxing venue] with thy skill; / If, trembling, you decline it—I protest thee / The baby of a girl—hence, shadow, hence; / Mockery of manhood, hence—⁵¹

Hector thus sees that Paris has not done his duty on the battlefield (i.e. the boxing ring) and therefore has tainted his reputation. The only way for Paris to redeem himself is to challenge Menelaus again, this time showing courage and emerging victorious. If Paris were to decline, he would be likened to a girl's doll ('the baby of a girl'). Paris is run off the stage whilst being called a 'mockery of manhood', which is altered from Shakespeare's 'unreal mockery', indicating that Dibdin deliberately included this explicit rebuke of unmanliness, which does not appear in the original parodied text. The use of Shakespeare furthermore adds the element of contrasting Macbeth/Hector and Banquo/Paris, two characters who represent different masculinities. In Dibdin, Hector embodies a manly hero in contrast with his cowardly brother.

In the play, Paris's manliness is directly linked to his ability to perform on the battlefield against his opponents. Failing to do so results in mockery and shame, as occurred after he lost his match with Menelaus. In addition, Paris is constantly referred to as a dandy, which is portrayed as a particularly damning characteristic. For example, after Paris has come on stage ready to challenge Achilles, Cassandra attacks him with a reprimand:

Away! I know thee too—thou—what shall I call thee? Thou art lower / than what my mind prophetic tells me, a nation yet unborn will call a / *Dandy*. Your ancestors were strong, could carry arms, but—(*sings* / "You're a frog in an opera hat, / Heigho! says Rowley."⁵²

Cassandra uses her prophetic skills to name Paris anachronistically as a dandy, highlighting the imagined decline in manly virtues: unlike his 'manly ancestors', a dandy is neither strong nor fit to fight. She continues:

⁵⁰ MM, p. 72. The scene refers to Macbeth Act III Scene IV: 'Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;/ Thou hast no speculation in those eyes / Which thou dost glare with!'. The Macbeth citations are from the edition *Macbeth, written by Shakespeare. As represented by Their Majesties servants, on opening the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, on Monday, April 21st. 1794*, London, 1794, p 42.

⁵¹ MM, p. 72. In Macbeth: 'Or, be alive again, / And dare me to the desert with thy sword; / If trembling I inhibit thee, protest me / The baby of a girl. Hence, horrible shadow! / Unreal mockery, hence!', *Macbeth*, p. 42 (n. 50 above).

⁵² MM, p. 78.

Go, get thee to a madhouse – go, for all thy tribe are lunatics. [...] and are no more like men than I to Hercules.⁵³

Paris is thus explicitly and constantly contrasted against stronger men, being of ‘weaker material’. The tone of Paris’s representation can thus be seen as a clear comment on dandyism: as the *Iliad*’s effeminate Paris is portrayed as a dandy, the play frames dandyism as an undesirable social development. Cassandra’s lines go as far as pathologizing dandyism. Her prophecies invite the audience’s laughter, both through the recognition of incongruous anachronism as well as superiority through engagement with the commentary on the unmanly qualities of the dandy.

The burlesque amplifies the original effeminate characteristics of Paris and caricatures and exaggerates them to fit the contemporary figure of the dandy, demonstrating a mode of reception typical of burlesque. Additionally, the dandy offered a discursive touchstone through which imagined concerns about the decadence of elite men could be addressed. In the *Iliad*, Paris is associated with both beauty and cowardice, features that were conventionally considered effeminate.⁵⁴ He is positioned as an ‘other’ in contrast to his brother Hector, whose character constructs a more ‘proper’ framework for masculinity.⁵⁵ In the two epic burlesques, Hector is similarly portrayed as a more ideal—but not perfect—soldier, who encourages others to the battlefield and does not shy away from a fight.⁵⁶ Paris’s otherness is reinforced through comparable aspects of effeminacy found in the figure of the dandy. In early nineteenth-century literature, dandies were typically associated with over-interest in appearance and self-presentation, with a ‘tendency towards narcissism’.⁵⁷ These negatively perceived qualities were often linked to leisurely lifestyle and luxury consumption, which in turn raised anxieties about decadence and masculine ‘softness’ in upper-class men.

