

## ‘Scorn Eunuch Sports’: Class, Gender and the Context of Early Cricket

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**Abstract:** The under-theorised eighteenth-century game of cricket represents a far more fluid and paradoxical site of enquiry than the exhaustively politicised discussions of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century versions of the sport. Eighteenth-century cricket represents a way of describing the performance of gender within a context of patriotic self-imagining. Poems and paintings describing cricketers of both sexes illustrate how ideas of masculinity and femininity can be celebrated and challenged at the same time. The extent to which cricket (as it is steadily organised and coded) functions as a ‘heroic’ pastime says much about the centrality of sport in general within the national consciousness.

**Keywords:** cricket, sociology, gender, class, mock-heroic, leisure, consumption, identity

Cricket’s early institutionalisation is contemporary with celebratory affirmations of its status as both a peculiarly English game and as a peculiarly masculinised one, a game to be contrasted with the more sedentary feminised pursuits of a continental (specifically French) aristocracy. Political analyses of sport are generally configured by describing the dynamics of class, race and gender which define the culture and assumptions of sporting endeavour. At the same time, gentility, ethnicity, masculinity and femininity are all variously staged, promoted and threatened by the celebration of sport. The assertive masculinity of the game of cricket coincides, meanwhile, with its popularity among women, both as a polite pastime and as a popular spectacle. The more masculinised a game becomes, the more interesting it becomes to watch women attempt to play it, and the more shrill the demand for gender normativity, the more seductive the spectacle of gender transgression.

Theoretically, this paper is informed by both Goffmanesque and Butlerian theories of performativity.<sup>1</sup> The performance of masculinity through sport contains within it the possibility of its opposite, its negation. Gender is troubled by women’s cricket, but this trouble is in itself part of the structuration of both cricket and gender, since ‘transgressive’ categories serve to define and consolidate approved categories. A team sport is one marked always by tension and negotiation, compromise and conflict and is therefore an ideal place for sociologists to consider gender as a work in process. The value of eighteenth-century cricket is that it illustrates how issues of gender and class are interdependent at a crucial stage of ideological development. This paper will show how cricket dramatises ways in which divisions of class and gender are presented, accommodated, ameliorated and sometimes even subverted by the development of an early organised sport. Furthermore, the sociology of sport tends to treat pre-nineteenth-century cricket as a somewhat prehistoric condition of disorganised innocence.

The data on which this paper is based have attracted the attention of cricketing enthusiasts for generations and have accordingly been anthologised far more than they

have been theorised. Social historians have also been drawn to these data, and, most recently, Derek Birley<sup>2</sup> and David Underdown<sup>3</sup> have written impressive treatments of the sport from a fairly orthodox position within social history. The authors of this paper flatter themselves, however, that no collaboration of sociological and literary training has yet been brought to bear on this same body of data, which include poems, anecdotes, rule books and score cards, not to mention evidence provided by paintings, engravings and other visual material.

This interdisciplinary collaboration provides insights from within a shared terrain, our common priority being an analysis of particular social activities as systems of meaning. Sociologically, cricket is an illuminating topic within the fields of leisure and consumption, as well as within the sociology of sport. Cricket is a sport that reflects and reproduces socio-cultural dynamics of class, gender and racial tension and negotiation. Frequently analysed within a post-colonial dynamic, under the influential aegis of C. L. R. James,<sup>4</sup> previous academic discussions have concentrated on class and racial tensions on the field of play, whereas gendered readings of the game are far more scarce, as are attempts to mediate issues of class and gender within a continuum of theoretical concern.

With a dedicated global fan base considerably greater than the entire population of North America, readings of modern cricket tend to consider its role in South Asian society and its ability both to reflect and to influence international relations.<sup>5</sup> However, understanding the origins of the organised game in southern England in the eighteenth century becomes crucial as a means of understanding how many of the gendered and class-based assumptions associated not only with sport but also with social and cultural figurations more generally considered were originally negotiated. The fact that cricket was one of the earliest codified team sports (with a version of the rules formalised in 1744), much earlier than other dominant modern examples (soccer, American football, rugby, basketball, baseball etc.), has its own interest and importance. The organisation of cricket was not patterned after the organisation of any prior sport, and cultural and contextual factors point to a more organic line of development.

### I. *The Excitement of the Game*

The single most influential sociological theorisation of sport has been provided by Norbert Elias, in particular his late work *The Quest for Excitement* (1986), written in collaboration with his one-time student Eric Dunning. This much acknowledged yet much criticised work charts the history of sporting organisation and regulation in terms of society's need for stimulating yet stabilised tension. Elias and Dunning inhabit a historicist and developmental frame of reference, concentrating on the progressive restraints placed on violence. Fox-hunting and soccer (especially spectator hooliganism) are the major themes treated. Cricket is referred to only briefly, although Elias and Dunning do instance the eighteenth-century invention of the middle stump as an example of how sports naturally evolve to preserve a balanced play of forces:

The middle stump of the wicket, it is reported, was introduced into cricket when bowlers developed a technique which got the ball too often and, it seemed, too easily through the wicket. In the second case, games frequently end in a stalemate. Thus, the adequacy of the tension-equilibrium and of the dynamics of the figuration in a sport-game depends, among others, on arrangements which ensure that the contestants, as well as attacking and defending, have equal chances to win and to lose.<sup>6</sup>

The logic and elegance of Elias and Dunning's reasoning is unanswerable, yet they fail to note the particular pressures that defined the quest for 'tension-equilibrium', in particular ignoring the central and overt role of gambling.

