

**Battles Staged By...:
The Development and Organization of
Stage Combat in Canada**

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

(Theatre)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

September 2012

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates and traces the history and development of stage combat within Canada. The inclusion of the fight director within the Canadian Theatre Agreement in 2002 recognized fight directors as professional theatre artists. However, the first recorded professional fight director in Canada was Douglas Campbell at the Stratford Festival in 1953. The fight director has been part of a long theatrical tradition that demands attention to both artistic interpretation of dramatic texts as well as practical skill sets. To date there has not been a thorough investigation of the history of the fight director.

Chapter One defines the role and function of the fight director and introduces the people interviewed as part of my research. Chapter Two explores the origins of modern stage combat. Chapter Three concerns the roles that Douglas Campbell and Patrick Crean played in the establishment of professional stage combat through their experience and involvement with the Stratford Festival. Chapters Four and Five explore the emergence of the two major fight associations in Canada and the training syllabi they created to properly train actor combatants. Chapter Six focuses on the role of the fight director as artist, dramaturg, instructor and choreographer through a series of interviews with fight directors John Stead, J.P. Fournier, John Nelles, Daniel Levinson, James Binkley, Steve Wilsher and F. Braun McAsh, and focuses on their experiences in staging fights for various Canadian productions of *Hamlet*. Chapter Seven explains the varying methods of fight notation instrumental in archiving a fight director's work for reference. Chapter Eight summarizes the role and function of the fight director in modern Canadian theatre.

These elements are placed in context through personal interviews, newspaper articles, existing scholarship on stage combat and fencing as well as current training methodologies used by Fight Directors Canada.

Preface

Interviews for this dissertation were conducted either through telephone or in person, prior to which each interviewee was sent permission forms as well as a set list of questions approved by the University of British Columbia's Behavioral Review Ethics Board (BREB). UBC BREB number issued was H09-01606.

Interviews were recorded for reference in the writing of this work and used in accordance with the policies outlined by BREB. Every fight director who responded to the request for interviews was included in the study. There were no exclusions.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to take the opportunity to offer my gratitude to the faculty and staff at UBC, who have encouraged me to carry on despite the odds. I especially want to thank Dr. Jerry Wasserman for his continued support and belief in me through these past few years.

I would also like to thank my committee: Dr. Kirsty Johnston, Stephen Heatley, and Dr. Wasserman for their continued support during my time at the University.

The staff at the Stratford Archives, including Dr. Francesca Marini, Elizabeth Knazook and her team assisted me greatly with my numerous queries and requests.

Special thanks must go to my family Rebecca, Benjamin and Olivia who continued to support me throughout this endeavor. I would also like to thank my parents whose financial and moral support over the years has been the most wonderful support a son could have.

Dedication

To my family

1 Introduction

A few years ago I received a telephone call from an actor who was playing the title role in a production of *Hamlet* at Presentation House in North Vancouver. He thought he had hired a fight director for the play. Unfortunately for him, the fight director had very little formal training, nor was he affiliated with any professional stage combat association. During an unfortunate fight rehearsal, the 'fight director' attempted to demonstrate an elbow to the stomach and ended up elbowing the lead actor's face, knocking out his front teeth. The 'fight director' soon left the production and the terrified cast. I was contacted to clean up the mess that had been left behind.

While I wish I could say that this is a rare anecdote in the field of stage combat, sadly similar stories have become commonplace. In 2011, an actor rehearsing a play in San Francisco sustained multiple fractures in her arm and shoulder as a result of "improvised violence." In this case the theatre company neglected to hire a fight director because the artistic director of the company despised the artificiality of staged violence (Garcia).

Unfortunately, some theatre artists still retain the misconception that fight directors are not capable of staging realistic depictions of violence on the stage. Some are not even aware that there are professional organizations devoted to the teaching of stage combat and the safe training and accreditation of actor combatants. Actors are often asked to stage fight scenes themselves, or in some cases the director, who may have limited experience with staged violence, attempts to create an interpretation of violence that compromises safety and creates fear among the theatre artists and the audiences who attend the performances. Even more common is the employment of dance choreographers. Although they may be trained in modern tap, jazz and ballet, most have little experience with staging violence. Some dance choreographers believe that they have the ability to stage violence because they have an understanding of human kinetics and are familiar with creating movement. Though there is some similarity

between dance choreographers and fight directors, each is limited by his or her capabilities and training.

The Canadian Actors Equity Association does not discriminate between its members wishing to work under various contracts. For example, actors wishing to direct may be engaged under a director's contract. The CAEA has maintained a position of neutrality in determining criteria for specific artistic qualifications of their membership. This position allows for any member to work as a fight director on professional Canadian stages. For example, actors, directors, and dance choreographers can apply to work as fight directors without proof of proper training. While engagers are encouraged by the CAEA to hire accredited fight directors, producers have the discretion to hire whom they wish.

Acting schools throughout Canada may offer a term of stage combat as part of their movement curriculum. Few, however, offer any more than that. The University of Calgary offers its BFA acting students stage combat classes throughout their program ("Jean-Pierre Fournier"). The result is that actors may leave the program with a good understanding of the basics of stage combat. Some leave the program with basic or intermediate certification in stage combat through Fight Directors Canada (Fournier). Most other universities in Canada with Fine Arts programs offer their students movement courses that include an emphasis on dance. Movement is an important part of any actor's training. However, Stage Combat is also an important part of any actor's training. It allows actors to learn the way their bodies move, and the discipline of control. Since conflict is an important part of any story, physical representation of conflict is often required. Actors trained in the ability to create illusionary violence fare much better in this area than actors who have not had adequate training. Scenes of violence staged by non-professionals present a greater degree of risk of injury to those involved.

In order to appreciate the importance of professional fight training and stage combat in Canada, we need to first look into the history of the practice itself and how it has developed into the current model. Since the professional fight

director is a relatively new concept we must find where the roots of the current methodologies began.

To date there has been no in-depth study into the organization and development of stage combat in Canada. Several informative and useful manuals of the practice of stage combat have been compiled by various fight directors in Canada and the United States. Dr. Kara Wooten successfully completed her PhD dissertation focusing on the terminology and safe presentation of physical conflict [“Developing a Course in Stage Combat: A Manual for Instructors and Students”, May 2000 Texas Tech University]. Her dissertation includes a brief overview of the history of violence in the theatre and the emergence of the fight director. Her main objective is to create a manual of stage combat, providing instruction in the techniques of the craft. In essence, her dissertation provides practical instruction to students of stage combat within the Society of American Fight Directors.

In addition to the several excellent sources of practical stage combat theory, including Jonathan Howell’s *Stage Fighting*, Dale Anthony Girard’s *Actors on Guard: A Practical Guide for the Use of the Rapier and Dagger for Stage and Screen* (1997), J. Allen Suddeth’s *Fight Directing for the Theatre* (1996), and William Hobbs’s *Fight Direction for Stage and Screen* (1995), there are a few sources that may have been written with good intentions, but are potentially dangerous to untrained performers seeking instruction in the field. Claude D. Kezer’s *Principles of Stage Combat* (1995) is an example of such a book. In a brief eighty-two pages Kezer attempts to address stage combat and safety, but his illustrations and techniques demonstrate a very dangerous approach to the craft. He insists, for example, in contrast to professional fight directors who concern themselves with safety that stage weapons must be sharp in order to maintain an effective stage illusion (49). I believe that stage weapons must be dull in order to minimize risk of injury to performers on stage. Though he has no formal stage combat training himself, Kezer credits his ability to the training he received in the military.

Throughout theatre's long history, there have been many innovations in realizing truth on stage. The concept of 'Realism in Theatre' has led to developments in acting styles, stage construction and dramaturgy. Great pains have been taken in modern theatre to create realistic interpretations of period costume, properties, architecture, and music. In addition, numerous books have been written on these subjects. Some books have been dedicated to the technical instruction of realistic stage combat, too, but they are limited to approximately forty. Of that number, only two have been written by Canadians. To date there is no written work that focuses on the history and organization of the fight director within Canadian theatre.

One important element of the *mise-en-scène* that is often neglected is the interpretation of staged violence. Many Canadian theatre companies do not attend to the details that historically accurate interpretations of swordplay require. The reasons for this failing are two-fold. First, due to the vast geographical expanse of Canada, the costs of procuring qualified stage fight directors can be prohibitive. Secondly, the concept of professional fight directors in Canada is relatively recent, having been established within Canada only in the mid to late twentieth century. In addition, rehearsal periods for most Canadian theatre companies are limited to an average of two to three weeks. During this time actors are being pulled from blocking rehearsals for wardrobe fittings, voice work, and fight rehearsals. Fight directors, costume fitters, and voice instructors must negotiate through stage management their time requirements in order to get the actors ready. Due to this time constraint, fight rehearsals are often reduced to the minimum required to reduce the risk of injury during performance, and to create the illusion of weapon proficiency. In this regard the fight director assumes the role of a technical instructor – teaching the basic levels of combat to the actors engaged in the fight scene, rather than being able to work more creatively with actors on the interpretation of the fight itself. Often the fight director has to combine basic techniques of stage combat with some creative interpretation within the time allocated to him or her.

This basic approach to stage combat has been established in the methodology of many fight societies including the British Academy of Dramatic Combat, Society of American Fight Directors, Society of Australian Fight Directors, Society of Canadian Fight Directors, Fight Directors Canada, and the Canadian Academy of Dramatic Combat. While generally accepted as a 'universal' approach to stage combat, the modern system is an over-simplified and distilled combination of saber and foil techniques carried over from the late nineteenth century. These fight organizations are primarily concerned with safety and proficiency in regards to fights on stage. This system, though basic, allows for actors from various regions and countries to speak a common fight language when working together. With only the basic training given to actors, sword technique runs the risk of being distilled into only simple attack and parry positions that are applied to all bladed weapons. Swords from various cultures and time periods, then, are denied their unique performance function. Rapiers, smallswords, longswords, gladius, dussacks, backswords, claymores, kindjals, katanas and other unique weapons become simply fight props and lose their distinct identities. Individual fight directors can offer insights into the uniqueness of the weapons through their own study and interest. In this regard, the education of the fight director in historical developments of bladed combat is paramount to preserving individual sword historiography and function.

Few fight directors are well-enough acquainted with the history of stage combat prior to the last century and that alone necessitates the importance of researching the past. In order to fully appreciate the importance of stage combat in Canada, we must look to its origins. Many fight directors are not familiar with historical styles of swordplay and therefore do not know how to stage period violence. The art of stage combat can only improve and develop if we have a better understanding of the origins of the modern techniques. Once we become aware of the developments of stage combat, we will be able to continue to further the art.

Stage combat is, simply put, an illusion of violence. An actor on stage is engaged in stage combat when he or she performs the simplest grab or shove.

The Society of Australian Fight Directors defines stage combat as a “movement based art form” that requires the study of various martial skills and actions requiring control to be safely executed on stage or in front of the camera (Safdi). It has its roots in practical martial applications and study. However, on stage, the artists are performing the illusion of conflict, no matter how real or dangerous the conflict may appear. Stage combat broadly ranges from shoves and slaps to punches, kicks, falls, rolls, stabs, choking, grappling, fighting and battling – with or without stage weapons - with one or more other artists on stage. Though the ultimate aim of stage combat is to appear real, in essence it is always an illusion created by two or more artists with the control to perform the illusion through a series of movements that have been carefully rehearsed and recorded and with the ability to reproduce this illusion safely, performance after performance. However, the real skill in stage combat is in understanding the mechanics of the reality before performing the illusion.

Next, we need to address what a fight director is. Different titles are used interchangeably for fight director. Fight Master, Fight Arranger, Action Arranger, Fight Choreographer, Fight Coordinator, Fight Coach, Fight Instructor, and Maître des Armes are all examples of titles that essentially define the person who is responsible for creating the illusion of violence on stage. In Braun McAsh’s book, *Fight Choreography*, he jokingly defines his role as fight director as “being paid to arrange for people to be beaten up or killed” (10). He goes on to define his role as a teller of violent stories. McAsh, like other fight directors, is a practitioner of illusionary violence. While the result of the choreography appears dangerous and life-threatening, the approach to designing the violence must be safe for the performers. Fight directors are the people responsible for the violence on stage and the safety of the performers and audience during rehearsals and performance.

Fight directors are also ultimately responsible for the types of weapons used on stage. In the past twenty years, there have been significant changes to the types and availability of weapons used on stage. In the past, choices were limited to only a handful of reliable armourers. Perhaps the most famous of the

previous generation was Alan Meek. British Fight Master B.H. Barry introduced Meek's work to the United States because he believed Meek's work to be the best (Ballard 19, 66). Meek's weapons have been used in many theatres in the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. In addition, his work has been seen in several films including Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V*, *The Princess Bride*, and Mel Gibson's *Hamlet*. Essentially, a theatrical weapon must be stronger than its historical counterpart. A stage weapon must withstand the rigors of rehearsal and performance without breaking down. Blades must be made of high quality metals, and the entire weapon must be able to be stripped apart for maintenance and periodic replacement. Not too long ago, the choices for stage blades were limited to surplus bayonets and fencing blades and theatres had access to only a limited number of armourers including Alan Meek. Some theatre companies made their own stock.

Most fight directors prefer to know the history of the weapons that they use in stage productions. It is important to know how long a weapon has been used, when the blade was last changed, and where it originated. The terror of watching a blade snap off a sword and hurtle towards the audience is something that can be avoided if stage weapons have been well made and cared for. For this reason, most fight directors today have their personal preferences of stage weapons. The fight directors interviewed in this study have consistent lists of what they look for in stage-grade weapons. The weapons have to be made of quality steel or high quality aircraft grade aluminum. Blades have to be constructed with proper tangs and quality parts. They avoid weapons bought cheaply abroad, and they look for simple, durable construction. Interestingly enough, the fight directors all have sources within Canada that manufacture and supply their weapons. In one case, the fight director also manufactured his own weapons for stage use.

This study will focus on the development and organization of stage combat within Canada through tracing its influences to England and the United states from the late eighteenth century to the creation of the Stratford Festival in 1953. For the purpose of this study I will focus my research on the developments

of stage combat through the use of bladed weaponry upon the stage. I will also address the growth of stage combat in Canada beyond Stratford and trace its development through to the present day.

Very few books focus on the history of stage combat and there are none at this time that focus on the development and history of the subject in Canada at all. Books focusing on the history of stage combat in general include *Old Sword Play; The Systems of Fence, Cold Steel; The Art of Fencing with the Sabre*, and *The Sword and the Centuries* by Alfred Hutton; *Schools and Masters of Fencing: From the Middle Ages to the Eighteenth Century* by Egerton Castle and Richard Burton's *Book of the Sword* – all of which were published in London during the late nineteenth century. The twentieth century has provided more works on the technicalities of fencing and practical manuals for stage combat in general. Of the many manuals that are currently in publication, only one has been written by a Canadian – F. Braun McAsh's *Fight Choreography: A Practical Guide for Stage, Film and Television*.

The *New York Times* archives provide a great many noteworthy articles on the subject of stage combat at the turn of the twentieth century, and I have found the information invaluable. The various articles illustrate a thriving arts community in America during the period and provide the names of several fencing masters working closely with theatre companies around New York. Some of the articles are dedicated to reviews of public fencing exhibitions that include demonstrations of numerous period weapons and Japanese martial arts contests. In addition, there are articles describing the training of leading actors and actresses in the art of swordplay.

It is the aim of this study to recognize the role of fight director as a legitimate theatre artist with as much artistic merit as directors, dance choreographers, and playwrights. The fight director must take on many roles while committed to a production. They may include antiquarian, instructor, advisor, choreographer, weapons expert, Maître des Armes, and styles coach while working in close concert with several other artists including directors, conductors, designers and actors. This work is further aimed at creating

awareness among the members of the theatre community as to the seemingly disparate functions of the modern day fight director within the context of theatrical productions.

For the purpose of this study I have conducted several personal interviews with Canadian fight directors from across Canada including J.P. Fournier (Alberta), John Nelles, Steve Wilshire, Daniel Levinson, John Stead (Toronto), James Binkley (Newfoundland), and F. Braun McAsh (Vancouver). These fight directors have been instrumental in the development of the art of stage combat within Canada and continue to develop their craft through the fight societies they belong to, including the Society of Canadian Fight Directors (McAsh, Stead), Fight Directors Canada (Fournier, Levinson, Nelles), and the Academy of Stage Combat in Canada (Wilsher, Stead, Binkley).

Interviews were conducted either by telephone or in person, prior to which each interviewee was sent permission forms as well as a set list of questions approved by the University of British Columbia's Behavioral Review Ethics Board (BREB). I have included the list of interview questions in Appendix B of this work. Interviews were recorded for reference in the writing of this work and used in accordance with the policies outlined by BREB. Every fight director who responded to the request for interviews was included in the study. There were no exclusions.

The fight directors included in this study are experts in the field of stage combat. J.P. Fournier is a certified Fight Master (FDC) and instructor of Stage Combat at Mount Royal College. In addition he has staged fights in theatres across Canada including Stratford, The Citadel, Vancouver Playhouse, Manitoba Theatre Centre, and Alberta Theatre Projects. Daniel Levinson is a certified Fight Master (FDC) and the owner of Canada's oldest stage combat school, Rapier Wit (Toronto). He is currently one of the Fight Directors at Stratford. John Stead (SCFD, ADC) was Fight Director at Stratford for nineteen seasons and the Shaw Festival for thirteen. Steve Wilsher (ADC, BADC) has been in the entertainment industry in Britain and Canada for over 38 years. He has over 500 fight credits to his name and is a senior instructor with ADC. John Nelles (FDC) is a fight

director in Canada and has served for over ten years on Canadian Actors Equity's Directors and Choreographers Committee. F. Braun McAsh (SCFD, IOSF) has choreographed stage fights at Stratford, The Shaw Festival and the National Opera Company in Canada. He was also the swordmaster on the TV series *Highlander* for four seasons.

In Chapter Two ("Fighting Back the Years: A Brief History of Stage Combat") I explore the origins of the modern practice of Stage Combat in western theatre traditions, tracing its roots as far back as the House of Angelo in the mid-eighteenth century. I examine the influence of the house of Angelo upon London's theatre scene in the nineteenth century, tracing its migration and practices to New York in the same century. The chapter then looks at the influence early cinema had upon stage combat when it became a popular medium in the early twentieth century.

Chapter Three ("Battles Staged by: The Influence of Douglas Campbell and Patrick Crean") focuses on the organization of the Stratford Festival and argues that the first professional fight director in Canada was Douglas Campbell. Archival research at the Festival aided in the writing of this chapter. The rich descriptions of the fight scenes in newspaper reviews provide proof that the fight director was getting publically noticed and credited with the spectacle of violence within the plays. Though Campbell was the first fight director, it was the arrival of Patrick Crean in 1962 that really established fight direction as an art in Canada. Archival reviews, interviews and a never released documentary by Lesley Walker-Fitzpatrick in the nineties about Paddy Crean were instrumental in the writing of this chapter.

Both Chapter Four ("The Fine Print: The Acceptance of Fight Directors as Professional Artists in Canada") and Chapter Five ("The Need for $\frac{3}{4}$ Speed: Establishing a Fight Syllabus in Canada") explore the emergence of the two major fight associations in Canada, and the inherent problem that the FDC and the SCFD faced in creating a syllabus in order to teach future generations of fight directors in Canada. These chapters detail the rigorous training that must be undertaken by those who wish to become better actor-combatants or even fight

directors themselves. The policies that have been established require students to apply themselves regardless of their opinions of opposing fight organizations. Interviewing subjects proved difficult due to the political nature of the conflict between these organizations. However different the politics are between the fight associations, the fight directors with whom I spoke agreed on the necessity of quality training in Canada, and the need to educate the theatre community about the important role fight directors have as mentors, artists and teachers.

Chapter Six (“To Fight or Not to Fight: Contextualizing Hamlet’s Duel From a Canadian Fight Director’s Perspective”) focuses on the role of the fight director as artist/ dramaturg/ instructor and choreographer. Interviewees were encouraged to share their experiences and challenges in staging the fights within productions of *Hamlet* with which they had been involved. *Hamlet* presents a great challenge for fight directors due to the several objectives that need to be met for the play to succeed. Through an examination of the text and interviews with Canadian fight directors, the chapter provides insight into the artistic and technical demands on fight directors in preparation for performance.

Chapter Seven (“Hitting all the Right Notes: Exploring Four Methods of Fight Notation”) explains the varying methodology of fight notation instrumental in archiving a fight director’s work for reference. Several methods are utilized, and this study examines the various ways of creating a methodology for archiving from the stage to the page. The chapter culminates with an examination of Patrick Crean’s fight notation for the complete first act fight between Valvert and Cyrano in *Cyrano de Bergerac* from a 1972 production in Fort Bragg, Florida. I discovered this document among papers in my personal library. Crean mentions in his memoir, *More Champagne Darling*, that he never felt the need to change the fight in *Cyrano* as his choreography was perfect. His notation provides a colorful example of the fight director as instructor, choreographer and even co-author. His notation often reads more like a novel than a fight plot. There were no copies of his notation in the Stratford Festival archives in any capacity. Since this document is likely the only complete notation that survives by the late Mr. Crean its inclusion is especially important.

Chapter Eight (“Conclusions”) summarizes how far fight directors in Canada have come in establishing their worth as artists, and the need for fight directors to continue working together to garner the respect of their theatrical peers and further the development of stage combat in Canada today. There is a need for fight directors to revisit the accomplishments of antiquarians such as Hutton and Castle in order to realize that fights can be not only viscerally exciting on stage, but also achieve a degree of historically accurate representation. In this age of creating spectacle on stage there is no need to sacrifice historical integrity for theatrical excitement. I will argue that the two can coexist on stage if the fight directors commit themselves to their art.

I intend to prove that the modern origins of stage combat in Canada are traceable back to the house of Angelo in London during the eighteenth century. Fights once learned for specific parts were passed on from actor to actor and this practice continued as artists came to North America to work. In New York fencing in the various *salles* became the popular method of depicting swordplay on the stage, and it was antiquarians Hutton, Castle and Burton that pushed artists to reexamine the historical styles. The creation of the Stratford Festival and the arrival of the two pioneers of stage combat – Douglas Campbell and Paddy Crean – established fight directors and stage combat as artistic entities within Canada. I will demonstrate this by examining the fight within *Hamlet* and the complex systems of notation that fight directors use today to record fights on the stage.

2 Fighting Back the Years: A Brief History of Stage Combat

Conflict has remained an essential element of western theatre for centuries. In ancient Greece, the *Pyrrachia* was a mimed combat that ended with the slaves and captured criminals who performed it killing themselves for the enjoyment of the audience (Kreng 2). The Romans also favoured martial games and enjoyed the spectacle of watching gladiators fight each other and exotic animals with a variety of weapons. The evolution of the Barriers – a mock combat between armored knights – may have been the earliest form of choreographed violence for an audience. The Barriers evolved in Europe in the late fifteenth century as a way of protecting knights during mock battles and sieges during tournaments (Anglo 168). Tournaments themselves had become a way of keeping knights prepared for war in Europe. In 1233, Richard Marshal was able to survive an attack by Baldwin de Gynnes and twelve well-armed companions (Prestwich 212). His prowess on the battlefield was attributed to his participation in tournaments. It has been argued that the tournament was an effective form of military training, and it was on this assumption that Richard I allowed tournaments in England (213).

The probable origin of the knightly tournament was the Roman *Ludus Troiae*, which was a martial exercise played by two mounted teams (Cohen 15). Early tournaments were violent free-for-alls where many knights were killed or injured (15). In 1332 during a tournament in Rome, eighteen knights were reported to have been killed (15). While tournaments offered a venue for knights to practice their martial skills, there was financial need to minimize the harm to participants so they could be of use during war. The cost of arming a knight in the thirteenth century was equivalent to the purchase of a light tank in 1939 (Prestwich 207). Tournaments therefore instituted various safety methods to preserve the fighting ability of the knight. As tournaments evolved, so did the pageantry that surrounded them. Germany was the first country to impose a strict code of honor upon participants in the tournament. By the fourteenth century

knights had to provide proof of their noble birth in order to be allowed to participate (Cohen 17). Combats were fought to submission rather than to bloody death as had been the previous practice at some tournaments. Knights, therefore, began to practice sword moves that included the concept of deceptions with the blade – a way of forcing their opponent into a false defense to gain advantage. This became an early form of fencing, since submission rather than death was the ultimate goal during tournament combats.

In Germany and Italy masters of arms began experimenting with movement notation to record specific fight moves as early as the thirteenth century (Anglo, “The Barriers” 91). The earliest example of this is the manuscript known as Royal Armouries Manuscript I.33 (Forgeng 2). This document deals exclusively with the use of the sword and buckler and wrestling (Wagner 15). In 1389, Johannes Liechtenauer published his book focusing on secret feints, thrusts and surprise parries (Cohen 23). Hans Talhoffer’s *Fechtbuch* published in 1443, mixes swordplay with wrestling, tripping, daggers, and cudgels and is as much a “survival book” as it is a manual of fencing (23).

The violence of the early tournaments became more formalized and ritualized across Europe and the mock encounters of violence transformed into performable entertainments suitable for court festivals outside of the lists (Anglo, “The Barriers” 92). Sword dances became popular throughout Europe in the Middle Ages (Corsin 25). These dances often included staged mock battles between characters who fought in order to settle an argument (Anglo, “The Barriers” 92). Mock combats were sometimes included in entertainments such as disguisings, masques, ballets, mummery, and intermezzi (92).

As tournaments became more of a spectator sport, steps were taken to limit the level of danger knights experienced. As a result knights used heavier armour, lighter weapons, rebated lances, and blunted swords (92). Furthermore, the introduction of the tilt in the thirteenth century drastically reduced casualties on the jousting field. The tilt is sometimes defined as a joust on horseback (Cohen 17) but also refers to the actual fence that runs the length of the jousting field. The tilt kept the horses from running into each other during the joust. Before

the tilt was introduced, jousting had extremely high casualty rates during tournaments (17). The tilts also reduced the likelihood that lances would penetrate armour when making contact. By the mid-thirteenth century in England notions of chivalry attached themselves to tournaments with re-enactments of Arthurian scenes or other stories becoming part of the entertainment (Gravett 70).

During this time mock combats on foot became prevalent at tournaments across Europe. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, foot combats were restricted to being performed with the addition of a wooden gate or barrier between opposing sides over which knights would have to swing their weapons (Anglo, "The Barriers" 92). The gate prevented knights from coming into direct contact with each other and reduced the variety and strength of the assaults that could be executed.

Eventually the *barriers* became a social game, or a "spectacle within a spectacle" (95). By the sixteenth century the battles at the barriers evolved into a form of semi-dramatic entertainment, with each group in the battle representing more than simply battling knights. The battles developed themes with sides representing struggles between Love and Riches, or Wild Men and Amazons (95). Instead of a chivalric contest, the barriers became more of a sporting event, and by the early seventeenth century, "the *barriers* became part of the University of Tübingen's curriculum for the education of gentlemen" (95).

By the seventeenth century knights were no longer permitted to fight to the extreme, and their weapons were light enough so as not to inflict harm on their opponents. The object of the barriers was to strike the crest of the opponent's helm, not the actual opponent. In his article on the barriers, Anglo argues that its purpose was to "display elegance; to provide knightly recreation; to give relish to the prince; and, most of all, to serve the ladies. Its actions should, therefore, 'never pose a danger to life'(97). The barriers eventually became so degraded that a Spanish master of fence observed that it had been "reduced to such a state that even women and children could try it as a game and entertainment and do as well as the knights at it" (Anglo, "Martial Arts" 169).

There are many surviving manuals of swordplay from Renaissance masters. Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press allowed for a wider readership of fencing manuals from French, Spanish, German, Italian and English masters. Achille Morozzo's *Opera Nova* published in 1536, is regarded as the first fencing book that provides a regularized system of sword practice (Cohen 24). Courtiers were encouraged to undertake sword training as part of their gentlemanly upbringing. *The Book of the Courtier*, published in 1528, states that any proper man should know about all forms of weapons (qtd. in Cohen 24). In 1553, Camillo Agrippa published his treatise on fencing in which he introduced the four basic parry positions of *prima*, *seconda*, *terza* and *quarta* (24). Capo Ferro's treatise *Gran Simulacro* (1610) has been regarded by some fencing masters as the "greatest fencing manual of all time" (Kirby 7). Many enthusiasts have tried to re-interpret Ferro's work with varying degrees of success in such books as Guy Windsor's *Duellist's Companion* and John Clements's *Renaissance Swordsmanship*.

Rapier fencing was popular all across Renaissance Europe, and the integration of the foreign rapier into theatrical entertainments in England was embraced with vigor and passion. Italian fencing master Rocco Bonetti arrived in London in 1569 and was able to take advantage of the English fascination with the Italian rapier (Wagner 14). However, the English masters strongly opposed the foreign methods of swordplay and Bonetti struggled to make a living as a fencing master. His fencing school was based in Blackfriars and it has been argued that William Shakespeare was one of his students (Wright 265). Shakespeare is supposedly referring to Bonetti in *Romeo and Juliet* in speaking of a "very butcher of a silk button" (266).

Bonetti died in 1587 and his son Jeronimo became Vincentio Saviolo's apprentice in 1589 (15). Saviolo and Jeronimo taught fencing at the Court of Elizabeth until Jeronimo was killed by an Englishman named "Cheese" (15). George Silver wrote his *Paradoxes of Defence* in 1599 and in his book calls for all Englishmen to return to the English ways of fencing with the old swords (17). However, by 1586 London had at least eight major rapier fencing schools; it

would appear that Elizabethans had an appetite for bloodsport (Cohen 34). According to Cohen, there are 437 references to “sword” within Shakespeare’s works (37).

English audiences were accustomed to watching violence. There were a number of English actors who were masters of fence themselves. Richard Tarleton was a London Master of Defence as well as a member of Richard Burbage’s acting company (Martinez 1). It is likely that Tarleton would have choreographed the fights in many of the plays in which he performed due to his ability with bladed weapons. J.D. Martinez, a member of the Society of American Fight Directors, examines what stage combat choreography may have looked like in the plays of Shakespeare in his book *The Swords of Shakespeare*.

Cromwell’s England did not support martial training as part of a gentleman’s education and as a result the “civilian fashion of wearing a sword as part of everyday dress subsided during his reign” (Loades 327). The Restoration in England introduced the French small sword to the country (Shoemaker 527). The small sword was the invention of France, and English gentlemen travelling to France for ‘finishing’ would study equitation, dancing, gymnastics and fencing (Loades 327). The small sword was lighter and faster than the rapier it replaced. The blade was triangular and the point was deadly. The cut-and-thrust mechanics of the rapier were not nearly as refined as the techniques employed for the small sword that relied upon the thrust alone.

The rise of the house of Angelo in London made a significant impact on swordplay in England – both theatrical and practical - for almost a hundred years. The dynasty of the Angelo family begins with the arrival of Domenico Angelo Tremamondo in London in 1755. Angelo was born in Italy, and studied swordplay, dancing and equestrianism at the Academy in Leghorn (Kirby vi). He moved to Paris and took up practice with the French foil under the tutelage of the finest fencer in France, Teillagory. He also took dance training with Gaetan Vestris, the first dancer in the Opéra. During a fencing demonstration, Angelo attracted the interest of an Irish actress, Margaret Woffington. She gave Angelo a gift of roses during the exhibition. As the story goes, he pinned the roses to his

right breast and challenged anyone to disturb any of the flowers or leaves of the bouquet (vii). In the spirit of all romantic stories, the bouquet went undisturbed and shortly thereafter he followed Woffington to Dublin, where she was employed by Thomas Sheridan at his Aungier Street Theatre (vii). Once her contract had ended they went to London, where Angelo fell in love with Elizabeth Johnson. They were married in 1756 and had six children.

Angelo became the riding master for the Earl of Pembroke, and was witnessed riding by George II who declared Angelo the “most elegant rider in Europe” (Loades 342). Angelo then became employed as the riding and fencing master to the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York.

Along with this post came anger from the British-born fencing masters who disliked the idea that the training of the heir to the British throne was being undertaken by a foreigner. An Irish doctor named Keyes, presumably one of Britain’s top fencers, challenged Angelo to a public fencing match at the Thatched House Tavern. Angelo accepted the invitation unaware that this match would draw the attention of several English nobles. The foils were dipped in ink so that the placements of the hits on the white fencing doublets they wore would be visible. Keyes’ style was broad and erratic. Angelo had no difficulty in evading Keyes’ advances. Angelo disarmed Keyes twice, and after letting Keyes tire, struck him in the chest “several times with the point of his foil, leaving no doubt who the master swordsman was” (Loades 343). Angelo’s son Henry wrote that it was no wonder his father did so well, for the French fencers were presumed to practice regularly for three years while English schools practice “rarely more than as many months” (Angelo H. 45).

This victory in London established Angelo as a supreme fencing master. Through the encouragement of London’s elite, Angelo opened his own *salle d’armes* in Soho square, where he taught fencing, dancing and riding. In 1763, he published his treatise on smallsword, *École des Armes*. This work is still regarded as the definitive work on the French smallsword. Egerton Castle wrote that Angelo’s *salle* was one of the most interesting in England and that his dynasty lasting a century kept up the honor of English fencing (Castle 212).

Angelo taught many actors at his school, including David Garrick. He offered instruction on defense against sword and dagger, sword and lantern, and sword and cloak (345). These techniques were taught as ways for gentlemen to protect themselves when they travelled abroad. During this period, Angelo also began teaching fencing with foils as a sport. He established strict regulations for targeting, and made allowances for freedom of movement that dueling did not allow for. Thus fencing became a gentlemanly pursuit. By creating a sport in the form of recreational fencing as, Angelo became one of the last fencing masters of the old style of swordplay and the first master of the sport of fencing (345). Students were able to learn the skills required to kill a person in a duel, and also learn the techniques to win matches. At the time of his death in 1802 he was still teaching students fencing at Eton (345).

Angelo's son Harry took over the main business when his father was seventy years old. Harry was not nearly as proficient an equestrian as his father. He preferred the theatre, where he performed on the stage as an actor himself. He continued to train gentlemen and actors at his school and in the productions he worked on. During a fight rehearsal in 1820 with Edmund Kean, Harry tore the ligaments in his right thigh, which led to his retirement. His son, Henry, took over the family business until he received a posting in the British army as Superintendent of Sword Exercise in 1833 (345). Though the Angelo family taught martial swordplay, their establishment of recreational fighting and fighting for the stage had the longest-lasting influence.

It appears that most actors of the period must have had a degree of fencing ability. There was neither time nor necessity for extended rehearsal periods and the actors were required to interpret their own parts. One of the reasons why this may have been the case is that there was no formal director rehearsing the plays. Often it was the leading actor, the manager, the actor-manager, or prompter that was in charge of the rehearsal (Booth 107). The time permitted for rehearsals was minimal under the best of circumstances, and fencing scenes would have required additional time (105). Henry Dickinson Stone writes:

His [the actor's] rehearsal begins at 10 o'clock, on an average and usually occupies till 1 o'clock, or more frequently until 2 o'clock. Between this hour is his time for study, which in long and new parts is often the most severe, and which must be constant, even with short or old parts. Costume, or mechanical or personal arrangements for the stage, require much attention always; and by 7 o'clock in the evening he must be at the theatre for the important labours of the night, frequently practiced to the very hour of the morning.... (Stone 257)

Macready, in rehearsing a new play *Gisippus* in 1842, had only a total of four rehearsals to get the play ready for performance at Drury Lane (Booth 106). Lesser theatres would allow even less time to prepare. Fight scenes might be worked out between actors in the wings while the main scenes were being rehearsed on stage (107). This tradition appears to have existed even through the early years of the "directors" theatre (Langton 4). Basil Langton recalls in his paper "Shaw's Stagecraft" that the actors at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1934 had little respect for the Russian director Theodore Komisarjevsky, and "after a play brilliantly staged by Komisarjevsky, I saw they slipped back into their old ways of doing things as soon as the director went back to London – changing the production to conform to their old business that they knew from years of experience would go down well with the audience" (6). Langton states that it had been common practice for actors to be self-reliant; they would walk through rehearsals knowing what they had to do without being told (6).

It would appear then that actors would have been left to create the fights to the best of their skills with little time for actual choreography. Actors would spend their own time training with fencing masters and applying those skills to the stage. Lesser actors would likely have received instruction from more experienced actors in a company. It is highly likely that actors would have developed simple combinations of moves that could be easily memorized and taught to others during the preparation for a production. Star performers often

appeared in plays with barely enough time to rehearse with local or travelling companies and were “inclined to disregard the rest of the cast and [there were] even times when plays were presented to audiences without rehearsals at all” (Briggs 257). Michael R. Booth discusses the limits of rehearsal time and the Victorian stage in his book *Theatre in the Victorian Age*. Richard Cohen also looks at the ways theatre companies rehearsed swordfights during this period in his book *By The Sword*. William Hobbs refers to the haphazard methods of staging swordfights in *Fight Direction for Stage and Screen*, and Douglas Campbell discusses the English theatre system and passing on of sword phrases, actor to actor, as late as the mid-twentieth century in his interview with the Canadian Theatre Museum.

Evidence of actors who trained other actors in stage combat in productions can be found in T. Allston Brown’s *History of the American Stage: containing biographical sketches of nearly every member of the profession that has appeared on the American stage from 1733 to 1870*. Patrick Connolly appears to have had a hand in training two of the most famous female performers of the Victorian age, Adah Isaacs Menken of *Mazeppa* fame, and Marietta Ravel.

CONNOLLY, PATRICK. – Born in Liverpool, Eng., of Irish parents, March 17, 1842. Come [sic] to America at six years of age. Has been married twice, first to a non-professional lady in April 3, 1859, and lastly to the widow of William O. Dale, the great vaulter and equestrian, June 7, 1867. His first knowledge of a theatre was as a gas boy in the Old Bowery Theatre, New York, under T.S. Hamblin’s management. Learned the trade of a practical engineer in the Novelty Works, New York, served four years and a half. He next became a cooper and worked at the trade two years and eight months. Next appeared at the New Bowery Theatre where he taught the late Adah Isaacs Menken sword fighting for the combat scene. Took charge of the horse “Black Bess” of Mr. Lingard’s, the first one Menken ever did Mazeppa on. He after this appeared in dramas to do only

sword-fighting. When Menken played her second engagement at the New Bowery, he appeared as the sentinel in “Mazeppa” and spoke his first line on the stage. He remained there four years, during which time he taught Leo Hudson, Kate Fisher, Addie Anderson, Lizzie Wood, Florence Temple, and Marietta Ravel the art of broad-sword fighting. Seasons of 1865, '66 and '68 he travelled with Marietta Ravel. (409)

Mazeppa launched Menken into stardom in 1861 at the Green Theater in Albany New York (Barca 296). The climax in the second act of H.M. Milner’s play occurs when Mazeppa, a prince, “is stripped naked and strapped to a horse that gallops up a mountain” (296). This stunt was so dangerous that actors usually substituted a dummy but Menken performed it herself wearing flesh colored tights (296). Menken became one of the highest paid actors of her time and performed mostly male roles. It appears that Connolly may have also had a hand in creating stage stunts with horses and took part in creating the sensational stunt in *Mazeppa* as well as teaching Menken swordplay for her male roles (Brown 409).

Prior to the establishment of the fight director, actors who were to perform violence in plays were largely responsible for creating the violence themselves. Typically, actors with good physical form and agility were expected to be able to fence to some degree. Their skills in fencing were adapted to the stage, and simple sword routines were easily memorized. These fights could be inserted into any number of plays, and were often given names to allow for easy memory recall. The ‘Square Eights’, ‘Round Eights’, ‘Glasgow Tens’, ‘Long Elevens’, and ‘The Drunk Combat’ were routines made up from a series of slashes and cuts delivered from one actor’s blade to another (Hobbs, “Fight Direction” 8). These could be repeated as often as needed in a fight, or combined with other routines to extend a fight scene as required. These sequences were typically directed at an actor’s sword and not their body in order to reduce the chance of injury if an actor was to lose control of their sword during the routine. However, the safety could be fleeting, as was the case with John Barrymore’s *Hamlet*. The stage

manager for the New York production of *Hamlet* from November 1922 – February 1923 was William Adams. He recollected,

When Barrymore exchanged the foils he had such a vicious look in his eyes that the actor portraying Laertes would be terrified for his own life. And well he might, as often the actor ended up with bloody welts on his thighs and calves. Padding was used to protect the actor, but this was of little value if Barrymore happened to be in a particularly bad mood. One night, in London, the actor playing Laertes was so frightened that he threw down his foil, ran off stage, out the stage door, and hasn't been heard from since. (Otis A18)

This anecdote paints an interesting portrait of John Barrymore. In *John Barrymore: Shakespearean Actor*, Michael A. Morrison confirms this anecdote – and reveals that it was not merely one actor, but many that walked away from their role as Laertes:

Boys used to come in so proud and happy they had been chosen [for the role]. Little did they know what was in store for them. When the graveyard scene came, Jack would fight violently...They would bear it patiently for a time, quite bewildered as to what had happened to them, thinking it was their own clumsiness, that the blows they had received were accidental, but not at all: Jack fought Laertes with the greatest realism...He hated the actors who played the part. In the end they had to give up and send in their notices and retire – covered in scars, and then another bright, young-faced actor, full of enthusiasm, would take their place. (Morrison 254)

Morrison also mentions that the actors who played Laertes took to wearing pads under their costumes:

At one performance this protection was inadequate, however, when Barrymore, having thoroughly stabbed Laertes, who had already fallen into Osric's arms, felt a need to administer a coup de grace; he abruptly leaped forward and slashed his dying adversary across his unpadding behind. (254)

Morrison writes about the intensity of Barrymore's performances and how, in the 1920 production of *Richard III* Barrymore wore heavy armor and would perform an acrobatic fall that often left him close to unconsciousness (116-117). Morrison also suggests that Barrymore often put strenuous physical demands upon himself when performing, so it is plausible that he may also have demanded as much from other actors on the stage. It would appear that there were a few victims of Barrymore's sword.