These anxieties were echoed in cultural concerns about masculinity. One of the characteristics of a dandy was to position oneself against society’s norms and values.⁵⁸ As in the *Iliad*, similarly in *Dibdin* this alienation and ‘narcissism’ can be seen as a dangerous quality in a man, because of its effect on cowardice or indifference towards success on the battlefield. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, England with growingly imperial interests wanted citizens who could also be trusted in war. Karen Downing has researched the anxiety and the urgency to make men of fashion (more generally the elite) suitable leaders and soldiers for the nation active in military conflicts and conquests. She argues that the rise in popularity of prize fights and their reporting was partly due to the instructive undertones of the fighter.⁵⁹ Similar instructions—and especially warnings—can be

⁵³ MM, pp. 78–9.

⁵⁴ Ransom, ‘Aspects of Effeminacy’, pp. 35–57 pp. 42–4 (n. 34 above).

⁵⁵ Ransom, ‘Aspects of Effeminacy’, p. 35 (n. 34 above).

⁵⁶ See for example MM, pp. 81–4; SoT, pp. 207–8.

⁵⁷ C. Beward, ‘Masculine Pleasures: Metropolitan Identities and the Commercial Sites of Dandyism, 1790–1840’, *The London Journal*, 28, pp. 60–72 (60).

⁵⁸ S. Godfrey, ‘The Dandy as Ironic Figure’, *SubStance*, 11, 1982, pp. 21–33 (24–25).

⁵⁹ Downing, ‘The Gentleman Boxer’, p. 334 (n. 39 above).

read in the treatment of Dabdin's Paris. After the attacks on his masculinity from both Hector and Cassandra, Paris gets his chance to redeem himself through various acts of courageous violence. First, his killing of Achilles earns Aeneas's approval.⁶⁰ Second, Paris enters the stage to challenge Menelaus again after the Greeks have climbed out of the Trojan horse. Menelaus answers his call, and the last appearance of these two exiting the stage leaves their destinies untold, but the characters are finally portrayed as equals.⁶¹ Paris's character arc moves from a beaten and ridiculed dandy to a figure whose redemption depends on courageous action in battle, linking violence to the performance of acceptable masculinity.

Similarly, in Brough's play, Paris is portrayed as a character who is obsessed with his appearance, and who has escaped by Venus's aid from the battle with Menelaus, which again is only narrated. He acts 'foppishly' and is called by Priam a 'puppy effeminate'.⁶² He once more is reprimanded by Hector for his failure in the battle, but in a way that attacks Paris's masculinity less explicitly, although he calls his brother a 'toy-shop beau that can't e'en shoot an arrow'. 'Beau' has a pejorative feminine meaning in this context with the additional comment on Paris's lack of fighting skills, linking masculinity and battlefield performance to underline Paris's effeminate features.⁶³ However, it is worth noting that in Brough's play Achilles, too, acts somewhat in the manner of a dandy, with close attention to appearances. These attributes are however not explicitly linked to his fighting abilities, since he also courageously challenges Hector, for example.

Sima Godfrey has written about how the dandy of the early nineteenth century was a 'mindless model of vanity', which, as the century progressed, transformed into a 'model of the repressed dreamer and intellectual rebel'.⁶⁴ In Brough's play from the middle of the century, it seems that the dandy remained a somewhat comic character, with links to effeminacy, but with less purely negative connotations. Whilst the rebelliousness is not a theme followed in Brough's play, the more nuanced portrayal of the dandy is nevertheless apparent due to the play's more relaxed treatment of the subject. It seems that the dandy had become a stereotypical comic stock character instead of a figure dangerously opposed to the nation's interests, thus lessening also its potent gender commentary. In Brough's play, the most poignant commentary on 'wrong' masculinity is made at the expense of Patroclus and his characteristics.

⁶⁰ MM, p. 84.

⁶¹ MM, p. 87.

⁶² SoT, p. 173.

⁶³ SoT, p. 179.

⁶⁴ Godfrey, 'The Dandy', p. 27 (n. 58 above).

Patroclus and the Price of Mimicry

In Dibdin's play, Patroclus does not even have a speaking role, and he is only referred to briefly: After the narration of Paris's defeat by Menelaus, it is stated that Patroclus rose to challenge Hector whilst wearing Achilles's boxing gloves as a reference to the original borrowed armour. Hector was said to have beaten him so that nothing was left 'for the Coroner to do but bring in a verdict of justifiable homicide'.⁶⁵ This spurred Achilles to seek revenge, bringing the plot forward in a Homeric manner.