The key issue in *The Quest for Excitement* is, rather, violence and its regulated expression in sporting endeavour. While we agree with much of what Elias and Dunning suggest, we would counter the 'reflexive' approach they assume, preferring to treat cricket as *sui generis*, its own system of meaning rather than as parasitic or mimetic of some more real abstraction such as 'society'. Nor do we follow the well-trodden and well-funded sociological tradition of seeing violence in sport as a 'problem', a social disorder. However, we do recognise that cricket's early years are associated with fears of violence and disorder far removed from its later, more genteel image. The Elias and Dunning tradition is challenged by Ruud Stokvis (1992), who claims that its conclusions are derived from an unbalanced sample of 'dangerous' sports at the expense of gentler ones, including cricket.<sup>7</sup> Stokvis is answered by one of Elias and Dunning's most eloquent defenders, Dominic Malcolm (2002), who maintains the usefulness of Elias and Dunning's overarching theory of 'the civilisation process' to explain the game's slow codification as well as stressing the violent aspects of early cricket.<sup>8</sup> Malcolm is in turn answered by Wray Vamplew (2005), who questions how violent early cricket could realistically have been.<sup>9</sup> Malcolm in turn replies (2008) attempting to sum up the debate by validating a distinctively sociological perspective.<sup>10</sup> The ongoing controversy illustrates the degree of investment that historians and sociologists place in the extent to which cricket could really have hurt people. A separate, related and, for the authors of this paper, more important question is the significance of *representations* of cricket as a dangerous sport.

Violence in cricket is certainly more significant than is casually assumed, but we would prefer to subsume 'violence' within a more potent and wide-ranging discussion of the performance of masculinity. Anthony Bateman has noted how the 'stylizations of masculinity enacted within the structured frame of cricket were interpreted as indicative of the health of the British nation and empire'.<sup>11</sup> However, Bateman's performative reading is focused, as usual, on nineteenth-century imperial cricket rather than on the more fluid gender dynamics of the earlier game.

Many of Elias and Dunning's observations regarding tension management in sport and society are anticipated by Georg Simmel, for whom ambivalences and uncertain liminal spaces form the basis of long-term socially stabilising structures – the accommodation rather than the resolution of contradictory attitudes is the basis of social formation.<sup>12</sup> For Simmel liminality is not some transient historical phase but rather a basis for historical continuity, since the agencies that seek to 'manage' liminal categories prove self-perpetuating. Managing violence, disorder and 'tension' in the game of cricket, in Simmelian terms, is therefore a story of reconfigurations rather than resolutions.

The Elias and Dunning construction of sport as displaced violence is independently reinforced by that most influential and performative of sociologists, Erving Goffman (1977):

one could argue, it is not that sports are but another expression of our human (specifically male) nature, but rather that sports are the only expression of male human nature – an arrangement specifically designed to allow males to manifest the qualities claimed as basic to them: strengths of various kinds, stamina, endurance, and the like. In consequence of this early training in sports, individuals can carry through life a framework of arrangement and

response, a referencing system, which provides evidence, perhaps the evidence, of our having a certain nature. Adult spectator sports, live and transmitted, ensure a continuous reminder of the contesting perspective.<sup>13</sup>

Goffman defines a world in which sport helps to define not only men's sense of their specifically male identity but also an organic and evolving mechanism for the process of framing and referencing itself.

## *II. The Rules of the Game*

By the 1780s cricket resembled the modern game in many key particulars. The length of the cricket pitch had long been fixed, although 'pitches' as such had yet to exist. The wickets were twenty-two yards apart, and had been for most of the century. The weight of the ball was between five and a half and five and three-quarter ounces. Following the arrival at the crease of one 'Shock' White with a bat that was wider than the wicket in 1771, swift and necessary rules were legislated fixing the size of the bat.<sup>14</sup> John Small the elder invented the straight bat around the same time, and after a fairly short transitional period cricketing equipment became standard. By the 1780s the Hambledon club in south Hampshire had secured for cricket its first widely mythologised golden age.<sup>15</sup>

Two crucial differences between the Hambledonian game (c.1780) and the modern game should be noted. Pitches were not prepared, and the team that got to choose where to pitch the wickets often enjoyed a significant tactical advantage. Also, all bowling was underarm, or 'underhand' as it was then described and prescribed. (Over-arm bowling is the product of the nineteenth century, and its folkloric origins link it with the women's game, since hooped skirts could not accommodate the traditional underarm action, although the over-arm action is preceded by the sideways 'round-arm' delivery championed by Jane Austen's nephew George Knight and currently illustrated by Sri Lankan paceman Lasith Malinga.<sup>16</sup>) However, it is crucial to note that underarm bowling was not necessarily or even usually slow, civilised or non-violent, and talented bowlers could make the ball rise alarmingly.

