To Write as a Boxer

To Write as a Boxer:

Disability and Resignification in the Text *A South African Boxer in Britain*

By

Kurt Campbell

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

To Write as a Boxer: Disability and Resignification in the Text
A South African Boxer in Britain

By Kurt Campbell

This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-3096-5
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-3096-6

Image Credit: Jules Beau. Gallica Digital Library.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

A South African Boxer in Britain contains the unique aesthetic of the Cape Town born boxer Andrew Jeptha: the first black fighter to win a British welterweight title in 1907. The booklet was published in 1910 to offer pecuniary relief to the author (Jeptha) who became blind during the very match that secured him his title. Thus, although masquerading as a "light read" of sporting achievements and memories from abroad, I argue that this booklet demonstrates complex thinking on text, disability, and boxing. This monograph takes care to present the publication as a crucial historical work that offers a level of psychic and racial strategy, which was not previously thought to exist in the genesis of a turn-of-the-century boxer. The textual ideation manifest in Jeptha's booklet is mooted within the monograph as distinctive in its accommodation of both desire and difference, thereby rendering a calculation that sees the text not as the deserted boundary where "mind" and "flesh" depart, but rather as a particular bibliographic configuration where both these worlds meet in a moment that demands reductive views of the gladiator and his careful words.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This monograph is dedicated to my wife, Nikita, and young son, Ezekiel.

Nikita, thank you for being such an incredible support in the final stages of this project. I appreciate the many public holidays you sacrificed to facilitate my reading and writing. Your words of encouragement seemed to breathe new life into my bones at the very points I felt like giving up. My hope is that I will demonstrate the same level of commitment and support when you find yourself in a similarly pressing endeavour. With a partner like you, surely the challenges of the future are already rendered innocuous?

Ezekiel, you are too young to read this text now, but perhaps you will comment on this monograph when you are older and possibly take the most productive aspects of the work to new disciplinary destinations. Please know that I will do my utmost to support you in whatever endeavour you wish to dedicate your mind and body. My greatest wish is that you think of your father as a "fighter" when you reach the age that asks for a judgement of me.

I would like to acknowledge the outstanding interlocution of Dr. Premesh Lalu. In many of our challenging discussions he changed scholarly views I had held "sacred" in what seemed like the blink of an eye and replaced them with expansive intellectual paths of flight. His unflinching belief in me has left me with a debt of gratitude I hope I can repay. It is an honour to be counted as one who has sparred with you, Premesh.

One of the most important periods of thinking during the course of this project occurred at the University of Minnesota, at the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change (ICGC). I could hardly believe my luck when I encountered the generosity of scholars like Yasmeen Arief and Therona Moodley who were also working at Minnesota on their respective projects. We shared many

discussions about cinema, affect, and postcolonial studies. They helped me shape many shapeless thoughts and offered exceptional critiques of my thinking and work.

Helena Pohlandt McCormick, Karen Brown, Qadri Ismail, Allen Isaacman, Ajay Skaria, and John Mowitt were inspirations during my time in Minnesota as watched them during their seminars, debates, and lectures. I learnt what it meant to be a committed scholar and teacher from these incredible individuals. Thank you.

The faithful support of the District Six Museum ensured that I enjoyed unfettered access to important archives in the foundational stages of this project. The curator, Tina Smith, and archivist, Chris Julius, proved to be incredible resources during my research. For this I am very grateful.

All my colleagues at the University of Cape Town deserve special mention. Particularly Jane Alexander, Jean Brundrit, Svea Josephy, Berni Searle, Andrew Lamprecht, Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz, Lyn Holness, Fritha Langerman, Carine Zaayman, Johann van der Schijff, Pippa Skotnes, Stephen Ingss, and the late Colin Richards. This cohort seemed to carry me when I felt juggling full-time employment, fatherhood, and academic studies simultaneously was too much to bear. Thank you all for your generosity and encouragement.

To my immediate family: Lionel, Claudette, Nicole, Craig and Mandy Campbell, and Leslie and Toni Van der Berg. You have silently supported me through this journey, ensuring that my domestic responsibilities were met and exceeded due to your direct support and involvement.

The final months of preparing this manuscript were enhanced by the excellent scholarship conditions at the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research, Harvard University. To this end, I owe much to Henry Louise Gates Jr, Abby Wolf, Krishna Lewis, and Cornel West. My days at Harvard were filled with conversations involving elite scholars Jean and John Camaroff, Jean-Christophe Cloutier, Miles Osborne, Tef Poe, Martha Diaz, Christa Clark, and Lorena Rizzo to name but a few.

A heartfelt thanks must go to the pastoral staff at St James Church, Kenilworth, for offering valuable encouragement and support during the years that passed before and during the writing of this book.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the NRF Thuthuka Fund, the University of Cape Town Teaching Relief Grant, and the Mellon Visiting Scholar Grant for the crucial financial support that made this research possible. To have been counted as a funded scholar was a privilege that I still continue to cherish.

