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THE MILITARY FIGURE AS TRAGIC HERO:
UNDERSTANDING THE ACTIONS OF MACBETH

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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by

Allen J. Gill

1994

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

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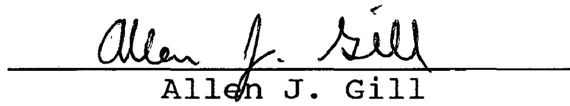

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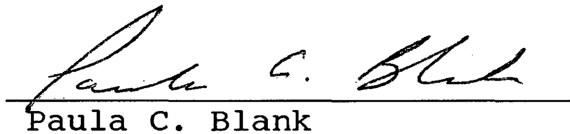

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ABSTRACT

Central to Shakespeare's Macbeth, as well as to most of the older criticism written about the play, are the motivations of the protagonist and the influences on him that produce such horrendous actions. Interpretations of the play in the first half of the twentieth century usually conclude that Macbeth's demise is brought about because of his great ambition. Harry Shaw's Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms uses Macbeth as an example under the entry for the Aristotelian concept of hamartia, an error in judgement on the part of a tragic hero: "The hamartia of Macbeth is ambition."

Though scholarship about the character of Macbeth expanded in the 1960's to the 1980's to include explanations of his actions based on psychoanalytic, gender, feminist, deconstructionist and other theories, one aspect of the play has been largely ignored: Macbeth's status as a soldier and the prevalence of things martial in the play. Paul Jorgensen wrote in 1956 that Shakespeare "seems to have specially chosen military men as tragic heros," and that this could "justify a common study of these men as warriors." Yet Jorgensen and other scholars have not offered a discussion that specifically considers Macbeth in these terms.

This study will investigate Macbeth's military background and experience as the cause of his actions when he attempts to move from the camp to the court. Evidence is presented, both from within the play and from sources outside of it, that Shakespeare conceived of Macbeth as a military figure. Military language, martial music, and carnage reminiscent of the battles which both begin and end the play are the defining elements of this tragedy. This thesis will demonstrate that Macbeth is largely an attempt by Shakespeare to reveal the dangers inherent in a society that cultivates martial heroism above all other forms of heroism. Furthermore, the play shows an audience what the results are when a misguided hero brings the acts of the battlefield into society.

THE MILITARY FIGURE AS TRAGIC HERO:
UNDERSTANDING THE ACTIONS OF MACBETH

For only in destroying I find ease
To my relentless thoughts.
Paradise Lost, ix, 128-29

I.

Of all the protagonists in Shakespearean tragedies the actions and motivations of Macbeth are the most difficult to comprehend. Macbeth's crimes are indisputably heinous, including regicide against his own kinsman, the killing of Duncan's guards to cover his crime, arranging the murder of Banquo, his friend and brother in arms, the attempted murder of Banquo's son, and the arranged assassination of the defenseless Lady Macduff and her children. The abominable nature and number of these crimes is matched by no other of Shakespeare's tragic heroes. The fact that the murder of Duncan is not committed by Macbeth in a state of ignorance, either of its repulsiveness or of the possible repercussions and consequences, makes it all the more difficult to understand. Macbeth, particularly in the murder of Duncan, carefully weighs and considers the effect his action will likely have on his life, if not his immortal soul, before choosing the option to kill.

If one is to comprehend this savagery the task requires more than a study of the obvious motivations of Macbeth and influences upon him; ambition, the quest for power, the supernatural influence of the three witches and the encouragement of the iron-willed Lady Macbeth, are only partially responsible for Macbeth's behavior. These factors,

though important, cannot explain the Macbeth we meet at the beginning of the play. Their importance is exaggerated by the compression of time in this shortest of Shakespearean tragedies. In a larger sense, these motivations and influences cannot explain the play itself as a tragedy in an Aristotelian sense; a work that "will arouse either pity or fear -- actions of that nature being what Tragedy is assumed to represent" (2324). If these influences were intended by Shakespeare as the only reasons for the great evil that Macbeth succumbs to, audiences would be more likely to feel relief, a sense that justice has been carried out, and perhaps even happiness at the demise of Macbeth in the last act of the play, rather than the sense of pity and fear which Aristotle believed were the essential emotions which a tragedy should evoke.

Little of Macbeth's previous history or biography as a character is revealed by Shakespeare. The one aspect of Macbeth's character that is made clear from the outset is that he is an accomplished warrior within a society that values and praises martial skill. It is within Macbeth's military character that the clues to his brutal behavior and the play's success as a tragedy are to be found.[1] There is ample evidence to suggest that Shakespeare conceived of Macbeth as a military figure whose fall and status as a tragic hero are the result of his experience as a soldier and the formation of his character in the destructive and killing atmosphere of war. The action of the play demonstrates the consequences of a

soldier's bringing the acts and horrors of war into the realm of peace and the heart of society. A Brigade Commander who had served several combat tours as a junior officer in Vietnam once told me that combat changes everyone that participates in it, and that his experience was "that most people are changed for the better, but some are made much, much worse." Macbeth is Shakespeare's testament to the truth of these words.

As a soldier, Macbeth has been thoroughly exposed to the dark and bloody side of human nature. It would be inaccurate, however, to say that the military background of Macbeth causes him to suffer from some type of tragic flaw which brings about his destruction. Rather, the very traits, abilities, and experiences Macbeth has gained as a warrior, which have garnered for him fame, renown, and positions of honor within his society, are the same qualities and traits which most directly contribute to his downfall when he utilizes the acts of war in his attempted transition from the battlefield to the throne.

In a discussion of Shakespearean soldiers in his book Shakespeare's Military World, Paul Jorgensen has pointed out that although "no two of Shakespeare's generals fail as citizens for the same reason . . . . almost to a man they do fail." Borrowing from a line of Coriolanus, Jorgensen identifies the failure as a function, in most cases, of "warriors moving inexpertly from the casque to the cushion" (215). Jorgensen clearly identifies a common theme of

Shakespeare's, the social displacement of soldiers, either sought after or pushed upon them, from the military arena into a different role, often political. Whether identified by the euphemisms from "casque to cushion," or from "camp to court," clearly the phenomenon is of significance to understanding Macbeth, whose crimes are committed in his attempt to rise from general to king. Jorgensen points out that the failure of Shakespearean soldiers to make the transition from camp to court should warrant "a common study of these men as warriors" (215), notes that Macbeth is one of "Shakespeare's later and ill-fated generals" (91), and states that in Macbeth "the sick country" of Scotland "must be purged by war" (190).

Jorgensen also draws attention to the tremendous importance of military music to Macbeth, stating that Shakespeare provided "tension for the closing scenes" through the "atmospheric uses of martial music." He notes that the fifth act of the play "from the second scene through the eighth, is drawn tensely together by the now intermittent, now steady, beating of drums . . . . announcing the approach of army after army to the place of Macbeth's last stand," while "within the thirty-nine lines which compromise scenes six and seven" (33) there are five instances of musical directions for martial music. All of this is of importance, Jorgensen states, because music was the primary means used by Shakespeare to recreate on stage the experience of war and battle for his audience and to inspire its imagination. Music is used as:

> Shakespeare's most effective and most consciously sought technique . . . . in transporting his audience from the immediate experience of battle -- in which sounds, cannon, and blows have a precise, uncolored meaning -- to a superior level of imaginative participation. (34)

Despite his identification of the martial music, motifs, and characteristics that pervade Macbeth, Jorgensen neglects, or dismisses, the importance of the tragic hero's military character to the play. He states that in creating the character of Macbeth, Shakespeare "had [in mind] other frictions so much more pertinent to the individual's nature that a study of soldierly disabilities would lie mainly outside the play" (215).[2] Though Jorgensen's assessment of Shakespeare's military characters is formidable, and while a study of Macbeth's "soldierly disabilities" may require reliance on some sources outside the play, such a study in my opinion would involve the most "pertinent friction" contributing to Macbeth's demise. By dramatizing the downfall of an eminent soldier Shakespeare is indicting not just Macbeth, for whose fate there is evidence that Shakespeare intended pity, but any society, whether of the Middle Ages, Elizabethan, or modern, that deigns to sanction and reward the abrogation of the sixth commandment. Alfred Harbage is correct when he states that "Macbeth is the shortest of Shakespeare's tragedies and the simplest in its statement: Thou shalt not kill" (Harbage's emphasis, 1107), but what the critic fails to address is the effect on Macbeth of having violated this commandment as a soldier many times before the action of the

play begins.

