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Traditions and Histories: Connections and Disconnections

This chapter maps out some of the pivotal moments in boxing history and shows how boxing as a sport and the specificities of boxing culture have evolved. One aim of the chapter is to pick out some of the big moments in boxing history, including some of those that have been classified as part of a golden age as well as highlighting the key elements which make boxing distinctive and particular. The timelines which boxing has followed are uneven and played out in different places. Looking at some of the big moments in the sport, however, is a good way of finding out how sport shapes as well as reflects social relations and transformations and the connections between different times and places.

Boxing involves a specific set of body practices and skills which have a long history. The sport has been marked by increased regulation, which has transformed the apparently free-for-all of ancient Greek Pankration – a form of wrestling or fighting, literally meaning the ‘all-power event’ – to heavily controlled forms of contemporary professional and amateur boxing with all their attention to carefully prescribed, detailed disciplinary practices and regimes. I mention this early form of boxing not to lay claim to a linear narrative of the culture of boxing but rather because this form of one-on-one largely unrestrained combat continues to inform what is classified as boxing in the twenty-first century and has evidential traces in the genealogy of boxing.

This chapter aims to provide an understanding of boxing through the development of the sport over time. Boxing connects to particular aspects of culture at different historical moments, which has produced the idea of golden ages of boxing. There are also disconnections between the sport and the wider society which play out in different ways. This chapter is not a linear chronological account, but rather a discussion, which highlights what are considered to be significant strands in the making of boxing and boxing culture in order to understand how change takes place and the interrelationship between boxing

and the societies in which it is lived and practiced. Chapter 2 interrogates the idea of golden ages and picks out the importance of fighting; the unregulated Pankration of Ancient Greece and the original Olympic Games, through the English golden age and the cultural implications of the Fancy, including some exploration of the connections and disconnections of women's boxing. The twentieth-century spatial shift to the USA and the golden ages of heavyweights are all part of what makes boxing culture in the present as well as providing the possibilities for change. Resonances of the past persist, but connect in different ways to the present. The apparently unconstrained practices of the ancient world have recently been invoked in the context of MMA and Ultimate Fighting.

Not that even the extremes of Pankration were entirely unregulated; there were limits to which practices were acceptable and unacceptable, with gouging out of the opponent's eyes being off limits and likely to result in 'a flogging from the judge or trainer' (Faulkner, 2012:153). However different the practices, which could loosely be called boxing or fighting at different times, there are distinctive and particular features of the sport which make boxing what it is in the twenty-first century too. Some of the points of connection relate to cultural and ideological rather than enfleshed and embodied practices. Bodies, however, remain central to boxing and the strengths and weaknesses of the flesh intersect with cultural meanings and social practices.

This chapter highlights some of the key moments and major links between flesh and culture in the genealogy of boxing and how boxing fits into the social worlds and the social processes of globalization. By looking at key moments in boxing history it is possible to see how boxing contributes to globalizing trends and is itself globalizing as well as subject to the forces of globalization. Modern boxing, as practised in the public arena and controlled by regulatory bodies, specifies precise body weights of boxers, the gloves they use, which punching and contact techniques are permitted and how they are targeted, the timing of rounds, head protection in amateur boxing and health checks including brain scans to name but a few of the interventions, which have become ever more precise and prescriptive. This seems a long way from prizefighting, although that too persists if not always within the law, but boxing is still one-on-one enfleshed combat, which carries much of the intensity and danger of earlier times. The forms of fighting associated with the ancient Greek world also highlight the extreme polarization of the civilized elevation of art, drama and philosophy, which marked Athenian society on the one hand, and violence, war, pain, hatred and excess, which was often focused upon physical, enfleshed experience, on the other.

These apparently contrasting elements of the culture of the ancient world were deeply embedded in the militarism of a world in which war between city states was routine. Men were expected to fight and the sporting practices of Pankration hardened them for the exigencies of war. Sporting brutality seems hardly surprising in this context, but the routes which boxing and the fight game have taken are haunted by tensions between acceptable and justifiable violence and excesses of illegality and what is legally sanctioned. Boundaries are blurred, but there remain more than evidential traces of the links to militarism and traditional masculinities.

The boundaries between what is seen to be legal and what is not are particularly interesting in the genealogies of boxing, not least because the more intensely and precisely regulated the sport becomes, the more appealing the transgressions of prizefighting, cage fighting and other less-mainstream activities become in some parts of the world and in some places where boxing is practised. Boxing also has particular associations, with militarism and with gendered codes of honour, as well as nefarious, illegal practices, and the borders between morality, legality and cultural acceptability are blurred.

In order to explore what is distinctive about boxing and how it connects to other sports and other cultural and economic practices, networks and systems, it is necessary to look at boxing histories. It is not, however, a simple study of change from the past to the present, but it does mean exploring some of the routes boxing has travelled.

Roots and routes

Sport is a field in which appeals are repeatedly made to authenticity, not least in relation to fandom. 'Real' fans attend every game. 'Real' fight fans go to actual fights rather than watching on television. Similarly true fans know every detail of their team's history, and in boxing they know who won what, how and in which round. Sometimes an element of authenticity can be gained by remembering where you were and what you were doing when the sporting event was taking place, if you did not actually manage to be there (Boddy, 2008). Heroes and heroic legends are made of historic detail. Boxers and boxing do not follow a simple narrative path but are constituted through an iterative and uneven cultural process.