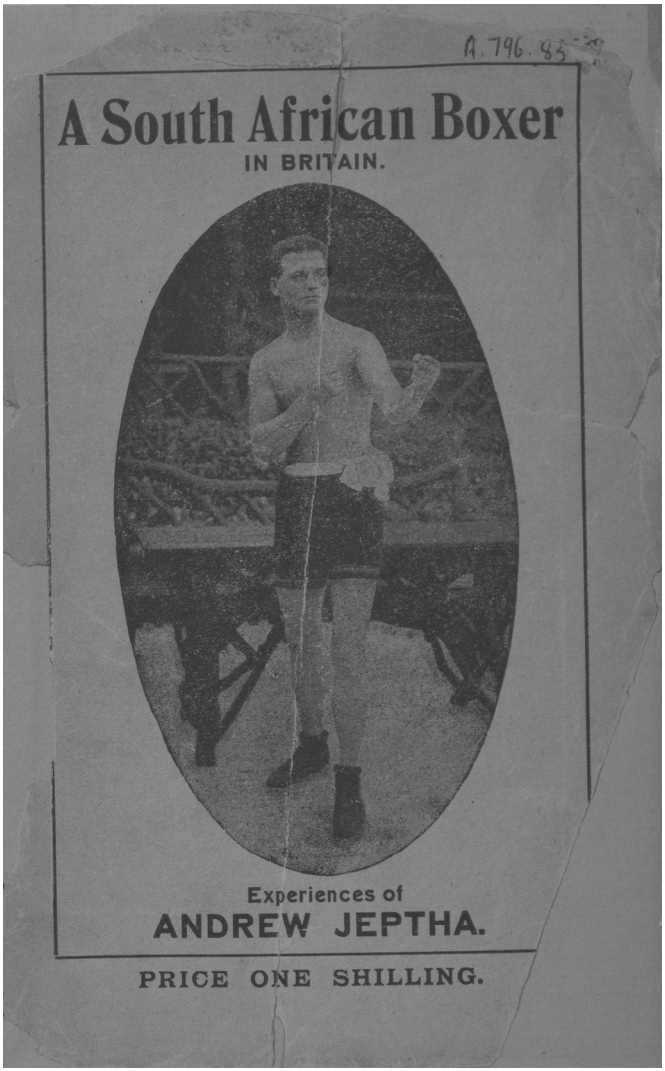

Figure A: The cover image of *A South African Boxer in Britain*, circa 1910. Here, Andrew Jeptha is carefully posed in his signature fighting stance. Image credit: South African National Library.

PREFACE TO A BOUT

In this preface to the reader, I provide a brief context of the social and sporting life of Andrew Daries Jeptha,[1] author of *A South African Boxer in Britain*: the booklet that is the central object of scholarly enquiry in this monograph. In addition, this preface will open up a discussion on the primary currents involved in formulating the questions that order this monograph, and the urgency that they embody in the postcolonial and post-apartheid space of South Africa. The autobiographical information provided in this synopsis on Jeptha's life is largely gleaned from his own publication (*A South African Boxer in Britain*), which was a self-published endeavour that was manufactured by Progress Printers in Cape Town in 1910. I initially encountered this booklet in 2008, when it was lodged at the National Library of South Africa and it is reportedly the only copy in existence. The staff at the National Library proved sterling in both their accommodation of my many trips to engage with the booklet and for their help with tracking down newspaper articles that mention Andrew Jeptha. Although this monograph relies primarily on various theoretical moves in the absence of a larger archive of literature relating to Jeptha and his time in London, these initial fragments are the fundamental points of departure and constitute the material scaffolding required for its conceptual labour.

[1] There are many questions about Andrew Jeptha that remain unanswered, least of which is the spelling of his surname during the course of his career. His wedding certificate from 1904 lists his surname as "Jephtha" as do various posters from that time. An article by the A.P.O. newspaper from Cape Town spells his surname as "Japtha". I have chosen to use "Jeptha" as per the title and signature used in his printed text, *A South African Boxer in Britain: Experiences of Andrew Jeptha*.

NOTES ON THE MONOGRAPH

This monograph operates primarily in a space between theory and its relation to boxing texts. It is composed so as to provide different conceptions of what may be known of Andrew Jeptha and his publication beyond the limits of normative historical modalities. Thus, by offering these concepts, the monograph will complicate what has so far been rendered as a relatively "straight forward" life and publication. Here, I am specifically referring to the writing of Chris Greyvenstein (1981), who in his publication, *The Fighters*, offers the life story of Jeptha and his booklet with a brevity and depth that may be critiqued as reductive and negligent in what it offers historical scholarship, namely a veritable "dead end". In contrast, my conceptual elaborations offer Jeptha's publication, *A South African Boxer in Britain*, as an intellectual staging which, while attuned to the limits of the flesh, is also able to measure out a calculation that is not bound by the finitude that stalks the boxer, or the racial registers ascribed to the author.