All versions of the rules, whether emanating from Marylebone or Hambledon, assume an initial wager. The rules refer not to the winner of the game but to the winner of the bet. The idea of competitive cricket in which no money changed hands was, quite simply, unthinkable. The history of the game's regulation is, therefore, the history of attempts to 'keep things interesting'. The ubiquity of gambling among all social classes in England in the eighteenth century indicates that sporting excitement and economic investment are inextricably linked.

## *III. A Game Which is More than Liquor*

If the game was unthinkable without betting, it was even more unthinkable without alcohol. It cannot be a coincidence that the cradle of cricket was prime hop-growing country (the Weald of Kent, Sussex and Hampshire). Publicans are over-represented at all levels of the game, hosting matches, sponsoring events, creating the social context of club cricket as we know it, as well as playing themselves at a high level. As Tony Collins and Wray Vamplew note: 'The commercial opportunities inherent in the ability of a cricket match to draw large crowds together for considerable lengths of time was not lost on the purveyors of alcohol.'<sup>17</sup> In short, unlike prize-fighting (which might

produce a quick knock-out) or fox-hunting (which ranged over an inconvenient extent of terrain), cricket assembled large numbers of people in one space for a sufficient time for large quantities of beer to be consumed. Changes in cricket and brewing follow the pattern of larger social change. The shift of power from Hambledon to Marylebone is co-extensive with the industrialisation and urbanisation of brewing in the same period. Our very understanding of the so-called urban/rural divide owes much to changes in the consumption of cricket and beer. The positively promoted aspects of so-called rural life become increasingly commodified and made available in an urban context.

The popular rhetoric of rural virtue is always invested with a heady nostalgia. John Nyren's description of cricketing drinking binges provides a classic vision of heady pastoral strength and vigour. Nyren, the publican/cricketer son of Richard Nyren, publican/cricket captain of the famed Hambledon club, recalled fondly one particular high feasting held on Broad Half-Penny Down not after but during one of their most important matches:

How those fine brawn-faced fellows of farmers would drink to our success! And then, what stuff they had to drink! – Punch! – not your new Ponche a la Romaine, or Ponche a la Groseille, or your modern cat-lap punch – punch be-deviled; but good, unsophisticated John Bull stuff – stark! – that would stand on end – punch that would make a cat speak! Sixpence a bottle! We had not sixty millions of interest to pay in those days. The ale too! – not the modern horror under the same name, that drives as many men melancholy-mad as the hypocrites do; – not the beastliness of these days, that will make a fellow's inside like a shaking bog – and as rotten; but barleycorn, such as would put the souls of three butchers into one weaver. Ale that would flare like turpentine – genuine Boniface! This immortal viand (for it was more than liquor) was vended at twopence per pint.<sup>18</sup>

The strength and health of the drink and the strength and health of the English rural cricketer exactly coincide and are, on this particular occasion, simultaneous. The nineteenth-century cricket historian James Pycroft remarked that cricket 'follows the course rather of ale than whiskey. Witness Kent, the land of hops.'<sup>19</sup> Cricket nostalgia, from the early nineteenth century onwards, draws on powerful associations between ideas of bucolic good health and national integrity and well-being. Drinks such as beer and punch (in an age prior to preservatives and refrigeration) also provide powerful signifiers of sense of place since they cannot be consumed very far from the site of their production. The display of cricketing prowess demonstrated by the home team would have been complemented by the display of brewing excellence exhibited by the innkeeper, who might well be the chief commercial beneficiary of the event. More relevantly for this paper, the display of masculinity exhibited on the field of play is clearly linked to the display of masculinity exhibited in terms of feats of drinking. The ability to quaff either strong ale or cat-verbalising punch creates an ideal confluence of rurality and masculinity within a heady cocktail of nostalgia.

#### IV. *The Joys of the Game*

These linkages were being eagerly forged nearly a century earlier, however. The title of this paper is provided by James Love's *Cricket: A Heroic Poem* (1744), a health Georgic reminiscent of the works of John Armstrong. Cricket is predictably promoted, half humorously, half seriously, as the outdoor, masculine, English antidote to indoor, effeminate, French sports such as billiards:

Leave the dissolving Song, the baby Dance,  
 To sooth the Slaves of Italy and France:  
 While the firm Limb, and strong brac'd Nerve are thine,  
 Scorn Eunuch Sports: to manlier Games incline;  
 Feed on the Joys that Health and Vigour give;  
 Where Freedom reigns, 'tis worth the while to live.<sup>20</sup>

The verse is efficiently enough managed. The fluent sibilants evoke a sense of dissolution, blurring, ambiguity attached to foreign pastimes, while the rougher, slower, more consonantal lines provide the British alternative. The idea of cricket as an antidote to 'Eunuch' sports is somewhat paradoxical, however, in light of the ability of eighteenth-century *underarm* fast bowlers to bowl balls that pitched short and rose significantly. William Lambert, a superb all-rounder and underarm bowler (later banned for life for alleged match-fixing) who published a cricketing manual in 1816, advises batsmen to have nothing to do with balls that rise five or six inches above the wicket.<sup>21</sup> The wicket is twenty-two inches high. In other words, the supposed antidote to Eunuch sports is the very sport that actually risks making a eunuch of you. Given the scarcity of appropriate safety gear, this is a game that asserts and threatens masculinity at one and the same time, a game that puts manhood to the test.