In this respect the distinction between roots and routes is important in a discussion of sport because the field of sport is so often characterized by appeals

to authenticity through memory and the measurement of the bodies that take part and of their sporting achievements (Woodward, 2009, 2012a). As the sociologist and cultural critic Stuart Hall has argued in the context of cultural identities, the matter of who we are is more often about routes than roots (Hall, 1992). Hall developed anthropological ideas such as those of the cultural anthropologist James Clifford (1988), who challenged the idea that identities can be traced back to original authentic roots and that what matters more is the routes that people have travelled than the myths of origin to which they may appeal (Hall, 1992, Gilroy, 1993). Claims to 'true' national or ethnic identity are often made at times of uncertainty, conflict and rapid social change. The problem of belonging, however, is one that does not only apply to the identifications which people make (Woodward, 1997a), especially the identities of diasporic peoples, whose travels so characterized the twentieth century (Berger, 1984) and are such an important element in the history of boxing; boxers so often come from migrant and mobile communities. Boxing is a sport which invites claims to authenticity, evidence of which is most clear in the knockout, which is the main objective of boxing in the ring. Boxing is also a cultural and social embodied practice in which diasporic and migrant people, especially men, have engaged, notably by investing physical capital (Bourdieu, 1984a, Wacquant, 2004).

Routes provide us with the narrative of the journey that has been made, with pivotal points along the way, and contribute to a more dynamic sense of what is involved in taking up identity positions which relate more closely to the conceptualization of identification and belonging as configured through the making of narratives. Narratives are structured around pivotal moments, which create possibilities for identification. For example, in a Foucauldian sense, stories put subject positions 'into discourse' (Foucault, 1981) and make identities available. This is crucial to the promise of change. In order for the culture of boxing to transform the lives not only of individuals but also of collectivities and to make changes in the broader field of social and cultural life, new figures and claims have to be put into discourse so that it becomes possible to think the hitherto unthinkable. Sporting stories often place heroes and pivotal moments into discourse and into what makes the sport what it is. Boxing is full of heroic narratives and great fights (Mitchell, 2009, Powley, 2011 and the glorious listings on boxrec.com, 2013). Such stories are part of the social and cultural dimensions of identities since they are part of the cultural currency of the time.

The problem of roots and belonging also applies to the history of things and of events as well as to people (Clifford, 1997); meanings are made through routes and, Clifford argues, it is the meanings attached to, for example,

diasporic identities or the objects and experiences associated with them which matter. In boxing, for example, objects, equipment and places matter: the gym, the sites of particular fights across the globe and their vicinities – Madison Square Garden and Jacob's Beach (Mitchell, 2009). Consequently, in looking at the history of a sport it can be more useful to explore the routes it has travelled rather than to trace a linear, chronological narrative which seeks to find its roots. There are, however, pivotal points in history which matter more than others and the early evidence of boxing, especially from the classical era, continues to have relevance and importance, not least because of the role of the Olympic Games with their quintessential and symbolic links to ancient Greece and the rediscovery and reconfiguration of classical sporting discourses in the nineteenth century with the establishment of the modern Olympics. Thus, it is useful to re-examine some of the routes boxing has travelled, starting with some of its earlier moments.

The Olympics are also worth particular attention because they are both a routine, recurrent sporting spectacle and the most spectacular of all such mega events. Boxing has played an important role in the Games and the Games have been important in boxing history for a number of reasons. Firstly, great boxers have made their names at the Games, the most notable of whom must be Muhammad Ali, who won gold at the 1960 Rome Olympics (Ali, 2004, Hauser, 1991, Marqusee, 2005). Secondly, the Olympics highlight particularly well the tensions and connections between amateurism and professionalism in sport and most especially boxing. Thirdly, in 2012, the year of the Olympics in London, women boxed in competition for the first time in the games, which signalled some of the promise of disruption and change. The gendered nature of boxing is central to its development and to understanding its popularity and endurance as well as its disruptions (Woodward, 2006). Any shifts in the binary logic of sex in a sport in which they are as entrenched and embedded as they appear to be in boxing are particularly significant and have powerful cultural resonance.

The classical golden age

Boxing dates back a long way, but evidence is relatively sparse, which makes it difficult to make well-supported claims about how extensively the sport was practised or how its practices were understood and evaluated. The lack of evidence also means that what evidence there is carries more significance than it would otherwise warrant. The first evidence of boxing can be found in Mesopotamian

stone reliefs, which are estimated to date from 3000 BCE (Barracclough, 1981). Early archaeological evidence of boxing as a sporting practice has been followed by a succession of 'golden ages', some of which are explored in the next section. One of the earlier periods which holds considerable sway in boxing histories, especially because of its links to the Olympic Games and their reformulation in modern times, is that of ancient Greece due to not only the presence but also the celebration and high-profile nature of the sport. Most histories of boxing make some reference to the sport's classical past and the legacy of ancient times (for example, Boddy, 2008, Mullan, 2010) and into more recent times (Early, 1994, Gorn, 1986, Sammons, 1988). The male dominance of boxing and its powerful connotations and configurations of masculinity have often gone largely unremarked (Woodward, 2006), but some feminist scholars have drawn attention to the gender-specific dimensions of sporting practices in the ancient world (Lefkowitz and Fant, 1982, Spivey, 2004). Women did participate in some sports, including the women's games, and attended gymnasia, but boxing was largely a male pursuit. The sex gender binary was enforced through the visible verification of embodied difference and classification of sex in a social world in which athletes largely performed without clothes.

The emphasis of many accounts of the ancient world (Faulkner, 2012, Spivey, 2004) is often upon the symbolic significance of boxing and the classical notions of honour which are implicated in its practices. Even Pankratiasts and, even more likely, wrestlers in the ancient world would have appeared beautiful in their youth although seasoned combatants, then as now, would have been bruised and battered with, at the very least, broken noses. Boxing in the ancient world, especially in ancient Greek culture, highlighted a classical aesthetic of the good-looking male body, which was underpinned by homoeroticism, which is an aspect of boxing that is often understated, as has been noted in more recent critiques (James, 1996).

Another of the boundaries transgressed in boxing is that between pain and pleasure, which also has erotic connotations and implications, as does the enfleshed actuality of the one-on-one skin contact of the sport. Like all sports, there is also the display of flesh in the form of fit, honed, musculature and beautiful bodies (Woodward, 2006, 2009, 2011). The pleasure inherent in boxers' beautiful bodies is always caught up in the pain of the broken bodies, which are also constitutive of the sport. The pain and possible death that is the inevitable outcome of prizefighting renders it an activity of enormous symbolic importance, especially in patriarchal societies with strong militaristic traditions.