Therefore, my enquiry into Jeptha's text constitutes the nexus where both blackness and desire exceed the limits of their normative historical imagining, which is an operation that is authorised as a function of text. As a consequence, what once may have been thought of as a language that is impossible to misinterpret––boxing as a sanctioned violence between opponents––is seen afresh in Jeptha's writing as a far more complex engagement. The distinctive conception of boxing intimated by Jeptha in various ways within his text is not simply constituted as the contest of fists. Rather it courts the transgression of boundaries, both racial and physical, as it traverses boundaries that were acutely felt by the community who constituted the boxing scene of the early 1900s. The implication is that the heightened engagement of one body encountering another within the ring operates concomitantly and comes squarely to bear on all who invest a symbolic power in the fighting body in addition to those involved in combat.

This fighting body (as in the case of Andrew Jeptha) is able to deploy the text as a technology that both re-stages these social complexities of engagement and, crucially, re-signifies a lived experience of damage incurred in the ring. By this, I mean that the very "wounds of battle" enable a particular species of ideation with a productivity not often associated with disabling damage, specifically with regard to the condition of blindness (as was the case with Jeptha's affliction). What emerges is what I term "night writing" (see Chapter Four), which is a process of bibliographic intensity that offers important concepts in relation to blindness, pugilism, and text.

An introduction to a fighter

Andrew Daries Jeptha was born in Cape Town in 1879, in what was then Cape Colony. He was the son of a specialist carpenter who plied his trade in Longmarket Street for a firm trading as *Colonial Furniture*. Although he knew his mother, she passed away before he reached his teenage years, something he believed contributed to an unbalanced childhood (1910: 4). Jeptha started his formal fistic career by participating in general boxing training run by a New York fighter (named in his text as Mr Green) at the gym on the lower end of Canterbury Street, District Six. This learning of the official terms of the engagement (read Queensberry boxing rules) in the sport of pugilism was important for Jeptha, who had previously used his fists with great success in schoolyards and alleyways but could not claim these as bona fide pugilistic engagements. This was something a formal induction into the sport would enable.

Jeptha displayed great talent and commitment during his training to the extent that he was encouraged by Green to try for the Light Weight Championship of South Africa, which was hosted at the old Vaudeville Theatre in Loop Street. Jeptha won the Lightweight Title on his very first attempt, just a few months shy of his eighteenth birthday; this provided a clear signal in his own mind and that of his contemporaries that he could have a future career as a professional in the sport. Therefore, despite the high level of literacy obtained during his education at the first mission school in Hope Street, which was founded by the French monastic order The Little Brothers of Mary (see Chapter Five), Jeptha was firm in his decision to not use

this training directly (although as we will see in subsequent chapters, these skills would eventually be put to use to great effect in his publication), and to instead pursue the route of a prize-ring fighter. In 1902, Jeptha eventually secured the funds, with the assistance of friends and family, to travel to London: the centre of the fistic world. On his very first day in London, local workers, evident in his recollection of events, greeted Jeptha with no small amount of curiosity:

> They returned the gaze at me and with astonishment I heard them saying one to the other "see the young black man!" (1910:7)

Jeptha's autobiographical reflections are suggestive of the world in which he fought and wrote. Jeptha was indeed marked by difference, and this is precisely what enabled him to rapidly secure a number of fights upon his arrival. The British public, and the pugilistic world in general, was pre-occupied by "race" at this time, and enjoyed the spectacle of pitting a white fighter against a black one.

Not shying away from the attention, Jeptha wanted to ensure that he was introduced as swiftly as possible to the boxing fraternity so as to gain financial backers, and was therefore willing to accept any fight in order to prove his prowess. This desire to fight "all comers" inevitably entailed severe punishment for his body. His very first trial-fight is indicative of this dangerous practice of "mixed-matching", as it saw him face the three-time heavyweight amateur champion Joe Steers. This dreadful practice of inter-divisional fighting unfortunately continued for most of Jeptha's career.

The progress of a fighter

Once Jeptha started establishing himself as a fighter, he was promoted variously as *Le Negre* in France and the *Boer* in Ireland: both terms attempted, yet struggled, to ascribe stability to Jeptha's identity. Despite the narrowness of these titles, Jeptha intrigued certain quarters of the British public, including a young Abby Mitchell, who eloped with Jeptha shortly after meeting him as a tenant at the Cardwell Arms in Aldington. Abby would eventually give birth to four children as a result of her union with Jeptha. He stated that these offspring were the primary motivation for his

continual fighting appointments, despite his many injuries.