Physical danger and personal vulnerability prove to be key aspects of how the game is poetically imagined. In a footnote to Love's poem, it is remarked:

With what Taste and Judgement, cries the enraptur'd Commentator, is the Frenchified Diversion of Billiards here, at the same time, pathetically describ'd, and critically expos'd! It is, no doubt, obvious to every Reader, how beautifully this ridiculous Amusement serves as a Foil to CRICKET. The Company at the former, are generally Beaus of the first Magnitude, dress'd in the Quintessence of the Fashion. The robust Cricketer, plays in his Shirt. The Rev. Mr. W—d, particularly, appears almost naked.<sup>22</sup>

Whatever reserves of absolutist might *ancien régime* France might be able to deploy on the battlefield, a nation that is able to field near-naked cricketing vicars is clearly a force to be reckoned with. Accounts of the physical exposure and danger of cricket are mainly derived from the early nineteenth-century anecdotage of players like Billy Beldham, William Lambert and, above all, John Nyren, whose reminiscences were organised into book form in the early nineteenth century. Broken bones and grisly flesh wounds are central to all these recollections. None of these old cricketers was able to authenticate an actual cricketing fatality, however, and one senses that this is a disappointing admission. However, the (dubious) story that Frederick, prince of Wales, was killed by a cricket ball in 1751 was widely and enthusiastically reported and has been stated as fact as recently as 1999 by Kirsten Olsen.<sup>23</sup> The story makes the delicious claim that the very first Hanoverian royal actually to take the trouble to try and be English is repaid for his efforts by being killed by cricket. Whether or not the story is true is far less interesting and important than the desirability of believing the story. The game is thereby sacramentalised with the blood of a prominent martyr.

The ability of underarm bowlers to produce such dangerous deliveries remains perhaps the most technically perplexing aspect of the eighteenth-century game. Lambert is clear that the ball should bounce just once before reaching the wicket. Presumably it could only rise so high on pitches so hard that they were virtually baked clay. Although it has been suggested that such bowling was an innovation of the 1760s, James Love's descriptions, steeped in the rhetoric of Pope's translation of Homer, show that dangerous bowling was clearly imagined back in 1744:

Nor with more Force the Death conveying Ball,  
Sprints from the Cannon to the batter'd Wall:  
Nor swifter yet the pointed Arrows go,  
Launch'd from the vigour of the *Parthian* Bow.  
It whizz'd along, with unimagi'd Force,  
And bore down all, resistless in its Course.  
To such impetuous Might compell'd to yield  
The *Bail* and mangled *Stumps* bestrew the Field.<sup>24</sup>

There is fascinating historical inversion invested in these similes. Cannon, unavailable to Homer's armies, are available metaphorically to eighteenth-century cricketers, who are being re-imagined as Homeric warriors. This sort of historical slippage and confusion are, of course, crucial to mock-heroic as a genre.

It is possible, of course, that the ball might 'whizz' all along the ground. However, had it done so, it seems hard to imagine quite how the batsman could have 'skied it' as follows:

When, scarce arriving fair,  
The glancing Ball mounts upward in the Air?  
The batsman sees it, and with mournful Eyes,  
Fix'd on th'ascending Pellet as it flies,  
Thus suppliant Claims the Favour of the Skies  
O Mighty Jove! And all ye Powers above!  
Let my regarded Pray'r your Pity move!  
Grant me but this. Whatever Youth shall dare  
Snatch at the Prize, descending thro' the Air;  
Lay him extended on the grassy Plain,  
And make his bold ambitious Effort vain.  
He said. The Powers, attended his Request,  
Granted one Part, to Winds consigned the rest.<sup>25</sup>

This prayer is one of the most effective features of the poem. Homer's warriors often pray after this fashion, and are often half satisfied, half disappointed, by the Olympian response they receive. In this instance the fielder does lie extended on the grassy plain, but only after having caught the ball. It is also true to the real experience of a modern batsman who has skied a ball and can do nothing but pray that no one gets underneath it. The fact that cricketers have time to reflect in this way allows us to restate the relevance of Elias and Dunning to make a crucial point about the relationship between the poetical imaginings of sport and warfare. Too often sport is regarded as some less important version of warfare: warfare tamed and made trivial. The reality, however, is that in many respects cricket is far closer to the experience of Homeric warfare than eighteenth-century warfare is to the world of the *Iliad*. Long lines of uniformed infantry, firing with drilled precision, provide nothing of the Homeric balance of individual and team effort that takes place before the fields of Troy. On no eighteenth-century battlefield did soldiers act as spectators, encircling a tense contest between two distinct opponents. John Richardson has deftly surveyed the technical problems facing would-be verse celebrants of the War of Spanish Succession. He notes that: 'Only if the battlefield is quiet enough for the hero to make speeches and if the most deadly missiles are arrows and darts will a heroic poem work. In short, heroic verse and modern warfare do not belong together.'<sup>26</sup>

A cricket ball thereby emerges as a more heroic projectile than a cannonball. Cricketers, like Greek and Trojan kings, have time to talk to one another, taunt and abuse each other,

to 'sledge' in modern parlance. Physical strength and precise eye and hand co-ordination are key factors for the likes of Tom Walker and Lumpy Stevens as well as for Hector and Achilles.