The prizefighting of the ancient world was marked by clearly understood codes of honour. Neil Faulkner describes boxing as *pugmachia* (2012:233), an activity involving repeated pummelling of the head by combatants wearing strips of leather wound around their hands, with fingers left free, again with very few restrictions. Faulkner is drawing on Homer, who describes a fight at the Patroclus's funeral games in the *Iliad* (Homer, 1910), which has also been accorded particular significance by some scholars because of its connotations of honour and respect in relation to the whole community (Hawhee, 2004). Imagery of the boxer is common in classical work such as vase painting and writing. For example, Plato in *Protagoras* and in *Gorgias* mentions boxing as a practice and a particular skill or *techne*, which has a cultural importance which would be widely recognized. Similarly, for the Roman period there are several allusions to boxing, for example in the work of the Roman poet Virgil, writing in the first century BCE, although the Romans did not share the enthusiastic ancient Greek celebration of the beautiful body.

Boxing in the classical world also served as entertainment, which illustrates the reiteration of the ambivalence between aristocratic articulations of honour and the gross mass spectacles of the arena, which nonetheless provided a route to free citizenship for gladiators who excelled. Gladiatorial combat usually involved weapons and animals and was not limited to the one-on-one corporeal combat more strictly classified as boxing. Virgil, who drew upon ancient Greek notions of heroism, describes Aeneas's challenge in the Aeneid, Book 5, 'Now let anyone who has a valorous heart and a quick resource come forward, ready to box with fists gloved in hide' (Virgil, 1956, v:130).

He then goes on to describe the fight between Entellus and Dares in a manner which is quite comprehensible in the contemporary world:

Each at once took position, alert, on tip-toe with eagerness, undismayed, and with arms raised in the air. Holding their heads high and well out of the reach of blows, they began to spar in interplay of fist with fist, warming to the fight.

(Virgil, 1956, v: 132)

Jackson Knight's translation of Virgil, although lacking some of the hyperbole of contemporary journalism, combines honour with aggression:

The heroic Entellus, as active and as fearless as ever in spite of his fall, returned to the fight all the fiercer, with a new force kindled by rage. His shame together with his confidence in his own valour, set his strength on fire ... There was no pause, no respite. The heroic Entellus battered Dares and sent him spinning.

(Virgil, 1956, v: 133)

Whilst the expression of conflict in the language of heroic endeavour is culturally and historically specific, the equation of defence of one's body with attack on that of another has a very strong hold and informs more recent retelling of boxing legends and the gendered identities that are forged therein. Discourses of honour and pugilistic body practices merge in the culture of boxing. Hand-on-hand combat has continued up to the present, although there have been variations along the way, not the least by the Romans with their gladiatorial competitions, which provided mass entertainment and diversion. Honourable endeavour, whether articulated as aristocratic fighting or as the investment of physical capital by the dispossessed as a means of gaining independence and self-respect (Bourdieu, 1984, Wacquant, 1995a, 2004), is a strand in boxing history which retains strong resonance from its earliest times. Indeed, it is one that is frequently revisited and rehearsed in popular cultural forms at other times – most recently in films such as Stanley Kubrick's 1960 film, based on the novel by Howard Fast, *Spartacus*, or Samuel Bronston's 1964 film *The Fall of the Roman Empire* and, especially, Ridley Scott's 2000 film *Gladiator*, and the somewhat hyperbolic television series such as the US 2010 Starz series *Spartacus* and the British American drama series *Rome*, created by Bruno Heller, John Millus and William J. McDonald, with seasons shown in 2005 and 2007. Popular culture reconstitutes the past through the present by using and reusing elements of the traditions that inform boxing, for example through gladiatorial one-on-one combat and codes of honour and enfleshed masculinity. It is worth noting that, in these popular cultural forms, the version of masculinity which is remade through the lens of enfleshed combat is usually constructed in relation to an oppositional figure of femininity. Femininity is also subject to dualistic thinking and is either embedded in the figure of the whore or the respectable matron (or virginal Madonna).

Classical scholars have debated the significance of fighting but the classical era offers useful illustration of some of the key elements of boxing which have contributed to the sport's enduring popularity and, indeed, to its continued existence into the twenty-first century. This is especially pertinent in relation to the nineteenth-century rediscovery, reinvention and re-articulation of classical ideals in sporting culture at the start of the modern Olympics which were represented through nineteenth-century patriarchal discourses (Woodward, 2012b). Pugilism was very different at the time of the recovery of classicism in the nineteenth century. It is not only western boxing which draws upon these repertoires. For example, Thai boxing has its own rituals and codes, codes of honour and rigidly bounded masculinities. In its development, boxing has travelled different routes

and in and through different places. There is no single source of boxing; it does not have necessarily authentic or even clearly identifiable roots, but there are points of connection and endurances which make looking at the legacy of the ancient world productive in exploring what boxing is about, its inspirations and imaginaries, and why people still do it and follow it with such enthusiasm.

The classical golden age was one of many in the routes boxing has travelled. Another pivotal point in the genealogy of global boxing, which lasted some time, is what has been called the English golden age. Each golden age demonstrates some of the enduring features of boxing.

The Fancy and the English golden age

What could be classified as boxing, or at least as a codified sport with links to the fighting of Pankration of ancient Greece and gladiatorial combat and fights to the death of the Romans, is recorded in England in the seventeenth century (Boddy, 2008). There is little evidence of how the sport might have been practised after it was banned in the Roman Empire in 339AD, but it seems that it was largely not formalized during this period. However, later in seventeenth-century England, bouts were performed in London theatres along with other forms of entertainment (Boddy, 2008) and by the early eighteenth century there was a boom in interest in boxing and the emergence of key figures, like James Figg, the first recognized champion in 1719. Figg was followed by a number of 'English heavyweights, from Jack Broughton and Daniel Mendoza to Tom Cribb, Jem Mace and the last of the great British champions from the bare-knuckle era, Bob Fitzsimmons, in 1899' (Powley, 2011:7). By the time Fitzsimmons was fighting, of course, the sport had become regulated. The eighteenth century, however, saw the start of what has often been called the English golden age.