Although Jeptha was consistently subjecting his body (and especially his eyes) to strain as a fighter, the most pointed encounter that brought the condition of blindness firmly to bear was also the most glorious moment of his career, which was when he faced, and defeated, Curley Watson in 1907 to become champion. The match was a tribute to Jeptha's tenacity, as he invited Watson to this third encounter, having already been defeated by him, on points, in two previous bouts. Jeptha was already battling with his eyesight in the twelfth round of the encounter when his nose was broken. By the end of the fight, he was blinded to such an extent that he had to be guided by hand from the ring. Jeptha would never recover from the injury, and in a future tragic turn, his opponent on the night Curley Watson was killed as a result of a boxing match that followed three years later in another pitting of black against white (see an account of the match in Chapter Five). Indeed, it was a world of boxing that few fighters in today's fraternity of pugilism would risk competing in.

Jeptha eventually decided to leave London, and head back to Cape Town in the hope of improving his eyesight at the Somerset Hospital because it specialised in eye afflictions. He had tried to remedy his situation prior to his departure by drawing on the skills of his contemporaries but was left feeling both confused by and regretful of their treatments, which included painful sessions where leaches were placed on his eyes in an effort to "draw out" dead blood. Many British punters rallied around Jeptha in his embattled state before he finally left Britain by organising a charity event in London at the sporting club Wonderland: the venue where Jeptha plied his trade on many an occasion. Unfortunately, Jeptha was not able to make a success of the business he started with the money gained from this event (a sum totalling £84).

His self-published booklet, *A South African Boxer in Britain*, seems to be the most successful endeavour of his time as a blind fighter, in the sense that it allowed him to reflect on his career, and collate the newspaper articles he had amassed from his time abroad into a single cohesive narrative of fortitude, strategy, moral guidance, and humour. He was thirty-five when the booklet was published six years before his death. The booklet had a relatively wide circulation; it was

distributed by Jeptha in central Cape Town and also by the A.P.O. (African Peoples Organisation): the leading black political organisation of the day, who took the education of non-white South Africans on their right to the franchise as its mandate. The distribution of the booklet by the A.P.O. ensured it reached as far as their offices in Kimberley, in the Northern Province of South Africa.

As for the final months of Jeptha's life, we do not know with any certainty what conditions emerged that brought about his untimely death, apart from to say that in 1920 Jeptha passed away, aged forty-one. We know that he was never able to return to his wife and three children in Britain. His eldest son, Charles, was in attendance during the final days of his life, and we can therefore safely assume that Jeptha did not die alone. We are left with Jeptha's text, which should be placed amongst the first books published in the newly formed Union of South Africa that signalled a level of psychic competition and racial strategy. Arguably, these attitudes were never imagined to exist in the genesis of a professional boxer at the turn of the century, let alone a nascent segregationist state.

That words may be shared across lives and spaces should not surprise us. My specific contribution will be to suggest that we receive *A South African Boxer in Britain* as a "gilded wound": a sublimation of pain that seeks to produce a glorious social and political register beyond the limitations enforced at the time of its writing. Weaving postcolonial theory throughout this work not only offers a route to constitute the object of this study but also changes the imagining of the object itself. Therefore, to say that *A South African Boxer in Britain* offers a narrative of a fighter is only part of the story. It also investigates the mechanics of the self-making that escapes the reductive possibilities of the gladiator's oath that dominates professional percussive sports: *uri, vinciri, verberari, ferroque necari* (I will endure to be burned, to be bound, to be beaten, and to be killed by the sword). The oath is focused on the mortal parameters of corporeal engagement. In this light, the conception of the text is positioned within this monograph not as a deserted boundary and the point at which "flesh" and "mind" depart. Rather, within *A South African Boxer in Britain*, both these worlds meet to constitute an original unity.

In this reading, Andrew Jeptha offers a complex work of identity politics and moral tutelage that masquerades as a "light read". These complexities within the text form a resonant (though divergent) "arc of the self" and a series of self-directed practices that influence the workings of both the body and mind. These disciplines, first catalogued in the Greco-Roman culture of the Stoics and gladiators find a potent re-configuration in *A South African Boxer in Britain*.

CHAPTER ONE

OPENING ROUND

It is easy to prepare the body for contest; it is difficult to prepare the mind.
—Edwin Haislet

Introduction

Somewhat unexpectedly, the text of the blind pugilist, Andrew Jeptha, opens with a distinctive configuration of a notion of "care" to the aspiring boxer. This may at first appear paradoxical: a text authored by a boxer to delineate means of combat that also offers a seemingly unrelated practice of solicitude. Yet, if we attune ourselves to the ideas offered in Andrew Jeptha's text, we will encounter a shared horizon with the Greco-Roman "technologies of care" present in the texts of ancient gladiators. These gladiators prepared both their minds and bodies with equal earnestness as a distinctive feature of their care. In this way, gladiators were sustained in a practice and discourse where care functioned as a central trope. These ancient and divergent notions of care are echoed in *A South African Boxer in Britain*. The connection is not inconsequential to this monograph on Andrew Jeptha's pugilistic pursuits and his textual ideation. Rather, it recommends the centrality of care that––although performed in a multitude of ways to varying degrees in the past––continues to configure in response to new spaces and times, as evident in Jeptha's text.

