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Queensberry's Misrule: Reputation, Celebrity, and the Idea of the Victorian Gentleman

Sitting in prison, a bitter and broken Oscar Wilde came to regret he had ever met the bewitching Lord Alfred Douglas. He characterised their friendship as regrettable, doomed, and the single cause of the destruction of his life and reputation.¹ While there is some truth to this, it was ultimately not Douglas who brought down Oscar Wilde, but his father John Sholto Douglas, the eighth Marquis of Queensberry.² It was this man who instigated Oscar Wilde's very public humiliation; Wilde could only lament the irony "that it was by a pariah that I was to be made a pariah myself."³ Queensberry was a peculiar character in nineteenth-century Britain; he was famous both for his outlandish behaviour and his incessant desire for that behaviour to be known. Any other father anxious about the unsavoury company of their young son might have tried to quietly break the connection, or at least tried to limit the publicity of their friendship. Instead, Queensberry blustered and threatened and did everything he could to create a scandal, daring Wilde to bring the matter to the courts. Here Queensberry set his trap and unleashed accusations and evidence that brought Wilde's (and by implication his own son's) private sexuality under public scrutiny over the course of three sensational trials.⁴ This action was not an isolated incident, but the pattern of a man who sought controversy and conflict at every turn in his adult life. Queensberry made himself an outsider among his peers because his behaviour was notorious in the truest sense of the term: it was outrageous and it was well-known. Victorian high society had certain rules of conduct and even more stringent rules of discretion; to transgress either was to risk social death. And Queensberry seemed to make a career out of courting public scandal.

Extraordinary and distinctive individuals such as the Marquis of Queensberry make for fascinating subjects of biography, and yet those very characteristics make it complicated to read Victorian social norms or typical aristocratic values in their lives.⁵ Queensberry's life was neither representative nor reflective of most Victorians' ideal of an aristocratic gentleman. In many ways his life is a case study in what a gentleman was *not* supposed to be, as he set about flouting every social convention conceivable. And yet his life reminds us that the veneer of Victorian respectability could be thin. Queensberry was not the only nobleman who failed to live up to the highest Victorian moral standards; in private circles there were many eccentric aristocrats who defied social mores.⁶ Queensberry's life helps draw the line of when and how peccadilloes could be overlooked. The key was to keep things quiet. Men who quietly flouted morality were accepted, or at least tolerated, within polite society.⁷ However, there was nothing quiet about the "scarlet" Marquis and he went out of his way to have his unconventional behaviour noticed.⁸ As such, the degeneration of the Marquis' public persona can be traced in the popular press.

Much scholarship exists defining the gentleman as a social ideal, but scholars of the nineteenth century need to pay closer attention to the class contexts of the term. How the patrician classes characterized appropriate behaviour for their members through the term "gentleman" was quite distinct from middle class attempts to cement the status of a "gentleman." Well into the 1870s, the British aristocracy and landed gentry maintained an unconcealed grip on the bulk of the nation's wealth, power, and status.⁹ While the decline of the aristocracy has been placed anywhere between the 1880s and the late twentieth century, historians agree that the landed gentry's hold on nineteenth century

society was deep and pervasive.¹⁰ Traditional concepts of the gentleman were rooted in aristocracy, whose very nature entitled them to political and economic power.¹¹ The model nineteenth-century gentleman was a mythical blend of blood and training, the epitome of “disinterested governance” dedicated to a life of service and power.¹² The patrician class helped revive a chivalric sense of gentlemanly conduct they set out as a model of masculine behaviour.¹³ Defining and redefining appropriate gentlemanly conduct was part of the continuing evolution of elite manners and morals.¹⁴ The idea of the gentleman was embracive and fluid, which both helped it survive well the nineteenth century, and also encouraged new aspirants to strive towards the ideal.¹⁵

Aristocrats were all gentleman by birth and they helped shape the model of gentlemanly behaviour. For those of humbler birth, the ascent to gentlemanly status was strictly about how one behaved. New aspirants to gentlemanly ideals had to constantly prove and reaffirm their social position in a way the aristocracy did not have to.¹⁶ Gentlemanly status was a prize fought for by those on their way up the social ladder striving for acceptance and acknowledgement of their hard work, their education, their occupational status, and in effect, their level of civilization.¹⁷ And yet middle class men’s adoption of the term gentleman brought with it concerns that did not always match the lifestyle or beliefs of the landed aristocracy. They adopted the word gentleman, but divorced it from any sense of birth and redirected the concept exclusively to character and behaviour. Historians need to be careful not to conflate the very real social and cultural differences that differentiate aristocratic and bourgeois ideas of masculinity and gentlemanliness.¹⁸ A man such as the Marquis of Queensberry was clearly a gentleman

by birth, by rank, and by right and yet he might not have met the emergent middle class definitions of gentleman defined by behaviour and public reputation.

Over the course of his life, the Marquis of Queensberry was always unconventional and often eccentric. Not only his behaviour, but the publicity of that behaviour, seemed more in keeping with a Regency rake than a late-nineteenth-century gentleman. The Regency had been an era of flamboyant leisure, exclusivity, and ostentation. The landed gentry lived their lives keen in the knowledge that theirs was a privileged existence. In the Regency era, eccentricity was far from a bar to social success; in many contexts it could assure it.¹⁹ In the more precarious social and economic context of the Victorian era, many were sensitive to the rising political and economic power of the burgeoning middle class. Even Queen Victoria attempted to distance her court from the behaviour of her notorious predecessors.²⁰ Sensitivity to public scandal among the elites, and the adoption of at least the public veneer of middle class respectability, was born out of a fearful reaction against the new gentlemen of the middle class.²¹ The scandalous aristocrat of old was increasingly unacceptable to his family, his peers and middle class moralists.²²

What a survey of the newspaper reportage reveals, however, is that the Marquis' rakish lifestyle would eventually find defenders among the working classes. While it would be a long road to working class hero, historians need to be careful to not focus exclusively on popular disdain towards a pampered and debauched aristocracy.²³ It is not difficult to find radical critiques of the aristocracy, *Reynolds's Newspaper* made it a virtual industry; however, this is not the full story of the relationship between the working and upper classes.²⁴ Victorian popular culture was just as rife with popular

representations and understandings of the noble aristocratic hero or the happy hedonistic sporting squire.²⁵ And in the latter part of Queensberry's life, when his behaviour was the most outlandish, Queensberry would find the most consistent support with the masses.

Queensberry not only behaved outlandishly, he was increasingly obsessed with setting himself before the public gaze. And it was this combination that landed him on the wrong side of gentlemanly status to his peers and middle class moralists. The Wilde incident was not the first of Queensberry's public scandals, and his combative relationship with his peers and the press is reflected in a chequered public reputation.²⁶

Queensberry embodied a kind of "performative publicity" wherein over the course of his life he increasingly used the press, the courts, and sometimes the streets as sites to air and publicize his ideas.²⁷ While Oscar Wilde is often cited as the originator of twentieth-century celebrity culture, Queensberry's life presents another early model.²⁸ Linda Stratmann's recent biography reveals that his contemporary reputation was far more complicated than previously recognized.²⁹ As such, Queensberry presents a useful case study to examine what happened when Victorians encountered an aristocrat who flouted every prescription of gentlemanly conduct.

In the nineteenth century, the lives of the aristocracy were charted daily in the press; their parties, their fashions, and their movements about the country were all well documented. Queensberry lived in an era when newspapers were widely read and readily available in homes across Britain, and through the media spotlight the Marquis transformed from a figure of renown into a celebrity.³⁰ Queensberry lived his life in the public eye, and increasingly turned to the newspapers to express his opinions. As such he proved himself a man of his era, as Victorians firmly believed that the popular press

could deeply influence public opinion.³¹ This article uses stories about the Marquis from over thirty newspapers across Britain to trace the interactions of reputation, celebrity, and the media. Newspapers were chosen to reflect a cross section of political, class, and regional biases in order to chart the fullest possible representation.

This article investigates the representation of Queensberry's antics to examine the limits of acceptable gentlemanly behaviour, and how those limits were defined and redefined depending on circumstances. Queensberry's life demonstrates the enormous leeway granted to aristocrats by almost all sections of the British press, no matter how outlandish their behaviour. It was only Queensberry's constant desire to publicize himself and his views that made him such a public spectacle. Such a study also proves that an aristocratic reputation once lost, could still be rehabilitated, and the most thorough rake could be heralded as a moral champion in the press. Queensberry appeared in the press in many guises over his life: as a sportsman, a brawler, an apostate, a roué, and ironically, a paterfamilias.

I. A Sporting Man

In March of 1873, the sporting *Baily's Magazine* singled out the horsemanship of an up-and-coming young man in their summary of recent athletic news.

We mentioned an instance of pluck and gameness on the part of a gentleman who, though we hope he has many years for the enjoyment of his favourite sport yet to come, must be looked upon as one of our Nestors, and now we will show that there is no chance of degeneracy in the young stock that is coming on.³²

This description of a twenty-nine year old Marquis of Queensberry, as not only a promising young rider but also proof against decadence is perhaps the most flattering portrait ever penned of the man. To be a well-known patron and practitioner of the sporting arts was a typically positive trait of the Victorian aristocrat. In a society worried that the British gentleman was becoming perhaps a bit too refined, sport was a great panacea to ease troubled minds and one of the least controversial indulgences of the upper classes.³³ Organized sports were heralded as not only healthy, but also manly activities for boys and men alike.³⁴ Playing according to the rules of the game demonstrated an understanding of fair play and sportsmanship that helped turn boys into men.³⁵ However, to gain such approval a man had to not simply play sports, but play sports appropriately and according to the rules.

Queensberry was a natural sporting man who came from an athletic family.³⁶ Having a prolific interest in sports, and field sports in particular, had long been an admirable goal for a young aristocrat, and could be a way to endear oneself to the general public.³⁷ The young Marquis was an avid rider and the sporting papers often covered his exploits.³⁸ While still a young man, he rode a particularly thrilling steeplechase at the end of the fox-hunting season. During the race, his horse fell taking a fence, and the Marquis' leg fractured. The incident led one journalist to praise the aristocrat's "bold and fearless" riding, pointing out that despite the fall, he "scrambled into the saddle, and succeeded in coming in second."³⁹ This youthful incident was a textbook example of how young English gentlemen were supposed to behave in the face of accidents, pain, and danger. Horse riding was seen as "the supreme test of sporting courage" and some aristocrats died in the pursuit of their passion.⁴⁰ To be a well-known horseman was an appropriate, and

enviable public persona. And yet Queensberry's brief moment of sporting orthodoxy did not last long.