Samuel Pepys records some excitement at the prospect of a fight in his famous diaries in the mid-seventeenth century, but it was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that an English golden age became established. In the seventeenth century, boxing had become part of a boisterous rural culture of entertainment, along with cockfighting and bear baiting, which seems far removed from classical aesthetics and codes of honour, but was nonetheless combative and aggressive. In the eighteenth century, boxing moved into the towns and became enmeshed with a whole set of sporting practices and entertainment in an assemblage in which gambling and betting were very definitely classified as sport as part of the entertainment and of the networks

of the Fancy. The activities of the Fancy are part of sport's associations with gambling and with entertainment as well as indicative of how sport can generate relationships and particular versions of masculinity (Woodward, 2006). What the Fancy so well demonstrates is the elisions of the enfleshed practices of sport, the activities that take place in the ring in boxing and those of spectators, followers and, especially, gamblers. The assemblage of the Fancy is made up of a diverse mix of intersecting forces and intensities, which also demonstrates the excitement, risk and danger that brings gambling and embodied practices of sport, especially boxing, together.

Popular fighters like James Figg, Britain's first national champion in 1719 (Gorn, 1986) who also offered to train young gentlemen in the Noble Art, became key figures in the development of this period in the history of boxing. Figg made money from his fairground bouts and then advertised his services to young gentlemen who might benefit from acquiring some of the arts of self-defence (Brailsford, 1988). The Noble Art learned as self-defence was less likely to include performance in the ring, however, although there was something of an alliance between the aristocracy and the migrant agricultural and urban poor, which persists today in field sports, especially shooting and hunting, between white, agricultural labour and landowners. Combat was undertaken by the poor and, often itinerant, dispossessed agricultural workers and some of the minority groups such as those from the Jewish diaspora (Bodner, 2011, Berkowitz and Ungar, 2007) and immigrant Irish people, who nonetheless were offered a route out of poverty and a chance to gain some recognition through the sport (Gorn, 1986), then as now. The culture of boxing, like blood sports in the contemporary world, brought together the poor and marginalized and the aristocratic and well-off in a mix of sporting activities, which included gambling, and generated considerable excitement.

Women were boxing, although largely in less-regulated spaces such as fairground booths, but the mixing of rich and poor, of aristocratic members of the Fancy and poor pugilists, did not apply to any gendered cultural mixing. Gender operates in particular ways in sport and is not only the outcome of regulatory mechanisms of governance, for example in the governing bodies which set separate competitions and rules for women and for men. The risks and enfleshed dangers of boxing applied equally to participating women and to men, who were nonetheless perceived in different ways; different cultural and political forces inhibited women's involvement in the Fancy.

The diversity of practitioners, however, is testament to the capacities which boxing has for promoting diversity and plurality. The middleweight Jewish boxer

Daniel Mendosa created a new style of boxing with sophisticated footwork, mobility and fluidity in jabs and defence work which moved away from the more static style of boxers like Broughton (Ungar, 2007). There are consistencies in the location of fights and the cultural context in which they take place, but there was also development of different and distinctive styles and expressions of corporeal boxing practices.

Powley describes the famous 1860 bare-knuckle fight between the English contestant Tom Sayers and the American J. C. Heenan, which was reputedly the first men's heavyweight championship fight. This fight is significant in its combination of political and cultural forces and is indicative of the disruptive elements in boxing as a sport, which has the capacity to resist attempts at regulation. The fight was technically illegal anyway, but was immensely popular, probably because of its illegal status. It was also well attended, including in the crowd Charles Dickens and William Thackeray. The fight was recorded in a famous but somewhat static engraving which reveals little of the drama and action of the contest. In the 37th round, spectators invaded the ring, but the fighters carried on without a referee until declaring a draw after 42 rounds (Powley, 2011:7).

Sugden points out not only that there were very few rules in operation in the ring in the early eighteenth century, but also that these were dangerous times in the public spaces of the city. His description of boxing at the time does not seem very far removed from the brutalities of the classical period. He suggests that:

In 1719 there were few rules associated with pugilism. In addition to punching, kicking was tolerated and wrestling holds and throws were permitted, as was the practice of gouging—inserting fingers and thumbs into the opponent's eye sockets. By the end of the century the sport had been taken over by a fraternity whose passions revolved around blood, gore and a wager. While strength, nimbleness of foot and power and speed of punch were attributes in a fighter ... being game and having 'bottom' (being lion-hearted, resolute and, above all, long suffering) were considered to be even more important. The more prize fighting developed as a public spectacle and a gambling forum the more organised the sport became.

(Sugden, 1996:15)

The more rule governed the sporting activity, the more scope there was for betting on diverse outcomes (as well as the more possibilities for transgressions of course). Dennis Brailsford (1988) also suggests that without the eighteenth-century love of gambling, boxing, or at least pugilism, would have been unthinkable. Large bets also themselves demanded a system of rules to limit disputes and arbitrate conflicts about winnings outside the ring. This presents another strand

in the routes boxing has travelled along with a reworking of enfolded heroism to incorporate both daring and unrestrained aggression and long-suffering endurance. Sugden suggests that gambling played an increasingly important role which was integrated into the organization of the sport (Sugden, 1996). Gambling is also part of the English golden age.