Beyond the initial formulation of a pugilist offering a complicated view of care in his text, I will then proceed to consider the nature of the link between the ailing body of the fighter (Jeptha) and his reflections on particular aspects of care in his text. This is an apt endeavour, as Jeptha's embattled state and the contingent ontological objectives of his booklet rehearse the original conditions of tension that gave rise to the very first mandate of care as a practice that accommodates both the vulnerability of the human body and a

movement beyond corporeal parameters: i.e., the "soul". Here, I am referring to the ancient genealogy of the concept of care as encountered in the myth of the Goddess Cura or Care.

This myth details a conflict that arises when a group of gods comprised of Terra, Cura, and Jupiter compete for the ultimate ownership and naming rights of the human subject they have created. Saturn, who is called to adjudicate the matter, eventually decides to divide the human. A decisive measure was enacted and the human was divided between the three gods. After death, the physical body was sent to Terra. It was agreed that the soul would ascend to Jupiter, who resided in the heavenly realm of Mount Olympus. Finally, the Goddess named Care was allowed to "have and hold" the human for the duration of his/her earthly life. For Warren Reich,[1] the myth of care is summarised as follows:

> As Care (Cura) was crossing a river, she thoughtfully picked up some mud and began to fashion a human being. While she was pondering what she had done, Jupiter came along. (Jupiter was the founder of Olympian society, which consisted of the major gods and goddesses who inhabited Mount Olympus.) Care asked him to give the spirit of life to the human being, and Jupiter readily granted this. Care wanted to name the human after herself, but Jupiter insisted that his name should be given to the human instead. While Care and Jupiter were arguing, Terra arose and said that the human being should be named after her, since she had given her own body. (Terra, or Earth, was the original life force of the earth, and she guided Jupiter's rise to power.) Finally, all three accepted Saturn as judge. (Saturn is known for his devotion to fairness and equality; he was Terra's son and Jupiter's father.) Saturn decided that Jupiter, who gave spirit to the human, would take back its soul after death and, since Terra had offered her body to the human, she should receive it back after death. But, said Saturn, "Since Care first fashioned the human being, let her have and hold it as long as it lives." Finally, Jupiter said, "Let it be called homo (Latin for human being), since it seems to be made from humus (Latin for earth)." (1995: 321)

Reich (1995) registers two primary configurations of shared human experience that impact directly on the mandate of the God Care as delineated in the narrative. The first is intimately linked to the worry of finitude, registering in the myth as the pull to the earth that will

[1] Reich, W. 1995. History of the Notion of Care. *Encyclopaedia of Bioethics* 5:319–331.

visit all humans eventually, whose summative consequence is death. The naming of the human being as "humus" delineates this fate. The second experience is registered in the myth as the spiritual or divine faculty possessed by humans despite their temporal earthly existence. This is symbolised by the upward movement of the soul to Jupiter, which finds its home in the sky (Mount Olympus) after the body has ceased living. By making these two designations clear, Reich reminds us of the delicate work involved in the myth that reveals a necessary "holding" of mankind in a unity, which accommodates the tension between the corporeal and spiritual aspects of human life. This then reveals the work of the goddess "Care". Following Reich's reading, we may understand the earliest notion of care as one that does not compete for a primacy of the body or spirit in its operations, but rather understands these worlds as deeply overlapping.

This particular understanding of care and its relationship to Jeptha's text and context are crucial for this chapter. In the first section, entitled *Time and Text in the Scene of Boxing*, I will draw attention to the important critical status of self-directed texts within the field of boxing. This will enable us to see a complex view of fighters as more than instruments of battle. By setting the scene of formal boxing in South Africa as one that was heavily influenced by the dimension of race and nationalism, I proceed to argue that although Jeptha registers these particular dimensions of society in his booklet, the text enables an alternate thinking on disability as an aesthetic productivity.

The second observation relates to the proximity of the written account that Jeptha mobilises in his text to the concept of "the arc of the self" and especially the *Hupomnemata*, which will be examined in the section entitled, *Understanding the making: Stoic discourse, technology of the self, and the resonance of Hupomnemata*. As a written set of thoughts that offer strategies to increase fortitude, the Hupomnemata provides a natural comparison to the acute instruction and coaching evident in Jeptha's work. The points of divergence and convergence between these two textual forms will be examined using the writing of Michel Foucault that bolster knowledge claims related to the Hupomnemata. *Technology of the self* and *Wounds of the teacher* further emphasise that Jeptha's text has a very clear didactic function. This is evident in Jeptha's self-conscious approach when he is directing his writing at young

fighters. He offers it as an instrument that invests in the rigours of self-directed discipline (technologies of self) with an added legitimacy derived from hard won experience (wounds of the teacher) that operates as a form of rhetoric.