Baptiste Bertrand was a Master of Fence in London during the mid-Victorian Period. William Hobbs erroneously credits his son Felix with Baptiste's fencing credits in his book *Fight Direction for Stage and Screen*. This error is addressed in Nick Evangelista's book *The Encyclopedia of the Sword*. Evangelista states that Felix was also a master who assisted his father and that the Bertrands often had their work intermingled (52). Bertrand also has been confused with another fencing master named Francois-Joseph Bertrand, who is accredited with developing the beat parry in fencing and is no relation to Baptiste and Felix (54). Students of Baptiste Bertrand included Beerbohm Tree, Forbes Robertson, Fred Terry, Ben Greet, Henry Irving and Charles Dickens (Hobbs, "Fight Direction" 8).

When it came to setting fights, actors who knew how to fence were at a great advantage due to the limited time in which rehearsals were conducted. It is very interesting to note that the duel between Henry Irving and Squire Bancroft in *The Dead Heart* was improvised except for the final move (Hobbs 9). This would not have been possible if the actors were not highly proficient fencers. What makes this stage fight more amazing is that Irving was supposedly short-sighted.

The knowledge of fencing among British and American actors at the turn of the twentieth century is well documented in an article entitled “Gleaned from Fields Theatrical: Stage Combats with Sword, Rapier, and Pistol – an Incident at the French Performance – Little Stories of Theatrical People” in the November 29, 1903 edition of the *New York Times*. This article is one of many that specifically address the popularity of fencing on the stage and the people who were highly proficient in performing exciting stage fights. Most of the articles in the *New York Times* on the subject have no author attributed to them, but contain much useful information about the history of stage combat and actor training of that period. I have chosen to include most of the article here, as it discusses several actors who had fencing abilities:

The sword duel on the stage has always had much interest for audiences. Shakespeare seems to have found it so in his time, for his plays abound with hot stage fights. Even in “Hamlet” there is the contest with rapiers in the last act – an incident that arouses the audience from the spell of the most lethargic Prince. This duel is quite a test of the actor’s capability, for, although he may read well and show a subtle understanding of the philosophy of his author, yet if he cannot come out to advantage in the contest with Laertes he betrays that he has not been properly trained in his profession. Here is one place in which Edwin Forrest is said to have manifested the thoroughness of his education. He was not an ideal Hamlet, especially in appearance, but he had mastered the art of fencing, and even when he was well advanced in life and a little gouty he handled the foils in this scene beautifully.

Charles Fechter fought in the French manner with a sort of theatricalism – just as young Alexander Salvini handled the foils in the scene years afterward.

One of the most graceful and spirited of the fencers was Edwin Booth – cool, resolute, and elegant. One can see him now as he came on with Horatio, stripped of all superfluous clothing, slender and trim, in deep

black, handsome and picturesque. He fought his bouts slowly, gaining in intensity with the onset, and making the climax work of the hottest sort. Mr. Booth was a good fencer, and had practiced the art from boyhood, although he was not comparable with Mr. Bellew, who is a master.

There are splendid fights in Shakespeare's "Richard III" and "Macbeth," and one of the delights of playgoers in olden time was to see these combats, especially in the days of Edmond [sic] Kean and George Frederick Cook. Junius Brutus Booth modeled his fight upon Kean's, and Edwin Booth naturally followed his father. E. L. Davenport fought much in the same way, but at the conclusion, having lost his sword, breathless and bleeding, he staggered toward Richmond with his fists.

The Elder Booth, one night at the Holiday Street Theatre in Baltimore, in the fight with Richmond, (the part of the latter played by E. L. Tilton), being not quite himself, would not give up. They fought for nearly fifteen minutes, the audience howling, and finally Tilton struck him across the nose, breaking the bridge. His voice was never the same afterward, having always a nasal inflection.

E.L. Davenport was a good fighter with cutlasses in nautical dramas – two up and one down, as the formula was. He had learned the art from the celebrated Cooke in London.

All the older actors new something of the use of the sword; such knowledge was indispensable. There are some good combats in the modern plays used by Sothorn and Hackett, and there was a strong one in "If I were King," where Villon and his enemy engaged by the light of lanterns.

In the broadsword encounters in the old melodramas the sword had a large hilt of curved bars, which served as a means of protecting the person who held it from severe blows, and the fighting was done to the low music of the orchestra, which was heightened or diminished according to the variations of the combat.

Dutton Cook, who was familiar with these contests at the Surrey [theatre] in London, describes how the fighters raged hither and thither about the stage, each performer being allowed a fair share of the feats accomplished. The swords clashed and showers of sparks fell, to the stern staccato music of the band, while thunders of applause came from the audience. This sort of stage combat has been so much burlesqued that it is no longer in use. It was ridiculed long ago, however, for Johnson in “The Rehearsal”, says: “But, Mr. Rayes, might we not have a little fighting, for I love those plays where they cut and slash one another on the stage for a whole hour together.” (“Gleaned from Fields Theatrical”)

This article reveals quite a bit of information about how fighting was handled on the stage, and the amount of knowledge actors had on the subject. It appears from the article that there may have been a tradition of handing down fights from one actor to another. As the author notes, “Junius Brutus Booth modeled his fight upon Kean’s, and Edwin Booth naturally followed his father. E.L. Davenport fought much in the same way, but at the conclusion, having lost his sword, breathless and bleeding, he staggered toward Richmond with his fists.” It seems that Davenport followed a similar fight plot to that of Kean and the Booths, with an artistic change to the fight’s conclusion. It is also possible that the fight had gone wrong for Davenport as he is described as “bloody” and “breathless” and using his fists to conclude the fight in *Richard III*.

The author’s reference to Davenport’s nautical fighting is also curious, as the article states, “E.L. Davenport was a good fighter with cutlasses in nautical dramas – two up and one down, as the formula was.” This may be a reference to a familiar fight sequence commonly staged during the period. It is not uncommon in modern stage fight sequences to incorporate fencing drills into the fight as a way of lengthening it without confusing the performers. By inserting something as simple as a parry-riposte drill, whereby one of the actors leads an attack to their partner’s target which is parried, and then the defending partner immediately executes a riposte to the instigating partner’s same target which is then repeated

to a sequential target and so on, a fight can be lengthened as long as the actors wish. It would seem logical that this “two up and one down” may be referring to strokes – two cuts or thrusts to the high line followed by one low, which is repeated as needed. The moves are simple and repeatable, although they may quickly become tedious to an audience. I have worked on a number of film sets where this is exactly the formula that coordinators give background fighters to allow for controlled movement in the background of a filmed fight.

Mark Twain makes reference to the same pattern of “two up and one down” in a passage in his novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, where Joe Harper and Tom act out a scene from *Robin Hood*:

“Then thou are indeed that famous outlaw? Right gladly will I dispute with thee the passes of the merry wood. Have at thee!”

They took their lath swords, dumped their other traps on the ground, struck a fencing attitude, foot to foot, and began a grave, careful combat, “two up and two down.” Presently Tom said:

“Now, if you’ve got the hang, go it lively!”

So they “went lively,” panting and perspiring with the work. By and by Tom shouted:

“Fall! Fall! Why don’t you fall?”

“I sha’n’t! Why don’t you fall yourself? You’re getting the worst of it.”

“Why, that ain’t anything. I can’t fall; that ain’t the way it is in the book. The book says, ‘Then with one back-handed stroke he slew poor Guy of Guisborne.’ You’re to turn around and let me hit you in the back.”

There was no getting around the authorities, so Joe turned, received the whack and fell. (Twain 145-146)

This passage gives us a glimpse of how theatrical combats may have been choreographed in the United States.

A similar example is found in the works of Charles Dickens, a student of Felix Bertrand and a fencer and actor himself. His depiction of a theatrical sword

fight in his novel *Nicholas Nickleby* provides some very interesting insights into the way some producers may have undertaken fight rehearsals in a company during this period. Mr. Crummles is in the midst of rehearsing two boys for a terrific combat in his company:

Nicholas was prepared for something odd, but not for something quite so odd as the sight he encountered. At the upper end of the room, were a couple of boys, one of them very tall and the other very short, both dressed as sailors – or at least as theatrical sailors, with belts, buckles, pigtails, and pistols complete – fighting was called in play-bills a terrific combat, with two of those short broad-swords with basket hilts which are commonly used at our minor theatres. The short boy had gained a great advantage over the tall boy, who was reduced to a mortal strait, and both were overlooked by a large heavy man, perched against the corner of a table, who emphatically adjured them to strike a little more fire out of the swords, and they couldn't fail to bring the house down, on the very first night.

'Mr. Vincent Crummles,' said the landlord with an air of great deference. 'This is the young gentleman.'

Mr. Vincent Crummles received Nicholas with an inclination of the head, something between the courtesy of a Roman emperor and the nod of a pot companion; and bade the landlord shut the door and begone.

'There's a picture,' said Mr. Crummles, motioning Nicholas not to advance and spoil it. 'The little 'un has him; if the big 'un doesn't knock under, in three seconds, he's a dead man. Do that again boys.'

The two combatants went to work afresh, and chopped away until the swords emitted a shower of sparks: to the great satisfaction of Mr. Crummles, who appeared to consider this a very great point indeed. The engagement commenced with about two hundred chops administered by the short sailor and the tall sailor alternately, without producing any particular result, until the short sailor was chopped down on one knee; but

as this was nothing to him, for he worked himself about on the one knee with the assistance of his left hand, and fought most desperately until the tall sailor chopped his sword out of his grasp. Now, the inference was, that the short sailor, reduced to this extremity, would give in at once and cry quarter, but instead of that, he all of a sudden drew a large pistol from his belt and presented it at the face of the tall sailor, who was so overcome at this (not expecting it) that he let the short sailor pick up his sword and begin again. Then, the chopping recommenced, and a variety of fancy chops were administered on both sides; such as chops dealt with the left hand, and under the leg, and over the right shoulder, and over the left; and when the short sailor made a vigorous cut at the tall sailor's legs, which would have shaved them clean off if it had taken effect, the tall sailor jumped over the short sailor's sword, wherefore to balance the matter, and make it all fair, the tall sailor administered the same cut, and the short sailor jumped over HIS sword. After this, there was a good deal of dodging about, and hitching up of the inexpressibles in the absence of braces, and then the short sailor (who was the moral character evidently, for he always had the best of it) made a violent demonstration and closed with tall sailor, who, after a few unavailing struggles, went down, and expired in great torture as the short sailor put his foot upon his breast, and bored a hole in him through and through.

'That'll be a double ENCORE if you take care boys,' said Mr. Crummles.

'You had better get your wind now and change your clothes.'

Having addressed these words to the combatants, he saluted Nicholas, who then observed that the face of Mr. Crummles was quite proportionate in size to his body; that he had a very full under-lip, a hoarse voice, as though he were in the habit of shouting very much, and very short black hair, shaved off nearly to the crown of his head – to admit (as he afterwards learnt) of his more easily wearing character wigs of any shape or pattern.

'What did you think of that sir?' inquired Mr. Crummles.

‘Very good, indeed – capital.’ Answered Nicholas.

‘You won’t see such boys as those very often, I think,’ said Mr. Crummles.

Nicholas assented – observing that if they were a little better match –

‘Match!’ cried Mr. Crummles.

‘I mean if they were a little more of a size,’ said Nicholas, explaining himself.

‘Size!’ repeated Mr. Crummles; ‘why, it’s the essence of the combat that there should be a foot or two between them. How are you to get up the sympathies of the audience in a legitimate manner, if there isn’t a little man contending against a big one? – unless there’s at least five to one, and we haven’t hands enough for that business in our company.’ (Dickens 842-847)

This passage, though perhaps somewhat exaggerated for dramatic effect in *Nicholas Nickleby*, paints a typical picture of the Victorian manager/producer. The combatants have a routine as part of their stock repertoire, in this case the nautical combat. Dickens describes the sparks flying from the swords just as Irving was fond of making happen by covering his blades with flints. Dickens also comments on the style of weapons – perhaps indicating that the lesser companies used the same weapons no matter what period the play was set in. Most interesting is the moment when the short sailor is disarmed, yet is able to produce a pistol – not to end the fight, but to reclaim his blade and fight on. The fight then continues for another two hundred clashes of steel and leg sweeps. This particular fight would have been quite repetitive and long. However, the Victorian and Edwardian audiences would have expected to see much action on their stages. In this case, it would appear quantity succeeded over quality.

There is enough evidence in novels, newspaper accounts and chronicles of the nineteenth century to conclude that fencing was popular and readily practiced by the leading men and ladies of the British and American stages during this period. Twain himself was noted as attending a New York fencing club soirée that included several interesting demonstrations including a samurai:

The Fencers Club held a housewarming last night, and at the same time did honor to the new master at arms, Prof. L. Vauthier of the Cercle d'Escrime de la Madeleine, in Paris...The meeting was the most brilliant event which has ever taken place in the United States. Never before have masters of the force of MM. Vauthier and Jacoby engaged together. There was much good fencing on the part of amateurs and of other professionals, but the "clou" of the evening was this classic combat...

...The bouts began with a fine set-to between Messrs. Tatham and Hammond, with foils, followed by Messrs. Claiborne and J. W. Gerard, and these in turn by Messrs. W. Scott O'Connor of the Fencers and Charles Bothner of the New-York Athletic. The last was a hotly-applauded struggle, in which O'Connor showed the finer form and seemed to have, on the whole, the better.

The President introduced M. Vauthier to the assemblage, which filled all the seats of the large hall and crowded the rear with standing figures. M. Vauthier began with an assault at arms with M. Gouspy, the master of the Racquet Club, in which he showed himself easily the superior. Prevot Capdevielle of the Fencers then took the stage and engaged young M. Louis Senac, son of the well-known master of that name. Their styles were very different, and if at first the older man had the advantage, M. Senac won several hits which were loudly acclaimed. Duelling swords were now in order, and Mr. James W. Gerard and Samuel Shaq acquitted themselves well, followed by Messrs. Hammond and Bothner of the New-York Athletic Club, using the broad-sword with great lightness and skill. After a contest with the dueling sword between Mr. A. Van Zo Post and Prevot Capdevielle, the bouts ended with a side-splitting scrimmage with Japanese singlesticks between Mr. Charles Tatham and the samurai Shilo Sacaze of Nagasaki. This epic combat showed the samurai extremely quick and clever with the peculiar bamboo stick of his native land. His odd movements and loud shouts delighted the audience

beyond measure, and the bout closed with screams of laughter and applause when the samurai closed with Mr. Tatham and began to wrestle with him on the stage.

...Last night the floor was crowded with representative amateurs of the graceful sport and many of the professors of fencing. Signore Pini, Greco and Pessina, the wandering swordsmen from Italy, who go about the world astonishing fencers by their vigorous swordplay were present...Many lights of the literary, artistic, and legal world were present. Mark Twain, Alexander Black, Brisben Walker, James Creelman, represented journalism and letters... (“A Gala Night at the Fencers”)

This article demonstrates the popularity of fencing amongst New York society. People were not only knowledgeable about stage fighting, but they had a keen interest in the proper display of various styles of swordplay. This article alone mentions four specific styles: fencing, dueling swords, broadswords, and Japanese ‘singlesticks,’ which were viewed as a novelty. In addition to the Japanese style of Kenjitsu, the spectators were witness to a demonstration of judo with the wrestling that resulted when the samurai tackled Mr. Tatham to the floor. The wandering swordsmen from Italy are mentioned in the article as well, indicating that they were a popular entertainment, “astonishing” audiences with their swordplay. During this time audiences were exposed to a variety of styles of swordplay and martial prowess, whether through public demonstrations or theatrical entertainments.

The release of Captain Alfred Hutton’s book, *Old Sword Play*, in the same year as Mark Twain witnessed those elaborate fencing matches was welcomed in Britain and New York. A review in the *New York Times* suggests that better instructors, better fencers, and intelligent audiences provided a need for works dedicated to reintroducing proper historic combats:

It is no longer possible, for example, to continue to give on the stage without criticism the absurd antics which have hitherto passed for fencing.

For, although classic foilwork is obviously out of place in mimic combats on the stage, audiences require that at least there shall be an approach to the reality, allowance being made for the necessary conventions. Thus the bright and charming lady who takes the leading role in Mr. de Koven's "Fencing Master" owes it to her sparkling action that audiences forgive her neglect of the ordinary rules of sword play in a part which seems to demand some attention to the first principles of fencing. But the stage is wonderfully conservative even in lands where fencing is the rule rather than the exception. In France and Italy once sees neglect of this side of scenic effects.

And even French art often ignores matters which are popularly supposed to form part of the French boy's education. Thus one may see in the windows of Tiffany & Co. a bronze group by a French artist representing two men stripped to the waist engaged in a combat with dueling swords sharpened for business. Yet the sculpture has placed them in positions no swordsman would dream of holding for an instant, at pains of an immediate wound on one side or the other, if not of a simultaneous thrust in which both would suffer. The men are not fighting at all; they are simply posing with the points of their swords in striking distance. There are plenty of observers here who are able to see this obvious mistake at first glance. ("Some New Publications")

The author of this article suggests that American audiences had a degree of fencing knowledge that made it difficult for theatrical productions to fool an audience with poor swordplay. However, in the case of *The Fencing Master*, scenes of "sparkling action" could be tolerated even if they were not accurate. The author also suggests that the practice of spectacle swordplay over practical was being tolerated in France and Italy. Even a particular French sculpture was guilty of neglecting reality in fencing form.

Laurence Olivier's comments about his sword training offers insight into the way stage fights were possibly conducted:

My training and exercise in the art of fence has been largely grounded on the clockwork technique of 'one, two, three; two one, four;' or 'bish, bash, bosh; bash, bosh, bish; no, no, no, you should not be doing bosh there, it is bash first, *then*, bosh, *now* then, bosh, bash, bish, then *backhand* bosh'. (Hobbs, "Techniques" 6)

He later lists the injuries he sustained during his illustrious career:

1 broken ankle, 2 torn cartilages (1 perforce yielding to surgery), 2 broken calf muscles, 3 ruptured Achilles tendons...Untold slashes including a full thrust razor-edged sword wound in the breast (thrilling)...Landing from a considerable height, scrotum first, upon an acrobats knee...Hanging by hand to piano wire 40 feet up for some minutes on account of unmoored rope...Hurled to the stage from 30 feet due to faultily moored rope ladder...Impalement upon jagged ply-cut outs...Near broken neck diving into net...One arrow shot between shinbones...Hands pretty well misshapen now through taking falls...Near electrocution through scimitar entering studio dimmer while backing away from unwelcome interview...(6)

Olivier's comments lend credence to the view that swordplay was something for which actors could train, but they were expected to be familiar with stock phrases and routines. Basic patterns were memorized and became part of the actor's repertoire in much the same way actors would have several roles memorized for performance. If this is were the case, then there were few original fights being staged. Fights may have been executed with actors repeating phrases that were commonly performed from production to production. There were actors, such as John Barrymore, who demanded perfection in their work; Michael Morrison writes that Barrymore went so far to create exciting stage fights in Hamlet that he even had Douglas Fairbanks work with him for a day in order to see where he could add daring acrobatic feats within the fight (Morrison 140). It

would seem that historical approaches to swordplay were being jazzed up with bits of acrobatic flair in order to dazzle audiences.

The *New York Times* has several articles on swordplay on stage as well as information on fencing schools and masters in the city that were offering their services during the late nineteenth century. It would appear that the sport of fencing was quite popular. Though sport fencing was perhaps rising in popularity, the art of swordplay as a gentlemanly art was largely forgotten for much of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Egerton Castle, an advocate for the art of historical swordplay, wrote that:

...under the reign of scientific police, arms are no longer a necessary part of a private gentleman's dress, the absurd habit of dueling has happily disappeared, whilst at war, unless it be against savages, more reliance is placed on powder than on cold steel... (Castle 3)

Castle was also upset with the way theatres were misrepresenting historical swordplay on the stage through the use of modern fencing:

Actors also, who, in every other case, are most particular about historical accuracy, generally dispose of all questions relative to fighting by referring them to the first fencing-master at hand; and accordingly one sees Laertes and Hamlet with the utmost sangfroid going through a "salute" which, besides being perfectly unmanageable with rapiers, was only established in all its details some fifty years ago. There would indeed be less anachronism in uncorking a bottle of champagne to fill a king's beaker than there is in Hamlet correctly lunging, reversing, his point, saluting carte and tierce, &c.- foil fencing, in fact – in spite of the anticipation raised by Osric's announcement that the bout should be played with rapier and dagger. (3)

Several articles in periodicals of the period make mention of the hazardous and careless swordplay demonstrated on Victorian stages. In the *St. James Gazette*, April 2, 1891, a report was published concerning a fatal stage combat during a production of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Manchester Cathedral school:

...Ernest Thompson, who played the part of Tybalt, said the duel scene was carried on in the usual way, with the exception that Mr. Bagnall, who was playing Romeo, came right in between himself and the deceased, instead of simply knocking up their swords. The witness made another lunge at the deceased, having to thrust right round Mr. Bagnall's body, but did not feel any resistance to the point of his sword. When he saw the deceased fall, he thought he must have hurt him. No one else could have possibly caused the wound. After he saw the blood flowing from the deceased's mouth, he fainted and remembered nothing more. He had no experience with swords of the kind he used in performance... (Wolfe 74)

Tony Wolfe's book, *A Terrific Combat*, chronicles several Victorian articles dedicated to the art of stage combat. Most of them emphasize the need for proper training:

Actors should make fencing a thorough study, for several reasons. They often use swords in fencing scenes in plays, and when they do they usually treat their audience to awkwardness, and commit anachronisms without number. The reason why this is so, no doubt, is that when they were called upon to fence they go to the nearest fencing master available, and learn to make a few "passes" and to take the position of "on guard," and think that that is enough. That is why we see the duel in "Hamlet" at the Danish court during the Middle Ages played upon the stage with a pair of nineteenth-century foils and Hamlet and Laertes executing the graceful salute of the modern fencing room with perfect *sang-froid*... (17)

Castle, along with his Victorian colleagues Captain Alfred Hutton and Sir Richard Francis Burton, spearheaded an interest in reviving the techniques of historical swordsmanship. Hutton was a career military officer and antiquarian. He was also a lifelong student of fence, and observed the decay of swordsmanship in England in both military and civilian training. He dedicated his time to researching the ancient manuals of swordplay to create his own unique interpretations of blade combat. Hutton also attributes the resurrection of historical swordplay to the London Rifle Brigade. This paramilitary unit had begun to study the methods of swordplay from ancient English, Italian and French books, and became extremely proficient with the use of rapiers and two-handed swords. According to Hutton, this group gave public demonstrations of their skills. (Hutton, "Centuries" xvii)

Hutton himself gave public demonstrations of his skills as a period sword devotee. In his 1902 address to the London Playgoers Club he stated:

...We very often see produced on the stage plays representing various periods of the world's history, in which fighting of some sort occurs, and when such a fight is correctly played, and with weapons suitable to its period, it certainly adds much to the attraction of the piece. But how very seldom it is that we see the characters armed with the proper weapons, and how still seldom do we see any attempt at using them as they were used in their own time...I have in my mind an actor-manager who put on Hamlet a while ago. This gentleman was a bit of an epicure. He says to himself, "None of your modern foils for me; no, no. I'll have rapiers – real rapiers – but what the Dickens is a rapier? I'm not quite sure." So he trots off to a shop where they sell fencing requisites. He says to the young man at the counter, "Oh, er – could you by any chance show me some rapiers?" The young man replies, "Yes, sir, certainly, sir," and forthwith lays before him a few pairs of modern French dueling swords – buttoned ones, of course – and our actor manager selects some. But, having

achieved his 'rapiers,' he does not know what to do with them...so he puts himself, as he thinks, into quite right hands – he repairs to an elderly professor, whose boast is that he has taught all the principal Hamlets in the last quarter of a century – and he taught every man jack of them wrong. And now we get on the stage – no we don't, we get into the stalls, and what do we see? We see Osric or somebody bring in a bundle of highly-nickelled French fencing swords of the most up-to-date- pattern, of which the Hamlet and the Laertes select each one, and they commence operations by going through, rather indifferently, the thoroughly modern performance of what is known as the 'Academy Salute.' Now, no such thing as a salute with the foils was known at all until the time of the first Angelos, in whose famous book (1783) you will find it depicted; but that, old as it now is, was now the salute put before us – what we saw was the very latest invention of the nineteenth century...this performance again verged on the burlesque... (Wolfe 101-103)

During the same address, Hutton gave several demonstrations of period swordplay, concluding with the following statement:

I am much gratified to be able to say that, with one or two exceptions, the lady and the gentlemen who are assisting me in the fencing bouts tonight are young members of the theatrical profession. It is to the young actors and the young actresses that we must look for improvement in stage fighting... (103)

Hutton was a major innovator of the reformation of stage combat in Victorian England. His book, *Cold Steel*, is dedicated to the art of saber fighting in a unique combination of French, Italian and English styles. His numbering system for saber defense is the same system still used today in stage combat in Canada, England, the United States and Australia. The system he utilizes is not entirely limited to one method, but rather, to a number of historical sources that

he believes to be tested and proven in the field of battle. The system is seemingly simple, yet effective. The techniques are equally effective in the fencing hall, dueling field, in battle, self-defense – and with minor modifications for safety -- on the stage.

Hutton had studied at the famous Angelo fencing school in his youth and was a life-long student of various forms of swordplay. In his book *The Sword and the Centuries*, he mentions the success of the London Rifle Brigade fencers, who gave demonstrations of period swordplay. Their touring production, aptly titled *L'escrime à travers les ages*, consisted of ten fight scenes spanning various periods in the history of swordplay (xviii). To add to the theatricality of the fight demonstrations, each fight was written as a playlet. The “Bon Chevalier” is said to have had two hundred people on the stage (xviii). Weapons demonstrated included rapiers, rapier and cloak, rapier and lantern, broadswords, and other weapons that suited the period they were depicting.

To put this in a modern context, True Edge Productions re-mounted their production of *Duel of Ages* in January 2011 for the Next Stage Theatre Festival at the Factory Theatre in Toronto. The result of three fight directors coming together to create a night of bloodshed and violence, the production consisted of nine fights from various periods of time with various edged weapons including broadswords, rapiers, smallswords, katanas, sabers, bucklers, lanterns, cloaks, pistols, and unarmed combat. Like *L'escrime à travers les ages*, this modern production included the talents of 25 actor combatants and several fight directors. The scenes were well performed, and the success of the show demonstrated that expertly choreographed violence is exciting to watch and will be well received by audiences. I attended the final two performances of the production which completely sold out its run at the Next Stage Festival.

The production was the creation of Todd Campbell. True Edge is a theatre company created to develop and promote the art of stage combat with the goal of creating opportunities for fight directors and trained actor combatants to “explore and push the boundaries of the art form that they love not just for itself but also

as an important and integral part of the theatrical process and experience” (Campbell 3).

The first scene, *Le Coup* was based on the true story of the famous judicial duel in France between Seigneur de Jarnac and the Lord of Châtaigneraye in 1547 that is recorded in Alfred Hutton’s book, *The Sword and the Centuries*. The duel has become a famous story among fight directors and bladed weapon enthusiasts. Jarnac’s name became immortalized with the technique he used to best Châtaigneraye, known as the *Coup de Jarnac* (Clements, “Duel of the Century” 1). The name refers to a crippling draw-cut or blow to the back of an opponent’s exposed knee. *Duel of Ages* presented the scene detailing the events leading to the judicial duel and the duel itself was fought with weapons resembling those that were used in the historical duel. In this case the weapons were military sword and buckler. The actors, Daniel Levinson (Jarnac) and Michael Dufays (Châtaigneraye), were directed in the scene by Dean Gabourie. The fight scene was choreographed by Kevin Robinson.

Scene two was written by Michael Rubinfeld and choreographed by Todd Campbell. *Le Duel des Mignons* concerns the true story of a brawl between two factions resolved to settle a dispute over the affections of a lady (Hutton, *Sword and the Centuries* 139). The duel took place on April 27, 1578 and was fought with rapier and dagger. Jacques de Caylus, Jean d’Arcès, and Louis de Maugiron engaged in battle with Charles de Balzac, Georges de Schomberg, and Ribérac. Only d’Arcès and Balzac survived. Caylus took thirty-three hours to die from his wounds (133-38). The combatants in the scene were Andrew McMaster, Todd Campbell, Nathan Bitton, Scott Moyle, Matt Richardson, and Chris Sironi (Campbell 2).

The third scene, *La Maupin*, is based on the life of French Opera singer Madeline d’Aubigny (1670-1707), who commonly dressed as a man and fought duels over other women. The scene focuses on the famous event when during a ball she made indecent proposals to a young lady. Three men provoked her and she went out with them to fight, killing all three and then presenting herself to the

prince who pardoned her. Small swords were used during this fight scene involving Casey Hudecki as La Maupin and Simon Fon, Christian Feliciano, and Kevin Robinson as the gentlemen. This fight was staged while a dance continued around the fencers.

The remaining true stories included the *Last Duel of Rob Roy*, *The Pen and the Gun*, which was about Bat Masterson and Wild Bill Hickok, and *The Pistoleers*, about a picnic duel in Nova Scotia at the turn of the century. Only three of the scenes presented were not based on actual events, but they were interesting fight scenes: *Two Swords*, about a Japanese Samurai and an American Officer in the late nineteenth century; *Egos and Idols*, in which Errol Flynn and Basil Rathbone fight during Hollywood's golden age; and *One* – a scene where One takes on Big Bad and a “Crazy Ninja Death Squad” of eleven in an unarmed martial arts fight that ends the show (Campbell 2).

Though *Duel of Ages* did not have the two hundred fighters that “Bon Chevalier” in *L'escrime à travers les ages* boasted, the twenty-five combatants created an exciting evening of historical combat. The company consisted entirely of fight directors and certified actor-combatants who were all members of Fight Directors Canada. Members of the company were Stephanie Bickford, Nathan Bitton, Todd Campbell, Stuart Constable, Michael Dufays, Tammy Everett, Christian Feliciano, Simon Fon, Dean Gabourie, Rachelle Ganesh, Kirsten Gundlack Levinson, Casey Hudecki, Aniko Kaszas, Dahlia Katz, M. John Kennedy, Sabrina Kolbegger, Adrienne Kress, Scott Leaver, Daniel Levinson, Andrew MacMaster, Denis McGrath, Mike McPhaden, Christopher Mott, Scott Moyle, Matt Richardson, Siobhan Richardson, Dean Rideout, Kevin Robinson, Rosanna Saracino, Michael Rubenfeld, Olaf Sham, Chris Sironi, and Gregg Taylor (3-7).

During the revitalization of swordplay in the late nineteenth century, another innovation was taking place in England. E.W. Barton-Wright developed a system of western martial arts in London. He combined his knowledge of the ancient arts as taught by his contemporaries, such as Hutton, with his studies of the Eastern martial arts in Japan such as Jiu-Jitsu. Barton-Wright was able to

create a completely new martial art – Bartitsu. This eclectic martial art combined the European fighting arts such as boxing, wrestling, *savate*, and *la canne* with Jiu-Jitsu and Judo (Wolfe, *Bartitsu Compendium Volume 1*, 11). Essentially, this was the start of the Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) craze. Bartitsu was so intriguing that Conan Doyle referenced it as Sherlock Holmes’s martial art of choice in his story “The Adventures of the Empty House” (11). In the past few years, Sherlock Holmes has become popular to modern audiences with the new BBC series *Sherlock* and the movie franchise starring Robert Downey Jr. as the Bartitsu fighting detective. Bartitsu and MMA clubs are also gaining in popularity once again as these works are being rediscovered.

It is important to note the developments in swordplay and the rediscovery of ancient fighting techniques in Britain during the Victorian and Edwardian eras, as well as the introduction of mixed martial arts through the work of Barton-Wright. Many of the stage combat texts that exist today focus more on the contributions of Di Grassi, Silver, Agrippa, Capo Ferro, Marozzo and other ancient masters that wrote treatises concerning swordsmanship. For example, Jared Kirby’s book *Italian Rapier Combat* is the first English translation of Capo Ferro’s 1610 treatise *Gran Simulacro*. Capo Ferro advocated the importance of the thrust in rapier fencing, and this book offers interpretations of the 43 plates from the original treatise. The work is translated and does not provide an interpretation of the techniques Ferro wrote about. Ken Mondschein’s *Fencing: A Renaissance Treatise* studies the work of Camillo Agrippa’s 1553 early rapier treatise. Mondschein offers an understandable translation of Agrippa’s work that focuses on his concepts of time, distance, line, blade opposition, counterattacks and countertime. David Lindholm’s *Sigmund Ringeck’s Knightly Art of Combat: Sword and Buckler Fighting, Wrestling and Fighting in Armor* provides an English translation of German Medieval swordplay with the original German kept intact. Lindholm offers commentary to assist the reader in understanding the concepts of medieval martial arts from the mid fifteenth century. Christian Tobler’s *Secrets of Medieval Swordsmanship* explores the techniques of Johannes Lichtenauer and Sigmund Ringeck, who was a student of the Lichtenauer school. Tobler

interprets the text and offers theory on the practice of the techniques. The book is divided into five major sections including longsword techniques, sword and buckler, wrestling, armored combat and mounted combat. There are other interpretations of these and other masters available through the Chivalry Bookshelf.

The inherent problem with these books is that they politicize their interpretations of the original manuals. Many of the authors are enthusiasts with an interest in historical swordsmanship but with no experience of staging fights for audiences. These books, though useful for historical fighting techniques, must be carefully examined before attempting theatrical representations in order to minimize risk of injury. I have come across only a single book that was written by a stage fight director and that concerns itself with interpretation of an historical document. Keith Ducklin and John Waller's *Sword Fighting: A Manual for Actors and Directors* attempts to extrapolate techniques from the Royal Armouries M.I. 33 manual and apply them to the stage. They do not focus on teaching the techniques, but rather demonstrate small fights using the techniques from the manual. This book provides proof that there can be practical stage applications for historical techniques with proper study.

What is often neglected are the contributions to the art of swordplay by the Victorian masters such as Hutton, Castle, and Barton-Wright, who were able not only to study the ancient arts, but to adapt the techniques in a way that led to the development of western martial arts and ultimately the development of stage combat. These men successfully interpreted and adapted ancient techniques that revitalized an appreciation for swordplay and unarmed combat. Even though swords at that time were more or less obsolete as weapons of defense, Victorian gentlemen possessed walking sticks and umbrellas. Barton-Wright's Bartitsu club taught Victorian gentlemen how to effectively use these accoutrements as defensive weapons.

While there was a resurgence of historical fencing occurring in England, the sport-fencing craze took hold in the American theatrical mecca – New York. In addition to the men who were fighting on stage, there appeared to be a

growing interest in women who trained in fencing and used these skills on stage. The article "The Foil in Woman's Hand," appearing in the March 12, 1893 edition of the *New York Times*, describes in some detail the popularity of fencing among society ladies and actresses of the stage:

Grace is pre-eminently the characteristic of fencing. It is this undoubtedly which makes the art a favorite one with women, this and because of the interest society women have taken in it. An awkward woman knows she is awkward; she knows too, as soon as she begins to move less clumsily and more surely; and the fencing woman discovers this change before she has put on the fencing glove many times.

Every movement of the fencer must be graceful; the art is made up of quick motion, light touch, coupled with an erect but easy bearing. This fact naturally especially appeals to women, and has proved a strong magnet in drawing them to the classes and clubs. Over-stout women have found the exercise very beneficial, particularly if, as such usually do, they take the bath and rub-down after the lesson. But whatever attracts them at first, they are always eager to go on from pure fondness of the exercise.

Actresses realize the value of practice with the foils in assuring confident and easy movements on the stage, and a large number of them in their leisure season regularly take lessons. I taught Mrs. Langtry, who is one of the best of women fencers, and so fascinated was she with the sport that she got me to accompany her to Long Branch one summer and devote myself to her practice for the whole season. She is an unusually strong and aggressive fencer and our daily contests were no play. It took all the skill at my command sometimes to withstand her fierce onslaughts. Marie Tempest, who took lessons last fall for her role in 'The Fencing Master,' handled the foils quite differently from Mrs. Langtry. She was what might be called a dainty fencer, and lacked the energy of the Englishwoman. She learned, however, with uncommon readiness.

Miss Tempest's fencing costume was a very handsome one. It was made of china silk of a salmon-pink shade. The skirt was trimmed around the edge with very delicate and costly lace, through which I was warned on no account to run my foil.

Miss Blanche Walsh is another actress who fences. She is, indeed, one of the best women fencers in New-York. She looks upon the exercise as wonderfully invigorating, and taken, as it is in her case, invariably with a cold bath immediately afterward, it is undoubtedly stimulating.

Other stage women proficient with the foils are Mrs. Leslie Carter, Nina Farrington, Mrs. James Brown Potter, Agnes Herndon, Isabella Urquhart, and Kate Forsyth. And sixty of the young women who are studying for the operatic stage in the National Conservatory of Music are taking lessons.

It is a noticeable fact that actresses take to fencing more readily than other women. They seem to have more confidence in themselves and less self-consciousness at beginning than other women. (Senac 12)

The article was written by fencing master Regis Senac. He was a French fencing master from Bordeaux who "became the dominant fencing expert in New York" (Shaw). He was the fencing master at the Conservatory of Music and the New York Fencing Club. His famous students included Mrs. Langtry, Mrs. James Brown Potter, Miss Maude Adams, Miss Blanche Walsh, Miss Marie Tempest, Mrs. Jessie Bartlett Davis, Miss Rose Coghlan, De Lancey Kane, Reginald and Pierre Lorillard Ronalds, Edwin Booth, Fernando Yznaga, Tommaso, and Henry Seligman (Shaw).

Not only did there appear to be interest in women fencing, but the style of the fencing appears to have favored the French rather than the Italian, as is mentioned later in the same article:

The language of fencing is French. The sport is imported from France and its calls and phrases are all in that tongue. In the Fencers' Club, an

organization which includes about thirty women, and of which Miss Kate Drexel is Secretary and an enthusiastic member, the fencing master speaks no English, and in consequence all conversation with him is in French. This is true, too, of other fencing classes in the city, where the instructor is able to speak English. Most New-York women speak French and like to practice it whenever possible. (Senac 12)

Fencing instructors were becoming known within various circles in New York as the fascination with fencing continued in the late nineteenth century. The allure of the art seemed to be in the grace and formality that surrounded it. It is surprising that there also seems to have been more than a cursory knowledge of fencing itself among the New York social elite during this time. In an article titled “Fencing as a Fine Art” from March 22, 1885, the author argues in favor of fencing over boxing as a civilized sport:

As soon as attack and defense with something in the hand begin, whether with a stick, a club, a lance, a cane, or a sword, the practice of boxing is rather a detriment than a favoring habit for the use of a weapon. Or of the eye has been trained to fighting at close quarters with the fists, the right distance for effectively striking, pushing, or thrusting, has not been learned. The foil, however, is the central exercise for all play with the single stick, broadsword, claymore, and quarter staff, and, other things being equal, ought to teach men best the way to defend themselves against a single assailant or against odds. Fencing is, in fact, the most practical of exercises – at the same time that it has been always the school of deportment and grace... (“Fencing as a Fine Art”)

So popular was fencing among women in New York that the Woman’s Protective League hosted a lecture on the history of the sword presented by Miss Olive Oliver in 1893. The lecture consisted of a short history of the sword and its development through the romantic period and was followed by exhibitions in

period fencing by Miss Olive Oliver and Miss Olive Gates (“Miss Oliver on Fencing” 8).

The late nineteenth century’s fascination with western martial arts was further fueled by the invention of the moving picture. Thomas Edison’s invention, the kinetoscope, allowed spectators to watch moving images. In 1894, Edison filmed what is believed to be the first combat on film. It is a short recording of a boxing match between Jack Cushing and Mike Leonard, filmed at Edison’s Black Maria Studios in New Jersey. The boxing match, exciting to view in its time, provides the modern fight director with insights into the way boxers fought during that time. This new medium provided an opportunity for combatants to demonstrate their skills in a whole new way. The visceral nature of fighting made it a popular subject for filmmakers. The dynamic movements easily translated to silent film where dialogue was not necessary to tell the story of the fight. Spectacle on stage brought in audiences, and it was plausible that action in film would appeal to the same audiences. The popularity of swordplay on the late nineteenth century stage quickly translated to film. Compared to the developments in the fencing halls and fight clubs of Hutton, Castle and Barton–Wright, the swashbuckling fights on film were much more stylized and dramatic, and bore little resemblance to any form of actual swordplay (Richards 1). This is largely due to the inclusion of fencing in the 1896 Olympics, which gave sport fencing an entirely new popularity as a legitimate sport. For film (and stage), fencing techniques were exaggerated in order to appeal to a wider audience. There was developing a distinctly American approach to swordplay.

The actor who personified the cinematic swashbuckler was Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. Though he did not direct his own films, he selected the casts, supervised the productions, collaborated on the stunts, and shaped the character archetypes into a distinctly Fairbanks character (12). The success of his 1920 film *The Mark of Zorro* kept the swashbuckler popular in films throughout the 1920’s. The previous years had been tumultuous. There was a worldwide disillusionment with a war based on rhetoric and idealism. The younger generation rebelled against the older generation. They rejected the “Victorian

standards of their elders, and the older generation...reacted with fear, distrust and incomprehension and took refuge in safe familiarity of their old prejudices” (Richards 13). The cinema provided a place where ideals and qualities thought long dead with the changing world were vibrantly alive – romance, heroism, adventure. Fairbanks captured the hearts of the people and became an idol. So popular was his 1921 film *The Three Musketeers* that box offices raised their prices from two dollars to five to cash in on the success (Cohen 225).