Soldiers, clergymen, statesmen, and philosophers have long pondered the problems that arise from the sanctioned killing of other humans. In a society in which strong christian religious beliefs and literal biblical interpretation were more the rule than the exception, such as Elizabethan England, it is not surprising that the question of killing and the legitimacy of soldiers and war should generate great interest and debate. Barnaby Rich (1542-1617), a soldier by vocation who became a prolific and popular writer, invested an inordinate amount of time and energy in his military treatises and books attempting to justify the necessity of war, the profession of arms, and the actions required of soldiers in war.

In Rich's treatise, _Allarme to England_, he acknowledges the arguments of his detractors for his writing on, and justifying of, war:

> I know there be many whose consciences be so scrupulous, that they think no warres may be lawfully attempted, allowed of by God's word, or agreeing with true christianitie, for the number of outrages which by it are committed. (A.i.2)

Yet Rich determines that he can easily show "what proofs may be alleadged in the defence of warre," particularly those "in the holy Scriptures where they have been allowed of, and many times commanded by the almightie God himselfe" (A.i.2). Rich then writes several pages to justify his position in which he cites the military exploits of Abraham in _Genesis_, Moses in

Numerals, Saul in Kings, and Josaphat in Chronicles, stating that "these may seeme sufficient to prove that warres have been acceptable before the majestie of God" (A.i-A.iii).

In his book Faultes Faults and Nothing Else but Faultes, Rich takes his defense of soldiers and war a step further, insisting that "warre is a minister of Gods Justice, eyther for contempt of himselfe, of his religion, or the wicked life of worldlings, so that it is the sinnes of the people that unsheatheth the Soldiers sword" (47). The significance of these examples and justifications, a small sample of the many written just by Rich, is that the author seems to protest too much. The fact that Rich felt he must explain and defend war, thereby justifying the abrogation of the sixth commandment that all war entails, attests to the significance of the debate on the topic of sanctioned killing, and suggests it troubled even a hardened and experienced soldier such as Rich.

Perhaps such debate, and the significant moral, ethical, and social questions that it includes and engenders, attracted the attention of Shakespeare in his quest for dramatic material. Melvin Wolf notes that Rich was an "important figure in his own day" whose "works were widely read" (12), and Thomas Cranfill states that Rich's collection of stories, Farewell to the Military Profession, was "an Elizabethan best-seller," and provides irrefutable proof that these works were used by Shakespeare as source documents for his plays (xlvii-lii). While noting that Shakespeare "did not treat Rich with

the respect he accorded Holinshed or North," and that Shakespeare may have laughed, along with other readers, at some of Rich's less ingenious works, Cranfill states that "one can imagine a worse fate for a group of short stories than to be laughed at, read -- and used by William Shakespeare" (xlvii). I submit that in Rich's treatises and books defending the necessity of war and killing, and in the texts of other authors that wrote on the same subject, Shakespeare may well have found a topic that is central to Macbeth.

II.

Our first glimpse of Macbeth's character is through the eyes of others. At a critical and decisive moment of battle, when the outcome for Duncan's forces is very much in doubt, a wounded captain reports that the tide of battle has been turned in favor of Duncan. This feat has been accomplished almost singlehandedly by Macbeth, whose "brandish'd steel" has "smok'd with bloody execution" while it "carve'd out his passage" through human flesh to reach Macdonwald, chief of the forces opposing Duncan (1.2.17-19). Upon reaching his opponent Macbeth "ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him / Till he unseam'd him from the nave to th' chops / And fix'd his head upon our battlements" (1.2.21-3). As the enemy regroups and begins a second attack Macbeth and Banquo are undaunted, and in classic battle rage their "strokes upon the foe" are "doubly redoubled" (1.2.39). The "bloody man" (1.2.1.) who has witnessed their heroism asserts that Macbeth and Banquo "meant

to bathe in reeking wounds, / Or memorize another Golgotha" (1.2.39-41).

These magnificent and horribly descriptive passages introduce the imagery of blood and violence that pervades the play. The image of blood appears in the speech of almost every character, and is used in increasingly broader applications. Lady Macbeth cries for spirits to "make thick my blood" for assisting in the murder of Duncan (1.5.42). After the act her guilt drives her to wonder "who would have thought the old / man to have had so much blood in him," while declaring that no amount of perfume will remove "the smell of blood" from her hand (5.1.37-8,47). Macbeth also wonders whether "Neptune's ocean [will] wash this blood / Clean from my hand" (2.2.59-60). He sees "gouts of blood" (2.1.46) on the imaginary dagger that points the way toward the "most bloody piece of work" (2.3.126), the "more than bloody deed" (2.4.21), that he performs. The vision of Banquo's bloody ghost drives Macbeth to declare that "It will have blood, they say: blood will have blood" (3.4.121). Even the country of Scotland itself "weeps" and "bleeds" according to Malcolm, who declares that "each new day a gash / Is added to her wounds" (4.3.40-41). Macduff also evokes the image of Scotland as a wounded and stricken being in his lament, "Bleed, bleed, poor country" (4.3.31).

A. C. Bradley has noted that "it is as if the poet saw the whole story through an ensanguined mist," and that "the vividness, magnitude and violence of the imagery . . . . are

characteristic of Macbeth almost throughout . . . . and their influence contributes to form its atmosphere" (278-9). One may wonder what kind of atmosphere this is. I assert that Shakespeare's imagery of blood and violence, in conjunction with the imagery of night, darkness, storm and tumult that fills the play, places the reader or audience directly into the arena of war, a place of blood, destruction, and violent death. Macbeth, who has previously been repeatedly exposed to this atmosphere in battle, brings it with him into the world of peace. In the "bloody business" of killing Duncan, Macbeth reveals the nature of the world which he inhabits, the "one half-world" of darkness, death, and thinly veiled violence where "nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse / The curtain'd sleep" (2.1.48-51). It is no wonder, as Bradley has noted, that one's imagination "is scarcely for a moment permitted to dwell on thoughts of peace and beauty" (279). Shakespeare isn't concerned with these things here. His motive is to transport his audience into the world of battle and carnage, and thereby into the mind of Macbeth, by revealing and describing in vivid detail the bloody nature of the soldier's business: the killing and maiming of other human beings. Simultaneously, by revealing other characters responses to Macbeth's rampage, Shakespeare comments on the nature of a society and a power that not only sanctions killing and brutality, but encourages it.