In Brough's 1858 play *Iliad; or the Siege of Troy*, however, Patroclus has a more pronounced role. He is Achilles's right hand, and he mimics Achilles's gentlemanly habits in a clumsy way, making him a comically pathetic flatterer and social climber, unable to hide his lower-class background. This transforms Patroclus into a ridiculous figure, who is violently punished for his mimicry. I argue that in the comic frame of the play, this is intended as both humourous and corrective. Patroclus also has an unrequited love for Cressida, thus participating in a love-triangle subplot between himself, Cressida and Troilus, a story especially familiar to audiences through Shakespeare's play, but also known from Chaucer's version of the tale and John Lydgate's *Troy Book*.

Like in the *Iliad*, Patroclus and Hector fight in the play. Notably, this fight is the most violent instance in the play, staged in the style of a boxing match. Patroclus' copying of Achilles eventually leads to the episode with Hector, since he is wearing Achilles's armour and is mistakenly identified. In the *Iliad*, Patroclus' action is considered heroic, making his demise tragic and meaningful. Brough, however, transforms Homeric virtue into social commentary: he retains the borrowing of armour familiar to the audience but turns it into comic social mimicry that invites violent correction. In the play, Patroclus' borrowing of the armour is not heroic, but a failed attempt to win Cressida's affections.⁶⁶ Whilst Cressida thinks he is Achilles, she comments on his shorter height and the loosely fitting armour, making him an especially comic character.⁶⁷

The assault ensues when Patroclus, wearing Achilles's oversized armour, comes across Troilus and Hector, who is drunk. As in the original plot, Patroclus is mistaken for Achilles, which initially flatters him until he realizes that the two men are after his armour pieces and shield. Troilus is showing a 'pugilistic attitude', most likely referring to a boxing stance with raised fists or another position signalling an initiative for a fight, which alarms Patroclus. Regardless, it is Hector who makes contact and—as the stage directions indicate—knocks him down.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ MM, p. 66.

⁶⁶ In Brough's play, the medieval love affair of Troilus and Cressida is included, most likely inspired by the Shakespearean play, although with alterations: it is Patroclus and Troilus who fight for the affections of Cressida, who is not taken as a prisoner of war at any point.

⁶⁷ SoT, p. 198.

⁶⁸ SoT, p. 202.

A scene follows in which Troilus and Aeneas first try to stop Hector, but he will not relent until ‘with [his] steam arm [he has] pummell’d the scamp’.⁶⁹ A *scena* follows, where Hector ‘pummels the prostate Patroclus – in Chancery – to chorus’.⁷⁰ The technique of getting your opponent ‘in Chancery’ is ‘violent and sudden’, since the opponent’s head is taken under one arm and then attacked with the other, putting the opponent into a defenceless and even embarrassing situation.⁷¹ In the scene, Patroclus has little opportunity to defend himself, instead receiving relentless punches. The moment is accentuated with the song ‘The Steam Arm’, although it is unclear whether it is sung in its entirety. In the popular ballad, a veteran of Waterloo receives a steam arm as a replacement for his hand and ends up attacking his wife and policemen, unable to stop the hand’s violence.⁷² The combination of the humiliating headlock position—illegal in modern boxing—and a popular, silly song would have emphasized the comicality of the scene, as well as the submissive position of the character of Patroclus.

During the scene, Patroclus receives unyielding attacks until Hector presumes him dead or at least unconscious, stripping him of his armour and ‘leaving Patroclus a ridiculous object’. Whilst the others exit, he ‘remains on the stage immovable, “spread-eagle-wise”’. Patroclus’ adversities, however, do not end here, since a group of Greeks and policemen come and fight for his body—this, too, following the pattern of the original narrative.⁷³ Here, Patroclus’ nose has also begun to bleed, visible to the audience. Blood is a significant instrument for visualizing pain, reminding the spectator of its continuity, and making something that is felt to become seen.⁷⁴

Many layers of comic pain seem to operate in this scene. Louise Peacock has categorized four steps for evaluating comic pain: recognition, embodied understanding, evaluation of pain and appreciation.⁷⁵ First, there is recognition of the genre and agreement on a comic frame as context. The fictional violence is amplified here because the pain is rendered as a rhythmic performance, fitted to the accompanying musical piece. This distances the audience from lived experience, as the performed nature of pain is underlined by theatrical elements of choreography and music.⁷⁶ In embodied understanding, the audience mirrors the performer’s body in kinetic empathy, relating to Patroclus’ suffering whilst the comic frame allows simultaneous disengagement. Finally, appreciation manifests as laughter. Of course,

⁶⁹ SoT, p. 203.