Gambling and other nefarious activities on the periphery of legality constitute some of the collusions of masculinity within sport and operate to reinstate a 'manhood formula' (Messner, 2002) which became available to the poor as well as the rich and socially favoured. Such networks through which masculinities are secured persist into the present as part of the collusions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). Taking risks and courting danger were, and remain, highly prized components of this version of masculinity. For the spectator it means being able to take the emotional experience of looking with its associated sensations, whereas for the boxer the process is more directly enfolded. The networks through which these masculinities and their alliances are forged draw in others, including those apparently on the periphery, such as commentators and journalists. It remains part of the networks of masculinity in which any transformations or reformulations might be accommodated.

There are other elements in this alliance. The eighteenth century also saw the advent of sports journalism. Pearce Egan, who has been considered as one of the first sports journalists, wrote most graphically and entertainingly about the subculture of boxing (Reid, 1971) and all its associated activities in his famous collection, *Boxiana*, published in 1812. Egan could be seen as a forerunner of the sports journalists and writers, who, without necessarily taking part themselves as pugilists, seek to be part of the boxing scene and to buy into its culture and its gender identities.

Although pugilism in Britain experienced great popularity in the early nineteenth century, social and economic changes led to new alliances and reconfigured discourses of morality which contributed to its transformation and to the demise of prizefighting. Prizefighting was first outlawed in 1750 and, as gambling became illegal and the sport lost its aristocratic support, it seemed doomed. It had lived for too long 'outside the pale of respectability for there to be now any hope of gradual amendment' (Brailsford, 1988:157). As Sugden notes, bare-knuckle fighting was forced underground in Britain by the 1830s, although it did receive something of a revival in the USA at that time (Sugden, 1996).

Looking back at the earlier period when James Figg achieved fame evokes some nostalgia for a less-regulated period than the later nineteenth century. There is evidence, however, that Figg's training sessions in pugilism for young

gentlemen, like Broughton's later efforts, constitute another strand of boxing in the participation of privileged young men in the corporeal risks and dangers as well as spectators, followers and investors. The training of young gentlemen also invoked classical boxing as part of the rediscovery of classicism and classical culture, but more with reference to the architecture of amphitheatres and honour of cultural codes than unregulated pugilism. This version of a classical renaissance also celebrated British courage set in opposition to foreign effeminacy (Boddy, 2008). It was certainly a period of enormous interest in boxing as an exceedingly violent sport in which there were frequent fatalities in the ring, although this was a violence which reflected that of the world outside the ring (Elias and Dunning, 1986, Gorn, 1986).

Rules and regulations

Boxing was one of the first sports to be organized around a set of principles governing practice, but in effect doing little to reduce the brutality inflicted in the ring (Sugden, 1996). Broughton's rules were introduced in 1843 and governed the practice of prizefighting until the Marquess of Queensberry's rules, with the imposition of the use of gloves, a limited number of three-minute rounds, weight equilibrium and the standardization of refereeing, which were brought in the late nineteenth century. As Brailsford commented on Broughton, in the individualistic language of the Enlightenment, 'no one sport owed more to one man than boxing owed to him' (in Elias and Dunning, 1986:21). Broughton's rules set the agenda for later regulatory developments by stating how seconds and umpires should behave, how rounds should start and finish and how the money should be divided. After 1846, boxers were categorized by size and divided into light, middle and heavyweight divisions. Then as in most subsequent golden ages, heavyweights were the champions, showing again how the sport and its particular practices shape the culture of boxing and gendered identities more widely, especially masculinity.

Again, the extent to which these rules, which remain in place today with few amendments, reduced violence and damage in the ring is strongly disputed (Gorn, 1986, Sugden, 1996). However, Queensberry's rules did contribute to the transformation of boxing, especially to the development of the amateur sport so that professional boxing could grow almost as a legitimized branch of amateur boxing. Amateur boxing has provided the training ground for those who want to turn professional and provides a useful, well-regulated route into

earning a living by boxing, not least through participation in the Olympic Games in modern times. The distinction between amateur and professional boxing presents another technology of regulation. Of course, the status of the amateur professional relationship has different meanings in different parts of the world. In the UK and the USA, amateur boxing represents a pathway to professional competition, for example via local gyms or through participation in the Olympic Games more recently. Professional boxing largely carries higher status in the UK and the USA, and in the gym the rules governing amateur bouts are seen as repressive and constraining of the greater aggression expressed in the professional sport (Woodward, 1997b). However, in Cuba, for example, there is much stronger congruence between amateur status and the honour of representing the country and there are heavy proscriptions against turning professional.

Debates about the regulation of boxing represented in the historical shift from bare-knuckle fighting to amateur and professional boxing demonstrate the ambivalent status of the sport and its occupation of a moral 'low ground', especially as positioned by those who lay claim to the moral high ground. These tensions, apparent in the nineteenth century in what Sugden calls the 'campaign against the popular recreations of the pre-industrial, urban labour pool, of which the crusade against prize fighting was part' (1996:27), re-emerge in different manifestations at different historical moments, but I cite the instance here as illustrative of the moral framework in which debates about boxing, whether men's or women's, are so often set. Prizefighting in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was characterized by more informal than formal regulations, for example through its association with *The Fancy*. Although boxing is now strictly rule-governed, there is some resonance with its earlier forms of association and the closure around the groups within the boxing community; however, the practices of *The Fancy* seem more suited to the timescales and routines of pre-industrial life in both its links to rural pursuits and blood sports as well as the entertainments of the fairground booth. Such networks provide support for hegemonic masculinity and for subversions of the regulatory regimes of boxing such as bare-knuckle and prizefighting. Contemporary boxing gyms are often the focus for information about quasi-legal or illegal activities including dog-fighting and bare-knuckle fighting (Beattie, 1996, Mitchell, 2001). The communication technologies have changed, with venues being advertised on the day of the event on the internet instead of by word of mouth in taverns, but the tension rules and breaking them is much the same. These practices are all constitutive of the regimes of masculinity that are

enacted and experienced in boxing. What has come to be taken for granted as the 'common sense' of boxing masculinities might be challenged and reconstructed. Some of the rules, even if they were informal in the English golden age of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, applied most specifically to gender binaries. Women's prizefighting was also an important element in entertainments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Hargreaves, 1996).

