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The Hanging Guard: William Hope's (1660-1724) Invention of Self-defence and the Spirit of Enlightenment

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Abstract: Fight books can be much more than repositories of knowledge or cornerstones of tradition. In some cases they may also reflect fundamental changes in the intellectual and social life of a society and even attempt to change the latter for the better. This is very much true for the works of William Hope (1660-1724). In eight printed books the Scotsman covered a wide range of topics connected to smallsword fencing and duelling. He employed early scientific methods when developing his school of swordplay, reflected on the social implications of fencing, introduced the notion of “sport for better health” into early modern fencing, and sought to institutionalise fencing in order to curb violence. As a whole this reflects the mindset of the early Enlightenment as it started to flourish in Hope’s native Scotland during his lifetime. This paper will answer the question of how the early Enlightenment influenced a set of remarkable Scottish fight books from the early modern period.

Keywords: William Hope, smallsword, duelling, self-defence, Enlightenment, science, Scotland

Sapere aude
Horace

I. MEETING SIR WILLIAM

Years ago, when roaming around London antique bookshops, the author of this text stumbled upon something that made him very curious. It was an anti-duelling treatise written by an expert fencing master. In fact it was a copy of William Hope’s *A Vindication of the true Art of self-defence* (1724). Why would someone who made a living out of training gentleman to survive and win duels write such a book? Was that not rather bad for business? When diving into William Hope’s works and life one will discover that he was not only an expert swordsman, a teacher, and a writer, but also someone who can be labelled as an early proponent of the Enlightenment, someone already profoundly touched by elements of this emerging philosophical school, and someone who incorporated reason and critique of tradition into his system of swordplay. Learning by experience and by mistakes, a pedagogical impetus, a desire to simplify things and make them as practical as possible as well as to do away with rituals, a lust for innovation, and



the desire to better the human condition by utilising human reason: all of this can be found in Hope's writings.

It is not the aim of this article to assess the innovation of every thrust or beat Hope advocates. Instead it will introduce a man who possessed universal interests and high methodological and theoretical standards. He was profoundly educated, interested in politics and society, and above all very productive. This makes him special among the many authors of fight books of the early seventeenth century. Nor will this article decide whether his *New Method* was indeed as revolutionary as he himself claimed. It is much more worthwhile to understand how he shaped it, how it developed, and how methods and mindsets that later became core elements of the Enlightenment were used and incorporated into Hope's swordplay. It is the "Hanging Guard", the central technique of Hope's *New Method of fencing*, that symbolises all of this, and explains the title of this paper. This article will first contextualise Hope's life and times. In the second part this article will show how the spirit of enlightenment inspired his school of swordplay. It will attempt to connect aspects of the history of violence and the history of ideas to the history of martial arts.

II. SCOTLAND, VIOLENCE, AND THE ROOTS OF AN ENLIGHTENED SWORDSMAN

Unfortunately, there is no picture of William Hope. Few details are known about his life but it has, however, been possible to fill in some of the gaps over the course of researching this article. Hope was born on 15 April 1660 and died, aged sixty-three, on 1 February 1724.¹ We do not know much about his family. His father was Sir John Hope of Hopetoun² and he was the younger brother of the first Earl of Hopetoun.³ It seems that his parents were well-to-do, thus being able to educate their youngest son rather well. We do not know any details about his education, but we may conclude from his writings that Hope was in command of both Latin and French. He obviously was very proud of these skills as in his books there are a large number of Latin phrases coined by himself⁴ as well as quotations and verses from classical Latin authors.⁵ Moreover, Hope presents himself

¹ Conolly, *Biographical Dictionary*, pp. 233f. Burke, *Genealogical and heraldic history*, pp. 626f.; Leighton, *History of the county of Fife*, pp. 88f.

² Burke, *Genealogical and heraldic history*, p. 626.

³ Conolly, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 233.

⁴ See for instance most prominent: *Gladiatura, non solum ad Honoris, Vitaeque Conservationem, sed etiam ad Corporis, atque Animae Relaxationem, perquam necessaria*. Hope, *New Method*, Motto on title page. *Certamen festinantium incendit Ignem, Et lis festinans effundit Sanguinem/Magno Ingenio turpe non est, sed honorificum, Errorem fateri simpliciter*. Hope, *Vindication*, Motto on title page. I am much obliged to Dr Christoph Catrein (Saarbrücken) for his indispensable help with the identification and translation of the Latin paragraphs of Hope's work.

⁵ See for instance: Hope, *Vindication*., pp. 40f, 54f, 63, 100, 106.

to the reader as a poet when he sums up the quintessence of his teachings in verse.⁶ Both of these aspects may be interpreted as a self-portrayal of the author as an educated man as well as an attempt to express the idea of the unity of mind and arm, an idea rather common among proponents of the Enlightenment.⁷ Hope is a clear exemplar of the educational ideal of his time.

