

**Narratives of Performance: An Interdisciplinary Qualitative
Ethnography Investigating the Storied Lives of Amateur and
Professional Boxers**

**Submitted by Paul Solomon Lennox, to the University of Exeter as a thesis
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Drama, August 2012.**

**This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is
copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published
without proper acknowledgment**

**I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been
identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved
for the award of a degree by this or any other University.**

Signature.....

Abstract

This thesis identifies the shared pool of narrative resources, which constitute the public discourses and cultural meanings of the sport of boxing, in order to examine how individual boxers engage with them when performing their narrative identities. It is argued that the shared pool of narrative resources for boxing contain myths and legends that are taken for granted and yet heavily invested in by boxers and academics alike. This project explores how individual boxers engage with these resources in order to make sense of their own experiences and to formulate their narrative identity. The thesis asks how a thorough investigation of the shared narrative resources, and their use by boxers, provides new insights into what the sport of boxing means to boxers, and how shared resources are engaged with in order to perform idiosyncratic ontological narratives.

This project makes a unique contribution, as it is the first project of its kind to fully consider the relationship between the individual accounts provided by boxers and the narrative resources available to them. It pays particular focus to the narrative resources as they relate to amateur and professional boxers alike. Through a performance ethnography, and qualitative inquiry approach, research data was collected and co-constructed over a period of three years. This data informed the reading of boxing texts in order to ascertain what the shared pool of narrative resources were for boxers, and how individuals used and engaged with them. This project found that the narrative resources of boxing were powerful, persuasive, and provided vocabularies of motives for individual boxers. The shared pool of resources, whilst constitutive of the cultural

meanings of boxing, were engaged with by individual boxers to tell stories about the desire for transformation, communion, respect and generativity.

Contents

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Introduction..... | |
| ..6 | |
| Methodology..... | |
| .8 | |
| Research | |
| Sites..... | 12 |
| The Importance of Boxing | |
| Stories..... | 18 |
| Boxing Narratives | |
| Contextualized..... | 21 |
| Boxing Texts, Ethnographies and Meta | |
| narratives..... | 24 |
| Masculinity, Femininity and | |
| Industrialization..... | 25 |
| Boxing | |
| Ethnographies..... | 31 |
| Non-ethnographic | |
| Studies..... | 42 |
| Narrative: Making Meaning of Experience and the Performance of | |
| Identity..... | 44 |
| Overview..... | 5 |
| 0 | |
| Conclusion..... | |
| 56 | |
| Chapter I: Auto- | |
| ethnography..... | 58 |
| J.R's Voyage to Foreign | |
| Lands..... | 60 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Sheffield: First | |
| Impressions..... | 63 |
| Second | |
| Day..... | 67 |
| The Brendan | |
| Effect..... | 69 |
| Feeling Out the New | |
| Guy..... | 79 |
| March | |
| 2010..... | 81 |
| August | |
| 2010..... | 87 |
| August 22, 2011: Wincobank, | |
| Sheffield..... | 88 |
| August 29, | |
| 2011..... | 91 |
| Exeter: Soaked and | |
| Drained..... | 92 |
| Testing..... | |
| 93 | |
| First | |
| Fights..... | 95 |
| Damage..... | |
| 95 | |
| Nerves..... | 9 |
| 7 | |
| The Mental | |
| Battle..... | 98 |
| Cancelled..... | |
| 01 | |
| Meat..... | 10 |
| I | |
| Unification and Discord: July 28, | |
| 2010..... | 102 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| August 20, | |
| 2010..... | 103 |
| August 24, | |
| 2010..... | 103 |
| September 20, | |
| 2010..... | 104 |
| Switching Camps, November 17, | |
| 2010..... | 104 |
| My | |
| Gym..... | 108 |
| Nerves - Again: September 13, | |
| 2011..... | 111 |
| September to November | |
| 2011..... | 113 |
| Fight | |
| Night..... | 120 |
| Conclusion..... | |
| 27 | |
| Chapter 2: The Narrative Resources of Boxing: Reviewing the | |
| Field..... | 129 |
| Introduction..... | |
| 29 | |
| Story | |
| Types..... | 130 |
| Cultural Meaning, Public | |
| Story..... | 133 |
| Transformation..... | |
| 135 | |
| Legacy and | |
| Heroes..... | 136 |
| Compensatory Drive and the Familial and Genealogical | |
| Resources..... | 140 |
| Crime and | |
| Salvation..... | 145 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Discovery..... | 1 |
| 50 | |
| The Commoditization of Boxing | |
| Bodies..... | 151 |
| Slavery, Prostitution and | |
| Husbandry..... | 154 |
| Animals..... | 1 |
| 56 | |
| Age..... | 15 |
| 8 | |
| Money..... | 16 |
| 5 | |
| Conclusion..... | 1 |
| 68 | |
| Chapter 3 Ontological Narratives and the Engagement with Pre-identified | |
| Narrative Resources and | |
| Themes..... | 170 |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| 70 | |
| Tales of Becoming: Identifying as a boxer and the Transition from | |
| Nobody to | |
| Somebody..... | 1 |
| 71 | |
| The Familial- | |
| Genealogical..... | 177 |
| Compensatory | |
| Drive..... | 185 |
| Crime and | |
| Salvation..... | 190 |
| Conclusion..... | 2 |
| 02 | |
| Chapter 4: A Generative | |
| Tale..... | 204 |
| Introduction..... | 2 |
| 04 | |

| | |
|---|----------|
| Methodology..... | 2 |
| 05 | |
| Experiential and Performative Ethnography: Transgressive | |
| Data.....208 | |
| Context, Background and | |
| Overview.....209 | |
| Global | |
| Impressions.....214 | |
| Components of the Global | |
| Impression.....215 | |
| Conclusion.....2 | |
| 36 | |
| Thesis | |
| Conclusion.....240 | |
| Introduction.....2 | |
| 40 | |
| What was | |
| Achieved?.....242 | |
| Limitations and Plans for | |
| Development.....255 | |
| Dissemination.....2 | |
| 60 | |
| Bibliography..... | |
| 264 | |