Fairbanks worked with a Belgian fencing master, Fred Cavens. He was the first fencing master to determine that on-screen fencing should be heightened. He stated, “All movements – instead of being as small as possible, as in competitive fencing – must be large, but nevertheless correct. Magnified is the word. The routine should contain the most spectacular attacks and parries it is possible to execute while remaining logical to the situation” (Richards 44). Cavens not only trained actors to fence, but also choreographed the fight scenes for many films. Fight directors who followed him shared an expertise in modern fencing and brought those skills into the film world.

The American government, pressured by the Catholic Legion of Decency, instituted a code of ethics for filmmakers in 1930. There had been growing concern about the vulgarity and inappropriateness in film (Cohen 230). Parallel to the establishment of the Académie française by Cardinal Richelieu in France in 1635, the Motion Picture Association of America and religious groups established a censor board under the direction of William H. Hays in 1929, which was to support the moral standards of its audience. While the Académie française was established to deal with the concepts of decorum, verisimilitude and order in the theatre, the Hays Code set out to establish a moral authority in film – providing universal values, respect for laws, nationalities and religions – and shun immorality. This code forced producers and directors to take responsibility and be accountable for their work.

Some of the key terms of the Code stipulated:

- No picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it...
- Correct standards of life, subject to the requirements of the drama and entertainment, shall be presented.
- Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed...
- The technique of murder must be presented in a way that will not inspire imitation.
- Brutal killings are not to be presented in detail. ("Hays Code")

The Code also mentions the importance of preserving morality, and argues that correct entertainment raises the whole standard of a nation, while wrong entertainment "lowers the whole living conditions and moral ideals of a race. Note for example, the healthy reactions to healthful sports, like baseball, golf; the unhealthy reactions to sports like cockfighting, bear baiting, etc. Note too, the effect on ancient nations of gladiatorial combats, the obscene plays of Roman times, etc." ("Hays code"). This last comment appears to be a bit strong. The Catholic League was insinuating that the fall of Rome was a direct result of the gratuitous entertainments the public enjoyed. The Catholic League, it appears, wished to take the moral reins for the American public.

The code remained in effect in the United States from 1930 until 1968. The existence of this code is evident in the swashbuckling films from the 1930's through the 1950's. The 1952 remake of the 1923 film *Scaramouche*, for example, omits the French Revolution. The Code was essentially a code of the ruling class and implies a pro-establishment mentality behind the films (Richards 5). The monarchy often represents the established order. A monarch may be a bad ruler, but the monarchy itself is good and needs to be preserved. The heroes in the films are often the capitalist landowners who take a vested interest in the people below them and stand up to despotic rule. They support the good rulers, and bad rulers are replaced with rightful heirs. In the films of the period, the interests of the ruling class are similar to the interests of the people (5). The swashbuckling heroes, therefore, are often bourgeois, well mannered, and quick

to act to restore “natural” order to their worlds. These are people of significance who provide inspiration for others to look up to and admire. They inspire their audiences to stand up for good, and to always do the right thing.

The unique role of the swashbuckler in the films of this era presents an interesting case. Action heroes such as Fairbanks provided a box office draw. The swordfights, though not able to depict the actual gravity and gore of realistic combats, were heightened in the ‘safe subjects’ of Hollywood filmmakers. These safe subjects included the adaptations of classic literature and historical dramas. Because the chivalric code was embodied in the role of the swashbuckling hero, the result of the Hays Code’s influence on Hollywood was a plethora of swashbuckling films released during this period.

These rules of decorum in filmmaking during this time caused stagnation in the realistic portrayal of sword fights on screen. The clichéd gay cavalier, or swaggering musketeer, brought a halt to the development of stage combat. Sword play in films during this time consists of nothing more than physical and verbal repartee between two opponents who swing about on chandeliers that could never hold an adult’s weight, and cut candles in half while they fight for honor or a woman’s love while engaging in witty banter. An example of such action can be seen in the 1937 version of the *Prisoner of Zenda* starring Ronald Colman (as Rudolf) and Douglas Fairbanks Jr. (as Rupert). The duel between them in this film is executed as a single continuous take through dungeons, staircases, and dark halls:

RUPERT: Touché, Rassendyll. I cannot get used to fighting with furniture. Where did you learn it?

RUDOLF: That all goes with the old school tie.

RUPERT: Well, then, here’s your last fencing lesson. Look out for your head. Why don’t you stand your ground and fight?

RUDOLF: “He who fights and runs away”- remember?

RUPERT: I see. YOU want to let the drawbridge down. I’ve just killed a man for trying that.

RUDOLF: An unarmed man, of course.

RUPERT: Of course...You English are a stubborn lot.

RUDOLF: Well, "England expects that every man..." – you know.

RUPERT: Your golden-haired goddess will look well in black, Rassendyll.

I'll console her for you...kiss away her tears. What, no quotation?

RUDOLF: Yes, a barking dog never bites.

RUPERT: Aargh! You'd be a sensation in a circus. I can't understand it.

Where did you learn such roller skating?

RUDOLF: Coldstream Guards, my boy. Come on, now, when does the fencing lesson begin?

RUPERT: Stand still and fight you coward.

RUDOLF: Bad-tempered fellow, aren't you, underneath the charm?

RUPERT: Why won't you let me kill you quietly?

RUDOLF: Oh, a little noise adds a touch of cheer. You notice I'm getting you closer to the drawbridge rope?

RUPERT: You're so fond of rope, it's a pity to have to finish you off with steel. What did they teach you on the playing fields of Eton? Puss in the corner?

RUDOLF: Oh, chiefly not throwing knives at other people's backs. (qtd. in Cohen 232)

In 1987, *The Princess Bride* paid homage to the nostalgia of the witty fencing scene as seen in the *Prisoner of Zenda* and other swashbuckling films. Instead of enemies, the iconic fight scene between two masters of the blade - Cary Elwiss (Wesley) and Mandy Patinkin (Inigo) - takes place throughout the ruins of a battlement, and includes flips, jumps and repartee. The fight is not violent, but it is a demonstration of expert swordsmanship. Because of the moral nature of the fight, it would have easily passed the scrutiny of the Hays Code censors:

INIGO: I do not mean to pry, but you don't by any chance happen to have six fingers on your right hand?

WESLEY: Do you always begin conversations this way?

INIGO: My father was slaughtered by a six-fingered man. He was a great swordmaker, my father. And when the six-fingered man appeared and requested a special sword, my father took the job. He slaved a year before he was done.

WESLEY: I have never seen its equal.

INIGO: The six-fingered man returned and demanded it, but at one-tenth his promised price. My father refused. Without a word, the six-fingered man slashed him through the heart. I loved my father, so naturally, I challenged his murderer to a duel...I failed...The six-fingered man did leave me alive with the six-fingered sword, but he gave me these.

WESLEY: How old were you?

INIGO: I was eleven years old. When I was strong enough, I dedicated my life to the study of fencing. So the next time we meet, I will not fail. I will go up to the six-fingered man and say, "Hello, my name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die."

WESLEY: You've done nothing but study swordplay?

INIGO: More pursuit than study lately. You see, I cannot find him. It's been twenty years now. I am starting to lose confidence. I just work for Vizzini to pay the bills. There's not a lot of money in revenge.

WESLEY: I certainly hope you find him someday.

INIGO: You ready then?

WESLEY: Whether I am or not, you've been more than fair.

INIGO: You seem a decent fellow. I hate to kill you.

WESLEY: You seem a decent fellow. I hate to die.

INIGO: Begin!...You're using Bonetti's defense against me, ah?

WESLEY: I thought it fitting, considering the rocky terrain.

INIGO: Naturally, you must expect me to attack with Capo Ferro.

WESLEY: Naturally. But I find Thibault cancels out Capo Ferro, don't you?

INIGO: Unless the enemy has studied his Agrippa...which I have...You are wonderful!

WESLEY: Thank you. I've worked hard to become so.

INIGO: I admit it. You are better than I am.

WESLEY: Then why are you smiling.

INIGO: Because I know something you don't know.

WESLEY: And what is that?

INIGO: I am not left-handed.

WESLEY: You're amazing.

INIGO: I ought to be after twenty years.

WESLEY: There's something I ought to tell you.

INIGO: Tell me.

WESLEY: I am not left-handed either.

INIGO: Who are you?

WESLEY: No one of consequence.

INIGO: I must know.

WESLEY: Get used to disappointment.

INIGO: Okay...Kill me quickly.

WESLEY: I would as soon destroy a stained glass window as an artist like yourself. However, since I can't have you following me either... Please understand I hold you in the highest respect. (*The Princess Bride*)

Bob Anderson choreographed the fights in *The Princess Bride*. Anderson was a former Olympic fencing coach for the British team, and began his career working in film on *The Master of Ballentrae* where he was choreographed under the direction of Patrick Crean, whose story will be an important part of the chronicle of Canadian stage fighting (see Chapter 3). Most of the fighting in this scene was done without the use of stunt doubles – another homage to the early swordfighting films. When I was working with Bob Anderson several years ago on the set of the television series *Highlander*, he recalled this

fight as his greatest. It was daring, visceral, and respectful. It had all the elements of cinematic mastery.

Fencing was common practice on screen during the early years of filmmaking. During this period, stunts flourished while the art of stage combat declined. That is not to say that there were not some innovations in action. Unlike stage, film provided a platform for creating heroic stunts and dangerous action. Emphasis was placed on the location of the fight rather than the fight itself. Climactic action, therefore, might occur on a high cliff, tower, the yardarm of a ship, or the rail of a staircase – essentially anywhere that might demonstrate the immediate danger for the combatants engaged in a fight. Fights in *The Master of Ballantrae* (1953) and *The Sword of Sherwood Forest* (1960) are examples of this cinematic practice. I have narrowed examples of this practice down specifically to films that have a connection with Canadian stage combat. In this case, these films involved the skills of Patrick Crean, perhaps Canada's most famous fight director. He was Errol Flynn's stunt double and worked in many Hollywood films where swordplay was required.

In *The Sword of Sherwood Forest*, the climactic battle occurs within the chapel of a priory. Richard Greene engages in a lengthy swordfight against another combatant while climbing over pews. The fight itself is no more than a series of parries and ripostes, and the broadswords are lost in favor of épée blades – used in sport fencing. The fight itself has nothing particularly exciting about it, but the action surrounding it attempts to be spectacular – torches are thrown, a candelabra is knocked over, and the actors leap from pew to pew for apparently no reason other than to excite the audience.

In *The Master of Ballantrae*, set in late eighteenth century Scotland, Errol Flynn, playing a wealthy landowner, carries a Scottish broadsword, but when he fights his brother in the barn, épées are readily available for the fight. Later in the film, a duel on a Spanish galleon travels from the deck to the ship's rails, rigging and stern, in an attempt to demonstrate the dangers present in the fight. Again, the same series of moves is executed over and over while the actors

precariously engage in swinging from ropes and swashbuckling amongst the eager crew.

In both these films the deaths are simplistic, unrealistic, and quick. I am sure this is largely the effect of the Hays Code on American filmmaking during this time, which suppressed the fight director's ability to explore realistic reactions and practices of period swordplay. As a result, audiences became conditioned to the witty, playful fight as seen on film, and consequently many came to believe that this style of "swashbuckling" was historically relevant.

The Hays Code remained in effect in the United States until 1968 when it was replaced with the ratings system. A few years later there was a renewed zeal for depicting realistic fights on film. Exciting, realistic, non-sport fencing sword fighting sequences are still held in high regard today. Richard Lester's *The Three Musketeers* and *The Four Musketeers* (1973) are vivid examples of how exciting swordplay can be depicted within proper period context. *The Duellists*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, *Monte Cristo*, and *The Man in the Iron Mask*, are other examples of films made in the 1970s that favored highly energetic interpretations of historical swordsmanship rather than the sport fencing evident in the films made previously. The names of the choreographers of these films – William Hobbs and Bob Anderson – are still revered among fight directors to this day.

I have looked briefly at the development of swordplay in England during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, touching on the developments of choreographed mock battles and duels from the mid fifteenth century through the Restoration. The methods and practice of the Victorian theatre have provided some insight into the way swordplay was rehearsed and performed on stage. I have also looked at the role of the fencing master, from Angelo through Bertrand and Senac in New York. These masters may have had an influence on the actors of their times. Since actors were not afforded long rehearsal periods, stock moves were memorized and a common terminology was often assigned to fight phrases that were memorized and could be easily recalled for performance. This system appeared to work within the constraints of rehearsal.

As the actor's theatre of the Victorian and Edwardian period evolved into the director's theatre of the twentieth century, the stage fight became more artistic and less pragmatic. Simple fight routines gradually evolved from fencing and stock moves into artistic enterprises in their own right that served a particular play's vision. Constantin Stanislavski addresses the need for stage actors to develop their muscles through gymnastics, dancing and fencing on a daily basis in *An Actor Prepares* (31-32).

Though some fight masters were employed by actors for training, there was no real fight director for the theatre until the twentieth century. Fencing has essentially remained a sport. The very essence of fencing for defense or sport is to deceive an opponent to score a hit on their body. An actor relies upon his or her body as the very tool of the trade. There are no choreographed moves in fencing. Fencing is a form of physical improvisation. Actors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries essentially improvised fights with the skills and phrases they had learned. Some techniques would have been dangerous, and I am sure John Barrymore's many Laertes in London would attest to the lack of control that some actors had in executing fights on the stage prior to the evolution of the fight choreographer and the unions that were created to establish minimum requirements for safety and sanitary working conditions for actors.

The rise of cinematic fights during Hollywood's early years also changed the way fights were approached and conceived. The two basic methods – the zeal for the historic approach advocated heavily by antiquarians Alfred Hutton and Eagerton Castle in nineteenth century England, and the energetic, playful approach of cinematic swordplay under the restraints of the Hays Code – converge with the creation of the Stratford Festival in Ontario, Canada, in 1953.

3 Battles Staged By: The Influence of Douglas Campbell and Patrick Crean

Whereas British and American theatre each had long histories of formal and informal stage fight choreography by the mid-twentieth century, and choreographed swordsmanship was an intrinsic element of American filmmaking in that era, the situation in Canada was very different. Professional Canadian theatre of the twentieth century developed little stage fight choreography of its own prior to the arrival of Douglas Campbell at the Stratford Festival in 1953.

Stratford's unique history has been told many times over (see Davies, Guthrie, Hall, Hunter, Pettigrew and Portman, Raby, Somerset, Spurdakos) and does not need to be repeated here. Stratford emerged in tandem with the development of professional theatre and other arts in post World War II Canada, shortly after the Massey Commission Report made the recommendations that ultimately led to the creation of the Canada Council. Ultimately, the 1953 inaugural season of the Festival placed Canada on the international theatrical map at last.

Tyrone Guthrie's international reputation as a leading Shakespearean director; the appearance of film and theatre star Alec Guinness as Richard III in a small Canadian town's festival; Tanya Moiseiwitsch's revolutionary thrust stage design created just for the Festival; and the novelty of an almost all-Canadian company performing with Guinness in a tent all contributed to making Stratford instantly the most important and high-profile theatre in Canada. The productions were also highly professional and of excellent quality. There was, however, an important and hitherto largely unacknowledged factor in making these Canadian Shakespeare productions function at a level that satisfied the most rigorous international critics. It appeared on page five of the first season's programs: "Fights Arranged by..." For likely the first time in Canadian theatrical history, stage fights were formally and systematically choreographed, and their choreographers credited. The first of them was Douglas Campbell. In later

seasons the credit would sometimes read, “Battles staged by...,” giving further recognition to the difficult task of organizing group battles in small spaces. Here is an example of the kind of detail Campbell brought to Stratford.



Figure 1 – Stratford’s 1953 Production of *Richard III**

Here we see Robert Goodier (Richmond) fighting Alec Guinness (Richard) in Act V, scene viii of Stratford’s inaugural production of *Richard III*. This archival photo provides some useful information regarding the final fight scene of the play. The first thing that draws my attention is Goodier’s distance from Guinness. Goodier’s right leg is extended in a basic lunge, foot in line towards Guinness. His right knee extends beyond a natural ninety-degree angle, which puts stress on his leg armor (for which the technical term is *greaves*). This picture suggests that the greaves were too long for Goodier. If this position were to be repeated in

* Photography by Peter Smith. Robert Goodier as Richmond, Alec Guinness as Richard III (background) Don Harron, William Hutt, Neil Vipond and members of the company in *Richard III* (1953). Directed by Tyrone Guthrie, Designed by Tanya Moiseiwitsch. Courtesy the Stratford Shakespeare Festival Archives.

his oversized greaves, the pressure on the top of his foot would eventually hinder his normal gait. If the armor were real, Goodier would never have been able to move in this way. The armor for the production was made by Jacqueline Cundall and staff from the School of Arts in Toronto, the University of Toronto and the University of Montreal (Guthrie, *Renown* 15). The material used in making the armor was felt stiffened with size (15). "Size" refers to a compound made from glue, wax, or clay that can be applied to porous materials as a filler or glaze. In this case the size would give some strength to the felt, and unlike metal it would have some flex. The inconsistent smoothness of the greaves reflects the hand-made craftsmanship of the armor. It is common for actors to wear replica armor made of lighter materials. If Guinness and Goodier had had to wear real armor on stage they would not have been able to comfortably move and fall without bruising and potentially hurting themselves. It appears that Campbell either was unaware of the way armor is supposed to fit or had little input into the construction and sizing.

The greaves the two are wearing in the photo bear a strong resemblance to Roman greaves with articulating knees, which were common among Roman infantry officers. The Roman greaves were shorter in length and rested above the ankle to allow for proper foot articulation. Medieval greaves were longer, resting on the sabaton (foot armor), and had a back piece that protected the calf and achilles tendon from being severed. Medieval greaves also were often fluted (i.e., had indentations in the metal that created designs) or decorated. Because budgets were tight and Cundall had to teach methods of armor-making as well as build for the show, it is possible that Roman greaves were the basis of this design due to their rather simple construction. Medieval greaves were sometimes built into the sabatons, or overlapped the sabatons in order to protect the ankle joint from attack. The style of Goodier's boots also suggests the designer's intention of creating the illusion of plated sabatons. His boots are segmented to give the appearance of plate armor. Guinness's boots are solidly made, suggesting the appearance of cavalry boots. Viewing his cavalry boots, I am reminded of Richard's famous line, "A horse. A horse. My kingdom for a horse."

Attention to detail like this is what distinguishes the great designers from the merely good ones.

The foible (tip) of Goodier's sword is blurred in the photo. This suggests that his attack was a cut rather than a thrust. As his cut would be executed from his right to left, the sword would move in and out of focus for the camera. If he were executing a thrust, the sword would have travelled in line with his body, moving from his low right to extended right. Guinness is holding his sword blade down and at the time of the photo his sword is in line with his body. His right hand is at shoulder height. This position illustrates a parry or defense in high prime. I would suggest that Guinness stepped back with his left foot in a counterclockwise semi-circular motion, taking his body out of line, and further defended his position by parrying Goodier's cut in high prime. While this would have been exciting and reflects a degree of knowledge of theatrical fencing, this type of defense is not conducive to fights with the arming swords they are using in the photograph. Historically, a combatant would endeavor to avoid the parry to reduce wear on the blade. However, it is possible that Campbell choreographed this defense to demonstrate the loss of control Richmond has as the fight reaches its conclusion. If this were the case, it would have been more powerful to have Guinness make the parry using both hands to demonstrate the severity and desperation of the fight. The parry in the photo is more appropriate for rapier or smallsword fighting.

The eye contact between Goodier and Guinness is important to note. Typically, combatants will maintain eye contact during a fight in order to create theatrical tension. This also allows the performers to maintain a connection as partners during a fight scene. In the photo, Guinness is looking downward towards Robert Goodier's hand position while Goodier is looking directly at Guinness. Certain schools of theatrical combat emphasize the importance of maintaining eye contact when possible (Society of British Fight Directors, Fight Directors Canada) while others prefer directing focus to the target areas as a way of indicating where the attack is going to land (Society of American Fight Directors) (Lane 28). If this publicity photo was taken, as seems likely, during a

fight call, then it is possible that Guinness was marking the fight without acting the intention. It is also possible that because Guinness worked often in The United States, he gradually adapted to the American method of stage combat. Goodier, a Canadian actor, and possibly the first “Canadian student” of stage combat to be trained on Canadian soil, demonstrates a fairly good line of attack (his cut to prime looks as though it is directed towards the proper target), balance (though he is overextending his leading foot slightly over the ninety-degree angle), eye contact, and distance.

The soldier in the upstage left position is brandishing a war club. The war club was a popular choice of weapon for common soldiers. There is also a pike holder in the background. The presence of these weapons in the photo suggests that the battle in *Richard III* consisted of various types of weaponry, with the central fight being staged with single-handed arming swords.

The photo provides us with a plethora of information about the stage fight in *Richard III*. Campbell’s staging shows that he maintained proper fighting distance, had clear lines of attack, and ensured that the actors had discipline with hand and feet placement. The photo demonstrates that Goodier, leading with his right arm has also extended his right foot, while Guinness, under attack to his left flank, steps back with his left leg, removing his target from Goodier’s cut. These are the essential basic techniques that indicate that this fight has been staged by an experienced fighter or choreographer. The photo also demonstrates the expertise that Campbell brought to the Stratford stage and Canada.

The Canadian Fencing Federation (CFF) states on its website that “Canadian fencing dates back to 1816 when Maitre Girard opened the first fencing school in Montréal” (“A Brief History”). There is another mention of Girard in the *Forum fédéral canne et bâton* website that makes this claim with more detail. The blog entries on this site mention that Girard was a soldier in Napoleon’s army and settled initially in Boston in 1808. He then travelled to Montréal where he taught “stick” fencing (Empirio). There is no mention of JB Girard in Franklin T. Graham’s detailed history of early Montreal theatre, *Histrionic Montreal*, nor is there mention of fencing actors either. There is one

advertisement in the March 16, 1816 edition of the *Montreal Herald* that indicates Girard attempted to establish a school in Montreal:

Mr. Girard respectfully informs the Gentlemen of Montreal, that he will open a FENCING SCHOOL, for the purpose of teaching the SMALL SWORD, CUT and THRUST, and BROAD SWORD exercise in the modern style. Any Gentlemen who wish to learn this useful accomplishment will call on Mr. Girard, at Palmer and Girards St. Vincent street, where the conditions will be known. Any person wishing private tuition, may be waited upon at his lodgings. As Mr. Girard is competent of talking English and French, it will be an advantage to those who speak either of the two languages.
("Fencing School")

Girard may have been too ambitious and misjudged the enthusiasm for his talents. This ad ran for a period of three weeks. There is no further mention of Girard or his school. While there may have been fencing instruction for actors on the stage as was the case in the United States, there is much less corroborative evidence of this happening in Canada.

It is difficult to determine how popular fencing was in Canada during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The CFF has not maintained records of enrolment or clubs during this time and the only information about the popularity of fencing is an entry in the *Online Canadian Encyclopedia* that states:

In Canada, fencing schools were well attended in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and the sport began to flourish again in the late 19th century. The Toronto Fencing club and a women's fencing club at Toronto's University College were formed in 1895. During the next decade, fencing clubs were established in eastern universities, and in 1902 the first Canadian championships were held. The 1930's saw further

development and after WWII immigration from Europe brought distinguished fencers and masters. (Schrodt)

The above passage directly contradicts the statement from the Canadian Fencing Federation that names Girard as the premiere fencing instructor in Canada in 1816.

If we were to consider the possibility that military regiments in Canada practiced swordplay and shared their sword knowledge with local citizens, it is quite possible that fencing was introduced in Canada much earlier. However, there are currently no books or other authoritative sources on the history of fencing in Canada. It is plausible that fencing clubs across Canada (once established) were utilized by theatre companies and actors wishing to develop stage fighting skills. In researching this information I came across a request for fencers in Saskatchewan who were needed to help with the fight scenes in the Regina Little Theatre's 2011 production of *The Three Musketeers* ("Fencers Needed for The Three Musketeers"). Though this request is recent, it suggests that fencing associations in Canada might have had relationships with theatre companies in lieu of stage fight directors.

Histories of regimental theatre in Canada, of British and American touring productions, of the Dominion Drama Festival, and of the Little Theatre movement provide little information on the development of stage fighting (see Chapman, Edwards, Lee, Plummer, Rubin, Usmiani, Wagner). Theatre reviews rarely mention stage fights in theatrical endeavors prior to the inaugural season of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival with the exception of the Canadian Repertory Theatre (CRT) in 1952.

In 1952, the CRT staged its production of *Hamlet* (Hall 215). The company had given itself two weeks to stage the play instead of its usual one-week rehearsal period (McNicholl 147). Richard Easton played the title role and the production was directed by Sam Payne. The rest of the cast included Donald Davis, Gertrude Allen, Amelia Hall, Ted Follows, and Peter Sturgess (148). In her memoir, *Life Before Stratford*, Amelia Hall mentions that the fencing duel

between Hamlet and Laertes was staged by Lieutenant-Colonel J.C.A. Campbell (Hall 215). Campbell had served with the 10th Field Battery of the R.C.A. during World War II and was the assistant Judge Advocate General at Camp Borden in Ottawa (“John Colin Armour”). Herbert Whittaker commented that the “CRT Hamlet was running very smoothly. It had pace, and emotion, a fair quota of fine speech and plenty of excitement with a rip-snorting duel to finish” (Whittaker “Show Business”).

When Tyrone Guthrie arrived at Stratford to be Artistic Director and to direct the first productions, he brought very few British professionals with him. In addition to his production team he brought over three British actors: Alec Guinness, Michael Bates and Douglas Campbell. He also brought Irene Worth – an American who had worked with him at the Old Vic.

Douglas Campbell made his stage debut in *Medea* and *Jacob's Ladder* at the Old Vic in 1941. He was a protégé of Guthrie and came to Canada as Guthrie's “second hand” (“Directing Fights for Guthrie”). Canada would eventually become Campbell's home. He worked with the Stratford Company in many productions between 1953 and 2001 as actor, fight director, director and choreographer. He became well known for his several portrayals of Falstaff (Conlogue 74). In 1954 Campbell co-founded The Canadian Players with Tom Patterson (73). He was awarded the Order of Canada in 1997. I had the privilege to choreograph Campbell and his son Torquil in the Bard on the Beach production of *Henry IV, Part 1* in 2000. The studio tent of Vancouver's Bard on the Beach Festival is named after Campbell.

According to Campbell, he was responsible for staging the fights and the dances in *Richard III*. He was chosen as the fight arranger because he was the only one in the company who “knew anything about swords” (“Directing Fights for Guthrie”). In one of his last interviews before his death, Campbell discussed his training and approach to fight choreography in detail. Contrary to popular belief, he had no background in formal fencing or stage combat as we currently perceive it. He was a product of the English theatre during the Second World War. Though there had been a renaissance of historical western martial arts

since the latter half of the nineteenth century, the fascination with creating historically accurate and realistic fight scenes was fleeting. The entrenched system of the actor-manager production that was so prevalent in England from the eighteenth century survived into the mid-twentieth. Principal actors would learn a selection of roles from popular Shakespeare plays that they could perform with little rehearsal. Douglas Campbell recollected this approach in his interview:

Most of the stuff that they were doing on that Stratford stage came from the days of the actor-managers who toured the stock companies in Britain. If somebody went to play Macbeth and had the fight with Macbeth and Macduff at the end of the play or with Siward and so on you didn't have any time. You just went there. You just arrived, the principal actor, with your basket, with your costume and your wig and all that stuff, and you played the part of Macbeth with the stock company that was there...

And so come the fight, what did you do? You didn't have time to rehearse a fight. So they had a series of passes which everybody knew – eights, primes, head and leg, fours, - you know, all the stuff I knew... You just shout it out, "Primes, fours." You made it part of the fight...so everybody knew, "you take the lead, en garde". You knew if someone said "en garde," that meant you were going to be the person who attacked in the scene so they knew who started the fight. I learned that from a fellow called Eddie Bailey whose father, grandfather and great-grandfather had been actors...That was in the forties, so Eddie was in his forties then, so it went back into the eighteenth century with his line in relation to the theatre.

There were "fours," "primes," "head and leg," "eights," and variations thereof. But with eights and primes, head and leg and fours you can put together quite a fight. You could say "half-prime" -- that would be a cut to there, a cut back to here and a cut to there [during this comment, Campbell, while remaining seated, leans forward and demonstrates a

simple combination of cutting to his imaginary opponent's five, parrying his four, and riposting to his opponents five once more. He then brings his right hand back into a seconde garde position.] ...that's half-prime. Then you say, "right now attack leg-head-leg!" [He then demonstrates this pass with his right hand by bringing his hand down to parry an imaginary attack to his seconde position, riposting to his opponent's quarte, back to another parry in seconde, again to riposte to another quarte, and finally another parry in seconde.] So if you were really confident and knew your passes, they all worked perfectly well... I was the only fight man [at Stratford] for quite a long time. ("Directing Fights for Guthrie")

This interview with the Theatre Museum Canada is invaluable for learning the approach Campbell took in staging the fights for the inaugural season of the Stratford Festival. Not only does Campbell recall some of the passes he choreographed; he demonstrates them with precision.

Campbell's fighting style was part of the English theatre tradition. Combinations of moves between combatants that could be easily memorized and executed when required became part of the actor's toolkit. Actors may not have had complete fights memorized, but as Campbell discusses in his interview, actors would be able to create a complete fight by performing a series of these combinations in succession. In this way a fight could carry on until a staged disarm, wound or kill was executed. If the actors working together in a fight knew the various combinations of stock moves, the only part of the fight that would require rehearsal would be the end of the fight. The actors worked together to become the fight directors of their own staged violence. If the actors were able to perform their combinations with prowess, the fights would have had the possibility of being as exciting as fights staged by modern fight directors today. In fact, many fight directors have a favourite fight sequence or phrase that they often recycle in fight scenes because they know it can work, is theatrically exciting, and can be learned and retained by actors who may have little or no fight experience. I know two professional fight coordinators who work in the film

industry who continually recycle the same moves in many of the fights they create. They do this because of the limited rehearsal time that film schedules allow, because the moves are simple, and because they look good on camera. I have one particular combination that I have re-used on occasion for these very reasons.

William Hobbs, one of the famous modern fight directors, argues that the older method of staging fights “consisted of a series of well known routines” and were not “specifically created as nowadays” (Hobbs, *Fight Direction* 17). He lists some of the names such as the ‘Square Eights,’ ‘Glasgow Tens,’ and ‘Drunken Combat’ (17). He then argues that these attacks were a series of cuts that were “whacks on the opponent’s blade” (17). Several of the reviews I have read from the nineteenth century, however, suggest that the actors knew how to fence properly. Hobbs himself writes about a fight between Squire Bancroft and Henry Irving in which he suggests that the two actors were expert fencers and rehearsed only the final move of the fight:

It is worth recording in this context that in the duel between Irving and Squire Bancroft occurring in the play *The Dead Heart*, only the final hit was actually planned, so it seems fairly obvious that both men must have been experts with the blade, and as such they would have been able to fence without trying for an actual hit – until the prepared and well rehearsed final thrust. This fight set all of London talking, and no wonder. It is even more remarkable when one learns that Irving was quite short-sighted – so short-sighted in fact that when he was playing a scene with an actress who was portraying a blind girl, it is said that he accidentally dropped his glasses on the stage and the ‘blind’ girl was the only one of the two who could ‘see’ to retrieve them. With such an affliction, it is almost incredible and certainly to his credit (or luck) that we was able to perform such fights on the stage night after night, without any serious mishap. (9)

This suggests that many actors were very competent with the stock moves they had perfected throughout their careers. This does not suggest to me that they only “whacked” at their blades, as Hobbs suggests was the practice of the period.

Dale Anthony Girard’s book *Actors on Guard* begins with another generalization: “Until a few years ago stage combat had been an inexact practice handled by anyone who felt qualified for the job” (Girard 1). Girard, like Hobbs, fails to realize that there was a methodology to the fights that appeared to work for many years. This is the style that Campbell had learned from Bailey and used at Stratford. It was not necessarily dangerous, boring or uninspired. Campbell made it exciting and the early Stratford audiences loved it.

Campbell mentions in his interview that he brought this stage combat system to Canada with *Richard III*. There is no written record of the fight plot in the prompt book at the Stratford archives, and it has been perplexing in my research not to be able to find written evidence of how these fights were constructed. Having seen Campbell’s interview provides the insight necessary to understand how the fights at Stratford were approached. Campbell was not a fencer. He admits that in his interview. In fact, he states that his fencing knowledge was crude. He was familiar with the system of passes – combinations of certain moves that could be easily remembered. He also states that he was the only one at Stratford that knew anything about swords, so the responsibility of staging the fights fell upon his shoulders. It would seem logical that he spent his fight rehearsal time training the actors in the company in the various passes he had learned from Eddy Bailey, who had learned from his father. Once the basic passes were learned, a fight could be created by combining a series of passes and attack cues. The actors in the company would have had to work diligently to establish their physical movement pattern on the stage so as not to get in the way of other combatants. Theoretically, if actors kept aware of their space and literally talked to each other during the fight, the battle at the end of *Richard III* could be achieved with relative success.

Fortunately, there exists film of the fight from the play. It can be viewed in the National Film Board’s 1954 production, *The Stratford Adventure*. The fight is

surprisingly intense and realistic. Guthrie enhanced the action with the use of shadows to create the illusion that the fight was epic. Richard's army stands alert on the Stratford stage. Two archers and a flag bearer stand in the balcony. Richard stays inside the circle of his guard. Richmond's army surrounds the stage along the audience aisles to the steady beat of a drum. The soldiers calmly take their positions on the floor surrounding the stage, in close proximity to the seated audience. Their swords are drawn, but as they enter the house they keep the tips of the swords in the air. The combatants wear chain mail, open helmets, and boots. The weapons in the scene include broadswords, shields, and the occasional lance. Richmond ascends the stairs to the stage slowly and deliberately. When he reaches the stage there is a quiet moment as Richmond and Richard stare at each other. With a battle cry, Richmond leads the attack. Immediately after his cry, both armies rush into action. Flag bearers run amongst the combatants. The stage gets crowded with several fights occurring simultaneously. Other fights are staged in the aisles. The swords are swung in extremely close proximity to the audience and the actors. In essence, the staged fight resembles a free-for-all brawl that appears both real and dangerous. Screams and falls of the dying characters in the field appear realistic and haunting. Within thirty seconds, the staging achieves the effect of a desperate battlefield. Only after close examination of the fight scene can a pattern of movement be detected.

After watching Campbell demonstrate two of his passes in his interview, one can recognize similar passes taking place between the actors in the fight. They are not easily detectable, though, and it takes careful examination of the scene to follow the flow. What makes this battle significant is that only a small number of actors would have had any training in the art of theatrical swordplay, as it was known back then. Campbell says he staged the fights only because he was the only one who knew anything about the sword, and that his fencing skills were "rudimentary." Of course, given the resume of Alec Guinness, it is clear that he had fight experience. What about the other actors? The fight in the 1953 production is of a very high caliber, even by today's standards. The movements

look realistic, and because Campbell had no formal fencing training, there is no trace of modern fencing moves (aside from the theatrical parries still used today) in the staged broadsword fights. The actors would have had to be trained to use a sword quickly, and the patterns would have had to be set early on if they wanted to avoid the risk of injury during performance.

There is one further contextual aspect of the fight to consider. Since Canada had sent many thousands of men to fight in the Second World War and the conflict in Korea, it is possible that some of the Canadian members of the company had been in the military during one of those conflicts, or had at least taken basic training. In his book *Who's in the Goose Tonight*, Vernon Chapman writes about his military training as a student at the University of Toronto:

How I managed all my extra-curricular activities, passed my grades, and took compulsory military training amazes me. All physically able male students had to take this latter training on the assumption that when we did join the regular forces, we would be officer material, a very false assumption in my opinion. We learned the rudiments of soldiering: how to march in step, how to order arms (outdated Lee-Enfield rifles), and how to disassemble and reassemble a Bren gun in less than a minute – a mechanical challenge I found most daunting. There was always a part left over. For three late afternoons a week we would drill on the back campus or in the Armoury on St. George Street. Before the war ended in Europe, we spent two weeks “roughing it” in tents at Camp Niagara where we learned about bayonet charging with appropriate blood-curdling screams, how to aim at a target and hopefully hit it with bullets from our ancient rifles, and how to negotiate obstacle courses. (Chapman 41)

It is very likely that other university students in Canada during the Second World War were also receiving military training like Chapman's. These skills could be beneficial to actors. The possibility that several actors in the Stratford company had such training deserves closer study at a later date. Moreover, even if no

member of the company had served in the military, the experience of loss and the ravages of war would have been easily recalled by the company to help them depict such realistic battle cries and deaths on stage.

The Stratford Festival received a great deal of press during its inaugural season. The opening night of *Richard III* was heralded as a success for the company, and a coming of age for Canadian theatre. E.H. Lampard of the *St. Catherine's Standard* wrote: "...The play is frankly a shocker with gory murders taking place right and left, nearly a dozen in all...some of the rousing battle scenes taking place almost in the laps of those in the front row" (Lampard). Laretta Thistle of the *Ottawa Evening Citizen* wrote, "Guthrie uses masses of people. His kings are attended by whole groups of pages. When he stages a battle, the theatre is full of sound and movement. Banners and shields and crosses are more than life size" (Thistle). The *Hamilton Spectator* mentions the battle scenes in a slightly different light: "The final battle scene is particularly successful and makes a great melodramatic spectacle of what is often something of a joke on a proscenium stage" (Johnson "Brilliant Production of Richard III is Thrilling"). It would appear that whatever Shakespeare productions had been seen previously in Canada lacked the ability to credibly interpret the violent spectacle achieved in Stratford's *Richard III*.

The praise was not all Canadian either. Harvey Taylor, the *Detroit Times* entertainment editor, wrote: "The action sometimes gets violent and the audience members in the first row occasionally duck as a sword comes a little too close for comfort... [T]he combat scenes... are executed with such vigor that the illusion of mortal conflict is well communicated" (Taylor). William Hawkins, writing for the *New York World Telegram*, was even more descriptive. "In the final battle scenes, the play takes on such violence that the audience last night was dodging as none ever did at the most startling 3-D movie" (Hawkins). The *Christian Science Monitor* shared equal enthusiasm for the fights: "Richard is finally brought down in a magnificently staged battle scene and a prolonged passage of arms between Mr. Guinness and Robert Goodier as Richmond (later Henry VII)" (Beaufort). The passage of arms between Guinness and Goodier would have

been able to be extended or shortened depending on the performance. If the audience had been enthralled by the fight, the combatants, under the instruction of Campbell, would have had the ability to extend the fight through calling out their favorite passes. If they were not up to the challenge of offering a prolonged passage, they could shorten their fight accordingly. Campbell's reference to his being trained in the actor-manager system of stage combat, together with film footage and reviews of the 1953 season at Stratford, provides proof that the eighteenth century system of performing fights was still exciting for twentieth century audiences.

In 1956, the Stratford Festival premiered *Henry V*, directed by Michael Langham. This production is historically significant because the cast itself was made up of a combination of English-and French-Canadians actors. The title role was played by Christopher Plummer. Campbell played Pistol but there is nothing in the program or reviews stating who arranged the fights. This is unfortunate because the fights were described in the press as being some of the most spectacular ever. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* stated:

The production also offers as outstanding and spectacular a battle scene as has been seen in recent years. That would be the Harfleur siege scene wherein scores of armed soldiers spring out of the darkness toward the audience from the nine entrances and three levels of the pie-shaped inner stage. (Radcliffe)

The *Toronto Daily Star* review recorded:

His [Langham's] battle scenes are staged with athletic actors rolling out of the stage balcony to the floor on scaling ladders and, finally, in the form of a dimly-lit slow motion dance. His players, in the tradition already established at this Stratford, are forever roaring through the aisles in full-throated cry. (Karr)

Douglas Campbell remained with the Stratford Festival as an actor and fight arranger for some time. His credits as either fight arranger or choreographer at Stratford include *Richard III* (Fight Arranger - 1953), *All's Well that Ends Well* (Fight Arranger – 1953), *Julius Caesar* (Fight Arranger – 1955), *I Henry IV* (Fight Arranger – 1958), *Othello* (Fight Arranger – 1959), *King John* (Fight Arranger – 1960), *HMS Pinafore* (Choreographer – 1960), and *The Pirates of Penzance* (Choreographer – 1961).

Other fight directors at Stratford during this time include Alex de Naszody (*Tamburlaine*, Fight Arranger – 1956), John Greenwood (*Hamlet*, Fight Arranger – 1957), Jeremy Wilkin (*As You Like It*, Fight Arranger – 1959), Peter Needham (*Romeo and Juliet*, Fight Arranger – 1960), and Alan Lund (*Coriolanus*, - Fight Arranger – 1961). Alex de Naszody has no other stage credits at Stratford as a fight arranger, John Greenwood continued to work as a fight arranger and became a founding member of the British Society of Fight Directors (SBFD) and an examiner with the British Academy of Dramatic Combat (BADC), Jeremy Wilkin and Peter Needham were British actors, and Alan Lund was a dancer and choreographer who later in his career received the Order of Canada. Until 1962, Campbell appears to have been the top fight director with the Stratford Festival.