The second half of the seventeenth century was a rather violent era of Scottish history. Thus William Hope – in spite of his education – pursued a military career. We do not know many details of these years but there are assumptions that he also fought abroad.⁸ In 1689 Hope was appointed captain of a cavalry unit of fifty men by king and parliament.⁹ Between 1700 and 1715 he served as a deputy governor of Edinburgh Castle.¹⁰ In 1698, aged thirty-eight, Hope was made a baronet. First designated of Grantoun and Kirklistoun, this was later changed into Balcomie, an estate he purchased for £7,500 around the turn of the century.¹¹ Hope was not only known as a keen dancer, fencer, and horseman, but also as a ruthless and cunning businessman. He was engaged in land deals and, in the case of the estate of Balcomie, he seems to have dispossessed a widow by rather dubious means.¹² The case was even investigated and ultimately decided by the Scottish Parliament.¹³

Hope was married, although we do not know anything about his wife. The couple had two sons and one daughter, Anne, who was his last surviving child; she died in Edinburgh in 1785.¹⁴ Hope's male bloodline became extinct with his grandson William, 3rd baronet of Balcomie, who died in 1763 without issue whilst a captain of the East India Company in Bengal.¹⁵

⁶ Thus Hope for instance paraphrases his motto on the front page of the *New Method* in Hope, *Vindication*, p. 175 in English verse: "Fencing not only for Diversion serves/It Life and Honour when attack'd preserves/The best Exercise of Heroick Kind/The cheer the Body and relex the Mind/Gout and Rheumatick Ach's ist does expel/And for their Cure all Medicines excel."

⁷ E.g. concerning Adam Smith's thought: "The ideal is a harmony of emotions, words and deeds, a wholeness of self, and so an unity of virtues." Griswold, *Adam Smith and the virtues of Enlightenment*, p. 213.

⁸ Leighton, *History of the county of Fife*, p. 89. Burke, *Genealogical and heraldic history*, p. 26.

⁹ Commission to Sir William Hope to be captain of a troop. April 25th, 1689. Brown et al (eds.), "The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland", 1689/3/173. Date accessed: 8 January 2019. <http://www.rps.ac.uk/trans/1689/3/173>

¹⁰ Grant, *Memorials*, p. 198.

¹¹ Conolly, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 233. Leighton, *History of the county of Fife*, pp. 88f.

¹² *The process between Mr. William Gordon of Balcomie, Advocate; and Sir William Hope, clearly and impartially represented*. London, 1702.

¹³ See: *Additional Representation of Sir William Hope, Deputy Governor of the Castle of Edinburgh, against a most clamorous and invective petition, given by Mr. William Gordon, and his wife, against the said Sir William Hope, to this Honourable House, and by then remitted to the Committee for Contraverted Elections*. Edinburgh, 1702. *Act for liberating and protecting Mr. William Gordon of Balcomie, advocate*. Edinburgh, 1703.

¹⁴ *The Scots Magazine*. November 1785, p. 572.

¹⁵ Leighton, *History of the county of Fife*, p. 89.

However, William Hope is still remembered in the vicinity of Balcomie. Famous as a perfect cavalier and renowned for his skills in fencing, dancing, and horsemanship, there are two legends that are connected to his name. The first concerns the circumstances of his death, and it is said that Hope died because he caught a fever after overheating when dancing at a party. The second is a tale about swordsmanship which relates that the fame of his books induced a French cavalier to come to Scotland and challenge Hope. Hope killed the Frenchman in the ensuing duel only to discover that the dead challenger was a soldier Hope had saved from death in wartime Flanders. This local legend was transformed into a romantic short story which was published in 1852.¹⁶

The years between the restoration of Scottish independence in 1660 and the Acts of Union in 1707 were characterised by religious strife, a succession of Jacobite risings against William of Orange after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and economic crisis. Moreover Scotland and Scotsmen were involved, in one way or another, in two major conflicts on the continent known as King William's War (1689-1697) and Queen Anne's War (1702-1713). The Acts of Union triggered another string of Jacobite uprisings during Hope's lifetime, the most important being "The Fifteen" in 1715, during or after which William Hope lost his post as deputy governor of Edinburgh Castle. The reason is unknown but it seems somewhat odd since Sir William was a staunch supporter of William of Orange.

This turbulent and violent time was also the founding period of an intellectual current which was later called the "Scottish Enlightenment". Its fundamental principles were the same as in England and later on in France and Germany. It aimed to understand the world by human reasoning, by means of constant critique of traditions, and by building on human experience. Enlightenment is anthropocentric in so much as it tries to discard irrelevant and superstitious beliefs and rituals that prevent a practical approach towards human life and human action, which would otherwise restrain human development. Cognition is seen as a process, not as an intuition granted by divine grace. Enlightenment was thus understood by its proponents as a constant human condition as well as a method which was applicable to every aspect of human life: man is there to learn and to strive for personal perfection.

The roots of the Scottish Enlightenment may be traced to the seventeenth century. At the advent of the union with England there were five Scottish universities – in England only two. Access to this level of higher education was easier than in any other European country. This may be due to the high esteem in which "education" was held in general, which may itself be traced back to the fifteenth century when the Education Act of 1496 stated that any freeholder was to send his sons to grammar school "until they are competently instructed and have perfect Latin".¹⁷ Thus there was enough intellectual

¹⁶ "A legend of the East Neuk of Fife". *The International Journal of Literature, Art and Science*. New York, 1. January 1852, pp. 63-71.