To Victorian moralists, sports were supposed to develop teamwork, to encourage a spirit of manliness and good sportsmanship. Yet Queensberry's appreciation of sporting pursuits was more reminiscent of Regency-era athletics than the more constructive activities of his day. Queensberry seemed to shy away from group sports, instead favouring individual contests and the possibility of a wager. And Queensberry's favourite sporting pursuit was perhaps his least respectable: boxing. The individual nature of the contest, the violence inherent in its practice, and its associations with bare-knuckle prize fighting made it problematic.⁴¹ In the early nineteenth-century aristocrats were boxing's greatest patrons, and yet it was a moment when such men embraced many less than respectable pursuits.⁴² Boxing lived on the fringes of legality throughout the mid-nineteenth century, and supporters realized that without respectability the future of their sport looked grim.⁴³ In 1865 John Chambers, an old Cambridge friend, asked young Queensberry to lend his name to new regulations for the controversial sport, hoping to confer some legitimacy and respectability. When the rules were eventually published two years later they were known as the "Queensberry Rules." The rules introduced the mandatory use of gloves; more than this, however, the Queensberry Rules became known as a code of conduct that demanded fair play and sportsmanship.⁴⁴ Queensberry's name was soon synonymous with the sport as his 1877 caricature in *Vanity Fair* was titled "A Good Light Weight."⁴⁵ The road to legitimacy for the sport was a long one, however, as boxing matches were often still held under secretive and quasi-legal conditions.⁴⁶

Queensberry's association with boxing was quickly undercut by the fact that not all of the fighting he did was according to the rules that bore his name. One wonders if Chambers came to regret his choice as Queensberry's name soon lost its pristine reputation. Fighting in the ring, or sparring for training was one thing; fighting in the streets was increasingly proscribed for all classes, and certainly for a man of wealth and influence like Queensberry.⁴⁷ The use of violence by men was increasingly unacceptable in almost all contexts.⁴⁸ And yet Queensberry was a man consumed by his temper, and his son remembered "a man who had established a reputation as a dangerous man, and one who would stick at nothing if he was roused... Everyone in London was apparently afraid of my father... for he was allowed to do things which would have been tolerated in no one else."⁴⁹ The Marquis of Queensberry compounded a short temper with a desperate desire to explain and justify his outbursts; this is where his complicated relationship with the media begins.

II. A Fighting Man

In 1872 Queensberry was involved in a very strange and very public altercation at the Charing Cross Hotel, being arrested on charges of assaulting a private detective.⁵⁰ He came to the hotel looking for a friend, and while staff directed him to the rooms, he could not find them. Queensberry seemed to think they were intentionally being difficult and he became increasingly agitated. As the irate Queensberry started yelling at the porters calling them "a lot of humbugs" the hotel's private detective came to investigate.⁵¹ What happened next is somewhat disputed. The hotel detective, Tom Toby, testified that he believed Queensberry was about to strike one of the porters, so he placed his hand on the

Marquis' shoulder to stop him and told him to leave the hotel. According to Toby, "He made no reply, but struck me a severe blow in the mouth. I don't know now what it was for, nor what he wanted. After that he ran out of the hotel."⁵² In the fracas with Toby, one witness testified: "I swear I saw [Queensberry's] two hands up in a boxing attitude."⁵³ This kind of public brawling was a far cry from the respectability that boxing sought out.

The working class press had a field day with the story. Journalists were quick to point out Queensberry's preferential treatment after his arrest. When the case was heard Queensberry was not required to sit in the dock, and his fine was negligible. *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, always critical of the lifestyles of lazy aristocrats, titled their article "Another Mischievous Marquis." The reporter sarcastically bemoaned that the nobility could not seem to keep themselves out of trouble with the law, something they always charged was the preserve of the poor. The fact that Queensberry received preferential treatment because of his noble status was infuriating.

He may think himself lucky that he [can] use his noble fists with impunity.

We should like to know how [the magistrate's] righteous indignation would have been roused, had one of the Marquis's servants conducted himself like a tavern brawler in the hall of an hotel.⁵⁴

Reynolds's Newspaper, a leading radical paper, was equally shocked by the court's deference and by Queensberry's behaviour having "assaulted the police, and swore and cursed at every one and everything."⁵⁵ Queensberry's actions were embarrassing and seemed designed to create a spectacle; coverage in the newspapers only compounded the fault.

There was a strong current of anti-aristocratic coverage in the working-class press, in particular focusing on cases where justice seemed to treat noblemen differently than the common man.⁵⁶ *Reynolds's Newspaper* was noted for writing stories demonstrating outrage at the scandalous behaviour of the aristocracy and their ability to get away with it.⁵⁷ A few days after Queensberry's arrest, when a gambling club that catered to less-than-aristocratic personnel was raided, the reporter for *Reynolds's* was incensed by the severity of fines imposed on people frequenting a longstanding establishment that harmed no one. The author directly compared this to Queensberry who

assaulted the police, and swore and cursed at every one and everything in a way that would make a costermonger blush—obtained the sympathy of Mr. Vaughan, the magistrate, who allowed him to occupy another place than that allotted to plebian rowdies and roisterers, and ultimately inflicted on him the trumpery penalty of one pound.⁵⁸

As a reporter for *Reynolds's* later wrote, “in proportion to their numbers, these so-called pure-blooded aristocrats help to swell the records of crime and debauchery to a far greater extent than any other section of the community.”⁵⁹ Anti-aristocratic sentiment was often just under the surface of popular feeling, and the ideal of a dissolute aristocracy resonated strongly in the radical press.⁶⁰

By the 1890s it seemed Queensberry picked fights everywhere—especially among his own family. One family squabble spilled out into the newspapers, the police station, and the streets when he and his eldest son, Percy, got into a fistfight in Piccadilly. The street fight was heavily publicized in the newspapers, with the sensation-seeking *Illustrated Police News* providing drawings of the ridiculous fracas.⁶¹ Both men were

arrested on charges of disorderly conduct and fighting in the streets.⁶² Witnesses gave testimony that the incident began when Percy demanded his father stop writing threatening letters to his wife. Queensberry's response was to say nothing but instead "made a vulgar noise with his lips."⁶³ The fact that Queensberry had been harassing his daughter-in-law and was baiting his son with vile gestures made it clear he was not following any known code of gentlemanly conduct. He also encouraged the crowd, which swelled so much it stopped traffic, to witness the fight declaring "I tell all these strangers that you have been a bad son from your birth up, and that I now publicly disown you."⁶⁴ Getting into a fight in the street was beyond the pale of acceptable behaviour for a British gentleman. Percy Douglas was ashamed of himself afterwards, and apologized profusely to his friends and associates.⁶⁵ Queensberry was unapologetic, and wrote to the papers only to ensure they had the correct timeline of events.⁶⁶ Instead of limiting his exposure in the press, the Marquis courted their attention.

Queensberry was defiant and proud of his desire to fight, and his letters show him constantly challenging his sons to fight anywhere or at any time.⁶⁷ His private correspondence seethes with bombastic rage and gives a sense of what the man must have been like when he lost his temper. Anger was an emotion that the upper and middle classes had increasingly identified as problematic. To be angry was to lose control, a characteristic inherently opposed to gentlemanly calm.⁶⁸ Queensberry's choice to live his life on the edge, and to display his emotions no matter the consequence, marked him as a man out of time. Had Queensberry lived in the 1820s he could have lived a life without restraint and still existed within the norm. Hard drinking, swearing, womanizing, betting, and raging at the world were far more prevalent among the Regency elites.⁶⁹ But in the

late Victorian era, Queensberry's insouciance towards his contemporary's opinions, and his courting of publicity found him few friends among his peers.

Studying newspaper reports, one can often look past the editorial opinion to find some popular support for the man's desire to settle his differences with his fists. A journalist for the *Leeds Mercury*, a leading liberal provincial paper, bemoaned the "spectacle" of father and son fighting in the streets. And yet he had to concede that the large crowd who gathered had a very different opinion for "The Marquis, who was wearing a rose in his button-hole, was loudly cheered as he drove off."⁷⁰ The crowds hailed their pugilist hero, but such fighting was not appropriate for the man's class and status and the publicity of those actions made the transgression worse.

Over time, Queensberry's reputation among the people improved even as his reputation among his peers and middle class moralists deteriorated. His behaviour became so outlandish, and his reputation suffered so greatly he eventually became an anti-hero for those eager to undercut the aristocracy. Such an evolution is not as strange as it seems in a culture with a complicated relationship to its aristocracy. The case of the Tichborne Claimant revealed a working class that could simultaneously embrace a nostalgia for hierarchy and anti-aristocratic libertarianism at the same moment.⁷¹ A lingering fondness for the rakish aristocrat seemed to prove that the common man did "dearly love a lord."⁷² And as a sporting hero, Queensberry followed a tradition that bound the aristocracy and working classes together in a shared love of pleasure, excitement, fighting, and gambling.⁷³ Despite Queensberry's more eccentric pursuits, working class supporters continued to see him as a good sporting fellow.

III. Celebrity Secularist

Queensberry's temper and sporting pursuits were not so damaging as to lose him all friends; however, his very public religious beliefs were the source of more lasting unpopularity. Having unorthodox religious views, or not attending religious services was accepted if it was kept private. But Queensberry entered very contentious debates about religious belief as an advocate for his peculiar brand of secularism. When the British Secularist Union was founded Queensberry took up the role of president and remained as such until it disbanded in 1884.⁷⁴ Queensberry made no secret of his unconventional views, giving talks, publishing pamphlets and writing to newspapers on several continents. And the press had little time or sympathy for freethinkers.⁷⁵

In 1879 Queensberry began making very public statements of his faith. On a trip to Argentina in 1879 where he was ostensibly racing and selling horses, he also discussed his religious ideas. An Argentinean reader of the *Sporting Times* wrote to the London paper about Queensberry's recent surprising speeches on religion. The editor published the letter along with his own commentary that the Marquis seemed particularly prone to "astonishing people generally."⁷⁶ This article actually spurred a rebuttal from the Queensberry family, and led to a somewhat comical exchange for several days.⁷⁷

Queensberry would exaggerate the controversy once again by seeking out the media. Inspired by the outrage caused by the unconsecrated burial of Lady Truro in her yard, Queensberry wrote to one of the leading society journals of the day, *Vanity Fair*, asking for his ideas to be published. While he began his letter with opinions about unleaded coffins as a natural and sanitary option for burial, his letter seeks controversy in its final paragraphs. It is in his avowal not to be buried in consecrated ground that he

confesses, “I am not a Christian... My avowal will do no harm; and wild horses won’t hold me from declaring myself now.”⁷⁸ The letter follows a preface by the editor avowing he did not want to publish the correspondence, and only did so after Queensberry refused his strong suggestion to reconsider and insisted on publication. The letter virtually threw down a gauntlet to public morality, and certainly caused a stir.

Reaction was swift. Letters came pouring in to the *Vanity Fair* offices, and they published a selection in the next issue ranging from one enthusiastic supporter to several denunciations of a heretic.⁷⁹ Queensberry’s brother, a Catholic priest, wrote that he could not support his brother, and quoted a number of ambiguous biblical passages.⁸⁰ Queensberry himself wrote back to *Vanity Fair* to respond to some of the accusations made against him, defending his statements and acknowledging his article had created quite a response.⁸¹ This was a calculated move to create a reaction and promote his cause, and yet all Queensberry gained was another mark on his sullied reputation.

The reaction to these revelations in the Scottish press was particularly negative.⁸² The *Dundee Courier & Argus* called Queensberry’s letter an “assault on the Christian religion” and mocked Queensberry’s confused self-professed beliefs.⁸³ *The Aberdeen Weekly Journal* was appalled and outraged by the article. It was not simply Queensberry’s views that were shocking, but his wanton desire for publicity. Citing his “egregious vanity” and his “impertinence and ... outrageous folly,” the author implores the Peers of Scotland to no longer send such a representative to the House of Lords.⁸⁴ In an article a few weeks later, the newspaper again made another plea to deny Queensberry his seat in the House of Lords, and possibly his title altogether.⁸⁵

Queensberry's choice of publication for his views was also mocked. In fact, even *Vanity Fair* admitted theirs was not the correct publication to carry an intensive theological debate and they ceased to publish correspondence on the topic after three issues.⁸⁶ An author for the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* concluded that a supercilious man had published his ridiculous ideas in a completely inappropriate fashion. "To have a new religion revealed in *Vanity Fair* is about as whimsical as to have a new social system proclaimed in *Punch*. Yet Lord Queensberry, dwelling in Mayfair, has given to the world a New Revelation in the pages of *Vanity Fair*."⁸⁷ And it was Queensberry's ability to blend the serious with the ridiculous that seemed the crux of many critiques of the man's public persona.