While Douglas Campbell was essentially Canada's first professional fight director, the person who is often remembered as Canada's premiere fight director arrived in Canada from England a decade after Campbell, in 1962. His name was Patrick Crean. Douglas Campbell's education in swordplay was based on the British actor-manager tradition as passed down from actor to actor. Campbell learned this system in the 1940's from Eddie Bailey, who had been taught by his father, who had been taught by his father in a theatrical lineage that went back to the eighteenth century. By contrast, 'Paddy' Crean's education in the art of swordplay was much more diverse and varied. Hobbs credits Crean with being a pioneer in contemporary stage combat:

Probably the first man to be employed by a theatre in the specific role of Fight Arranger was Patrick Crean, who still works in this capacity and is

not only skilled in the use of weapons but understands the special problems of the theatre as well. (Hobbs, *Fight Direction* 8)

Paddy Crean essentially lived his life by the sword. He was born in London in 1911. His father was a respected doctor and recipient of the Victoria Cross. His mother was the daughter of a Spanish nobleman (Crean 3). He received a gentleman's upbringing in London, and took rudimentary fencing lessons in foil from the Army Sabre Champion, John Fox, at St. George's. In his book, *More Champagne Darling*, Crean recalls the moment when he actually began his love of swordplay. In 1930 his aunt had arranged for him to apprentice to a tea planter in Ceylon. He was sent off to the West Indies aboard the *Esperance Bay* where he witnessed a young lady and her father fencing in the ship's gymnasium:

The girl wore a trim tailored jacket which showed off her provocative figure. A pleated skirt danced saucily at her knees. She was masked. Facing her was a man, also masked, and between them steel flashed fire. Suddenly, with the speed of a greyhound, the girl lunged forward, swept aside her opponent's defence and before he could recover fixed her point firmly on his breast. "Touché!" the man cried and removed his mask. The girl lifted hers, letting the bib rest on top of thick blonde curls, pulled off her glove and extended her hand. The man kissed it, then they both looked at me. I stood in the entrance of the tiny gymnasium and gazed back, little realizing in the moment that I was about to embark on two love affairs – one with this dynamic young lady fencer which would end when fate decreed, and the other with *l'arme blanche* which would last my span. (88)

The captain and others aboard the ship passed their time fencing. Mary, the woman fencer Paddy became enamored with, and her father taught Paddy the finer points of their style of swordplay. They had been visiting the father's old fencing master in London, Leon Bertrand. Bertrand had given them an intensive

class in foil at his *salle* in Hanover Square. Bertrand was from a family of fencing masters. Baptiste Bertrand was considered the legitimate successor to the fencing dynasty of Angelo in London. Baptiste Bertrand set up his *salle* in 1857 and the academic atmosphere he created made his school the most popular in England (Evangelista 53). Baptiste popularized fencing for women and was a noted fight arranger for the stage (53). His son Felix was also a fencing master and assisted his father with his work. When Baptiste died in 1898, Felix took over the school in London. Leon Bertrand was the grandson of Baptiste and the son of Felix. In 1930, Leon assumed the position of head instructor of the Bertrand school (54). Leon continued to teach fencing until his death in 1980.

Paddy Crean describes watching Leon Bertrand give a demonstration at an *assault* when Bertrand was in his seventies:

His preparation alone was worth the price of a seat. He would bow, adjust a black neck stock, strap on an Italian foil, mop his brow, suck on a sliver of lemon, salute, then snap down his mask. After a dazzling display of parry and riposte, he would salute again to thunderous applause, then reverse the procedure. (Crean 89)

Crean was fascinated with the form of fencing that Mary and her father exhibited. He claims in his book that Mary moulded him for training with the fencing “greats” – Madame Bertrand with whom he studied foil, Professor Parkins (*épée*), Professor McNeil at Eton (*sabre*), and Ugo Piniotti, Olympic fencing coach who taught Crean Italian foil when he was in Rome (91).

Crean made his professional debut as a fight arranger in 1932 at the London Coliseum staging fights for *Casanova* while understudying some of the roles. His first fight credit was in 1934 in Northampton for *Macbeth*, which was also the first Shakespeare production with which Crean was involved. As he gained more experience in England he became more frequently engaged as a fight arranger.

Over lunch at Denham Studios, Laurence Olivier asked Crean to stage the fights for his film version of *Hamlet*. The studio sent Terence Morgan (Laertes) to train in foil, épée, and sabre with Crean. Wilkinson armouries supplied the rapiers that Crean had designed for the film (232). Crean had worked out a fight plot based on discussions with Olivier, and began training Morgan when he had sufficient instruction in the use of the foils. Crean and Morgan demonstrated the fight to the cast and crew of *Hamlet*, and though the fight received applause from the spectators, Olivier gave Crean 'suggestions' on tweaking the fight. According to Crean, he ignored the recommendations that Olivier had given him. He states in his book:

Olivier gave me a number of suggestions to think about concerning the *Hamlet* duel, adding that some review of my innovations "might be useful." I should have paid close attention to this. But I had not yet taken to heart the fact that many directors cloak definite instructions in terms such as these. I never made the same mistake again. (232)

Crean did not change anything in the fight. He demonstrated it again before Olivier a few weeks later and shortly after that he received a call from Anthony Bushell, Olivier's production manager. He explained to Crean that his services would no longer be required. Denis Lorraine was credited with the fights when the film was released. Crean recalled, "Years later, I heard that Olivier's final comment had been, 'Paddy is very, very good...but he is stubborn. He will learn, and then he will be very, very, very good'" (233).

In an unpublished short film about Paddy Crean created in 1999, in which several fight directors and actors who worked with Crean celebrate his legacy, J.P. Fournier tells a slightly different version of the Olivier story:

He taught people like Alec Guinness, John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier...He did the fights for Laurence Olivier's Hamlet. He was pulled from those

fights because he wouldn't do a dangerous move that Olivier wanted in the fight. (*Paddy Crean: The Fight Master*)

Five years later Paddy Crean was engaged as the Fight Director and stunt double for Errol Flynn in *The Master of Ballantrae*. Crean used choreography inspired by the Hollywood fencing master Fred Cavens. Crean recalls:

At last everything was ready and I stood on the castle set, sword in hand, dressed and made up faithfully as Errol Flynn. Cameras whirred, still photographers flitted. "Move around Pat," said Keighley. "Do some blade-work like Errol!" I had seen every swashbuckling movie that Errol had made. I knew his style pretty well and I also knew he had worked for years with the legendary Hollywood fencing master, Fred Cavens. For fencing buffs, moves devised by Cavens for Flynn sometimes combined a combination of triple *molinello*, followed by a cut to the head, a thrust to centre, a prime parry to riposte-cut at the chest, this prime parry leading to cuts at the left cheek and right cheek. So I leapt about and did a bit of the Cavens routines in shadow-play. (Crean, 259)

Crean was able to employ several top British Olympic fencing team members as stunt men for *Ballantrae*, including Bob Anderson who later on became a famous film fight director himself. Crean had devised several spectacular deaths for the stunt men but was not allowed to show graphic deaths for two main reasons – the Hays Code did not permit graphic violence, and if stunt men could be seen dying, then they couldn't be used again (260). Crean made two more films with Errol Flynn in addition to a host of other films and television appearances over the course of his career.

Paddy Crean's Stratford adventure began with a phone call from Peter Coe in 1962. Coe wanted Crean to stage the fights for the upcoming production of *Macbeth*. Christopher Plummer was to play the lead with Bruno Gerussi as Macduff. The fight was staged with knives. The play was not a critical success,

and the reviews of the fights are the first bad press that fights received at Stratford. Nathan Cohen from the *Toronto Daily Star* wrote:

The climactic encounter between Macbeth and Macduff is ludicrously staged by Mr. Coe and Patrick Crean. After various lunges and counter-lunges with daggers, Macduff renders Macbeth defenceless with a series of judo-chops – on the neck, in the stomach, on the jaw, and on the throat – and then pierces him through the stomach. Mr. Plummer lets out a howl and falls, face downward, into what one assumes is a pool. (Cohen, Nathan)

The *Stratford Beacon-Herald* reported:

The sword play, directed by Britisher Patrick Crean, was violent, primitive, paced by the ferocity of an alley switch-blade rumble. It seemed a shame, after this excellent knife work, to have Macduff resort to Judo. (Sanborn)

In similar fashion the *New York Times* stated:

Patrick Crean is credited with having arranged the fight. As it came off last night it would be better shortened. Certainly the sparring between Macbeth and Macduff, who resemble those actor-wrestlers seen on television, should be expunged. The audience, apparently reminded, giggled. Macbeth has no time for comedy. (Funke)

Years later, in an interview with Theatre Museum Canada, Christopher Plummer admitted that the knife fights for *Macbeth* were not very good and blamed the openness of the Stratford Festival stage for the poor reception of the fight scene between Gerussi and himself. He claimed that it was hard to mask the knife fighting on such an open and “naked” stage (“Patrick Crean Fight Director”).

Douglas Campbell had introduced a basic system of swordplay inherited from the tradition of the eighteenth century actor-manager stock companies. A series of rehearsed passes easily memorized and executed on the stage proved to be effective and bore a resemblance to realistic fighting. Campbell was not a fencer but knew how to stage fights from his experience in England. Patrick Crean, starting his tenure at Stratford in 1962, brought a mastery of panache and style in his approach to the fights. Crean instructed actors not only in the function of various weapons but also in attitudes. He emphasized the importance of safety. Martha Henry said that Paddy “set a standard of swordplay and safety that set a standard in this country and in the theatre which is not to be surpassed” (*Paddy Crean: The Fight Master*). Kenneth Welsh adds that while safety was always Crean’s first priority, he also stressed that a combatant should never “forget the ladies in the front row” (*Paddy Crean: The Fight Master*).

What made Crean’s fights stand out is the way he addressed the period of the play and the characters who fought in it. He would get the combatants to think about what the characters were feeling in the fight. He devised sword fights that would tell the stories of the characters involved and that furthered the story of the play (*Paddy Crean: The Fight Master*). In a sense he filled the fights he staged with passion, and it is Martha Henry’s opinion that Crean is the first fight director to “achieve this so spectacularly” (*Paddy Crean: The Fight Master*). R.H. Thompson agrees with Henry and recalls how Crean had the ability to add so much more to the characters in the plays through the physicality and originality of the fights he staged (*Paddy Crean: The Fight Master*). As opposed to fights that were merely utilitarian, actors that worked with Paddy fondly recall the imaginative nature of the fights he devised. Crean’s fights were larger than life and truly theatrical in nature. Coming from a strong fencing background, he gave to all his fights, whether using broadswords, rapiers, foils, or sabres, the feeling of fencing. Photographs of plays at Stratford with fights choreographed by Crean show actors posing with broadswords in one hand, positioning in fencing stances.



Figure 2 – *The Three Musketeers* 1968*

This is a production still from *The Three Musketeers*, directed by John Hirsch in 1968. It appears to be the scene where D'Artagnan (Douglas Rain) brings his letter of introduction to the Musketeer headquarters and first encounters Athos (Powys Thomas) and the other musketeers. The second level of the stage shows the arrival, while below, eight Musketeers practice their skills of swordplay. The two characters downstage are likely Aramis (Christopher Newton) and Porthos (James Blendick). Aramis reads his Bible while practicing and Porthos sports a new cloak while the surrounding Musketeers wear their official tabards. The armed fighters below all maintain the same distance between each other. Their footwork is identical. They are all either right-hand

* Photographed by Robert C. Ragsdale. (on balcony) Jerome Tiberghien as the Sergeant-Major, Douglas Rain as D'Artagnan. (On floor) James Blendick as Porthos, Christopher Newton as Aramis, and Christopher Bernau. Lawrence Benedict, Robin Marshall, Leon Pownall, Terry Judd, Christopher Walken as Musketeers in *The Three Musketeers* (1968). Directed by John Hirsch, Designed by Desmond Healey. Courtesy the Stratford Shakespeare Festival Archives.

dominant, or have been taught to fight with their right hands. The leading foot is pointed forward while the back foot is resting at a ninety-degree angle. The costumes of the Musketeers suggest that the period is circa 1642.

The footwork is the first giveaway that the fights were staged by a professional fencer. Modern fencing requires the centre of balance to be in between the feet. Period fencing favors leaning forward or back with the back foot pivoted towards an opponent. Period fencing also requires the hips to be more square on with an opponent as the left hand was used not so much as a counter-balance but as a means to deflect or grab an adversary's blade. This photograph shows proper distance and beautiful symmetry between the fencers. It also shows the blades coming in contact in the third en-garde position. The combatants in this photograph are holding their swords too high. The sword points should be lower so that if a fencer extended his arm, the point would meet a target. However, keeping the points higher, reduces the risk of injury. This is important on stage because the actors do not have the luxury of wearing masks to protect their faces.

The blades used in the production are modern épée blades. The correct blades for the period would be rapier blades. Rapier blades are designed to cut and thrust, whereas épée blades function as thrusting swords only. Since épées are not designed for the abuse of parrying cutting attacks, they are more prone to breakage than the longer and heavier rapier blade. Again, there must be theatrical compromise. The photograph shows how crowded the stage is. It is impossible for the actors to initiate a drill that would include cuts. Crean would have staged this to be a parry-riposte drill. The actors could perform this drill in unison and appear elegant and martial at the same time. The actors in the photo look well drilled, all with the same footwork and centre of balance. With slight adjustments this picture would not be out of place in a modern fencing hall.

No doubt the fights Crean staged were exciting, but they were not grounded in historical accuracy. This style of fighting can be seen in Crean's choreography for the 1960 film, *The Sword of Sherwood Forest*, which is set in the early eleventh century. Knights wear single-handed broadswords, but wield

them as though they were foils. Fights are staged in a manner that makes them look as though the knights are fencing, and during the final fight the broadswords become broadsword-handled épées. The entire final fight provides an excellent example of twentieth century fencing techniques masquerading in the style of eleventh century chivalry.

Paddy Crean became known and admired for his theatrical swordplay. His phrase, “acting with Za!,” became synonymous with his style. “Za” was Crean’s word for the bite of the steel – an excitement, energy and explosion of life in a single moment (Walker-Fitzpatrick). Braun McAsh recalls Paddy – his former fight master – saying that nothing embodied the spirit of stage combat better than the slash in the air. This phenomenon was the “Zawhhh!” (McAsh, *Fight Choreography* 77). It was with this attitude that Crean approached his fights.

Crean’s favorite play, *Cyrano de Bergerac* was also staged at Stratford in 1962. Christopher Plummer again played the title role. The reviews were much more enthusiastic than the reviews for *Macbeth*. The *Toronto Daily Star* critic wrote, “Patrick Crean has staged some exciting battle and fighting scenes and the duel Cyrano fights while composing an extemporaneous ballad is truly memorable (Michener). The *Toronto Telegram* describes the fights in some detail:

Take his first act duel with Vicomte de Valvert. This is a stunning display of energy and precision, terrifying even though we know it has been endlessly rehearsed by Mr. Plummer, John Horton (as Valvert) and fencing coach Patrick Crean. Mr. Plummer thrusts and parries with such startling ferocity that, unless he is restrained, I’m sure someone – Mr. Horton, or one of the spectators – will one night be slashed to ribbons. That dazzling duel brought the first roaring ovation for Mr. Plummer.
(Evans)

Crean’s fight score for the Stratford *Cyrano* was the same one he had devised for the Donald Wolfitt production staged in London in 1938. He declared

that in his mind the fight could not have been staged any better than the way he had devised it. His score from the 1962 production of *Cyrano* is as follows:

1. Actors to rub feet in resin box before scene to prevent slipping.
2. Blades to be rubbed with strong emery paper to remove nicks and warm up steel.
3. Pommels of swords tightened before each performance.
4. All fights to be rehearsed before each performance.
5. Mr. Plummer's sword to have knuckle-guard removed and quillons and pas d'âne to be covered with leather.

CYRANO Thrusts centre.

DE VALVERT Shortens line. Pulls to prime, binds, lunges centre (double bind).

CYRANO Goes with the first part of bind, evades second part, parries Seconde.

DE VALVERT Lunges Centre.

CYRANO Parries Prime, disarms by bind, tosses DE VALVERT'S sword high in the air, catches it in his left hand as it comes down, places it on his left instep, flicks the sword towards DE VALVERT, turns and salutes ROXANNE.

DE VALVERT Catches sword, makes wild moulinet, slashes at CYRANO'S head, lunges centre.

CYRANO Ducks almost without looking, parries Seconde almost without looking, swings to face DE VALVERT and still keeping blade contact ruffles DE VALVERT'S hair with his left hand. (Crean 334)

A brilliant Fight Master, Crean claimed that this was the perfect way to stage this fight and he had not changed it since 1938 because "it is a rapier fight and, apart from theatrical business inherent in Rostand's text, must be done with the point" (335).

However, the rapier is a cut-and-thrust weapon. The *stramazone*, a cutting-stroke with a flicking action delivered from the wrist, was a development in rapier fighting from the early seventeenth century (Loades 252). This technique, if successful, draws blood providing a good psychological advantage in a fight. Though the thrust was fast and deadly, cuts were also quite effective. The argument over cutting and thrusting is nothing new. George Silver advocated the use of the cut in his 1599 treatise, *Paradoxes of Defence*. He claimed that there could be no perfect fight without both blow and thrust. His argument for the cut is as follows:

First, the blow cometh as neare a way and most commonly nearer than doth the thrust, and is therefore done in a shorter time then is the thrust: therefore in respect of time, whereupon standeth the perfection of fight, the blow is much better than the thrust. Againe, the force of the thrust passeth straight, therefore any crosse being indirectly made, the force of a child may put it by: but the force of a blow passeth indirectly, therefore must be directly warded in the counterchecke of his force: which cannot be done but by the convenient strength of a man, and with true crosse in true time, or else will not safely defend him: and is therefore much better and more dangerous than the thrust. (qtd in Wagner 217)

As a fencer, Crean favored attacking with the point. He did not seem to utilize the effectiveness of the cut as much in his choreography. This is evident in the *Sword of Sherwood Forest*, and *The Master of Ballantrae* and is repeated in his fight plot for *Cyrano*. Crean created exciting fights with theatrical panache, but it appears that elements of modern fencing remained in his fights despite the period.

Crean's style was definitely unique and as a result of his twenty-five years at Stratford, his style was passed on to future generations of fight directors. David Bouschey, founder of the American Stuntman's Association, and co-founder of the Society of American Fight Directors, says:

The majority of us in the Society of American Fight Directors, and I am sure the majority in all the fight societies in the world will always hold Paddy first and foremost... He's not held just for his ability to choreograph a fight or his ability to pass on information – it's his ability to pass on humanity. (*Paddy Crean: The Fight Master*)

In 1974, Crean appeared in a student film titled *The Legend of Old Man's Cave* with future fight master J. Allan Suddeth. At the end of the film there is a brief instructional segment with Crean and Suddeth demonstrating how the fight was put together. This video clearly illustrates the “parry box” now used by all the fight societies in the world. This system was based on the saber system that was popularized by Hutton towards the end of the nineteenth century. Suddeth and Crean take turns demonstrating cuts to parries one through six. At the first pass, Suddeth calls the numbers of the parries. When Crean returns the attack, he calls out the positions – “first flank cut, flank cut, arm, body, head, and head” (“Patrick Crean and J. Allen Suddeth Teach a Swordfight”). Crean tells his audience that these six basic positions were all that were required in setting the fight for the film. In true Crean fashion he concludes the segment by reminding the audience that, in staging the fights in film and on stage, one must pay attention to safety and perform with panache and “Zaaa” (*Paddy Crean: The Fight Master*).

Crean's attention to detail was well known long before he arrived in Stratford. He was showcased as a fight director in a 1946 British Pathé newsreel. Crean's approach to swordplay is described, and though it is nothing that fight directors today would marvel at, it must have been revolutionary at the time, given that fights were still being performed the way Douglas Campbell was approaching them at the Old Vic and in various stock companies. The three-minute video explains what goes into the making of a stage fight. Every stroke must be worked out carefully on paper, making sure that no parry or attack is left to chance. Once the fight is put on paper, Crean works out the fight with model swords. This is demonstrated in the film with his former partner, Rex Rickman.

The miniature swords he uses in the film were used to figure out if the moves would look dramatic enough on stage. He would continue to use miniature swords in devising fights throughout his career (“Stage Fight”).

Over the course of his career, Patrick Crean had trained many famous actors. This list includes John Gielgud, Alec Guinness, Laurence Olivier, Errol Flynn, Christopher Plummer, Bruno Gerussi, John Horton, William Hutt, William Needles, Martha Henry, Richard Monette, Amelia Hall, Christopher Newton, Kenneth Welsh, Douglas Rain, Alan Bates, John Hirsch, Christopher Walken, Donald Sutherland, Brian Bedford, Maggie Smith, Peter Ustinov, Norman Browning, Rod Beattie, Colm Feore, and Jessica Tandy. The excitement and fun he put into his swordfights are synonymous with the way actors such as Martha Henry and fight directors like J.P. Fournier remember Crean.

Patrick Crean remained with the Stratford Festival as an actor and fight arranger for twenty-five years. Battles and fights staged by Crean at the Stratford Festival include *Macbeth* (Fight Arranger - 1962), *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Fight Arranger – 1962), *Troilus and Cressida* (Fight Arranger – 1963), *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Fight Arranger – 1963), *Richard II* (Fight Arranger – 1964), *King Lear* (Fight Arranger – 1964), *I Henry IV* (Fight Arranger – 1965), *Julius Caesar* (Fight Arranger – 1965), *Henry V* (Fight Arranger – 1966), *Henry VI* (Fight Arranger – 1966), *Twelfth Night* (Fight Arranger – 1966), *Don Giovanni* (Fight Arranger – 1966), *Twelfth Night* (Fight Arranger – 1967), *Richard III* (Fight Arranger – 1967), *Antony and Cleopatra* (Fight Arranger – 1967), *Romeo and Juliet* (Fight Arranger – 1968), *The Three Musketeers* (Fight Arranger – 1968), *Hamlet* (Fight Arranger – 1969), *Cymbeline* (Fight Arranger – 1970), *Vatlav* (Fight Arranger – 1970), *Macbeth* (Fight Arranger – 1971), *Lorenzaccio* (Fight Arranger – 1972), *King Lear* (Fight Arranger – 1972), *Othello* (Fight Arranger – 1973), *Twelfth Night* (Fight Arranger – 1975), *Hamlet* (Fight Arranger – 1976), *Romeo and Juliet* (Fight Arranger – 1977), *All's Well That Ends Well* (Movement by – 1977), *Richard III* (Fight Arranger – 1977), *Macbeth* (Fight Arranger – 1978), *I Henry IV* (Fight Arranger – 1979), *Richard II* (Fight Arranger – 1979), *Othello* (Fight Arranger – 1979), *King Lear* (Fight Arranger – 1979), *Julius Caesar* (Fight Arranger – 1982),

The Merry Wives of Windsor (Fight Arranger – 1982), *Macbeth* (Fight Arranger – 1983), and *The Three Musketeers* (Co-Fight Arranger – 1988).

Paddy Crean died in 2003. Though he did not receive any major awards or distinctions for his contributions to theatre, he has been given the title of Maître d'Armes with Fight Directors Canada, the Society of American Fight Directors and the Society of British Fight Directors. Fight Directors Canada gives a scholarship in his name for promising students of stage combat. There is also an international stage combat workshop named after Crean. In tribute to his skill and remarkable contribution to the art of stage fighting, Crean even had a song dedicated to him:

*Come all you lads of high renown
Come all you tender ladies
Let us proclaim our swordsman's name
He's the man we know
The man we know gallant from head to toe
Charm and dash with a touch of retro flash
The old pirate's grin with shades of Flynn
And the soldier's chin is proud
Oh we can swear with one accord
No gentler man lives by the sword
Than the man we know – Paddy Crean. (Paddy Crean: The Fight Master)*

The Stratford Festival in the 1950's and '60's represented a high point in the development of professional theatre in Canada. Many actors who were involved with the Festival in its first decades became stars of Canada's theatre. The Festival was instrumental in creating and defining a world-class identity for Canadian theatre in the mid-twentieth century. The influence of Douglas Campbell and Patrick Crean upon the development of stage combat in Canada was equally instrumental if not revolutionary.

4 The Fine Print: The Acceptance of Fight Directors as Professional Artists in Canada

The success of the inaugural season at Stratford ensured that another season would follow, and soon the tent would be replaced with a permanent theatre. In 1954, members of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival approached the Canadian Council of Authors and Artists (CCAA) for bargaining representation. A meeting between the CCAA and the American Equity Association (AEA) took place in Montreal to work out the way in which AEA contracts for Stratford actors would be administered by the CCAA (“Equity’s History”). On March 20, 1955 the first Canadian Equity Advisory Committee was elected. The members of the committee were Lloyd Bochner, Douglas Campbell, Robert Christie, David Gardner, Eric House, William Hutt, Paul Kligman, Larry McCance, John Maddison, Grania Mortimer and William Needles (“Equity’s History”). By 1958, Equity had opened its first office. The rights of actors were secured relatively quickly after the inception of the Stratford Festival. The status of fight directors was not so easily defined.

At Stratford fights were a part of the show. At first, it fell upon cast members or directors to take on the responsibility of staging the fights. As we have seen, Douglas Campbell was Guthrie’s stand-by for staging the fights during the premiere season of the festival. He also played Hastings in *Richard III* and Parolles in *All’s Well That Ends Well* that season. In 1955, Campbell once again was the Fight Arranger in addition to playing Casca in *Julius Caesar*, though there is no listing of a fight arranger for the 1956 production of *Henry V* in which Campbell played Pistol. The first production at Stratford that lists a Fight Arranger not a member of the company is the 1957 production of *Hamlet*, which credits John Greenwood with staging the fights. Greenwood, a native of England, was only at the festival for that production. In 1958, Douglas Campbell is again listed as Fight Arranger while playing Falstaff in *I Henry IV*, and in 1959 he played the title role in *Othello* in addition to staging the fights. Perhaps

Campbell's approach to staging fights by linking memorized passes made it easy enough for him to choreograph and play such demanding parts at the same time.

At that time there were no Equity contracts for fight arrangers. Remuneration for fight arrangers was done by way of agreement with the producer. To be compensated for their work as a fight arranger an actor might be at the mercy of the production. The more physical actors might also have been expected to take on the responsibility of staging fights they were in – going back to the pattern of the actor-manager system that Campbell was familiar with.

As more professional theatre companies emerged across Canada, the need for regional fight directors, or at least actors who knew how to fight, was increasing. Some fight directors who were taking their craft seriously began creating their own contracts for companies that employed them. These were important documents for fight directors because the contract not only set out the financial compensation but outlined the implications of the stage fight to both management and the fight director. Here is what a typical independent fight director contract usually included:

AGREEMENT made this ___ day of ___ 19 __ , between ___ (hereinafter called "the Management") and XXXXX XXXXXXXX (hereinafter called "the Artist") engaged at (State Artist's Place of Residence) ___.

The Artist is hereby contracted to stage the fight scenes for _____. The engagement shall be made from ___ to ___.

COMPENSATION for this contract shall be ____, to be paid in the following manner agreed by both Artist and Management : _____.

It is understood by both Artist and Management that the above remuneration is all-inclusive for the period of the contract stipulated above, and as such, the payment of overtime, meal penalties, travel time and buy-outs do not apply to this contract.

It is the understanding of the Artist and the Management that should it become necessary to extend the duration of this contract, that it shall be

done by an attached rider to this contract which shall stipulate compensation on a day-to-day basis.

It is the understanding of both the Artist and the Management that the fights be choreographed in such a manner that the safety of the performers not be compromised. It is therefore understood by the Management that the Artist has final approval over the weapons insofar as their design and construction are relevant to the safety of the performer.

It is the understanding of the Artist that the fight scene/s be choreographed within the framework of the Director's intent, given the physical restrictions of set and costume design, and the performer's ability. It is also the understanding of the Artist that he be available for consultation on any subject that has a direct bearing on the fight scene/s. (I.E: costume and armour construction, weapon design, social protocol, special effects, etc.). (McAsh "Blank Contract of Engagement")

F. Braun McAsh's contract template appears to be generic enough to cover film and theatre productions with his inclusion of travel costs, per diems and consultation for social protocol and special effects design. It was drafted by McAsh with both theatre companies and film productions in mind.

This contract specifies elements that were often overlooked by theatre companies, such as the construction of the weapons. A sword, by definition, can have countless variations and styles. To a theatre manager a sword is a sword. To a fight director the swords used in a production must meet several criteria. Are the swords relevant to the period of the play? A rapier, foil, smallsword, broadsword and greatsword are vastly different from one another. Are the swords designed for use on the stage? A sword that is made to hang on a wall may be inexpensive and look the part, but the construction is important. Swords made for stage must be made to endure repeated use. There are serious implications when using a weapon with questionable origins. How old are the blades? Swords that have sat for too long or that have been used for a long time may have metal

fatigue and be prone to breaking. A blade that breaks on stage during a fight may have disastrous consequences for actors and audience members.

The above sample contract also outlined the time that would be allowed for staging the fight. Management needs to understand that for every minute of fighting on stage, approximately ten to fifteen hours of rehearsal are involved in its creation. Stating how much rehearsal time is required informs the management that the fight will not be rushed but carefully planned with the performers so as to minimize any risk of injury. Also taken into consideration in the contract are other factors such as costume design. If an actor cannot move properly, they pose a potential risk while involved in onstage violence.

But however well intentioned the contract may have been, there was nothing in place to prevent a fight director from being sued should something go wrong with the fight. If the fight director was not a member of the company, they were not covered by third party liability as they were simply an outside contractor. As the demands for exciting stage fights increased, so did the need for properly trained actors and fight directors, and a way of monitoring the system. The Stratford Festival auditioned actors from across Canada. Actors who stayed on for a season or two and returned to their homes after being released from the company often continued to work within their regions. Actors who had been involved in stage fights at Stratford had some skills with which to provide the service of fight director to local productions. An actor could be more employable with a company if they possessed more than one skill. With no regulation of stage combat training, a disparity in the level of expertise from fight director to fight director became the norm. There was a need for qualified people to teach falls, slaps, punches and brawls. The popularity of Shakespeare plays increased the need for the ability to stage fights involving weapons. In *Swashbuckling*, Richard Lane writes that until fairly recently there was limited availability for learning safe or “convincing” fights (2). He argues that stock moves were often used in creating fights and “more athletic performers relied upon the techniques of sport fencing to liven up their fights” (2). It was becoming evident that there

needed to be some form of regulation in the training of actors and in the hiring of qualified fight directors for theatre production.

When Patrick Crean was staging fights for *The Master of Ballentrae*, he enlisted the services of several competitive fencers including Bob Anderson. Anderson had learned fencing when he served with the British Royal Marines, and he was a champion fencer (Childs). He learned his swashbuckling style from Crean and became a prominent fight director in film and television. Until he worked on *The Master of Ballentrae*, Anderson knew nothing about theatrical swordplay and ended up accidentally wounding Errol Flynn during the shoot. He became known as the “man who stabbed Errol Flynn” (Childs). Anderson later became the technical director of the Canadian Fencing Association and an internationally known fight director for his work on *The Princess Bride*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Though he was not a historical fencer, Anderson, like Crean, had a knack for creating exciting fight sequences. When I worked with Anderson on a fight scene for the second season of the television series *Highlander*, he told me that Paddy Crean was the man who gave him his start in the industry. Crean refers to Anderson’s abilities as a fencer on the set in *Master of Ballentrae* in his book *More Champagne Darling* (262).

The first country to address the concerns of stage fight education was England. In 1969, Henry Marshall, William Hobbs, Charles Alexiz, B.H. Barry, John Barton, Roy Goodall, John Greenwood, Ian McKay, Bryan Mosley, Derek Ware, Arthur Wise, Philip Anthony, Patrick Crean, Hans Mater and John Waller founded the Society of British Fight Directors (SBFD) (“History of British Academy”). These fight directors were either teaching stage combat at drama schools in the U.K. or were working in British film and theatre in that capacity. Their goals were to raise the standard of stage fighting, and status of the fight director.

According to the British Academy of Dramatic Combat’s website, William Hobbs is accredited with coining the term *Fight Director*. He created the term in order to “describe the craft of directing dramatic combat as a performance discipline that incorporated historical accuracy, technical flair and rigorous safety”

("History of the British Academy"). It had been decided that the terms previously used -- *Sword Master* and *Fight Arranger* -- did not adequately reflect the true nature of the emerging art form of stage combat. Fight Director offered a more comprehensive definition. The fight director is responsible for all aspects of violence within a theatrical production. This ranges from falls on stage to violence between two or more people with or without weapons. The fight director works directly with the director and has the added responsibility to ensure that the violence on stage functions within the artistic vision of the director. The violent events on stage are designed to enhance and advance the theatrical event's narrative. William Hobbs, in the first stage fight book on the subject, published in 1967, attempts a definition of Fight Arranger that is much more suited for the term *Fight Director* coined in 1969: "At its best, arranging a fight is an art, combining something of the skills of a director, choreographer, actor, athlete, and, because a feeling for rhythm is essential, in some small way even that of a musician" (Hobbs, *Techniques* 7).

The first three books on stage combat were published in England beginning with William Hobbs's book, *Techniques of the Stage Fight* (1967); the others were Arthur Wise's *Weapons in the Theatre* (1968), and Gilbert Gordon's *Stage Fights* (1973). Hobbs introduces the concept of stage fighting and provides some basic sword techniques that are complemented in Wise's book the following year. Gordon's book, *Stage Fights*, provides a view of stage fights from the pen of an amateur fencer. Gordon's book, however, is the first publication to use Hobbs' term *Fight Director*.

Soon after the creation of the SBFDF, British Equity requested that the new society create a structured training program for future fight directors. The SBFDF established a system of actor training that was adopted by the major drama schools, largely due to the fact that the members of the SBFDF were already teaching at them. A system of grades was established within the SBFDF that reflected the students' abilities at different levels, ranging from basic to advanced. The Advanced certificate was recognized by British Actor's Equity as the first stage of qualifications required for anyone wishing to become a fight

director. Thus the SBFD had become a specialist body within BAE. In addition to establishing a list of actors proficient in stage combat for BAE, the SBFD also assisted in the creation of a health and safety advisory document regarding the safe handling and maintenance of weapons in training and performance (“History of the British Academy”). The SBFD was asked by the Equity council to form a committee within Equity to represent the professional needs of the fight director and to advise the council. This allowed the fight committee to negotiate with theatrical producers for a contract with fight directors. The Society was instrumental in establishing the method of continuing character development through the fight (Fournier). This was not only a monumental development for fight directors in the United Kingdom, but also for other interest groups in other countries including the United States, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, New Zealand, Australia and eventually Canada.

In Stratford, Patrick Crean was training actors for stage combat as the plays required. However, in the rest of Canada stage combat training was much more limited. An article in the *Winnipeg Free Press* in 1966 mentions the Manitoba Theatre Centre Fencing Club attending a tournament in Ottawa under the coaching of Juan Gomez Perales. In the 1940’s he was the Spanish champion at sabre, and was the sabre fencing world champion in 1950 (Fournier). Perales was hired to teach at the Manitoba Theatre School where he also became the instructor for the MTC fencing club. Because fight directors were not commonly accessible – especially since Canada’s only fight director was employed at Stratford - actors were getting trained by fencing coaches.

JP Fournier, a Canadian Fight Master with Fight Directors Canada began his training in sabre in 1968 with Juan Gomez Perales. Returning to Alberta, Fournier attended the University of Alberta and trained with the University coach, Francis Wetterberg, who had introduced fencing to Albertans in the 1930’s. He was inducted into the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame as a fencing “builder”. Fournier took lessons as part of his theatrical training at the University of Alberta. Wetterberg taught fencing to the drama students but would show moves that he thought beneficial to theatrical fencing to Fournier and other keen students of the

blade. Fournier attributes his excellence in blade work to the instruction of Fran Wetterberg. In 1972 Fournier began choreographing fights in theatres across Western Canada. "Over the next five years I would choreograph two or three fights a year in shows that I was in" (Fournier). This was similar to the pattern in British theatre and the first season of Stratford where the most able actor was given the added responsibility of staging the fights in the productions they were cast in.

In 1974, Fournier became the fight instructor at the University of Alberta and taught stage combat in the Drama Department. "I taught fencing and whatever else I knew about any kind of stage fighting at the time" (Fournier). In 1978, Fournier was approached by a former chair of the department and was told about the SBF in Britain. He applied for a Canada Council grant and went to England for nine months to train with John Waller, Roy Goodall, William Hobbs, Derek Ware, Ian McKay, and Henry Marshall. Upon his return to Canada, Fournier started working more and more as a fight director, equally divided between choreography and acting. "The difference this time is that I actually knew a bit about what I was doing" (Fournier).

Fournier had worked with Patrick Crean. "From Paddy I learned 'Baronial Hall Travelling' and 'Up against a Ship's Rail' sequences"(Fournier). These were set sequences that Crean had developed during his filming days. Baronial Hall Travelling was heading in one direction. The Ship's Rail was a sequence of eight to twelve moves "that were pretty silly, but when you do them on stage people would buy them" (Fournier). Note the similarity with Campbell's discussion of the set passes that were passed on from actor to actor. Crean was passing on the sequences that were functional and useful beyond the film for which they were devised. Crean continued to use these proven sequences in Stratford into the latter half of the twentieth century. When Fournier started directing fights in Western Canada, only Crean and Fournier were working in this capacity.

The Society of American Fight Directors began in a fashion similar to what was happening in Canada. David Boushey, an American film and theatre artist, travelled to the United Kingdom and trained with the SBF. Upon his return in

the mid 1970's, Boushey was determined to establish the role of fight director in the United States the way it had been established in Britain. He contacted several other Americans that he knew had experience with stage combat, including Erik Fredricksen, Joseph Martinez, Byron Jennings and Rod Coibin ("History of Stage Combat"). The SAFD was incorporated in 1977 but did not formalize its own testing for students until 1979. The SBFDF was administering tests for Americans at Carnegie-Mellon and Julliard ("History of Stage Combat"). In 1980 the SBFDF formally acknowledged that the SAFD was capable of administering its own tests and announced that it would no longer test outside the United Kingdom.

Canada's development was slower. The first attempt at forming a Canadian society resulted in the Society of Canadian Fight Directors (SCFD). Braun F. McAsh, a member of the Stratford Company, began his instruction under Patrick Crean as an actor combatant, and studied under him for four seasons. Eventually he arranged fights for the 1980 Stratford production of *Henry VI* (McAsh Interview). In similar fashion to Fournier, McAsh went to England after his final season at Stratford to further his fight education. There he studied with Henry Marshall and William Hobbs to develop his skills for stage and film. McAsh co-founded the SCFD with K. Reed Needles in 1981. McAsh was the founding president and published the newsletter. In Volume IV of the newsletter (June 1986) the society's mandate was published:

The Society of Canadian Fight Directors is a non-profit organization of accredited professional fight choreographers, drama school fencing and combat instructors and actor combatants who have passed and been accredited by a Society examining board. There already exists both a British and an American Society. The aim of the Canadian Society is to raise the standard of choreography training and safety within the Canadian Theatre community. It will also attempt to bring to the attention of directors the number of qualified Canadians known to it so as to insure that Canadians do not lose out on potential employment because directors

are unaware of their existence. The Society hopes to be a focal point for fight directors to share their knowledge, organize workshops, achieve Union recognition in terms of job description (something neither Equity nor Actra currently define,) and to act as a liaison to the British and American Societies. To set up and conduct an examining board to grant students accreditation in their proficiency with various weapons, and to advocate that accreditation be recognized by directors and schools as valid evidence of their proficiency.

We believe that Canada's theatre community is now large enough and diverse enough to warrant such a Society and that it can only serve to improve and benefit those involved in it.

There is no desire to create a closed shop of elitists, but obviously there must be some criteria for membership, just as there is in any professional organization. This then, is the proposed criteria:

FULL MEMBERSHIP

Anyone who makes a substantial portion of his or her income as a fight director. A person with at least ten professional credits and training and/or letters of recommendation from recognized schools or masters.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

Fencing masters of drama schools or clubs and those who do not make their living or a large portion thereof from professional choreography but are actively involved in the theatre as an actor/choreographer or a drama teacher.

ACTOR-COMBATANT

An actor who has passed the Society review board. (Each certificate granted is specified for a specific weapon or weapons and is an acknowledgement of ability within a framework of standards for those weapons and not a license to choreograph.

FRIEND

Non-Canadian professionals and Canadians not necessarily directly involved in theatre but interested in correspondence with the Society. (McAsh “The Society of Canadian Fight Directors Newsletter 4”)

The models for this format were the SAFD and the SBFD organizations. The SCFD was co-founded in 1981 by F.Braun McAsh, K. Reed Needles and John Stead. McAsh had approached JP Fournier in 1981 and asked him to join the Society, but at the time Fournier declined, stating that “Canada is not ready for a fight society just yet” (Fournier). Though well intentioned, the SCFD was not very well organized (Stead). In the October 1985 newsletter, McAsh informs the readership of his ongoing frustrations trying to establish recognition with Canadian Actors’ Equity:

...We are still nowhere with Equity. In a recent Equity listing, choreographers are listed. They are all dance choreographers. We are not represented because in the paperwork Equity sent out to compile these lists, there was no category for fight directors. We still don’t exist as far as the unions are concerned. And as long as we have no consensus among ourselves as a professional organization we will remain in obscurity and people will continue to be hurt because directors still do not know who to turn to for our skills (McAsh “The Society of Canadian Fight Directors Newsletter 3”).

Canadian Actors Equity had previously established the categories of Director in the 1977 Canadian Theatre Agreement (CTA) and Dance Choreographer in the 1980 CTA. Fight Directors were still unrepresented within the CTA, allowing Canadian theatres the freedom to hire anyone they wished to choreograph violence for them. Typically, the duty of choreographing violence went to an actor with physical ability within the company who would take on the responsibility for little or no remuneration.