¹⁷ Brown et al (eds.), "The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland", A1496/6/4. Date accessed: 8 January 2019, <http://www.rps.ac.uk/trans/A1496/6/4>.

humus in Edinburgh and Glasgow to grow new ideas.¹⁸ In the 1710s this new movement was already in full bloom. It flourished up until the early nineteenth century and embraced literature, philosophy, economics, and natural sciences. Names like Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, or Adam Smith need to be mentioned here. No wonder that this powerful intellectual current, which started to develop during his lifetime, also massively influenced the swordsman and fencing master William Hope.

III. ENLIGHTENING SMALLSWORD PLAY

William Hope was not, contrary to many other authors of swordplay in the age of the small-sword (as for instance L'Abbat,¹⁹ McBane²⁰ or Angelo), a one hit wonder: we know today of seven publications on fencing, one translation of a manual on horsemanship, and one political treatise on duelling.²¹ It is most striking that his system developed from publication to publication. Hope never claimed to present a final system but always conceded that there is room for further development according to growing experience.²² His first book, *The Scots fencing-master*, was published in 1687 when he was only twenty-seven years old. It comprises the conventional knowledge of contemporary smallsword play of the time, thus showing an almost exclusively French and Italian influence. However, young William Hope – by now an experienced soldier – already in his first book showed a desire to make smallsword fencing more practical and more effective, more fitting for the battlefield and for self-defence, less ritualistic, less focused on duelling, and also less elegant – in short less French and less Italian. In 1687 Hope was able to express this desire in theory, but it was not yet incorporated into his system. It seems, however, that he already knew where to look in order to overhaul the dominating French and Italian style – the broadsword and backsword systems of his native Scotland. Thus he wrote in the *Scots fencing-master*:

I say, if a man should be forced to make use of sharps our Scots-play is in my Opinion farr before any I ever saw abroad as for security; and the Reason why I think it so, is, because all French play ... appeareth to the Eyes of the Spectatours to be a farr neater, & Gentiler way of playing then ours, but no man that understands what secure fencing is, will ever call that kind of play sure play.²³

As previously mentioned, Hope was a clever businessman. He published all of his books in Edinburgh as well as in London. The *Scots fencing-master*, however, appeared in England

¹⁸ Concerning the conditions under which the Scottish enlightenment flourished cf. Emerson, “The Context of the Scottish Enlightenment”.

¹⁹ Cf. L'Abbat, *Art of Fencing*.

²⁰ Cf. McBane, *Expert Sword-man's Companion*.

²¹ Cf. Angelo, *School of fencing*.

²² “...it was alwise my Opinion, that a Man should never so fix his Judgement, but that upon stronger and more convincing Reasons he might alter it.” Hope, *New Method*, p. 6.

²³ Hope, *Scots Fencing-master*, The Epistle to the Reader, 9f.

under the title *The complete fencing-master*. Scots were not very popular in England during those times, and Hope was obviously aware of this.

His second book is remarkable. *The sword-man's vade-mecum* of 1691 is much more than a treatise on the technical aspects of sword-play; it is focused on the mental and physical qualities of a fencer. It stresses the unity of body and mind, and above all this book gives an insight into Hope's way of thinking and his almost scientific method. Hope starts out with a renewed criticism of the French system. To him, while it "has Bonne grace"²⁴ and "appears Brisk and Couragious" it was insecure and dangerous since it lacked an emphasis on parrying and was of "hot constitution". In short, Hope judged the French way unsafe and dangerous. In order to correct these faults, the Scotsman set out to analyse particular situations in order to derive general rules for an engagement which, he claimed, are of universal validity since they may be easily adapted to particular situations during "an occasion with sharps". Hope wrote that:

You may now perceive the great Advantage General Rules have over Particular ones, and it is the Abstract of those General Rules that are of such admirable use, which I am to set down to you together with the reasons in the following sheets.²⁵

This is an inductive method that tries to derive generally valid rules from the observation of particular situations and which was so much beloved by many proponents of the European Enlightenment.²⁶ Natural sciences and medicine – disciplines that rely on learning from observation – were part and parcel of the Enlightenment, especially in Scotland.²⁷ Thus one may assume that William Hope was at least familiar with basic methods of scientific work and used them when setting up his system of smallsword play.

In the above quote we also find the word "reason", which is of utmost importance for Hope's system. In the *Vade-Mecum* Hope established eight General Rules. The reasons for each particular rule were of utmost importance to him. In modern terms: he emphasised the creation of declarative knowledge. For Hope, moreover, the only acceptable way to pursue his art – and fencing was an "art" to him – was to discard all passions and irrationalities but to instead apply soberness and judgement and to ever better one's skills in order to overcome ignorance.²⁸ Thus he asked "is it not therefore ... far more commendable ... that if we overcome we may be said to have done it by Art and Judgement, and not at randome and by chance, more besecming an irrational than a rational Creature?"²⁹

²⁴ Hope, *Vade-mecum*, To all True Artists, 4f.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 5.