By disemboweling Macdonwald, beheading the corpse and

placing the head on a battlement, by carving his way through human flesh, by attempting "to bathe in reeking wounds," Macbeth receives the accolades and admiration of all those around him. Marilyn French notes that although the bloody descriptions of his actions "might shock and appall an audience, might imply that the hero is not totally admirable, we hear only praise for Macbeth," and much of this praise "comes from Duncan, the king, the authority figure" (58).[3] In light of his actions he is variously described as "brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name)" by the wounded captain (1.2.16), "valiant cousin! worthy gentleman!" (1.2.24) and "noble Macbeth" by Duncan (1.2.69), and "most worthy Thane" (1.3.106) by Rosse. He is granted the title of Thane of Cawdor for his valorous actions by the grateful Duncan, who has ironically just put the former holder of this title to death for being a traitor. Duncan goes on to elevate Macbeth, his "worthiest cousin," further by downplaying his own generosity in bestowing these honors; "the sin of my ingratitude even now / was heavy on me . . . . More is thy due than more than all can pay" (1.4.14-21).

Clearly, Macbeth is a soldier who excels in bloody battle. His violent nature and bloody experiences are encouraged by, and a product of, a society and a sovereign which sanction the abrogation of the sixth commandment, as long as the killing serves the purpose of the sovereign and the state. What cannot be predicted, any more than it can be

prevented, is that a man whose military experiences have repeatedly exposed him to the realities of bloody death and dismemberment may see other situations and opportunities in the context of past experience, and reach beyond the boundaries that society has prescribed for the utilization of killing. Marilyn French notes that

> at the end of this play we accept without demur the judgement that Macbeth is a butcher. In fact, however, he is no more of a butcher then than he is at the opening. His crime is not in being a murderer; he is praised and rewarded for being a murderer. His crime is a failure to make the distinctions his culture accepts among the objects of his slaughter. (58)

Regardless of whether one wants to argue over semantic differences between the word kill and murder, it is clear that French is correct in a very important respect; every act that Macbeth commits or hires others to commit in the course of the play is much the same, as far as physical characteristics are concerned, to the acts he has performed again and again on the battlefield in his role as a loyal soldier.

The characters and spirits that influence Macbeth understand that he is first and foremost a soldier. The rhetoric of their speeches is carefully couched in language that is designed to appeal to his warrior background, to encourage his ambition and combine it with war's violence in securing his desires. Their advice strikes its target, accomplishes its purpose, and is answered in the same soldierly language. "But screw your courage to the sticking-place, / And we'll not fail," insists Lady Macbeth, invoking

a metaphor of weaponry (1.7.61). "I am settled, and bend up / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat," responds Macbeth, using the same metaphor of stringed weapons for his resolve (1.7.80). On his second visit to the witches he is advised by one apparition to "Be bloody, bold, and resolute," and by another to "Be lion-mettled, proud, and take no care / Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are" (4.1. 80, 90-91). These words seem more appropriate for a military commander going into battle than for a man who is contemplating murder, and again it works: "From this moment, / The very firstlings of my heart shall be / The firstlings of my hand," Macbeth answers, "No boasting like a fool; / This deed I'll do, before this purpose cool" (4.2.146-48, 153-54). Such language was chosen by Shakespeare to reinforce the facts that Macbeth's background is that of a soldier, that he conceives of himself in such terms, that others see him in such terms, and that his actions are made possible to a great extent because of this background and conception of himself.

That Macbeth is capable of transferring the acts of the battlefield to the court and that he is strangely susceptible to violent thoughts are points made by Shakespeare early in the play. In Macbeth's reaction to the tempting prophecy of the witches it is significant that Macbeth immediately interprets the third witch's assertion that he "shalt be King hereafter" (1.3.50) as a prophesy that will require of him a bloody and murderous act: "why do I yield to that suggestion

/ Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair, / and make my seated heart knock" (1.3.134-36). The horrid image is, of course, a mental picture of himself murdering Duncan. Though this murder "yet is but fantastical," Macbeth acknowledges that it "shakes so my single state of man, / That function is smother'd in surmise" (1.3.140-41). This image is so vivid and powerful that Macbeth's temporary inability to dismiss it and the power it holds over him is obvious to Banquo, who remarks "look, how our partner's rapt" (1.3.143). The importance of this initial reaction to the prophecy, the image of killing as a means to jump from casque to cushion, is that it is Macbeth's first step in displacing the acts of a warrior in battle to a civilian environment. It is the thought that will determine the course of action that he will follow for the remainder of the play. The significance of this initial indication that Macbeth has a propensity to transfer violence away from the battlefield is not undercut, but in fact heightened, by the second and obviously more rational argument that occurs to him as a mere afterthought: "If chance will have me King, why, Chance may crown me, Without my stir" (1.3.143-44).

That Macbeth's mind immediately succumbs to visions of violence in reaction to the temptation of power and position that the witches hold before him is perhaps an indication that he has contemplated the position of king for himself, if not the bloody deeds of achieving it, before. It may be that his valorous actions in combat have been the physical expression

of the desire to advance himself. The brevity of the play and the limited background of Macbeth's character will only allow conjecture on these points. However, in Macbeth's immediate consideration of Duncan's murder, we are granted an insight into the nature of Macbeth's violent perceptions of ways and means, and an introduction to the disdainful manner in which he regards human life.

III.

Macbeth's first disquisition on the nature of life is an ironic masterpiece. On the surface, it is a monument to deceit, a morbid sermon preached to Duncan's sons in an attempt to avert suspicion away from himself for the murder of their father:

> There's nothing serious in mortality;
> All is but toys: renown and grace is dead;
> The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
> Is left this vault to brag of. (2.3.91-940)

Though the speech is effective as a tactic of deception, it is also the heartfelt philosophy of a warrior who knows too well how easily extinguishable and expendable human life is, a soldier who has lost his mooring in a moral sense. "This is no mere acting," says Bradley, "it is meant to deceive, but it utters at the same time his profoundest feeling" (297), a feeling that I argue is the direct result of his experience as a soldier. This passage provides a double perspective on Macbeth's character. It encourages a glance backward at his bloody warrior background, the primary cause of his pessimism, and foreshadows the utter despair he will express later.

Macbeth's point of view is one that has been expressed and noted by other soldiers and dramatic characters with combat experience. Glenn Gray, a philosopher, writer, and veteran of four years in the Second World War, offers insights that are useful in interpreting Macbeth's speeches. As a man who received his draft notification and doctorate of philosophy from Columbia in the same day's mail, Gray approaches his subject with learning and detachment as well as practical experience (viii).[4] Gray states that his "deepest fear" of his experiences in war, a fear that still lingers years later,

> is that these happenings had no real purpose. Just as chance often appeared to rule my course then, so the more ordered paths of peace might well signify nothing or nothing much. This conclusion I am unwilling to accept without a struggle; indeed, I cannot accept it at all except as a counsel of despair. (24)

Macbeth's soliloquy on the death of Lady Macbeth is the speech of a man who has accepted this conclusion. The soliloquy is essentially a recapitulation and expansion of the emotions Macbeth expresses immediately after Duncan's murder, and it reveals him to be a man who has succumbed to Gray's deepest fear:

> Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more: it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing. (5.5.24-28)

Macbeth is living Gray's nightmare, fighting and losing the same struggle over the significance of life that Gray fought

and overcame. The sentiments of this speech are the same as those expressed after Duncan's murder. This time he is deceiving no one, and the irony of his first speech hovers over the second in the bitter knowledge, both of audience and protagonist, that Macbeth's murderous acts have not provided him the security and position that he sought, and have led to the death of his wife through her participation in them.