The literature of cricket is saturated with pathos and Epimethean commentary. Cricket, it is repeated *ad nauseam*, is, of course, not what it was. A little investigation soon tells us that eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century cricket was bedevilled by bullying, corruption, sledging, crowd violence and, above all, crooked bookmakers and match-fixing allegations. If there is a weakness to David Underdown's masterly study of eighteenth-century cricket *Start of Play* (2000), it is his unproblematic seduction by idea of a pure rural cricket offered by Hambledon and other Hampshire and Kent communities in the central decades of the century.<sup>27</sup> The literary imagination is better placed to note that the best cricket is always in the past, or imagined in the past. It is worthwhile noting at this point the very earliest verse imagining of cricket we possess, a poem by the young William Goldwin called 'In Certamen Pilae', taken from a collection of Latin verse published in 1706 as *Musae Juvenalis*. The poem mentions a 'Nestor' who is called upon to adjudicate.<sup>28</sup> The role of a Nestor is always to remind a febrile cohort of youngsters how pusillanimous and degenerate they are compared with the heroes of his time. Cricket is no different.

The fusion of cricket and Classical learning is perhaps inevitable, given that public schoolboys acquired both skills at around the same time and suffered physically whether missing a shot or a conjugation. Homeric imaginings of cricket seem, however, to have spread far beyond the expensively educated classically literate. The single most spirited and oft reproduced cricket song is 'Derry-down-Derry', a ballad written in 1772 by the Revd Cotton to celebrate Kent's victory over Hampshire, and rewritten six years later to celebrate the Hambledon club. Again the description places an emphasis on relative nudity and physical exposure:

Famed Elis ne'er boasted so pleasing a sight;  
Each nymph looks askew at her favourite swain,  
And views him, half stript, both with pleasure and pain.<sup>29</sup>

The pleasure and pain consist of delight in and fear of the damage that cricket can inflict. Protective clothing is not only unavailable; it is, one suspects antipathetic to the heroic values cricket is meant to embody.

#### V. *The Extraordinary Game*

The pleasure was, on occasion, reciprocated, given the number of well-attended women's matches that are recorded. The women's game appears to have gone into decline in the nineteenth century, presumably because the increasingly dominant MCC refused to patronise it.<sup>30</sup> The decline in women's cricket would seem to coincide with more intransigently gendered imaginings of the game as well as much tighter regulation of various forms of traditional spectacle. Always concerned with staging sexual identities, the loose organisation of the earlier game permitted more flexible and at times ambiguous forms of sexual rhetoric to circulate.

Some famous visual representations of women's cricket may help to illustrate this point. Thomas Rowlandson's painting (and subsequent engravings) *A Cricket Match Extraordinary* (1811; Fig. 1) illustrates a particular women's county match between Hampshire and Surrey.





1. Thomas Rowlandson, *A Cricket Match Extraordinary*, 1811. British Library, by permission

The display of limbs and bosoms on display at this particular match may be exaggerated by Rowlandson, but there can be little doubt that the spectacle of women's cricket (at least when played by the lower orders) had a voyeuristic value in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The difference between plebeian and patrician women's cricket is evidenced by a slightly earlier painting of the countess of Derby (1779) at play with some select female acquaintance (Fig. 2). The restrictive clothing would appear to make running between the wickets awkward, to say the least, and the painter (unlike Rowlandson) decorously does not show anyone attempting it. The lack of any uniform (other than the suspiciously similar hats) makes it especially hard to tell whether the figures on the extreme right are spectators or outfielders. Above all, this painting shows aristocratic women's cricket as a private party. There is no paying audience and not a single man in the painting.

One very probable male spectator of this game is the duke of Dorset, keen cricketer and reputed lover of the countess of Derby. His championing of women's cricket evidences a degree of frankly erotic *frisson* at the spectacle of ladies engaged in vigorous exercise, even if the exercise may seem very restrained to modern eyes. As Dorset exclaimed:

Let your sex go on, and assert their right to every pursuit that does not debase the mind. Go on, and attach yourselves to the athletic, and, but that, convince your neighbours the French, that you despise their washes, their paint, and their pomatums; and that you are now determined to convince all Europe, how worthy you are of being considered the wives of plain, generous, and native Englishmen.