²⁶ Wood, "Science in the Scottish Enlightenment", pp. 94f.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Hope, *Vade-mecum*, p. 6.

²⁹ Ibid, 6f.

To Hope ignorance created passion and passion ultimately led to death.³⁰ Thus a true swordsman had to study theory and also to practice as much as possible.³¹ Hope finally boiled down the necessary qualities of a true swordsman to three major principles, which to him formed a precondition to master his system of swordplay. It was the trinity of calmness, vigour and judgement that are “the only foundation upon which all True fencing is built, and each Word in particular being as it were a Column, or Pillar by which my rules are to be supported”.³²

Finally, Hope even visualised the most important principles of his philosophy of swordplay, this being something the age of Enlightenment was very fond of (Fig.1).

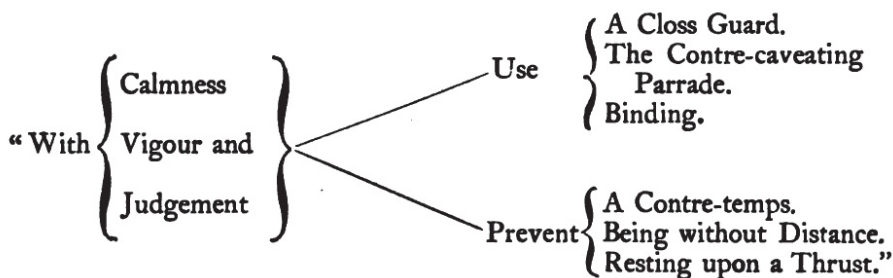


Fig. 1: Visualisation of the trinity Calmness, Vigour and Judgement. William Hope, *Vademecum*, p. 11

The *Vade-Mecum* was, without any doubt, an essential and necessary preliminary work for William Hope’s magnum opus, *The New Method*. The *Vade-Mecum* established his methodology, paved the way to the eventual breach with the French system, and set the governing principles of what was now presented as a very much unique style of swordplay. The *New Method* cast into practical advice the more abstract principles of the *Vade-Mecum*, although the *Vade-Mecum* also consists of a measure of practical swordplay and the *New Method* embraces theory. For Hope the unity of theory and practice was most important.

First of all, this meant radical simplification. Hope almost completely discarded the prime and tierce parries, keeping only seconde and quart. There is only one major, universal parry, or parade, which Hope calls the “True Cross”, and there is a very much reduced variety of thrusts. Finally, there is only one guard on which Hope’s system relies; the hanging guard. It is very different from the then common quart-guard and was probably taken from Scottish and English broadsword systems where it was occasionally in use. André Wernesson de Liancour, the most influential French master of the smallsword, however, also mentions the hanging guard in his 1692 *Maitre d’armes*. Liancour, however, calls it the “Guardes Allemandes”³³ and claims to have fought against masters who made

³⁰ Ibid., 4f.

³¹ Ibid, pp. 5-7.

³² Ibid., p. 8.

³³ Liancour, *Maitre d’armes*, pp. 22-24.

use of it in Germany and the Netherlands.³⁴ Liancour recognised in his book the danger an enemy who utilised the hanging guard represented as “it is true that they can use this guard very well; it is hard to find their sword. Therefore one must be careful with them”.³⁵

Hope knew Liancour’s book and he knew of the mention of the “Guardes Allemandes” in the *Maitre d’armes*. Although Hope named Liancour as “one of the most celebrated Masters in France”,³⁶ he remarked that he and other French masters “did not know the singular Advantages”³⁷ of the hanging guard. William Hope himself chose the hanging guard since he considered it a “more natural”³⁸ position than the quart guard which he judged “too constraining” and thus not able to provide sufficient cover for the lower body. Moreover, he considered the hanging guard the best position for his preferred kind of parry. Above all, however, there was the desire to simplify things and create a universal system of swordplay, leading Hope to state that:

Thus I have shown you exactly, how this excellent Hanging-Guard is to be kept, with any kind of Weapon, either a-Foot or Horse-back; from which I intend to draw such a secure and General Defence, against the thrusts and blows of all weapons.

By all weapons he meant even those much heavier than a smallsword: a diagram attached to the *New Method* shows a man with a smallsword “defending a full blow of a Halbard”.³⁹

Defence and security in encounters of very different characters were the heart and soul of the *New Method*. Hope refused risky techniques. In his system there was no dequarting, volting, or circling.⁴⁰ Elongeing⁴¹ he judged to be dangerous too. The Scotsman demanded control of the opponent’s blade by always binding it.⁴² Neither was he a friend of faints, which he judged “an uncertain kind of Play” since they could offer the opponent an opening.⁴³ Hope tried to establish a universal system fit for any blade and for all occasions that could arise during his unruly and violent time, including duels, war and above all self-defence. His system was meant to transform the smallsword from being almost exclusively a weapon of the duellist into a universal tool for war and self-defence. The common school methods, which Hope criticised, were not preparing to “Engage at Closs Fight in a Field-Battel”.⁴⁴ Instead he claimed:

³⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

³⁶ Hope, *New Method*, p. 45.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ The following three quotes Hope, *ibid*, p. 11.