Queensberry's decision to approach the media in this case would have direct, and to him, personally devastating consequences.⁸⁸ When the Scottish peers met in 1880 to choose their 16 representatives to sit in the House of Lords, Queensberry anticipated trouble. He declared publicly, and it was duly quoted in multiple newspapers, that if he was not chosen, it would only be because of his religious convictions and he believed such action was motivated by "the same spirit which had lighted the martyr fires of Smithfield."⁸⁹ Losing a seat in the House of Lords was hardly akin to being burned at the stake; however, it speaks to Queensberry's sense of persecution by 1880. When the Scottish peers met to vote, Queensberry complained that the press had been publishing "violent and abusive" claims about him, in particular in the Scottish papers.⁹⁰ After Queensberry lost his seat, the *Liverpool Mercury* joked that he was hard at work writing up a poem to explain his bizarre views. While this author believed he had the right to his beliefs, he certainly thought Queensberry's ideas both strange and mystifying.⁹¹ A poem

did emerge that year, ironically dedicated to the Peers of Scotland, where he mused about death and the nature of the soul.⁹² At the next meeting of the Scotch Representative Peers he was furious when his lengthy attempts to defend his reputation and religious beliefs were yet again dismissed.⁹³

Queensberry's religion (or lack thereof) led him into intense debates caused by the avowed atheist Charles Bradlaugh's desire to affirm, rather than swear the oath of allegiance, to take his seat as MP for Northampton in 1880. This was denied, as was his attempt to claim his seat when he was actually arrested. The dispute heated up as the seat was declared vacant and his riding called a by-election—this process was repeated three more times until in 1886 when he was finally allowed to take his seat. Bradlaugh was *the* symbol of the secularist cause and a famed freethinker.⁹⁴ Queensberry donated money towards his mission, however *Reynolds's* wondered if the token gesture, done publicly, was more of a stunt or a fad than anything more serious.⁹⁵ In the summer of 1881, however, Queensberry was voted president of the British Secular Union and gave a lengthy speech about the agnostic creed. Speaking in support of the movement, and of Bradlaugh in particular, Queensberry later published the talk as a six penny pamphlet entitled *The Religion of Secularism and the Perfectability of Man*.⁹⁶ In fact his many appearances for the secular cause grated on some, but critics at *the Radical* assumed “It is such a rare thing for Secularists to catch a live nobleman that we can readily excuse them for running him to death when they do get him into their clutches.”⁹⁷

During the production of Alfred Lord Tennyson's play *The Promise of May* in 1882, Queensberry demonstrated his uncanny ability to cause a scandal. Queensberry found the character of Edgar to be a deeply offensive portrayal of a “freethinker.” He

stood up in the theatre and protested against the character and declared his own beliefs, until he was forced to sit down. At the curtain, he again took to his feet admonishing Tennyson.⁹⁸ Heckling the work of the Poet Laureate of England, was sure to get a reaction. The comic paper *Fun* wondered at a man who created the rules of boxing, but did not understand the rules of decorum. The paper declared, “The Marquis of Queensberry’s pa and ma evidently did not spend that conventional ‘tuppence’ for manners on their son during his early youth.” And they noted that Bradlaugh had been “blushing” about the incident ever since it occurred.⁹⁹ Months later, the comic journal *Moonshine* wondered about who might replace the Marquis of Lorne as the new Governor General of Canada. Queensberry was suggested and then discarded because “He is too busy just now getting up a book to be entitled ‘Hallucinations and Affirmations,’ to be published in the summer.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, this was not the kind of publicity Bradlaugh hoped for with his cause. To be a free-thinker was one thing—to make a spectacle of oneself in a public theatre was quite another.

Queensberry made the incident worse as he sought further publicity defending himself to the papers. He wrote to more than one, and his letters were reproduced in several places, trying to explain his actions.

I became so horrified and indignant that, rising in my stall, I simply, in a loud voice, made the following remarks *a propos* of *Edgar’s* comments upon ‘Marriage.’ ‘These are the sentiments that a professing Christian (meaning Mr. Tennyson) had put into the mouth of his imaginary Freethinking [sic], and it is *not* the truth.’¹⁰¹

To the *Daily News* he defended his actions even more vigorously, and declared that disturbing a play was completely appropriate. In trying to have his opinions, and those of other secularists heard, there was no tactic he would not try as: “everything is fair in war; and this is war.”¹⁰² Not only was Queensberry’s cause as he defined it unpopular, but his tactics in defending that cause were so inflammatory they detracted from his mission.¹⁰³

Vanity Fair ignored his outburst in their initial coverage of the play, and simply highlighted what a terrible, insipid piece of writing it was. And yet weeks later, the Queensberry incident was so well known they referenced it in reviewing another play. This play was better received, “no *viva voce* protest was made. Lord Queensberry was not present.”¹⁰⁴ Queensberry’s name became a punch line. Years later the *Newcastle Weekly Courant* published an embellishment to the story. According to their sources, Queensberry vigorously objected to how one of the papers had presented the incident so strongly he went down to their offices armed with a heavy whip and demanded to see the editor. Only when he was led to see the elderly, bespectacled woman did he put down his whip and speak rationally.¹⁰⁵ The legacy of this strange event haunted Queensberry’s character, and cemented his reputation as a man incapable of letting things go.

His reputation was such that it is of little surprise that newspapers could believe even the most outlandish stories. One false story making Queensberry appear foolish was printed in at least two newspapers.¹⁰⁶ According to the reports, at the opening of parliament, Queensberry presented himself at the entrance to the House of Lords and demanded admittance. No longer one of the elected Scottish representative peers, he was denied admission. Growing upset, officials directed him to the robing rooms where they locked him up until the ceremony was completed and he was discovered. It is no surprise

that *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* would print such a rumour as it loved to poke fun at the aristocratic class. More surprising, however, was the middle class *Pall Mall Gazette* ran the story; however, they did print a retraction the following week.¹⁰⁷ This incident demonstrates that by 1886, Queensberry was a well-known eccentric, and the story seemed likely enough for newspapers to run with the story.¹⁰⁸

Queensberry never realized that in doing battle with the newspapers, the newspapers always had the last laugh. When travelling to Australia, Queensberry was outraged that the local *Sydney Bulletin* described him as “boisterous freethinker.” He responded with a letter to the editor printed in Sydney, and reproduced by the ever-vigilant *Reynolds's*. He seemed to go out of his way to be inflammatory and called the editor the “a lying Christian; [as] lies and Christianity go well together. I have generally found them hand-in-hand.” He ended his rant by saying he was proud of being denied his seat in the Lords for his religious beliefs.¹⁰⁹ Years later when he was called in court to be examined on an affidavit, he pointedly refused to take an oath on a Bible and insisted on the statute that allowed him to affirm instead.¹¹⁰ Unlike many of his contemporaries, Queensberry was fiercely proud of publicizing his opinions, and this perhaps explains his morbid insistence on consistently writing to the newspapers to get his side of the story publicized.

IV. A Bad Husband and a Worse Father

The Marquis's religious convictions and his personal life converged in the public sphere when his unhappy marriage became public and finally fell apart. The Queensberry marriage was troubled from an early stage, and from the mid-1870s the couple were

completely estranged. Infidelity was not unusual among the upper classes, and country house indiscretions were legendary.¹¹¹ However, the key was to keep such peccadilloes quiet. Instead, having closed up the ancestral home in Scotland, Queensberry took rented rooms for his wife and children in London, and it was public knowledge he did not stay with them and in fact had little contact.¹¹² Queensberry had his own rooms in London where he entertained his mistresses without much discretion.¹¹³ Among his associates he bragged about his conquests, and he increasingly publicized his coarse lifestyle.

Queensberry's actions transgressed acceptable bounds because he made no attempt to hide his infidelities and failed in every way as a husband and father. He was hardly the only wealthy aristocrat to lose control of his family life, but when it stayed private a man's public patriarchal reputation could remain intact.¹¹⁴ Queensberry was publicly known to have neglected, ignored, and humiliated his wife.¹¹⁵ This did little to help his personal reputation, nor did it help forge relationships with his children who were devoted to their mother. The most famous incident of neglect and humiliation was during Ascot week when he turned out his wife and children from their summerhouse so he could entertain his mistress and friends at the home instead.¹¹⁶ The Marchioness finally had enough and petitioned for divorce on the grounds of adultery. His divorce proceedings inevitably made it into the papers. The star witness was interviewed privately in London, but because of "illness" did not travel to Edinburgh for the trial.¹¹⁷ As such, the testimony was not heard in open court. However, testimony from servants confirmed unnamed women staying the night in the Marquis' rooms. More unusually, they confirmed that for years he had been living as a bachelor in London. His life was

separate enough from his wife's that none of his servants had ever met the Marchioness.¹¹⁸

A few years later Queensberry headed down the aisle again with a much younger woman in a runaway marriage. The papers were interested in the story because of the age of the bride, her large fortune, and the fact it was a private marriage.¹¹⁹ Private rumours circulated that the marriage was a futile attempt to cure his impotency.¹²⁰ Less than a year later Queensberry's young wife had her marriage annulled. The case was not heard in open court, leaving far more questions of Queensberry's character than answers.¹²¹ The impression, however, was clearly that again the husband had been to blame for the destruction of their marriage. Queensberry's failures as a husband certainly made for good press and the papers loved covering an aristocratic divorce.¹²² The newspapers had ample fodder tracing the scandalous divorces of public figures like Sir Charles Dilke, Lord Colin Campbell, and Charles Parnell.¹²³ Society journal *Vanity Fair* complained that divorce seemed like the latest fashion, and placed the blame squarely at the feet of a modern, permissive society.¹²⁴

Despite moralists' calls for propriety and reserve, a significant subset of the British aristocracy continued to act in defiance of middle-class Victorian decorum. And they had a rather powerful spokesman to lead them: the Prince of Wales. While the Queen was the very model of an almost bourgeois domesticity, the heir to the throne led the raffish Marlborough Set. He embraced a 'fast' set of aristocrats, financiers and ruthless social climbers.¹²⁵ And while the future king tolerated, and indeed participated, in many liaisons, he followed the golden rule of London Society: bad behaviour could be glossed over—public scandal could not.¹²⁶ As the future king's biographer Christopher

Hibbert points out, “he was regal as well as *roué*.”¹²⁷ The unwritten rule of the Marlborough House set, and thus fashionable society in general was “though shalt not be found out.”¹²⁸ Adultery and unconventional sexual behaviour was tolerated if it was kept quiet.