As the author of the first manifesto on behalf of women's cricket, Dorset waxes lyrical in defence of a version of British womanhood that is more, not less, seductive because of its inclusive attitude to sporting participation.<sup>31</sup>



2. *Cricket Match Played by the Countess of Derby and Other Ladies*, 1779.  
© Bridgeman Art Library / © Marylebone Cricket Club, London

No image typifies the appealingly transgressive quality of women's cricket more famously than John Collet's painting (and subsequent engraving) *Miss Wicket and Miss Trigger* (c.1779; Fig. 3). Betty Rizzo makes the point that John Collet may have been influenced by the original Oakes game with the countess of Derby.<sup>32</sup> The legend beneath the image reads: 'Miss Trigger you see is an excellent shot, and forty five notches Miss Wicket has got.' (In the age of unprepared pitches a score of 45 represented a significant innings.) Patricia Crown glosses this print within a larger fascination with supposedly masculine attire for women, albeit clothing that paradoxically emphasised women's contours (essential to the voyeuristic paradox of all female-male transvestism in the eighteenth century).<sup>33</sup> Compositionally, the image is dominated by a parallelogram bordered by the matching diagonals of the gun and the cricket bat. Crown notes the masculine associations of crossed legs, while a more obvious point is being made by Miss Trigger trampling a paper marked 'effeminacy'. The relaxed confidence with which these sportswomen wield these rather phallic objects compliments the form of hunting jacket worn by Miss Trigger and the exposed ankles of Miss Wicket. This trans-gendered utility of dress is somewhat offset by the elaborate hats worn by each miss, perhaps as a reminder that the commercial erotics of women's sport always involves a simultaneous reassertion as well as a challenging of feminine norms on class lines. In the background is a faintly sketched male figure who appears to be holding a drink, within the garden of what may be a public house. Collet is offering the possibility therefore that this entire gender transgressive spectacle has been framed for a male drinker's gaze.

#### VI. *Heroics of the Game*

In 1789 the duke of Dorset proposed taking eleven or so of the best players in the country to play in a series of exhibition matches in Paris. This abortive enterprise proved to be the first overseas tour to be cancelled for political reasons. In the decades that followed, the whole machismo of cricket was to be drastically revised. Lambert's manual of 1816 habitually brackets 'noble' and 'manly' together in its introduction – whereas before 1789 the game might equally well have been described as noble *or* manly. The generosity of Stephen Green, curator of the MCC museum, enabled us to peruse many eighteenth-



3. John Collet, *Miss Wicket and Miss Trigger*, c.1779. British Library, by permission

century scorecards, and before the 1790s it is rare for anyone named as 'Earl of ...' to get into double figures.<sup>34</sup> The aristocracy played the game, but principally to satisfy the terms of the wager. There was no particular pressure on the well-born to perform well individually. The French Revolution both reinforces and complicates the bizarre 'amateur' versus 'player' distinction while forcing amateurs to be seen to play well – to dispel any impression that the English ruling classes are as degenerate as their late, unlamented French counterparts. For a century and a half, inexperienced 'amateurs' would captain the England side, often silently guided by the nods and winks of their NCOs, the hardened, working-class 'professionals' – a pattern not to be broken until the appointment of the professional plebeian Len Hutton as England captain in the 1950s.

A still more important social change in the nature of the game takes place with the industrialisation of time in the nineteenth century, a process hinted at but not fully developed by the cricket historian Derek Birley.<sup>35</sup> Cricket has always been a self-consciously profligate and joyous 'waste of time'. The jaunty mock-heroic 'Surry Triumphant', published in 1773, depicts working-class Andromaches bewailing the fate of their respective Hectors, doomed to face the field of battle the following day.

*Their husbands woful case that night  
 Did many wives bewail,  
 Their labour, time, and money lost,  
 But all would not prevail.*

Their sun-burnt cheeks, though *bath'd* in sweat,  
*They kiss'd, and wash'd them clean,*  
 And to that fatal paddock begg'd  
 They ne'er would go again.<sup>36</sup>

The paddock is 'fatal' – not merely because of the risk of being struck by a very hard ball but also because of the insane waste of time involved. The labourers' wives complain that the harvest is rotting in the fields and families risk starvation, all to satisfy the terms of an absurdly prolonged game. The husbands do not make the unheroic but logical reply that the squire is likely to reimburse the players, having won his bet.

We should be unsurprised by the fact that passionate 'mock'-heroic sentiment co-existed, sometimes uneasily, alongside the most ruthless and amoral attempts to enforce or thwart the will of bookmakers. The conceptualisation of the 'civilizing process' does tentatively suggest that the whole concept of English 'fair play' may derive primarily from legalistic enforcement of the terms of eighteenth-century wagers, and this analysis is certainly vindicated by early accounts of cricket. Eighteenth-century aristocrats would famously bet on absolutely anything, and many of the more bizarre cricket matches of the period are clearly inspired by the need to answer speculative suggestions made in late-night drinking clubs.<sup>37</sup> Most famously, in 1793, limbless war veterans competed in two matches between eleven one-armed men and eleven one-legged men.<sup>38</sup> The first game was marred by crowd trouble, but a win apiece restored good spirits all round. Other matches included married men versus bachelors and players with surnames beginning with the first thirteen letters of the alphabet versus players with surnames beginning with the last thirteen letters of the alphabet.