³⁹ Ibid, attached diagram, Fig 16.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 110-112.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 96.

⁴² Ibid, pp. 105, and 112-118.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 99.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. x.

in such a Case this Hanging Guard with the Cross-Parade from it, is the only One in the World he can rely upon; and if he be Agile and Vigorous, and can perform it Nimble and Dexterously ... it will certainly ... save him from many a wound...⁴⁵

Consequently, Hope not only simplified his system but also de-ritualised it and put great emphasis on practicability.⁴⁶ The result was a no-nonsense-attitude in which effectiveness ruled. Thus, Hope not only recommended the use of the left hand but outright demanded it.⁴⁷ Breaking measure was not considered cowardly⁴⁸ but useful, and he introduced the blow into smallsword to accompany the thrust.⁴⁹ Hope's insistence on practicability and his effort to develop a system broad enough for various arms and various situations mirrors a distinct feature of enlightened thinking: the desire to be useful and to expand usefulness. Utility had thus become a widespread argument for the spread of the new natural sciences at Scottish universities during and shortly after Hope's lifetime.⁵⁰

Compared to other fencing masters and authors of the time, William Hope's work is unique because of his scientific method, the systematic approach, the insistence on utility, and the connection of philosophical and practical reasoning. In contrast, Zacharias Wyld's *English Master of Defence* of 1711 is a purely mechanistic itemisation of knowledge in which the author sets up a number of rules without any reasoning for their validity. The same is even truer for the short treatise by the noted Venetian fencing master Giuseppe Colombani, published in the same year. Both books stand on a much lower intellectual level than Hope's *New Method* and appear as if they originated from a very different time. And indeed, although both the Venetian and the Englishman were contemporaries of William Hope, their works lack the distinct spirit of the early Enlightenment that the Scotsman displays in his writings. Moreover, neither of them contain any reflections on the social and political implications of fencing, duelling, or self-defence, as do Hope's later works.

One may probably label the way of simply itemising knowledge as the traditional way of writing a treatise on smallsword fencing. One of the earliest books on the handling of the smallsword seems to have set the example for many of the following until William Hope took up the pen: this was Liancour's above-mentioned *Maitre d'armes* (1692). This book was fashionable throughout the age of the smallsword. It comprises probably the most comprehensive collection of positions and actions for the sophisticated and arty French style of smallsword play. William Hope may have had Liancour on his mind when he

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ See for instance *ibid.*, p. 72. There Hope advised immediate readiness when drawing the sword and abstinence from any form of courtesy.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.72, and 92f.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-124, and 131-134. Considering breaking measure an act of cowardice was apparently a distinct feature of French and Italian schools of sword-play. George Silver mentioned it as early as 1599. Cf. Silver, *Paradoxes*, p. 66.

⁴⁹ Hope, *New Method*, p. 167-171.

⁵⁰ Wood, "Science in the Scottish Enlightenment", p. 103.

called this French style on the one hand “a farr neater, & Gentiler way of playing then ours”,⁵¹ but on the other hand an insecure and dangerous method of swordplay. Liancour did not busy himself with philosophical considerations but went *in medias res* immediately. He basically described his style and the necessary drills to master it one after the other in an authoritative manner. It seems as if the book was probably intended for other teachers and masters of the smallsword, but not so much for the novice of the art.

Even affiliation to universities, sources of enlightened reasoning and thinking, did not automatically guarantee enlightened fencing. Thus Jean Danielle L’Angée, master of fencing at the University of Heidelberg, published a book in 1702 which simply codified his views on the handling of a smallsword or rapier without any scientific reasoning, desire for much practicability, or reflections on the effects of the art on society.⁵² There were, however, attempts to enlighten fencing in a university environment on the continent. One example can be found in Anthon Friedrich Kahn, fencing master at the University of Göttingen.⁵³ In 1739 he published his attempts to create a smallsword system “according to nature”⁵⁴ and by means of “reasoning on the natural order”⁵⁵ with the aim to prove that “the art is based on rational reason which may be found valuable or false by the proper use of the human mind”.⁵⁶ Moreover, Kahn was very much concerned with the implications of his art for society.⁵⁷

IV. CURBING VIOLENCE BY CREATING A MONOPOLY

William Hope likewise followed the same principles as Kahn. One may be tempted to regard him as a “fencing nerd”, a mere technician. Typically for someone touched by the gentle hand of the Enlightenment, however, he was not. The desire to expand usefulness was obviously not his only impetus, but probably also because in his case during the Enlightenment, “the concept of ‘usefulness’ encompassed both practical, economic benefit and a sense of utility related to the moral or intellectual improvement of the individual.”⁵⁸ One may add to the latter, and to the improvement of society as a whole. Hope, the enlightened fencing master, showed a strong pedagogical impetus and was additionally highly concerned with the dark and deadly flipside of his trade.

With respect to teaching and the proper setup of a school of arms Hope published another book in 1692. The *Fencing Master’s Advice* is a collection of advice for rules in

⁵¹ Hope, *Scots fencing-master*, The Epistle to the Reader, p. 9.

⁵² L’Ange, *Deutliche und gründliche Erklärung der Adeliichen und Ritterlichen freyen Fecht-Kunst*.