Again it was not simply Queensberry’s private behaviour, but his public actions that made his life the subject of particular rebuke. While married to his second wife, he made the headlines for public talks in Birmingham and London that were reprinted as a pamphlet. His basic premise was that the current English marriage laws were flawed and hypocritical; he believed most men preached monogamy, and yet practiced adultery. Criticisms of men’s sexual monogamy and the failures of marriage placed him squarely in the great marriage debates of the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹²⁹ But Queensberry’s solution was so radical he had to start by explaining he was not advocating polygamy where a man lived with multiple wives at the same time. His definition, however, was hardly less unsettling to a Victorian audience. His idea of polygamy was a sort of “legitimate concubinage” where a couple would remain married and maintain that connection while simultaneously setting up new separate households with sexual interests.¹³⁰ The only problem with adultery for Queensberry was the need to keep it a secret. Queensberry claimed all the problems of modern society, from prostitution to syphilis, could be traced back to the failed institution of monogamous marriage.¹³¹ Queensberry inserted himself into a topic almost as contentious as his secularist beliefs, as throughout the century the structures of marriage and divorce were highly contentious topics.¹³²

Queensberry’s lecture was highly publicized, and while some reports focussed

exclusively on the text of the speech, many added their own editorial commentary.¹³³ Few accounts were flattering; however, considering the inflammatory subject, the discretion of most newspapers is remarkable.¹³⁴ Even so, responding to the papers proved to be a family trait as Queensberry's controversial sister, Lady Florence Dixie, felt the need to defend his remarks.¹³⁵

My brother has shown the moral courage—possessed by few men—of coming forward and trying to arouse the public conscience to the enormity of the evil which is wrecking and ruining so many lives, and those idiots who snarl and snap at him like yelping curs had better answer in downright argument and honest courageous and outspoken utterance.¹³⁶

Dixie's response fell on deaf ears, and given his public failures as a husband, few were able to interpret Queensberry's remarks as anything but at best, a bizarre joke, and at worse, an endorsement of adultery and polygamy.

Queensberry compounded a failure as a husband with troubles as a father. An increasingly complicated factor of Victorian men's sense of identity, respectability, and masculinity was in their roles as fathers. Middle class families had idealized roles for men and women where the woman ran the household and men were breadwinners and masters of the house.¹³⁷ There is a wealth of evidence that nineteenth-century middle class fathers saw their duty to their children as role-models, companions, disciplinarians, and friends as essential.¹³⁸ This idealization of family life already influenced aristocratic wives and mothers by mid century; however, the role of the patrician father was ambiguous.¹³⁹ Aristocratic fathers rarely had to make a living and thus had a different role to play in the home; some were distant autocrats, others loving and doting friends.¹⁴⁰

No matter the style of parenting, a man with title and property such as Queensberry had a duty to maintain the family's wealth and position, groom his sons for their place in society, and keep the family together. A father had an obligation to protect and preserve his family and his estates.¹⁴¹ And recent research is finding fatherhood an increasingly important role in aristocratic men's self-identity.¹⁴² As the head of a large family, it was Queensberry's job to keep the family together; instead, each family drama compounded his failures as head of the Queensberry clan.¹⁴³

The Queensberrys seemed a textbook case of the breakdown of aristocratic families: the idea of a dynastic curse hung heavily over the family.¹⁴⁴ At the end of the century, a correspondent for the *Belfast News-Letter* pointed out the tragic outcomes of many members of this peculiar family. "The fate of the eldest sons, heirs to the marquissate, has been unfortunate, and Scotch superstition has attached quite a long record of reasons, chiefly superstitious and unreliable, to the family history."¹⁴⁵ While the reasons given for the misfortunes might have been superstitious, the author acknowledged they had endured more than their fair share of tragedy. In just a few generations there were five suicides or suspicious deaths, and more eccentrics than was typical even for the aristocracy.¹⁴⁶ Lord James Douglas, the Marquis' brother, died by his own hand in 1891. A month earlier he had been charged with maliciously filling out his census form where he listed his wife as a "cross sweep" and her son as a boy born in "Darkest Africa" who worked as a "shoe black." The incident was covered up when Douglas apologized, explained to a census agent that he had been ill, and to his wife and stepson that it had been a joke.¹⁴⁷ His subsequent suicide at the age of 36 seemed indicative of a family in crisis.¹⁴⁸ This was a family prone to scandal, disaster, and the

desire to pull each other apart. Even the Marquis of Queensberry's grandson, who tried to paint his ancestor in a sympathetic light in his biography, admitted that by the end of the nineteenth century, the Marquis "was determined to utterly ruin his entire family."¹⁴⁹

By the 1890s Queensberry's relationship with all of his children seem to have reached a breaking point. Even his sympathetic biographer admits he was an absent father, strictly a source of funds and disrepute to his children.¹⁵⁰ He had quarrelled with his heir, Viscount Drumlanrig, because of the young man's close association with the prominent politician Lord Rosebery. And when Drumlanrig was made a British peer in his own right, and able to sit in the House of Lords while his Scottish father could not, Queensberry was incensed. He wrote to Rosebery, the Prime Minister, and even the Queen noting his objection to the peerage, which he considered a personal insult.¹⁵¹ Coverage of these events demonstrated little sympathy for the slighted father.

Queensberry saw a grand conspiracy to shun and humiliate him. And he wanted everyone to know about it, even asking the Queen for permission to publish all correspondence on the issue.¹⁵² Queensberry travelled to Homburg in Germany to track down his son and Rosebery and threatened to horsewhip them. The subsequent publicity made him appear ridiculous.¹⁵³ Rather than put the needs of his family first, Queensberry clearly believed his own desires to be paramount and ruled less as a patriarch than a despot.¹⁵⁴ Viscount Drumlanrig died before reconciling with his estranged father at the age of 27 from a gunshot wound to the head; a highly controversial hunting accident almost identical to that which took the life of his grandfather, widely rumoured to be suicide.¹⁵⁵ It would be Queensberry's troubled relationship with his third son that gave him the most public spotlight of his life.

V. A Temporary Apotheosis

In 1895 Queensberry was a well-known public personality, a ridiculous and laughable figure, and yet one who appeared and then disappeared from the public eye. It was only when his notoriety combined with arguably the first modern celebrity that Queensberry's public persona was cemented into public consciousness.¹⁵⁶ Oscar Wilde had formed an intimate friendship with one of Queensberry's young sons, the petulant Lord Alfred Douglas. Deciding (without a trace of irony) that Wilde was not a fit man to be in his son's company, the Marquis did everything in his power to separate the two men.¹⁵⁷ To Douglas' mind, his father had lost any right to parental dictates or sage counsel and he alternatively laughed and railed at his progenitor.¹⁵⁸irate, Queensberry turned his attention to harassing Wilde. He showed up at Wilde's home with a pair of professional boxers and attempted to throw rotten vegetables at the premier of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Finally, he showed up with his calling card at Wilde's Club leaving a crudely written note describing him as "posing as sodomite."¹⁵⁹ This was a step too far, accusing Wilde with what was then considered a monstrous crime. After consulting his lawyers, Wilde charged the Marquis with criminal libel.¹⁶⁰

Turning to the courts was not as unusual a step as it might seem today. Early in the nineteenth century, the British state frequently turned to criminal libel laws to crush dissent.¹⁶¹ Individuals from a variety of backgrounds increasingly turned to the courts to settle personal and professional disputes. Some trials could be sensational such as the Catholic nun who sued her mother superior for libel and conspiracy after being expelled from her convent in 1869.¹⁶² More well known today was the showdown between two of

the great artists of the day, John Ruskin and James McNeill Whistler. Ruskin attacked Whistler's work and method in a letter to the press and Whistler took him to court.¹⁶³ Not long before Wilde's troubles, perhaps the most sensational libel case to date reached the courts in 1890: the Tranby Croft Affair. Combining gambling, aristocratic country houses, and even testimony from the Prince of Wales himself, the libel trial captivated the nation.¹⁶⁴ Thus the idea of Wilde turning to the courts to solve his problems was not out of the norm.

The prosecution presented the case as a necessary expedient to stop the constant, personal, and increasingly public persecution by Queensberry.¹⁶⁵ Wilde's lawyer, Sir Edward George Clarke, marvelled at Queensberry's "pantomimic" antics, and openly pondered "whether Lord Queensberry was always and altogether responsible for his actions would be open to doubt on the part of the jury before the case ended."¹⁶⁶ The defence's argument that Queensberry had caused a public scandal to protect his son likely led many to wonder if the Marquis was chasing windmills again. Initial notices of Queensberry's arrest were brief and did not portray the Marquis in a flattering light.¹⁶⁷ *The Hampshire Telegraph* reacquainted its readers with the man's chequered past, before sarcastically explaining "The Marquis of Queensberry, who has now obtained a new celebrity, is certainly a most picturesque nobleman. Of how many interesting incidents he has been the hero it would be impossible to say."¹⁶⁸ *The Pall Mall Gazette*, who consistently presented Wilde as a foppish, if not sinister character, presented Queensberry as equally ridiculous.¹⁶⁹ Most papers treated the notice of the case as the continuation of one man's consistently bizarre career.

And yet there was a method to his madness. Queensberry's counsel never denied he

had sent the card, nor that he had threatened and attempted to intimidate Wilde. Instead they admitted Queensberry had been attempting to bring the crisis to a head. The defence explained that “Wilde had conceived a vile, abominable passion for Lord Alfred Douglas,” and it was that relationship that had driven Queensberry to such extreme measures.¹⁷⁰ The idea he had been harassing Wilde out of any motive to “save” his son as he claimed, was ludicrous to most who knew them. Alfred Douglas loathed his father, and Queensberry so infuriated his son Percy the two were hauled into jail for public fighting in the midst of the trials. And yet for once Queensberry seemed to be able to justify his outlandish actions. It was only in retrospect that Wilde came to fully appreciate Queensberry’s motives. Writing to Douglas from prison, Wilde realized

What your father wanted, indeed, was not the cessation of our friendship, but a public scandal. That is what he was striving for. His name had not been in the papers for years. He saw an opportunity of appearing before the British public in an entirely new character, that of the affectionate father.¹⁷¹

Incongruously, in the most publicized event of his life, Queensberry chose to present himself to the public as a defender of traditional family values. While much has been written about Oscar Wilde’s attempt to fashion himself as a controversial celebrity, Queensberry himself enjoyed a self-conscious relationship with the press.¹⁷² He enjoyed courting controversy.

Scholars have well documented Wilde’s scandalous public persona, and his conviction by the middle-class press even before he was put on trial for gross indecency.¹⁷³ Despite a prejudice against Wilde, there was little benefit of the doubt given to Queensberry during the libel trial. Middle-class periodicals saw this as yet

another example of Queensberry's morbid desire to put his private business before the public and most papers treated it as such. The conservative *Morning Post* quoted letters written by Queensberry and read into evidence that offered up his abusive behaviour in black and white.¹⁷⁴ The liberal-leaning *Hampshire Telegraph* offered a précis of one letter that not only insulted Wilde and his own recently deceased son, it also put forward bizarre accusations.¹⁷⁵ Clearly, the press had no favourites in between the two scandalous figures. Most journalists covering the Wilde v. Queensberry trial were well aware of the Marquis' history and reputation, and were wary of supporting him.