The perception that life is essentially meaningless is a conclusion that is reached by other Renaissance military characters as well. In George Chapman's The Conspiracie of Charles Duke of Byron, Byron states that "There is no truth of any good / To be discerned on earth: and by conversion / Nought therefore simply bad." In an expression similar to Macbeth's, Byron states his belief that life is essentially amoral in nature. Whatever moral meaning there is in life is a purely human construction. Expanding his philosophy to identify the source of meaning that others find in life, Byron uses the metaphor of a tapestry's threads, that are woven with "imaginouse fancie" and often mislead those who look at the finished product as to the nature of the scene it depicts:

> so all things here [on earth],
> Have all their price set downe, from mens concepts,
> Which make all terms and actions, good, or bad,
> And are but pliant, and wel-coloured threads,
> Put into fained images of truth:
> To which, to yeeld, and kneele, as truth-pure kings,
> That puld us downe with cleere truth of their Ghospell,
> Were Superstition to be hist to hell. (3.1.48-62)

Byron argues that "mens concepts" alone define good and bad, and that these constructions are only "fained images of

truth," with no more bearing on reality than the artist's rendition of the external world in a tapestry. He regards these constructions as nothing more than "Superstition to be hist to hell." The last three lines are ambiguous, but imply at least two related meanings. One interpretation is that "truth pure-kings" make use of these constructions to justify their policies and sovereignty as "cleere truth of the Ghospell." Another interpretation is that most men abide by and fail to question these constructions because they view them as "truth-pure kings," and are therefore "puld down with cleere truth of their Ghospell," which Byron regards as no gospel at all, but as superstitious nonsense.

No matter how the passage is interpreted, it is clear that Byron feels he has seen through the threads that make up the philosophical, political, and religious foundations of belief on which his society is based. He questions and undermines the philosophy of the divine right of kings, the use of which he feels is no more than the invoking of religious principles in order to justify a sovereign's wishes and to assist in controlling subjects. Byron's view of life is essentially a politicized type of atheism that probably has its source in Lucretian philosophy.[5] What makes it notable and interesting, and applicable to a study of Macbeth, is that Chapman's character arrives at his conclusions about the nature of the world in which he lives as a result of his experiences as a soldier and the abrogation of the sixth

commandment that combat entails. Like Macbeth in his contemplation of Duncan's murder, Byron has taken the initial mental step that precedes action for the misguided warrior, a step that leads both characters outside the jurisdiction of their societies and severs the bonds they have lived by as officially sanctioned soldiers.

Byron's vision of human existence, as a soldier and warrior, has developed along lines similar to Macbeth's. As Byron repeatedly insists, he is the bearer of "five and thirty wounds" that have been born for his country. Like Macbeth he is admired and honored for his service. King Henry, whom Byron plots against, states that Byron "sets valour in his height, / And hath done service to an equal pitch" (2.2.89-90). Even after being advised that Byron is involved in a conspiracy Henry declares that though Byron "be a little tainted . . . . He that hath borne wounds for his worthy parts, / Must for his wurst be borne with" (2.2.26-34).

Byron's demise as a tragic hero is much more easily traced to his battle experiences than is Macbeth's demise. Chapman's play is much longer than Shakespeare's, and the character of Byron as a soldier is more highly developed. Once Byron defines his stance as a soldier who no longer believes in the authority and powers under which he has served, and from which he has profited, it is only a short leap for him to justify his own usurpation of power and law. "I am a nobler substance then the Starres," he asserts, questioning whether

"the baser" shall "over-rule the better" (3.3.110-11). He is both defining himself by his soldier's background and setting himself on the road to ruin when he insists that

> There is no danger to a man, that knowes
> What life and death is: there's not any law,
> Exceeds his knowledge; neither is it lawful
> That he should stoope to any other lawe.
> He goes before them, and commands them all,
> That to him-selfe is a law rationall. (3.3.140-45)

Byron is essentially lost when he decides that "there's not any law" that "exceeds" the knowledge of "life and death" that he has gained as a soldier, and that he "him-self is a law rationall." It is this line of reasoning, so clearly expressed by Byron, that ensures his destruction. These same ideas, and perhaps a similar philosophy of atheism that is expressed more obtusely but rendered into action, lead to the damnation of Macbeth. Though his speeches are not as lengthy, revealing, and egotistical as Byron's, his actions in killing and usurping power for himself identify him as a sharer of Byron's beliefs. Surely Macbeth is a member of Byron's camp, so to speak, in philosophical alignment, self elevation, and disdain for the existing order. In his dagger speech Macbeth reaches conclusions about his powers and status as a soldier similar to Byron's.

The "fatal vision" (2.1.36) that appears to Macbeth may be a hallucination, but for him it is real, a palpable symbol of the bloody thoughts and past deeds that are coming together in his mind. As John Mitchell states, "he does see it . . . . he tries to take it . . . . he's not drunk; he's not mad, and

there are no witches on stage conjuring up the dagger. He sees it" (99, Mitchell's emphasis). The vision is important not only because the dagger is the weapon which Macbeth has planned to use in Duncan's murder, but also because it is a "dagger of the mind," (2.1.38) an edged weapon that drips with "gouts of blood," (2.1.46) and is symbolic of the entire weight of Macbeth's previous actions in combat as a soldier that lead him in the direction of killing in another arena. It recalls his "brandish'd steel / Which smok'd with bloody execution" (1.2.17-18) in the battle at the beginning of the play, and now Macbeth will execute again. He tries to deny the dagger-vision as "a false creation" (2.1.38) and seems to reach the conclusion that "there's no such thing /It is the bloody business which informs / Thus to mine eyes" (2.1.47-49). But it is at this juncture that Macbeth chooses as a soldier, like Byron, to become his own "law rationall," and his ultimate decision is to accept the vision of the bloody weapon's summoning, to use the actual dagger which he has drawn while addressing the imaginary one. He gives in to the dark "one half-world" of his character, the portion that has been formed in war, where "Nature seems dead," "Witchcraft celebrates," and "wither'd Murther . . . . towards his design / Moves like a ghost" (2.1.50-56). By accepting this world of night, darkness, and death and embracing his "dagger of the mind" Macbeth exhibits his own atheism, rejecting any plan or order in the world except his own plan of murder and

usurpation of the throne. Both Macbeth and Byron give in to the dark and ugly side of their natures, yielding to the horrors they have seen as soldiers and justifying their plots in terms of their status as soldiers and prior experiences in war.

I am not arguing that Macbeth and Byron are absolutely analogous, or that either character was conceived of by their respective authors with the other in mind, an unlikely possibility since the plays were written almost simultaneously.[6] Macbeth engages in less of the stomach turning vanity and self-aggrandizement that Byron continually demonstrates. While Byron is largely duped and tricked into conspiracy and treasonable activity, Macbeth knows what he is about in the murder of Duncan. The acts that Byron only considers Macbeth carries out in horrid and murderous detail. Byron's character is much more straightforward and less ambiguous than Macbeth's, and it is for exactly these reasons that Shakespeare's play is superior to those of Chapman.

What I am arguing is that the character traits of Macbeth and Byron, the decisions and choices that they make which result in their respective demises, are inextricably linked to their extensive and successful service to their countries during armed conflict. As tragic figures they can only be properly understood and fully interpreted, and be used to interpret each other, within the context of war: what they have done on the battlefield, and how these experiences have

shaped their views of death, human interaction, power, politics, and their positions within their respective societies. Of all the bloody battles that Macbeth and Byron have fought, the most intense and momentous have occurred within themselves. Macbeth is a soldier who, as Bradley notes, has "knowingly made war on his own soul" (298), and his tragedy is more significant than Byron's only because this war has been more savage and atrocious and has been fought with more consciousness of the consequences of his actions. Both characters reach the conclusion that as warriors they have the capability to reshape and recast not only their own destinies, but with the lessons and methods of the battlefield at their command the destinies of their countries as well. Their perspectives are made possible by their essential atheism, their placement of themselves as soldiers who are familiar with brutal death above all other values which they view as mere human constructions.