⁵³ Kahn, *Anfangsgründe der Fechtkunst*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁵⁷ See *ibid.*, pp. 15-37.

⁵⁸ Wood, “Science in the Scottish Enlightenment”, p. 103.

fencing schools. It deals with its layout,⁵⁹ the general rules of such a school⁶⁰ – including the course of training –⁶¹ and the behaviour of the scholars.⁶² Every rule that Hope provides is supported by reason. Hope’s rules as they are laid down in this book seem to serve one general purpose: taming smallsword play to become primarily a sport, a “Divertisement”,⁶³ or in any case an activity bound by rules and a strict code of conduct. Thus, Hope radically confined the area of the body that was considered a fair target in school play.⁶⁴ Training for life or death encounters was banished to private lessons. He further forbade certain techniques that he considered peculiar to a confrontation with sharps in public lessons⁶⁵ and suggested introducing general rules and regulations for public stage encounters that were fought for prizes.⁶⁶ Moreover Hope devised an idea to institutionalise public prize fencing by incorporating fencing masters⁶⁷ and thereby standardising the rules for such encounters that were highly popular in early modern Scotland and England. Hope’s envisioned rules suggest that his idea of stage fencing resembled much more a sportive event than a show of potentially deadly techniques. Once more one may find here an attempt to tame fencing. The *Fencing Master’s Advice* thus contains a copy of the “Original Contract of the Society of Sword Men in Scotland”.⁶⁸ One may read it as a much broader attempt to tame violence rather than to only set up general rules for public performances: the teachers of the art were to constrain themselves by self-imposed rules. The preamble⁶⁹ makes it quite clear what ultimate purpose practical fencing had to serve: self-defence alone. Hope’s enlightened contract deduced the right to the defence of one’s life from “nature”, not from religion:

The Preservation of Life or Self-Defence being that to which all Creatures by Natural instinct are inclined; Nature hath thought to fit to bestow upon each kind a particular Defence, that so they might preserve themselves from the insults of their Enemies ... some with their Teeth, Breaks, Trunks, and Claves. ... So man coming into the world naked, and in a manner stript of all those Defences, she hath endued him with

⁵⁹ Hope, *Fencing-master’s Advice*, pp. 14-16.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-26.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-41.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶⁴ “...beneath the neck, and above the headband of the Breeches, as to the length and within the two shoulders, as to the breadth of the Body”. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶⁵ I.e. the use of the left hand. See *ibid.*, pp. 22f.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-85.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 75-81.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-90. Hope claimed it was actually founded February 25th, 1692. See *ibid.*, p. 86. However there are no sources apart from Hopes own writings to support this claim.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

Reason, that he might ... invent to himself such a varietie of Artificial ones, as might be ... serviceable to him in everie encounter of danger.⁷⁰

To Hope, of course, fencing was the preferred “artificial method” of defence. Therefore the Society of Sword Men was founded on the one hand “for the greater encouragement of the art; And to excite in all People a Desire and Emulation to understand and practice so Noble and Useful an exercise”⁷¹ and on the other hand so that “we [fencing masters and the members of the society] may have a fairer & better Opportunity to take into our consideration what methods may be fallen upon, not only to excite all People to its practice but also improve our selves in it”.⁷² Although the defence of a man’s honour is briefly mentioned in the contract as another benefit of commanding the art of fencing,⁷³ it is very much clear that to Hope emphasis of self-defence was the major vindication of his art against critique.

Hope, the enlightened fencing master, clearly recognised the negative social implications of his art. Being enlightened, he was a staunch enemy of duelling and anxious to curb this kind of ritualised violence by various rational means. In *The Fencing-Masters Advice* Hope’s critique of the practice was still an indirect one. Therein he demonstratively stresses the positive aspects of fencing, its benefits for self-defence and “Divertisement”, while not yet downright condemning duelling.

This, however, fundamentally changed in Hope’s last book, *A vindication of the true Art of self-defence*, published in Edinburgh in 1724 and posthumously in London in 1729. It is actually an anti-duelling book. Here, Hope vindicates fencing for the purpose of just war and for any kind of self-defence. On the other hand he strongly rejects duelling. To make his point he applies moral, philosophical, and to a lesser extent religious reasoning. Thus, Hope started out with a clear and strong condemnation of duelling:

Duelling or Single Combat, either without or with Seconds, are of such bad Consequence, and have destroy’d within the Hundred Years so many Brave Man, that I am persuded, there is no man of True Honour, but will be well satisfied with my ... chief Arguments against them.⁷⁴

Consequently, Hope utterly rejected the notion that an insult was to be answered by a challenge. In his opinion fighting a duel equalled seeking private revenge. This was unacceptable to him: “Private Revenge is altogether unlawful, if GOD be considered and if there be Regard to His supreme and sovereign Authority; for he has expressly forbidden the Avenging of our selves”.⁷⁵ Therefore no provocation can be an excuse for “doing an

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 88.

⁷² Ibid., p. 90.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 88.

⁷⁴ Hope, *Vindication*, p. i.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 48.