Part of the problem with this system was that violence on stage was not regarded as an integral part of dramatic production. Theatre companies were able to pass on the risk to potentially unqualified individuals. The other reason for the lack of interest in the Society of Canadian Fight Directors was that the training of actors across Canada was inconsistent and limited to the few drama schools that offered workshops and master classes. Only a handful of drama schools in Canada offered stage combat as a course. In these instances the training was limited to the students enrolled at the institutions themselves. Canadian actors training in England or the United States were much more likely to take stage fighting as part of their curriculum, and workshops were more consistent and available to drama school students, community theatre members, and the general public. In Canada, actors were receiving education in fights only at Stratford and select drama schools. Many actors in regional theatres were being trained or choreographed by peers with little or no formal training themselves. In a sense, Canada's theatre stage combat scene was operating in a fashion similar to the older actor-manager companies in England in the nineteenth century – not necessarily out of choice, but driven by a lack of accessibility to qualified fight directors and instructors.

JP Fournier had told Braun McAsh that Canada was not ready for a Society of Fight Directors in the 1980's. Fournier was approached by another Canadian fight director, Robert Seale, in 1992. Seale wanted to create a fight association in Canada that would focus on the training of actor combatants within the country. Fournier was hesitant initially to join Seale in creating Fight Directors Canada. Fournier's primary concern about forming a professional association was about elitism. McAsh had addressed this concern in the 1986 edition of the SCFD Newsletter: "There is no desire to create a closed shop of elitists, but obviously there must be some criteria for membership, just as there is in any professional organization" (McAsh "The Society of Canadian Fight Directors Newsletter 4"). Fournier was interested in doing, "good work with good people. I want to teach anybody anything. I don't want to hide anything from anybody. Nothing is a secret, it's an open world. I told Bob [Seale] that when we start this it

has to be an inclusive place – not an exclusive place” (Fournier). Fournier eventually agreed to join Seale in creating the second fight association in Canada. This created tension between the two groups and eventually created a split amongst Canadian fight directors. The SCFD had a smaller membership and eventually the newsletters and membership requests stopped. The FDC started out with a strong membership enrollment and focused on the training of actors in Canada with a yearly national workshop. This drive helped maintain memberships within the organization across Canada.

The reason for creating the FDC is stated within the articles of incorporation:

The purpose of Fight Directors Canada is to promote and maintain a national standard of safety and aesthetics of the art of fight choreography as an integral part of the entertainment industry: to educate, train, examine and confer grades of proficiency on its members: to safeguard the diversity, interests and concerns of those members: and to inform the general public of the safety and aesthetics of well choreographed fight sequences for television, film and theatre. (Fight Directors Canada *Articles*)

Fight Directors Canada held its first workshop at Ryerson College with sixty people in 1993. Everyone fought at the basic level (Fournier). A few years later, basic, intermediate and advanced levels at bronze, silver and gold were introduced. By 1995, Fournier and Seale hosted an advanced level workshop in Toronto. The criterion for the advanced level was that the fights had to be completely free of error from start to finish. The problem with establishing the criteria for the levels in the early years was that “nobody could figure out what we needed to do at the advanced gold level. So we decided that each fight had to be glitch-free in execution. The students who were able to pull this off were Daniel Levinson, John Nelles, and Simon Fon that year” (Fournier).

The national workshops that were mandated to occur in Canada every year struggled with enrolling combatants. In 1994, a national workshop was planned for Alberta. Far from the sixty students who participated in 1993, only fourteen participated. Fournier ended up training the students himself, essentially turning the national workshop into a regional workshop.

As the membership slowly grew within the FDC, policy and administration grew accordingly. The next step for the organization was to establish fight directors as legitimized professionals within the CTA. John Nelles was responsible for creating the liaison between fight directors and Canadian Actors' Equity, which had become independent from American Equity in 1976. Over twelve years, Nelles continued to advocate for fight directors' rights in Canada. Equity was initially concerned about making judgment calls regarding the qualifications of fight directors. Equity had never before been in a position to determine who could or could not be a fight director. Under their system, a person acquiring the requisite number of credits was permitted to join the association. Equity had not prevented people who were not trained actors from becoming a part of the association (Nelles).

In an August 2011 interview, John Nelles discussed the issues he was facing with Equity in establishing a list of criteria for inclusion of Fight Directors within the CTA:

If you're an actor, you can also get an Equity directing contract...they just give you an Equity Director contract. There's no program or qualifications. The problem with fight stuff is that how can they then say if you're an actor, an Equity member and want to do fights for a show. For Equity to say, "no, you don't have the qualifications," is not within their mandate. (Nelles)

Nelles approached Equity as an Equity member and asked to become a member of the Directors and Choreographers committee with the intention of being an advocate for Equity members who were fight directors. At this time

there was no inclusion of fight directors within the CTA. He was given permission to be a part of the committee. Nelles' objective was to bring fight directors into the CTA. Equity was reluctant to let this happen on the grounds that they did not want to discriminate against members. More importantly, Equity did not wish to take on the responsibility of determining who was qualified in the event of potential lawsuits. They wanted the theatres to take the responsibility of determining whom they would hire and thereby assume the liability.

Another issue within Equity was the conflict between the SCFD and FDC in negotiating with Equity. On the one hand, Bob Seale was informing Equity that FDC was the authority in determining qualifications for fight directors, and on the other John Stead was insisting that the SCFD was the authority. This put Equity in the middle of the two groups (Nelles). Ultimately, Equity included the names of both organizations within the Canadian Theatre Agreement to satisfy the members belonging to either side.

In addition to this, there were Equity members who had certifications in stage combat from outside Canada that were being approached by theatre managers to set fights for them at little or no cost. Though they had competency certificates as combatants, they were not qualified for staging fights. Theatre companies were not too excited about having a regulated minimum rate for fight directors. Nelles spoke to the committee about the common practices theatres were employing in order to attain the services of fight directors for little or no cost:

Very often the fight director is brought in at the last minute. He's told they have no budget because they didn't budget for a fight director and they didn't know what to pay, with no minimums in place. I had a call from a theatre company in Toronto that said they had a show with a little fight with an axe. An actor would chase another actor around the audience with an axe, then they have to throw the axe and have a little fight with the axe and they need to break a chair over another person's back and we open in three days. When I asked them about the budget they said they wanted it as a favour. I told them I was an Equity member and needed an Equity

contract. I refused this because when can I call the favour? A day later a friend of mine called me about a show in town with an axe fight. The theatres in this way were causing a spiraling to the bottom. By undercutting other fight directors, we are racing to the bottom. As trained professionals we need to draw the line at some point. We spend a lot of time and money training and are asked often to perform our services as favours. It really needs to stop. (Nelles)

The FDC was trying to follow a codified set of standards and a curriculum similar to that of the SAFD so that everyone who trained within the system would come out with the same basic training. This includes basic sword work, basic hand-to-hand fighting and proficiency in basic quarterstaff. In this way, a standard of proficiency is created. The SCFD was establishing a system that followed more of an apprenticeship approach (Nelles). However, both groups agreed that there needed to be a level of basic proficiencies in the disciplines of swordplay, unarmed fighting and quarterstaff.

The next step for the committee was to look at different models. The committee looked at the US and British models. By now it was 2000, and fight directors were asked to come in and discuss their concerns with the committee. A series of round table discussions began involving members from the Toronto area. There was no representation from fight directors in Western Canada. The round table discussions were to establish minimum fees for fight directors. Fight directors were asked how much time they required to stage fights ranging from slaps to brawls. A four-hour minimum was agreed upon. In addition to this, it was recommended that the fight director be included in production meetings in order to have input regarding set design, costuming, etc. as a way of establishing safety for the actors. Steve Wilsher was contacted by the committee for input into the establishment of the Canadian Equity fight director register, as he was instrumental in the establishment of the fight registry with British Equity. Ken Burns and Susan Wallace at Equity were in consultation with the committee during the entire process (Nelles).

For the first time, after twelve years of hard work, fight directors were included in the CTA in 2003. Ironically, section 18:00 of the CTA provides definitions for Director, Choreographer, Dance Captain, and Fight Captain. The definition for fight director has been, and continues to be, overlooked. There is, however, a definition in the Preamble to section 61:00 that defines the fight director:

For the purposes of this Article, a member of any of Canadian Actors' Equity Association and/or Fight Directors Canada and/or the Society of Canadian Fight Directors and/or any other affiliated fight directors society shall be defined as an Equity Fight Director. (Canadian Actors Equity "Canadian Theatre Agreement 2006-2009")

This preamble allows any member of any fight association the ability to work without prejudice under an Equity contract. This specific clause prevents any fight organization from claiming favoritism by Equity to another organization. It appears this clause was important at the time of negotiation due to the rivalry between FDC and SCFD members involved in the CTA negotiations.

Section 61:00 of the CTA provides the responsibilities and remuneration for fight directors. In keeping with theatre management concerns, article 61:01 defines the requirement for a fight director:

The Theatre will determine if staging requires choreography within the realm of dance, or other specialized movement, or fight direction. When fight direction is required, a fight director shall be contracted according to this Article 61:00 whenever two or more Artists are required to participate in a stage fight (in accordance with Clause 28:07) involving one or more of the following elements:

(i) weapons of any sort, including but not limited to, furniture or other props used as weapons;

(ii) martial arts and unarmed combat. (Canadian Actors Equity “Canadian Theatre Agreement 2006-2009”)

The Agreement also mandates the position of *Fight Captain* in article 28:07: If, in accordance with clause 28:06(A) and Article 61:00, the Theatre engages a Fight Director, and if that person is not engaged for the duration of the production, the Theatre, in consultation with the Fight Director, shall assign a “Fight Captain” to monitor the stage fight(s) for the duration of the production. (Canadian Actors Equity “Canadian Theatre Agreement 2006-2009”)

The definition of Fight Captain is included in the earlier Clause 18:14: “A ‘Fight Captain’ is an Artist engaged in a performing capacity assigned to monitor stage fights for the duration of the production” (Canadian Actors Equity “Canadian Theatre Agreement 2006-2009”).

In addition to the Fight Captain clause, the agreement creates a mandatory fight warm up for staged violence in clause 24:01(K):

Notwithstanding the above, Artists may be required to rehearse fight sequences immediately prior to the half-hour call. All Artists who participate in a stage fight must rehearse said fight before each performance. Any exception shall be at the discretion of the Fight Captain. The Artists must, prior to the fight rehearsal, receive the break specified in Clause 24:01(I) or Clause 26:04, whichever applies. (Canadian Actors Equity “Canadian Theatre Agreement 2006-2009”)

Furthermore, the CTA shifts all responsibility for staged violence to the theatres in clause 28:06:

The Theatre accepts responsibility for the safety of the Artists in the training and execution of Extraordinary Risks. The Theatre has the right to

engage qualified individuals for the purpose of instructing the Artists in the performance of Extraordinary Risks. (Canadian Actors Equity “Canadian Theatre Agreement 2006-2009”)

This clause allows theatre companies the freedom to decide who they employ to stage the violence for their productions. It also states the responsibility that the theatre assumes in having this freedom. In this way, Equity manages to keep out of the politics of preferential casting while underlining the importance for theatres to create high levels of safety for their performers.

The inclusion of the fight captain was an important addition to the CTA. The fight captain has a responsibility to uphold the integrity of the fight scenes in a production as well as having to ensure that clause 24:01(k) is followed throughout the run. The responsibility for choosing a fight captain is given to the theatre in consultation with the fight director. According to John Stead, the fight captain has the responsibility to maintain the fight and keep the artistic vision of the fight director and the director (Stead). Steve Wilsher states that the fight captain is invaluable to a production (Wilsher). The fight captain should not change any choreography or alter the fight in any way. “A good fight captain keeps an eye on everything, not just the fights.” As far as Wilsher is concerned, the fight captain has to have a good knowledge of stage combat, but must not be involved in the fights themselves (Wilsher). JP Fournier states, “fight captains should be trained...but they can sometimes be in the fights. It depends on the person who is the fight captain” (Fournier). Further to this, Fournier feels that the fight captain should also have a good knowledge of how weapons should be repaired and maintained to assist with the running crew (Fournier). Daniel Levinson feels that the best trained fight person in the production should be the fight captain (Levinson). In the event of large battles, Levinson would like to see two fight captains involved. He also argues that “Fight captains should know when weaponry should be replaced, serviced. They should also know how to write choreography, to make sure guns are loaded properly. I also like to pick

fight captains that I have trained, and with the highest amount of training in the production” (Levinson).

Theatre companies consult with fight directors in the selection of fight captains to ensure that the responsibility of the position is met seriously. Fight captains are essential to the integrity of the fights as conceived by the fight director and have a large responsibility to ensure that nothing changes in the staging and execution of the fights throughout the duration of the production. By making fight calls mandatory within the CTA, Equity has made the fight captain’s duty of running the fights prior to each performance easier. During long runs, as is the case with companies such as the Stratford Festival and Bard on the Beach, it becomes tiresome assembling actors nightly to attend the fight calls. Having the fight call mandatory under the CTA provides a higher degree of success in running the fights and minimizing risk.

“Fight Directors Land Safely in the CTA” declared the summer 2003 edition of *The Equity News*. It informed the membership that fight directors had finally been accepted into the CTA. It also stated that non-member fight directors would not be allowed to undercut the established minimums within the new CTA. Some key points in the article are as follows:

Theatres operating under the CTA will be required to give first consideration to existing Equity fight directors. Members of Fight Directors Canada and the Society of Canadian Fight Directors or any other affiliated fight directors society will be considered to be Equity fight directors, signed to an Equity contract and will join the association if engaged by a PACT theatre.

Non-member fight directors cannot be engaged under terms less favourable than those of the CTA and shall be offered a CTA engagement contract. In other words, a non-member fight director cannot undercut an Equity fight director by agreeing to work for less...The minimum threshold at which a fight director must be engaged occurs when two or more artists are required to participate in a stage fight involving weapons of any sort,

including furniture or other props, or when martial arts or unarmed combat takes place.

Fight directors may be engaged for more than one production under a single contract and on a non-continuous basis. This provides the theatre with the flexibility to engage a single fight director to work on various productions for one or more hours, days, weeks or any combination of time periods, which do not need to be consecutive nor do they require a minimum number of contract hours (“Fight Directors Land Safely in the CTA”).

The inclusion of the fight director in the CTA took over twelve years of consultation to be achieved. Some issues with the implementation of the policy still need to be addressed. The first is that the wording of the policy setting the criteria for a fight director is left open to interpretation. Steve Wilsher argues that there now needs to be a standing committee of fight directors from across Canada to create a level playing field for fight directors to discuss the ongoing issues of minimum fees and rehearsal periods for staging fights in the theatre (Wilsher).

This inclusion of fight directors in the CTA was an important step in legitimizing the profession. The ongoing attempts by theatre producers to have actors, directors or dance choreographers create fights without proper compensation was finally changing. Now individuals who staged fights were properly paid. Theatre companies retained their right to hire whomever they wished, but the age of creating fights for favours was at an end.

It took a lot of hard work to recognize fight directors officially in the CTA, but only fight directors in Eastern Canada had been consulted through the entire process (Fournier). Fight directors west of Toronto felt excluded from the negotiations. There was also tension between the FDC and the SCFD as each organization worried that Equity might choose to listen to one group over another. Equity chose to include both organizations during consultations and both groups did come together on issues about safety and the importance of

assigning fight captains for productions with more involved staged violence. In addition there were some fight directors who were not happy with the minimum rates and argued that now theatre companies would refuse to pay more than what was outlined in the CTA. However, professional theatre artists are able to negotiate fees above the minimums as set out in the CTA. Theatre companies are also able to determine what constitutes a fight and how long they can engage a fight director for. If the staged violence is minimal, they have the option to employ the services of a fight director on an hourly or daily basis. If there is more involved violence, companies can decide to hire a fight director on a weekly or production contract. There is flexibility for producers and fight directors to negotiate the details of their contracts. Above all, the fight director is finally a recognized artist in the CTA and is entitled to all the rights and privileges that membership in Equity offers.

5 The Need for $\frac{3}{4}$ Speed: Establishing a Fight Syllabus in Canada

Establishing syllabi for the instruction of stage combat requires attention to the current demands for actor training. In the eighteenth century the Angelo family was responsible for the unofficial training of actors on the London stage. During those times fencing was more common as a sport and gentlemanly practice. The popular plays from that period often included duels or fights with swords. Actors may have been familiar with the practice of fencing and likely sought private instruction to keep their skills current. This method carried over into the nineteenth century when actors privately trained with French fencing masters such as Master Senac in New York or the Bertrands in England. Another method was passing on combinations of sword moves from actor to actor. In this way they would become familiar with moves such as the 'Long Elevens', 'Round Eights', and 'Drunken Combat'. Both these systems were brought to the Stratford Festival in 1953 and 1962 with the arrival of Douglas Campbell and Patrick Crean respectively.

The World Wars and military conflicts throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first established the destructive power and supremacy of the firearm. Just as the sword was identifiable as a weapon of honor and justice in the past, the firearm has become an iconic image of death, violence, power and justice for modern audiences. Fight directors have increasingly had to deal with the use and presentation of firearms in addition to several types of weapons and fighting styles from different cultures and periods over the past few decades. Actors are increasingly required to perform more complex and potentially dangerous fights on stage with various types of weapons and firearms. Fight directors and instructors must have a breadth of knowledge to accommodate stage directors' increasing level of expectation when staging fights.

Robert Seale and J.P. Fournier were responsible for establishing a syllabus within Fight Directors Canada in 1993. They looked to the training requirements of the Society of British Fight Directors and the Society of American

Fight Directors as models for a Canadian syllabus. The Society of Australian Fight Directors also looked to the British and American societies when drafting their course syllabus. The result is that actors who are trained in North America, England, Australia and New Zealand are taught similar terminology and methodology in stage combat.

This allows actors the ability to communicate effectively when working on productions that have fight scenes in any of these countries. The common understanding of fight language has saved me many hours of rehearsal time when working with actors from outside Vancouver. When I was working as the Kendo choreographer on the film *Snow Falling on Cedars*, I was responsible for training Rick Yune before principal photography began, as well as choreographing the fight scenes in the film. The issue was finding an instructor in New York that I could trust to teach Yune the basics before he travelled to Vancouver. I had been a member of the British Kendo team when I lived in England and was able to find a former competitor from the American Kendo team to begin Yune's instruction. When Rick Yune arrived he had a basic working knowledge of the moves that I eventually used with him in the film. Without the month of basic training he received in New York, he would not have been ready for filming when he was required. In a similar fashion I was fight director for the mini-series *Voyage of the Unicorn* with Beau Bridges. I had to create the fights with his stunt double in Vancouver and communicate with the fight director in Los Angeles, telling him what would be required of Bridges in the fights. Again, the common language that actor-combatants and fight directors share made it much easier for me to communicate to another professional. My expectations were met when Beau Bridges arrived with a basic understanding of the fights that would be required of him for shooting. His training that I set up in Los Angeles made it possible for me to meet deadlines for principal photography and it was the common language that I had with my American counterpart that made it happen. What was unique in this instance was that Mr. Bridges was required to fight trolls who were brandishing axes, scythes, and fantasy weapons while he himself fought with only a naval saber.

The modern fight director has to have knowledge of more than just sport fencing to be an effective professional. The explosion of martial arts into mainstream culture and the epic blockbuster action portrayed in film have also played significant roles in what modern audiences have come to expect in theatre.

With the evolution of violence on stage, the possibility of accidents also becomes more of an issue. The injuries sustained in the Broadway musical *Spider Man: Turn Off The Dark* in 2012 included a shattered leg, broken wrists, and a thirty-foot fall from a faulty wire (Mandell). In 2010, an actor at Hartford Stage was gored in a matinee performance of *Antony and Cleopatra* (Rizzo), and an actor was shot in the eye in the London West End production of *Passion* (Ward). In 2008, an actor in Vienna cut his own throat on stage (“Actor Cuts Throat on Vienna Stage”). Alexandra Hastings, an American fight director, believes that the demand for heightened violence on stage is a direct result of Hollywood films (Mandell). Like many other fight directors, she has seen that stage combat has grown from Elizabethan swordplay to now include “martial arts, brawls, fights with found objects, and stunts” (Mandell). Fight directors need to establish and follow a solid training in basic stage combat techniques to minimize the risk.

The common theme that all practical stage combat books emphasize is safety. This is also the main focus of every professional stage combat organization. With this in mind, J.P. Fournier and Robert Seale determined that stage combat instruction at the very least should focus on four main elements: Combat Techniques, Stage Craft, Safety Techniques and Fight Concepts. Though stage fights can be complicated spectacles consisting of flashy stunts, numerous types of weapons and gunplay, the basic elements of movement and safety training remain the core of all stage combat instruction.

“Combat Techniques” introduce the students to the concepts of ‘In-Distance’ and ‘Out-of-Distance’ attacks and defenses. Jonathan Howell defines Out-of-Distance attacks as those that allow a swinging arm to pass freely through the space between partners engaged in a fight scene, and In-Distance as attacks

where partners are close enough to make physical contact with each other (Howell 32). The concepts of 'On-Line' and 'Off-Line' techniques are also introduced and defined as attacks that are directed towards or away from the body. Contact techniques are attacks that actually make contact with the body and include stage slaps, punches, kicks, cuts and stabs. Special care must be taken when teaching or choreographing contact techniques due to the fact that physical contact is made between the actor combatants. In addition proper footwork is introduced and taught throughout an actor's stage combat training.

"Stage Craft" includes the theatrical concepts of stage blocking, rehearsal process, spatial awareness, stage directions and performance speed. Performance speed is crucial to minimizing risk during fight scenes. Fight scenes are usually executed at three-quarter speed. When the actors have learned a fight scene and are able to begin running it, they then gradually increase the speed of the fight to the level at which they feel comfortable. When they feel they have achieved "full" speed in the fight, they may be asked to reduce the performing speed to three-quarters of full speed. This prevents the actors from not rushing through the fight, reducing the risk of injury and allowing the audience to keep up with the action on stage.

"Safety Techniques" include teaching the combatants how to handle weapons on and off the stage, how to transport and care for the weapons in productions, how to perform theatrical disarms on stage, and how to maintain weapons throughout the run of a show to minimize damage. Fight instructors are encouraged to also teach the legal requirements concerning stage weaponry and rehearsal etiquette.

Beyond the four main elements, combatants usually learn a number of other important theatrical concepts. These include Acted Aggression, Reversal of Energy, Eye Contact, Distance, Combat Anxiety, Blanking, Masking Techniques, Fight Notation, Blow Intensity, Reaction Intensity, Fight Pacing and Characterization.

It is important to teach combatants to act out the aggressive attitudes that are presented in stage fights rather than just feel them. Actors must be in control

of their physical and emotional actions when performing a fight. They have to be completely aware of the other combatant(s) in the scene as well as the audience. There is no room for method acting in a stage fight. In addition, if an actor literally “goes for it” during a fight scene, the audience may begin to fear for the actors on stage rather than the characters they are portraying. F. Braun McAsh writes:

On stage, the audience is very aware these are living actors. If you create scenes of such incredibly realistic violence that the audience begins to fear, not for the life or safety of the character, but for the safety of the actor portraying the character, you have now effectively broken down the fourth wall, and the audience’s willing suspension of disbelief. (McAsh, *Fight Choreography* 134)

Reversal of Energy is the technique of pulling back the intensity of a physical action. For example, if a combatant throws a punch, they would pull their arm back at the theoretical point of contact to create the illusion that their fist had struck its intended target and recoiled from the action.

Eye Contact is very important and should be maintained whenever it is safe to do so in a fight. Eye contact creates a connection between partners in a fight. It is an unspoken communication that allows combatants to create a sense of tension for the audience while keeping engaged in the fight scene. The Society of American Fight Directors does not teach the practice of eye contact. Their belief is that the combatant leading an attack should break eye contact with their partner and look where they will be attacking (Lane 28). While this may seem like a safe way to stage a fight, it becomes a habit that is difficult to break when shooting a fight scene for film or television. Often fights are shot with several close-ups of the actors, and extraneous eye movement ends up ruining the shots. I have worked on several sets where American trained combatants have difficulty shooting fight scenes because of the way they have been trained to look to the target instead of at their partner.

Dale Anthony Girard explains Distance (Fencing Measure) excellently in his book *Actors on Guard*:

Fencing measure, or “correct distance,” is the distance between two fencers that requires extending the sword arm and lunging in order to touch one’s partner. In stage combat, we never get close enough to “touch” our partner, except when specifically called for in choreography. There is always a distance of at least six to ten inches from the chest of one combatant to the furthest extension of the sword from the other. (Girard 67)

It is extremely important to teach actors proper fighting distance when staging a fight. If they maintain a proper distance in stage fights, the risk of injury is greatly reduced.

Combat Anxiety in stage combat is the natural fear that performers get from time to time. Combatants are taught how to learn and memorize a fight and how to recover from a missed phrase or move so that they don’t panic. The most dangerous combatant is one who is afraid of their weapons, combat, or their partner. Controlling breathing, developing trust with their partners, and getting to know the weapons they are using are fundamental to reducing combat anxiety.

Blanking is when the combatant forgets or drops a move during a fight scene. This is usually the result of combat anxiety, lack of focus or lack of proper rehearsal time. Combatants are taught how to reduce the risk of injury if they or a partner forget a move in the fight. The usual method of recovering when an actor blanks during a fight is to skip to the next phrase rather than trying to repeat the forgotten phrase or move.

Masking Techniques are important for hiding crucial wounds, kills or strikes to a partner during a fight scene on stage. Combatants are taught several examples of masking moves for different types of stages. There is a big difference between staging a punch on a proscenium stage and staging one in

the round. Combatants are trained, much like magicians, on how to create the illusion so that the audience believes what they think they are seeing.

Fight Notation is another critical element of stage combat and I will explore in greater detail in chapter seven. It is important to note here, however, that combatants are taught different methods of fight notation so they may be able to record and share fights with other combatants and for archival purposes.

Blow Intensity and Reaction Intensity denote the action-reaction that is enacted in aggressive attacks. There is a difference between the blow intensity of a stage slap and a full out punch to the face, and the reaction intensity must match the blow intensity with which the strike was delivered. Sometimes it is possible to exaggerate the reaction or blow intensity for comedic effect. It is important to suit the action to the action.

Fight Pacing is setting the speed of the fight. As a rule-of-thumb the performance speed of a stage fight is three-quarters the real-time fight. This is done to keep the performers from losing control of their actions and to allow the audience to keep up with the dramatic action of the fight scene.

Characterization must be maintained during fight scenes. Combatants are taught how to create feasible backgrounds for their fighting characters. Some of the questions the combatants must answer include why the playwright wrote the fight scene, who the characters are, and what their social backgrounds, education, and fight training would be. Are they characters who would know how to legitimately fight? Is the tone of the fight comedic? Does it begin seriously and end in comedy? What is the cause of the fight? What are the social backgrounds of the fighters? Are the characters drunk during the fight? Are they resolved to fight or are they afraid? What type of weapons would the characters be using and would they know how to use them properly?

The FDC teaches sword techniques that are designed to apply to a variety of historical weapons. The single sword technique comprises theory and practice involving three different types of swords: Saber, Rapier and Smallsword. By combining the three styles into a 'Single Sword' technique, the FDC has created a style that encompasses the cutting style of the saber and the point work of the

small sword within the nuances of the cut-and-thrust of the rapier. It is not a historical or traditional style of swordplay, but can best be described as a hybrid of the three styles. This provides combatants with a broad overview of a multitude of techniques that would be difficult to learn individually. It also provides Fight Directors and combatants with the necessary tools to adapt the moves to various theatrical weapons rather than having to focus on separate techniques limited to specific styles of swords.

The quarterstaff technique comprises the elements of traditional English quarterstaff mixed with Asian Martial Arts staff technique (including Japanese, Chinese and Korean styles). Though similar to Japanese Bo training, each FDC instructor is permitted to teach this weapon with variations based on his/her martial arts expertise and experience.

Broadsword techniques are introduced once the basic techniques have been mastered. The FDC uses the term *broadsword* generically to represent more than one type of weapon. The broadsword typically has a wide, straight blade. Dale Anthony Girard defines the term as comprising “almost all the swords of the Medieval period. Most often applied to the *Arming Sword* of the Middle Ages” (Girard 480). Nick Evangelista defines the broadsword quite a bit differently:

A sword with a straight, wide, single-edged blade, often employing a basket-type-hilt. An average blade length would be 36 inches. The broadsword was the favourite military sword of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (although it was also used in the sixteenth century). It was also the weapon commonly used by the lower classes. (Evangelista 79)

Gerald Weland acknowledges the confusion often associated with the term *Broadsword*:

True broadswords bear no relationship to the type of weapon that most of us imagine Macbeth wielded in defense of the realm he had usurped. The broadsword had a straight, wide single-edged blade, and, by the seventeenth century, it was widely accepted as the standard military sword, becoming the weapon of the common soldier in place of the rapier. (Weland 32)

The FDC is not referring to the literal broadsword as defined by Weland and Evangelista, but to the weapon commonly associated with knightly medieval swords that was made essentially for cutting and equipped with simple hilts for use in either hand. This type of weapon was used from approximately 900 AD until the seventeenth century, and went through a number of changes in blade length and size. However, the basic shape and function was essentially the same until the proliferation of gunpowder eventually made the weapon obsolete and it was replaced with the smaller and faster rapier.

Bearing this in mind, the techniques classified as broadsword in the FDC syllabus apply to a vast time period. These techniques were developed in conjunction with the double-edged cruciform swords that may range in length, but function in similar ways.

The guards for medieval arming swords (referred to as broadswords in the FDC, SAFD and SBFD) use the same terminology as the French foil and smallsword within the FDC. The actions of the cuts and thrusts may be similar in nature, but the historical terminology of the arming sword is not used. Currently, students are not taught the terms *Posta di donna soprana* (upper woman's guard), *Tutta porta di ferro* (whole gate of iron), *Posta di donna* (woman's guard), *Dente di zenghiale* (Boar's Tooth), or *Posta bicorni* (two-horned guard) as taught by Fiore dei liberi (Price 160). By keeping the terminology consistent for all bladed weapons, the fight organizations believe that the simplified number system allows for easier memorization. These guards are taught as *Prime* (one), *Seconde* (two), *Terza* (three), *Quadra* (four), and attacks to the target areas *Prime* (lower left hip), *Seconde* (lower right hip), *Tierce* (upper right shoulder),

Quarte (upper left shoulder), *Quinte* (head) and so on. These numbers come from French foil, saber and Italian smallsword techniques.

Since martial arts have become more commonplace in film and television, martial arts are also appearing more frequently on stage. I have had to choreograph martial arts scenes with and without Asian swords for stage productions such as *Company*, *Rashomon*, and various Shakespeare plays including *Julius Caesar*, *Othello* and *Macbeth*. I am fortunate that I have a background in karate and kendo. The FDC has established a martial arts component for actor combatants to learn because it is likely actors will encounter some form of martial arts on stage during their career. The martial arts component of FDC training includes Eastern weapons training for non-bladed weapons involving tonfa (side-handled baton similar to a policeman's club), jo (short wooden staff), bo (a long wooden or bamboo staff), and nunchaku (two short hardwood sticks attached by a chain or rope). Bladed weapons in this category include katana (samurai sword), boken (wooden practice sword), kamas (small scythes), and naginata (wood staff with a curved blade).

Although the katana is historically a Japanese samurai weapon, it has become a symbol of justice and honor in western culture. Bob Anderson created an entire new historiography for the katana in the original *Star Wars* films. The lightsabers used by Darth Vader, Obi-Wan Kenobi and Luke Skywalker are based on the *shinai* (bamboo practice swords representing katanas) used in kendo. Kendo is the Japanese martial art of the samurai. The fight scenes in the films used the guards and techniques of kendo. The Jedi knights are costumed in similar fashion to samurai, and the reverence to their swords embodies the philosophies of Shinto and the warrior's way. The cult fascination with the *Star Wars* trilogy has created a fictitious history of an old galactic order based on real Japanese culture and history. My own desire to learn swordplay originated with my childhood fascination with the *Star Wars* universe. This is an example of extrapolating an entrenched fighting system and creating a new reality for it to live in. The use of lightsabers as katanas in the film makes sense. The standard Jedi guard, holding the saber up high next to the right of the head, is known as

Hasso No Kamae. The positions of the hand and the movement of the feet are exactly the same as used in kendo. However, the fictional universe in which *Star Wars* is set honours the traditions and ancient sword techniques and is able to make them believable.

F. Braun McAsh was able to continue the use of the katana in television with the successful series *Highlander*. I had worked on the series when Bob Anderson was creating the fight scenes. McAsh replaced Anderson and continued to put the katana against several weapons that historically would never have been matched to it. McAsh taught the guards traditionally rather than using the common numbering system that is taught amongst the various fight societies. In this way he was able to honour the tradition of the katana while creating new fictional realities for it to live in.

The FDC continues to update and revise the training syllabus to keep up with current trends on stage and in film. There is currently no training for actor combatants with the Society of Canadian Fight Directors independently. A more recent organization, the Academy of Dramatic Combat (ADC), offers annual stage combat classes for performers in Canada. Steve Wilsher, founder of the ADC, is a former member of the FDC and a current member of the SCFD. The ADC is an academy created solely for the training of students in stage combat and does not offer any form of certification for actors wishing to become fight directors or fight masters (unlike FDC) (Wilsher). According to Wilsher, the ADC is run by a core group of current fight directors and stunt coordinators in Ontario. Wilsher compares the training at the ADC with that of Daniel Levinson's permanent school in Toronto, Rapier Wit.

June 2012 marked the Academy of Dramatic Combat's 13th annual Stage Combat Conference and Workshop at the Humber School of Creative and Performing Arts. The workshop offered ADC certification at the basic, intermediate and advanced levels. Actors had the opportunity to train in rapier, dagger, broadsword, and unarmed stage combat techniques. Wilsher, as a former member of FDC, was part of the curriculum planning and development

committee with Fournier and Seale, and it is likely that the quality and level of training of the ADC would have been consistent with those of the FDC.

Another training opportunity that exists for combatants in Canada is the International Order of the Sword and Pen (IOSP) Paddy Crean Workshop, which is held in Banff, Alberta every two years. The workshop brings world-class instructors from all over the world and pays homage to Paddy Crean's dedication and lifelong achievement in stage combat. Crean is considered by the IOSP to be the father of stage combat around the world. Due to the demands for new and exciting forms of stage combat, the Paddy Crean Workshop has offered specialty courses that are not part of typical stage combat syllabi. The courses that have been part of the Paddy Crean Workshop range from Parkour, Victorian Swordplay, Comedic Fencing, Wushu, Tomahawk, Greek Spear and Shield, to WW2 Commando Close Combat and Zulu Stick Fighting.

The ability for actors to find quality training in stage combat in Canada has never been better. International students come to workshops such as the Paddy Crean because the level of instruction is high (Fournier). Canada has fewer workshops in stage combat than the United States or England, but the quality of the workshops that are offered makes Canada a leader in the field (Fournier). The geographical expanse of the country, however, makes it difficult for Canadian fight directors to get together on a more frequent basis to continue sharing knowledge.

The following syllabus outlines the individual components required for the instruction and testing of actor-combatants at the basic, intermediate and advanced levels within the FDC. The syllabus is rigorous and demanding, and it is important to keep in mind that actor-combatants usually get to train and test for only two weeks every year at a National or Regional Workshop. The exception to this is in Toronto where Daniel Levinson, a certified FDC Fight Master, has his own permanent fight school – Rapier Wit. Rapier Wit holds workshops and classes for actor-combatants year-round.

The course content at the Basic Level is as follows:

1. Stance – Offensive, Defensive, Neutral
2. Punches
 - a. Contact and Non Contact
 - b. Jab, Straight, Hook, Roundhouse, Cross, Uppercut
3. Slaps
 - a. Forehand
 - b. Backhand
 - c. Contact
4. Elbow Strikes – Stomach, Face, Head
5. Kicks – Contact and Non Contact
 - a. Stomach
 - b. Upper Thigh
 - c. Face
 - d. Groin
6. Knee Attacks – Contact and Non Contact
 - a. Stomach
 - b. Face
7. Knaps (creating the sound of a punch or attack)
 - a. Self Knaps
 - b. Partner Knaps
 - c. Shared Knaps
 - d. Third Party Knaps
8. Blocks / Avoidances / Ducking
 - a. Forearm
 - b. Hands
 - c. Deflection
9. Falls
 - a. Forward
 - b. Backward
 - c. Sit
 - d. Side

10. Throws / Take Downs

- a. Trips
- b. Slips
- c. Hip
- d. Throw
- e. Irish Whip
- f. Leg Sweep

11. General Techniques

- a. Pulls (Ear, Nose, Hair)
- b. Shoving
- c. Strangles (Hands, Forearms)
- d. Bites
- e. Scratches (P&P, 13)

The training curriculum clearly demonstrates the amalgamation of the Saber, Rapier and Smallsword techniques:

1. Posture / Stances

- a. Lines of Engagement – High Line, Low Line, Inside Line, Outside Line
- b. Basic Guards – Covered Lines, Open Lines, Engaged Guards
- c. Stances – Wide / Narrow, Offensive, Defensive, Neutral

2. Footwork

- a. Linear / Circular
- b. Advance / Retreat
- c. Pass Back / Pass Forward
- d. Avoidances – Crosses, Thwarts, Voltes
- e. Patinando
- f. Balestra

3. Holding the Weapon

- a. Supination

b. Pronation

c. Neutral

4. Attacks

a. Cuts - With or Without foot movement

- Horizontal / Diagonal / Ascending / Descending

b. Thrusts – With or Without foot movement

- Piston Thrust, Remise

c. Slashes

5. Parries

a. 1,2,3,4,5,5a,6,7,8, back hanging guard, low 5

b. Hand Parries

c. Direct Parries

d. Semi-Circular Parries

e. Circular Parries

f. Hanging Parries

6. Blade Work

a. Point Control

b. Degage

c. Coupe

d. Pris-de-fer

- Bind, Envelopment, Croise

e. Attacks on the Blade

- Beat, Pressure, Froissement

f. Double

g. Riposte

h. Remise

i. Reprise

7. Simple Disarms

8. Simple Wounds

9. General Techniques

a. Corps a Corps

- b. Shunts
- c. Salutes (P&P, 12-13)

The third component of the Basic Certification is quarterstaff technique. The basic approaches are taught with the following syllabus with allowances for individual style and technique based on a Fight Director's personal martial arts experience and skill:

1. Posture / Stances
 - a. Lines of Engagement – High Line, Low Line, Inside Line, Outside Line
 - b. Basic Guards / Stances – Covered Lines, Open Lines, Engaged Guards, Wide/Narrow Stances
2. Footwork
 - a. Linear / Circular
 - b. Advance, Retreat, Passing
3. Distance – Short / Long Form
4. Forms / Guards
 - a. Short Form
 - Boxing Guard (Both Hands in Pronation)
 - Supination / Pronation
 - b. Long Form
 - Boxing Guard (Both Hands in Pronation)
 - Supination / Pronation
5. Attacks
 - a. Cuts
 - Horizontal, Diagonal, Rising, Falling
 - To all lines
 - With / Without Foot Movement
 - Slashing Techniques (Head, Center, Foot, Diagonal)
 - b. Thrusts

- To all lines
- With / Without Foot Movement

6. Lunges

7. Blocks / Avoidances

- a. Defending the High, Low, Inside, Outside lines
- b. Vertical, Horizontal, Diagonal, Hanging Parries
- c. Fore End, Butt End, and Center Staff Parries

8. Exchange / Retrieval

- a. Hand Exchanges
- b. Staff Exchanges
- c. Retrieval from Shoulder Roll

9. General Techniques

- a. Beats, Binds, Envelopment, Sweeps
- b. Pushes
- c. Leverage
- d. Disarms (P&P 14, 15)

Following is the syllabus for the swords classified as broadswords:

1. Posture/Stances

- a. Lines of Engagement – High Line, Low Line, Inside Line, Outside Line
- b. Basic Guards/Wards – Covered Lines, Open Lines, Engaged Guards
- c. Stances – Wide Stance, Offensive, Defensive, Neutral

2. Footwork

- a. Linear/Circular
- b. Advance/Retreat
- c. Pass Back/Pass Forward
- d. Avoidances – Crosses, Thwarts, Voltes

3. Holding the Weapon

- a. Single Handed
- b. Hand and a Half

- c. Double Handed
- d. Supination, Pronation
- e. Reverse Grip

4. Attacks

a. Cuts

- With or Without foot movement
- Horizontal, Diagonal, Ascending, Descending

b. Thrusts

- With or Without foot movement
- Piston Thrusts
- Feint Thrusts
- Pommel Attacks
- Quillon Strikes

5. Parries

a. 1,2,3,4,5,5a, backhanging guard, low 5

b. Direct Parries

c. Semi-Circular Parries

d. Circular Parries

e. Reinforced Parries

f. Hanging Parries

g. Yielding Parries

h. Beat Parries

6. Blade Work

a. Point Control

b. Degage

c. Coupe

d. Prise-de-Fer

e. Attacks on the Blade – Beat, Pressure, Froissement

7. Disarms

8. Wounds

9. General Techniques

- a. Corps a Corps
- b. Tripping
- c. Shunts
- d. Salutes (P&P, 17, 18)

The Smallsword – as a combination of modern fencing and techniques by Angelo - is taught at this level:

1. Posture/Stances

- a. Lines of Engagement – High Line, Low Line, Inside Line, Outside Line
- b. Basic Guards/Wards – Covered Lines, Open Lines, Engaged Guards
- c. Various Guards – Italian, French, English
- d. Stances – Narrow, Offensive, Defensive, Neutral

2. Footwork

- a. Linear/ Circular
- b. Advance/Retreat
- c. Pass Back/ Pass Forward
- d. Avoidances – Crosses, Thwarts, Voltes
- e. Patinando
- f. Balestra

3. Holding the Weapon

- a. Supination
- b. Pronation
- c. Neutral

4. Attacks

- a. Thrusts
 - With or Without foot movement
 - Piston Thrust, Remise
- b. Lunges

- Half (Demi), Three Quarter, Grande
- Recover Forward, Recover Backward

c. Slashes

5. Parries

- a. 1,2,3,4,5,5a,6,7,8
- b. Hand Parries
- c. Direct Parries
- d. Semi-Circular Parries
- e. Circular Parries
- f. Yield Parries
- g. Vertical/Angulated
- h. Deflected
- i. Beat Parries

6. Blade Work

- a. Point Control
- b. Degage
- c. Coupe
- d. Prise-de-Fer
- e. Attacks on the Blade
 - Beat, Pressure, Froissement
- f. Double
- g. Riposte
- h. Remise
- i. Reprise

7. Disarms

8. Wounds

9. Kills

10. General Techniques

- a. Feints
- b. Corps a Corps
- c. Salutes (P&P 18, 19)

The techniques of the Single Sword as taught at the Basic Level have been expanded through the more complex systems of Small Sword and the Rapier and Dagger at the Intermediate level. The Rapier techniques are essentially a combination of saber, foil and cut and thrust techniques. No serious attention has been paid to the Ancient Masters Cappelletti, Agrippa, Silver or Bonetti:

1. Posture/ Stances

- a. Lines of Engagement – High Line, Low Line, Inside Line, Outside Line
- b. Basic Guards/Wards – Covered Lines, Open Lines, Engaged Guards
- c. Various Guards, Postures – Italian, French, Spanish
- d. Stances – Wide, Offensive, Defensive, Neutral

2. Footwork

- a. Linear/ Circular
- b. Advance/Retreat
- c. Pass Back/ Pass Forward
- d. Avoidances – Crosses, Thwarts, Voltes
- e. Patinando
- f. Balestra

3. Holding the Weapon

- a. Supination
- b. Pronation
- c. Neutral
- d. Inverted Dagger

4. Attacks

- a. Thrusts
 - With or With out foot movement
 - Piston Thrust, Remise

-Paired Thrusts

b. Lunges

- Half (Demi), Three Quarter, Grande

-Recover Forward, Recover Backward

-Paired Lunges

c. Cuts

- With or Without Foot Movement

- Horizontal, Diagonal, Ascending, Descending

-Paired Cuts

-Slashes

5. Parries with Both Weapons

a. 1,2,3,4,5,5a,6,7,8, back hanging guard, low 5

b. Hand Parries

c. Direct Parries

d. Semi-Circular Parries

e. Circular Parries

f. Yield Parries

g. Vertical/Angulated

h. Deflected

i. Beat Parries

j. Reinforced Parries

k. Cross Parries

l. Parallel Parries

m. Opposition Parries

n. Paired

6. Blade Work

a. Point Control

b. Degage

c. Coupe

d. Prise-de-Fer

e. Attacks on the Blade

-Beat, Pressure, Froissement

- f. Double
 - g. Riposte
 - h. Remise
 - i. Reprise
- 7. Disarms
 - 8. Wounds
 - 9. Kills
 - 10. General Techniques
 - a. Feints
 - b. Corps a Corps
 - c. Shunts
 - d. Salutes (P&P 20,21)

The Basic unarmed techniques evolve into a style of Eastern Martial Art. The style of martial art is left open for the instructor to decide what it should be. The wording within the syllabus calls for a “flavor” of martial art (P&P, 21). This indicates that the martial art is not necessarily true to form, but suggests rather that the movement create the illusion of Eastern Martial practices. The following syllabus presents the complexity of the techniques the actor combatant must learn:

- 1. Stance
 - a. Probing (Long Range, Medium Range, Close Range)
 - b. Offensive, Defensive, Neutral
 - c. Front Stance, Back Stance (in regards to the style being taught)
- 2. Punches
 - a. Contact and Non-Contact
 - b. Jab, Straight, Hook, Roundhouse, Cross, Uppercut
 - c. Back Fist, Knife Hand, Palm Strikes, Spear Hand, Ridge Hand
- 3. Elbow Strikes

4. Kicks

- a. To Stomach, Upper Thigh, Face, etc.
- b. Front Snap Kick, Side Kick, Shuffling Side Kick (Step Behind Side Kick), Roundhouse, Crescent (Inside, Outside), Back Kick, Sweep, Axe Kick, Bicycle Kick, Jump Front, Turning Kicks. Basically all kicking techniques that are accomplished while one foot/leg remains on the ground.
- c. Distance, Spotting, Spot-Turning and Placement

5. Knee Attacks

6. Knaps (4 Categories)

- a. Self Knaps
 - b. Partner Knaps
 - c. Shared Knaps
 - d. Third Party Knaps
- (Be sure to include the use of vocal reactions)

7. Blocks

Forearm, Wing, Hands, Shin, Knife Hand, High Blocks, Low Blocks, Inside Blocks, Outside Blocks, Block/Replace, Redirection

8. Break Falls

Forward Roll, Backward Roll, Sit Falls, Side Falls, Forward Break Fall

9. Throws/Take Downs/Holds

- a. Joint Locks
- b. Submission Holds and Chokes
- c. Half Hip Throws, Major Hip Throw, Shoulder Throw, Stomach Throw, Valley Drop, Sweeps, etc.
- d. Ground Fighting
- e. Fireman's Carry

10. General Techniques

- a. Close Quarter Combat
- b. Inside/Outside Entries

- c. Trapping Hands, Sticky Hands, Grabbing Hands
 - d. Combinations
 - e. Strength and Flexibility Exercises
 - f. Salutes/Traditional Signs of Respect
11. Angles of Execution for TV/Film (P&P 21, 22)

Essentially, the Advanced Levels of training expand upon the Basic and Intermediate. In the Broadsword category, a shield is added as a companion to the sword. The Martial Arts component includes Eastern weapon training including tonfa, jo, bo, nunchaku for non-bladed weapons. Bladed weapons in this category include katana, boken, kamas, and naginata.

