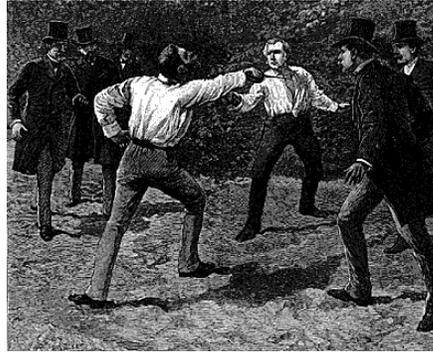


**He Threw Down The Glove:**  
Practical Aspects and Considerations  
of 19<sup>th</sup> century French Duelling Culture

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## Context and Origin

- Duelling ongoing in France since the C14th as a result of Trial by Combat Officially banned in 1626 under Louis XIII after he issued 8,000 pardons in 20 years
- Practice revived with the rise and fall of Constitutional politics in France varying between Monarchy and Republic
- Socially acceptable (i.e. would not be punished in court if rules followed) and expected of men of “Honour” in the public eye e.g. journalists and politicians
- Aim is to be dangerous enough to discourage casual duelling but controlled enough to not be murder ( unlike those Germans who make a hobby of slashing each other open and turn the sword into a lancet!)



## Weapons

- Epee de combat/duelling sword- primary tool to be used in all duels as has social status as honourable

*"I have a sword to defend my honour. I have a stick to answer those without honour."*

Thrust only, infighting by agreement, off- hand by arrangement

- Sabre- only for military and ex-military men due to lack of practice by civilians. Cut and thrust allowed (though thrust may be disallowed by agreement). Tips tend to be blunted for safety

- Pistol- default in cases of infirmity, disparity of skill, weapon availability and fashion

Aimed Duel (stand still at 15 paces and fire) and Duel of Command (walk forward up to five paces while firing)



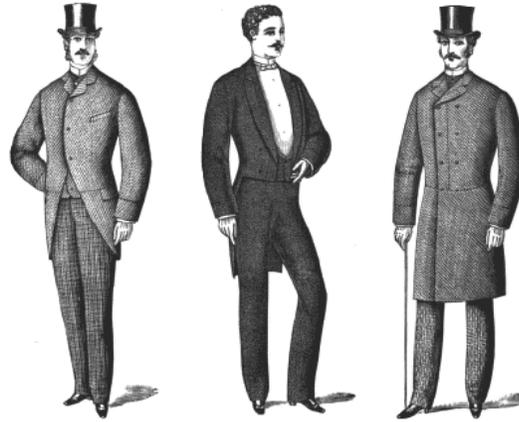
## Duelling Process

- First codified by Chateauevillars' *"L'Essai sure le Duel"*, simplified by Jacob into a Code of Conduct in *"Le Jeu de L'Epee"* to prevent Murder charges
- The offence- Offender and Offended determine what redress is required in the immediate case
- Find Witnesses- Witnesses may decline. Determine severity of offence and what redress is acceptable
- Witnesses visit Offender and seek redress.  
Leave card return in 24 hours, return in 48 hours
- Offender engages Witnesses
- Witnesses meet and agree the Minutes and who is Director of Combat from between them (seniority of age and experience, may be a joint role in the case of a lack of these)
- Offender or Offender can appeal in a Court of Honour (must be convened by all involved plus an agreed other to verify whether the party in question is worthy of the duel. Archaic vestige of the Royal Court and seen as a bit of a boulderish thing to do in itself)
- Offended and Offender engage a Fencing Master and practice, practice, practice!



## The Minutes

- Very important! Could be deemed Murder if not presentable
- Legal document that defines the rules of the combat, breaks, weapons, severity of offence, cause of duel &c.
- Must all be agreed overtly in advance
- Chateauvillars gives a format of “Common Law” that may be assumed or referred to if aspect is not expressly covered
- Must be compiled by Witnesses and agreed by all parties beforehand
- Must be completed by Witnesses afterwards with the result but NO opinion or modifiers. If Witnesses disagree on the outcome then both versions are logged for future reference.



## Clothing

- Shirt- starched or not. Former may cause blade to slip but limits movement
- Pockets- emptied to prevent bouncing the point
- Coats- worn or not, buttoned or not (former encouraged to discourage targetting at the white shirt against the black jacket)
- Hats and wigs- removed or not
- Shoes- well worn and grippy suggested. No salle shoes or sandals
- Gloves- very important! Town glove vs salle gauntlet matches severity of offence by determining how dangerous the duel is. Must be discussed in the Minutes



### **Role of the Witness**

- Do all negotiation between Offender and Offended
- Decide all practical issues for the Minutes
- Ensures nothing ridiculous is agreed!
- Ensure that their party attends and has required equipment
- Engages a Doctor
- Scout the duelling ground the night before
- Takes active part in observing the duel, supporting the Director of Combat
- Signs off the Minutes



### **Role of the Director of Combat**

- Arbiter in the event of disputes between parties
- Ensures fair play and parity of duel on the day
- Check equipment (discharges and loads pistols, matches blades &c.)
- Calls the start and breaks
- Determines the end of the combat