⁷⁰ SoT, p. 203.

⁷¹ M. Reynolds, “‘In Chancery’ Again: Dickens and Prize-Fighting”, *Dickens Studies Newsletter*, 14, 1983, pp. 48–50 (50).

⁷² Transcribed by K. Blair in “‘The Steam Arm’”: Proto-Steam-punk Themes in a Victorian Popular Song’, *Neo-Victorian Studies* 3, 2010, pp. 196–207 (203–5).

⁷³ SoT, pp. 203–204.

⁷⁴ This thought is inspired by Brooke Holmes, who has written about the representations of pain in the *Iliad* and how in it the description of blood denotes the pain that is felt by the one who bleeds. B. Holmes, ‘The *Iliad*’s Economy of Pain’, *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974–2014), 137, 2007, pp. 45–84, (especially 60–65).

⁷⁵ Peacock, *Slapstick*, pp. 74–78 (n. 6 above).

⁷⁶ Peacock, *Slapstick*, p. 74 (n. 6 above).

we cannot know whether the audience at the Lyceum laughed at the scene or how they felt about the comic pain. Only two reviews mention the scene, calling it ‘a sound drubbing’ and a good trashing.⁷⁷ These suggest that at least some appreciation was found, either in the actors’ skill or in the corrective aspect implied. However, since the scene was not further discussed in reviews, it seems that the audience most likely found the portrayal reasonable, indicating that the gender commentary conformed to the normative discourse of the period.

Distancing also works when the laughter elicited is considered consequential, produced with the aim of correcting unwanted or shameful behaviour.⁷⁸ Such laughter is characterized as the superiority theory of humour, in which the pleasure of laughter is combined with malicious intent towards those who are laughed at.⁷⁹ Here, the idea of deservedness operates, as the characterization makes the audience feel that the pain they encounter is deserved. The punishment is indicated by social norms, which dictate what behaviour is considered to require correction. Thus, to understand what the play portrays as unwanted behaviour in need of violent correction, it is crucial to take Patroclus’ performed social class and masculinity into closer analysis.

Patroclus is characterized by his attempt to emulate Achilles. Primarily, this is a question of class. Whilst Achilles is described as a tailor, his mother Thetis offers him gold and jewels, and he is also many times called a ‘swell’, i.e. a fashionable, wealthy man. Patroclus, on the other hand, is more noticeably of a lower socio-economic status, desperately attempting to appear more respectable.⁸⁰ Humour through Achilles is created largely by his dandyism, whilst Patroclus is laughed at for his attempts at social climbing. This is made clear from the very beginning in the stage directions, when the two first appear on stage:

Achilles [--] [c]omes forward, fanning himself with pocket-handkerchief: Patroclus comes forward, *also exactly imitating the gestures of Achilles*, whom he copies, in a feeble manner, upon all occasions. N.B. Achilles is magnificently dressed in the style of a Greek guardsman. *Patroclus is a little vulgar gent.*⁸¹

⁷⁷ *The Standard*, 29 December 1858, p. 3; *Morning Post*, 28 December 1858, p. 6.

⁷⁸ Peacock, *Slapstick*, p. 64 (n. 6 above).

⁷⁹ J. Morreall, *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*, Hoboken, 2009, pp. 6–8.

⁸⁰ Justine McConnell has argued that Achilles has a working-class background since he is portrayed as a tailor. J. McConnell, ‘Epic Parodies: Martial Extravaganzas on the Nineteenth-Century Stage’, in *War as Spectacle: Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Display of Armed Conflict*, ed. A. Bakogianni and V. M. Hope, London, 2015, pp. 257–69 (265). Alessandra Grossi challenges this by pointing out that Thetis is a goddess who for example offers expensive jewellery to his son, although simultaneously speaking somewhat like a sailor. Such inconsistencies were not unusual in burlesque. A. Grossi, ‘Challenging Narratives: Gender, Politics, and Performance in Mid-Victorian Classical Burlesque’, PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2022, pp. 143–5. Whilst the specific class definition of Achilles remains unclear, it is nevertheless something higher or at least more refined than that of Patroclus—on which neither comment further.

⁸¹ SoT, p. 149. Emphasis mine.