With the end of war, Byron perceives that "The world is quite inverted," with "vertue throwne / At Vices feete," a time when "sensuall peace confounds valure." As a soldier he believes that

> Wee must reforme and have a new creation
> Of state and government; and on our Chaos
> Will I sit brooding up another world.
> I who through all the dangers that can siege
> The life of man, have forcst my glorious way
> To the repayring of my countries ruines,
> Will ruine it againe, to re-advance it.
> (Tragedie, 1.2.14-35)

Byron now believes himself capable of weaving the threads that

form the tapestry of his own life and destiny, as well as those which construct his society, and believes he is justified in doing so even at the expense of destroying the tapestry of society as it now exists. Though ostensibly less concerned with his country than with "re-advancing" himself, Macbeth's actions are again clearly parallel to Byron's expressed thoughts. He too has just witnessed the end of a war and immediately seeks to re-fashion society through killing and destruction, forming a new order with himself as ruler. As soldiers bent on the usurping power it is not surprising that their visions and actions of creating a new order are expressed and enacted in terms of destruction and chaos to achieve their ends.

Macbeth, less inclined to lofty rhetoric than Byron, is much more disposed to action. His murderous rampage to gain and secure power increases in barbarity as the play progresses, reminiscent of the manner in which his sword strokes were "doubly redoubled" against the enemy as recounted in the first act. The progression is from the murder of his king and kinsman to the murder of Banquo, his companion and brother in arms, and to the attempt on the life of Fleance, Banquo's son. This step is significant because the killing of a fellow soldier, one who has fought beside Macbeth and shared the dangers of combat, and the attempt to kill his young son are in many ways more heinous to a soldier than the killing of Duncan. No matter how gracious and benevolent Duncan has been,

Macbeth was still a subject. They come from two different worlds; Duncan is the personification of life at court while Macbeth is the essence of the soldier fresh from the camp. In killing Duncan Macbeth overturns the divine right of kings, in the killing of Banquo he overturns the most sacred trust and unwritten laws of his own profession. Macbeth is haunted by Banquo's ghost, but never by Duncan's. He is able, despite his initial horror at his own actions, to compose himself and act the part of the outraged host in front of his guests after killing Duncan, even managing to slay the guards who might testify to his guilt. But after the murder of Banquo and the appearance of Banquo's ghost he can no longer compose himself in front of his guests and is unmanned by the sight of the bloody ghost of his friend, declaring he is "a man again" (3.4.107) only after the apparition disappears. It is also the killing of Banquo and the appearance of his bloody ghost that drives Macbeth to a critical decision. He declares to Lady Macbeth, after his startled guests have departed, that he is "in blood / Stepp'd in so far" that even if he should "wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as [to] go o'er" (3.5.135-37). The killing of Duncan begins Macbeth's decline, but the killing of Banquo and the effect of it on him assures that there will be no recovery.

The progression of violence continues and culminates with the arranged murders of Lady Macduff, as well as her children and servants. This act breaches every barrier of humanity and

civility, destroying, as Marilyn French points out, the very people whom Macbeth formerly protected as a soldier. It is at this point that Macbeth reaches the depths of his depravity, arranging an act that, as the title of French's article suggests, calls to mind the actions of Lieutenant Calley and his platoon at My Lai to the late twentieth century American mind. The number of his victims increases, and this time the victims have absolutely no chance of successful self defense. This increase in barbarity is accompanied by a decline in motive. Kill Duncan and become King. Kill Banquo and his son and perhaps secure succession for your own progeny. Kill Lady Macduff, all her children and servants, and become what? The witches warning was to "beware Macduff; Beware the Thane of Fife," and insinuated nothing about any possible advantage in killing Macduff's family and servants. Macbeth begins to kill for the sake of killing alone, for he has no motive conceivable to others. As Bradley notes, Macbeth suffers at this point from an "inward fever," and "nothing but destruction" can offer any relief, however temporary such relief may be, from it (300).

Shakespeare, in this progression of barbarity, recreates a phenomenon long noted in certain combat soldiers that lose their moral bearing. Killing becomes an end in itself, rather than a necessary means of achieving victory. Macbeth is fulfilling the role of the combat soldier in another arena, moving the violence from the "casque" to the "cushion," out of

the camp and into the court, off the battlefield and onto the stage for all his audience to view. The progression of Macbeth's violence bears a notable resemblance to the spread of violence in war, often involving only the combatants initially, but inevitably spreading into the realm of noncombatants and civilians. Even Barnaby Rich, in his defense of war, admits that war "afflicteth as well the poore and innocents, as those that be wicked and evil disposed" (Allarme, A.i.). For Macbeth, there are no more "poore and innocents." He is determined to create his own order and reality through violence and he couldn't care less who he kills to achieve his ends. He feels frustrated in his plans, stymied in placing his stamp on the world he is creating, the tapestry he is weaving, and this increases his feeling that life is essentially meaningless. These frustrations both feed and are fed by his atheism, making it progressively easier to kill those whose lives he views as meaningless anyway. Through imagery of blood and violence Shakespeare has set the stage of war, and now come the most horrible acts of war home to roost. Macbeth's actions and his morbidly pessimistic view of the meaningless nature of life are the products of a man who is a destruction addict. He is a man who has abrogated the sixth commandment once too often and developed a philosophy of atheism in which he feels the only meaning in life is that which he gives it and achieves through violence.

Gray notes several atypical varieties of soldiers whom he

observed while fighting in Europe, and his comments help illuminate the dark actions and motives of Macbeth. "Soldier-killers" is the term he uses for men who have given in to the primal human urge to destroy. He notes that most soldiers are attracted in some measure to this innate urge for destruction, but in the huge majority of cases it is offset by the opposite urge for love, which often manifests itself in the need to preserve life and objects amid the carnage of war. He states that "when soldiers lose this need to preserve and become impersonal killers, they are truly figures of terror. Fortunately few men ever obliterate this kind of love altogether" (86). In Macbeth we find a man who has clearly become "a figure of terror" to other characters and audience alike, a man in whom all love and desire to preserve life has been extinguished.

Among soldiers who are overcome with the urge to destroy Gray notes certain characteristics. Their temperament often leads to isolation because their enjoyment of killing is

> an ecstasy without a union, for comradeship among killers is terribly difficult, and the kinship with nature that aesthetic vision often affords is closed to them . . . . The willingness to sacrifice self for comrades is no longer characteristic of soldiers who have become killers for pleasure. War henceforth becomes for them increasingly what the philosopher Hobbes thought to be the primal condition of all human life, a war of every man against every man . . . . I can hardly doubt that the delight in destruction leads in this direction. (56-57)

If applied to Macbeth, how much light does this propensity for destruction shed on his actions? Surely it helps explain his

alienation from, and eventual murder of, Banquo. As Macbeth becomes progressively more violent he also becomes more introverted, refusing to share his schemes even with his co-conspirator, Lady Macbeth. Gray notes that preoccupation with destruction, violence for the sake of violence, "tends to turn men inward upon themselves and make them inaccessible to more normal satisfactions." In his introverted state of isolation Macbeth's crimes expand until he appears to be fighting a war "against every man," woman, or child he perceives as a threat.