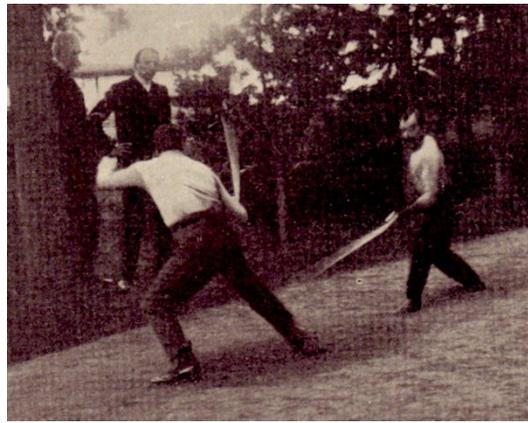
## **Role of the Fencing Master**

- Keep them alive! Traditionally only paid if their party succeeds
- “The Duel in 24 hours” is a common chapter in epee fencing texts
- Determine party’s fencing ability and adapt to their needs:-

None- adapt instinctive basics to keep them alive and limit injury

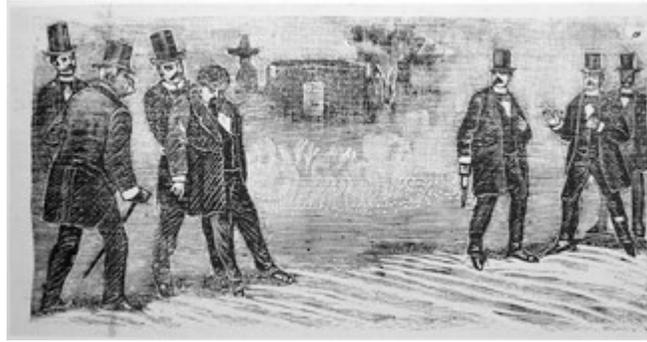
Some- adapt skill at another weapon to match the agreed weapon

Experienced- reduce their skill to a few certain moves and avoid “academic” fencing



## **Conduct on the Day**

- Witnesses arrive and scout the ground for stones, trip hazards, advantages of sunlight &c
- Check weapons for parity and load if required
- Agree all aware of the Minutes
- Director starts duel out of measure or clap hands/call for the pistol duel
- Determine if breaks are acceptable or being abused
- Rule on unusual circumstances, cheating, abuse of rules
- Witnesses act as observers for the Director
- Director rules if a wound is severe enough (in liaison with the Doctor) to end the duel and/or satisfaction
- Minutes signed off by all
- Should be all over with within five minutes of arrival!



## **Avoiding the Duel in the First Place I**

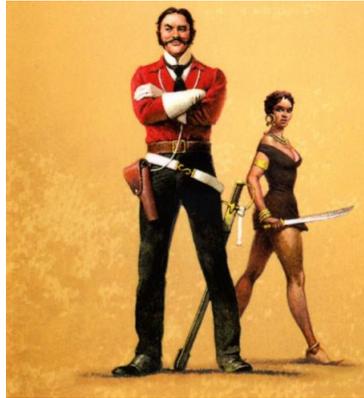
Skilful ways of handling the progression toward an Affair  
(cf The Book of the Courtier)

- Reputation- develop through civilian “good works” or military glory  
become known for being “handy”
- Character- be a moral person and live well  
avoid religion but follow philosophy
- Scene - avoid unfortunate places  
don’t drink excessively, gamble or whore
- Fashion- dress fashionably but not extravagantly so  
blend in and don’t stand out for ridicule
- Apologising- Apologise promptly and profusely



## Avoiding the Duel in the First Place II

- Witnesses- have solid friends to back you up  
they will negotiate for you so make sure they won't let you down
- Dinners- invite offended parties to a dinner with lots of wine  
1 bottle quells hatred, leading to  
2 bottles they no longer threaten each other, leads to  
3 bottles they draw nearer  
4 bottles they hold hands  
5 bottles they are hugging
- Interventions- have a respectable friend of great Influence  
have him step in on your behalf to ban the duel
- Bullets- Seconds should conspire to load with bullets made of cork!  
must be kept secret from everyone involved other than the Seconds
- Epee- Keep good form  
Courage will keep you safe!



### **Dirty Tricks in the Duel I**

- When exhausted, let your point drag across the dirt. Since a contaminated point would inevitably procure an infected wound the Director will be bound to interrupt the bout and confiscate the weapon.
- To scam a breather, try to hit the steel *coquille* (bell guard) of your opponent full force. Your fragile point will be blunted into a hook, the director will interfere, and you may enjoy a rest until a new, sharp weapon is brought to you.
- Finish the damn thing simply by feinting a low attack and “unfortunately” getting clipped on the lower arm. There’ll be blood, honour’s served, and you can wave your bandaged lower arm at your groupies...



## Dirty Tricks in the Duel II

- Slip and Slide: You might just “slip”, digging your pommel into the ground. Fancy that your opponent might continue to advance... accidentally embedding your point in his gut...
- Since a *corps a corps* is illegal based on duelling rules, how about creating one AND stepping on your opponent's foot... that should get Director going again.
- Your opponent is likely to prepare a serious attack with a serious beat. Drop the blade in response and all the advantage is yours. And I mean, *oh my, there it goes, I DROPPED it!* The director will interfere on your behalf, your weapon will have to be cleaned or replaced... the works. All the while you get to catch your breath.