Throughout the play, this copying continues, and Achilles becomes increasingly agitated by the other's behaviour. Furthermore, Patroclus as a 'little vulgar gent' reveals various class markers in his speech, such as the misuse of aspirated /h/, like hypercorrection ('a hass' instead of 'an ass'),⁸² which in literature was often used to comically expose the true origins of the *nouveau riche* or other social climbers.⁸³ Another class-defining marker of Patroclus is incorrect French, which again signals his uneducated background.⁸⁴ When Patroclus regains his senses after the attack, he instead h-drops ('might an 'umble individual ask what he has done?')⁸⁵, underlining that all his pretences have been stripped from him through this violent episode. This detail demonstrates clearly how violence functions as a tool for maintaining the status quo of class and masculinity within a comic frame.

The attempt to social climbing is displayed in a negative light. Patroclus never quite succeeds in copying the proper class markers, constantly reminding the audience that he is a 'vulgar gent'. As John Tosh has written, some characteristics of the ideal man of the Victorian age were the virtues of individualism, interiority and authenticity.⁸⁶ In a way, Patroclus could be seen as a personification of the clash between gentlemanliness and manliness. The former was socially exclusive, calling for more elite breeding and education, whilst the latter was socially inclusive and judged by the qualities of the individual.⁸⁷ Thus, Patroclus lacks the requirements of a gentleman but still feigns to be one, instead of developing his own manly self, suitable for his true social standing. For this, he is punished. This would probably have been understood as a reinforcement of class distinctions and normative masculinity of the period. With mainly middle-class members in the audience, the commentary on class would be from their point of view, making a lower-class character comic through his futile attempt to copy the signs of a 'true gentleman'.

Paul Babiak has researched burlesque boxing matches, which were a common element of other burlesque shows as well. Whilst Dibdin already employed boxing as an alternative form of narrated fighting, in Brough's play this becomes a choreographed, physical scene. Babiak writes that in the nineteenth-century discussion of changing masculine ideals, the popular entertainment of boxing and bodily humour came together, linking it to the rising contemporary interest in physical fitness and the limits and potential of the human body. The popularity of 'knockabout comedy' was, according to Babiak, in its peak during the latter part of the nineteenth century, when the earlier development of the civilized, self-controlled man raised concerns about whether men had become *too* civilized, and thus too effeminized. The stage reflected the society's discussions and anxieties about proper masculinity, which resulted in an increase of violent entertainment (and real-life

⁸² SoT, p. 152.

⁸³ L. Mugglestone, *Talking proper: The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol*, Oxford, 2003, pp. 110–11.

⁸⁴ SoT, p. 153.

⁸⁵ SoT, p. 204.

⁸⁶ J. Tosh, 'Gentlemanly Politeness and Manly Simplicity in Victorian England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 12, 2002, pp. 455–72 (458).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 458.

incidents). This was, however, deemed welcome, since it offered a controlled vent for what was seen as inherent manly aggressions.⁸⁸ Thus, ‘the burlesque boxing match provides an opportunity to analyse and to re-imagine the nexus of relationships between masculinity, aggression, intellectuality, physicality, victory and defeat’.⁸⁹

In Babiak’s examples, laughter was produced through unexpectedness, as was common in burlesque humour overall. Unexpectedness stemmed from surprising contexts, rule-breaking and unusual protagonists.⁹⁰ The context in these plays can be seen as surprising because of the clash between expectation and realization, swords replaced by fists. However, many burlesque boxing matches, according to Babiak, created comedy through a third mechanism, in which a weaker opponent overthrew the stronger one. In this way, burlesque boxing also offered an opportunity to challenge normative masculine ideals, when the ‘lesser man’ managed to defeat the stronger one. Here, laughter is produced by the supposed absurdity of the ‘weaker’ character emerging victorious (which perhaps also reified normative masculinity by underlining the improbable).⁹¹ In these epic burlesques, however, the hierarchical dynamic is more complex, and the question of laughter is more difficult to answer. In both Dibdin and Brough, the winners are predictable from the start and conform with the epic source. Additionally, the winners—Menelaus and Hector—are portrayed throughout the plays as stronger, more courageous and thus more ideally masculine characters (although Menelaus is also called a cuckold by Achilles.⁹²) They win against characters—Paris and Patroclus—that are portrayed as weaker and less masculine. Therefore, in these plays, laughter functions primarily as a corrective mechanism, enforcing social and masculine norms by punishing characters whose behaviour, strength, or class performance deviates from expectations.