While Gray finds that "most soldiers forget their wartime order of values when they return to the security of peace" (82), soldier-killers are unable to drop their battle focus:

> Though there may be a fierce pride in the numbers destroyed and in their reputation, soldier-killers usually experience an ineffable sameness and boredom in their lives. The restlessness of such men in rest areas [behind the lines camps set up for the recuperation and relaxation of combat soldiers] is notorious. (57)

Perhaps for these very reasons Macbeth carries his wartime values into the realm of peace, and the result is chaos, murder and madness. Gray believes that "if wars were to make killers of all combat soldiers, rather than men who have killed, civilian life would be endangered for generations or, in fact, made impossible" (86). T. R. Fehrenbach, an officer with combat experience in Korea, recounts the experiences of a medic who observed a soldier-killer in action, a man who "in anything but war . . . . [was] useless," and one who took glee in killing as many enemy soldiers as possible. When he

observed this man dead, lying among a dozen enemy corpses with an empty, broken weapon, it occurred to the medic that "the values composing civilization and the values required to protect it are normally at war" (442). This war of values becomes apocalyptic when a soldier-killer utilizes his talents outside the realm of the battlefield. The turmoil that Macbeth's actions cause in peace, actions that lead inevitably back to a state of war, bear witness to the truth of Gray's and Fehrenbach's remarks.

In addition to the "soldier-killer," Gray remarks on another atypical brand of combat soldier that bears resemblance to Macbeth. He observed men who sustained and thrived on the "illusion of indestructibility," a very few men who maintained this fallacy for "deeper causes than deficient imagination or delayed adolescence." He describes such men as being characterized by

> an indomitable will to power which refuses to recognize ordinary mortality. Such men have a fanatic faith in their destiny which is only strengthened by narrow escapes and the sight of death in manifold forms. They are commonly leaders and win recognition as fearless warriors whose iron nerves and will to victory are out of all proportion to those of other men. (109)

It is just these qualities that are epitomized in Macbeth, a leader and fearless warrior who "refuses to recognize ordinary mortality." It is no wonder that the prophecies of the spirits called forth by the witches, which foretell of the unlikely circumstances that must come to pass before Macbeth shall fall, are regarded by him as truth. His character is formed as

a warrior who already has the propensity to believe such prophesies as "none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth," (4.1.80-81) and that he will "never vanquished be, until / Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill / Shall come against him" (4.1.92-94). His "fanatic faith" in the destiny he believes he is creating for himself makes him susceptible to such dubious statements.

Like Gray's stereotype for this kind of soldier, Macbeth's native environment is one of violence and destruction: "Battle appears to be their very element, and in that element men will not hesitate to pay them homage." This was the world of Macbeth before the action of the play opens. Shakespeare's purpose is to show his audience what happens when this type of man transports his battle values and morals into the post-war arena of peace. Macbeth's tragedy and the horrors he engenders are predicted by Gray: "In their secret hearts they despise friend and foe equally, these supreme egoists. If nature brought many such forth, the world would be more a shambles after warfare than it customarily is" (110). The witches and Lady Macbeth appeal to Macbeth's "secret heart," and whatever reservations of guilt and conscience he may have are eventually overcome by Macbeth as he creates a shambles of the world in which he lives.

IV.

It would be unfair to the character of Macbeth and the intent of Shakespeare, given the assertions I have made

concerning the motivations for Macbeth's actions, to ignore the fact that Macbeth clearly voices reservations about his initial actions before committing them and is confused, almost dazed, after committing them. Of all Shakespeare's tragic heroes, Macbeth, in fact, seems to have the most consciousness of the depraved nature of his plot before he carries it out. Yet, these very reservations and this guilt can also be viewed as the emotions, repeated in peace, that every soldier undergoes in war. Killing becomes progressively easier for a man of Macbeth's nature in either circumstance, and often leads to a sense of damnation and despair.

The reservations that Macbeth voices before killing Duncan indicate a man who cares little for his soul. His deepest concerns, in fact, often appear trite considering the nature of what he proposes to do.

> If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
> It were done quickly: if th'assassination
> Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
> With his surcease success; that but this blow
> Might be the be-all and the end-all -- here,
> But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
> We'd jump the life to come. -- But in these cases,
> We still have judgement here; that we but teach
> Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
> To plague th'inventor: this even-handed Justice
> Commends th'ingredience of our poison'd chalice
> To our own lips. (1.7.1-12)

Macbeth wishes that the murder could be done quickly, that it would be an end unto itself, resulting in success for him with no adverse consequences. If this could be the case Macbeth admits that here, "upon this bank and shoal of time," at this decisive point of departure in his mortal existence, he would

risk, or perhaps sacrifice, any possible consequences to his immortal soul in the afterlife. His primary fear and worry is that he will be caught, and will face "judgement here" by other mortals, a fear that provides strong evidence of his atheism.

After carefully considering exactly which bonds of trust he is breaking by murdering Duncan, his primary concern is that "Pity, like a naked new-born babe . . . . Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye" (1.7.21/24). Macbeth is much more concerned with his appearance to others, and the consequences of being discovered by others, than with any thoughts of how this deed will affect his soul. In his temporary retreat from the murder he explains to his wife that he has "bought / Golden opinions from all sorts of people" with the currency of his valor in battle, and that the garments of his fine reputation should be "worn now in their newest gloss / Not cast away so soon" (1.7.32-34). Like Byron, Macbeth seems to have accepted a type of atheism with its roots in Lucretian philosophy, regarding the afterlife of the soul as inconsequential or nonexistent and acknowledging only the worries and threats of exposure in his temporal existence.

Perhaps, in conceiving of Macbeth as a military figure, Shakespeare credited his tragic hero with having previously considered the status of his soul and with having reached significantly different conclusions regarding it than did soldiers such as Barnaby Rich. If Macbeth has not been able to

justify to himself the distinctions between sanctioned killing in war and unsanctioned killing in peace, distinctions which are crystal clear to Rich, then why should he worry about the state and future of his soul? The shortest of commandments consists of four short unqualified words, "Thou shalt not kill." Clearly, Macbeth has done this many times over as an accomplished soldier. Perhaps the only difference between killing in war and peace to Macbeth is the one that he consistently dwells on and refers to: the difference it will make to him in this life when and if it is detected by others. If not an atheist of the same mold as Chapman's Byron, Macbeth is, at a minimum, significantly confused as to the moral consequences of killing Duncan.

All of this argument is irrelevant if one adopts the opinion that Macbeth is not, and has never been, a religious character, that the question of his soul is simply not pertinent to him. Yet, Macbeth's actions and thoughts immediately after killing Duncan indicate that he did once have religious beliefs, be they ever so confused and frustrated now. "One cried, 'God bless us!' and, 'Amen,' the other," he tells his wife of Duncan's servants, adding that "I could not say, 'Amen,' / When they did say, 'God bless us' . . . . "wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'? / I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen' Stuck in my throat" (2.2.26-31).

Macbeth's confusion is another indication that he has trouble distinguishing any moral difference between types of

killing. Perhaps he has never had the need to ask for a blessing before while killing in battle, since his whole society and weight of popular opinion support such killing, and if he had, no doubt such blessings were quickly forthcoming. Macbeth has not only lost his moral bearing and succumbed to evil, he is dazed and confused concerning the very nature of what he has done and will continue to do. From this point on, after overcoming his reservations and Killing Duncan, he declines rapidly. His reservations and guilt about killing dwindle even more with the killing of Banquo, and then disappear altogether. Death and destruction become his hallmark as he submits to what Gray identified as "the counsel of despair," in which his actions, no matter how violent, mean nothing to him.