Women's boxing in the English golden age

Women's fighting has not been situated quite so firmly within the same discourses of honour, for example as a means of settling disputes, as has men's. Women have tended to be associated with the low life of boxing, with both boxing and wrestling being 'characterized as disreputable and dangerous, and self-contained in working class venues' (Hargreaves, 1994:183). This association with low life is sexualized, drawing on traditional repertoires of the Madonna and the whore, whereby gender and sexuality elide in popular categorizations of women's behaviour, and women fighters were strongly associated with low life in their transgressions of upper-class and bourgeois femininity.

Although women participated in boxing in the form of prizefighting at fairgrounds in the eighteenth century, by the nineteenth there was more of a separation into men's and women's spheres, and women's pugilism was increasingly seen as risible (Dugaw, 1989). Richard Bisset mocked Mary Wollstonecraft's arguments for women's full participation in sport in his 1804 book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, saying that Wollstonecraft longed for the day when women 'would acquire high renown in boxing matches' (quoted in Dugaw, 1989:141). The satire of Bisset's claim lies in the assumptions of gentility among middle- and upper-class women; boxing was not entirely out of the remit of poor women who fought at fairgrounds.

Women's boxing or more accurately prizefighting can be traced back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in competitions that were just as brutal and bloody as those fought by men in bare-knuckle contests of similar ferocity. Bouts were staged in London from the 1720s between working-class women who did manual labour and sought both income and recognition (Hargreaves, 1996). It was not only men who achieved some fame. If a golden age is defined by its celebrities and heroes, then there is some support for this period of the English golden age being a golden age for women boxers. There is evidence of such women prizefighters: The Famous Boxing Woman of Billingsgate, The Fighting

Ass-Driver from Stoke Newington, The Female Boxing Blacksmith, The Market Woman, The Vendor of Sprats, The City Championess, The Hibernian Heroine and, perhaps most famously, Bruising Peg (Park, 1994).

Women's contests, rather like men's, were 'vicious free-for-alls, either topless or in tight-fitting jackets, short petticoats and Holland drawers. They involved punching, feet- and knee-kicking to all parts of the body, mauling scratching and throwing, and usually resulted in serious injuries' (Hargreaves, 1996:125). Perhaps not surprisingly these contests attracted large crowds, with lucrative purses being donated by members of the aristocracy and nobility (Guttman, 1991). As the fights became more popular, they also attracted large bets. Fights could last for two hours, as Guttman describes one such bout in 1794, in which the protagonists suffered considerable injuries and extensive bleeding.

In many ways women's boxing was on a par with men's in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was brutal, popular, attracted bets and sometimes an attractive purse, and women's fighting – although less frequent than men's – offered the added value of being more unusual and counter to ideological prescriptions of femininity, especially bourgeois femininity. Women's boxing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could be seen as being part of a golden age in that, compared to the twentieth century, it was practised. On the whole the label 'golden age' is difficult to apply to the women's sport whatever the extent to which it accords with the body practices, popularity and rewards of men's boxing. Women's boxing is not practised by men and more importantly its practices and ways of being do not accord with any celebration of femininity: they are contrary to cultural norms of femininity largely to the same extent that they accord with masculinity. Cultural expectations and values make it difficult to celebrate the heroes of women's boxing and iconic figures and great fights. They are recorded but not on the scale of men's boxing. The obstacles to the recognition of women engaging in boxing are not just the body practices in which they engage. Women's prizefighting seemed to be every bit as brutal as men's at the time of the English golden age and attracted crowds and betting, even if there were not as many fights. Rather than being read as heroic, however, women's fighting appears to have been understood as freakish and bizarre. Thus it is culture and especially gendered conceptualizations of heroism and success which make it more difficult for women to be part of their own golden age.

Historical evidence (Costa and Guthrie, 1994, Dugaw, 1989, Eskin, 1974, Guttman, 1991, Hargreaves, 1994, 1996) suggests that women were actively engaged in prizefighting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but the logic of embodied participation does not necessarily challenge the value and

status that is accorded on the basis of the classification of sex gender. In fact, sex gender includes both the social and cultural construction of sexual difference and the material, enfolded anatomical actualities of the body.

That men's activity in prizefighting and in the associated networks of the Fancy especially was framed by patriarchal value systems suggests that the men's sport is often meant when the English golden age is cited. As has been noted, however, in the context of the nineteenth-century renaissance of classical times and especially the Olympic ideals, golden ages tend to be constructed and conceptualized retrospectively and women's participation in prizefighting has also been written out of history, in everyday discourses in the twentieth century if less so in the academy, by later cultural forces which re-made and reinstated the inequalities of patriarchy in sport.

However, the evidence cited in this section demonstrates that women were active in the sport in the English golden age and were indeed part of the culture and practice of prizefighting, which is what boxing was at the time, and one of the tasks of contemporary historians, critical commentators and proponents of women's boxing is to note that women's participation in the sport did not start at the Olympic Games in 2012.

A century after this golden age of English boxing, things changed spatially and in terms of women's participation in the sport. There remained significant players but far fewer of them. In the geographical shift in the primary location of boxing to the USA, women's prizefighting remained popular on both sides of the Atlantic. The shift in emphasis at the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century also featured a move from the local champion to national and even international titles. Jennifer Hargreaves cites the claims of Nellie Stewart of Norfolk, Virginia, to having won the first 'Female Championship of the World' (Hargreaves, 1996:127). By the early twentieth century, however, fights were far fewer, following restrictions from the 1880s and the twentieth-century golden ages were even less democratic and equitable in relation to sex gender than in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Men's heavyweight boxing, which had assumed some importance in the eighteenth century, was a legacy that remained into the twentieth century, with the greatest of the golden ages notably that was known as 'When We Were Kings'.