Violence in Nineteenth-Century Theatre

These two case studies raise a broader question about the place of bodily pain on the nineteenth-century London stage. Whilst the plays contain violent episodes, as shown, they nevertheless present a relative absence of graphic suffering and character deaths found in the classical Trojan War narrative. By situating epic burlesque within the wider theatrical culture of nineteenth-century London, I argue that the portrayal of explicit violence was shaped by genre conventions, audience composition and class-based expectations.

As Rosalind Crone has written in her monograph *Violent Victorians* (2012), violent behaviour decreased over the nineteenth century due to growing intolerance for violence, beginning in previous centuries.⁹³ Progressively smaller aggressions

⁸⁸ Babiak, ‘The Manly Art’, pp. 22–3 (n. 38 above).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁹² *MM*, p. 66.

⁹³ R. Crone, *Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth-Century London*, Manchester, 2012, p. 4.

were categorized as criminal behaviour and prosecuted.⁹⁴ For example, duelling was increasingly seen as an unsuitable means of displaying masculine power, which now valued more pacific and self-controlled approaches to conflict resolution. Public violent conduct came to be regarded as a vulgar expression of the lowest social classes.⁹⁵

However, this process was neither straightforward nor applicable to all aspects of everyday life. Despite the change in attitudes towards public violence, Crone has researched the violence of popular entertainment in nineteenth-century London, which—she argues—tells a different story: Victorians very much enjoyed entertainment that centred on violence, which in the theatrical context reached its epitome in the ‘murder melodramas’, inspired even by real-life murders.⁹⁶ Melodramas generally relied on strong emotions, sensational plots and stock characters, whilst the ‘murder melodramas’ added the thrilling spectacle of pain, blood and violence.⁹⁷

Thus, whilst nineteenth-century Londoners did not abhor consuming entertainment that centred on violence and the infliction of (imagined) pain on others, it appears that such instances were not sought in every setting. Given that the Homeric theme could have allowed for a staging emphasising blood and pain, and since evidently these themes were not taboo on stage, the question arises of where portrayals of pain and violence were tolerated and where they were not.

First, there is the question of genre. As shown in this paper, epic theatrical burlesques⁹⁸ of the Trojan War diminished explicit aspects of pain and violence, either concealing or removing them altogether from the plot, thus altering the narrative. If violence was present, as in the cases of Paris and Patroclus, it served as a corrective element that was deemed justifiable. Whilst comedy itself was no stranger to instances of violence as humourous actions, I argue that in the case of burlesque such changes were necessary for two reasons. On the one hand, burlesque works by parodying its source material: when the audience expects to witness portrayals of pain, the absence of them generates humour.

On the other hand, contrasted with the aforementioned ‘murder melodramas’, the meaning of pain is also significant. Whilst some of melodrama’s popularity stemmed from explicit violence, the stock characters at the genre’s core also called for justification and retaliation for the villain, who had inflicted pain on another. As Michael Booth writes: ‘Audiences could enjoy crime and villainy and horror in the full knowledge that the bright sword of justice would always fall in the right place.’⁹⁹ Contrastd with the *Iliad* and its characters, there are no such clear moral patterns. Whilst in these burlesques there are—as noted—some caricatures such as the masculine hero Hector and a dandy Paris, none of the characters can be seen as

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 134.

⁹⁷ Booth, *English Melodrama*, pp. 13–14 (n. 10 above); Crone, *Violent Victorians*, p. 132 (n. 93 above).

⁹⁸ On Dibdin’s genre, see n. 10 above.

⁹⁹ Booth, *English Melodrama*, p. 14 (n. 10 above).

purely good or evil. The more complex the characters were—and they often were in (classical) burlesque, not to mention the subject matter—the more complex was the justification of pain, making it in most cases unsavoury in its excess, for the contemporary stage.