If such games were the product of the whimsical aspect of gambling society, a far more prevalent and relevant phenomenon was the practice of evening the odds by withholding certain players or even giving them to the opposing team. On 26 August 1791 nine men of Kent in a fit of hubris took on twenty-two of Essex, Middlesex and Hertfordshire combined – and lost. Next summer, on 5 July 1792, the MCC took on Nottinghamshire, eleven men to twenty-two – and won by 100 runs. Gambling stakes ran into thousands of guineas, exciting large crowds and provoking several legal actions and (needless to say) riots.

Cricket functioned, then, as a form of black economy in which gambling was central to day-to-day economic exchange. No cricketer in the eighteenth century listed cricket as his 'occupation', but a number of agricultural labourers might have admitted that the sport provided them with the lion's share of their income.

### VII. *Imagining the Game Again*

The most temptingly straightforward conclusion to be drawn from all these ways in which cricket intersected with real and imagined larger worlds is the one poignantly provided by David Underdown (itself derived from the nostalgic literature of Pycroft and Nyren): that cricket was a people's game, a rural game, usurped by aristocrats with an acquisitive urban agenda. This version of events, however, ignores the ways in which commercial and idealistic interpretations of the game coexisted and thrived side by side. The authors of this paper believe that cricket, although providing a perspective on larger social trends, is by no

means the belated, superstructural consequence of political or economic base conditions. The conflict, excitement and passion provided by the game are themselves determining phenomena.

In the 1720s the French travel writer César de Saussure commented on cricket: 'I will not attempt to describe this game to you, it is too complicated, but it requires agility and skill, and everyone plays it, the common people and also men of rank.'<sup>39</sup> Saussure was correct to note cricket's perhaps most unique feature: the fact that teams were made up of players from radically different social backgrounds. This famously eclectic mix was driven by a gambling imperative, by the economic need to win at all costs. Lord Dorset was treated radically differently, of course, from lanky Tom Walker, but the very fact of their joint participation means that the cricket pitch is a liminal space, a space where class tensions are staged and only partially resolved. John Burnby's poetic defence of Kent's cricketers, in reply to the already cited celebration of Surrey's triumph, explicitly treats this carefully contained literalisation of class conflict:

His Grace the DUKE of DORSET came,  
The next enroll'd in skilful Fame,  
Equall'd by few, he plays with Glee,  
Nor peevish seeks for Victory.  
His Grace for Bowling cannot yield  
To none but Lumpey in the Field:<sup>40</sup>

The mass appeal of this spectacle, the social and sociable energy it organised and distributed, leads us to believe that there is nothing 'mock' about the heroic literature that celebrates it.

Cricket, therefore, at the historic juncture of its codification and early dominance, is a spectacle that stages displays of class and gender that illustrate the interdependence of each category. The display of masculinity is intended to mediate class conflict, and the display of *noblesse oblige* is intended to promote a nationalistic cult of masculinity. The (temporary) success, meanwhile, of women's cricket is an example of how subversions of feminised stereotypes have a commercial (yet transgressive) spectatorial fascination at the very moment when such stereotypes are being most urgently promoted. Stereotypes thrive not in an atmosphere of exclusion of transgressive images but rather by promoting such images within an organised framework of licit and illicit aspirations. As Judith Butler notes:

The binarism of feminized male homosexuality, on the one hand, and masculinized female homosexuality, on the other, is itself produced as the restrictive spectre that constitutes the defining limits of symbolic exchange. Importantly, these are spectres produced *by* that symbolic as its threatening outside to safeguard its continuing hegemony.<sup>41</sup>

Although this discussion of the gendered imagining of eighteenth-century cricket must concur with Butler's understanding of how transgressive figures help define gendered norms, the extent to which any gendered hegemony is thereby maintained and safeguarded would appear to be more questionable. Such 'definitions' of masculinity and femininity appear rather more flexible, contingent and disputed in practice. In an eighteenth-century cricketing context, transgressive gendered spectres are not easily reducible to nineteenth-century sexual typologies, and determining who is 'out' and 'not out' can be hard to refer to any neutral umpire.