While the FDC offers intensive certification courses in stage combat at the basic, intermediate and advanced levels, it is up to the students to carry on their own training in order to prepare for certification at the fight instructor or fight director levels. Students are recommended to work closely with professional fight directors and are encouraged to train in martial arts if they have not had previous training. They are also expected to take a certification course in first aid and get their firearms acquisition license that serves as proof they have taken appropriate gun safety courses and qualifies them to handle weapons on stage and film sets.

Groups such as the International Order of the Pen and Sword (IOSP) offer specialized master classes that expand upon basic levels of stage combat proficiency within stage combat. The annual Combat Con in Las Vegas is a conference dedicated to western martial arts, film and theatrical fighting. It allows enthusiasts and instructors in western martial arts and stage combat the opportunity to share their knowledge with each other through workshops, panels, demonstrations and competitions. It also offers workshops for subcultures of historical fighting systems that have become popular within the past few years. The 2012 Combat Con in July held demonstrations and panels on fighting for Steam Punk, Pirates, Cos-Play, Cyber-Punk, and Fantasia. Instructors and attendees came from across the United States, Canada, Europe and Australia to participate in the second annual Combat Con.

Given the significant skill sets that fight directors are required to possess, they can be of great assistance to film and theatrical productions by offering advice on weaponry and period styles of fighting to help realize the director's vision. *Hamlet*, for example, is a play that requires many different aspects of the expertise that fight directors can offer, as we will see in the following chapter.

6 To Fight Or Not To Fight: Contextualizing *Hamlet's* Duel From a Canadian Fight Director's Perspective

Hamlet is perhaps the play that best showcases the fight director as artist. The play of swords between Hamlet and Laertes in Act V, Scene ii is complex and requires more attention than simply creating a fight in which both characters die as a result of their wounds. Typically, fights in Shakespeare's plays are described merely by the stage direction, "they fight." This is not the case in *Hamlet*. Shakespeare has written specific instructions into the text including the type of weapons for the fight, the number of phrases contained in the play of swords, and the instruction that weapons are exchanged between the two characters. The text cannot speak for itself, but it does provide suggestions for the creation of the fight that ultimately costs Hamlet and Laertes their lives.

Hamlet provides an opportunity for fight directors to stage the duel with specific moments that must be justified to make logical sense within the context of the fight. The characters exchange weapons, Hamlet scores two points, and Laertes wounds Hamlet before Hamlet kills Laertes. Though it may appear somewhat restrictive, this scene provides numerous opportunities for fight directors to demonstrate their ability.

This chapter explores the various ways some of Canada's top Fight Directors have approached the challenges that the *Hamlet* fight presents, and how vital their role is when staging complex fight scenes such as the swordplay within *Hamlet*.

Shakespeare wrote for his contemporary audience. In England at the turn of the seventeenth century, the rapier and dagger were the gentleman's weapons of choice. Craig Turner and Tony Soper argue that the rapier was introduced from the continent and was widely accepted in England by 1600 "Shakespeare, Marlowe, Tourner, Middleton, and others were sensitive to the latest trends and styles" (Turner and Soper xiv), so rapier combat was included in their works. Evengelista writes:

The rapier first appeared in England around 1560, although it was used much earlier on the Continent by the Italians and the Spanish. At first, there was much contention between swordsmen who favored old-style cutting swords and those who preferred the rapier as to which weapon was the best. But soon it became apparent to all concerned that the thrust of the rapier was much superior to the cut of the sword in its stopping power. (Evangelista 491)

Mike Loades explains the rise of popularity of the rapier in England and the Continent towards the end of the sixteenth century:

The last two decades of the fifteenth century were a time of great social mobility and an outward show of status became even more important. It is then that we start to see men wearing swords with civilian dress. Established nobility adopted the fashion to assert their old authority; the new bourgeois gentlemen class did it to establish equal claim to that authority. Both did it to proclaim that they were 'men of honour' and therefore prepared to defend that honour in a duel. Moreover, population growth in the towns and cities led to an increase in violent crime and gentlemen also felt the need to carry a sword for self-defence. (Loades 247-48)

The earliest fencing manual in English that has survived was Giacomo Di Grassi's *True Arte of Defence* which was published towards the end of the sixteenth century (Turner and Soper 22). Turner and Soper argue that the rapier and dagger were the most popular combination of weapons during Shakespeare's time and that "Elizabethans thought that striking and defending simultaneously was possible only with rapier and dagger (41).

It is no wonder that Shakespeare, writing what he knew, would include the popular style of contemporary swordplay in the play. In the First Quarto (1603) the Gentleman who addresses Hamlet (in later editions Osric) states:

Gent. Mary sir, that yong Laertes in twelue venies
At Rapier and Dagger do not get three oddes of you,
And on your side the King hath laide,
And desires you to be in readinesse.

(Bertram, lines 2108-11, 252)

The Second Quarto (1604/5) and the First Folio have identical passages describing Laertes' weapon of choice:

Ham. What's his weapon?

Osr. Rapier and Dagger.

Ham. That's two of his weapons; but well.

(3613-15, 250-251)

By the late sixteenth century, there were several schools of fencing taught in London including Italian, Spanish and French methods of rapier and dagger fighting. Theatres in London were also rented to the London Masters of Defence who would publicly test students of fencing who wanted to advance (Martinez 21). A number of the members of Shakespeare's company were Masters of Defence including Richard Tarlington and Richard Burbage (21). The rapier and dagger were associated with the upper class gentlemen who were "enamored with not only the sense of refinement inherent in rapier play, but also with the attendant code of ethics taught by the foreign Masters of Defence who introduced these exotic weapons to the English court" (24).

The rapier was a cutting and thrusting sword of the mid-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the thrust was the most deadly and quick attack with the weapon. The dagger, a defensive weapon, was the companion weapon to the

rapier. The footwork for rapier and dagger play was important to achieve mastery of the weapons. Several of the ancient manuals stress the importance of solid footwork. Because of the complexity involved in a combatant's using two weapons, several combinations could be devised, allowing for many types of feints, ripostes, and counter attacks:

Swordfighting with the rapier and dagger began to simulate the sophistication of a dangerous chess match. A man's strategy and cool deliberation in the heat of combat were as significant as physical skill. It is little wonder that this combination of weaponry, that required such erudition in its use and embodied such poetry in its "philosophy," became so popular among the more educated and wealthy in England. Although Shakespeare abhorred abusive violence and ridiculed the hypocritical rapier enthusiasts of his age, there is little doubt that he admired the elegance that Richard Burbage must have displayed in Hamlet's final duel.
(25)

It would be easy enough to cut the lines that mention the weapons from the text. However, Shakespeare sets up the shape of the contest between Laertes and Hamlet:

Osr. The King, sir, hath laid, sir, that in a dozen passes between yourself and him he shall not exceed you three hits; he hath laid on twelve for nine. And it would come to immediate trial if your lordship would vouchsafe the answer.

(V.ii, 162-65)

The odds are set by the king to give advantage to Hamlet, the lesser fencer. The suggestion is that Hamlet only has to win four hits. Laertes must win nine out of the twelve to win the match. Another theory is that the match will continue until

one fencer has made a dozen hits, and must have a certain lead (Jackson 292). James L. Jackson believes that the most logical explanation of the odds is that by the time Laertes has scored twelve hits, Hamlet will have scored nine or more (292). Laertes is set up as being a much better fencer, yet Hamlet expects to win at the odds:

Hor. You will lose, my lord.

Ham. I do not think so. Since he went into France, I have
been in continual practice. I shall win at the odds.

(V.ii, 205-207)

This is important information for the audience and the fight director. Hamlet is more than an educated university student. He has been training in swordplay since Laertes has been in France. This lends credibility to Hamlet as a swordsman.

The way the weapons are introduced into the scene is important to note:

Ham. I embrace it freely,
And will this brothers' wager frankly play. –
Give us the foils.

Laer. Come, one for me.

Ham. I'll be your foil, Laertes. In mine ignorance
Your skill shall like a star i'th' darkest night
Stick fiery off indeed.

Laer. You mock me, sir.

Ham. No, by this hand.

King. Give them the foils, young Osric. Cousin Hamlet,
You know the wager?

Ham. Very well, my lord.
Your Grace has laid the odds o'th' weaker side.

King. I do not fear it. I have seen you both,

But since he is better'd, we have therefore odds.

Laer. This is too heavy. Let me see another.

Ham. This likes me well. These foils have all a length?

Osr. Aye, my good lord.

They prepare to play. (V.ii, 249-263)

The modern definition of *foil* is a practice blade for modern fencing. The modern foil blade is quadrangular, approximately 36 inches in length and weighs 17 5/8 ounces (Evangelista 255). The term *foil* derived from the French word *refouler*, “to turn back,” and refers to any weapon designed for the purpose of practice. As far as Hamlet knows, the weapons that are being offered are practice weapons – designed to look and function just like their real counterparts, but with dull, rebated blades. Rapier foils could easily be sharpened for practical use, but would be hard to tell apart from a rapier with a sharpened blade. They are not to be confused with modern fencing foils – though this does lend itself to modern stagings of *Hamlet*. BH Barry staged a production of *Hamlet* with Christopher Walken as Hamlet and Christopher Sarandon as Laertes at the American Shakespeare Theatre in 1982. Barry took the issue of the sharpened sword very seriously as he wanted the audience to be made aware that Hamlet’s sword was ineffective against Laertes’ in a real fight situation. Barry tried to create the “baited” sword by tying a small leather padded bag to the end of the blade which was a “disaster, it looked stupid and made the blade heavy, and eventually it flew off into some remote corner of the building never to be seen or used again” (Barry 43). Laertes exchanges his first choice of weapon for another. This could be where he exchanges a regular foil for a real blade.

The play of swords between Laertes and Hamlet also demands close attention:

Ham. Come on, sir.

Laer. Come, my lord.

Hamlet and Laertes play (V.ii, 277-278)

This phrase demonstrates that the bout is long enough to make Hamlet work up a sweat. The hit that Hamlet scores on Laertes is too clear to be contested. Laertes cannot deny that he has been touched again.

Ham. Good madam.

King. Gertrude, do not drink.

Queen. I will, my lord, I pray you pardon me.

She drinks [and offers the cup to Hamlet].

King. [*aside*] It is the poison'd cup. It is too late.

Ham. I dare not drink yet, madam – by and by.

Queen. Come, let me wipe thy face.

Laer. My lord, I'll hit him now.

King. I do not think't

Laer. [*aside*] And yet it is almost against my conscience.

Ham. Come for the third, Laertes. You do but dally.

I pray you pass with your best violence.

I am afeard you make a wanton of me.

Laer. Say you so? Come on.

They play.

Osr. Nothing, neither way.

Laer. Have at you now.

*[Laertes wounds Hamlet; then,] in
scuffling they change rapiers.*

King. Part them; they are incensed.

Ham. Nay, come again.

[He wounds Laertes.] The Queen falls.

Osr. Look to the Queen there, ho!

Hor. They bleed on both sides. How is it my lord?

Osr. How is it Laertes?

Laer. Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osrice.

I am justly kill'd with mine own treachery.

(293-309)

Hamlet and Laertes must wound each other with the poisoned foil if the dramatic action is to continue. Obviously, cutting the action in this scene is not an option. The challenge is that there are always several things that must be accomplished within the dramatic text:

- Hamlet must get the first point (line 279); Laertes contests it and asks for an official judgement to be made (line 280). It is concluded that Hamlet made the first hit legally (line 282);
- Hamlet strikes Laertes a second time to which Laertes acquiesces (line 288);
- Laertes wounds Hamlet with the poisoned blade (line 306);
- There is some sort of scuffle during which the weapons are switched (line 306);
- Laertes is wounded secondly, yet dies first (line 336);
- Hamlet is able to kill Claudius before he finally succumbs to the poison and dies (line 363).

There is a great deal of physical business to accomplish within the fight. Because the script does not offer any indication how it is to be performed, it is therefore open to careful interpretation. These major plot points must not only be revealed on stage, they must be signified to the audience in order for the play to maintain its clarity. Different fight directors each have their own way of interpreting the exchange of weapons and the exact nature of the scuffling that ensues.

Jackson's theory is that the 'exchange of rapiers' is performed according to a technique used and taught by George Silver. In the First Quarto the stage direction reads, "*They catch one another's Rapiers, and both are wounded*" (Bertram, line 3777). George Silver, an outspoken English Master who strongly

opposed the Italian methods of swordplay, gives instruction, in his *Brief Instructions Upon my Paradoxes of Defence* in 1599, to the left hand grip:

If you are both crossed in close fight upon the bastard guardant warde alowe [sic], you may put your left hand on the outside of his sword at the back of his hand, neere or at the hilde of his sword arme and take him on the inside of that arme with your hand, above the elbow is best, and draw him towarde you strongly, wrestinge his knuckles downward and his elbowe upward so may you endanger to breake his arme, or caste him downe, or to wreste his sword out of his hand, and go free yourself.

(Wagner, 283)

Jackson states that the exchange of rapiers would have been staged in this manner:

What follows is the “exchange of rapiers.” The Q1 stage direction reads “They catch one anothers Rapiers...,” and the Folio’s “In scuffling, they change Rapiers.” These two stage directions...indicate the following action; the Hamlet-actor is to force the gryp[sic] on Laertes in order to stop him and obtain the sharp, and Laertes is to employ a counter-gryp and thus an exchange. The moment when each fencer has taken the gryp of the other’s rapier hilt is well described by the stage direction “they catch one another’s rapiers.” Hamlet’s correct fencing action when he is endangered by the sharp is to press forward with short steps, sweeping Laertes’s point up and to his left with his left arm and stepping inside the length of Laertes’s rapier, dropping his dagger if he has one. He takes the gryp of Laertes’s hilt with his left hand to immobilize that dangerous weapon and wrest it out of Laertes’s hand. (Jackson 293)

Laertes would not want to let go of the sharp sword so easily, so the only options for him are to let go of the sword and run, or employ a counter-gryp on Hamlet’s

sword. This technique works well for the rapier, which allows for the index finger, and even the middle finger to wrap over the quillon in the hilt. By Hamlet's securing the hilt of the sword in this way, Laertes' only realistic method of successfully disarming his opponent with a rapier would be with the left-hand grip.

Presumably, the fight sequence as performed during Shakespeare's time would have undergone a degree of scrutiny from the audience. With the playhouses being Sunday venues for prizefighting, Elizabethan audiences would have been familiar with the look of rapier and dagger fighting. The London Masters of Defence taught proficiency in the staff, long sword, short sword, rapier, target, buckler, dagger, poniard and bastard sword. Many of these weapons appear in Shakespeare's plays. The audiences would have had some knowledge of fighting techniques and expected the fights in the productions to be good. They would not have been tolerant of any swordplay that was "slapdash" or "tawdry" (Mills 9).

Though no description of fencing matches appears in the Renaissance fencing manuals, JD Martinez discusses how Elizabethan fencing matches may have been structured:

These public combats or fencing matches (referred to as "playing a prize" in the Minute Book of the English Masters of Defence) were designed to openly test a student's level of skill. They were often performed on a raised platform or theatre stage. The combatants could not retreat very far from fear of falling off the stage. Although the weapons were dull or blunt, they were of the type normally used in actual combat and could inflict injuries. Judges were present to decide the outcome. How many judges is unclear, but probably more than one. Targets below the waist were considered ungentlemanly. In addition to the torso, the face, head, and wrists were prime target areas. It was common to allow the combatants time to "breathe" between bouts and refresh themselves with stimulating drink. A pre-determined number of bouts and the number of weapons to

be used was established before the event. The use of hidden armor or mystic charms was not allowed. (Martinez 141-42)

Today's modern audiences are not as educated in the technicalities of rapier fencing or even modern sport fencing. The weapons used in sport fencing today are much lighter than the rapiers used in Shakespeare's time, resulting in much faster techniques that audiences may not be able to follow. Hollywood's portrayal of period fencing also has affected the perception of how swordplay was performed in the past. As a result, modern audiences expect much noise and energetic movement from stage fencing which can be a safety problem for actors and directors if not handled properly under the care of a professional fight director (Jackson 281).

Modern fight directors have substantial access to stage-quality period weapons. The abundance of historic fight manuals and the renewed interest in Western martial arts have provided more choices for directors and fight directors working on *Hamlet*. In the past it was more difficult to procure weapons suitable to the period the play was set in. Today the possibilities are endless.

In order to make the fight in *Hamlet* successful, fight directors ask for proper rehearsal time. Because of the lack of properly trained stage-fight professional actors in Canada, fight directors spend some of their rehearsal time training actors in the basics of stage combat. If an actor is not trained in stage combat, they must learn the basics before they can be choreographed. Actors must learn the difference between "in-line" and "out-of-line" distances. They must also learn the essential elements of minimizing the risk when it comes to performing fights on stage. Mike Loades, a Fight Master in England, uses the acronym 'BLED,' which stands for the four key elements of staging a fight:

B = Balance

L = Line of Attack

E = Eye Contact

D = Distance

Balance is essential for actors to minimize risk. Solid footwork and a good centre of balance are important to maintain during a fight. Line of Attack refers to the angle and line that an attack travels from character A to B. The attacks must be executed with precision each performance and maintain their angles so as to not be too high or low. Consistency is the key. The hand and foot must land at the same time to keep true to the line. This also allows greater control over the weapon. Eye Contact is also important. Not that there should be eye contact all the time in a fight (this cannot be achieved while performing 'blind techniques' such as those that are executed from behind a person). But eye contact is essential for communication on stage between partners. When eye contact is maintained during a fight, it draws the audience's eye line to the conflict between the characters engaged in the fight (Loades *Blow By Blow*). Henry Blackwell, an English Fencing Master was an advocate of maintaining eye contact when dueling:

You must look in his face, and then you will perceive everything that he does, which is more manly than to be always fixating upon his wrists – being almost as terrible to some people, as if they felt the sword in their body. (Loades *Blow By Blow*)

Sustained eye contact is an act of aggression. In stage combat, eye contact is a form of silent communication. It is important to use peripheral vision when performing a fight. Working with a fixed point of focus develops a better sense of spatial awareness and increases the level of safety in a fight.

Distance is also a critical factor in staging a fight. Working out of distance is crucial to some forms of weapon combat. Moves can be executed by an actor while keeping out of reach of the target, thereby minimizing risk of contact. In-distance moves may be employed by stopping them off target. The audience sees the critical distance, but is unable to determine that the cuts to the target are being pulled.

Only when actors are familiar with these concepts can they be properly choreographed in a stage fight. They must also be familiar with the weapons that will be used in the production. If a play is set within a certain time period, then it should follow that the weapons used in the production should also be from that period. If the producers have invested research into the period and the weapons, then it should follow that the fights should be also reminiscent of the period. If a director wants the actors to be 'truthful' in their portrayal of the time and characterizations, then the stage fight must be afforded the same amount of care and attention as the costumes, set, music and properties. Mike Loades argues:

There is a common belief that stage fighting is somehow supposed to be a separate art in itself – a particular theatrical method of combat, having its own peculiar movement styles which need have nothing to do with reality or history. Implausible moves are justified as being entertaining effects. I think this idea is outdated – that it is possible to strive for a more authentic approach to historical stage combats, and yet still be dramatically exciting. I also believe that an actor should search for truth in a fight scene just as much as he does in any other aspect of his performance. That means truth in emotion in how his character feels and behaves in a situation of conflict. It means truth in history. If a fight is set in a given historical period then it should have the appropriate historical style. And it means truth in action. Every move should have a practical viability in reality. (Loades *Blow By Blow*)

JD Martinez and James Jackson agree that the Act Five fight in the original production of *Hamlet* likely consisted of rapier and dagger. This is supported in the text itself; when asked what Laertes weapon is, Osric replies, "Rapier and Dagger." *Hamlet* was written in approximately 1600-01, when the popularity of the rapier and dagger was immense. Martinez takes this theory one step further and suggests that the original fight was performed with rapier and dagger and rapier and poniard. At the turn of the seventeenth century, the rapier

and dagger was popular in London, and the rapier and poniard was popular on the continent (Martinez 140). The sword in this time was used predominantly as an offensive weapon. A second weapon, such as a dagger or poniard, was used in the left hand as a defensive weapon to parry attacks made with the sword. Martinez writes: “For two skilled fencers to use a rapier without a dagger, poniard, or second defensive weapon would have been an anomaly in a late sixteenth or early seventeenth century fencing match” (140).

By the time the First Folio was published in 1623, the transition rapier had become the popular weapon of choice. The transition rapier was lighter and shorter than the rapier. Its hilt was much simpler as well. Instead of several sweepings of the hilt, the transition rapier’s guard consisted of a shallow cup, guard, quillons, a knuckle guard and a pas d’âne. Since the transition rapier was lighter and faster than its predecessor, it could be used both as an offensive and defensive weapon. Productions of *Hamlet* staged at this time would be much more likely to favor the use of the single rapier. The stage directions within the First Folio of 1623 intimate this.

How do modern Canadian stage productions of the Act Five fencing match and eventual fight deal with the task of staging the fight so it can be understood and followed by the audience? Various issues come into play here. Hollywood films have been the biggest influence upon individual perceptions of swordplay. Canadian fight directors must constantly find new ways to reach the audience. At the same time, there are many different obstacles that the fight director must address in order to make the fight safe above all.

The stage set can be an attribute to the play. It can set the tone and allude to the world that the play is set in. Braun McAsh shared with me his concerns about a set designer who did not understand the action that was required in the show:

I have tackled three productions of *Hamlet*. Once in the 80’s as the lead...I did have a problem with one *Hamlet*. It had nothing to do with the actors – it had to do with the set. The set designer created a set that was raked.

The whole playing surface was raked towards the audience – just slightly. If you were standing stage right facing stage left chest on, you would notice that your upstage foot would be three-quarters of an inch higher than your downstage foot. It wasn't a significant rake until you tried to do anything from upstage to downstage and realized you were dropping six inches over twenty-five feet. You would get a lumbering motion going, for which there was no possibility of arresting because there is nothing there. The stage just dropped off into the orchestra and the audience. The real problem is that the stage was also distressed. He wanted an appearance of "beaten gold." Essentially it was like walking across a farmer's field that had ten thousand gopher holes that had only been partially filled up. There was no risk of getting your heel or your foot caught in these things, but there was no way to get solid footing. Sword moves that would normally be in line had to be adapted to work on the set. The movement had to be adapted. Another series of movements had to be thrown out. Action had to be changed to work diagonally instead of up and down. The fight had to go on quite a while. The script breaks the fight up into a minimum number of phrases. It's a long fight. To break things up we changed weapons quite often. We went from single rapier to rapier and dagger, to brace and back to single rapier. The actors, though, were superb. They were Jeff Hyslop and Brent Carver. The set though, was hellacious. (McAsh *Interview*)

JP Fournier shares a similar story of dealing with a difficult set. Fournier's challenging *Hamlet* was the 1986 production at Stratford and again starred Brent Carver as Hamlet with Scott Wentworth as Laertes. The set was designed by Sue Lepage and the production directed by John Neville:

The designer, under the direction of the director, had done this design where there was a long triangular ramp that went from way upstage to a point down at the centre of the stage. At the end of the point there was about a foot in front of it. You would either be at one side of the point or

another. It went up about three steps. It had three levels, this huge triangular thing. The fight had to happen over top of the point – back and forth. I said to the director, “Is it possible to put a ramp here so the actors can move more freely over the top of this point?” Neville said to me, “Talk to the designer.” So I went to Sue LePage and asked her. She said no. I asked why. She said it was because this was the design that John Neville wants, without any alterations. So we get to stage and I ask the director how we are going to get over this point back and forth and make it look like a fencing match. Neville replied, “Darling, the stage is yours. Take it as long as you need it. Everyone else, coffee.” Brent is one of the best physically moving actors I have ever worked with. Scott Wentworth is also very good. So we started slowly working over this from top to bottom. What we discovered is that without moving back and forth a lot over top of it, we could actually work across the point of it. One guy could end up on one step for a brief moment and the other guy would back him off. We were able to make it work. Neville refused to give in. That was one of the worst situations I have been in. But once we got it, it actually worked out very well. It actually was one of the better *Hamlets* I have worked on. (Fournier)

Sometimes the concept of the play can get in the way of the staging of the fight. Daniel Levinson recalled his involvement with a production of *Hamlet* that was set in Sarajevo. The issue with the fight was the director’s wish to use combat weapons:

The Sarajevo *Hamlet* used a bayonet and a combat dagger, one in each hand. The problem is that these are weapons to kill. Hamlet does not go into it thinking he is going to fight for his life. His mind is on something else, he’s not thinking that Laertes is going to kill him. It would be a different scene then. Textually, getting it through to the audience that the weapons Hamlet has are dull and the weapons Laertes has are sharp. We

did that by having the tray come out with the weapons. They take their weapons simultaneously. When Laertes says this is too heavy, let me have another, Osric flips down a fabric on the tray revealing another weapon so that Hamlet could not have possibly taken that weapon. The “have at you now” moment – Laertes cut Hamlet’s palm so that it would take the poison a while to get to him. Laertes was given a more serious wound so that he dies before Hamlet. By the time Hamlet kills Claudius, the poison is so diluted that I gave him a more severe wound. I don’t believe the Sarajevo play was a success. At the end Fortinbras came in after an SAS squad came in and took everyone prisoner. So how did Hamlet’s story get told? (Levinson)

More successful productions Levinson recalls with regards to the weapons in *Hamlet* involved Laertes taking a guard’s sword from his belt when Hamlet has the poisoned sword, and another where Laertes actually broke the blade and fought with the sharp metal against the poisoned tip that Hamlet was wielding. However, according to Levinson, the most difficult part about staging the fight in *Hamlet* is always dealing with the crowd’s reactions to the play of swords:

The hard part, in my opinion, is keeping the crowd engaged. The crowd has to be there all excited about these two important guys – youthful important guys - who are putting on a fencing competition, and the King is betting on it. There needs to be that aspect to it. It’s hard to get the actors to react to, “One! No! A hit, a palpable hit!” It’s often as hard as getting the fight up to speed. (Levinson)

Levinson raises an interesting point regarding Osric. The question remains to be interpreted from production to production – is Osric a conspirator? Some fight directors are convinced that Osric must be. Others leave it up to the actor to decide. Steve Wilsher suggests that the answers to questions such as this are in the text. He argues that there is more than one judge for the match. Claudius’s

line, “You the judges bear a wary eye” (V.ii.275), suggests that there are at least two judges – Osric and perhaps Horatio. Making Osric a collaborator makes Laertes’ ability to pull a poisoned blade much easier. Wilsher also states that the exchange of rapiers must be seen by the audience. It cannot be done magically (Wilsher). The duel also must be staged as a fencing match, not a fight. It degenerates into a fight. This is where most fight directors and directors make their mistakes (Wilsher). This is echoed in Martinez’s book, *The Swords of Shakespeare*:

The preparations for the match would be festive, with the court spectators vociferously supporting their favourite champion. No innocent bystander is expecting a tragedy. When all have assembled, the king begins the competition by introducing the mismatched weapons. (142)

James Binkley’s first production of *Hamlet* was in 1991 in Stratford, when he was assisting John Stead. Colm Feore played Hamlet and Paul Miller played Laertes. Binkley finds great freedom in working on *Hamlet*:

Shakespeare is the best. He writes, ‘They fight.’ This was my first year working with John. What I liked the most about working on that show is that it doesn’t really matter how long the bout is. A bout in *Hamlet* can be forty moves long, or it can be three. The sword exchange can happen because they are grappling, it can happen because one of them quits, it can be a joke. I’ve often done it angry. They get into a scrum, Hamlet picks up the two swords and throws the wrong one back. I’ve also done it funny. Where Hamlet has gone, ‘I’ve had enough,’ and Laertes comes up from behind and disarms him. Then I’ve had Hamlet do it back to him. I’ve had a Laertes ask me when this happened, “Why don’t I run away?” I said that with all the people around you, you can’t look guilty. You have to pick up his sword to defend yourself from being hit by him. It’s up to us as fight directors to sell our ideas to the actors and directors. What I love about the

Hamlet fight is the number of choices there are in the fight. There's no right or wrong way to do it. My first question is how much does Claudius want to kill Hamlet? The regret of Claudius is more interesting. You can play Laertes as a stone cold killer, but that is boring. The challenge comes down to keeping people safe in small stages. At Upper Canada College I did a *Hamlet* in such a small space. I had to put the actors in the front rows to make sure the swords were not going to be in the audience's way. (Binkley)

John Stead, fight director at Stratford for twenty-five years, has staged *Hamlet* over a dozen times on many different stages:

That fight is always different. I think the text gives us all the information. Shakespeare refers to foils. I have done it with foils, but rarely. I want to cut. You could say that foil means something different. There is a lot of different ways to interpret foil. But to a contemporary audience foil means foil. I want to do the fight with rapier and dagger. One of the first challenges is getting your head around the language and what he describes and making sense of it. There is also the interpretation of how to do the hits. This is the fun of it – reinventing the story and doing it different ways. How Laertes reacts to the different things. He comes out of the gate hot and fast expecting to win quickly, and he doesn't. It's always different. I love that fight. (Stead)

The physical ability of the actor is important to casting the roles in *Hamlet*. Often the roles are cast without consideration of the fights in the final scene. John Nelles feels that consulting the fight director in casting is a good idea. Having actors who have the physical ability to move essentially improves the overall quality of the production. Having actors who can fight in a play such as *Hamlet* allows the fight choreography to be staged efficiently. Nelles states:

It would be great if the fight director had some input with casting. The actor who plays Hamlet has to be on stage for three to four hours acting before the fight. He has so much to do before he gets to the climax of the play. It's not something taken lightly by the playwright. If you have two actors who are good for the part and one guy has 'advanced actor combatant' on his resume, and the other guy doesn't, what does it make sense to do? You're going to save time, and you've then got somebody who understands the language of fighting and now the fight director can do something more fancy and raise the production value of the show. Part of our job is to make the actor, whether the actor has fought or not, look good. Paddy Crean said our job as fight directors is twofold: to make the actors look good, and make them safe. (Nelles)

In 2005, I was hired to choreograph the fights for the Bard on the Beach production of *Hamlet*, directed by Dean Paul Gibson and starring Bob Frazer as Hamlet with Michael Scholar, Jr. as Laertes. This production was set in a three-quarter thrust in modern day. In the fall of 2004, I was asked to attend the callbacks for Laertes. I was excited that the director had taken such care in selecting his Laertes. We saw six actors called in for the part. My duty during the callback was to take the actor and determine his skill level with the fencing saber. It had been previously discussed and agreed that the production would use modern fencing equipment with retro twists. Most of the actors had stage fight training listed on their resumes, yet most had difficulty with the basic fencing moves I was giving them. Michael Scholar, Jr. was the only actor who did not list any fight training, but he was a physical actor. He very quickly picked up the techniques I was demonstrating. His ability was impressive and he won the role. Ironically, Bob Frazer who was playing Hamlet also had little stage fight experience. Not only was I choreographing two inexperienced fighters in two demanding fighter roles, I was teaching them the concepts of sport fencing with the saber and it was my job to make them look as if they had spent years in a *salle*. To add to this, the director wanted the fight to flow from real-time to slow

motion in time with a soundscape with which we rehearsed. Fortunately, the actors were quick to learn and were able to successfully achieve both the director's and my vision for the fight.

In addition to the responsibility of playing a role in casting, I worked closely with the costume designer to make sure the clothing would support the lunges and movement I was devising for the fight. I was asked to assist in the purchasing and fitting of proper fencing clothes for the actors. Having years of experience as a swordsman, I was able to source and assist with the purchase and fit of the proper equipment for the production. I found weapons that were functional and would withstand the rigors of stage fighting, while being unique in design to exist in the world of the play. The set designer was also aware of the needs I would have for staging and I was happy to be given a set that supported the essential action in the Act Five fight scene. I was given everything that I needed to create a safe, dynamic fight that fulfilled Paddy Crean's mandate – the actors were safe; and the actors looked good.

It is important that fight directors be involved from the beginning of the production process – or at least as early as possible in order to be available for consultation even prior to the actual fight rehearsal process. There are so many ways that a fight director should be involved in order to reduce the risks of injury and to ensure that the overall vision of the production is not compromised by last-minute crises. In my consultations with several of Canada's top fight directors, I have heard repeated many of the same potential risks and ways in which fight directors assist in theatrical productions.

It all begins with the script, not the fight scene itself. To understand the *Hamlet* fight in Act five, the Fight Director must first understand the whole story. Then the fight director must pay attention to the fight itself. The way that the actors have interpreted their roles affects the way the fencing match begins. Whether the actor playing Laertes chooses to be insolent, angry, or suppress his rage in the scene will change the approach to the way the match begins. A good fight director will listen to the actors who must fight, and should always honor their interpretation of the character when staging the violence. That way the

actors will invest themselves as the characters in the scene rather than dropping the character during the 'physical business.' There are many other things that fight directors must pay attention to when staging fights. The fight itself must be thought through. Was the scene written as a sudden attack, the eruption of a long-smoldering hatred, the result of a pressure to restore honor? In the case of *Hamlet*, the premise is a match of two gentlemen of the court in a friendly demonstration of swordplay with the undercurrent of the planned treachery by Laertes. The social conditions of the characters are also important to address. A person who is of noble birth and education is more likely to have been formally trained in the fighting arts as they would have been part of his education. A person of lower class might have a much more primal style of fighting. Luckily, in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare has written that Laertes is a very good fencer, having been trained in France. Hamlet tells Horatio that he has been in continual practice himself – so Hamlet may not be as good as Laertes, but he is still proficient at the very least.

If the characters have been drinking, then that must be represented in the execution of the fight. Determining where and when the play takes place will lead to an understanding of the style or styles of fighting that were popular during the time period. Shakespeare was writing his plays for a contemporary audience. He deliberately wrote the rapier and dagger match into the play, likely because it was the popular form of swordplay at the time. While Shakespeare's inspirations for *Hamlet* may have been *Amleth, Prince of Denmark*, written by Saxo Grammaticus in the twelfth century, and *The Murder of Gonzago*, a popular play well known to the Elizabethans, the specificity of the weapons preferred by Laertes sets the play no earlier than the mid-sixteenth century.

This brings us to another important consideration for the fight director. The fight director must have the final say in the choice of weapons for Hamlet and Laertes to use in the Act Five fight. These weapons must withstand the rigor of stage combat and, as a matter of safety, should not be selected for only aesthetic reasons. Designers often look to the aesthetics of the properties in a production, with weapons as no exception. Decorative swords are designed to be hung on

walls and not to withstand the vigor of repetitive use. The fight in *Hamlet* requires the weapons to be dropped and actually fought with. As recently as the past few decades it was difficult to find period weapons that could be used for stage fighting within Canada. The popularity of the Internet and the renewed interest in Western martial arts has allowed for much easier acquisitions of weaponry that serves both the aesthetic goals of the designers and the functionality necessary for staged fights.

The weapons that are selected must be used appropriately. An actor who has a history of using only medieval swords may initially attempt to transfer these skills to other weapons. For example, if an actor has experience fighting on stage with a two-handed fifteenth century arming sword and begins rehearsal on a production that requires the use of Japanese Katanas, the actor will attempt to use what he or she knows with the new weapon. Some moves may work visually, but not historically or even necessarily safely. Each weapon was designed for specific applications and use. The actors must be able to adapt new movements and learn new skills to use these weapons effectively and convincingly before an audience. If rapiers are to be used in *Hamlet*, then the actors must have adequate time to learn the nuances of the weapons. A professionally trained fight director will have the ability to teach the various historic styles applicable to the weapon, and stage the fight in such a way that the actors perform it convincingly and safely. Modern fencing coaches and instructors from the Society of Creative Anachronisms (SCA) are sometimes called in to stage fights for productions. Sport fencers are used to working with speed and wearing protective equipment. They are trained to hit, and hit their target as fast as possible – this goes against the very nature of what stage combat is all about. The SCA also trains their members to hit. Stage combat is about the illusion. Both fencing societies and the SCA require their members to wear protective equipment and full-face masks. On stage this is rarely possible. The production of *Hamlet* I staged at Bard on the Beach began formally as a fencing match with full masks, but as the fight became more serious for Hamlet the masks were tossed aside as the action heightened.