Through the newspapers, one catches a glimpse, however, at a public that was far more forgiving of the roguish aristocrat. No matter the newspapers' editorial opinion of the Marquis, all reported that Queensberry's presence was met with cheers and congratulations from the public on his way in and out of court.¹⁷⁶ The "congratulatory handshaking" from his friends in court was met by a wider "salvo of applause" inside and outside the courtroom.¹⁷⁷ Through the newspaper accounts, one can clearly trace a growing public opinion that supported the Marquis. Wilde's alleged offences, and the idea he corrupted Queensberry's son swung public opinion in his favour. Here, it seemed, Queensberry's famous temper was finally justifiable and his outrage understandable. He was granted the benefit of the doubt, and publicly cheered for his ability to bring Wilde to justice.¹⁷⁸ Queensberry's public accolades are testimony to the fact that the newspapers are not always a direct reflection of public opinion. The crowds cheered Queensberry long before the editorial staffs could forget the Marquis' erratic past.

In their description of witness testimony, the newspapers rarely provided verbatim accounts of the proceedings.¹⁷⁹ Thus it is difficult untangle what the judge, and the jury,

thought of such strange characters as Wilde and Queensberry. However, after the libel trial fell apart, and Wilde was put on trial for gross indecency, the judge's final summation of the proceedings does give some insight into the legal opinion of the day. The jury found Wilde guilty, and the judge sentenced him to two years' hard labour. However, Justice Wills could not help, in his ruling, point out the dysfunctional Queensberry family that he believed was "a house divided against itself" with seemingly "no filial love or parental affection... nothing but hatred between father and son."¹⁸⁰ Clearly, not everyone believed Queensberry's self-rebranding as a crusading patriarch.

However, to Queensberry's luck and Wilde's downfall, the only thing the newspapers liked less than a dissolute aristocrat was a sodomite.¹⁸¹ Thus when Wilde was in the dock for gross indecency, the newspapers swung decidedly against the playwright and in support of the Marquis.¹⁸² In a strange twist of fate, throughout the trial papers that typically lampooned aristocratic life celebrated Queensberry. The Marquis was heralded as a hero by the working class press as a man standing up against the dissolute and debauched aristocracy, personified by Wilde.¹⁸³ After Queensberry was cleared of libel, and Wilde was the man on trial, Queensberry's hyper-aggressive masculinity was cheered as a more positive foil to Wilde's corrupting effeminacy. *Reynolds's Newspaper* contrasted the man favourably with other aristocrats of the age: "Whatever may be his little weaknesses in the direction of the turf, and however eccentric his unmuscular patronage of the prize ring it stands to his credit that he has had in his public life the courage of his opinions—he is not a mere man-doll."¹⁸⁴ Surely the accusation of being a man-doll was never made of Queensberry. When placed side by side, Queensberry's failings were nothing compared to Wilde's.

VI. Denouement

This sudden rehabilitation of Queensberry's reputation was transparent and temporary. Queensberry's defence that he was trying to "save" his son, or that he was acting out of a sense of family honour, as he repeated endlessly, was laughable considering his conduct to that point.¹⁸⁵ Attempts to protect his family were dramatic, heavy-handed, and often done to promote rather than quell controversy.¹⁸⁶ The trial was the final straw for many of Queensberry's friends and associates.¹⁸⁷ He was "cut" not for having tried to end the friendship between Wilde and his son, but for doing it in such a way as to guarantee a public scandal. Instead of dealing with his family business behind closed doors, he sought scandal and publicity at every turn.¹⁸⁸ Queensberry was ultimately responsible for the criminal prosecution and conviction of Oscar Wilde that left the great author a broken man. However, it would damage his own reputation almost as seriously.

Within a year, any good will towards Queensberry had disappeared. He was again in the newspapers, presented in a number of farcical situations from his mad bicycle enthusiasm to his rambling letters to the American papers about the Civil War, and his irate reaction to his youngest son marrying an American musical hall performer without his permission.¹⁸⁹ His sudden death in 1900 was met with little sympathy.¹⁹⁰ The most generous obituaries could only grant him a mixed legacy

His lordship seems to have led a somewhat erratic and irregular career, and the conventionalities of society were not entirely to his liking. ... He had his good qualities, and was very popular among a large section of the community, but his eccentricities did not commend themselves to the

judgment either of the class from which he sprang or of the general public.¹⁹¹

His one moment as self-declared defender of the nation's morality, as persecutor of Oscar Wilde, was never mentioned. One obituary even forgot to mention Lord Alfred Douglas as one of his children.¹⁹² For the press, his legacy was therefore clearly and uncompromisingly that of a man who inherited land, talent, and title and wasted it all to pursue "a life of pleasure."¹⁹³

Even stories meant to show a gentler side to the man were rarely flattering. After admitting Queensberry was always a man of fierce temper, the *Manchester Guardian* printed an anecdote about the man they believed was never in print before:

On one occasion he took offence at some remarks made by an officer in the Life Guards about a matter which was no concern of either party. So he wrote to him, offering to play him a match at cricket (single wicket), to sail him from Putney to Mortlake, to fight a duel in Belgium, to drink him under the table with raw brandy, or to box him in any gymnasium—the fact of his opponent being quite eight inches taller than himself being a mere detail to the plucky "Q." The only reply was an invitation to dinner at mess, which was accepted, and no reference was ever made again to the subject of the dispute.¹⁹⁴

It is not Queensberry who displays the gentlemanly virtues here: it is the Guardsman. To not only take offence undeservedly, but then to be so hot-tempered as to pursue the challenge later did not demonstrate much restraint. It was only the Guardsman who

showed the indifferent, cool-tempered humour a Victorian gentleman was supposed to embody.

Indeed, his obituaries seem to speak of a man born to the wrong era. He was often compared to his ancestor, “Old Q,” one of the most infamous rakes of the eighteenth century.¹⁹⁵ This was appropriate, as many agreed that Queensberry was the picture of the old Regency bucks. His outlandish behaviour and indifference to Victorian ideas of privacy might have been perfectly acceptable in another era. Once he was dead, he could almost be remembered as if he lived in this era. *Freeman’s Journal* blurs details of the two men’s lives born more than a century apart.¹⁹⁶ The obituary in the *Times* spoke of an unstable aristocrat very much out of time, a type of man “which is associated in the public mind with a life of idleness and indulgence rather than with ... useful aims.”¹⁹⁷ And while his lifestyle might have endeared him to another era, his seeking out media attention situated him squarely in the Victorian era.

Many obituaries listed the series of strange decisions he made in his life, emphasising his many public scandals.¹⁹⁸ His disturbance of Tennyson’s play to defend his secular views was often referenced to exemplify his strange behaviour.¹⁹⁹ Other obituaries referenced his legal will, large portions of which were printed verbatim as it was deemed so bizarre.²⁰⁰ In particular, his request that he wanted “no Christian mummeries or tomfooleries to be performed over my grave” was deemed almost blasphemous.²⁰¹ This detail, and its publication, caused one journalist at the *New York Times* to lament Queensberry’s perverse need for publicity, even in death, which proved his contempt towards his family and the public at large.²⁰² And it was for his desire to put himself before the public in eccentric ways that he was most remembered.²⁰³

In his lifetime, the Marquis of Queensberry was many things: a sportsman, an apostate, a rake, a patriarch, and a laughing stock. His temporary lionization as a paternal figure looking after the morality of society at large was a transparent, and short-lasting moment that did not endure the length of Wilde's prison sentence. This one heroic pose was not enough to erase a lifetime of aberrant behaviour. Nothing about the Marquis of Queensberry's life was typical. Yet as this article suggests, the exceptional individual can still offer clues to broader ideas among the British public. His unruly public persona is a clear demonstration of how bad publicity, rather than the bad behaviour in itself, made Queensberry an unacceptable figure to his peers and the middle class press. His life also hints at a lingering working class admiration for the raffish aristocracy.

Queensberry became a celebrity in the very modern sense of the world, stripped of all sense of renown or adoration.²⁰⁴ His antics were publicized in newspapers not only in the capital, but across Britain, and he was a popular subject because he made his life and his opinions so absolutely public. While broadcasting his bizarre behaviour at every turn what is remarkable, given our understanding of contemporary paparazzi culture, is the general deference shown to this eccentric man. For many years the press did not seek to embarrass him and was mystified by the fact he worked so hard to embarrass himself. This is not a case of the press seeking out rumour, gossip, and bad behaviour in order to discredit a dissolute aristocrat. Rather, this was a Marquis actively seeking to break the cardinal rule of upper class life—all indiscretions can be forgiven if they are kept quiet. It is bad publicity, and not bad morals, that is unforgiveable. And it is for that reason Queensberry became a social pariah. His life of excess highlights the unspoken rules that

governed elite society that were not obvious unless transgressed. Mourned by few, remembered by fewer, the fighting Marquis' life offered a guidebook on how one could be an aristocrat, and yet not quite a gentleman.

A special thank you to Andrew Haley and John Laband for their insightful comments on early drafts of this article.

¹ Oscar Wilde, "De Profundis," in *De Profundis: The Ballad of Reading Gaol and Other Writings* (Ware, 1999), p. 3.

² I have adopted the spelling "Marquis" instead of "Marquess" as it was the spelling Queensberry and his contemporaries employed at the time. In addition, in the twentieth century the numbering of the marquise was reformed as James, born in 1697, was restored as the third marquis. This young man's life would add to the colourful character of his family history. James was born with severe mental problems and was kept permanently restrained. When he escaped in 1707 he killed a young servant, roasted him on a spit and began to eat him. Linda Stratmann, *The Marquis of Queensberry: Wilde's Nemesis* (New Haven, 2013), pp. xi-xii.

³ Wilde, "De Profundis," p. 89.

⁴ The legal action began with Wilde as the accuser in a libel trial. It would not take long, however, before it was Wilde in the dock on charges of "gross indecency."

⁵ Indeed the idea of biographies as accurate portraits of the age seems distinctly out of fashion. Lloyd E. Ambrosius (ed.), *Writing Biography: Historians and their Craft* (Lincoln, 2004), xi, xiii.

⁶ For example, Hugh Cecil Lowther, 5th earl of Lonsdale ran through his inheritance, supported boxing and racing, and had to flee England to avoid the fallout of one of his more scandalous affairs. But his subsequent arctic adventures helped transform his public reputation from a roué to a rugged hero. Shepard Krech (ed.), *A Victorian Earl in the Arctic: The Travels and Collections of the Fifth Earl of Lonsdale 1888-9* (London, 1989); Douglas Sutherland, *The Yellow Earl: the Life of Hugh Lowther, 5th Earl of Lonsdale* (London, 1965).

⁷ For example: The Marquis of Hartington, or "Harty-Tarty" as he was known, was a very successful career politician. And yet among aristocratic circles it was an open secret he had an affair with courtesan Catherine Walters before a thirty-year affair with a married Duchess. Patrick Jackson, "'Skittles' and the Marquis: A Victorian Love Affair," *History Today*, 45:12 (1995): pp. 47-52.

⁸ Merlin Holland, *The Real Trial of Oscar Wilde* (New York, 2003), p. xvii.

⁹ David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), pp. 15-16.

¹⁰ Marcus Collins, "The fall of the English gentleman: The national character in decline, c. 1918-1970," *Historical Research* 75:187 (2002): pp. 90-111; Anne de Courcy, *1939: The Last Season* (London, 2003); Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998); Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven, 2010); Roy Perrott, *The Aristocrats: A*

Portrait of Britain's Nobility and their Way of Life Today (London, 1968); F.M.L Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1963). A recent Channel 4 documentary, *The Aristocrats*, profiled some of the oldest aristocratic families who continue to live in wealth and splendor. *The Aristocrats*, directed by Patrick Forbes (2012, Oxford Film and Television, Channel 4).