This utilitarian aspect of Jeptha's work, as it relates to his readers, grounds the thinking of the section entitled, *Text and human experience*. The power that text and care enact as a configuration is foregrounded by John Mowitt, especially his thinking of textuality as an immanent and intimate condition that is irreducible to time and space. I will further argue that this emancipatory feature is evident in the writing of Andrew Jeptha as he displays a confidence as a means of connecting his specific life (made distinctive by boxing achievements) to a wide group of aspirants that will never be known to him. This is not a fact that creates anxiety in relation to Jeptha's text, but rather attests to its circuitous quality.

Finally, I turn to a "care-less" reading of boxing in South Africa against which I pit my own research in order to emphasise the potential of my argument for rethinking contemporary debates on aesthetics and politics in a post-apartheid South African setting. *The new man* positions Tyler Fleming's article on boxing and boxers in South Africa during the early to mid 1900s as deficient. Fleming's reading is caught in an emphatic register that recommends boxing as an exclusively corporeal event. This does allow a superficial reading of the performance of fighters in relation to significant victories and their imagined symbolic importance in a highly racialised time in South Africa. However, it also begs the question of how the acts of volition which boxers enact upon themselves function as a self-directed "care" beyond the authorised violence of a contest. By this I mean (and here I am drawing on the initial discussion of care that I deploy in the early sections of the chapter) a particular attitude and procedure which, while addressing aspects of the corporeal (that is, gymnastic and gastronomic preparation), is not exclusively bound to it. This includes, most centrally, the reflective procedures of writing, reading, meditating, and ultimately self-crafting to produce a new social visage. Fleming's engagement with boxing and those who commit to its order is thus critiqued as a symptom of the limited understanding of the sport and its expansive history.

The implications of this critique act as an urgent call to revise the archive of sport and history along the lines of the text and its

relationship to the notion of care. This enables subversive genealogies[2] of "care-full" concepts that do not seek a summative and conclusive argument, but rather asks scholars for a movement of ever-expanding critical designations. In this regard, I conclude the chapter by asserting that Andrew Jeptha's text offers a route to imagining histories of care that are largely unresolved in South Africa. This is an important effect of my enquiry, as it emboldens us to discover (and retain) knowledges of "living" and "caring".[3] This enables the exercise of both the solicitude and re-signification of the self that works against a specific limit of subjugation, which is premised on a biopolitics of assigned difference that was the central logic of the apartheid state. This exercise of care-full consideration is made possible through the manifestation of thoughts that may plot directions of newness that have not been marked in the colonial index.

Time and text in the boxing scene

Time is the official master of the boxing ring: it authorises boxers to fight and then cease when the round is concluded. Time, however, functions in a more substantive way beyond the chronology of a specific contest. Boxers are captured *in* time via their inscription in official fighting records, which fundamentally stages them through the contest's binaries outcome: winner or loser. Yet, we know that many fighters, the earliest in 1798,[4] perform a reversal as they are not only captured *in* time through an inscription denoting success or failure in relation to specific boxing matches, but they also actively

---

[2] The Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape, has adopted the concept of "subversive genealogies" as a productive route to re-thinking the conditions of critique for the post-apartheid space of humanities scholarship.

[3] In taking this particular stance with regard to notions of care, I oppose the pessimistic and self-assured view of John Paley. Although his enquiry is largely directed to the epistemology of care as it operates in the field of nursing, he asserts that care, and studies related to gaining further knowledge of the subject ultimately constitute *"an endless project, whose monotony is matched only by its uselessness. It [care] is the domain of an 'elusive' concept, which is destined to remain elusive-permanently and irretrievably." (2001: 196)*

[4] Mendoza. 1978. *The Art of Boxing*. Here, I refer specifically to the introductory paragraphs, which deal with his motivations for writing the book and discuss the position he enjoyed within his community.

produce texts as the authors of self-directed books. Therefore, boxers achieve a measure of mastery against a *reductive time*, by denoting conditions of their own life in excess of fistic statistics.