Twentieth-century geographical shifts and golden ages

The genealogy of boxing has frequently been marked by key moments, great champions and epic fights, from what evidence there is of the ancient world

through the eighteenth century and up to the present times. Some of the moments identified as golden ages, however, are so called for different reasons. Those discussed so far in this chapter have particular significance in relation to the making of boxing as a sport and as a social and cultural phenomenon.

The formulation and categorization of golden ages is not only largely undertaken retrospectively, it is also contested, not the least in the twentieth century. The retrospective and often nostalgic creation of a golden age of boxing also involves some mechanisms of recovery and of finding what has been forgotten. In an account of the golden age of boxing skills and embodied practices and competencies, Kelly Richard Nicholson lists boxers from the period between 1890 and 1910 who have in many cases been all but forgotten but for whom he makes a strong case: George 'Kid' Lavigne, Bob Fitzsimmons Barbados Joe Walcott, Joe Gans, 'Terrible' Terry McGovern, Sam Langford and Stanley Ketchel (Nicholson, 2010).

In the twenty-first century, there is more regret expressed for the passing of the great days and golden ages of boxing than assertion of any new golden age. The twentieth century saw significant shifts in the location of boxing and the creation of the most significant of golden ages, at least in terms of the hyperbole with which they were expressed and the extent to which boxing was able to promote a celebration of the sport and its heroes. Notably, key figures became megastars and sports celebrities (Cashmore, 2006) as well as heroes and, as had been the case in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, local heroes. It was in the twentieth century that the very notion of boxing as a global sport took over and the centre of the fight game moved more emphatically to the USA.

It was in the twentieth century that the language of boxing as a metaphor for life was put into discourse (Foucault, 1981). As Barry McGuigan reflects with nostalgia on the twentieth century, as the era of 'legendary fights, great characters and memorable events... Boxing is the story of life, of triumph and disaster, elation and disappointment' (in Powley, 2011:4–5).

By the early twentieth century, the USA was beginning to dominate boxing, especially in the heavyweight category. The relationship between the diverse, multi-ethnic immigrant population of the USA and the opportunities offered by boxing led to an expansion of the sport and to its greater popularity. The twentieth-century boxing story is marked by the emergence of a series of 'champs' who were figures constituted through the capacities of individual boxers, their skills and enfolded properties, their trainers, promoters and the relationship between the often impoverished, disadvantaged backgrounds of boxers and the mechanisms for the promotion of the sport on the mass media. The body

practices of the sport and its excitement and risks are combined with the biographies of its practitioners, whose life stories featured the marginalization, racialization and poverty that were so often the result of migration and their own crossing of national boundaries. The heroic figures of boxing's golden ages in the twentieth century brought together these different elements, which make boxing stars heroes as well as media celebrities (Marqusee, 2000).

The twentieth century is almost itself a golden age – from Jack Johnson, the first black heavyweight champion of the world, a title he held from 1908 to 1915, and the Frenchman George Carpentier, through the pre-war heydays of the 1920s, the era of the great Jack Dempsey and of Gene Tunney, up to the start of the Second World War in 1939, when politics too featured in boxing to a large extent. The so-called 'Hitler's champion' Max Schmeling was knocked out in the first round of his rematch heavyweight title fight with Joe Louis in the New York Yankee stadium in 1938. The 1950s have been called the 'glory days' of western boxing (Powley, 2011:45) especially in the USA, thanks to the amazing achievements of boxers like Rocky Marciano and Sugar Ray Robinson. The century is dotted with great champions and big moments, but although women continued to engage in boxing throughout this period (Hargreaves, 1996), their names are largely not in boxing's hall of fame until the end of the century. It remains an assumption that women were not boxing. The women's sport was not permitted at the Olympics after a demonstration in 1904, which may, indeed, have contributed to the everyday beliefs that women were not involved at all. A more likely explanation is the lack of visibility of the women's sport. The more media sport sponsorship synergies developed, the more visible the men's fight game became and the less possible it became to think of women participating, except as spectators in the front row, as oppressed wives and girlfriends or anxious mothers of male boxers (Woodward, 2006, 2011).

A key moment which marks a point of transformation and was part of the geographical shift was the 'Gentleman Jim' Corbett fight, against Peter Courtney in East Orange New Jersey in 1894 (Mitchell, 2005). This fight was filmed or perhaps more accurately recorded on film, but this was the start of exploiting the capacities of boxing to cross boundaries between what is real and what is drama. Filming and cinema have been an important component of boxing culture and is part of the relationship between the embodied practices of the sport and its popular and artistic cultural representations (Woodward, 2006, 2011).

There are several big moments in the twentieth century but in this highly selective brief discussion of golden ages, one that stands out is the era of 'When We Were Kings', which was the title of Leon Gast's film of the Ali–Foreman

'Rumble in the Jungle' in Kinshasa in Zaire in 1974. The 1940s and the 1950s might be seen as the golden era of boxing films. Fight films of the post-war period with its 'rampant inflation, unemployment, labour strife, shifting social patterns' (Telotte, 1989:4) were able to deploy the trope of the existential angst of heroic masculinity of the boxer, confronted with economic challenges and those of corrupt forces. However, there are specificities about the 1970s, especially when the boxing stage was occupied by personal rivalries, and heavyweight figures. These were heavyweights in all senses of the word. Great boxing, if often extraordinary, is also exciting and skilful and some great boxers were significant outside the ring as well as inside it.

The 1970s were often characterized by the rivalry between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier and the Thrilla in Manila in 1975, which was their third and arguably greatest fight when Ali retained his heavyweight title (BBC On This Day, 2012), but described the experience as the nearest he had ever come to dying in the ring (Hauser, 1991). The fight is also noted for its violence as well as the controversy over the result, when Frazier tried to prevent his trainer stopping the fight in the 14th round.

The detail of which era constitutes the greatest and similarly which fight was the fight of the century (a title more often accorded to Ali and Frazier's first meeting at Madison Square Garden in 1971 (Hauser, 1991, 2004, Mailer, 1991)) is one that is often discussed by followers of boxing.