Rehearsal time, then, is required to teach actors the basic functions and movements with the chosen weapons, and allow the actors time to become familiar with the weapons' weight and heft. They also need time for the choreography to set in. This cannot be rushed. Different fight directors have different preferences regarding the optimum time for fight rehearsals in the rehearsal day. In my own experience I prefer working with actors at the top of the rehearsal day. By getting the actors fresh, I am able to work with them longer, and because their day begins with being physical, they are much more focused than they tend to be at the end of a long rehearsal day, and more is accomplished as a result. I have often found that fight calls at the end of the day are unproductive. The actors have had several hours of line and blocking rehearsals, or have run scenes in the play. They are not as energetic or attentive as they were earlier. Working with actors at the start of the day, or after their lunch break, has seemed to me the best times to get them working physically. They are able to retain the choreography and less likely to forget their moves in the fight.

Costuming is another department with which the fight director must have a good relationship. The actors must not be restricted in their movement in the fight. Costumes must not bind or restrict the movement of the actors in any way that would make the execution of the fight unsafe. The most common issue with costuming is the fit of the pants or tights. Pants that are too tight in the hips can impede the flexibility of the lunge or kick. The shoulders must have full mobility. Some fight directors believe that period costumes can adversely affect their fights. However, if the period costumes have been designed properly, and the weapons are suitable to the period, then the stage fight should be highly functional. In many periods the clothing was designed with the understanding that the man wearing the clothes might have to fight in them. Actors who must wear period costumes should have reasonable facsimiles in the rehearsal hall in order to become familiar with the way period clothing changes movement. Today's fashions focus on complete freedom of movement. Actors who are used to wearing their yoga workout gear on a daily basis are often shocked when they

first put on a period jacket or doublet. Wearing period fashion changes a person's posture and bearing, and therefore should be introduced early in rehearsal. The shoes are also important. Properly fitting shoes are essential. The surface of the shoes must also allow for good surface traction. Men rarely wear heels on their shoes anymore. Period shoes and boots can have heels as high as two inches. An actor who has never worn heels must be given time to get used to the feel and the ways their movement is affected.

For the 2005 production of *Hamlet*, costume designer Mara Gottler, created a modern upscale setting for the court of Elsinore. Clothing was form-fitting and followed current fashions. When it came to the fencing scene Gottler understood what was required of the actors and chose to dress them in modern white fencing uniforms. There would be no movement issues with the actors dressed in proper fencing gear. The contrast of two actors in white clothing surrounded by a court dressed in dark and black clothing was visually stunning. However, it was discovered during a quick-change rehearsal that the actors did not have enough time to change into their full fencing costumes. Gottler decided that they would have to wear their fencing doublets over their main costume. Adjustments were made to their costumes and shoes that allowed Frazer and Scholar the freedom of movement without the risk of slipping on stage when performing the fight.

The fight director must also pay attention to the set. The surface of the set is the actor's workplace. The set must be designed to accommodate the action of the play, which includes any stage combat. Set designers must be made aware of the requirements for the stage fight as soon as possible. J.P. Fournier was not consulted when Sue LePage designed the set for the 1986 Stratford production. He recalled that the set had; "three levels of triangular stage and the fight had to happen over the point" (Fournier). He approached director John Neville who was adamant that the set would not be changed to accommodate the fights, but rather that the fights must accommodate the set. Ultimately, Fournier made the fight work, but the set was not "fight-friendly." The set for the 2005 production of *Hamlet* at Bard on the Beach was designed by Kevin McAllister. McAllister was

aware of the action that would be required on the stage and he consulted with the director and me. I knew exactly how much space I had for the fight and was confident that the stage surface would be finished in such a way that slipping would not be an issue. The communication between the set designer, costume designer, director and myself was excellent and there were very few surprises when the company moved onto the stage from the rehearsal hall.

Raked stages may be visually stunning, but over time they can aggravate back problems. A number of years ago a Bard on the Beach actor required surgery for a herniated disk due to playing on the raked stage for too many seasons. Bard since then has stopped using raked stages. Designers and fight directors must openly discuss the concepts for the design and the action that the play requires. Foreknowledge of what walls, stairs and balconies can be used for fighting can speed up the fight rehearsal process substantially. Also knowing what set dressing and stage properties will be in the scene can affect the structure and shape of the fight. Outdoor theatres such as Bard on the Beach must also take into consideration the weather and how it can affect the stage. In Vancouver the issue is the rain. Actors must travel from their dressing rooms outside to the performance tent. Along the way they walk on wooden boardwalks. Slipping and falling is always a consideration and precautions are taken when surfacing the stage and walkways to minimize the risk of injury. Costume designers also keep this in mind when buying footwear for the actors during the season.

Lighting and special effects can also affect the fight scene. A stage lit in low light can be potentially dangerous. Moving from a brightly lit part of the stage to an area in low light can cause an actor's pupils to dilate. The eyes need time to adapt to light changes. A fight scene would need to incorporate time in between the phrases to allow for the actors' eyes to adjust to varying levels of light. The situation at Bard on the Beach is unique. The plays are staged in tents and the natural light affects the light in the tent. Matinee performances have a different lighting plot than the evening performances. The evening lighting plots have to change continually with the change of seasons from summer to fall. As it

gets darker earlier, lighting levels change accordingly. The actors are constantly aware of the lighting changes that occur in the tents. Fortunately, the lighting demands at Bard on the Beach do not adversely affect the performers.

The fight director and the director must arrive at a clear understanding prior to the rehearsal of the fight scene(s). It is important to establish the tone of the play and the emotional quality the director is looking for in the fight. The director should also be available to audit the fight rehearsals on a regular basis. It is important for everyone to learn early on if the fight scene needs to be lengthened, shortened, or changed in any way before too much rehearsal time has passed. It should also be made clear that the fight director be responsible for blocking the non-combatants in the fight scene. In the case of *Hamlet*, the fight director will know the best places for people to be safe. Actors who move actively around the fight as it progresses (Osric, Horatio, etc.) should be blocked by the fight director only.

Some directors have difficulty giving up this kind of control in their productions. Steve Wilsher shared one experience he had in staging the Act Five fight scene:

A lot of directors don't like to have a 'fight director.' They don't want that title taken away from them. They say "Okay we'll have a 'fight-arranger', or a 'fight choreographer' or a 'fights by'." It doesn't work. The fight director is someone who takes over the whole scene - the in, the out, and the fight that happens in between. I've had it where a director here in Canada lost his temper with me. I had just met them half an hour before. I was starting to rehearse the fights and I was saying, "Okay, you're one of the guards, so you can stand here and you can go there, and if you can stand here and here for me..." I was trying to set up safety on stage. The director yelled from the back of the auditorium, "Don't fucking direct. Just do the fight." That was great fun. It didn't sit well with me. It was shouted in front of the whole company. I went down and had a quiet word with them. He sat very quietly through the rest of the rehearsal process. He never said

another word to me. I asked him how many shows he had directed. This was his sixth show. I said I lost count how many shows I had directed but it was over six hundred. I find that in Canada most directors are frightened of having another director on the show – they're frightened of having the show taken away from them. That is unfortunate. We are there to help with such a small part of the show, but to keep it within the artistic director's vision and make it as safe and enjoyable as possible. (Wilsher)

Once the fight director has discussed these issues with the various departments, the next step is to look at the floor plan and create a visual map describing where the fight should go. It is important to know where the sight lines are and where the best angles are for masking movement such as stage slaps. It is also important to know what areas of the stage can or cannot be used for the fight. In *Hamlet* I consulted with the director and the set designer to make sure my movement could be supported on the set. The audience sat on both sides of the stage in an alley-theatre configuration. The fight had to be staged in such a way that both sides would be able to see the exchange of weapons and the clarity of the hits from Hamlet to Laertes. Before I began designing the fight I needed to know what areas of the stage I would be restricted to. I had thought about Laertes and Hamlet getting entangled with their weapons locked together and running into the wall of the set to drop their weapons and go from a 'civilized' play of swords into a chaotic brawl. I was told that the wall would not support the action so I played with the tempo of the fight instead. The visual map gave the lighting designer, set designer and director a clear idea of where the action would take place and be restricted to. This allowed the director to plan where he wanted the observers to be. The map also showed him where people could move safely without being in the way of the combatants.

Fight scenes should be staged as phrases. Each phrase consists of a set number of moves. The fight should never be choreographed as a non-stop event. Fights can look too realistic. The audience should never fear for the safety of the actors in the fight. When this happens the delicate suspension of disbelief is lost

and the reality of the world of the play comes to a crashing halt. The *Hamlet* fight begins as a play of swords and becomes a homicide scene. If the actors (not the characters) appear to be losing control of the weapons and the fight, the audience begins to worry for their own safety. However, if the characters appear to be losing control, the audience understands that the choreographed action is part of the play and enjoys the climactic fight that ends the play.

The fight director takes on much more responsibility in a theatrical production than is commonly believed. A successful fight director has the ability to work with others and without compromising safety is able to adapt easily to changes. The fight director's main goals are to have the actors look good and fight with reduced risk to themselves, other actors and the audience. A good fight director must be a good instructor, leader and listener.

The most important thing for a fight director to understand is that he or she is involved in creating a dramatic moment in the production. It must serve the purpose of the play and the director's vision. It is not to show how amazing the fight director is. Moves that are too complicated for actors to perform safely and proficiently must not be used. As Hamlet says, "The play's the thing."

Hamlet is one of William Shakespeare's greatest plays. It presents a mountain of challenges for which the actor must emotionally and physically prepare. The same can be said for the fight director. The Act Five fight requires the fight director to honour the text and interpret how the fight should be staged with special attention to the details. The weapons that are used in the fight, the staging of each phrase of the fight, and the dialogue that justifies the action, the exchange of rapiers, and the order of deaths require careful preparation. The fight must be logical and visceral. To paraphrase Shakespeare, "The action has to suit the word and the word must suit the action."

Shakespeare was a contemporary writer and the swordplay he wrote into this play is consistent with the popularity of the rapier and dagger swordplay of the Elizabethans. Modern audiences, however, are not as familiar with fencing as their Elizabethan counterparts. This presents a challenge to modern fight directors. Determining what weapons to use, creating the reality of the fencing

match, logically establishing how Laertes is able to produce a sharp and poisoned blade during a “friendly” match, all require careful thought and consultations with the director, set, costume and lighting designers. Training actors to handle the chosen weapons within a reasonable time and safely staging a fight that goes out of control within the play on a stage surrounded by non-combatant actors also requires careful planning and choreography. Through interviewing some of Canada’s top fight directors, I found that their shared experiences demonstrate the common ground of fight directors share in general, as well as the numerous possibilities of creating fights for *Hamlet*. The play provides an excellent example of the many considerations fight directors must address when staging fights of such a complex nature.

7 Hitting All The Right Notes: Exploring Four Styles of Written Fight Notation

The fight director's notation is an important element within a production. The notation or 'fight plot' is a record of the fight or fights devised within a production and it is essential for actors wishing to memorize their moves. It is also an important document for fight captains and stage managers who need to know what is happening within a fight for rehearsals and for calling cues during performances. The notation must be clear and easy to understand and read.

Fight notation is a dying art. Mobile phones and video cameras can record high definition video to be instantly uploaded to computers or emailed to other mobile phone users. This has become the favourite means of archiving fight scenes in plays. Many production companies look to the archival video copy as a way of documenting the production. Less emphasis is now placed on the prompt book. I had initially wished to look at the fights directed by B.H. Barry in the Keanu Reeves production of *Hamlet* at the Manitoba Theatre Centre. Unfortunately, the archival video has 'disappeared' from the theatre. The prompt book has also been misplaced, leaving no real way of looking at how the fight scene was staged or performed except via the reviews.

It is important to document fights in a way that enables actors, stage managers, and other fight directors to interpret them. Unfortunately, there is no universal system of fight notation. J. Allan Suddeth believes that fight notation must be "accessible" for people wishing to learn choreography: "It must include descriptions of placement on the stage, special business, acting beats, as well as the blow-by-blow techniques employed in the fight itself" (Suddeth 100). Dale Anthony Girard writes that most fight directors have their own "cryptic" style of notation that makes it difficult for others to interpret. He believes that "Each choreographer develops a system of notation based on what they were originally taught and what they have developed throughout their career" (Girard 428). Like

Suddeth, Girard also believes that it is important for written choreography to be understood by those who are involved in the fights.

In this chapter I will examine the four most common methods of fight notation that are used internationally today. These are the “Wise Notation,” “Hobbs Notation,” “Simple Method,” and “Crean Notation.” It is useful for fight directors to become conversant with these different styles in order to study fight plots that they did not create. This is especially true if they are asked to re-create a fight scene from a previous production. This knowledge is also of benefit to theatre historians, directors, and dramaturges who may come across one of these styles or a similar style of notation in prompt books or other theatre documents. Understanding the written notation of fight choreography can help researchers visualize a particular fight scene within a play, the importance of the fight director’s role, and the way dramatic action informs the play as a whole.

Though there may be individual ways of recording fight moves, most fight directors choose to record specific sword moves using the universally accepted parry and attack numbers ranging from prime (1) to octave (8). Prime (written commonly as the number 1) describes the target area of the left leg between the hip and the knee. Seconde (2) is the same target area of the right leg. Tierce (3) is the area of the right side of the body from the waist to the shoulder. Quarte (4) is the area of the left side of the body from waist to shoulder. Quinte (5) is the area above the head and right shoulder. Alternate Quinte (5A) is the area above the head and left shoulder. Sixte (6) is the target area of the right shoulder. Septime (7) is the area of the left leg. Octave is the area of the right leg.

The earliest dedicated shorthand system for notating fights was developed in the 1960’s by Arthur Wise, co-founder of the Society of British Fight Directors. He believed that while Laban notation was beneficial for dancers, it required serious study in order to master it. Actors, Wise argued, have many more concerns than the movements within a fight. Consequently, Wise created a simple form of notation to assist fight directors and actors with the recording of fight scenes. It is commonly referred to as “Wise’s Notation.”

The general movements of the fight are important to note. The general movements essentially represent the geography of the fight – where the fight moves. For example, if the fight moved from an initial area on the stage to another area, the notation would be represented in Wise’s system as illustrated in figure 3.



Figure 3 – Moving from one area to another

The fight may be executed in a single area, but the actors may move within the area. These patterns are recorded by using directional arrows. For example, a quarter turn to the right would be represented as illustrated in figure 4.



Figure 4 – Quarter turn to the right

Foot movements are recorded as if looking down at your feet. An aggressive guard position for a right-handed combatant would need to show the right foot forward and is shown in figure 5. The defensive guard (right foot back) and neutral guard (feet astride) are represented in figures 6 and 7. Moving forward one step from the aggressive guard is demonstrated by recording the outline of the moving foot as the starting position. The solid block is where the foot ends up (fig. 8). Stepping back would follow the same pattern (fig. 9).



Figure 5 – Aggressive guard



Figure 6 – Defensive guard



Figure 7 – Neutral stance

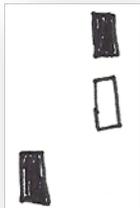


Figure 8 – Moving forward one step



Figure 9 – Stepping backward one step

Movements that require more than one step in a certain direction are represented by adding an open triangle in the direction of the movement (fig. 10-12). The end position shows the foot placement in either aggressive guard, defensive guard, or neutral positioning. Displacements can also be recorded by showing the direction in which they are taken (fig. 13-14).



Figure 10 - Moving forward to an aggressive guard



Figure 11 – Moving backwards to an aggressive guard



Figure 12 – Moving forward to a neutral position



Figure 13 – Displacement to right of neutral position



Figure 14 – Displacement to left of neutral position

Placing a bar over the foot symbols indicates a displacement of the body by ducking (fig. 15).



Figure 15 – Ducking while in an aggressive guard

Cuts and thrusts, the two main forms of attack with swords, are recorded by using either the half open circle for cuts (fig. 16) or the complete circle (fig. 17) to represent thrusts.



Figure 16 – Cut with a sword

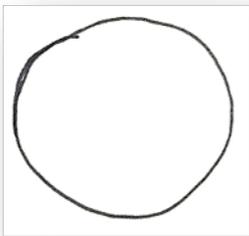


Figure 17 – Thrust with a sword

The body is divided into nine different target areas represented by the letters A through G (fig. 18). The Letters correspond as follows:

- A- Centre top of head
- Ar – Right side of head
- Al – Left side of head
- B – Left Chest from the elbow to the shoulder
- C – Right Chest from the elbow to the shoulder
- D – Left Waist
- E – Right Waist
- F – Left leg above the knee
- G – Right leg above the knee

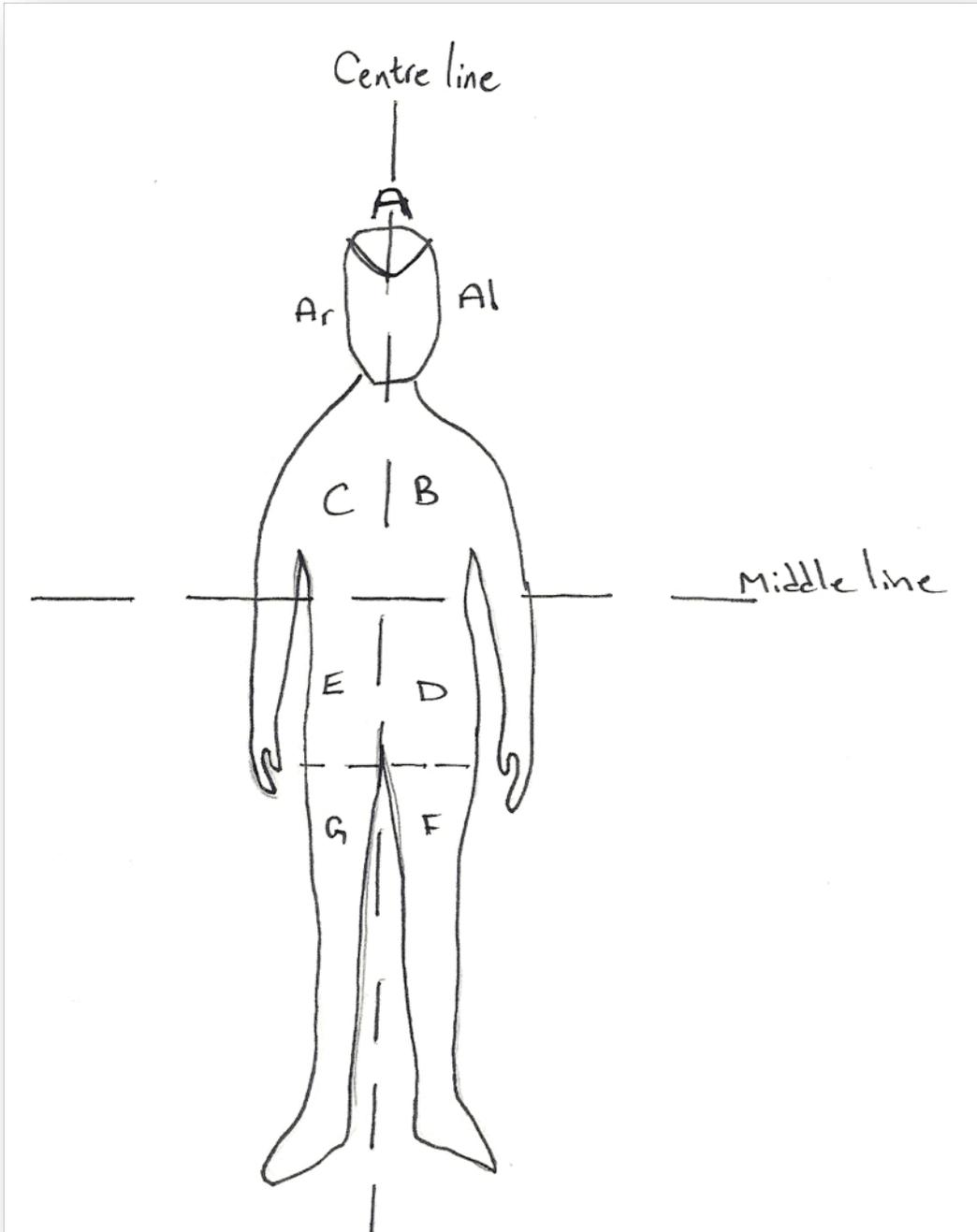


Figure 18 – Target areas of the body as devised by Arthur Wise

A cut with a sword to the top of the head would be indicated by placing the symbol A under the cut symbol (fig. 19), whereas a thrust to the left chest would be achieved by placing the letter B inside the thrust circle (fig. 20).



Figure 19 – Cutting to the head with a sword

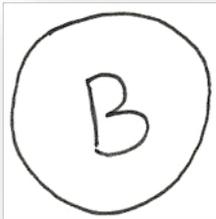


Figure 20 – Thrusting to the left side of the chest with a sword

Attacks that are made without weapons are indicated by using lower case letters to describe the nature of the attack. For example, a punch is indicated by using the small p. If we wanted to demonstrate a punch to the head, the letter p would be placed at either side of the letter A (fig. 21-22).

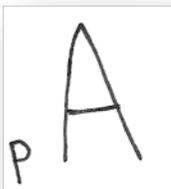


Figure 21 – A punch to the left side of the head



Figure 22 – A punch to the right side of the head

Parries are indicated with the use of a straight line hooking down on the side that indicates either a right or left handed parry (fig. 23-24).



Figure 23 – Right handed parry



Figure 24 – Left handed parry

One potential problem with the Wise Notation is that the actor or fight director may see the notation and think of the moves happening in sequence. That may be the case, but if the moves are intended to happen simultaneously, then the movements must be recorded in a way that shows they are to be executed at the same time. This is done by placing the moves under an arc (fig. 25).

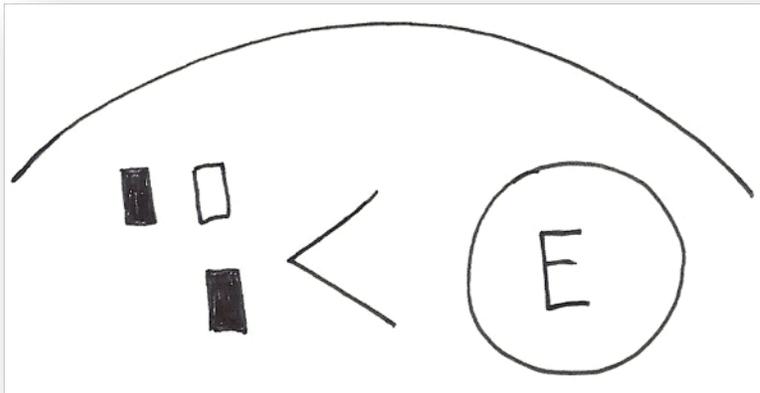


Figure 25 – Simultaneous movement using the Wise method of notation

With these symbols in mind, figure 26 demonstrates a brief exchange between two characters. The fight is divided into five sections: Area, Script, Phrase, and the characters involved in the fight. The fight would read as follows:

Character 1 begins with his/her feet in an aggressive guard. Character 2 begins with his/her feet in a defensive guard. On the line, “I have you now,” Character 1 steps forward and cuts to Character 2’s left flank (prime). Character 2 parries the attack with their right hand as they pass back to prevent the flank from being exposed to the hit. Character 1 again steps forward and cuts to Character 2’s left side of the head which Character 2 ducks to avoid. Then Character 1 cuts to Character 2’s right flank (seconde), which Character 2 parries with their right hand, and thrusts back to Character 1’s left flank. Character 1 displaces their body

from an aggressive stance, avoids the thrust, and thrusts to Character 2's left chest. Character 2 steps back enough to avoid and then turns to their right away from Character 2.

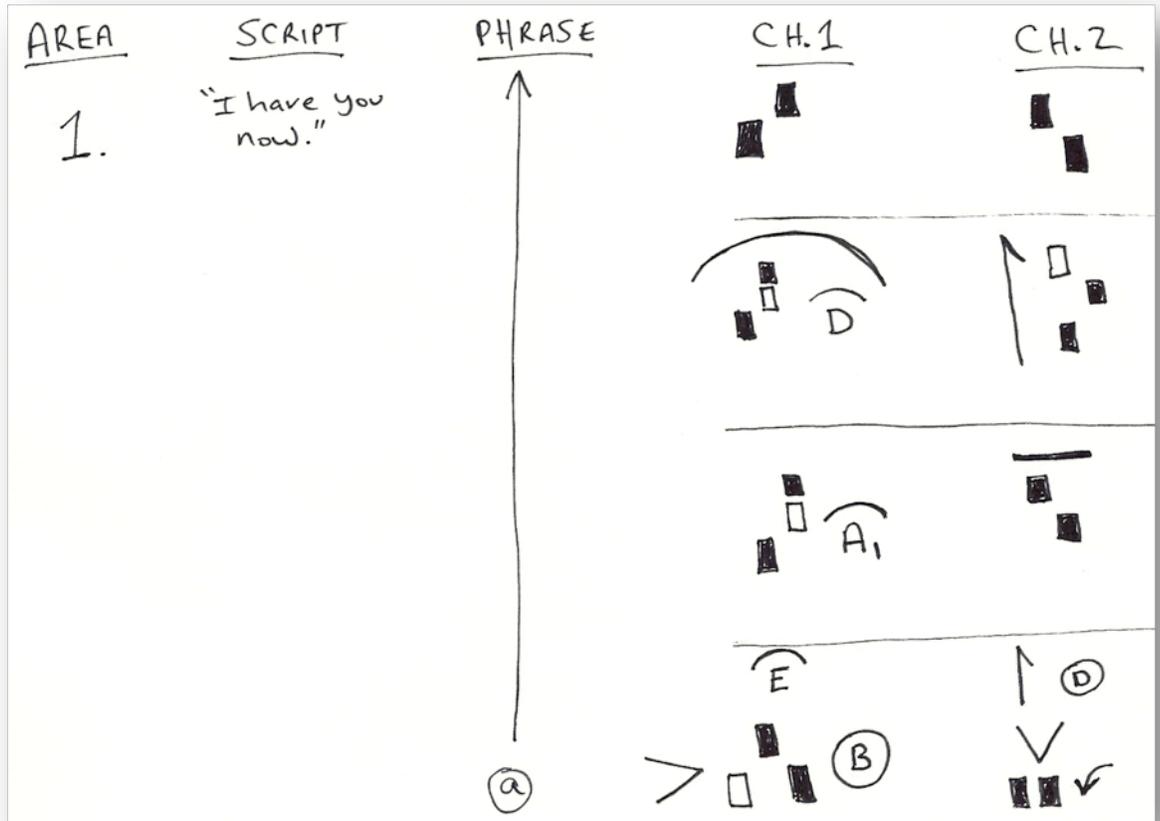


Figure 26 – Example of a brief fight using the Wise notation method

Arthur Wise's system of fight notation is comprehensive. It allows the choreographer to read where the movement of the feet must be in conjunction with the movement of the sword. It also shows specific areas of the body towards which attacks are directed. However, certain notations such as the cut (fig. 16) and the arc (demonstrated in fig. 25) are too similar and can be misinterpreted. Wise's system also requires study if the choreographer or combatant is to be able to write it down quickly. It is more appropriate for experienced

choreographers to use when designing choreography that will be taught to combatants at a later date using simplified notation.

William Hobbs is a British fight director who co-founded of the Society of British Fight Directors. During the 1960's he developed his own style of fight notation that was significantly different than the notation developed by Arthur Wise. William Hobbs's system consists of a series of his own devised symbols that represent particular sword techniques. Hobbs introduced them in his first book, *Techniques of the Stage Fight* (1967), and revisits them again in his next book, *Fight Direction for Stage and Screen* (1980) (fig. 27). He admits in his latter book that the symbols he created are not comprehensive enough for the variety of moves that he uses himself. Describing the same fight as noted in figure 26 using Wise's system, the notation recorded using Hobbs' system in figure 28 lacks the important positioning of the feet. Hobbs has not created any notation for aggressive, defensive or neutral guards. Fights that are recorded using this method are left open for interpretation to determine the proper footwork for the routine. William Hobbs was known to be fairly secretive about his choreography, and though he writes that his symbols represent the movement, it is clear that without the key to the symbols it would be nearly impossible to interpret the notation.

Thrust	•	Left Flank	↖
Head	T	Ducks	⤿
Feints	^	Throw	⌒
Envelops	~	Sidestep Left	↙
Sword Only	♯	Sidestep Right	↘
Jumps	⤿	Parry and Reply	↖↗
Lock	e	Swings	⤿
Circle	⊖	Short Pause	⤿
Lunge	—	Long Pause	⤿
Pushes	+	Body to Body	
Pulls	≠	Moving Forward	↗
Kick	↪	Moving Back	↖
Kills / Wounds	*	One Step Forward	↗↘
Cut	Y	One Step Back	↖↗
Parry	<	Deceive Circular Parry	⊙
Right Shoulder	↖	Dagger Only (or any weapon in left hand)	♯
Left Shoulder	↘	Sword and Dagger	X
Right Flank	↘		

Figure 27 – William Hobbs' system of fight notation

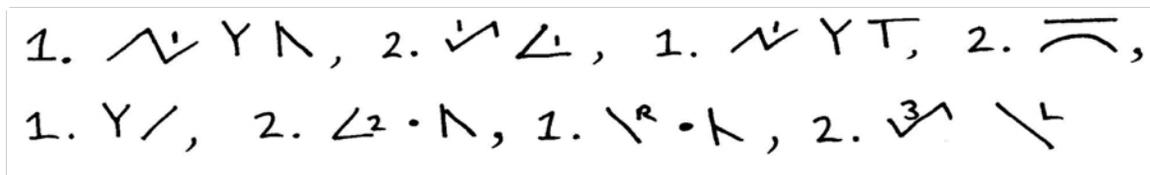


Figure 28 – Using William Hobbs’s notation to record the same fight as seen in figure 26

Arthur Wise’s notation is thorough and comprehensive but requires a degree of proficiency in order to be able to transcribe fights quickly as they are created. William Hobbs’s notation is rather confusing and does not address the need for recording proper footwork within a fight scene. The Hobbs Notation system is also more prone to misinterpretation by actor combatants and stage management. Hobbs’s notation requires even more study in order to be useful when creating fight scenes.

Because fight directors have to create fight plots that can be easily interpreted by actors and stage managers, the more common form of notation among fight directors and actors today is a simplified form I am calling Simple Method. It relies on a basic grid system that is read across the page from left to right, with each line representing the moves. Choreography that is written across the center-line of the notation page indicates techniques that actors perform together such as coming into a guard (fig. 29). Additional information can be written across the lines as well. Since the notation is read from left to right, it is common to put the character leading the attack in the left column. This is done so the choreography is easier to follow. Once again, footwork is left open for interpretation unless the fight director notates the precise footwork in the columns. The directional arrows in each column indicate the direction of travel – backwards or forwards. The ‘sideways T’ indicates when the characters stop traveling and fight *pied ferme* (meaning their feet do not move during the attack). The end of each phrase is indicated by drawing parallel lines across the centre bar as shown in figure 29.

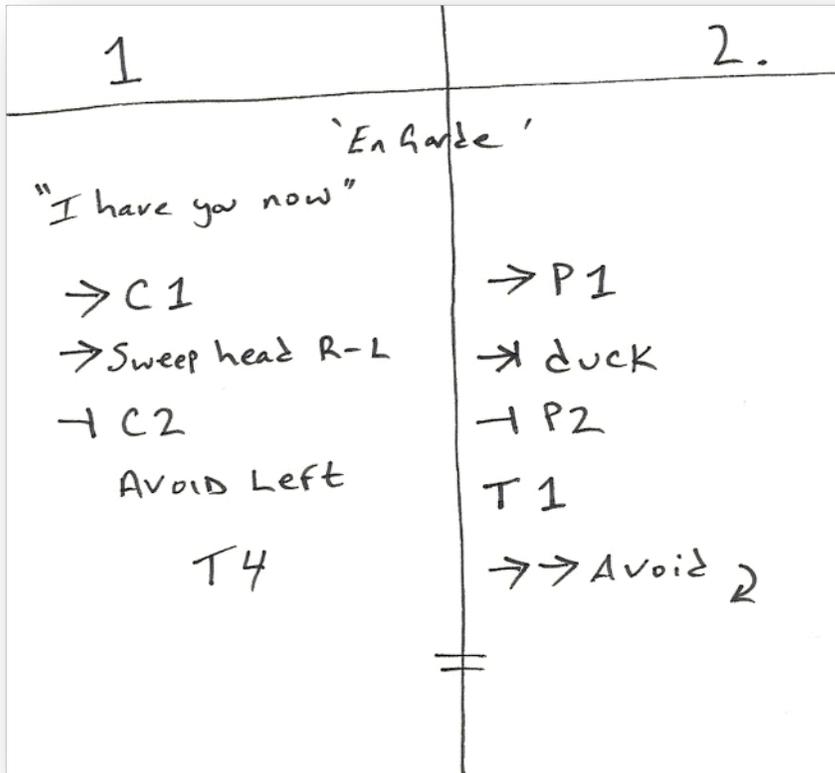


Figure 29 – The simplified system of fight notation

Figure 30 is a brief excerpt from the Simple Method fight notation created by John Stead for the 2000 production of *Hamlet* at Stratford starring Paul Gross. The first phrase of the fight is short: Laertes begins the attack by faking a thrust to Hamlet's prime, but Hamlet does not appear to react to the feint. Laertes advances and thrusts to Seconde while Hamlet retreats and parries Seconde. When Laertes advances and thrusts to Hamlet's Tierce, Hamlet parries Tierce and drags his sword across Laertes' stomach, which wins Hamlet his first point in the match. The phrase ends with the stomach cut and is indicated by the line drawn underneath the phrase, which separates it from the next phrase.

The notation does not reveal how they start the fight. There is no indication of guards or footwork in the notation. However, a fight director would be able to reasonably recreate the movements of the fight with this notation and knowledge of the particular weapons with which the fight was designed.

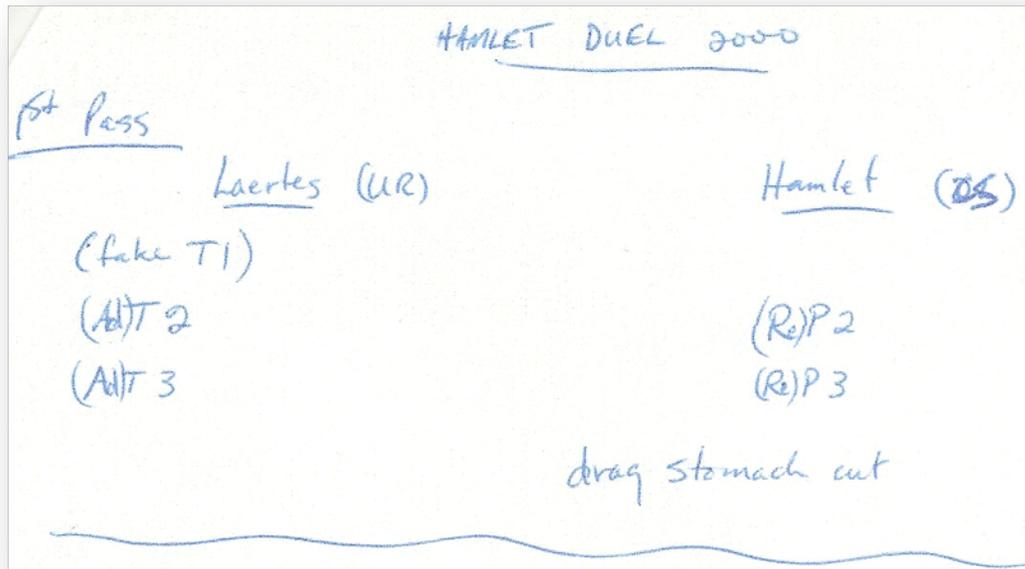


Figure 30 – A sample of Fight Director John Stead's choreography for *Hamlet* (2000) using the simplified system of notation. Courtesy the Stratford Shakespeare Festival Archives.

The Simple Method as demonstrated in figures 29 and 30 is the most common method of fight notation. This method allows for quick notation while creating a fight and allows the individual fight director to provide as much information as he or she wishes. It is also easy for combatants and stage managers to learn.

There is yet another way to notate fights. Appropriately referred to as the Description of Moves, this system is intentionally simple so that anyone can read it and understand the moves in a general way. It is intended to provide a clear description of the moves in a fight using longhand notation. This system, though not invented by Crean, was used extensively by him during his career. Hence I am calling it Crean Notation.

Several years ago I was preparing to organize the fight scene for *Cyrano de Bergerac* at the Chemainus Festival Theatre on Vancouver Island. I was given a number of things to read prior to starting my contract. One of the items was a stapled stack of papers with instructions for creating a theatrical rapier. I paid

not be flexed in such a manner for fear of breaking since it was a cutting and thrusting weapon.)

CYRANO Says “languidly over my arm let fall”, reacts to DE VALVERT exercising and swishing, and goes on: “The cloak that covers my bright array – Then out swords and to work withal!”...On “...out swords...” grasps sword hanger with left hand, takes hold of blade close to underside of coquille with his right, yanks sword from hanger, throws it in air, catches it with his right by the grip as he says: “...and to work withal!” He salutes, revolves sword twice, invites.

(Crean specifically mentions the sword’s *coquille*. Literally meaning “shell,” the coquille commonly refers to the modern fencing sword’s hand guard. This suggests that Crean created the fight with modern fencing equipment in mind.)

DE VALVERT Advances fiercely, points centre, deceives tierce in balestra, half lunges centre.

(The balestra is a forward jump followed by a lunge that was developed with the smallsword in the 18th century and is common in modern sport fencing. It is an elegant move that did not exist during the time that *Cyrano* takes place.)

CYRANO Says “A Launcelot, in his daddy’s hall...” timing line so that “A Launcelot” comes on DE VALVERT’S deception in tierce and half lunge centre as above. CYRANO finds in tierce on the half lunge. He backs throughout DE VALVERT’S attack.

DE VALVERT Continues attack, after CYRANO finds in tierce, with another advance with point centre, in which he deceives seconde. Finished with big lunge centre.

CYRANO As he continues with “...in his Lady’s hall...” he backs again, is deceived in seconde as above, finds in seconde to DE VALVERT’S big centre lunge.

DE VALVERT Statically and relaxing lunge, makes two quick 'piston' jabs centre (timing is 1-2).

(The above exchange is rapid and common with thrusting weapons. The timing of the "piston" jabs suggests that these two moves are quicker and more intense than the previous attacks. These moves are more appropriate for smallsword or foil fencing than for rapier fighting. So far there has been no cutting action with the swords, but only exchanges of lunges and thrusts.)

CYRANO Says: "A Spartacus at the Hippodrome" as he parries seconde to the two above 'piston' jabs.

DE VALVERT Continues with an advance, points low, deceives seconde three times, makes full lunge centre.

CYRANO Backs, is deceived three times in seconde, finds on final.

DE VALVERT Comes on again furiously with two more (static) 'piston' jabs (timing 1-2) cuts left head (CYRANO'S left head), 'bounces' off blade with cut at right flank (CYRANO'S right), then withdraws and makes a full lunge centre.

CYRANO Says: "I dally awhile with you, dear jackal," while he parries DE VALVERT'S last attack with prime, seconde (the bell clanger), high carte, seconde, and seconde with a beat away to right. Note: Bell clanger and rest of CYRANO'S above defence could take place sitting on something, after backing.

(Crean has choreographed a move that is potentially very dangerous. Valvert's cut to Cyrano's left head (or quarte) "bounces off" and he attacks Cyrano's right flank (seconde). This suggests that his blade that is designed for thrusting is now used for a cut. If the actors are using épée bladed weapons, there is a risk of breaking the blades because they are not designed for such use.)

CYRANO After beat away to right in seconde, jumps forward with thrust in tierce as a riposte, no contact.

DE VALVERT Leaps back, tries to parry in tierce, misses, cuts down in air.

CYRANO: “Waggles” in carte in what could have been a hit had he wanted to make one, “waggles” in seconde in what could have been another hit had he wished, and he says: “Then, as I end the refrain, thrust home.”

DE VALVERT Is deceived in carte and seconde with CYRANO’S “waggles” as he backs.

(It is unclear what is meant by “waggles”. It would make sense that Crean is referring to the fencing technique of rapidly redirecting the point of the sword similar to an *enveloppement*. When executing an envelopment the fencer binds the opposing blade with his own and controls that blade without losing contact. The waggle appears to be the action of the envelopment without the contact as a theatrical attempt to confuse the other fencer and deceive his attempts at guarding his body.)

END OF FIRST ENCOUNTER

SECOND ENCOUNTER. BOUT TWO

CYRANO “Where...” on this “where” he makes a lightning, taunting thrust centre, piston-type withdrawal, no contact.

DE VALVERT Goes to parry seconde but misses, attempts to bind and throw off as well, finds his bind is in thin air, as CYRANO avoids it. “...shall I skewer my peacock?...” Cyrano speaks the above line as DE VALVERT attacks, after missing his bind attempt, en marchant, with points centre and at right arm (CYRANO’S right) in furious advance, and cuts at left head (CYRANO’S left) and centre head (backhander), withdraws – “piston” and makes full lunge centre.

CYRANO As he speaks the above line, parries in retreat seconde, tierce, high carte, 5th, seconde, with bind and throw off. As he throws off he says: “Better for you to have shunned this brawl”

DE VALVERT Staggers back.

CYRANO On: “Here in the heart,” he makes lightning, light thrust in carte, touching DE VALVERT lightly with the point, withdrawing fast.

DE VALVERT Tries to knock CYRANO’S sword away to right in seconde, misses, thrusts centre.

CYRANO Parries seconde, ripostes with thrust at right arm (DE VALVERT’S right), deceives tierce and an attempt at cut down, cuts off ribbon on DE VALVERT’S left arm in moulinet and using false edge in upward cut, as he says: “...through your ribbons gay.”

DE VALVERT Tries to parry thrust at right arm in tierce, is deceived, cuts down in air, reacts to left arm rosette going.