Injury to another”.⁷⁶ Moreover, Hope did not only see God’s commandments infringed but also the laws of Man, for “by this (duels) all legal Trials and Order of Law is out-dated and Justice openly and avowedly violated”.⁷⁷ To Hope only society embodied in the state possessed the right and the duty to punish wrongdoers:

When any one is wronged by Word or Deed, if it be of that Nature and Consequence, as to make it very prejudicial, it ought to be carried to the Magistrate; But if it be unworthy of his Cognizance, it is also unworthy of a Christian or wise Man’s Resentment, especially by Duel.⁷⁸

The fencing master advocated character building as a means of immunisation against the temptation of duels. He writes that a wise man “may conclude to meet with Injuries, Provocations and what is called Affronts and should prepare for them”.⁷⁹ Hope’s ultimate advice is that “the wisest Course then, that a Gentleman or Soldier ... without the least Impeachment to his Honour, can take, is peremptorily to decline accepting all private Challenges”.⁸⁰ To Hope it was crystal-clear that “Nothing but being attacked, and necessary Self-Defence, being what can vindicate any Man’s running the Hazard, as well as Sin, of taking away another Man’s Life”.⁸¹

It is worthwhile to note that the idea of “self-defence” was a comparably recent addition to Scottish codified law in Hope’s lifetime. An act of 1661 provided an exemption from punishment in cases of “homicide in lawful defence and homicide committed upon thieves and robbers breaking into houses in the night”.⁸² In Scotland, as in any other early modern realm, duelling, or “single combat” was illegal. The first statute making it illegal was voted and approved in the parliament of 1600. It stipulated death for either party, the challenger and the defender.⁸³ However duelling obviously continued to flourish in Scotland. Thus in 1674 the Privy Council issued a proclamation which found, that:

...the said abuse and wickednesse is becoming so ordinary, and grown to that highth, that frequently ... by persons otherwayes in friendship and

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 57.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 54.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 58.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 163.

⁸² An act anent the several degrees of casual homicide, May 16th, 1661. Brown et al (eds.), *Records of the Parliaments of Scotland*, 1661/1/265. Date accessed: January 8th, 2019. <http://www.rps.ac.uk/trans/1661/1/265>

⁸³ “...no person in time coming without his highness’s licence fight any singular combat under the pain of death and his moveable gear escheat to his highness’s use, and the provoker to be punished with a more ignominious death than the defender at the pleasure of his majesty.” Regarding singular combats, November 15th, 1600. Ibid., 1600/11/33. Date accessed: January 8th, 2019. <http://www.rps.ac.uk/trans/1600/11/33>.

acquaintance, they presume and pretend, that they are concerned in honour, to take reparation in their own hands in the said wicked, and consequently most dishonourable way of fighting Duels.⁸⁴

The proclamation therefore requested all royal officials to severely apply the law of 1600. The King announced that no duellist was to expect a royal pardon. Moreover, punishment was expanded to seconds. The parliament of 1696 once more tightened the laws against duelling: even if there was only a challenge, but no actual fighting took place, both parties and their seconds were to be expropriated and banished from the realm.⁸⁵

William Hope believed that, in exchange for the individual's self-restraint, society should create institutions that one could turn to in case of an insult to one's honour. In the *Vindication*, Hope thus broadened his concept of an institutionalised curbing of sword violence. To him it was not the state as such which had to act. The crown, Hope imagined, was to delegate certain judicial powers to a private body of men which, by this act of the state, would become responsible for the peaceful settlement of matters of honour. Thus he renewed his idea to incorporate swordmasters in an association of swordsmen. This time he expanded the concept by a suggestion to attach a "Scottish Court of Honour" to the association that was supposed to solve all disputes of honour, which usually would have led to duels.⁸⁶

Hope and his co-swordsmen did indeed try to accomplish the said institutionalisation. Hope's then solely private "Society of Sword-Men" submitted a proposal to parliament in 1696 for the erection of a "Royal Society of Sword Men, and Court of Honour" in order to obtain royal recognition and at the same time the character of a court of honour.⁸⁷ The Scottish Parliament even debated the matter before the Acts of Union, but Hope's idea never materialised.

The proposed act went much further than to grant the new Royal Society "full Power ... to prevent if possible, Cognosce upon, and Determine all Differences betwixt Parties, upon giving Satisfaction, and other points of Honour, whom they are hereby empowered to call before them, for the more effectual preventing of Duels".⁸⁸ At the same time Hope and his friends tried to monopolise the teaching of smallsword fencing, thus on the one hand curbing the spread of potentially deadly knowledge and on the other hand establishing a ruling philosophy of smallsword fencing, as well as creating a regulated

⁸⁴ Proclamation against fighting of Duels or single Combats. March 19th, 1674.

⁸⁵ Act against duels, October, 12th 1696. Brown et al (eds.), *Records of the Parliaments of Scotland*, 1696/9/168. Date accessed: January, 8th 2019. <http://www.rps.ac.uk/mss/1696/9/168>.

⁸⁶ Hope, *Vindication*, pp. 77-99.