This monograph engages with one of these types of publication. Its focus is *A South African Boxer in Britain*, which was authored by Andrew Jeptha: the Cape Town born boxer who, when he won the welterweight championship in 1907 against Curley Watson, became the first black fighter to ever secure an official British title. Although Jeptha was the first black fighter to trouble the British fraternity of boxing with a sanctioned title fight victory, the history of early South African boxing is filled with a number of black fighters who achieved a level of international prominence. The earliest example is Joe Brown of Port Elizabeth. He had the fighting name of "young Pluto" and, on 17th January 1899, [5] engaged in a bout for the world featherweight title in New York. He can therefore be considered the first South African to challenge a world title. Jimmy Dixon and Arthur Cupido serve as additional examples of black fighters from South Africa who were active in the early 1900s. They both travelled to Brazil in 1920 where they competed in the prize ring, with Cupido winning all eight matches.[6]

However, it is Jeptha who is the most significant as a historical subject due to his welterweight title and, because he was a black subject from a colony, it strengthened certain racist fears in Britain at the time, which eventually culminated in the exclusion of all black fighters as challengers for any English boxing title.[7] The nature of this fear related partly to the symbolic power boxing titles held in relation to Nationalism; a view which was clearly articulated by the secretary of the British boxing fraternity in the *News Chronicle* on the 23rd of January 1947:

> It is only right that a small country such as ours should have championships restricted to boxers of white parents—otherwise we might be faced with a situation where all our British titles are held by coloured Empire boxers. (Carter 2011: 6)

---

[5] Greyvenstein, C. 1981. *The Fighters*. Johannesburg: Don Nelson. 59.
[6] Greyvenstein, C.1981. *The Fighters*. Johannesburg: Don Nelson p. 415.
[7] Runstedtler, T. 2010. "White Anglo-Saxon Hopes and Black Americans' Atlantic Dreams: Jack Johnson and the British Boxing Colour Bar". *Journal of World History*. 21(4): 657–689.

The colour bar in boxing officially came into effect when this sentiment was exacerbated by the imminent arrival of Jack Johnson, the black heavyweight champion of America, who was scheduled to challenge the World Title against the British-born Billy Wells in 1911. The merits or dangers of interracial boxing was a matter of heated public debate, involving both civil and religious societies. Fears of an unfair contest due to the perceived heightened instincts and muscular development of black fighters came into play. This was an apparent outcome of an encroaching bio-politics[8] that invited debate about not only the match itself, but also about the broader consequences should a "black" victory occur. These consequences were not only articulated by the British public but also by a number of South African commentators and they linked a black victory in the ring with an imagined rupture in the social fabric of many African colonies if the footage of the fight was to spread. The evidence and symbolic power of a black victory would, it was argued, encourage interracial sexual mixing and the widespread challenge of white authority figures. [9] Eventually, Winston Churchill supported the decision to deny Johnson access. The formal normative enforcement of the colour bar was subsequently codified by the British Boxing Board of Control in 1929. Dick Turpin, who was of mixed heritage, eventually broke the colour bar in 1948 when he secured a victory against Vince Hawkins in a contest for the British middle-weight title.

Beyond the political ramifications of Jeptha's welterweight title fight in 1907, the personal consequences were also very severe for the newly crowned champion, as the title match cost him his eyes, and forced him into avenues beyond boxing to make a living. Indeed, it is commercial, self-published booklet, *A South African Boxer in Britain*, that I analyse as both a historical-material event and,

[8] These imagined qualities troubled many in the white South African public, who were then at the height of segregation and wholly invested in a reductive and damaging bio-politic of apartheid. The black body in contest with a white body (as promised by the Wells/Johnson fight) was seen as highly dangerous by many white South African men, in the sense that it could be seen (they feared) as a "primer" for interracial sexual mixing. This was explained by various social commentators, who not only called for the match and the planned film to be banned, but also offered the sternest of warnings to the "cheerful English girls", by alerting them to the threat of the "Black Peril" (see: Runstedtler, T. 2010: 681).

[9] For further detailed information on the South African commentary on the match see Runstedtler, T. 2010: 678–681.

crucially, as a work of self-thinking (see Chapter 2: Modalities of Self Craft). The booklet is a complex set of social admonishments, in addition to being a training guide and work of boxing strategy. It is comprised of 30 pages, with Andrew Jeptha, in his fighting stance, carefully posed in a photograph on the cover (Figure A). At the time of writing, Jeptha was completely blind. He acknowledged this in the introduction of the book, and carefully described how, through dictation, he was able to present an account of his career to the South African public. The archive that he had collected (comprised of international newspaper clippings and articles) ensured an authenticity and chronology that bolstered his personal recollection of events (Jeptha 1910: 8).

A South African Boxer in Britain must surely become part of a broader public record of an individual who negotiated two worlds (South Africa and Britain) in relation to race and politics, and an individual world of disability. This desire is made all the more urgent when one considers that, currently, the Black Cultural Archive of Britain has as its mandate[10] the preservation and education of contributions made by black subjects in early British society. Despite the fact that boxing is one of their defined categories of research, they have no record of Andrew Jeptha[11] or his achievement. This renders his victory almost obscure in the official boxing records of the British sporting imagination.