CYRANO As DE VALVERT reacts to first ribbon, goes back in moulinet and takes off rosette on right arm using false edge in upward cut as before.

(The above passage is difficult for non-fencers or Fight Directors to understand and this part of the fight always requires attention to detail. Crean does not write anything about the way De Valvert’s ribbons are cut off. He only mentions that the technique is performed with a *moulinet*. This is a vague definition. The moulinet is a saber technique: a circular action of the blade that involves the rotation of the wrist. It is not clear how the moulinet is supposed to take the ribbons off of De Valvert’s chest. The moulinet has become a flashy theatrical fencing move because of its grand sweeping action. It is not a common fencing move, nor was it common with rapier play. It does look good on stage. I am not sure how this move safely or effectively worked in this section. It would require

proper study and practice to fully understand how it may have worked in this context.)

DE VALVERT	Reacts to second rosette, raging, lunges fiercely centre.
CYRANO	Parries prime, ripostes at belly, deceiving seconde, on: "Here in the belly of your silken shawl?"
DE VALVERT	Recovers fast from lunge, is deceived in seconde.
CYRANO	Attacks in one-two in the advance, the feint in carte, final on a half lunge.
DE VALVERT	Is deceived in carte, parries tierce, ripostes in tierce on a half lunge.
CYRANO	Backs a pace, parries tierce, ripostes in tierce as he says: "Hark –".
DE VALVERT	Parries tierce, ripostes with full lunge in tierce.
CYRANO	Parries tierce.
VARY SLIGHT BEAT PAUSE	
CYRANO	Now says: "...how the steel rings musical" as the following exchange takes place. The words do not time with the moves but they end as the attacks end.
CYRANO	Ripostes in tierce.
DE VALVERT	Still on the lunge, parries tierce, ripostes tierce.
CYRANO	holding ground, parries tierce, ripostes tierce.
DE VALVERT	Still on the lunge, parries tierce, ripostes tierce.
CYRANO	Parries tierce, ripostes tierce, but deceived DE VALVERT'S blade on this (there are <u>five</u> exchanges after the slight beat pause on PAGE FOUR, the fifth being the deception of DE VALVERT'S final parry in tierce...)
DE VALVERT	Goes to parry tierce (the <u>fifth</u> exchange as above), misses because of the deception. Furiously breaks lunge which he has held all through the five

exchanges, advances with a wild slash left to right across chest (CYRANO'S left and right), and cuts over head right to left (CYRANO'S right and left).

CYRANO On: "Mark as my point floats light as the foam," which he says on DE VALVERT'S above slash and cut, he backs – 'flicking' his point in front of him.

DE VALVERT The impetus of his cut over head has taken him back a pace. He regains balance, tries again, with an attack "en marchant" with thrust centre and cut at left head (CYRANO'S left) taking his sword round his own head in moulinet to do so.

(The above exchange is an elaborate parry-and-riposte fencing exercise that is used to train fencers to attack immediately after defending an attack. It looks quite good on stage and has been used many times in film and on stage to show the match of skill between two fighting characters. It requires proper training and can be performed with moving feet or while standing stationary. Crean does not clearly write out when the footwork moves or stops. If this had been written out using Arthur Wise's notation, there would be more clarity as to the movement of the body. Wise's method, however, would have taken much longer to properly record. Hobbs's fight notation would require the use of a legend to interpret his symbols. The Simple Method of notation would adequately be able to record these moves, but without the eloquence that Crean has put into his fight plot.)

CYRANO Backs, parrying seconde and carte (high). On: "Ready to drive you back to the wall," he thrusts centre.

DE VALVERT Shortens line, pulls to a prime parry, binds, lunges centre (double bind).

CYRANO Goes with first part of bind, evades second part of bind, parries seconde to DE VALVERT'S lunge.

DE VALVERT Continues attack, brings up left foot, disengaging with

straight thrust, completes lunge when CYRANO has parried prime and bound over to tierce. This takes him into Corps à Corps.

CYRANO Parries prime, binds to tierce as above, “rides” in parry as DE VALVERT completes his lunge to Corps à Corps.

DE VALVERT Breaks Corps à Corps, thrusts centre at CYRANO close, his sword “goes” of him, he follows, thrusting himself forward past CYRANO.

CYRANO Parries glancing seconde as DE VALVERT goes by, gives him the semblance of a hit on the backside, thinks better of it as he says: “Then, as I end the refrain, thrust home.”

END OF SECOND BOUT – ENCOUNTER

(The last portion of the above section shows Crean’s influence on the fight as director. He has written in a bit of business where Cyrano almost decides to slap De Valvert’s backside but then thinks better of it. It seems that Crean is overstepping his role as Fight Director and assuming the roles of director, actor and dramaturge. Sometimes the director wants the easy laugh had when Cyrano insults De Valvert further by spanking him with the blade. Sometimes the actor playing De Valvert wants to feel further insulted. I understand Crean’s decision to leave it out in this fight, but I believe that this action requires consultation with the other people involved in the staging of the fight.)

THIRD BOUT

CYRANO On: “Ho,…” He assumes guard, drops the point position once, returns to guard, without looking and as if deep in thought, - as he composes. He drops guard

for a second time as he says: "...for a rhyme," then returns to guard.

- DE VALVERT Aims to hit CYRANO'S sword twice with swipes – right to left, left to right (CYRANO'S left and right), misses each time as CYRANO evades. The fury of the second miss spins him round off balance in a "travel" back, and he turns back to a guard just in time to face CYRANO'S next attack.
- CYRANO On: "...You are white as whey..." He advances with straight arm deceiving four times in carte and tierce at speed, starting in carte.
- DE VALVERT Carried away upstage is deceived four times in carte and tierce. On the last tierce he tries to parry in a cut down but is in the air. He turns to get more maneuvering room and is now behind a table or bench upstage.
- CYRANO On: "You break, you cower, you cringe, you...crawl."
Allows DE VALVERT no time to riposte but thrusts centre.
- DE VALVERT Backing, parries seconde.
- CYRANO Doesn't let up now, continues attack with six deceptions in seconde.
- DE VALVERT Continues to retreat hard pressed, is deceived six times in seconde, lunges desperately centre.
- CYRANO Parries seconde in slight check, binds up, slams DE VALVERT'S sword down onto bench or whatever.
- DE VALVERT Breaks slam in withdrawal, clears away from bench or whatever, thrusts centre at CYRANO as CYRANO comes on with leap over bench or whatever, backs.
- CYRANO Leaps over bench or whatever, parries prime, as he

lands, to above thrust, in glance off drives DE VALVERT further back with cuts at centre head, right flank, left head (DE VALVERT'S right and left), thrusts centre.

DE VALVERT Continually backing, parries 5th, seconde, high carte, seconde, lunges centre with balestra.

CYRANO On: "Tac! – and I parry your last essay." He takes a pace back, parries prime to DE VALVERT'S sword in his left hand. This bind also takes in: "So may the turn of a hand forstall..." And the sword is in the air for: "Life with its honey, death with its gall," the catch is completed on this line too.

CYRANO On: "So may the turn of my fancy roam," he walks towards a backing DE VALVERT, offering DE VALVERT back his sword. As DE VALVERT goes to take it, CYRANO suddenly withdraws it and pushes his own point forward instead as he says, "Free, for a time, till the rhymes recall." On: "Then, as I end the refrain, thrust home," he places DE VALVERT'S sword carefully on his boot and kicks it towards him. The actual kick comes on: "...home."

END OF THIRD BOUT

(Crean again has suggested in this notation that De Valvert gets disarmed and that Cyrano must be able to back De Valvert onto something. Crean's majestic disarm requires that the Cyrano actor is able to successfully disarm De Valvert and catch his blade in the air. While this is amazing to watch, the ability to successfully perform this technique on a regular basis requires extensive training. I doubt that this could be performed properly with the minimum rehearsal periods that are common with staging modern productions in Canada. The only way for this to happen without endangering the actors on stage would be to have

professional theatrical fencers perform this technique, or to have adequate rehearsal time for the actors to train specifically for this move.)

BOUT FOUR

At the end of BOUT THREE, CYRANO turns his back on DE VALVERT and salutes the assembly.

DE VALVERT Catches his sword at the end of BOUT THREE, makes running balestra thrust with lunge at CYRANO'S back. Crowd reacts. Some definite scream is needed here to cue CYRANO to parry behind his back without looking.

CYRANO Parries behind his back as above, turns, quickly ruffles DE VALVERT'S hair with his left hand.

(This assumes that Cyrano is right-handed. This action also seems something better left for the director to decide. Because of Crean's intimacy with this script and this fight in particular, he has taken many liberties with his fight plot and assumes that the director will accept his characterizations during the fight.)

DE VALVERT Recovers to a guard, swipes furiously over CYRANO'S head in an off balance wheeling movement away and half fall.

(The action in this moment is unclear. The half fall does not specify how or why De Valvert does this. The only information that is provided is that in his fury, De Valvert swipes his blade with such over-extension that he loses balance.)

CYRANO Says as DE VALVERT is staggering back: "Prince! Pray God, that is Lord of all, Pardon your soul, for your time has come!"

DE VALVERT Rushes forward in a final effort.

CYRANO Checks DE VALVERT'S rush with cuts at left and right head (DE VALVERT'S left and right) and a thrust centre.

DE VALVERT Checked in what he thought would be his own attack,

parries carte, tierce, seconde.

CYRANO On the next phrase of verse: “Beat – pass...” he is doing his cuts at left and right head as above, the “pass” being in the thrust as above.

DE VALVERT After the last parry in seconde as above, lunges desperately centre.

CYRANO On: “...Fling you aslant,” he parries seconde, flings DE VALVERT away.

(This is unclear again. Does Cyrano fling De Valvert or his sword away? Without the proper notation to make the actors understand this could be interpreted either way.)

DE VALVERT Thrusts again centre.

CYRANO On: “...asprawl...” he parries prime, flings DE VALVERT away again.

DE VALVERT Is now down on one knee from second fling away. He rises as CYRANO says: “Then, as I end the refrain...Thrust home!”

CYRANO He makes the only full lunge he makes in the fight as he says: “Thrust home!”, killing (or wounding?) DE VALVERT.

DE VALVERT He has risen from fall about to go on but suddenly receives CYRANO’S thrust before he can. He makes a late seconde with contact and his blade slides down CYRANO’S who flicks it away and catches it in his left hand.

CYRANO Catches DE VALVERT’S sword as above, raises both swords in the air, flings DE VALVERT’S sword to one of his henchmen.

DE VALVERT Falls, is carried off.

Unlike William Hobbs's or Arthur Wise's methods of notation, Crean's notation is clear and colorful. His fight scene for *Cyrano* can be easily read and understood by fight directors and actors who have an advanced knowledge of swordplay and terminology. However, as can be seen in this particular fight plot for *Cyrano*, Crean's approach also leaves room for a Fight Director attempting to recreate it to be creative and bring in his or her own interpretation, too.

Crean's choreography is unique in providing options in the notation for killing or wounding De Valvert. Crean also suggests the placement of a table or bench in the scene to provide obstacles for the actors. His fight script provides a vivid example of the several duties of the fight director. Far from simply staging moves in a fight, Crean writes the scene as fight director, director, dramaturge, acting coach and actor. He gives clear acting notes to the fencers in the scene. He does, however, neglect to specifically record foot placement and has written the fight in such a way that only students of stage combat and fencing can properly interpret his fight plot. Since it is written as a manuscript, it is difficult to find certain moves without reading each entire phrase. The Simple Method of notation allows readers to see the moves without having to read to find them. This allows the combatants to quickly find their moves and work the fight. It also allows fight captains to make quick reference to any forgotten moves during a fight rehearsal. Crean's method makes quick reference much more difficult.

Paddy Crean explains in his book that he used the same choreography in subsequent productions of the play after 1938. The fight script reads much like a Hollywood swashbuckling epic, with thrilling sword business including kicking a sword in the air to an adversary and parrying an attack without looking. It is no wonder this fight at Stratford won critical praise, including comments from the press such as these: "The first act duel with Donnelly Rhodes (brilliantly staged by Patrick Crean) was a dazzling exhibition that drew a spontaneous salvo of applause (Johnson "A Touch of Magic in 'Cyrano'"), and "...the sword fight...would shame all the heroes of our childhood movies" (Whittaker "John Colicos Magnificent as Cyrano").

While there is no universally accepted method of recording fight scenes for the stage, it appears that the clearest and most time-efficient method is the Simple Method that allows combatants and Fight Directors to quickly find specific moves and preserve choreography for easy reference. The Wise Notation method is more comprehensive but requires that students learn the terminology before they can adequately notate fights. Hobbs' Notation is the most impractical and in *Fight Direction for Stage and Screen*, he admits that his method is not comprehensive enough for the moves he uses (111). Hobbs's approach is too complicated for quick reference and can be misinterpreted. Crean's method clearly paints a picture of how the fight is performed, but his writing neglects to specify key foot movements and blade functions. His *Cyrano* fight plot does provide insight into how Crean thought out his fights and reads more like a period Hollywood swashbuckler film than a fight plot. It combines the elements of acting, fight choreography and directing into a single document, making it clear when the actions suit the words and when the action rises.

Comparing the four main styles of fight notation may be a useful starting point for a director, fight director or researcher to interpret fight plots that they may come across and want to understand better. What is clear is that, although there is no single universally accepted fight notation system, fights have been recorded through the ages in one form or another and they are an important aspect of the *mise en scène*. As fight directors, directors, and stage managers rely more and more on the video recording of fight scenes, we risk losing the ability to properly notate fights on the page. Stage managers in particular rely on written notes to maintain the consistency of a fight during the run of a production. As a fight director, I will continue to teach stage managers and fight captains the Simple Method of fight notation, so that fights can be recorded and accessed as needed, in addition to video recordings.

8 Conclusions

My own fascination with stage combat began when I was a child. For me it was the influence of films such as *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The Princess Bride* and Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V* that sparked such fascination. My love of live fight scenes started with my first stage combat class at theatre school in England. Roy and Angela Goodall, my Fight Masters, introduced me to the art that ended up being my life-long career – stage combat.

There is nothing more exciting (in my opinion) for an audience than to witness an exhilarating fight on stage. Unfortunately, bad fights are the ones that people tend never to forget. For a fight director, if he or she has done their job well, the fight will simply be an integral part of the story being told. It should serve the play, not stand out, unless it is the playwright's or director's intention for it to do so. Directors are often viewed as the people responsible for staging everything that an audience sees during a production. I have been present at opening night parties and have witnessed directors willingly accept praise for the swordfights as if they had constructed them. Fight directors are used to this. However, it is important for critics and theatre historians to be aware of the enormous responsibility borne by the fight director while working on a production.

Though the fight director has been a part of theatre production for centuries, there has been little proper study of the history of the fight director and stage combat. The inclusion of sword fights within Elizabethan plays has proven a significant step in legitimizing the professional status of the modern fight director. It is because of the numerous sword fights, battles and brawls Shakespeare has written into his plays that many fight directors, such as myself, enjoy seasonal work with the Shakespeare festivals that have become popular summer theatre within North America.

As swords fell out of fashion as gentlemen's accessories, the theatre continued to be a place where swordplay could be seen. Fencing masters, such as the Angelos during the eighteenth century and the Bertrands in the nineteenth century in England, trained actors in fencing for the stage. In the United States

during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the French Masters such as Maître Senac in New York were commissioned to teach actors and actresses how to fence – and judging from the numerous articles from the period, stage fencing appeared to be popular.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were the age of the actor-manager theatre companies in Britain. Actors would have several roles memorized that they could perform with different companies with little or no rehearsal. Stage combat was not often given much rehearsal time. Sometimes only the business that ended a fight was practiced prior to a theatrical run. Actors were being trained by actors. Touring actors would likely have memorized stock moves – a series of short fighting phrases – that could be called out and performed without the need for lengthy rehearsal time. These phrases were given names so that other actors would be able to identify what phrases were to be used during a fight. Examples of this kind of stage combat can be found within the literature of Mark Twain and Charles Dickens. Fight rehearsals might have sounded something like this: “Tonight we’ll start with the Glasgow Tens, you start back at me with the Long Elevens, and we’ll end with two rounds of the Drunken Combat.” This practice was still in effect at least until the mid-twentieth century. Douglas Campbell verifies in his interview with the Canadian Theatre Museum that he was trained in this way.

Canada’s theatre history was different than that of the United States and England. Though companies from these countries looked to Canada as a place where money could be made on tour, indigenous professional theatre slowly developed on its own across this country. The Stratford Festival eventually brought international attention to Canada’s theatrical coming of age. When Douglas Campbell brought his stage talents to the inaugural Stratford season in 1953, he established himself as the first professionally recognized fight director in Canada.

Douglas Campbell was not properly trained in fencing. He had only the fight skills that had been passed on to him in the English tradition, plus he had a talent for choreography. He was able to piece the fights together at Stratford

using a centuries-old style of set passes. His choreography was successful, and critics praised the fight scenes in *Richard III*, some even comparing his fights to the effect of 3D films.

While Campbell's fights brought realistic primal battle to the Stratford stage, the arrival of Patrick Crean in 1962 introduced more refined fighting techniques to the company and eventually the country. Crean had worked professionally on stage and in film. He had designed fights for Hollywood films and had been stunt double to Errol Flynn. He was a fencer primarily, but designed fights with energetic swashbuckling style. Many actors have said that his mantra was to make the actors safe and look good. Crean was also one of the founding members of the Society of British Fight Directors. This society, with co-founding members such as William Hobbs, Roy Goodall and Arthur Wise, was the first professional association of fight directors anywhere in the world. It also greatly influenced the Society of American Fight Directors, the Society of Canadian Fight Directors, Fight Directors Canada, and the Society of Australian Fight Directors.

Stratford was the melting pot for two distinct approaches to stage combat. Actors got the no-nonsense, realistic-looking fights from Campbell, and received a contrasting style of grace and agility that Crean brought with him. As a result, the actors who worked with both Campbell and Crean were able to enjoy two very different techniques: the rough-and-tumble approach of Campbell and the grace of Crean. This combination of such disparate styles makes Canadian stage combat different from that of other countries. Moreover, while American fight directors were going to England to train with British fight directors, Canada had two top-tier fight directors within the country. Actors at Stratford were getting unique experience in stage combat without having to leave Canada to do it.

Canada now has three different organizations dedicated to the development of stage combat: Fight Directors Canada, Society of Canadian Fight Directors, and the Academy of Dramatic Combat. At present only the FDC and the ADC offer actor training. Though the FDC fighting syllabus offers training at the levels of Basic, Intermediate and Advanced Actor Combatant, Fight

Instructor, Fight Director and Fight Master, the syllabus is dependent upon instructors who have the qualifications to teach the course materials. Some of the material is left up to the individual instructor. While this is a good way for instructors to teach what they know, the geographical expanse of the country makes it difficult to maintain consistency. Leaving Eastern Martial Art to be taught by instructors who know a martial art is chancy at best. For example, I have a second-degree black belt in Kendo. I served on the British Kendo team and was internationally ranked. I also trained the Japanese actors in *Snow Falling on Cedars* how to fight in kenjitsu – which was banned after the Second World War. But though I am qualified to teach Kendo, the content would not be suitable to a class for stage combat as the basics alone require months of training before a shinai (bamboo training sword) is even picked up.

Most audiences are aware of martial arts from watching films. Martial arts depicted on the screen are generally performed by Asian stunt teams, or stunt people highly trained in particular disciplines. In the West we tend to categorize the several different Eastern martial arts under the generic banner of Martial Arts. Meron Langsener makes this observation in his dissertation, *Impossible Bodies in Motion: The Representation of Martial Arts on the Stage*:

Asian martial traditions are often lumped together as a homogeneous set of disciplines, while in reality they are as varied as the cultures that originated them. As different theater artists examined different forms, aspects of those forms would make it onto the stage. Since the martial arts themselves often have multiple conflicting narratives as to origin, effectiveness, proper training methodology, the ways in which they are being assimilated into what must be a fairly standardized method of training actors continues to be in a state of flux. (11)

Western professional theatre representation of martial arts on stage often invites the audience to perceive the movements as powerful, while the actors remain in control of the techniques and are able to execute them safely while creating the

illusion of danger. It is no different than the way a 'regular' stage fight using kicks and punches is executed. It would seem more logical that the initial unarmed components of stage combat begin with the basic unarmed moves, including variations of the punches and kicks, to create the illusion of Asian martial arts. It is better to start developing this skill set early on, rather than introduce it at a later time. In doing so, the body has time to become familiar with and adapt to the basic variations.

The other issue with the current methodology of actor training is the way sword fighting is taught. Swordplay is most often taught using saber guards and parries as popularized by Alfred Hutton. Though this system offers complete bodily protection against cut and thrust weapons, it was designed for use with the military saber. The guards and defenses were not created for earlier weapons. However, the saber system has been the main system of staged swordplay for over a century. Every bladed weapon introduced was a new development. It was not always an improvement, but a response to a situation that required a different 'tool' for the combatant. The techniques that we readily transfer from weapon to weapon today limit the scope of their function. This practice also risks generalizing swordplay into a common style that greatly diminishes the quality of stage swordsmanship. If, as theatre artists, we are expected to stage fights within a historical period, then it is our duty to apply that period to the weaponry and styles of fighting particular to the time and place in which the production is set. Thanks to the Internet and the resurgence of interest in period swordplay, there has been a recent flood of books on the various periods of structured sword instruction. The problem with many of these books is that they have been written by enthusiasts who are likely to make sweeping generalizations about their subject. For example, in his book *Renaissance Swordsmanship: The Illustrated Use of Rapiers and Cut-and-Thrust Swords* John Clements states that linear fencing only began with the smallsword in the 1700's (9). He later describes and illustrates how to correctly hold a parrying dagger but unfortunately assumes that the side ring of the dagger was designed for the placement of the thumb rather than for the protection of the knuckles of the hand (57). However generalized or

misleading some of the books may be, they do offer insight to the discerning fight director who wishes to better understand swordplay prior to the nineteenth century.

In addition to offering a generic system of cut, thrust and parry positions, fight directors should at the very least offer three period styles adapted for the stage which include the historical guards, offences and defences. I would recommend Fabris for medieval swordplay, Capo Ferro for Renaissance swordplay (Jared Kirby, a period fencing enthusiast, has published the best book on Italian Rapier Combat – Capo Ferro's '*Gran Simulacro*' [2006]. The book offers a revealing mindset of the seventeenth century swordsman, whose dedication to the arts and sciences paid close attention to the preservation of life with the mastery of the blade.), and Angelo for eighteenth century swordplay. By receiving this type of instruction, students would be better able to depict period staged violence that would suit most of Shakespeare's plays and other dramatic works involving smallswords, such as *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. With actors trained in a variety of periods and styles, audiences would be exposed to increased historical accuracy in theatrical production rather than generalized approaches to swordplay. While there are many new sword schools in Canada offering period instruction with bladed weapons, the classes emphasize actual fighting techniques. Students are required to wear padded gambesons, gauntlets, and fencing masks to protect themselves in training. This does not work for stage training, however, where moves are intentionally modified for safety and combatants work hard to maintain the illusion of violence under the strict adherence to minimizing risk.

I have been asked upon occasion why it is important to study the historical aspect of swordplay. The basic cut and thrust style that is seen so often on stage and screen is viscerally exciting. Why change it? The answer is because so much of what we have become accustomed to is wrong. So much professional Canadian theatre upholds aesthetic traditions that seek historical accuracy and realistic detail on stage. Costume designers, set designers, sound designers, directors, property buyers, and actors all research in great detail when working

on a project. By contrast, fights are often much less-grounded in research and simply prepared as afterthoughts rather than integral features of the story world presented on stage. *Romeo and Juliet* includes text specific to Italian and Spanish swordplay: *punto reverso*, *passado*, and *stocata*. I attended a production of *Romeo and Juliet* several years ago in Vancouver in which the director chose to have Mercutio and Tybalt fight with butcher knives. He also chose to present the text un-edited. The terminology made no sense in the play. The director did not know the meanings of the fencing terms and told me after the show that it did not matter, that no one really cares about those words anyway. This comment has haunted me. Perhaps many in the audience did not care, or understand. Nevertheless, I believe there is a duty within the text to honor it. To stage plays such as *Romeo and Juliet* or *Hamlet* without any attention to the detail of the swordfights dishonors the playwright and discredits the integrity of the play. This is why more attention needs to be paid to the art of swordplay.

Canada's population is relatively small and dispersed over a large geographical terrain. The total number of professional fight directors is small, with the largest concentration in Ontario. The FDC and ADC workshops are relatively small and held only on an annual basis. The Paddy Crean Workshop is held in Banff, Alberta in the winter of every other year. However small and infrequent these workshops are, Canada offers some of the best training in the world in stage combat. The variety of topics covered at the Crean Workshop draws students and instructors from all over the world. Canada, in this sense, is a hub where enthusiasts, academics and practitioners can converge and share their knowledge over a two-week period. The globalization of sword training made possible through the resources now available on the Internet has contributed to this development.

Paddy Crean's legacy lives on through the hundreds of students he trained at Stratford, in England, across Canada and the United States. He was born in Britain and died in Stratford as a Canadian. Crean elevated the process of swordplay into an art form. More than just a series of moves and techniques, his attention to the dialogue of the fight and the details surrounding the fight

brought functional stage combat to another level. The students of Crean and the fight directors who have followed for the most part strive to create fights that exist as part of the play, as heightened dramatic action. While not always authentic to the period, the fights become part of the created world within the play. Influences from Britain and the United States have shaped stage combat in Canada, but it is Canadian fight directors who continue to advance the art of the fight. The syllabus created by the FDC is comprehensive, but to remain strong it needs the inclusion of period approaches to fighting rather than just a generalized approach. There also needs to be a more developed approach to the way martial arts are taught across Canada. At the moment too much is left up to individual instructors.

Fight directors have come a long way in being recognized as theatre professionals. In Chapter Four I described how Canadian Actors Equity Association had not included fight directors in the list of definitions under section 18:00 in the Canadian Theatre Agreement. Fight Captains, however, were included. The *Proposed Changes to the 2012-2015 Canadian Theatre Agreement (CTA) Ratification Package*, sent to members in June 2012, contains a new clause under section 18:00 that pertains to fight directors. The proposed clause reads:

A “Fight Director” is the person engaged for the purpose of choreographing fight sequence(s) in a production. A fight director must have valid certification at the time of contracting for the production. (5)

There is no further mention in the proposed changes as to what constitutes valid certification. I can only assume that this will mean fight director certification will include qualifications from Fight Directors Canada, the Society of Canadian Fight Directors, or the Academy of Dramatic Combat, and possibly internationally recognized organizations such as the British Academy of Dramatic Combat, the Society of British Fight Directors, and the Society of American Fight Directors. Should these changes be ratified, they will ensure that high levels of safety and

choreography will be present on the Canadian stage. This would also mark the first acknowledgement by the CAEA that fight directors need to be properly trained to properly perform their duties as professional artists on the stage. If this amendment passes, Canadian stage combat organizations will be an even more important part of Canadian theatre.

Paddy Crean made stage combat an art. The challenge today is for fight directors to maintain the level of quality currently inherent in the training in Canada and to continue to advocate for the relatively few of us theatre artists who work as professional fight directors. We must continue, as Paddy Crean said, to keep our actors and (audiences) safe, and to keep them looking good.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Terminology

The following glossary is a combination of terms from the Fight Directors' Canada syllabus included with permission from the FDC.*

ABDUCTION. Movement of the sword-arm away from the central line of the body.

ADVANCE. The leading foot steps forward, followed by the trailing foot, maintaining the same distance between the feet as the en-garde position. [This is the first move beginning fencers learn. Footwork is the key to good form and style in fencing. This is also very true for stage combat. During the advance the feet must never slide.]

ALIGNMENT. The body's posture when fencing, where the head and spine are straight.

APPEL. The stamping of the foot prior to, or after an attack. [I would argue that the appel is a motion that assists in the continual movement forward after an initial attack is unsuccessful. This allows another attack to occur without returning to an en-garde position.]

ATTACK. Any offensive movement.

ATTACK ON THE BLADE. A preparation for an offensive movement. The basic attacks on the blade include the Beat, the Pressure, and the Froissement.

AVOIDANCE. A defensive movement intended to evade an attack; therefore no contact is made.

BALDRICK. A sword belt hung from the shoulder.

BALESTRA. A preparation for attack. A jump forward usually, but not always followed by a lunge.

* From time to time I have added my own definitions in brackets([]) when I feel that the term requires clarification.

BEAT. (Attack on the Blade). A sharp “tap” against either the middle or foible of the partner’s blade, with the object of opening an offensive line, or provoking an attack.

BEAT PARRY. A parry that clears the line by striking an attacking blade, as opposed to stopping or redirecting [the blade].

BIND. (Prise de Fer) A preparation of an attack that carries the partner’s blade diagonally across the body from high to low or vice versa. [The bind is generally the result of reacting to an extended point of the partner’s sword. In order to remove the threat and prepare for a riposte, the bind takes the sword out of danger.]

CADENCE. The rhythm in which a sequence of movement is made.

CARTE. A parry in 4.

CENTRAL GUARD. An en-garde position where the hand and sword are placed between two horizontal and vertical lines, not completely in any one line.

CENTRE LINE. An imaginary line that bisects the body into equal halves.

CHANGE BEAT. A change of engagement immediately followed by a beat attack.

CHANGE OF ENGAGEMENT. To release contact of the blades, and re-establish contact in a new line.

CIRCULAR PARRY. (Counter Parry – Acquired Parry) A parry during which the defender’s blade describes a circle to gather a partner’s blade.

CLOSED LINE. (Covered Line) When the defender’s weapon prevents an attack to that line of targeting.

COMPOUND ATTACK. Composed of more than one blade action and incorporating one or more feints.

CORPS À CORPS. Literally means ‘body to body.’ Describes the moment when the combatants come into physical contact and the weapons are immobilized.

COULÉ. (Glissade, Graze) To extend the sword-arm, remaining in contact with the partner’s blade and slipping lightly along it.

COUPÉ. A disengagement made by passing the tip over the partner’s blade or hilt.

CROISÉ. (Pris de Fer) Taking the partner's blade from a high line to a low line or vice versa on the same side of the body.

CUT. An attack made with the edge of the blade.

CUT OVER HEAD/SLASH OVER. A horizontal cut designed to look as if it will strike the head if it lands. It may travel right to left or vice versa. It is usually avoided by ducking.

CUT ACROSS STOMACH/SLASH CENTRE. A horizontal cut designed to look as if it will cut the stomach open if it landed. It may travel right to left or vice versa. It is usually evaded by jumping back.

DECEPTION OF PARRY. The evasion of the defender's blade as they attempt to parry, engage or attack the blade.

DEFENSIVE GUARD. When the trail foot is forward of the lead foot when in guard.

DÉGAGER. Moving from the line of engagement to another by passing the blade under the partner's blade or hilt.

DELAYED RIPOSTE. An attack made after a pause. This is either a tactical or dramatic choice.

DEMI VOLTE. A defensive method of effacing the target by swinging the rear leg backward and sideways, so that the torso is brought 90 degrees to the line of attack.

DÉROBEMENT. Evading a partner's attempts to beat or take the blade while the arm is extended.

DIAGONAL CUT. An angled cut to either the inside or outside line. It may be rising or falling.

DISARM. The act of removing the partner's weapon from their hand.

DIRECT PARRY. (Lateral, simple, instinctive parry) Any parry made from guard, or a horizontal parry that remains in the high or low line.

DISENGAGEMENT. The act of removing the blade from contact with the partner's blade.

DOUBLÉ. (Compound attack) A thrusting attack in any line that deceives a direct parry and a counter parry. [This attack gained popularity with the introduction of the smallsword due to the lighter weight of the smallsword over the rapier.]

ENGAGE. To establish contact with the blades at the outset of a fight sequence.

ENVELOPMENT. (Pris de fer) Taking the partner's blade and describing a circle to return to the line of engagement without losing contact of blades. [This is a binding action. The partner who takes the blade 'leads' the blades in a circular motion.]

ÉPÉE. A dueling sword that evolved in the nineteenth century. One of the three competitive fencing weapons.

EXPULSION. A movement that forces a disengagement.

FALSE EDGE. The back edge of the blade.

FEINT. An offensive movement made to resemble an attack in order to draw a reaction from the partner.

FENCING MEASURE. The distance between two combatants.

FLAT. Part of the blade. The width of the blade.

FOIBLE. The third of the blade nearest the point. The weakest part of the blade.

FOIL. The practice weapon of the small sword, evolved in the late seventeenth century. One of the three competitive fencing weapons. [It comes from the French word *refouler* which means to turn back, and existed in the late sixteenth century. Any weapon with the point turned back could essentially be a foil.]

FORTE. The third of the blade nearest to the hilt. The strongest part of the blade, normally used for defense.

FROISSEMENT. (Attack on the blade) A preparation of attack made by deflecting the partner's blade by a strong grazing action along it, ending with an expulsion.

HAND PARRY. A defensive move where the hand (usually gloved) is used to deflect, block or seize an attacking blade.

HANGING PARRY. A parry protecting the diagonal lines with the hilt high and the point low.

HILT. Technically, collective term for parts of the sword including the guard, quillons, grip and pommel. The term, however, is loosely applied to the guard itself in cup-hilt and cross-hilt.

HIGH LINES. The parts of the partner's target visible above the sword hand when on guard.

HIT. An offensive action, which lands with the point or edge on the target.

INSIDE LINES. The parts of the target to the left of the sword hand when one is right handed, and to the right if one is left handed.

INVITATION TO ATTACK. Opening a line to offer the partner the chance for an offensive movement.

LEAD FOOT. The front foot when on guard.

LINES. Four divisions of the target areas (inside, outside, high, low).

LOW LINES. The target areas visible below the sword-hand when on guard.

LUNGE. The forward extension of the arm, body, and legs used to reach a partner [with the sword].

MID BLADE. The third of the blade between the foible and forte. Ideally, most attack/defense engagements should seek to avoid mid-blade contact in favour of the foible or forte, normally through correct fighting distance and hand/blade position.

MOLINELLO. A cut to the head following the parry of one.

MOULINET. The so-called 'figure-of-eight' consists in the continuous execution of the two downward diagonal cuts, making an 'X' in the air. When the subsidiary point movements needed to join the arms of the figure are added, an imaginary figure '8', lying on its side, is created. [It is guided by the forearm and controlled with the wrist. Today it is used predominantly in stage combat due to its large motion.]

NEUTRAL. Halfway between supination and pronation.

NEUTRAL GUARD. When both feet are parallel when on guard.

OCTAVE. (Parry 8) The position and parry protecting the low outside line, with the hand in supination. One of the last parries to be defined and adopted.

OFF LINE. (Off target) An attack that is directed away from the partner's body.

OFFENSIVE GUARD. When the lead foot is forward when on guard.

ON GUARD. The basic position. Where the lead foot is placed in step in front of the rear foot, with the knees slightly flexed. The spine and head should be in line.

ON LINE. (On target) An attack directed to a target area of the body.

OPENING. An unguarded area.

OUTSIDE LINES. The parts of the target to the right of the sword hand when one is right handed and to the left if one is left handed.

PARRY. A defensive action whereby an attack is blocked, deflected or re-directed. The three categories of parries are:

Simple/Instinctive/Direct

Semi or Half Circular

Counter/Circle/Acquired/Direct

The nine basic parry positions are:

Prime

Seconde

Tierce

Carte (Quarte)

Quinte

Quinte Alternate

Sixte

Septime

Octave

PASS BACKWARD. When the lead foot crosses trail foot in retreat (one step).

PASS FORWARD. When the trail foot crosses the lead foot in advance (one step).

PATINANDO. An advance followed immediately by a lunge.

PIED A FERME. Standing your ground with feet in place.

PISTON THRUST. The use of the sword arm in a direct thrust, withdrawing the arm and repeating the action.

POINT CONTROL. The ability to regulate the movement of the point accurately and place it on the exact part of the target desired.

POMMEL. The metal cap which screws onto and locks in place the 'tang' of the blade, where the latter passes through and projects just beyond the top of the grip. The pommel's weight also serves to balance the blade.

POMMEL ATTACK. An attack made with the pommel of the weapon instead of the blade.

POSITIONS. Refers to the position of hand and blade at any given time and can be analyzed on a dual basis:

- a) The hand positions: Pronation, Supination or Neutral.
- b) The blade positions.

PREPARATION OF ATTACK. A movement of blade or foot, designed to prepare the way for an attack, either by displacing the partner's blade from its line or by obtaining a reaction from him. Preparations involving the use of the feet are normally used to close the fencing measure and come within attacking distance, although occasionally they may succeed in distracting the partner's attention.

Preparations may be classified as follows:

- 1) With the foot. Steps forward and back, jumps, appel, balestras, and so forth are of course included under this heading and a backward movement may well be used in order to tempt the partner into advancing within attacking distance.

- 2) Prises-de-fer or taking the blade.

- a) Bind
- b) Croise
- c) Envelopment

- 3) Attacks on the blade.

- a) Beat
- b) Pressure
- c) Froissement

PRESSURE. (Attack on the blade) A preparation of attack made by pressing on the partner's blade.

PRIME. (parry 1) The first position and parry, so called because it was supposed to be that which was instinctively assumed when the sword was drawn from its sheath to meet a surprise attack. It protects the low inside line, with the hand in pronation.

PRISE-DE-FER. A preparation of attack in which the partner's blade is taken by an envelopment, a bind or a croise. A Prise-de-fer can only be effective when the partner's arm is extended with the blade in line.

PRONATION. The position of the sword hand with the palm down.

QUARTE. (Quarta, Carte) The fourth position and parry, protecting the high inside line of the combatant's torso.

QUILLON BEAT. Beating away a partner's blade using the quillon block after a successful parry.

QUINTE (Parry 5) The fifth position and parry, protecting the head with the hand in pronation.

RAPIER. The long, narrow thrusting weapon which originated in Italy in the early sixteenth century and was destined entirely to replace the broadsword. As time passed, the rapier was progressively shortened and lightened, until it evolved into the eighteenth century smallsword.

RECOVER BACK. Returning to the en-garde after a lunge moving the front foot back.

RECOVER FORWARD. Returning to the on guard position after a lunge moving the rear foot forward.

RECOVER. A return to the on guard position after a lunge.

REDOUBLEMENT. The delivery of a second thrust, without rising from the lunge, after the first attack has been parried.

REINFORCED PARRY. A parry that is directly supported by a secondary weapon, object or hand.

RETREAT. (retire) The rear foot steps backward, followed by the front foot, while retaining the gap between the feet.

REVERSE GRIP. An underhand grip on a weapon.

RICASSO. The flattened part of the tang of the blade, immediately above and within a guard.

RIPOSTE. The offensive action following the successful parry of an attack.

SALUTE. A courtesy exchanged between combatants and duelists at the start and conclusion of an encounter.

SECONDE. (Parry 2) The second position and parry protecting the combatants' lower trunk on their sword hand side, similar to octave, but the hand is in pronation.

SEIZING THE SWORD. Grasping the partner's weapon, preparatory to disarming them.

SEMICIRCULAR PARRY. A parry during which the blade describes a half circle from a high to low line or vice versa.

SENTIMENT DU FER. 'Sensation of the blade.' Feeling a partner's reactions through contact with the blades.

SEPTIME. (Parry 7) The seventh position and parry, protecting the lower part of the combatant's target on the inside low line, the hand in supination.

SESTA. (Parry 5A) A reversed parry protecting the head but with the hand in supination.

SIMPLE ATTACK. An attack made with one movement either direct or indirect.

SIXTE. (Parry 6) The sixth position and parry protecting the high outside line of the combatant's trunk. The hand, supinated, the parry is usually used against a thrust.

SUPINATION. The position of the sword hand with the palm up.

TARGET. The part of the body to which an attack is delivered.

THRUST. An attack with the tip of the blade and the arm in extension.

TIERCE. (Parry 3) The third position and parry, protecting the outside high lines of the body, with the hand in pronation.

TRAILING FOOT. The rear foot in the on guard position.

VOLTE. A method of effacing the target by swinging the rear leg backwards and sideways, so that the torso is brought 180 degrees in relation to the line of attack.

YIELD PARRY. (Ceding) A defensive movement immediately following a parried attack, whereby the initial attacker gives way to a counterattack while the blades remain engaged.

Appendix B: List of Interview Questions

The following list of interview questions was used as a structure for conducting interviews. Subjects were sent the list of questions in advance in order to prepare for the interview:

- 1) Can you list your experience and training as a Fight Director?
- 2) What first inspired you to become a fight director?
- 3) When did you become interested in stage combat?
- 4) What are some of your experiences, both good and bad as an actor-combatant and fight director?
- 5) What is your association with either Fight Directors Canada or the Society of Canadian Fight Directors? Is there a different fight association you belong to?
- 6) Who plans and implements your organization's policies?
- 7) What sort of creative and logistical decisions do you have to consider in planning fight scenes for the stage?
- 8) How many styles of fighting and weapons are you familiar with and can you list your current level of proficiency with each style of weapon?
- 9) What are your thoughts about the role of Fight Director being part of the Canadian Theatre Agreement? Are there any changes or alterations you would like to see with the current definition and remuneration for your services as a fight director?
- 10) Can you explain the importance of the role of Fight Captain and the duties associated with the title during the run of a play?
- 11) What do you look for in stage ready weaponry? Where do you look for stage-grade weapons?
- 12) What, if any, were some of the difficulties you have encountered as a fight director?
- 13) Can you define what a safe stage fight entails? What do you do to ensure minimal levels of risk during the staging and execution of a stage fight?

- 14) Have you ever been involved in a production of Hamlet? If so, can you describe in detail what challenges you had staging the fight between Laertes and Hamlet – both physical and textual?
- 15) Can you describe the relationship between the Fight Director and other departments during the rehearsal and run of a theatrical production?
- 16) What system of fight notation do you use?