No Sharper Steel, No Lovelier Treasure: The Cult of the Sword throughout History

Why do we imbue swords with honorific, ritual, and even mystical qualities? And what do Vikings, fencing, and Star Trek have in common? As a fencer myself, I analyze a broad spectrum of historical, scholarly, literary, and popular culture sources to evaluate the types and extent of the sword’s influence and portrayal, discussing its relevance in sports, historical context, and popular works of fiction. The development of the sword is intertwined with the development of humanity; the cult of the sword is an integral aspect of Western culture. By examining in particular the evolution of fencing from combat and duels, I mark the progress of the sword, not merely technologically, but in terms of cultural relevance. Even in modern times, swords remain significant; we recognize the sword as a representation of courage, valor, and power, both in popular culture and elsewhere. This paper discusses the sword, both historical and modern-day, as a symbol and inherent piece of Western cultural consciousness.

Keywords: fencing, sword, myth, pop culture, duel, combat, weapon, ritual, sports