Second, I argue that the classical aspect of the plays required a treatment that was considered more refined, making performed pain also a question of class. Whilst burlesques were viewed by a varied audience, from lower and working classes to the elite—made possible by the multiple price categories—the question of intended audience remains important. Alessandra Grossi argues that the target audience of a classical burlesque consisted of middle-class men of the city.¹⁰⁰ Thanks to their education, these men could appreciate the humour of the play from multiple perspectives: classical, Shakespearean and contemporary. However, ‘knowingness’ was not a clearly defined attribute, as Davies has demonstrated: in addition to classics, allusions to current affairs and contemporary culture comprised a significant part of the plays’ humour.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, classical education was by no means the only route to classical knowledge, since ancient mythology, epic and literature were made familiar to the public through cheap print media, for example.¹⁰² Until further study, the question of the audience of classical burlesques remains conclusively unanswered.¹⁰³

Looking at the theatres, however, some general connections between violence and class can be drawn. Classical burlesques were systematically made more socially acceptable to reduce audiences’ confrontation with social implications of violence and other unsavoury subjects.¹⁰⁴ Booth has written that the theatres near and in the West End attracted audiences consisting mostly of middle-class patrons, producing performances with their amusement criteria in mind. Theatres located outside this area, in south and east London, attracted a lower-middle and working-class audience of local patrons.¹⁰⁵ These theatres also prominently staged violent performances as part of their programme, such as the aforementioned ‘murder melodramas’.¹⁰⁶ Whilst these theatres occasionally staged classical burlesques, such productions were rare compared to the theatres on or near the West End. A similar tendency can be observed in Shakespearean burlesques, which were seldom performed in East

¹⁰⁰ Grossi, ‘Challenging Narratives’, p. 246 (n. 80 above).

¹⁰¹ Davies, *Troy, Carthage and the Victorians*, pp. 223–4 (n. 12 above).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹⁰³ For different perspectives see for example Davies, *Troy, Carthage and the Victorians* (n. 12 above), Hall, ‘Classical Mythology’ (n. 1 above), and for more general discussion about burlesque audiences, Schoch, *Victorian Theatrical Burlesques* (n. 4 above). The most throughout research on classical burlesque audiences—and also challenging previous interpretations—is carried out by Grossi, ‘Challenging Narratives’ (n. 80 above).

¹⁰⁴ Hall, ‘Classical Mythology’, p. 361 (n. 1 above).

¹⁰⁵ Crone, *Violent Victorians*, p. 128 (n. 93 above). For West End and East End audiences, see also M. Booth, ‘East End and West End: Class and Audience in Victorian London’, *Theatre Research International*, 2, 1977, 98–103.

¹⁰⁶ Crone, *Violent Victorians*, p. 132 (n. 93 above).

End or South London theatres, where working-class melodrama was instead more common.¹⁰⁷

Of course, Dibdin's play was performed at the Surrey Theatre, whose audience consisted primarily of lower-class patrons—although, as noted earlier in the reviews, the theatre was also attended by members of the elite. The theatre apparently staged only two classical burlesques during the century: *Melodrame Mad!* and *The Daughters of Danaus and the Sons of Aegyptus; or, Fifty Weddings and Nine and Forty Murders* (1821). The latter was also written by Thomas Dibdin and performed in the theatre under his management. According to Frederick Burwick, Dibdin's management period between 1816 and 1823, and again in 1825, led the theatre into bankruptcy. One of Dibdin's mistakes was attempting to attract wealthier theatregoers from other parts of the city at the expense of the local audience.¹⁰⁸ The presence of a lower-class audience was also suggested by a reviewer of *Melodrame Mad!*, who described it as almost 'too classical' for the theatre, continuing:

We mean no offence to the audience frequenting this theatre, who have given many proofs of their good taste; but, as almost every incident related by the historian of the Siege of Troy is preserved in the burlesque, those who are best acquainted with Homer will most admire it.¹⁰⁹

Brough's play, on the other hand, was performed at the Lyceum Theatre, one of the middle-class West End theatres.¹¹⁰ Its audience was less frequently commented on, although one reviewer noted that 'Mr. Brough's *Iliad* will not require a very long-winded scholiast'.¹¹¹

Significantly, both plays end more or less happily, as was expected from the comic genre. In Dibdin's play, the city is on fire, but Jupiter descends and restores it with the aid of the fire department. The stage setting transforms 'the whole burning city to a beautiful allegorical palace of safety and the Arts by Insurance', also referencing different fire insurance companies—Priam was insured and therefore able to begin reconstructing his town anew.¹¹² Brough, on the other hand, concludes the play with the Trojans and Greeks amicably chatting about their states. To underline the triviality of the war fought, Hector comments: 'With all our sorry hits and clumsy cuts, And stragglng arrows aim'd at noble butts, I trust there's no one wounded seriously.'¹¹³ He adds: 'If, as staunch Trojans and as merry Greeks, our struggles are approved; for, after all, it rests with you if Troy must stand or fall.'¹¹⁴ Thus, the ending is left open, a feature commended in one review:

¹⁰⁷ R. W. Schoch, *Not Shakespeare: Bardolatry and Burlesque in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 13–14.