Macbeth's feelings of despair and his belief in his own damnation increase as the last vestiges of his honor and morality decrease: "For mine own good / All causes shall give way" he tells his wife, "I am in blood / Stepp'd so far, that, should I wade no more, / returning were as tedious as go o'er" (3.5.134-37). Macbeth asserts that his new order, achieved through violence, shall supersede "all causes," and that he believes himself committed to violence and destruction beyond the possibility of reconsidering or altering his plans and actions. After seeking out and demanding more knowledge from the witches, whose prophesies he takes as truths, he ironically, yet perhaps half-knowingly, admits his own

damnation: "Infected be the air whereon they ride; / And damn'd all those that trust them" (4.2.138-39). The depth of his fall and his damnation is reflected in the references to him by others. Those who used to describe him as honorable, brave, and valorous now refer to him as "black Macbeth" (4.3.52), "an untitled tyrant bloody-scepter'd" (4.3.104), "devilish Macbeth" (4.3.117), and "thou bloodier villain" (5.8.7).

As his destruction approaches, Macbeth asserts his defiance in soldierly rhetoric and deeds, language and actions that once won for him accolades and praise, yet also set him on the road to damnation. "I'll fight, till from my bones my flesh be hacked," he declares as he yells for his armor. Again Macbeth enacts and voices behavior that Gray noted in WWII:

> Men who have lived in the zone of combat long enough to be veterans are sometimes possessed by a fury that makes them capable of anything. Blinded by the rage to destroy and supremely careless of consequences, they storm against the enemy until they are either victorious, dead, or utterly exhausted. It is as if they are seized by a demon and are no longer in control of themselves. (51)

If Macbeth does not appear as a soldier "seized by a demon" in the latter part of the play, no Shakespearean character does. Even as he voices regrets for the future that he has sacrificed, and for the situation he has created, the image of himself as soldier and defiant warrior is the one he expresses most eloquently: "I'gin to be aweary of the sun, / And wish th'estate o'th'world were now undone. -- / Ring the alarum bell! -- Blow, wind! come, wrack! / At least we'll die with

harness on our back" (5.5.49-52).

When facing Macduff, aware now that all has been in vain and that he is afforded no supernatural protection, Macbeth's soldierly defiance again comes to the forefront:

> I will not yield,
> To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,
> And to be baited with the rabble's curse.
> Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane,
> And thou oppos'd, being of no woman born,
> Yet I will try the last: before my body
> I throw my warlike shield: lay on, Macduff;
> And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'
> (5.8.28-34)

Bradley states that in this speech the vestiges of honor, dignity, and integrity that Macbeth once had can still be detected: "there remains something sublime in the defiance with which, even when cheated of his last hope, he faces earth and hell and heaven" (302). Macbeth expresses the same indomitable will that may have inspired Milton's portrayal of Satan, who possesses "the unconquerable Will, / And study of Revenge, immortal hate, / And courage never to submit or yield" (I. 106-08). The words of Malcolm describing the man whose title Macbeth earned in combat, the traitorous former Thane of Cawdor, have ironically become true of Macbeth also, considering the portion of his life we see in the play: "nothing in his life / Became him like the leaving of it" (1.4.7-8).

V.

In conceiving of Macbeth as a military figure, Shakespeare allows and encourages the audience to view his

downfall with a sense of pity for a once noble warrior who loses his moral footing. Formed in the fire and fury of combat, studied and proficient in the art of war and killing, Macbeth has previously served his country well. That he once was a man of virtue and honor is critical to the play's success as tragedy. As Aristotle noted, there is little of the tragic in seeing an inherently evil person come to an evil end. That Macbeth battles, however inefficiently and unsuccessfully, with guilt, remorse, and pity is essential.

What we witness in the action of Macbeth is a warrior whose displacement of battlefield actions into another realm is only made possible because he has performed these actions so well in their sanctioned sphere. In abrogating the sixth commandment on the battlefield, Macbeth loses his moral balance and sense of perspective. He is essentially damned when the play opens, and all we witness is the way in which his damnation progresses and manifests itself. Willing to "jump the life to come," perhaps believing that in his military battles he has already taken such risks, the only thing left restraining him from his horrible deeds is a fear of being exposed before other mortals in this life. This restraint proves to be too weak to keep him from bringing death out of the camp into the court.

From the first scene of the play Shakespeare has revealed that he will tell the tale of a soldier, as one of the witches reveals that they will meet again "When the battle's lost and

won" (1.1.4). This curious phrase only makes sense at the play's end. The battle has been won in the sense that Macbeth, leading Duncan's forces, defeats and kills Macdonwald as the play opens. It has been lost in two senses: by the death of Macbeth in the last battle, and in the battleground of Macbeth's mind, where he has submitted to evil and the urge to kill, creating chaos out of order.

With the death of Macbeth and the establishment of peace, Shakespeare could have neatly and optimistically ended the play. The action has moved full circle twice: from war to a brief peace, during which Macbeth sows the seeds of yet another war, the conclusion of this war with the death of Macbeth, and the promise of the return of prosperity and peace again. Yet, Shakespeare adds the curious events of the last scene. This scene contributes to his purpose in telling the tale of a soldier, indicates to the audience that all victory comes with a price, and reveals the attitudes and atmosphere that created and made possible the actions of Macbeth in the first place. Most importantly, it perhaps indicates that the cycle of war and peace is without end in a martial society.

Old Siward, a veteran soldier, is informed that his son "has paid a soldier's debt" and been killed in the fight against Macbeth. Rather than grieve for his loss, Old Siward simply questions whether his son had "his hurts before," whether he received his fatal wounds on the front part of his body. When it is affirmed that he did, the old man dismisses

the tragedy in what, to say the least, is an unusual manner:

> Why then, God's soldier be he!
> Had I as many sons as I have hairs,
> I would not wish them to a fairer death:
> And, so, his knell is knoll'd . . . .
> He's worth no more;
> They say he parted well and paid his score:
> And so, God be with him! (5.9.14-16, 18-19)

The old soldier's almost happy dismissal of a parent's most grievous loss, given as a benediction or blessing and ironically invoking God's name, is Shakespeare's final comment on the tragedy of Macbeth. The old soldier reveals his own conception of God and religion, as well as that of the society that produced Macbeth, by referring to his son as "God's soldier." This is the root of Macbeth's transgressions, the belief that God sanctions the breach of his own commandment in certain circumstances. As long as this is the prevailing attitude certain men of Macbeth's stamp will lose sight of the value system that society proscribes for sanctioned killing and begin to kill either for the sake of killing alone or to further their own interests. It is no coincidence that Old Siward's speech bears such a close resemblance to a speech in Coriolanus.

Jorgensen notes that Shakespeare "seems to have specially chosen military men as tragic heroes," and that "Coriolanus is the clearest example of the general who succeeds in war, his occupation, and comes to ruin when he is forced into a nonmilitary situation" (214-15). Speaking to Virgilia, Volumnia explains her war-like philosophy and the education

she provided her young son, Coriolanus, in much the same language as that of Siward. "I, considering how honour would become such a person, ... / was pleased / to let him seek danger where he was like to find / fame. To a cruel war I sent him." Virgilia asks how Volumnia would have felt had the young Coriolanus "died in the business" of war and is told by this formidable woman that

> his good report should have been my son, I
> therein would have found issue. Hear me profess
> sincerely: had I a dozen sons, each in my love alike,
> and none less dear than thine and my good Martius,
> I had rather had eleven die nobly for their country,
> than one voluptuously surfeit out of action.
> (1.3.9-25)

This is the atmosphere in which Coriolanus, as well as Macbeth, was bred. Alfred Harbage notes that "we need not look far afield for the school that nurtured" Coriolanus in his flawed education, it is "the Roman matron, the masculine dowager, the statuesque Volumnia" that has formed her son's "martial courage" as well as the "aristocratic scorn" which is his downfall (1214).