¹¹ Pat O'Malley, "From Feudal Honour to Bourgeois Reputation: Ideology, Law and the Rise of Industrial Capitalism," *Sociology*, 15:1 (1981): pp. 81-82.

¹² Christine Berberich, *The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature: Englishness and Nostalgia* (Aldershot: 2007), p. 10; Lauren M. E. Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal Society* (Baltimore: 2003), p. 26. The legal definition of "gentleman" was always a man with no occupation. Perrott, *The Aristocrats*, p. 132.

¹³ Mark Girouard, "Victorian Values and the Upper Classes," in T.C. Smout, (ed.), *Victorian Values: A Joint Symposium of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the British Academy*, (Oxford, 1992), p. 57.

¹⁴ Anna Bryson, "The Rhetoric of Status: Gesture, Demeanour and the Image of the Gentleman in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England," in Lucy Gent and Nigel Llewellyn, (eds.) *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture c. 1540-1660* (London, 1995), pp. 136-153; Lawrence E. Klein, "Liberty, Manners, and Politeness in Early Eighteenth-Century England," *The Historical Journal* 32:3 (1989): pp. 583-605.

¹⁵ Penny Corfield, "The Democratic History of the English Gentleman," *History Today*, 42:12 (1992), pp. 40-47.

¹⁶ Lauren M. E. Goodlad, *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal Society* (Baltimore: 2003), pp. 246-47.

¹⁷ Janet Wolff and John Seed, *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth-Century Middle Class* (Manchester: 1988); Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c.1780-1840* (Cambridge: 1995).

¹⁸ Martin Francis, "The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century British Masculinity," *The Historical Journal*, 45:3 (2002), p. 649.

¹⁹ Venetia Murray, *An Elegant Madness: High Society in Regency England* (New York, 1998), p. 38.

²⁰ Dorothy Thompson, *Queen Victoria: Gender and Power* (London, 1990), pp. 15-16.

²¹ Winifred Hughes, "Silver Fork Writers and Readers: Social Contexts of a Best Seller," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 25:2 (1992), pp. 331-332.

²² Philip Mason, *The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal* (London: 1982), p. 82.

²³ Anthony Taylor's work is a useful exploration of this theme, but this is one book in an under-researched field. Anthony Taylor, *Lords of Misrule: Hostility to Aristocracy in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2005), p. 14.

²⁴ Michael Diamond, "From Journalism and Fiction into Politics," in Anne Humpherys & Louis James, (eds.), *G.W.M. Reynolds: Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Politics, and the Press* (Aldershot, 2008), p. 91.

²⁵ Rohan McWilliam, *The Tichborne Claimant: A Victorian Sensation* (London, 2007), pp. 190-191, 248.

²⁶ Loren Reid, "Charles Fox and the London Press," *Parliamentary Affairs*, 15:3 (1962), pp. 365-378

²⁷ I borrow this useful term from one of Brian Cowan's in-depth explorations of coffeehouse culture. Brian Cowan, "Publicity and Privacy in the History of the British Coffeehouse," *History Compass*, 5: 4 (2007), p. 1187.

²⁸ Jonathan Goldman, *Modernism is the Literature of Celebrity* (Austin: 2011), p. 20.

²⁹ However, in trying to balance the vision of Queensberry crafted by his disgruntled son, Stratmann is perhaps too sympathetic towards her subject. Stratmann, *The Marquis of Queensberry*, p. 274.

³⁰ Simon Morgan's distinction here is important; whereas renown is focused on reputation in a social network, celebrity requires no relationship between the figure and the public. Simon Morgan, "Celebrity: Academic 'Pseudo-Event' or a Useful Concept for Historians?" *Cultural and Social History*, 8:1 (2011), p. 97.

³¹ Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot, 1996), p. 7.

³² "Our Van," *Baily's Magazine*, March 1873, p. 184.

³³ Lawrence James, *Aristocrats: Power, Grace and Decadence* (London: 2009), pp. 279, 338; Mike Huggins, *The Victorians and Sport* (New York: 2004), pp. 21-23; James Williams, "Sport and the Elite in Early Modern England," *Sport in History*, 28:3 (2008), pp. 389-413.

³⁴ "Oliver Lumby: the Cool Hand" *Baily's Magazine*, September 1883, p. 138.

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- ³⁵ Leslie Stephen, "Athletic Sports and University Studies," *Fraser's Magazine*, 2 (1870), pp. 691-692.
- ³⁶ His grandfather had been a prize-fighter in his youth, and his father a cricketer. Among his generation the sporting pursuits tended towards adventuring with his younger brother dying trying to climb the Matterhorn at nineteen and his sister being a noted traveler and big-game hunter. H. Montgomery Hyde, *Lord Alfred Douglas: A Biography* (London: 1984), p. 3; Kenneth P. Czech, *With Rifle and Petticoat: Women as Big Game Hunters* (New York: 2002), pp. 33-40.
- ³⁷ John Tolson, "The Thirteenth Earl of Eglinton (1812-1861): A Notable Scottish Sportsman," *Sport in History*, 28:3 (2008): pp. 473, 487; J.A. Mangan and Callum McKenzie, "The Other Side of the Coin: Victorian Masculinity, Field Sports and English Elite Education," in J.A. Mangan, (ed.), *A Sport Loving Society: Victorian and Edwardian Middle-Class England at Play* (Abingdon: 2006), pp. 45-64.
- ³⁸ "Our Van," *Baily's Magazine*, December 1870, p. 215; "Our Van," *Baily's Magazine*, June 1872, p. 57; "Our Van," *Baily's Magazine*, September 1872, p. 244; "Our Van," *Baily's Magazine*, February 1874, p. 421; "On the Grass Round Rugby," *Baily's Magazine*, May 1876, p. 345; He also at least on one occasion tried his hand at polo. "Polo in Ireland," *Baily's Magazine*, August 1882, p. 213.
- ³⁹ "Accident to the Marquis of Queensberry," *The Daily News*, 14 April 1868, p. 3.
- ⁴⁰ Others quietly wasted their fortunes pursuing their passions. Wray Vamplew and Joyce Kay, "Captains Courageous: Gentlemen Riders in British Horse Racing, 1866-1914," *Sport in History* 26: 3 (2006), pp. 375, 376.
- ⁴¹ Peter Radford, "Lifting the Spirits of the Nation: British Boxers and the Emergence of the National Sporting Hero at the time of the Napoleonic Wars," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 12:2, (2005), p. 252.
- ⁴² Edward D. Krzemienski, "Fulcrum of Change: Boxing and Society at a Crossroads," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 21:2 (2004), pp. 161-163.
- ⁴³ Many lost faith in the future of boxing around mid-century as prize-fights were routinely fixed, and there seemed to be no sense of fair play. Jack Anderson, "Pugilistic Prosecutions: Prize Fighting and the Courts in Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Sports Historian* 21:2 (2001), p. 44.
- ⁴⁴ Bob Mee, *Bare Fists: The History of Bare-Knuckle Prize-Fighting* (Woodstock: 2001). Some boxers, to protect their hands, had started wearing gloves and their use cut down the appearance of blood. Kenneth G. Sheard, "Boxing in the Western Civilizing Process," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 32:1 (1997), p. 24; The Queensberry rules came to dominate the sport gradually over the next 25 years; courts in England directed juries to use the Queensberry rules to determine whether a contest was a legitimate fighting match or an unlawful encounter thereby legitimating the principles of Queensberry rules into law. Jack Anderson, "Pugilistic Prosecutions: Prize Fighting and the Courts in Nineteenth Century Britain," *Sports Historian* 21:2 (2001), p. 45.
- ⁴⁵ Queensberry was, however, still identified under the statesman category in the paper in recognition of his position as a representative Peer of Scotland. "A Good Light Weight," *Vanity Fair*, 10 November 1877, n.p.
- ⁴⁶ One prizefight Queensberry attended between the American and English champions had to be held in a muddy field outside a small French town. "The Prize-Fight between Jem Smith and Jake Kilrain," *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times*, 24 December 1887, p. 406.
- ⁴⁷ John Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth-Century England: The Shadow of Our Refinement* (London: 2004), pp. 25, 90.
- ⁴⁸ Martin J. Wiener, *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness, and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge: 2004), p. 6.
- ⁴⁹ Alfred Bruce Douglas, *The Autobiography of Lord Alfred Douglas* (London: 1972), p. 101. Douglas' potential for bias in assessing his father is rife; however, his father's reputation as a man with a short fuse was legendary. Thaïs Morgan, "Victorian Effeminacies," in Richard Dellamora, (ed.), *Victorian Sexual Dissidence* (Chicago: 1999), p. 111-112.
- ⁵⁰ *The Graphic*, 7 December 1872, n.p.
- ⁵¹ "Fight between a Marquis and a Detective," *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 8 December 1872, n.p.
- ⁵² "Charge of Assault against the Marquis of Queensberry," *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 8 December 1872, p. 4.
- ⁵³ "Charge of Assault," p. 4.
- ⁵⁴ "Another Mischievous Marquis," *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 8 December 1872, p. 5.
- ⁵⁵ "The Mal-Administration of Justice," *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 15 December, 1872, n.p.