Beyond the historical achievement of Andrew Jeptha as a boxer, his book offers a unique and innovative aesthetic contribution, not despite but precisely because of the blindness he endured during its writing. The innovation displayed in the booklet escapes a mere discourse on trauma, as it also specifically focuses on the way writing

[10] Len Garrison, the co-founder of the Black Cultural Archives, created a poem that contributed to the foundational question that inaugurated the focus of its collections: "Where are our heroes, martyrs and monuments?" The aim of promoting and understanding black cultural heritage in relation to London implies a scope that must include Jeptha, due to his importance in the realm of the sporting and cultural life of early London. Black Cultural Archives: http://bcaheritage.org.uk

[11] This fact was ascertained during a research trip to the Black Cultural Archives in Britain in September 2009. No image, article, or cross-reference existed for the South African fighter despite being a welterweight champion. It is telling that many of Jeptha's opponents (British fighters) are catalogued and some entries include large format images.

serves as a potential agency. Therefore, my goal is to analyse how meaning is made, deployed, and moderated through the text to find out exactly what is innovative in the textual rendering of the self. I have termed this "textual ideation". In order for this concept to materialise in the most salient manner, it is necessary to thread the discussion through a grid of intelligibility where history encounters text. To this end, I turn to John Mowitt, Michel Foucault, Jerome McCann, Miley Steele, Paul Smith, Elaine Scarry, and Stephen Greenblatt, who span the fields of both history and textual studies. An interdisciplinary approach is fundamental to the analysis of a century-old book that is about disability, race, and athletics, even as it declares its own space as a training manual and professional fighting record.

Scarry, in her seminal work, *The Body in Pain*,[12] asserts the importance of using ideas collectively when researching the work of disabled individuals, so as to enable the synergy that is made available when a number of frames are held together in relation to the object of production:

> Knowledge about the character of creating and created objects is at present in a state of conceptual infancy. Its illumination will require a richness of work far beyond the frame of any single study: like the activity of "making", the activity of "understanding making" will be a collective rather than a solitary labour. (1985: 279–80)

By embracing this assertion, the implications for my own project are clear in that the imbrication of a number of fields and the concepts they provide offer a productive route to thinking about Jeptha's text in a substantive and radical way. With this in mind, I will now turn to the ancient archive of the Greco Roman culture in order to reveal the complexity of concepts found in the text.

Understanding the making: Stoic discourse, technology of the self, and the resonance of the Hupomnemata

A radial reading of the concept of the boxer and the texts that have been produced surrounding this figure, may be traced back to Greek and Roman antiquity. These provide ancient records of the life and

[12] Scarry, E. 1985. *The Body in Pain: The making and unmaking of the world*. New York: Oxford University Press.

training of pugilists, and thus create an important archive from which many foundational ideas about the form and structure of boxing may be gleaned. These ideas are evident, not merely as revealed in written texts but also as artworks (see, for example, the sculpture *Pugilist at rest* in Chapter four) that speak directly to the cult of the fighter. They are, therefore, valuable as objects that bring both embodied and emotive discursive propositions to bear. Joyce Carol Oates notes that even the current model of the boxing match cannot escape its intimate link to the ancient gladiatorial culture and particularly the combat arena, which is seen most clearly when the fighter in contemporary contests is either counted *in*, or *out*, after he falls. This is a time- based modality that directly relates to the ancient signal of the Roman emperor who authorised death (or not) as a consequence of public interaction.[13]

While the fighting contests of the ancient Romans had an emphatically public modality, it is the personal exercises performed by athletes, who followed the Stoic school of philosophy, that illuminate *A South African Boxer in Britain* as a text that speaks to an intimate and personal space of the self, even though it is prefaced on the highly public world of prize fighting. There are unequivocal instances when gladiators in the arena are described as philosophers and stoics as opposed to mere combatants. This was largely because of the self-imposed discipline that was displayed in the days leading up to their gladiatorial encounter and the highly-practiced behaviour ultimately required in the face of death. Here, I am referring to specific instances when Galin of Pergamum, the personal physician to Marcus Aurelius, describes the Christian gladiators as notable in their discernment and self-control in matters of food and drink in the training camps.[14] In his estimation, boxers attained the status of "genuine philosophers" when they were eventually confronted with inescapable death. He also believed that they displayed remarkable equanimity, which he ascribed to their stoic training. A notable example of this feat is credited to Saturus, a Christian martyr, who guided the quivering hand of a novice fighter to her throat once she was crippled in the ring, thus seizing the course of the contest.[15]

---

[13] Oates, J. 1985. *On Boxing*. New York: Dolphin/Doubleday.
[14] See: Denzy, N (2010) Facing the Beast: Justin, Christian Martyrdom, and Freedom of the Will. In Rasimus, T, Engberg-Pedersen, T & Dunderberg, I. Eds. *Stoicism in Early Christianity*. Baker Academic: Grand Rapids.188.
[15]. Ibid