The speech of Old Siward at the end of Macbeth performs the same function as Volumnia's speech near the beginning of Coriolanus. Old Siward's speech is one man's voice which stands for that of the martial society which produced Macbeth, one which condones and awards the abrogation of the sixth commandment in times of war, and can accept the loss of a son, even offering more, with a mere shrug and a "God be with him!" Old Siward's speech undercuts whatever optimism may be drawn

from the reassertion of order in Scotland after Macbeth's death. One wonders, as Shakespeare would have you wonder, how long it will be before another soldier is raised in this atmosphere who will perhaps seek out, or be sought out by, the witches, transfer death from the camp to the court, and recreate the tragedy of Macbeth.

Notes

1. Recent criticism pays little heed to Macbeth's martial character. Besides the works of Paul Jorgensen and Marilyn French (see notes 2 and 3) recent scholarship has ignored Macbeth's military background as a cause of or influence upon his actions. No mention is made of this aspect of Macbeth's character in the most recent Riverside (1974, ed. Blakemore Evans) and Oxford (1986, ed. Stanley Wells) editions of Shakespeare's collected works. This is also true of recent editions of the text, including a 1973 version edited by Roy B. Kennedy (London: Collins), the 1984 revision of the Arden edition (reprinted 1991) edited by Kenneth Muir, a 1990 edition edited by Nicholas Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon) and a 1991 edition edited by Harold Bloom (New York, Chelsea House. Collections of recent criticism, including Twentieth Century Interpretations of Macbeth: A collection of Critical Interpretations, edited by Terence Hawkes (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977), Focus on Macbeth, edited by John R. Brown (Boston: Routledge, 1982) and Macbeth: Critical Essays, edited by Samuel Schoenbaum (New york, Garland, 1991) also fail to include any essays centering around the martial background of the tragic hero. Perhaps this is due in part to the divisiveness generated by the Vietnamese war. Most academics and scholars opposed the war, and an aversion to scholarship regarding aspects of military influences may have resulted. Even with the explosion in scholarship of the last twenty years, including approaches from every imaginable aspect and theory, no one has addressed this as a primary explanation of Macbeth's actions.

2. Jorgensen's 1956 book, Shakespeare's Military World, stands alone as the only in depth study of Shakespearean military characters and themes. Although he asserts that these characters and themes were of great importance to many of Shakespeare's plays, and includes many references to the military aspects of Macbeth, he does not believe they were critical to understanding the character and actions of Macbeth as a tragic hero. Jorgensen states that in some "Shakespearean generals the tragic disability [of the hero] is less clearly marked" than in Coriolanus, and that Shakespeare "did not constantly wish to highlight the theme of the misplaced warrior . . . . occasionally, as in Macbeth, he had other frictions so much more pertinent to the individual's nature that a study of soldierly disabilities would lie mainly outside th play." I disagree with Jorgensen on this point, but it is a stand he apparently maintained. He fails to pursue the subject in two major works that followed: Our Naked Frailties: Sensational Art and Meaning in Macbeth, (Berkely: Univ. of CA. Press, 1971), and William Shakespeare: The Tragedies, (Ed. Arthur Kinney. Boston: Twayne, 1985).

3. French's essay, "Macbeth at My Lai," (Soundings, 58, 1975), 54-68, is primarily a study of gender roles, but it considers Macbeth's military background secondarily. She states that when "humans find themselves shaken in their moral standards, they return to the past, ... and they unfailingly find there the hierarchical relationship between men and women" in the "heroic" world. French sees Macbeth in terms of this "grim, hard, savage" world in which "hardship and war are constants." In this world males must be "aggressive, physically powerful, and authoritative," because they "are expected to do the fighting," while females "must be compassionate, nutritive, chaste, and must accept with contentment their subordinate status." Fighting is a "means of survival" while reproduction and pleasure are "the ends which the means are designed to protect and insure." Therefore, "family, neighborhood, [and] nation" are fenced off from the world of war and fighting "for the sake of sanity" and survival. In the "outer world" men are supposed to be violent, and are rewarded for martial valor, while in the inner, "civilized section of the world, law and custom are supposed to supersede the right of might." Lady Macbeth's proper role in this hierarchy is to dissuade her husband from violence in the inner, civilized world. Instead, she encourages him to pursue it. "In Shakespeare's eyes, Macbeth violates moral law: Lady Macbeth violates nature's law." The result is the chaos that comes to Scotland, leading to Macbeth's killing of Lady Macduff and her children. "The connection between means and ends is broken and life becomes hell," when "home becomes part of the war zone, life is merely battle." French concludes that the only thing reasserted at the end of the play is the "moral schizophrenia," of a world in which two vastly different ideals are required of men: "as long as we continue to return uncritically" to such value systems "these standards will be perpetuated. Their perpetuation guarantees that we shall continue to end up in worlds as insane as Scotland. Or My Lai."

4. The question may arise as to how a text on modern warfare and its effects on men written over three hundred and fifty years after Macbeth, and almost a thousand years after the historical events recounted by Holinshed which Shakespeare used as his source, can apply to an interpretation of Macbeth's character. I would assert that though there are great differences in the nature of combat between the two ages men exposed to violent death in combat would be subject to many of the same psychological and emotional effects. In some cases, due to the nature of close combat with edged weapons, the effects on soldiers in medieval and Elizabethan armies may have been more extreme. The opponents were almost always face to face, and there could be little doubt about what the physical damage done to an opponent was. One hacked and thrust and immediately saw the effect of these actions on the body of the enemy. This is rarely any longer the case. Soldiers are still frequently "unseam'd," decapitated, and mutilated but this is most often done by shrapnel and high velocity projectiles fired from a great distance. Even Infantry soldiers, those on the front lines who may see horrible carnage, rarely know if their own individual actions produced the results they see, and artillerymen may never even see the damage they inflict. Hand-to-hand combat has become relatively uncommon, and even the use of the bayonet is a relatively rare occurrence. In his historical account of warfare, The Face of Battle, John Keegan states that "edged weapon wounds were a fraction of one per cent of all wounds inflicted in the First World War," while bullets accounted for "thirty per cent of all new wounds" and shell and bomb wounds "usually amounted to about seventy per cent of those inflicted" (264). The point is that Macbeth, though not subjected to long durations of shelling and high explosives, would undoubtedly be much more conscious than most modern soldiers of exactly what he had done. I believe that Gray's experiences and accounts of men in battle are just as applicable to Macbeth as they are to soldiers subjected to combat today.

5. In his introduction to the Arden Macbeth, Kenneth Muir establishes that "the play was therefore written . . . . between 1603 and 1606" (xx), while John Gabel, in his introduction to the Lord Byron plays in the collection of Chapman's tragedies edited by Holaday, finds that the plays "must have been completed by about January 1607/08" (266).

6. Lucretius lays out his pre-christian atheistic philosophy in his epic poem, De Rerum Natura (On the Nature of the Universe). Though he does not deny the existence of the Gods or the human soul, he does question the part the Gods play in arranging the world for the benefit of humanity, their concern with what occurs to mortals, and the immortality of the soul. James Mantinband's verse translation of the poem and introduction are instructive (New York: Ungar, 1965). In the second book of the poem Lucretius asserts that all things, including our world, are made from chance combinations of the atoms, not by the Gods. In the third book he declares that the soul dies with the body, and that the fear of torment in hell after death is sheer nonsense; he interprets the torments of hell as nothing more than symbols of earthly suffering. This philosophy bears not only a resemblance to the conclusions that Chapman's Byron reaches about the nature of life, but the conclusions that Macbeth seems to reach as well.

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