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- ⁵⁶ There were several cases in the 1870s that seemed to favour aristocratic reputation at the expense of justice. Anthony Taylor, *Lords of Misrule*, pp. 24-29.
- ⁵⁷ Michael H. Shirley, "G.W.M. Reynolds, *Reynolds's Newspaper* and Popular Politics," in Anne Humpherys & Louis James (eds.), *G.W.M. Reynolds: Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Politics, and the Press* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 75, 89; Michael Diamond, "From Journalism and Fiction into Politics," in *G.W.M. Reynolds*, p. 91.
- ⁵⁸ "The Mal-Administration of Justice," n.p.
- ⁵⁹ "Our Hereditary Legislators," *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 16 April, 1893, p. 4.
- ⁶⁰ Taylor, *Lords of Misrule*, p. 19.
- ⁶¹ "The Queensberry Case: Fight Between Father & Son," *Illustrated Police News*, 1 June 1895, p. 1.
- ⁶² "Queensberry Squabble," *The Globe*, 22 May 1895, p. 1.
- ⁶³ "The Queensberry Case," *The Illustrated Police News*, 1 June 1895, p. 3.
- ⁶⁴ "A Queensberry Fight: 'Twixt Marquis and Son,'" *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 25 May 1892, p. 2.
- ⁶⁵ The incident was considered such unbecoming conduct Lord Percy Douglas had to write a letter of abject apology to his club to ensure he did not lose his membership. "Letter to the Army & Navy Club," April 1895, ADD81732 General Correspondence 1893-1895, British Library Manuscripts, London.
- ⁶⁶ *The Times*, 25 May 1893, p. 19.
- ⁶⁷ Marquis of Queensberry, letter to S.D. Stoneham, 22 April 1895, Eccles Bequest Add 81723 A General Correspondence, British Library Manuscripts, London; Marquis of Queensberry, letter to S.D. Stoneham, 8 May 1895, Eccles Bequest Add 81723 A General Correspondence, British Library Manuscripts, London; Marquis of Queensberry, letter to Lord Alfred Douglas, 12 March 1895, ADD 81732 General Correspondence 1893-1895, British Library Manuscripts, London; Marquis of Queensberry, letter to Lord Alfred Douglas, 23 March 1895, ADD 81732 General Correspondence 1893-1895, British Library Manuscripts, London.
- ⁶⁸ Elizabeth Foyster, "Boys will be Boys? Manhood and Aggression, 1660-1800," in Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen (eds.), *English Masculinities 1660-1800* (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 155, 159.
- ⁶⁹ Lisa Anne SurrIDGE, *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* (Athens, 2005), pp. 73-74.
- ⁷⁰ "The Queensberry-Douglas Fracas," *The Leeds Mercury*, 23 May 1895, p. 6.
- ⁷¹ The case of the Tichborne Claimant involved a working class butcher who claimed to be the deceased heir to a Hampshire estate. He became a symbol of working class popular politics. McWilliam, *The Tichborne Claimant*, p. 204.
- ⁷² After hearing his English friend use this expression, Samuel Clemens mused on its American equivalency. Mark Twain, "Does the Race of Man Love a Lord?" *North American Review* 174:545 (1902), pp. 433-444.
- ⁷³ Mike Huggins, "Lord Bentinck, the Jockey Club and Racing Morality in Mid-Nineteenth Century England: The 'Running Rein' Derby Revisited," *International Journal Of The History Of Sport* 13:3 (1996): pp. 432-433; John Pinfold, "Horse Racing and the Upper Classes in the Nineteenth Century," *Sport In History* 28:3 (2008): pp. 414-415.
- ⁷⁴ John Davis, "Douglas, John Sholto, ninth Marquess of Queensberry (1844-1900)," in H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: 2004).
- ⁷⁵ Edward Royle, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866-1915* (Manchester, 1980), p. 263.
- ⁷⁶ 'Bulbus,' "The Marquis of Queensberry," *The Sporting Times*, 5 July 1879, p. 7.
- ⁷⁷ James Douglas, "The Marquis of Queensberry," *The Sporting Times*, 12 July 1879, p. 5; 'Bulbus,' "The Marquis of Queensberry," *The Sporting Times*, 4 October 1879, p. 7.
- ⁷⁸ "Lord Queensberry and Christianity," *Vanity Fair*, 1 November 1879, p. 232.
- ⁷⁹ E.C.H., letter to the editor, *Vanity Fair*, 8 November 1879, p. 246; M.A., letter to the editor, *Vanity Fair*, 8 November 1879, pp. 246-247; E.M., letter to the editor, 8 November 1879, *Vanity Fair*, p. 247.
- ⁸⁰ Archibald Douglas, letter to the editor, *Vanity Fair*, 15 November 1879, pp. 263-264.
- ⁸¹ Queensberry, letter to editor, *Vanity Fair*, 15 November 1879, p. 263.
- ⁸² Stratmann, *The Marquess of Queensberry*, p. 93.
- ⁸³ "The Marquis of Queensberry and 'the Religion of Mankind,'" *The Dundee Courier & Argus*, 17 November 1879, n.p.

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- ⁸⁴ Perhaps the most amusing epithet the author uses to describe Queensberry is as a “transcendental donkey.” “A Free Thinking Peer,” *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 4 November 1879, p. 4.
- ⁸⁵ “The Marquis of Queensberry Again,” *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 18 November 1879, p. 8.
- ⁸⁶ Note from editor, *Vanity Fair*, 15 November 1879, p. 264
- ⁸⁷ “The Marquis of Queensberry Again,” *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 18 November 1879, p. 4.
- ⁸⁸ Not only did Queensberry feel the personal affront, his loss of a seat in the House of Lords and his son’s elevation to the peerage would be the cause of a serious rift in the family. Stratmann, *The Marquess of Queensberry*, pp. 97, 164-171.
- ⁸⁹ “The Scotch Representative Peers,” *The Graphic*, 24 April 1880, n.p.; “The Election of Scotch Representative Peers,” *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 April 1880, p. 8.
- ⁹⁰ He also reiterated the Smithfield martyrs metaphor in his speech. “Scotch Representative Peers: A Scene in Holyrood Palace,” *Glasgow Herald*, 17 April 1880, p. 5.
- ⁹¹ “Our London Correspondence,” *Liverpool Mercury*, January 15, 1881, n.p.
- ⁹² Lord Queensberry, *The Spirit of the Matterhorn* (London: 1881).
- ⁹³ In a classic Queensberry response, he threatened the Peers that if they would not give him a hearing “I shall go about the country delivering my speech and it shall be published all over the world.... and it will cause a sensation.” “Scottish Representative Peers,” *The Times*, 11 December 1885, p. 6
- ⁹⁴ Brian Roberts, *The Mad, Bad, Line: The Family of Lord Alfred Douglas* (London: 1981), p. 97.
- ⁹⁵ “Special Notes,” *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 29 May 1881, n.p.
- ⁹⁶ Stratmann, *The Marquis of Queensberry*, p. 101.
- ⁹⁷ *The Radical*, 23 July 1881, 1.
- ⁹⁸ “Extraordinary Scene at a Theatre,” *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 19 November 1882, n.p.
- ⁹⁹ “The Marquis of Queensberry and ‘The Promise of May,’” *Fun*, 22 November 1882, p. 221.
- ¹⁰⁰ In a strange coincidence, the comic personage listed just before Queensberry was Oscar Wilde, dismissed because he would be too busy “curling his hair.” “Scraps from the Comic Journals,” *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 10 June 1883, n.p..
- ¹⁰¹ For example: “Attack on Tennyson by a Marquis,” *The Dundee Courier & Argus*, 16 November 1882, n.p.; *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 19 November 1882, n.p.
- ¹⁰² “Letter to the Editor,” *The Daily News*, 17 November 1882, p. 6.
- ¹⁰³ While Anglicanism was the conventional upper class religion, attitudes were diverse. However, like in many areas of life, opinion was united that one’s religious beliefs should never be too strident, nor too public. Queensberry’s loud and discordant tone was therefore the height of bad form. Frank Turner, “The Victorian Crisis of Faith and the Faith that was Lost,” in Richard J. Helmstadter and Bernard Lightman (eds.), *Victorian Faith in Crisis: Essays on Continuity and Change in Nineteenth Century Religious Belief* (Stanford: 1990), p. 11.
- ¹⁰⁴ “At the Play: ‘The Promise of May’ at the Globe,” *Vanity Fair*, 18 November 1882, pp. 291-292; “At the Play: ‘Iolanthe’ at the Savoy,” *Vanity Fair*, 2 December 1882, pp. 326-327.
- ¹⁰⁵ “Storyettes,” *The Newcastle Weekly Courant*, 17 February 1900, n.p.
- ¹⁰⁶ “Outwitting a Scotch Peer,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 January 1886, p. 10; “Imprisoning of a Scotch Peer” *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 24 January 1886, p. 3.
- ¹⁰⁷ “Outwitting a Scotch Peer,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 January 1886, p. 8.
- ¹⁰⁸ Further proof of Queensberry’s ostracism from his peers was when he was blackballed from membership of the Reform Club in 1886, despite being proposed by Lord Rosebery and Lord Kensington. Stratmann, *The Marquess of Queensberry*, p. 121.
- ¹⁰⁹ “The Court,” *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 12 August 1888, n.p.
- ¹¹⁰ “Lord Queensberry and the Oath,” *The North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, 1 March 1890, n.p.
- ¹¹¹ Olwen Claire Niessen, *Aristocracy, Temperance and Social Reform: the Life of Lady Henry Somerset* (London: 2007), p. 36.
- ¹¹² Hyde, *Lord Alfred Douglas*, p. 13.
- ¹¹³ While admittedly not an unbiased source, his son claimed his father in fact was known to spend all of his money on “prostitutes and kept women.” Lord Alfred Douglas, letter to W.T. Stead, 28 June 1895, ADD 81732 General Correspondence 1893-1895, British Library Manuscripts, London.
- ¹¹⁴ Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Man’s Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities, c. 1660-c. 1900* (Oxford, 2012), p. 230.
- ¹¹⁵ Roberts, *The Mad, Bad Line*, 72.

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- ¹¹⁶ Hyde, *Lord Alfred Douglas*, 15.
- ¹¹⁷ “The Queensberry Divorce Case,” *The Daily News*, 24 January 1887, p. 7.
- ¹¹⁸ “The Queensberry Divorce Case,” *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 23 January 1887, n.p.; “The Queensberry Divorce Suit,” *The Illustrated Police News*, 29 January 1887, p. 2.
- ¹¹⁹ “Missing,” *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 12 November 1893, n.p.
- ¹²⁰ Stratmann, *The Marquess of Queensberry*, pp. 175-176,
- ¹²¹ *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 21 October 1894, n.p.; “The Law Courts,” *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 28 October 1894, n.p.
- ¹²² Gail Savage, “They Would if they Could: Class, Gender, and Popular Representation of English Divorce Litigation, 1858-1908,” *Journal of Family History*, 36:2 (2011), pp. 177-179.
- ¹²³ David Nicholls, *The Lost Prime Minister: A Life of Sir Charles Dilke* (London, 1995), pp. 177-194; Michael Diamond, *Victorian Sensation: Or, the Spectacular, the Shocking and the Scandalous in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, 2004), pp. 134-142.
- ¹²⁴ “Vanities,” *Vanity Fair*, 18 November 1882, p. 296.
- ¹²⁵ Hibbert, *Edward VII*, pp. 174-179.
- ¹²⁶ Amy Milne-Smith, *London Clubland: A Cultural History of Gender and Class in Late Victorian Britain* (New York, 2011), p. 61.
- ¹²⁷ Christopher Hibbert, *Edward VII: The Last Victorian King* (New York, 2007), p. 177.
- ¹²⁸ Angela Lambert, *Unquiet Souls: The Indian Summer of the British Aristocracy, 1880-1918* (London, 1984), p. 37.
- ¹²⁹ John M. Robson, *Marriage or Celibacy? The Daily Telegraph on a Victorian Dilemma* (Toronto: 1995).
- ¹³⁰ The Marquis of Queensberry, *Marriage and the Relation of the Sexes: An Address to Women* (London: 1893), p. 1.
- ¹³¹ Queensberry, *Marriage and the Relation of the Sexes*, pp. 8-10.
- ¹³² Stephanie Forward, “Attitudes to Marriage and Prostitution in the Writings of Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird, Sarah Grand and George Egerton,” *Women’s History Review*, 8:1 (1999): pp. 53-80; James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Married Life* (London: 1992).
- ¹³³ “Lord Queensberry on Marriage,” *The Standard*, 19 January 1893, p. 2; “Lord Queensberry on the Marriage Laws,” *Western Mail*, 20 January 1893, n.p.
- ¹³⁴ One author delighted in adding that the controversial speaker “tripped upon the stage.” “Marriage Under Queensberry Rules,” *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 19 January 1893, p. 7.
- ¹³⁵ Lady Florence Dixie was married to a gambler and drinker, and she had a taste for the wild and exotic. She became a well-known adventurer and travel writer, once kept a jaguar as a pet, and claimed a kidnapping attempt that few believed. Stratmann, *The Marquess of Queensberry*, pp. 110-114
- ¹³⁶ “Marriage Under Queensberry Rules,” *Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury*, 28 January 1893, p. 2.
- ¹³⁷ Stephanie Olsen, “The Authority of Motherhood in Question: Fatherhood and the Moral Education of Children in England, c. 1870-1900,” *Women’s History Review*, 18:5 (2009): pp. 765-780. Other scholars have pointed out a more nuanced and contradictory experience of middle class fatherhood. However, the pressures of the ideal remained. Claudia Nelson, *Invisible Men: Fatherhood in Victorian Periodicals, 1850-1910* (Athens, 2010), pp. 42-44.
- ¹³⁸ Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, “Domestic Fathers and the Victorian Parental Role,” *Women’s History Review*, 15:4 (2006): p. 556; John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: 1999).
- ¹³⁹ Judith Schneid Lewis, *In the Family Way: Childbearing in the British Aristocracy, 1760-1860* (New Brunswick, 1986), pp. 65-69.
- ¹⁴⁰ Hartcup points out Queensberry as a notoriously bad example of fatherhood. Adeline Hartcup, *Children of the Great Country Houses* (London: 1982), pp. 17-27.
- ¹⁴¹ John Tosh, “The old Adam and the new man: emerging themes in the history of English masculinities, 1750-1850,” in *English Masculinities 1660-1800*, p. 223.
- ¹⁴² French and Rothery, *Man’s Estate*, p. 231.
- ¹⁴³ The financial stability of the Queensberry estate was in trouble early on. In April of 1883 properties at Tinwald and Thorwald went on the market, selling in June 1884 for £220,000. Stratmann, *The Marquess of Queensberry*, p. 115.