⁸⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 83. The proposal was read in parliament and remitted to the committee of elections September 16th, 1696. See Brown et al (eds.), *Records of the Parliaments of Scotland*, 1696/9/29. Date accessed: January 6th, 2019, <http://www.rps.ac.uk/mss/1696/9/29>. Further proceedings concerning the matter as described by Hope in *Vindication*, p. 83 are not verifiable in the *Records of the Scottish Parliaments*. The draft of the proposed act is contained in Hope, *Vindication*, pp. 84-94.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

market which granted them government-protected income. The society was to permit or prevent market access for prospective fencing masters by examining anyone who offered his service as a teacher.⁸⁹ Nobody would have been able to practice without “the special Licence of the Society”.⁹⁰

One may consider this odd connection between one’s personal interest and the attempt to better the state of society a rather typical feature of Hope’s character. Having simultaneously been a cunning businessman and a man on a mission, his example demonstrates that enlightened thinking and an enlightened life were not inevitably matters of altruism or pacifism. They were not creatures of the ivory tower, but at times deeply connected to political and economic matters, down to earth and concerned with the practical solution of public grievances while exploring new ways to fit the material existence and subsistence of the individual into a bettered world.

V. A NEW BREED OF FIGHT BOOK

Concerning his system of smallsword combat, William Hope is a solitaire. One will not find a second system which is based so much on reason and which was developed step-by-step by analysing actual practice in the age of the smallsword.⁹¹ The desire to make smallsword play practical for all occasions and to do away with artificiality – but at the same time to tame the violent art by stressing the athletic and sportive aspect of fencing – is unique.⁹²

Hope’s system remained singular and stands for itself. It did not replace the dominating, highly ritualised, and formalised French or Italian systems. The heart and soul of it, however, the hanging guard, was found useful by later authors in Britain too. Although his name is not mentioned as a source, it seems probable that Hope’s writings influenced other fencing masters, like John Godfrey⁹³ (1748) or one Captain Sinclair⁹⁴ (1800), to use the hanging guard and to include it in their respective schools of swordplay. The hanging

⁸⁹ Ibid., 91f.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

⁹¹ One might point to earlier attempts towards “scientific” swordplay e.g. in Gérard Thibault’s *Academie de l’espée*. However, the “mystic circle”, the quasi-mathematical basis of Thibault’s system, is rather an artificial construct missing the notion of learning by experience and by mistake whereas Hope’s system draws from observation and practice as well as from an obvious process of try and error. Concerning Thibault cf. Verwey, “Gerard Thibault and his Academie de l’espée”. *Quaerendo*, VIII, 1978, pp. 283-319.

⁹² The use of reasoning as the basic method of treating fighting was tried on a different field again many years later. In 1790 Thomas Fewtrell published a book on boxing in London that in many aspects mirrored Hope’s enlightened method. Cf. Fewtrell, *Boxing Reviewed*.

⁹³ See Godfrey, *Treatise*, pp. 17 and 23. Godfrey prized the hanging guard when used with a smallsword while discarding it for the back-sword.

⁹⁴ Sinclair, *Cudgel-Playing*. Sinclair ventured, as printed on the title-page, to “qualify the reader to handle a Sword or Stick with Grace, enabling him to correct Abuse, repel Attack, and secure himself from unprovoked Insult.” For the hanging guard see p. 8.

guard was known on the continent as well, although it seems as if this was not William Hope's merit. As mentioned above we find this particular guard under the name of "Garde Allemande" in Liancour's *Maitre d'Armes*. From there it was probably borrowed by later French masters such as Guillaume Danet⁹⁵ (1788) and Pierre Girard⁹⁶ (1755). However, neither in German nor in Italian manuals from the age of the smallsword will one find a "hanging" or a "German" guard.

It is worth mentioning that the hanging guard has indeed survived in practical fencing until today. One will inevitably encounter it when visiting a venue where Austro-German academic fencing is cultivated in a "Paukboden". This highly ritualised swordplay is – unlike smallsword fencing – exclusively based on the blow. However, its principal guard is a version of the hanging guard, the "verhängte Auslage"⁹⁷, thus proving Hope's point of the universal usefulness of the hanging guard.

When taking William Hope's bibliography into account one may find that fight books were not only manuals for fencing masters, records of knowledge of a school, or handbooks for students. Fight books may contain complex philosophical reasoning with implication for the wider contemporary society in which it was produced. Thus were William Hope's books influenced by the intellectual current of the time, namely the early Enlightenment, and not merely by the development of arms, techniques of fighting, or military tactics. Hope's "fight books" are as much about fighting as they are about finding a rational interpretation of the world. And more: they are about a bettering of its condition based on reasoning. Above all we may discover in William Hope's books that the early Enlightenment in Scotland was a widespread affair that reached far beyond universities and intellectual clubs. Its main attributes – use of reason, critique of tradition, and relying on human experience – did indeed influence people like the relatively humble soldier and fencing master William Hope, who was neither a pacifist nor an altruist.

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⁹⁵ Danet, *L'Art des Armes*, vol. 2, plate 34.

⁹⁶ Girard, *L'Academie*, p. 89, plates 57 and 58.

⁹⁷ Cf. Geilke, *Die kleine studentische Fechtzettel*, p. 144.

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