¹⁰⁸ F. Burwick, *Playing to the Crowd: London Popular Theatre, 1780–1830*, New York, 2011, p. 186.

¹⁰⁹ *The Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review*, 8 April 1820.

¹¹⁰ Booth, 'East End and West End' (n. 105 above), pp. 99–100.

¹¹¹ *The Standard*, 29 December 1858, p. 3.

¹¹² MM, p. 90.

¹¹³ SoT, p. 218.

¹¹⁴ SoT, p. 218.

The destruction of the ancient house of Priam is expected, but the author makes thing end much more comfortable. Achilles is not slain, nor are Hector and Priam; Hecuba is not carried off captive, and Menelaus willingly makes a present of that treasure of a wife, Helen, to his old rival and enemy. So all ends happily and agreeably on both sides, an improvement, it must be admitted, on the Homeric and Virgilian catastrophe.¹¹⁵

The happy ending is described as comfortable and an improvement on the original sources, underlining the tendency of audiences to expect happy endings and perhaps uncomplicated outcomes from their comic entertainment. Justine McConnell has also interpreted Brough's ending as a political commentary on the futility of war, in relation to the critique of the Crimean War, and as reflecting the development of more pacifist attitudes during the nineteenth century.¹¹⁶ Davies has noted that the survival of Troy was ensured in all but one burlesque about the Trojan War.¹¹⁷ She argues that this decision appealed especially to the audiences, since the play's anachronisms interwove ancient Troy and modern London as one. These more open endings thus reduced reminders of the rise and fall of empires, avoiding any suggestion that the British Empire might face a similar fate.¹¹⁸

Conclusions

On the nineteenth-century London stage, explicit violence, pain and death were handled differently depending on the genre and the theatre in which they were performed. Here, I have investigated the portrayals of pain and models of masculinity in two epic burlesques of the Trojan War, a subject that could have lent itself to myriad displays of blood and gore. However, such explicit instances are largely absent: in Dibdin's play, character deaths occur mainly off-stage, and in Brough's play they are avoided altogether.

Furthermore, pain is transformed into something more comic and inconsequential. Whilst sword-fighting duels are staged (before being carried off-stage), boxing matches are also prevalent in both plays. They resonated with contemporary audiences but also functioned as a comic device in the burlesques' manner of subverting expectations. The link between masculinity and heroism is made clear, and characters who lack this virtue are condemned. Dibdin's Paris is portrayed as a cowardly dandy, too effeminate to earn respect until he proved his military capabilities. Patroclus, on the other hand, as a social climber lacks individual, masculine self-respect, which is punished through his violent encounter with Hector. In both cases, comic pain operates as a corrective mechanism, reinforcing the social and class hierarchies

¹¹⁵ *Morning Post*, 28 December 1858, p. 6.

¹¹⁶ McConnell, 'Martial Extravaganzas' (n. 80 above), p. 266.

¹¹⁷ *The Golden Pippin; or, Judgement of Paris and Siege of Troy* (1858) was played at the Marionette Theatre and in it Rome rises from the ruins of the burnt Troy. Davies, *Troy, Carthage and the Victorians* (n. 12 above), p. 265.

¹¹⁸ Davies, *Troy, Carthage and the Victorians* (n. 12 above), pp. 266–7.

and providing the audience with a theatrical lens through which normative masculinity was both affirmed and negotiated.

Whilst nineteenth-century theatre was no stranger to bloodied performances, these were particularly expected in melodramas, especially in theatres more often patronized by local working-class audiences. Comedy, by contrast, was increasingly regarded as a respectable form of theatre, and middle-class values appear to have shaped performances, smoothing over upsetting aspects such as violence, death and pain. Therefore, the horizon of audience expectations for burlesques differed from that of melodrama. After all, both Paris and Patroclus endure pain and survive it. In a comic context, this conformed with the audience expectations rather than challenging them. Thus, the portrayal of bodily pain and suffering on stage served not only as a marker of genre and class, but also as a means of correcting failures in masculinity, reinforcing cultural ideals within nineteenth-century London.

Originality I confirm that this manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by another journal.

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