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- ¹⁴⁴ In many ways his extended family eccentricity's matched his own. Stratmann, *The Marquess of Queensberry*, pp. 107-120
- ¹⁴⁵ A Lady Correspondent, "Metropolitan Gossip," *The Belfast News-Letter*, 5 February, 1900, n.p.
- ¹⁴⁶ A Lady, "Metropolitan Gossip," n.p.
- ¹⁴⁷ "Police," *The Times*, 11 April 1891, p. 15.
- ¹⁴⁸ *The Graphic*, 9 May 1891, n.p.; "Suicide of Lord James Douglas," *Reynold's Newspaper*, 10 May 1891, n.p.
- ¹⁴⁹ F.A.K. Douglas and Percy Colson, *Oscar Wilde and the Black Douglas* (London: 1949), p. 69.
- ¹⁵⁰ Stratman,, p. 137.
- ¹⁵¹ "A Curious Question in the Peerage: Lord Queensberry and Mr. Gladstone," *The Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 26 July 1893, p. 4; "A Curious Question in the Peerage," *The Huddersfield Chronicle and West Yorkshire Advertiser*, 29 July 1893, p. 3.
- ¹⁵² "A Peerage Squabble," *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 30 July 1893, p. 9.
- ¹⁵³ "Lord Queensberry and Lord Rosebery: A Curious Homburg Story," *The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 30 August 1893, p. 6.
- ¹⁵⁴ Soon after, relations with his second son, Percy Douglas, deteriorated as he threatened to disown him should he marry without his father's permission. John Sholto Douglas to Percy Douglas, 1893. Eccles Bequest Add 81723 A General Correspondence, British Library Manuscripts.
- ¹⁵⁵ "Fatal Accident to Viscount Drumlanrig," *The Daily News*, 19 October 1894, p. 5.
- ¹⁵⁶ Jonathan Goldman, *Modernism is the Literature of Celebrity* (Austin: 2011), p. 20.
- ¹⁵⁷ Neil McKenna, *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde* (New York: 2011), p. 195.
- ¹⁵⁸ Douglas' hostility to his father's presumption of telling him what to do was certainly about rebellion. It also, however, reflects Victorian beliefs that the rights of fatherhood were tempered by a sense of duty. Trev Lynn Broughton and Helen Rogers, "Introduction: The Empire of the Father," in *Gender and Fatherhood in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: 2007), p. 20.
- ¹⁵⁹ His handwriting was so illegible, it appeared to say "ponce and somdomite." McKenna, *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde*, p. 342.
- ¹⁶⁰ Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side* (New York: 1992), p. 126.
- ¹⁶¹ Philip Harling, "The Law of Libel and the Limits of Repression, 1790-1832," *Historical Journal* 44: 1 (2001), p. 107.
- ¹⁶² *The Great Convent Case: Saurin v. Star & Kennedy Tried Before Lord Chief Justice Cockburn in the Court of Queens' Bench* (London, 1869).
- ¹⁶³ Shearer West, "Laughter at the Whistler/Ruskin Trial," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 12:1 (2007), p. 43.
- ¹⁶⁴ Michael Havers, Edward Grayson and Peter Shankland, *The Royal Baccarat Scandal* (London, 1977), p. 60.
- ¹⁶⁵ "The Marquis of Queensberry and Mr. Oscar Wilde," *The Daily News*, 4 March 1895, p. 7.
- ¹⁶⁶ "The Marquis and Oscar Wilde," *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 7 April 1895, n.p.
- ¹⁶⁷ "How the World Wags," *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times*, 9 March 1895, p. 150.
- ¹⁶⁸ "Serious Charge against Lord Queensberry," *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 9 March 1895, p. 2.
- ¹⁶⁹ "The Wilde Libel Case," *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 March 1895, p. 7; "Oscar Wilde Libel Case," *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 April 1895, p. 7.
- ¹⁷⁰ "Oscar Wilde and Lord Queensberry: A Minute Cross-Examination," *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 5 April 1895, p. 5.
- ¹⁷¹ Wilde, "DeProfundis," p. 96.
- ¹⁷² Heather Marcovitch, *The Art of the Pose: Oscar Wilde's Performance Theory* (Berlin: 2010), pp. 57-58.
- ¹⁷³ Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Stanford: 1986), p. 95.
- ¹⁷⁴ The letters to his son read in court and reproduced by the papers were full of colourful language doubting Lord Alfred Douglas's parentage and describing him as an "impertinent young jackanape" and a "miserable creature." "Queensberry Trial," *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 14 April 1895, p.15; "The Charge Against Lord Queensberry," *The Morning Post*, 5 April 1895, p. 7.
- ¹⁷⁵ "Queensberry Case: Shocking Evidence," *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 6 April 1895, p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ “The Charge Against Lord Queensberry: Verdict of Not Guilty,” *The Morning Post*, 6 April 1895, p. 3; “The Wilde-Queensberry Case: Sensational Termination,” *Birmingham Daily Post*, 6 April 1895, p. 5; “The Queensberry Libel Case: Sensational Scene,” *The Belfast News-Letter*, 6 April 1895, p. 5.

¹⁷⁷ “Oscar Wilde Libel Case: Sudden Collapse,” *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 5 April, 1895, p. 7.

¹⁷⁸ “Central Criminal Court,” *The Times*, 6 April 1895, p. 10; “Oscar Wilde v. Lord Queensberry,” *The Scotsman*, 4 April 1895, p. 6.

¹⁷⁹ Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side*, p. 4. The full records of Oscar Wilde’s legal trials do not exist in the records of the Old Bailey. Merlin Holland’s recent publication of the Queensberry trial, based on original shorthand notes indicates how incomplete newspaper accounts were compared to the full trial discourse. Merlin Holland, *The Real Trial of Oscar Wilde* (New York: 2003).

¹⁸⁰ “Wilde—Taylor,” *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 5 May 1895, p. 1.

¹⁸¹ Sodomite, or more rarely Uranian or invert, were the terms used in the nineteenth century before the emergence of homosexual as a recognized identity. However, Wilde always maintained he never engaged in actual sodomy. Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: 2004).

¹⁸² Despite the scandalous copy and promise of sales, some newspapers obviously considered the entire incident so distasteful they did not carry any coverage of the trials. The theatrical and sporting paper *The Era* and the solidly middle class *Illustrated London News* are two examples.

¹⁸³ This is very much in line with the working class Toryism Rohan McWilliam identified in the case of the Tichborne claimant: a popular disdain for overly refined urban elites. McWilliam, *The Tichborne Claimant*, p. 248. Andrew Adonis’ book is an exception to our general lack of knowledge of working class ideas of aristocracy. Andrew Adonis, *Making Aristocracy Work: the Peerage and the Political System in Britain, 1884-1914* (Oxford: 1993).

¹⁸⁴ “The Notorious Mr. Wilde,” *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 14 April 1895, p. 1.

¹⁸⁵ “Oscar Wilde Libel Case: Sudden Collapse,” *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 5 April, 1895, p. 7.

¹⁸⁶ In the midst of Wilde’s first trial, *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* published an article noting Queensberry’s youngest son was detained in California on a charge of insanity. His family did so in order to prevent him from marrying a pretty saloon waitress. “Arrest of Lord Sholto Douglas,” *Lloyds’s Weekly Newspaper*, 28 April 1895, p. 1.

¹⁸⁷ Douglas, *The Autobiography of Lord Alfred Douglas*, p. 122.

¹⁸⁸ Even Linda Stratmann admits Queensberry was back on “the fringes of society” after the trial, however she disagrees that he was ostracized in the way Lord Alfred Douglas wrote. Stratmann, *The Marquess of Queensberry*, p. 255.

¹⁸⁹ *The Sporting Times*, 18 January 1896, p. 7; *The Sporting Times*, 29 February 1896, p. 1; “Queensberry Was With Us,” *New York Times*, 28 January 1896, p. 4; “Court and Aristocracy: Lord and Barmaid,” *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 23 June 1895, p. 3. In fact he was arrested and fined for his bicycling adventures when he rode on a footpath. The only reason the minor transgression (and 15 shilling fine) made the papers is likely because the man fought the charges in his typical vociferous manner. “Marquis of Queensberry Fined,” *The Illustrated Police News*, 20 February 1897, p. 6.

¹⁹⁰ This stands in contrast to *Reynolds’s* complaint more than thirty years previously that no matter how “profligate, tyrannical, arbitrary, and altogether reprehensible,” noblemen were always given cordial obituaries. “Amiable Aristocracy,” *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 31 January 1869, n.p.

¹⁹¹ *Western Mail*, 2 February 1900, n.p.

¹⁹² *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 4 February 1900, p. 8.

¹⁹³ “The Late Marquis of Queensberry,” *Birmingham Daily Post*, 2 February 1900, p. 4.

¹⁹⁴ *Manchester Times*, 16 February 1900, n.p.

¹⁹⁵ “Personal Paragraphs,” *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 3 February, 1900, n.p.; *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 4 February 1900, p. 8; A Lady Correspondent, “Metropolitan Gossip,” *The Belfast News-Letter*, 5 February 1900, n.p.

¹⁹⁶ “Personal Paragraphs,” *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 3 February, 1900, n.p.

¹⁹⁷ “Obituary: The Marquis of Queensberry,” *The Times*, 1 February 1900, p. 6.

¹⁹⁸ “Sporting Man Dead,” *New York Times*, 1 February 1900, 1; “Obituary: the Marquess of Queensberry,” *The Standard*, 2 February 1900, 5; “Personal Paragraphs,” *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 3 February 1900, n.p.; *Manchester Times*, 16 February 1900, n.p.

¹⁹⁹ For example: “Queensberry Dead,” *Weekly Dispatch*, 4 February 1900, p. 15.

²⁰⁰ “An Eccentric Will,” *News of the World*, 25 February 1900, p. 3.

²⁰¹ “The Marquis of Queensberry’s Strange Will,” *The Illustrated Police News*, 24 February 1900, p. 4.

²⁰² “The Marquis of Queensberry’s Ashes,” *New York Times*, 21 February 1900, p. 6.

²⁰³ “Death of A Peer: The Marquess of Queensberry Passes Away,” *News of the World*, 4 February 1900, p. 3.

²⁰⁴ Fred Inglis, *A Short History of Celebrity* (Princeton: 2010), pp. 6-7.