Which era deserves the accolade of the golden age of heavyweight boxing especially is hotly debated on boxing fan websites (for example, Heavyweight blog, 2012), but there is considerable consensus about the supremacy of Ali as a hero as well as an incredibly dynamic, creative and skilful boxer and of Dundee as the trainer who helped Ali defeat both Joe Frazier and Henry Cooper, also great boxers of this era. The period was characterized by a wealth of talent among heavyweights and also by the visibility of boxing within popular culture. Boxing news was social and political news and this is probably the one time when it was a boxer who was the most famous man on the planet (Powley, 2011:6). When Joe Frazier, Henry Cooper and Angelo Dundee all died in 2012, most of the obituaries bemoaned the loss of a golden age of boxing which could never be recovered and listed all the other great names of fighters for whom Dundee had been the cornerman (Dundee Obituary, 2012).

My purpose in selecting and briefly reflecting upon this moment in boxing history is to focus on the ways in which boxing as a sport is caught up in social movements and forces and in its cultural, political and economic context and to demonstrate how what can be called golden ages are retrospectively

constituted as well as made in dialogue between past and present to express both aspirations and fears for the future. The 1970s also raise issues about how discursive constructions which accord greater importance and value to one period over another are also embodied and enfolded. It is possible to have these debates only because of the actual practices and capacities of fighters, trainers and what makes boxing. Golden ages are not just social constructs; they are embodied too.

Conclusion: Looking back and moving on

What makes a golden age may be open to discussion but there is some consensus within boxing culture about the big moments which coalesce to make golden ages, and the purpose of the brief exploration of these possibilities in this chapter has been to pick out some of the distinctive features of boxing through focusing on golden ages and glory days. The past often seems more glorious when viewed through the present and it is largely the present which remakes the past within narratives of great moments, spectacular events and, especially in men's boxing, heroes, usually heavyweight boxers.

There are temporal as well as spatial points of connection in the moments covered in this chapter. The routes boxing has travelled through – Pankration, activities that are nearer wrestling, bare-knuckle fighting and prizefighting – demonstrate that the sport has retained key features: the corporeal engagement of boxing, the singularity of its risks and dangers and the intensities of its one-on-one pugilism. Bodies and flesh are central to boxing in ways that are more heightened than in other sports. The one-on-one contest is a feature which enhances the binaries of boxing between the beautiful body and the broken body, between winning and losing, success and failure in life as well as in the ring, and between women and men.

Another strand which re-emerges in boxing is its links to a particular version of masculinity in which codes of heroic and honourable masculinity are implicated and reworked. Most of the golden ages discussed in this chapter have been formed within patriarchal cultures and, perhaps more importantly, have themselves contributed to what is understood as patriarchy and, in particular, traditional masculinities. This can be enforced through rules and regulations as they were in relation to who was permitted to take part in it in the ancient world, or it might be through more diffuse gendered networks of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) such as the Fancy.

Some of the elements which make up the parameters of the conceptualization of a golden age have been heightened through forces of globalization, especially in relation to the speed and velocity of communications systems and the properties of the mega event which permeates the late modernity period. The past gets reconstituted through the trope of mega events such as the great fights of the age of 'When We Were Kings' in the twentieth century. The 'Rumble in the Jungle' has become more of a transnational event through its reiteration and reconstruction in films. Cultural artefacts have reinstated and even created narratives of heroism, spectacle and sensation and have rehearsed some of the strands which this chapter has demonstrated make boxing what it is. The categories of activity which can loosely be called boxing in the different eras covered in this section all involve unarmed combat between two people; flesh is central to boxing, as is risk, danger and excitement.

The one-on-one pugilistic practices of boxing lend themselves well to heroic narratives which are retold in the annals of the sport and in the twentieth-century cinema played a key role in this. Boxing has particular traditions of providing opportunities for disadvantaged and dispossessed people in different places and at different times, not always in the context of mobility, although migration and the participation of diasporic people have been a significant element in the mix. The stories of individual triumph over poverty, racism and social exclusion that expressed the hopes of a people have become an important strand of what makes boxing and connects the sport to global forces, notably of mobility and migration, although as subsequent chapters demonstrate, in some parts of the globe, boxing traditions are part of local communities and local culture. The participation of coal miners and men working in heavy industry in the Welsh valleys in the twentieth century is a case in point. Boxing brings together the personal and the social in powerful ways, some of which are given expression in its golden ages.

Each golden age demonstrates the capacities of boxing to generate excitement through its particular enfolded practices. Boxing has particular properties of risk and danger that are linked to the polarized and corporeal combat which the sport involves. Although by the twentieth century the sport was highly regulated, the great moments which make up a golden age always feature some pretty brutal fights. Boxing is routine in much of what actually happens but the sport always carries elements of danger which make it one of the most exhilarating and exciting of all sports. This may also contribute to the strong associations between gambling and boxing. Betting can be corrupt and lead to illegitimate and illegal practices but some of the risks and uncertainties of boxing make it a sport that has always been one which creates the desire to gamble on outcomes.

As the twentieth century progressed, the culture and cult of celebrity became more important and impacted upon boxing as much as other sports. The pressure of fame and visibility and public recognition as well as the financial rewards that increasingly accompany success in sports can present their own problems. Boxing has attracted illegal as well as legitimate interests, notably those of the Mafia in its twentieth-century golden ages (Mitchell, 2009). Also those who have been accorded the visibility of celebrity status have not always been able to cope with some of the more difficult and troubling aspects, as the case of Mike Tyson has shown at the end of the twentieth century: a truly great boxer in his prime on the one hand, and a criminal and a convicted rapist in later life, on the other. It is a complex story. Visibility, however, is always countered by and in conversation with invisibility and the desire to make good and to be recognized through boxing has very often been the desire and hope of those who are otherwise most invisible, especially migrant and diasporic peoples, which is the concern of the next chapter.