## NOTES

1. Specifically, Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor, 1959), and *Frame Analysis* (London: Harper and Row, 1974), and Judith Butler, *Gender Troubles* (1990), and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
2. Derek Birley, *A Social History of Cricket* (London: Aurum Press, 1999).
3. David Underdown, *Start of Play: Cricket and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000).
4. C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London: Stanley Paul/Hutchinson, 1963).
5. For a systematic discussion of international dispersion patterns for cricket since the nineteenth century, see Jason Kaufman and Orlando Patterson, 'Cross-National Cultural Diffusion: The Global Spread of Cricket', *American Sociological Review* 70 (February 2005), p.82-110.
6. Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).
7. Ruud Stokvis, 'Sports and Civilization: Is Violence the Central Problem?', in E. Dunning and C. Rojek (eds), *Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process: Critique and Counter/Critique* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p.121-36.
8. Dominic Malcolm, 'Cricket and the Civilizing Process', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 37:1 (2002), p.37-57.
9. Wray Vamplew, 'It's Not Cricket and Perhaps It Never Was: A Historical View of Violence in the English Game', in TRAN (eds), *Violence et sport*, CD-Rom (Seville, 2005).
10. Dominic Malcolm, 'A Response to Vamplew and Some Comments on the Relationship between Sports Historians and Sociologists of Sport', *Sport in History* 28:2 (2008), p.259-79.
11. Anthony Bateman, 'Performing Imperial Masculinities: The Discourse and Practice of Cricket', in Rainer Emig and Antony Rowland (eds), *Performing Masculinities* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2010), p.93.
12. George Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald Levine (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972).
13. Erving Goffman, 'The Arrangement between the Sexes', *Theory and Society* 4:3 (Autumn 1977), p.322.
14. *New Articles on the Game of Cricket, as settled and revised at the Star and Garter, Pall Mall* (London: Printed for H. Turpin, 1785), p.2-3.
15. The mythology of Hambledon was established in the early nineteenth century, largely thanks to the published reminiscences of John Nyren. See John Nyren, *The Cricketers of my Time*, ed. Ashley Mote (London: Robson, 1998).
16. Netta Rheinberg records two competing accounts of the feminised origins of over-arm bowling. Christina Willes is the woman most often credited with the invention. Rachel Heyhoe Flint and Netta Rheinberg, *Fair Play: The Story of Women's Cricket* (London: Angus and Robertson, 1976), p.21-2.
17. Tony Collins and Wray Vamplew, *Mud, Sweat and Beers: A Cultural History of Sport and Alcohol* (New York: Berg, 2002), p.10.
18. *The Hambledon Men, being a New Edition of John Nyren's Young Cricketer's Tutor*, ed. E. V. Lucas (London: Henry Frowde, 1907), p.57-8.
19. James Pycroft, *The Cricket Field: or, The History and the Science of the Game of Cricket*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1854), p.19.
20. James Love, *Cricket, An Heroic Poem. Illustrated with the Critical Observations of Scriblerus Maximus* (London: Printed for W. Bickerton, 1742), p.7.
21. William Lambert, *Instructions and Rules for Playing the Noble Game of Cricket. [...] To which are subjoined the laws of the game, with additions and corrections* (Lewes, 1816).
22. Lambert, *Instructions and Rules*, p.4, n.
23. Kirsten Olsen, *Daily Life in Eighteenth-Century England* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), p.149.
24. Love, *Cricket*, p.19.
25. Love, *Cricket*, p.22-3.
26. John Richardson, 'Modern Warfare in Early Eighteenth-Century Poetry', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 45:3 (Summer 2005), p.573.
27. Underdown, *Start of Play*.
28. William Goldwin, *Musae Iuvenalis* (London: Printed for A. Baldwin, 1706), p.10.
29. John Duncombe, *Surry Triumphant; or, The Kentish-Men's Defeat. A new ballad, being a parody on Chevy Chase* (London: printed for J. Johnson, 1773).
30. Diana Rait Kerr, while commenting on Rowlandson's *Cricket Match Extraordinary*, remarks: 'With the coming of Victorian propriety such exhibitions ceased, and so did press references to women's cricket.' Norman Birkett, *The Game of Cricket* (London: Batsford, 1955), p.120.
31. *The Sporting Magazine* 22 (April 1803), p.14.
32. Betty Rizzo, 'Equivocations of Gender and Rank: Eighteenth-Century Sporting Women', *Eighteenth Century Life* 26:1 (Winter 2002), p.70-118.
33. Patricia Crown, 'Sporting with Clothes: John Collet's Prints in the 1770's', *Eighteenth Century Life* 26:1 (Winter 2002), p.119-35.
34. Note Henry Bentley, *A Correct Account of all the Cricket Matches which have been played by the Marylebone Club, and all other Principal Matches, from the Year 1786 to 1822 inclusive* (London: T. Traveller, 1823). This

invaluable compilation details (for example) the low scoring of the earl of Winchelsea unless he was playing in a 'Gentleman's match' compared with the impressive all-round figures of Lord Beauclerk from a slightly later period. The scoring abilities of other genteel players can be noted by observing prefixes such as 'Hon.' and suffixes such as 'Esq'.

35. Birley, *A Social History of English Cricket*.

36. Duncombe, *Surry Triumphant*, p.22.

37. Justine Crump has described the culture of eighteenth-century gambling in ways that reveal societal anxieties regarding its asocial, non-productive character as well as its relationship with pure contingency: 'The Perils of Play': Eighteenth-Century Ideas about Gambling', *Centre for History and Economics* (Cambridge: April 2004). However, gambling on sporting events could just as easily be regarded as a sociable work of sponsorship.

38. *The Sporting Magazine, or Monthly Calendar of the Transactions of the Turf, the Chace, and Every Other Diversion Interesting to The Man of Pleasure and Enterprise*, 2 vols (London: Printed for J. Wheble, 1793), vol. II.121.

39. *A Foreign View of England in 1725-1729: The Letters of Monsieur César de Saussure to his Family, Translated and Edited by Madame Van Muyden* (London: Caliban, 1995).

40. John Burnby, *The Kentish Cricketers: A Poem. By a Gentleman. Being a reply to a late publication of a parody on the ballad of Chevy Chace* (Canterbury, 1773), p.11.

41. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p.104.

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